Analyzing Manners of Coping amongst Korean University Students in a Sociocultural Environment

Dr. Ian Done D. Ramos *

Department of English Language and Literature, University of Suwon, South Korea

Prof. Vincent N. Gilhooley

Dasan University College, Ajou University, South Korea

Prof. Scott A. DeWaelsche

Department of General Education, Duksung Women's University, South Korea

Abstract

To analyze ways of coping among Korean university students in a sociocultural environment, 100 student respondents answered a survey questionnaire and 251 respondents participated in 10 classroom observations to complement the answers provided in the questionnaire. The 100 students in the survey questionnaire were among the 251 observed from the Department of International Education at a university in Gyeonggi-do province, South Korea. The study was able to determine EFL teachers' concerns in their English classes with reference to: a) student coping methods with content in regard to utilizing private speech, b) student coping methods for understanding instructional conversations, and c) student behavior in relation to social and cultural mediation, including teacher observed student involvement in classroom activities that affect their communicative performance and cultural sensitivity. How successfully lesson plans and approaches were implemented in a socio-cultural environment was also determined. Performance differed significantly in these areas from class to class. It was evident that English language ability was a major contributive factor, yet certain teaching approaches and environmental limitations such as classroom size and layout also played significant roles. To best achieve classroom goals in a sociocultural environment, this paper has constructed a recommended assessment component for students to fill out in determining relevance between prepared curriculum and student actual needs.

Keywords: sociocultural theory, private speech, language based theories of learning and semiotic mediation, activity theory

INTRODUCTION

Many native speakers from various English-speaking countries teach English in Asia by implementing the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approach at all levels and

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in *hagwons*, or private schools, for utilitarian purposes. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes at language institutes in Korea, native-speaking English teachers are tasked with the challenge of educating students effectively while promoting culturally sensitive approaches and overcoming difficulties associated with cultural differences among students and teachers.

At the university where this study was conducted, the teachers are well-equipped to determine strengths and weaknesses of students' abilities in acquiring English language skills. As expected, the teachers themselves have learned what and how to teach their students based on their perceived needs. However, when cultural and sociolinguistic issues come into play in the language classroom, teachers often need to realign their objectives with teaching approaches and classroom activities. For instance, in the struggle of Korean students to cope with the demand of English language use, they have utilized various Konglish (Korean-English) words in English conversations. Kosofsky (1986) defined Konglish as '...the English which is spoken and written by native speakers of Korean.' This occurrence involves cultural factors that influence English word usage in a sentence to incorporate meanings in their own cultural language, and it is related to private speech (Diaz, 1992; Furrow, 1994; Smith, 1996; Winsler et al, 2005; Feigenbaum, 2009). Furthermore, interpersonal interaction between English teachers and Korean students in some communicative activities appears awkward in terms of students expressing and accepting something they discuss, and this reshapes their learning styles and behavior towards each other. This scenario describes how instructional conversation (Tharp and Gallimore, 1981, 1991; Goldenberg, 1991; Hasan, 2002; Fernyhough, 2008; Donato, 2014) and activity theory (Leont'ev, 1978; Werstch, 1981; Wang, 1996; Dayydov, 1999; Lantolf; 2000; Kim, 2011) interplay in expressing communicative proficiency as well as behavior in the EFL classroom or any sociocultural environment.

Due to the variance in sociocultural orientation amongst students, definitive levels of perceived needs and actual needs are frequently elusive to the casual observer. In this respect, the authors of the current study sought to analyze manners of coping amongst EFL students in a sociocultural environment by seeking answers to the following questions: 1) What are EFL teachers' concerns in their English language classes with reference to: a) student coping with content in private speech, b) student coping with instructional conversations, and c) student behavior concerning social and cultural mediation? 2) How involved are students in classroom activities that affect their communicative performance and levels of cultural sensitivity as observed by EFL teachers? 3) How is the teaching approach implemented in a socio-cultural environment?

This study is significant since Korea is experiencing the effects of globalization and students preparing for the future will soon become professionals in their respective fields. Globalization refers to exposure to foreign teachers, tourism, international business and trading, entertainment, and media. This study seeks to aid students in the

development of coping skills necessary for overcoming communicative challenges in a sociocultural environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky purported that primary instances of enculturation such as parents, other caregivers and guardians, as well as other important factors of socialization such as peers and culture at large, are crucial to the development of higher order functions. Therefore, sociocultural theory attempts to explain the individual in terms of society, of which he or she is a part, and its undeniable influence on the make-up of the individual. Moreover, Vygotzky posited that a child develops mentally in a two-fold manner. Any particular function is first realized on a social level, that is to say interpsychologically; only thereafter would said function be reconciled on an individual level, intrapsychologically. Accordingly, this process is equally valid in voluntary attention, logical memory, and the formation of concepts. A relationship stands at the base of all higher functions. Thus, the researchers in this study acknowledge that sociocultural theory focuses not only on how adults and their peers influence individual learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes make an impact on instruction and learning that take place in a sociocultural environment.

