English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol. *14*, No. 2 Summer 2008

Developing English Discourse Competence through Self-directed Practices of Non-native English Teachers[1]

Seonghee Choi (Kyonggi Institute of Technology)*
Jeongsoon Joh (Konkuk University)**
Yoan Lee (Seogang University)***

Choi, Seonghee, Joh, Jeongsoon & Lee, Yoan. (2008). Developing English discourse competence through self-directed practices of non-native English teachers. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 14*(2), 25-46.

The purpose of this study is to present a model for the teachers to develop English discourse competence needed at English classrooms, and to build a basis on which to offer quality English teaching in the formal education without depending upon native speakers. A total of 30 teachers participated in this study. The participants met in group once a week, and had 10-15 minutes' presentation each. Their presentation was recorded and sent to the researchers for analysis. Three conferences were held to motivate and guide the participants, and the researchers visited each team twice to encourage the participants and check the research procedures. Two surveys were conducted to gather data about the beliefs of the participants while engaged in this project. The findings include the participants' self-perceived improvement, to a varying degree, in speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and even in structural knowledge as a result of incidental learning. Also the participants showed increased self-confidence in teaching English, as well as more spontaneous and lengthened speech as the project went on. It is hoped that the findings from this project will provide insights on the areas of teacher cooperation, teachers' self-directed development, reflective teaching, using English as the media of instruction, and teacher training programs.

[discourse competence/self-directed practice/teacher-training]

---

[1] This work was supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOEHRD (KRF-2005-B00222).

* First author ** Corresponding Author *** Co-author
The authors of this paper express sincere thanks to the reviews for their invaluable comments and feedback.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, "communicative competence" has become the ultimate goal for the English education in Korea. The English teachers, whether they teach at secondary or higher level schools, are practically in the center of achieving this goal in that they are the primary source of language input necessary for acquiring English language. This awareness of the critical role of teachers in English education is partly reflected in the recent trend called "TETE(Teaching English through English)". Also, for the past few years there have been a growing number of studies pin-pointed at the discourse competence of the teachers themselves in the English classroom context (e.g., Jung, 2005; Kim, 2002; Lee, 2004, 2005; Seong, 2006)

However, there are several things to take into account in implementing such idea as TETE in real classrooms. First of all, teachers should have high level proficiency in English discourse to teach in English. In addition to general communicative competence, teachers need to develop specific discourse ability such as building multiple utterances. This means there should be a strong need for an empirical study to figure out the nature of discourse ability required for classroom management and the ways for the teachers to develop such ability.

Secondly, there has been a doubt that non-native speakers can not reach native-like proficiency (e.g., Cook, 1999; Davies, 1991; Doughty & Long, 2003), and such doubt has greatly influenced teacher training practice in non-English-speaking countries. For example, many Asian countries including Korea are recently inviting native speakers of English for English teaching at public schools (Group, 1989; Koike & Tanaka, 1995).

Given this, the present study starts from the assumption that it IS possible for classroom teachers to develop high level proficiency in English enough to teach English in English (Lee, 2005). The second assumption that motivated this study is that, in non-English speaking countries like Korea, developing language proficiency has been conceived as a totally personal problem without any support from educational authorities (Medgyes, 2001). To make it worse, most teacher training programs so far have emphasized theoretical aspects far from actual classrooms, without mutual understanding between teacher educators and teachers themselves. As such, existing teacher training programs, often lacking consistency, have revealed limitations in producing cohesive results that can be applied to real classrooms.

Bearing this in mind, we carried out a one-year longitudinal study by way of close cooperation between researchers and teachers. The purpose of this study is to present a

model for teachers to develop speaking proficiency (discourse competence)[2] needed for classroom teaching, and to search a new direction for English teacher training in the future. By doing so, we ultimately hope to build a basis on which to offer quality English teaching in the formal education without depending upon native speakers.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers in language education literature hold the view that language learning essentially evolves out of processing available resources and thus, they place emphasis on examining how and what types of resources are optimal for language acquisition to take place (Doughty, 2003; Long, 1996). In this analytic tradition, it becomes important to analyze what types of language resources become important in developing language proficiency and how they can be embodied into language production. It is also notable that processing input is not sufficient for language acquisition to take place because it is entirely possible for language learners to understand a message without understanding all the structures and lexical items in the language, and without being aware of not understanding them all. Therefore, language learners need to ***produce*** their language (Swain, 1985, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). That is to say, language teachers (as language learners themselves) need to have regular occasions in which they produce the language in the target form. Once they do, they become more observant not only in meaning of language but also in forms (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989).

In this relationship between input and output, language teachers need to pay attention to how they process input and what kinds of output they produce. Influenced by cognitive science, language education researchers have explored the notion of 'consciousness' that began with Schimidt and Froto's groundbreaking study (Schmidt & Froto, 1986), MacLaughlin's theoretical perception (McLaughlin, 1990) and more recently implicit learning (Doughty, 2003). This focus on cognitive process points to the fact that much of language acquisition can be accomplished through careful and explicit attention to how language functions are performed through linguistics forms. This literature therefore informs us of the importance of making use of the teachers' own analytic capacity to examine their own language development, for example, in what practical consequences can be expected from what types of learning methods. Unfortunately, there have been very

[2] In this paper, the terms 'speaking proficiency' and 'discourse competence' will be used interchangeably.

few empirical studies that examine the types of discourse constructions that language teachers need in their classrooms.

By discourse constructions, we mean to examine discourse produced in its naturalistic context, for example, how discourse is produced in the evolving sequence of interactional contingencies. If teachers use English as a primary instructional language, they have to produce their discourse in the temporally evolving sequence of talk. That is to say, teachers have to think as they speak, hearing what has been said and determine what to say next on the fly. If they offer examples for a particular concept, they have to plan quickly as to what types of examples are adequate and then, offer examples in a way that students can understand (Lee, 2004). All these have to be accomplished in real-time discourse. Then, one can say, the particular form of the discourse and its functional features are determined by the speakers' interpretive choices they make in the very course of producing their talk.

One of the distinctive ways to retrieve and describe the speakers' interpretive choices is through sequential analysis. Initiated by conversation analysis (Markee, 2000; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby, & Olsher, 2002), the sequential analysis attends to the phenomena in natural conversation in which speakers are oriented to the prior talk, most commonly, to immediately preceding talk because each turn is tied to each other in temporally evolving sequence of talk. Looking into the sequential contexts of discourse production allows us to retrieve how speakers are engaged in a constant decision making as they produce their language. Examining teachers' discourse construction can be informed by this sequential analysis. For example, Lee (2005) found that one of the important tasks for nonnative teachers of English is how to construct multiple turns. Teachers are bound to speak more than one utterance if they use English as an instructional language, which means they have to constantly monitor what they have said and determine what to say next. More fluent speakers are capable of making that decision quickly, which results in the production of coherent speech. This result therefore emphasizes the need for bringing out the teachers' own analytic capacity in constructing their own discourse.

The final area of relevant literature is from teacher education literature. One of the primary developments in language education is a transition from traditional grammar and reading based approach to communication oriented teaching, namely, CLT (Communicative Language Teaching)(Bax, 2003; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1995; Li, 1998; Savignon, 1997). Unfortunately, adopting this approach has been challenging, particularly in the areas where English is not a native language, Korea included (Bax, 2003; Li, 1998). One of the challenging aspects in this regard is to provide consistent and long-last training support but in realities, most teacher training programs are short-term, fragmented, and externally administered. That is to say, teacher education models have been a quick fix with a primary emphasis on methodological issues, which

makes hard to apply in the face of a litany of practical realities classroom presents. Though there have been studies on teacher training in Korea (e.g., Chang, 1996; Jeon & Kim, 2001; Park, 2004), the aspects of learner-autonomy or cooperation among the peers when the teachers themselves become learners have rarely been touched.

For this reason, the present study explores the possibility of having classroom teachers involved in various stages of their language development, from analyzing their own discourse constructions to choosing adequate learning approach. Teachers will be provided with systematic support along with concrete data of their discourse constructions such that they will be given ample opportunities for collaborative analysis and for bringing out and reflecting on their own realities of working at the school frame. One of the key elements here is "research session" in which groups of teachers produce a presentation type of discourse and then, offer their analysis as to what they accomplish, and what becomes problematic. Through this research session, teachers become more observant and attentive to the procedure by which their speaking proficiency develops and how they could become embodied in their language lessons. This type of support makes it possible for teachers to become engaged in collaborative educational decision making for their own development, which leads to the sustained involvement in the peer collaboration. This trend has been amply documented in teacher education literature. The present study therefore is organized in such a way to promote those collaborative work among teachers so that they can take own initiative in their own learning process.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

For this study elementary and secondary school teachers were recruited in one of the following three ways: 1) by asking the professors in the department of English education to inform their students; 2) by visiting offices of educational districts in Seoul and Kyong-gi area and asking for help in teacher recruiting; 3) by posting an ad at academic organization of English teachers.