Sociocultural Environment

Human beings live in an environment where they socialize with each other through actions and words in conformity with mutual personality, attitude, age, and culture until a relationship is built and will continue overtime. Lantolf (2014) suggested that humans use symbolic artifacts to relate with the world, and that the purpose of psychology is to understand the social and mental aspect of this relationship. Based on a sociocultural understanding of humanity, Hall (2012) identified communication as the essence of social life. He noted that we set goals through linguistic symbols, as well as establish our identities, relationships, and social group memberships.

In the case of English native speakers who are now part of the social group in a non-English speaking nation, their sociocultural perspective may naturally broaden into intercultural aspects from which intercultural competence is being challenged. According to Fantini's (2006) definition, intercultural competence involves the need for abilities that allow L2 learners to interact effectively with others who are culturally and linguistically different. Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman (2003) defined intercultural competence as thinking and behaving in 'interculturally appropriate ways.' True enough, teachers from English speaking countries settle in non-English speaking nations to teach, and they are expected to think and behave according to what is tolerable or acceptable in the host culture. Furthermore, it is also important to note that participation in a variety of cultural activities involves the adoption of multiple cultural identities (Hall, 2012). In response, local students studying English naturally situate themselves in the culture of their English teachers since they are learning English. Hall

(2012) also pointed out that we use linguistic actions to define our world and to convince others to view it in the same way, thus developing relationships and emphasizing select identities with them.

Through exposure to English language policy in Korea, Koreans are generally aware of the influence of culture in the EFL classroom. For teachers and students alike, the English education process is part of the challenge that requires common understanding of their roles. According to Ramos (2014a), young adults in Korea possess a heightened awareness concerning English acquisition. He explained that in this small, increasingly multicultural nation, they recognize the value of English proficiency and acknowledge the likelihood that English may become a second language. As a result, schools and language institutes offer extracurricular English language programs for students and parents interested in rapidly growing English language proficiency. However, he reported that evidence from student responses revealed a perceived trend of fluctuation in the effectiveness of English education in Korea. This trend suggests that changes may occur more slowly as a result of some degree of what DeWaelsche (2015) referred to as sociocultural transfer, or the classroom impact of attitudes, beliefs, or practices related to the local culture. As Alptekin (2002) explained, foreign language study involves the development of a new worldview influenced by the culture of the target language.

Sociocultural Contributions to the EFL Classroom

To achieve success in sociocultural contexts, Halliday (1975) emphasized knowledge of proper L2 language use among foreign language learners. In support, Donato (2014) discussed the sociocultural contributions in understanding the foreign and second language classroom by using classroom-based research projects with three sociocultural themes, namely: private speech, language-based theories of learning and semiotic mediation, and activity theory.

Private Speech. Smith (1996) cited in Donato (2014) conducted a study on private speech where he recognized the distinction between using private speech as "a verbal attempt to gain self-regulation" and as a component of the more conventional interpersonal communication. In one class, Smith observed a particular student who had difficulty understanding a grammatical point. Rather than immediately addressing the student's problem, the teacher observed the student's private speech and through careful observation and interaction with the student reached a point where a "co-construction" process between teacher and student was achieved. This indicates that students mediate their thinking when faced with a difficult task by utilizing private speech. The study was incomplete, however, as there was not sufficient linguistic analysis of private speech. In private speech, there can exist a dichotomy of purposes. By vocalizing the problem, the student may also be seeking assistance from peers or the teacher. Nonetheless, the study revealed the importance of analyzing private speech for its communicative value.

In his discussion of Vygotsky's conception of private speech, Feigenbaum (2009) cited several studies that identified the impact of private speech on task-relevant behavior in children, confirming what he referred to as "the universality of the development of the self-regulatory functions of private speech" (p. 19). Feigenbaum argued, however, that discourse analysis research is extremely limited concerning the dialogical structures and functions that connect utterances of private speech to longer oral statements, an association that he insisted is vital to the evaluation of Vygotsky's theory.

Feigenbaum offered several possible reasons for the lack of research relating to the "utterance-utterance" relationship in private speech. First, he indicated a limitation in the availability of private speech data that are "sufficiently robust" with regards to turn-taking and interaction. He added that some researchers may not even see the value in such data. Another reason Feigenbaum provides is an emphasis on the utterance-behavior relationship among private speech researchers. He explained that their primary interest is in the self-regulatory effects of private speech on performance, a behavioral relationship. He also noted that the time, labor, and methodological complexity involved in discourse analysis in private speech research have contributed to the limitation of data.

Finally, Feigenbaum suggested that a lack of discourse analysis in private speech studies may be a result of a misinterpretation of Vygotsky's theory. He indicated a "deep-seated resistance" in Western countries to the idea that speech shapes thought, a resistance he claimed may pose a barrier to understanding the theory. Another misinterpretation, he argued, is a contradiction between the Western emphasis on individualism and Vygotsky's principles of gradual individuation and socialization from birth. The absence of discourse analysis in private speech research, in Feigenbaum's view, has led to serious consequences. He argued that by implementing conventional linguistic analyses where sentences are analyzed in isolation, investigators ignore conversational connections between sentences, or the utterance-utterance relationships. He concluded that this omission results in a "diluted understanding" of Vygotsky's theory.