At the recruiting stage, we researchers recommended that the potential participants join this project as a group which is composed of 3 to 4 members. The rationale for the group work was that cooperation among those sharing the common goal (of improving English speaking proficiency) would be more effective to keep them motivated than working alone. As for the group size, 3 or 4 was considered optimal to carry out group work for the purpose of improving speaking proficiency.

As a result, a total of 9 teams of teachers were made up (30 participants in total). At the closing of this project, only six groups survived. The teachers generally had 5-20 years of teaching experience. Seven teams were from Seoul, and the rest were from Kyong-gi. Two teams were high school teachers, one middle school, and the rest were elementary school teachers. Most of the participants were female and elementary school teachers took up the majority.

The result of initial questionnaire showed the following: 1) most participants were feeling burden about the recent TETE, and looking for opportunity to improve their English; 2) they decided to join this study thinking that this project will help; 3) they had no clear idea, though, about how to manage their group work, and they expected the researchers to keep in touch with them and take care of them; 4) they generally underestimated their speaking ability.

2. Procedures

The main procedures for this project were as follows: 1) the participants' weekly meetings where they talk in English on selected topics of their own for about one and half hour per meeting; 2) three conference meetings where the researchers and the participants come together and where the participants could share the learning experience, get professional help and feedback from researchers and experts in the area, and evaluate their own learning process; 3) the researchers' team visits to encourage and observe the participants and check the research procedures. In addition to this, communication between the researchers and the participants on the one hand, and that among the participants was tried via an Internet Café designed specifically for this project.

First, all participants worked towards as study groups. Each study group met once a week in which they practice their language skills. A particular focus of the study group meeting was placed on providing each participant to speak for extended amount of time (15-20 minutes of uninterrupted spontaneous speech). Each group determined the topic of their speech yet their presentations should not be interrupted in order to help participants to develop speaking skills, organizing the thoughts and put them into coherent discourse as they speak. Their group meetings were audio-recorded, sent to the researchers, transcribed, and analyzed for the exploration of their developmental process.

Secondly, in order to guide, motivate and promote participants' progress, three conference sessions were held. In each session, participants were encouraged to communicate to figure out in what areas show progress, what become problematic, if and how their current speaking skills could fare in classroom settings and to determine learning strategies before the next conference session.

Thirdly, the researchers made two visits to each team, where a model lesson guide for teaching English in English was provided by the researchers. At this team visit, one of the members each team gave a sample lesson with their own students in the presence of the researchers and team mates.

In the below is described in detail how this project went through one year.

1) The Beginning Period (Dec. 2005 – March 2006)

First conference was held on Dec. 24, 2005 as an orientation meeting about the procedures and nature of this project. The participants were informed of general guidelines about the management of this project, learned how to use digital recorder, and listened to a lecture on English pronunciation and discourse structure by an invited speaker. Also, an announcement was made about the future conferences. All of this conference was video-taped.

It was made a rule for each team to meet once a week and give a presentation for 10-15 minutes per person. One member in each team was supposed to send the recording of the weekly meeting to the researchers. Most teams began their weekly meeting in January, 2006. As most participants were not accustomed to this type of group work, first two to three meetings were most difficult for them. Therefore in order to encourage the participants and check the procedures, the researchers made visits to the teams and observed the team meeting.

Two teams dropped out after only two meetings. The biggest problem for them was the difficulty in arranging schedules for weekly meeting. Most teams survived, though, as of March, 2006. Before the March Conference, the transcriptions of the first and the most recent meetings were distributed to the participants and discussions on them were encouraged.

Team visits revealed that even the survived teams still have concerns about schedule arrangement and burden of preparation for the meeting. Remarkable was, though, that their most serious concern was keeping face in the presence of acquaintances. For that reason, they tended to spend lots of time on composing and memorizing what to say in the meeting, and they in turn had increased burden about time.

At the March Conference, the participants shared their experience and strategy. They remained highly interested through the conference as they realized the differences among the teams in the way to understand the task involved and to implement the task, and accordingly in the result. Actually, several teams mentioned that they would try what other teams have done.

2) The Middle Period (March-June, 2006)

This was the hardest period for the participants. Weekly meetings were missed occasionally for the new semester hectic schedules, and additional 3 teams dropped feeling that there was not much perceived improvement after 3 months' effort. By April, only three teams survived, but these 3 teams became true survivors until the official end of this project.

Another set of team visits were made during this period to the survived 3 teams, and this time one from each team was appointed to do teaching in English. Their teaching was videotaped and analyzed. The researchers observed the teacher's teaching, and discussion followed. It was found that the teachers felt less fear about teaching in English and were willing to use new expressions.

3) The Last Period (July –November)

By November a huge body of recorded data was collected. Now, the teachers began to feel a need for free discussion, and tried to include free discussion session into their weekly meetings. They believed that free discussion helps to practice newly learned expressions and make the meeting more exciting.

By this time weekly meetings became part of their life, and little difficulty in meeting was found. But they needed a kind of change, a new, fresh wind to keep them motivated. Various methods were tried in each team towards the goal.

4) Consolidation Meeting (The end of November)

Survived teams and researcher gathered for the final conference and had time to look back at the whole year. Most participants agreed that they came to have increased confidence in speaking, and it was found that peer evaluation was higher than self-evaluation about the improvement. Two teams are still meeting even after the end of this project.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected via three channels in large. They are the participants' audio-recordings of English discussion at weekly meetings, video-recordings of three conferences and of the researchers' team visits (focusing on the English teaching by one member per team), and interviews and surveys. The participants' group meetings were

audio-recorded and sent to the researchers, and then the researchers transcribed and analyzed the recordings for the exploration of the participants' English developmental process.

The conferences were the second source of data. All the three conferences were video-taped and transcribed to see how the participants go through this project towards the common goal of improving their English speaking skills. The teachers' sample classes that were conducted at the time of the researchers' team visits were also video-taped on selective basis for transcription and analysis.

For more qualitative data source, selective informal interviews were conducted and audio-recorded at the conference venues or at the team visits. Apart from this, formal, semi-structured surveys were carried out at the beginning, middle, and at the end of this research project to see if there is any change in the attitudes/beliefs of the participants regarding English learning as they proceed in this self-directed English learning project.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Participants' Background Information

1) Motivation of Joining the Project

Most of the participants revealed that they had felt burden about teaching English through English and were frustrated when they thought they didn't have enough speaking ability in English. As a result, they participated in this project sincerely hoping to improve their speaking ability and wanted to have a chance to start out their on-going study, as shown in the following excerpts from interview and survey protocols.

> To improve English speaking ability and to get out of mental burden about teaching English in English (KJY)

> I thought this project would provide me a good opportunity to improve my English speaking ability as it is a basically group-based cooperative project. (IHC)

> I have been frustrated as my speaking ability did not improve as I expected although I spent lots of time and money studying English. (LSC)

> Though I have felt a strong need for studying English, I haven't had a chance to do that or a strong motivation to keep on with it. I thought this project would give me the very chance and the motivation to go on (KYK)

Another motivation to start this project was from their college supervisors or their colleagues as seen below.

> As my colleague strongly encouraged me to join (SKM)
> As my dissertation supervisor recommended (INH)
> As one of my team mate suggested joining this project together (ISJ)

As shown in the above examples, it was found that one's personal and internal motivation is the most important factor to start any study and that the encouragement from colleagues or former teachers could be another important factor.

2) Preparation for the Speaking Presentation at Weekly Meetings

Data from interviews, some of which is given in the below, showed that the participants usually decided the topic first individually or in group when they prepared for the speaking presentation. Some groups share the same topics among members but most of the participants selected their own topics individually. Once they selected their topics (See Appendix for sample topics thy used), the next procedure was to find out the articles related with their topics even though there were a few participants who didn't read and improvised their speech at the spot. This implies that teachers acknowledge good speech needs good content along with finding out good materials to provide content. That is, a good speech does not only require talking ability but also needs good content.

> I decide on the topic first and then collect information through books or internet (LHJ)

> The presenter decides the topic for presentation 2 weeks before the meeting, and the members discuss on the topic (KJY)

> Topic for the next meeting is decided through discussion at the end of each weekly meeting. There was no preference for special topics: any topic was welcomed, except that priority was given to things happening around us. Once the topic is decided, information is searched for mainly through internet. (IHC)

[I usually find topics for presentation] By searching attractive articles either in Korean or in English or after watching an impressive TV program (SKM)

I select topics of interest first to talk about for several months: various topics including politics, economy, social problems, culture, travels, family matters, job-related matters...; I file relevant articles from magazines, TV news, or from newspapers for later use (SMK)

Once the topic is decided, search the internet for relevant information, and when there's no idea for a topic, [I] read books over looking for topics that interest me. (KYK)

[I] Scan newspapers, magazines, or books written in English [to get an idea] (INH)

Another interesting finding was that after they read articles, many of them wrote drafts in English and practiced with the written materials orally for their speech presentation.