Moreover, Winsler et al (2005) drew on research by Diaz (1992), Furrow (1994), and Feigenbaum (1992), among others, to outline the function and form of private speech and the various methods of categorization researchers employ when coding it. The authors reported that private speech "refers to the possible consequences of the utterance for the individual's ongoing behavior" (p. 11). They identified 12 functional categories in Furrow's study of young toddlers, as well as 15 categories established by Feigenbaum. The purpose of these categories was to identify the function of each utterance. Furrow included categories such as self-regulatory, expressive, or informative, for example. While some of the Feigenbaum categories resembled Furrow's, Winsler et al noted that he subdivided his coding system by recognizing planning and non-planning functions.

Citing Diaz (1992), Winsler et al (2005) indicated that form represents auditory features of private speech, what they referred to as "prosodic and structural," as well as deletions or syntactic violations. These auditory features include "loudness, intonation,

and other relevant acoustic variations" (p. 14). The authors reported that private speech utterances can be complete or contain formal deletions, which they coded as fragmented or abbreviated. Fragmented private speech involves grammatically incorrect utterances that Winsler et al characterized as "indicative of children's increased internalization or interiorization of speech" (p. 15).

However, some SLA studies have also supported the presence of private speech in adult learners. Accordingly, adult learners revert back to private speech whenever they struggle in communication that requires cognitive or unfamiliar tasks (John-Steiner, 1992; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985).

Language based theories of learning and semiotic mediation. The use of instructional conversations (Tharp and Gallimore 1998, 1991; Goldenberg, 1991) as a meditational tool for development of language stems from theories advanced by Vygotsky who posed that the origins of human development, learning, and action may be linked to conversation (Donato, 2014). Vygotsky also linked this theory to language socialization between individuals as a source of learning. Donato further explained that instructional conversations can offer a chance to socialize students in terms of experiencing how language can be used outside the classroom. Opportunities for expansion, elaboration, and activation of knowledge in the students by the teacher exist. These opportunities can be shaped and mediated by the teacher to achieve curricular aims. Instructional conversations offer an array of communicative and cognitive functions as a method of analyzing classroom talk.

Ramos (2014b) reported positive student responses concerning cultural understanding and language learning in large English classes taught by native speakers of English using western films as the vehicle for instruction. The study revealed that students were more motivated, confident, and expressive in this environment for several reasons: the exposure to interesting, culturally-rich films with simpler stories; the use of grouping and pairing during class activities; the presence of an easygoing and helpful instructor; the exposure to the foreign teacher's techniques, accent, and diction; and the use of challenging questions in discussions. Students reported that their analysis of the elements of fiction in the films, including theme, plot, characterization, and conflict, aided them in their understanding of the target culture as well as their own. They also noted that the "thinking like a native speaker" technique the instructor employed removed cultural boundaries and helped them to freely and spontaneously express themselves.

In his assessment of Vygotskian literature on semiotic mediation, however, Hasan (2002) outlined several shortcomings related to Vygotsky's conceptualization of language and how it functions in relation to semiotic mediation. Hasan offers two, interdependent perspectives that are essential to giving a "viable account" of semiotic mediation. The first perspective is related to viewing language as a system of signs, realizing the semiotic potential of this system and the importance placed on how language exists, and how it is used and processed.

Hasan goes on to describe these aforementioned shortcomings in Vygotsky's discourse on semiotic mediation as a series of three contradictions. The first contradiction is that the Vygotskian framework has no theory of language use, which is difficult to equate with Vygotsky's discourse related to semiotic mediation by means of language which would necessitate language usage. The second contradiction outlined by Hasan relates to Vygotsky's views on the social origins of the development of linguistic meaning and language as a system. While Vygotsky's work focuses on the importance of experiential meaning and represents the commonly held views of his contemporaries of the time, it does not pay sufficient attention to the roles of context and thematic movements and their importance in relation to semiotic mediation.

The third and final contradiction that Hassan raises in relation to Vygotsky's discourse on semiotic mediation is the lack of importance placed on the mediator and mediatee in relation to the process of mediation. Hasan goes so far as to say that while Vygotsky maintains that both speech and semiotic mediation are social, the process of mediation as per Vygotskian discourse is a-social. Hasan brings sociology, particularly that of Bernstein, to the argument to add a third dimension to Vygotsky's description of mental growth.

Wake (2006) carried out a study that aimed to assess the effectiveness of semiotic mediation as represented in dialogic learning in an economics course for second language learners. The study was based entirely on spoken data collected in the classes; this meant the focus was on the students acquiring knowledge through semiotic means. The study revealed that transformations in understanding described as a neat, incremental process were, in fact, "peripatetic" and formed part of an overall devolutionary process rather than moving towards higher dimensions of metaphorical and abstract language. The tendency instead was that students devolved into more congruent descriptions of the economic theories being taught.

The study also demonstrated that although there was deference to the authoritative discourse in class, students were determined to find explicit reasons behind the economic theories being taught. This would counter literature that claims that authoritative discourse is not subject to dialogic negations. Students in actuality enhanced their understanding of economic theory through these negotiations.

The author made three recommendations in this study. Firstly, a revision of course curriculum for the class would allow for more of a focus on practical professional practice. Secondly, the curriculum would be re-structured in a manner where students would have to construct predictions for the reasons behind and the consequences of economic models. Their questions would serve as indictors of understanding or as an indicator of the instructor's need to enact contingency strategies for learning. Thirdly, the study identified a need for professional development associated with the implementation of a university-wide system that transcends the responsibility of individual lecturers.