I read the materials printed out from internet. From those materials I make a draft about 1 page long, including anything that comes to my mind and then logically organize and revise the draft before presentation. (IHC)

[I] Decide the topic first, think about things relevant to the topic, organize into writing what comes to my mind, and present; or select interesting parts of a book or an article and organized them into writing; Sometimes I present interesting parts of an English book or an English article just as they appear in the book or in the article (HSH)

[I] Write a draft (SMK)

[I] Put into a written form whatever was collected (KYK)

[I] Decide the topic first and then compose on the topic or search English newspapers for relevant information (CHS)

However, different from these, one participant observed that writing a draft and memorizing it did not help to improve speaking proficiency as shown below:

For the first 5 months, I read texts on the topic about which to present, write a draft, and present the prepared draft by memorization. Since the class observation (at one of the team member's class) in June, instead of writing a draft, I simply decided the order of presentation of ideas after reading the texts on the selected topic, because presenting by memorization didn't seem to help improve my speaking ability by inducing me to depend upon the memorized draft. (ISJ)

In conclusion, all the teachers believed that reading related articles or books were helpful for their speech but writing drafts was shown as controversial about its effectiveness in improving speaking ability, even though many of participants used writing drafts as the basis for their speech.

2. Change in English Skills by Self-Report

1) Speaking Proficiency

The data from surveys and interviews showed that all the participants believed that they improved their speaking proficiency to a varying degree, with nobody marking on the scale of 'No improvement'. About 20% of the participants answered that they felt their speaking proficiency improved a little bit by expressing their anxiety level became lower as shown below:

> I can speak in English with less anxiety. (SKM)
> I think my English writing and speaking ability have been improved a little. (JHS)

About 60% of the participants believed that their speaking ability was developed to some degree and most of them mentioned that their self-confidence became higher as shown in the following:

> My confidence in speaking in English gradually increased through repeated 15-minute English talk. Speaking in English for more than 15 minutes is what I rarely experienced and I don't think there are many who can do that even they are English teachers. (IHC)

> The length of [spontaneous] speech increased. (KYK)

> My self-confidence in speaking English increased with less fear of making mistakes. (LSJ)
>
> Self-confidence was cultivated from opportunities of speaking in English. (INH)
> I can speak in English with more naturalness. (HSH)

The rest 20% showed strong confidence in speaking in English believing that their proficiency improved considerably or dramatically.

> My self-confidence in speaking increased considerably and I also enlarged my English vocabulary (SMK)
>
> My anxiety about speaking in English in the presence of others dramatically decreased. I feel that my change is in my self-confidence dramatic due to this English speech project work. (KJY)

2) Other Developed Skills

Surprisingly, many participants reported that they had developed many other skills, not to speak of speaking skill, such as reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammatical knowledge. They also mentioned that social and cultural awareness had been improved through this English speech project.

(1) Reading Skill, Social and Cultural Knowledge, and Vocabulary

After the participants selected the topics for their speech, since all of them read some articles, newspapers or books, they experienced a lot of reading throughout this project:

> I read a lot and my interest increased in reading in English. (INH)

At the same time, through those kinds of reading, they found themselves alert on social and cultural issues more than before because most of them used the internet searching for the reading materials which dealt with many current social issues and provided many cultural sources world-widely as shown below:

> I got much more while preparing for presentation than while having meetings: Most important is my increased knowledge about lots of unfamiliar fields in the course of searching for information needed for preparing presentation. I think that one of the reasons that make it difficult to speak in English is lack of background

> knowledge of certain domains. Since I began this project I have tried to talk about a variety of topics and it helped me to accumulate background knowledge of those topic areas. Now I have things to talk about whatever topic is given to me. (SMK)

Another reported area of improvement was vocabulary. All of them indicated that their vocabulary knowledge increased and about 60% of them felt that their vocabulary knowledge expanded 'considerably'.

(2) Writing Skill and Grammatical Knowledge

Many of the participants wrote drafts when they prepared for their presentations. This made them develop their writing skills. Even, they reported, they could develop English structural (grammatical) knowledge while they were writing drafts, as seen below:

> In the course of writing down, I could pay attention to grammar and could improve English structural knowledge in what I would talk about, as well as confidence in speaking English. (HSH)

(3) Ability to Prepare for Something and Thinking Skill

All the while they prepared for the speech and when they actually make a speech in English, they found some other skills than language skills developed. They indicated they were able to prepare for the speech more easily as time went on, and through the process, their thinking skills also improved, as can be seen in the below:

> I became more skillful for preparing for the presentation. I could form a new habit of organizing my ideas while I was reading English texts, thinking of how to put into speaking what I read. (LSJ)

> I feel my organizing and thinking skills has improved. (SMK)

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the original purpose of this project was to improve participants' speaking ability (discourse competence). In addition to accomplishing the original purpose, this study interestingly reveals that participants developed many other skills as discussed above and thus shows all the processes done in this study are worth trying in teacher education program.

3. Change in Discourse Competence from Transcribed Speech Data

Three teams (a total of 10 participants) that had continued to have a regular practice session throughout a year show some visible changes in their discourse competence. Those changes can be summarized as follows: (1) More improvisation and less elaborated preparation for the discussion session, indicating more fluent and spontaneous speech on the part of the participants; (2) Longer utterances and more complicated sentence patterns, suggesting enhanced ability to connect sentences to form a coherent discourse; (3) Increased capacity to manage their discourse, implying more attention available to care more than content itself.

While discourse competence involves an array of skills such as accuracy, fluency, and the use of grammar and vocabulary, there is no systematic tool to measure the specific ways in which nonnative speakers build their discourse contents in the course of their speech. Several speaking tests developed in Korea might give us some summative evaluations of the speech as a whole, but they are short of offering close analytic findings with which nonnative teachers develop adequate learning strategies. The following summary is designed to illustrate the types of alternative analyses of the discourse that could generate adequate learning strategies for nonnative teachers of English. The data analyses are based on the comparison of the speech samples gathered from January-February sessions to ones from November-December from three aforementioned teams.

1) Spontaneous Speech

In their first six months into the project, more than 50% of the participants had prepared their speech sessions by composing what they wanted to say. Some of them actually memorized what they prepared. The reason for adopting this seemingly burdensome strategy is out of their desire not to become embarrassed in front of their colleagues and also of the belief that their speech should be accurate drawn from reliable sources. Most of their speeches were then not improvised ones.

In the second half of the project period, however, they began to see the point of practicing improvised speech as they saw the need for practicing such speeches. The supportive rapport they had developed with their team members also contributed to the change with their strategies. Most participants gathered some resources for their speech and then, make a note from the source and try to speak off it. Accordingly, their speech in the second parts show more gaps, fillers, hesitation and repetitions. Nonetheless, the change with their strategies implicates an important improvement in their attitude and learning strategies.

2) Simple to Complex Sentences

Earlier speech by the participants consisted of a number of short phrases and sentences. The following is an example of a speech that shows a list of sentences. The speaker is talking about her husband. "My husband is a computer programmer. He works for a department store. Originally he graduated from the university. He majored in Nutrient."

The same speaker shows much more complex sentences in her December speech. The following is an example of her speech about a movie she had recently seen. "People who can't live well on earth well like criminal or poorer people, they live on the Mars." The use of complex sentence shows some degree of discourse planning; by using relative pronoun, the speaker is able to hold the information about the people "people" before producing the remaining part of the sentence about "people."

3) Awareness of Discourse Content

In early speeches, participants were busy to deliver the messages they intended, and they often changed their topic abruptly. For example, the next three sentences by a speaker show a series of terse remark without connecting them. "I think I have to work everyday; that is my destiny. I think. So yeah, yesterday, last night, I was a little boring." However, in November and December data, their speeches show some evidence that they are aware of how their talk is being built up. Clear evidence is shown that the speaker characterizes her speech as she speaks. "They are handicapped, how can I call that in English? Do you understand? People with some genetic disease?"

When we see a meta comment like this, it is likely that the speaker is ready to see how his/her discourse is constructed and to change if necessary. Another example is as follows. "The next topic is English story book. And I'll show you, show you some sample. Maybe you heard about the "Learn to read" series, it's very famous and popular series." This type of speech demonstrates the speaker's ability to cohere the sentences that are being produced.

IV. CONCLUSION

Developing English proficiency has been one of the most important curricular goals in Korean education as a way to help students become more effective communicators in the global community. Particularly important in this regard is the role of classroom instructors as they offer primary English input necessary for language acquisition. This issue coincides

with the recent push in many school districts and universities to have their courses taught in English. However, there has been a wide skepticism about the possibility of accomplishing the native-like proficiency among teachers in the literature (Cook, 1999; Davies, 1991; Doughty & Long, 2003).