Moreover, Fernyhough (2008) emphasized the importance of semiotic mediation (related to child development) in the ability to use natural language and engage in interpersonal dialogues in describing our reality or in representing our intentional relations to reality (representing Bakhtin's work in 1984 and 1986, noting human languages being uniquely suited to the speaker representing their orientation towards perspective on reality). Fernyhough termed these semiotically manifested relations "perspectives." Referencing the work of Barresi and Moore (1996), he went on to point out the importance of the interplay of perspectives present in internal dialogue, preserving triadic intentional relations in external dialogues. This means that the perspectives have both a relationship with each other as well as with the reality they refer to. Fernyhough summarized dialogic thinking framework as thinking about higher mental functions incorporating these multiple, interrelated perspectives on reality to form part of a system of signs which we term natural language.

Activity Theory. Activity theory (AT) refers to human behavior that "results from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 8). Wang (1996) cited in Donato (2014) observed an ESL class in the application of AT. The teacher was frustrated that the students would not adhere to the directions in achieving the goals set at the start of each activity. Several important factors were acknowledged through the observation period. The first factor was that tasks are not generalizable and that set goals cannot always be achieved because activities and how they are approached is a product of the participants and circumstances in which the activities are introduced. Secondly, student backgrounds make it impossible to mold them to a set behavior. They have their own goals, cultural background, actions and beliefs. Thirdly, seemingly menial activities are not to be disregarded as they offer students a chance to improve mediation and allow students to gain control over their language skills and improve their procedures in carrying out activities. Lastly, Wang suggested that teachers need to re-assess their need for students to complete tasks in a set manner instead of focusing on the desires, motivations, and beliefs of their students, who have their own approaches and goals beyond those set by the activity.

Kim (2011) explained that "the mediation of L2 learning motivation between L2 learners and their perceived contexts has not been fully addressed from an AT perspective. Prior research has not fully highlighted the dynamics under which the relationship between L2 learners and their perceived social contexts affects the development of their L2 motivation" (p. 93). Therefore, "activity is defined as a system of purposive behavior; that is, only the purposive behavior that brings recognizable changes through the behavior would become activity" (Davydov, 1999, cited in Kim, 2011, p. 94). For Leont'ev (1978), activity can be seen as follows:

"Activity is a molar, not an additive unit of the life of the physical, material subject. . . . [A]t the psychological level, it is a unit of life, mediated by psychic reflection, the real function of which is that it orients the subject in the objective world. In other words,

activity is not a reaction and not a totality of reactions but a system that has structure, its own internal transitions and transformations, its own development." (p. 50)

Ramos (2013) reported favorable results in terms of cultural understanding and student response to class discussions and activities in culture-based classes. Respondents in his study claimed that such classes allowed them to differentiate between the English language and their own, and aided them in terms of cultural understanding and communicative challenges. Nearly half of respondents agreed that the presence of a foreign professor in these classes helped to ease any anxieties about participation in class activities so that they could develop English communication skills in an environment free of threats to their own culture. It was shown that the students developed good attitudes and behaviors in the activity, depending on their motivation and interest.

METHOD

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. As for quantitative, data were collected through a survey questionnaire answered by 100 EFL student participants from the Department of International Education in a university in Gyeonggi-do province, South Korea. As for qualitative perspectives, 4 professors participated in interviews and 10 classroom observations with 251 participants were conducted to complement the answers provided in the questionnaire. The 100 student participants who participated in the survey questionnaire are among the 251. The participants ranged between the elementary and intermediate levels of English language ability. The number of survey participants was determined by purposive-cluster random sampling according to Slovin's formula, and frequency count was determined by the percentage formula. The number of classroom observations was determined based on class availability and a focus on reaching the 100 student threshold with the survey questionnaire.

The collection of data through survey questionnaires and classroom observations was performed simultaneously. Regarding the survey questionnaire, there were three sections, namely: a) Student Coping methods with Content in Private Speech, b) Student Coping methods with Instructional Conversations, and c) Student Behavior Concerning Social and Cultural Mediation. During classroom observations, the researchers adhered to a set of guide questions, and classroom observations were also recorded. The questions used during the observations were not only aimed at validating the questionnaire data, but were also considered additional sources of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below presents the percentage of student coping with content in private speech.

Table 1. Percentage of Student Coping with Content in Private Speech

	excellent	superior	good	fair	poor
UCT-RPKS (Understand Communicative Topics & Relate to	1	8	49	30	12

Previous Knowledge & Skills)					
GCES-ETK (Give Concrete Examples or Situations & Expand Thinking Skills)	1	12	45	29	13
POI/ELS (Process Opinions or Ideas with Effective Linguistic Skills)	0	13	51	28	8
PKS/LCT (Practice Knowledge & Skills for any Level of Communicative Task)	1	11	49	31	8

As for UCT-RPKS (Understand Communicative Topics & Relate to Previous Knowledge and Skills), only 1% of the student respondents were identified as excellent; 8%, superior; 49%, good; 30%, fair; and 12%, poor. Based on the data shown, 88% were competent and confident that they were able to understand communicative topics and relate them to their previous knowledge and skills, while only 32% were not. The results are consistent with observed behavior in Classroom Observation A with 35 students. Students were able to interact with each other in terms of gaining understanding of the tasks set and explained by the teacher, or to clarify the instructions with each other. Although they seemed to exhibit limited private speech when interacting with the teacher directly, they were more engaged as a result of the use of humor by the instructor. His use of Korean cultural references and often self-deprecating humorous remarks seemed to relate to students and keep them interested and focused. Moreover, in Classroom Observation H with 24 students, the only struggles that were observed were isolated limitations in language ability. However, the students were so determined and engaged that they often found ways to overcome limitations by getting help from group mates, working through the difficulty and discovering a new path to communicating an idea using alternate vocabulary, or using single-word responses and gestures to convey ideas.