In light of this situation, the present study began with the premise that it is possible to help classroom teachers to develop the advanced level of English proficiency for instructional use, against the general tendency to admit the inherent difficulties for nonnative speaking professionals to accomplish the advanced level of proficiency. This study also tried to provide academic and professional support to teaching professionals for longer period of time with the task of developing discourse competence, which condition most teacher training programs seem to fail to satisfy in the face of practical realities of classroom settings and other administrative duties that press classroom teachers.

In the present study, classroom teachers formed a group of three or four, and met regularly and practiced, throughout a year, the type of speaking tasks they would eventually need in English classrooms. The researchers provided support for them by holding the conferences where the teachers shared their experiences and learned from one another, and by making visits to the schools where the teachers work to encourage them and also to help them stay in the framework of this project.

These mutual efforts seem to have yielded considerable changes in many different aspects among the participating teachers. First of all, most participants reported they became more confident in speaking in English, and they also developed, they observed, some other language skills such as reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammatical knowledge as a result of incidental learning in the process of preparing for the weekly presentation session. Apart from these linguistic aspects, the teachers seem to have earned social and cultural knowledge, as well as developed some practical skills for strategic preparation and critical thinking through this collaborative project. The analysis of the participants' speech data proved their self-perceived improvement was not simply subjective estimation. Their discourse competence had increased actually in terms of the length and complexity of utterance, spontaneity of speech, and attention capacity available to the content and style of discourse.

This study has the following principal implications for educational endeavor. First of all, this research will provide an empirical basis on how non-native English teachers can improve discourse competence through self-directed practices in collaborative work. The findings from this study also offer empirical suggestions for educational administration in Korea. While teachers have been encouraged to use English as the instructional language, such policy has been without any empirical findings or support. This study clearly shows that the administrative push can have more persuasive power with systematic support. Another implication is related to the format of teacher training as implemented in the

present study by way of cooperation between teachers and researchers. By getting theoretical support and systematic guidance from researchers, the teachers could be guided in the right direction and encouraged to keep going on their practices and progress.

The findings from this study could also shed some lights, though indirectly, on the notion of reflective teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 1994) in that the participating teachers surely had lots of opportunities throughout this project of 'expanding their understanding of the teaching-learning process and their repertoire of strategic options as a language teacher-learner' (cf. Murphy, 2001). As Richards and Lockhart (1994) posited, the teachers could have learned much about teaching through self-inquiry as they tried while participating in the present study, and their experience as language learners could possibly be reflected in their future teaching.

After all, it is hoped that this study will provide a new model for a teacher training that promotes collegial collaboration among the teachers as a means to improve their English proficiency.

REFERENCES

Bax, L. (2003). The end of CLT: A context approach to language teaching. *ELT Journal, 57*(3), 278-287..

Celce-Murcia, M., Dornyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Issues in Applied Linguistics, 6*, 5-35.

Chang, K.-S. (1996). Content and process in language teacher training. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 2*, 193-212.

Cook, V. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(2), 185-209.

Davies, A. (1991). *The native speaker in applied lingusitics*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press.

Doughty, C. (2003). Instructed SLA: Constraints, compensation, and enhancement. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (2nd ed., pp. 256-310). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Doughty, C., & Long, M. (2003). The scope of inquiry and goals of SLA. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (2nd ed., pp. 3-15). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Group, R. (1989). *Expatriate English language teachers pilot scheme: Final Evaluation Report*. Hong Kong: Education Department.

Izumi, S., & Bigelow, M. (2000). Does output promote noticing and second language acquisition? *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(2), 239-278.

Jeon, J.-H., & Kim, E.-J. (2001). Teacher training through self-observation. *The Journal of the Applied Linguistics Association of Korea, 17*(2), 157-177.

Jung, E-H. (2005). Second language classroom discourse: The roles of teacher and learners. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 11*(4), 121-138.

Kim, S.-Y. (2002). Teachers' perceptions about teaching English through English. *English Teaching, 57*(1), 131-148.

Koike, I., & Tanaka, H. (1995). English in foreign language education policy in Japan: Toward the twenty-first century. *World Englishes, 14*(1), 13-25.

Lee, Y.-A. (2004). The work of examples in classroom instruction. *Linguistics and Education, 15*(1-2), 99-120.