As for GCES-ETK (Give Concrete Examples or Situations & Expand Thinking Skills), still 1% of all respondents rated excellent; 12%, superior; 45%, good; 29%, fair; and 13%, poor. The data show that 58% were competent at giving concrete examples or situations and expanding their thinking skills, while the remaining 42% were not. In Classroom Observation B, 28 students frequently gave one-word answers as they often struggled with L2 speaking. Students appeared extremely uncomfortable speaking in English, though they often used gestures to communicate meaning. In one example when the instructor asked a student to recall the material from the previous lesson, the student was able to mix the use of gestures and single-word statements to convey ideas. Moreover, the instructor in Classroom Observation G with 25 students approached all the groups and posed questions to stimulate student engagement in the discussion activity. He consistently asked questions linking the lesson topic to Korean culture. This was used to keep them on task, as well as to gauge understanding. In the interview, Prof. A mentioned that "to bridge socio-cultural barriers, I try and relate the material to things that are closer to the students' lives." He further explained, "I bridge the gap by talking a lot about my own experiences and also relating the material to the students' lives. I think that more role play and speaking would be more ideal to process

communicative tasks, but in my 50-minute Reading class, that is neither a possibility, nor the goal of the class."

As for POI/ELS (Process Opinions or Ideas with Effective Linguistic Skills), it is surprising that no one from the student respondents rated themselves as excellent, while 13% of them rated themselves as superior; 51%, good; 28%, fair; and 8%, poor. The data show that 64% of the student respondents were competent at processing opinions or ideas with effective linguistic skills, while 36% were not. For instance, 25 students in Classroom Observation J exhibited limited private speech when interacting with the teacher directly. Occasionally, they answered in L1 while they were thinking of the appropriate/correct vocabulary in L2 in a more competitive type of interaction.

As for PKS/LCT (Practice Knowledge and Skills for any Level of Communicative Task), only 1% of all respondents rated excellent; 11%, superior; 49%, good; 31%, fair; and 8%, poor. In short, 61% of them were competent at practicing their knowledge and skills for any level of communicative task, while 39% were not. This was likely influenced by the use of heterogeneous grouping strategies as observed in Classroom Observation E with 19 students. In this class, stronger students and weaker students were grouped together. The groups tried to answer altogether and the weaker students were helped along by the instructor and the other students.

Table 2 below presents the percentage of student coping with instructional conversations.

Table 2. Percentage of Student Coping with Instructional Conversations

	excellent	superior	good	fair	poor
ALS/ECP (Apply Language Skills in an Effective Communicative Process)	2	15	45	30	8
IC-GEI (Initiate Conversation & Guide Enjoyable Interaction)	1	20	46	26	7
RQSTSA (Respond to Questions & Situation Topics Spontaneously & Automatically)	1	24	45	23	7
AS/SCT (Apply Strategies in Sustaining Communicative Tasks)	0	20	45	25	10

As for ALS/ECP (Apply Language Skills in an Effective Communicative Process), only 2% of the total respondents were identified as excellent; 15%, superior; 45%, good; 30%, fair; and 8%, poor. The data show that 62% of the student respondents were competent at applying their language skills in an effective communication process with their classmates and teachers, while 38% were not. This could be seen in Classroom Observation E with 19 students. They generally understood the instructions given by the instructor, though they sometimes confirmed meaning in L1 or L2 with each other. It was generally unnecessary, however, as the materials presented on the projector were explained clearly by the instructor at a notable slow pace to facilitate a generally low proficiency level as assessed by the instructor. Some key information was repeated and re-iterated as a matter of course rather than by necessity. Moreover, 25 students in Classroom Observation J were seen to perform well because the teacher clearly

introduced tasks and explained the goals and the step-by-step procedures of the activities. A final check on understanding was also carried out. During the activities, the teacher interacted with students individually in hushed tones where they were having issues completing the task in a timely manner without disturbing the other students who were on task. There was also a lot of non-verbal communication in the class (e.g. hand raising) for questions posed by the teacher. This was good in that it ensured that the whole class was participating in the activities, not just the students with the strongest speaking skills.

As for IC-GEI (Initiate Conversation & Guide Enjoyable Interaction), 1% rated excellent; 20%, superior; 46%, good; 26%, fair; and 7%, poor. Based on the data shown, 67% of them were competent at initiating conversation and guiding other interlocutors to enjoyable interaction, while the remaining 33% were not. This was evident among 25 students in Classroom Observation G. Relevant local and cultural issues related to the topic were incorporated into the discussion often, and they initially spoke up and responded enthusiastically to topics they were familiar with. As an example, the instructor introduced the Korean cigarette tax issue in the world issues lesson and it helped to clarify the meaning of the term 'tax.' Another example was identified in the interview with Prof. C. He explained, "The goal for me is not that they have to speak beautiful English with me, but we have to communicate. We have to communicate with one another. They can do that in a number of ways -- it could be broken English, Konglish, whatever -- through similar interests."

As for RQSTSA (Respond to Questions & Situation Topics Spontaneously & Automatically), another 1% of all respondents rated excellent; 24%, superior; 45%, good; 23%, fair; and 7%, poor. In short, 70% considered themselves competent at responding to questions and situational topics spontaneously and automatically, while only 30% did not. In Classroom Observation G with 25 students, the teacher made good use of questions, using many questions to elicit responses in an effort to keep students active. By posing many new questions, including follow-up questions, he encouraged students to elaborate and go beyond the surface to think more critically on the topic. The instructor also used graphic organizers to aid students in processing the target material. Furthermore, an impressive aspect of this class was the group discussion for the world issues topic from the text. The instructor asked students to brainstorm several current social issues in the local community (Korea), and to determine in group discussion which of these problems was the most important and why. It was another effective way to get the students active because of an interest in issues they are familiar with, and it was effective in getting them to produce original ideas and communicate them in English.

As for AS/SCT (Apply Strategies in Sustaining Communicative Tasks), none of the respondents rated excellent. However, 20% of them rated superior; 45%, good; 25%, fair; and 10%, poor. The data show that 65% considered themselves competent at applying strategies in sustaining communicative tasks, while 35% did not. This was evident in Classroom Observation C with 16 students, where instructional

conversations at the start of class were presented and processed to review the previous lessons and to clarify the 'going forward' timetable. The instructor was very clear as he spoke at a very reasonable pace for understanding. He used intonation and hand gestures to maintain the concentration of students and to highlight significant elements of the instructional conversation. Re-iteration of key points was also utilized. Professor D in the interview said that he prepared his class for sociocultural interaction by presenting both sides. He tried to show relevance to Korean contexts, as well as take advantage of his exposure to what works in America. Moreover, in Classroom Observation H with 24 students, the instructor elicited everything from students throughout the lesson and motivated them using a reward system. This kept the students participating from beginning to end. He also provided good group conversation activities that involved problem-solving and were related to the text-based material of the lesson. By providing these opportunities and placing them in teams, students were encouraged to participate, and they were extremely active. Table 3 below presents the percentage of student behavior concerning social and cultural mediation

Table 3. Percentage of Student Behavior concerning Social and Cultural Mediation

	excellent	superior	good	fair	poor
AWT/BPC (Adjust Ways of Thinking with Student's Beliefs, Practices & Culture)	0	10	46	30	14
DMAA/ROIF (Display Manners or Act Appropriately in Reacting to Opinions, Ideas & Feelings)	1	18	42	29	10
ABP/CACS (Assert Beliefs or Principles with Conscious Attention to Cultural Sensitivity)	3	19	46	22	10

As for AWT/BPC (Adjust Ways of Thinking with Student's Beliefs, Practices & Culture), none of the student respondents rated excellent, 10% superior; 46%, good; 30%, fair; and 14%, poor. From the data shown, 56% were competent at adjusting their way of thinking with consideration for other students' beliefs, practices, and culture, while 44% were not. This is evident is in Classroom Observation B with 28 students. The instructor asked students to tell a story about any topic in their own words in any way they could. Since the students had been doing this all semester, they were comfortable in a one-on-one setting with the instructor telling their story. However, several students were predominantly unresponsive unless specifically targeted by the instructor, despite the instructor's effort to get students to participate. Professor B in the interview was aware of common cultural implications in Korean classrooms. He explained, "It is really tough in this culture to tell someone that they're wrong. And so, the better way to do is just to skip the wrong part and go in the right way and let them increase their confidence."

As for DMAA/ROIF (Display Manners or Act Appropriately in Reacting to Opinions, Ideas & Feelings), only 1% rated excellent; 18%, superior; 42%, good; 29%, fair; and 10%, poor. The data show that 61% of the student respondents were competent at displaying manners or acting appropriately in reacting to opinions, ideas, and feelings in a discussion by using the proper choice of words, expressions, and gestures; while 39%

were not. In Classroom Observation D, 22 students responded promptly to the teacher's instructions to begin work on the lesson. During tasks, students responded individually and chorally. The teacher encouraged and directed students to answer in full sentences, helping them through repetition either in full or word by word while inferring the following word. Moreover, in Classroom Observation I with 32 students, the teacher repeated instructions to get into groups, and the class very quickly settled into self-defined groups in terms of size indicating some familiarity with this particular group designation.

As for ABP/CACS (Assert Beliefs or Principles with Conscious Attention to Cultural Sensitivity), 3% of them rated excellent; 19%, superior; 46%, good; 22%, fair; and 10%, poor. The data show that 68% considered themselves competent at asserting their beliefs or principles with conscious attention to cultural sensitivity, while only 32% did not. In Classroom Observation J, 25 students provided answers promptly and without a large amount of thinking time or private speech when the teacher asked them to answer individually by calling out their names. This is because good linking was displayed by the students to previously taught lessons in recognizing terms belonging to the specific unit being taught. However, the main issue for some students on assertion still lied in the limited opportunities for student-to-student interaction in carrying out tasks in groups or taking advantage of face-to face-communication due to the traditional seating pattern. This is also evident in a mixed major group of 19 students in Classroom Observation E. This mixed major group was different from previously viewed classes in that it seemed to include fewer behavioral disruptions, but at the same time it exhibited a lesser degree of interaction and participation beyond processing input and discussion in group format.

Table 4 below presents the summary of findings with mean scores. Results of 'excellent,' 'superior,' and 'good' are grouped together to indicate 'high competency,' while results of 'fair' and 'poor' are combined to indicate 'low competency' or 'needing improvement.'

Table 4. Summary of Findings

	Excellent / Superior / Good (%)	Fair / Poor (%)
A. Student coping with contents in private speech		
UCT-RPKS	88	22
GCES-ETK	58	42
POI/ELS	64	36
PKS/LCT	61	39
mean	67.75	34.75
B. Student coping with instructional conversations		
ALS/ECP	62	38
IC-GEI	67	33
RQSTSA	70	30
AS/SCT	65	35
mean	66	34

C. Student behavior concerning social and cultural mediation		
AWT/BPC	56	44
DMAA/ROIF	61	39
ABP/CACS	68	32
mean	61.67	38.33

As shown in the table above, the mean scores for student coping with contents in private speech in terms of UCT-RPKS, GCES-ETK, POI/ELS, and PKS/LCT were 67.75 indicating 'high competency' and 34.75 indicating 'low competency' or 'needing improvement.' The mean scores for student coping with instructional conversations in terms of ALS/ECP, IC-GEI, RQSTSA, and AS/SCT were 66, indicating 'high competency' and 34, indicating 'low competency' or 'needing improvement.' Finally, student behavior concerning social and cultural mediation in terms of AWT/BPC, DMAA/ROIF, and ABP/CACS had mean scores of 61.67 indicating 'high competency' and 38.33 indicating 'low competency' or 'needing improvement.' Reasons for the results are evident in the discussion of the classroom observations above.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It is important to note that teaching English in a sociocultural environment needs to consider student needs such as a) coping with content in private speech, b) coping with instructional conversations, and c) behavior concerning social and cultural mediation. These were all felt and recognized by the professors throughout the entire semester. However, attention should be given to the potential and sociocultural expectations of students in an EFL environment. Sociocultural expectations refer to how students expect their teachers to conduct classes, and it is linked to student interaction in class. Sociocultural expectations involve teacher input which is embedded with cultural and professional experiences that influence the way they carry out classroom objectives.

Korean students spend time and effort going to language academies after school in their elementary, middle, and high school lives to improve their proficiency in four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (see Kim, 2008). Motivation for such effort is derived in part from personal ego so that they are able to communicate with foreigners or travel alone with convenience, but mainly so they can obtain good grades on the basis of their performance (see Ramos, 2013; Ramos, 2014b). These are all considered as a driving force to exert effort in line with desire for a higher level of potential. Korean students face the realization early on that higher grades are the basis for better employment in good companies.

Teachers are now loaded with obligation to bridge the gap between the higher and lower proficiency students. As for lower level students, carefully-defined activities embedded with sociocultural elements should be developed and properly assessed before a semester starts. Sociocultural elements should include cultural and classroom orientation, communicative scaffolding, and compelling lesson design that involves interesting topics and activities for multi-dimensional purposes. As for higher level students, any activities could be applied as long as target goals are clearly defined so

that input is more meaningful to them. With meaningful input, this group of students will navigate sociocultural factors and challenge themselves to achieve across all communicative levels and develop their skills for greater success in a globalized world.

CONCLUSION

Mean scores shown in Table 4 indicate that there is a significant difference between the 'excellent-superior-good' results and 'fair-poor' results in: a) student coping with content in private speech, b) student coping with instructional conversations, and c) student behavior concerning social and cultural mediation. Obviously, nearly half of the total participants did not rate themselves as competent enough in coping with sociocultural activities in the EFL classroom, but more than half of them believed they were able to cope with the classroom challenges. The propensity of many students to underestimate their abilities in English, particularly with speaking, was also linked by some instructors to an associated impact on their behavior in terms of social and cultural mediation.

Therefore, more activities geared toward student interest should be utilized, and strategies that promote increased interaction should be implemented. Furthermore, smaller class sizes and desk arrangements that facilitated cooperative grouping and teacher movement should be designed in fostering a more active atmosphere based on students' actual needs. In some observed classes, such variables led to more dynamic lessons where participation, cooperation, and engagement were the norm. Instructors should also incorporate more useful topics and approaches which are culturally sensitive to Korean students to enable them to move from a familiarity with Korean-centric elements to effectively overcoming sociocultural barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To best achieve classroom goals in a sociocultural environment, Ramos (2015) cited this study and made a recommendation. Accordingly, teachers and curriculum developer are required to construct an assessment sheet for students to fill out to determine relevance between prepared curriculum and students' actual needs. Here are the three areas of the recommendation:

A. Classroom and cultural orientation

'Classroom and cultural orientation' includes classroom set-up, cultural input, and foreign teacher's personality that sustain both a teacher and a student in a sociocultural and communicative spirit. Students are likely to meaningfully learn when a classroom environment is feasible for learning in which a teacher has the primary role to process learning. van Pier (2014) commented that "in terms of language learning, the environment is full of language that provides opportunities for learning to the active, participating learner" (p. 253).

statement	yes	no

1) I prefer a classroom set-up that has:
   a) a round table seating arrangement which promotes comfort among students to complete collaborative work;   _   _
   b) useful multimedia equipment which easily facilitates teaching and learning;   _   _
   c) a small class size which promotes effective and efficient assessment;   _   _
   d) a weekly homework which reviews or previews a conversational topic; and,   _   _
   e) Other, please specify:

   _____   _   _
   _____

   General comment:

   _____
   _____

2) I prefer cultural input to a topic that:
   a) compares and contrasts English language with Korean language;   _   _
   b) teaches or illustrates manners and gestures in western world;   _   _
   c) reshapes attitude and behavior for global affairs or purpose;   _   _
   d) reflects my communicative performance and/or intercultural competence; and,   _   _
   e) Other, please specify:

   _____   _   _
   _____

   General comment:

   _____
   _____

3) I prefer a foreign teacher to be:
   a) friendlier and accommodating during discussion or interaction;   _   _
   b) less strict and supportive to student needs;   _   _
   c) animated and vocal in explaining concepts or giving inputs;   _   _
   d) understanding and considerate when homework is submitted late; and,   _   _
   e) Other, please specify:

   _____   _   _
   _____

   General comment:

   _____
   _____

B. Communicative scaffolding

'Communicative scaffolding' includes active classroom interaction, scaffolding techniques, and communicative fluency assessment that is believed to promote sociocultural competence as negotiation happens between teacher and student in the

course of interaction. According to van Lier (2014), "from all complex phenomena that may occur during interaction, the notion of negotiation of meaning is highlighted as being indicative of learning processes at work, or at least as a likely candidate for learning opportunities" (p. 247).

statement	yes	no
1) I prefer active classroom interaction facilitated through:		
a) question-and-answer activity where follow-up questions are processed;	_	_
b) photo interpretation or description activity where input and organization skills are evaluated;	_	_
c) problem-solving activity where target goals and strategies are carried out;	_	_
d) games where communicative competence is significant in developing confidence and collective input; and,	_	_
e) Other, please specify:		
_____	_	_
_____		
General comment:		
_____		
_____		
2) I prefer scaffolding techniques processed through:		
a) illustration where communicative instruction and flow are shown on the board;	_	_
b) vocabulary where synonyms and antonyms are written on the board;	_	_
c) direct correction where its process-based approach is executed with less intimidation or threats;	_	_
d) teacher's relaxing attitude where student communication is naturally performed; and,	_	_
e) Other, please specify:		
_____	_	_
_____		
General comment:		
_____		
_____		
3) I prefer communicative fluency assessment when discussing or expressing inputs processed through:		
a) student-to-student interaction where question-and-answer and follow-up questions are required to break inhibition when speaking English among ourselves with a teacher facilitating;	_	_
b) speaking proficiency mentoring where students are open to constructive criticism anytime by a teacher;	_	_
c) useful and relevant expressions or idioms where culture implication is explained;	_	_
d) free talking where ideas, opinions, and emotions are expressed anytime; and,	_	_
e) Other, please specify:		

_____   —   —
_____

General comment:

_____

_____

C. Topics and activities

'Topics and activities' includes choice of conversational topics, societal issues, and types of activities that are vital in keeping up the curriculum in a communicative language teaching approach where sociocultural competence is developed. A topic and its types of activities to facilitate learning are inevitably inseparable as competence is actually interplaying in the course of interaction. "... language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment... do not deny cognitive processes, but it connects those cognitive processes with social processes" (van Lier, 2014, p. 258).

statement	yes	no
1) I prefer conversational topics that:		
a) are not so serious, but fun and interesting;	—	—
b) are useful for academic and professional endeavors;	—	—
c) are more relevant and practical to match a class level;	—	—
d) are predictable, yet challenging to anticipate communicative flow; and,	—	—
e) Other, please specify:		

_____   —   —
_____

General comment:

_____

_____

2) I prefer societal issues that involve presentation skills and develop:	yes	no
a) analogy	—	—
b) classification or division	—	—
c) cause-effect	—	—
d) comparison-contrast	—	—
e) definition	—	—
f) description of details	—	—
g) elimination	—	—
h) enumeration	—	—
i) examples	—	—
j) process	—	—
k) narration of details, and	—	—
l) Other, please specify:		

_____   —   —
_____

General comment:

_____

_____

3) I prefer activities of a topic that:
   a) involve notional-functional grammar which aids accuracy to   _   _
      express thoughts and feelings;
   b) encourage creative and critical thinking to develop impressive   _   _
      content or input;
   c) develop organizational skills;   _   _
   d) reflect experiential learning or daily practical activity; and,   _   _
   e) Other, please specify:
      _____   _   _
      _____

      General comment:
      _____
      _____

The assessment sheet will be provided with concept explanation or definition and Korean translation so that students would have a valid response.

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