Lee, Y.-A. (2005). *Speaking proficiency of non-native language teachers: Constructing multiple utterances.* Paper presented at the The Korea Association of Teachers of English 2005 International Conference, Seoul, South Korea.

Li, D. (1998). It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly, 32*(4), 677-703.

Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie (Ed.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). New York: Academic Press.

Markee, N. (2000). *Conversation analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McLaughlin, B. (1990). "Conscious" versus "Unconscious" Learning. *TESOL Quarterly, 24*(4), 617-634.

Medgyes, P. (2001). When the teacher is a non-native speaker. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 429-442). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Murphy, J. M. (2001). Reflective teaching in ELT. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 499-514). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Park, J.-K. (2004). Needs analysis for developing a culture-focused teacher training course. *English Language Teaching, 16*(2), 73-100.

Pica, T., Holliday, L., Lewis, N., & Morgenthaler, L. (1989). Comprehensible output as an outcome of linguistic demands on the learner. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 11*(1), 63-90.

Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language, 50*(4), 693-735.

Savignon, S. (1997). *Communicative competence: Theory and classroom practice* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill..

Schegloff, E., Koshik, I., Jacoby, S., & Olsher, D. (2002). Conversation analysis and applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 22*, 3-31.

Schiffrin, D. (1996). Interactional sociolinguistics. In S. McKay & N. Hornberger (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language teaching* (pp. 307-328). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schmidt, R., & Froto, S. (1986). Developing basic conversational ability in a second language: A case study of an adult learner of Portuguese. In R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to learn: Conversation in second language acquisition* (pp. 237-326). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Seong, G. (2006). Pedagogical functions of teachers' conversational repair strategies in the ESL classroom. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 12*(1), 77-102.

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 235-253). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principles and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in honour of H. G. Widdowson* (pp. 125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (1995). Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: A step towards second language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 16*(3), 371-391.

APPENDIX

Sample Survey Questions

Your Group Name: Your Name:

School you work at: Teaching Experience (Year/Month):

1. What is your motivation to join this project?
2. What is the relationship of the members in your group and how did you get together at first?
3. Where do you meet, which place is the most comfortable and why?
4. What kinds of topics have you dealt with?
5. How do you prepare for the weekly meetings? Please describe in detail.
6. How much time on average do you spend preparing for weekly meetings?

7. What was the most effective way for you to prepare for the presentation? Any know-how of your own for preparation that you can recommend for your colleagues?
8. What do you think about peer-cooperation like the present project? Do you think it helps? If so, how? If not, why?
9. What are the advantages or benefits of doing this task? Describe as many as effects you have experienced personally. [e.g., improved self confidence, improved speaking ability, change in attitudes/beliefs, etc.]
10. What are the difficulties or disadvantages of doing this task?
11. Did you learn anything from your colleagues while carrying out this project? If so, what is it?
12. Do you think your speaking proficiency has improved as you go on with this project? (Yes/No)

* *Answer only those who chose "Yes."*

1) How much do you think your speaking proficiency has improved?
(A little/To some degree/Considerably/Dramatically)
2) Specifically which aspect of speaking do you think has improved?

13. Is (Are) there any other area(s) in which your ability has improved? (Yes/No)

* *Answer only those who chose "Yes."*

1) Specifically which aspect(s) of your English do you think has improved?
2) How much do you think your speaking proficiency has improved?
(A little/To some degree/Considerably/Dramatically)

14. Please evaluate the December and March conferences in terms of their usefulness for your carrying out this project.
15. What are your recommendations for colleagues or other participants regarding the effective ways to learn in and prepare for this project?
16. What are your suggestions for the researchers for this project and future projects related with improving teachers' speaking proficiency?
17. Please attach samples, if any, of your prepared scripts or materials for the presentation at weekly meetings.

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Higher

Seonghee Choi
Division of Liberal Education
Kyonggi Institute of Technology

2121-3 Jeongwang-dong, Shihung
Kyonggi, 429-450
Tel: (031)496-4756
Fax: N/A
Email: schoi99@kinst.ac.kr

Jeongsoon Joh
Department of English Language and Literature
Konkuk University
1 Hwayang-dong, Kwangjin-Ku
Seoul 143-701, Korea
Tel: (02) 450-4157
Email: johjs@konkuk.ac.kr

Yoan Lee
Department of English Language and Literature
Seogang University
1 Shinsu-Dong, Mapo-Ku
Seoul, 121-742
Tel: 02-705-8298
Fax: N/A
Email: yoanlee@seogang.ac.kr

Received in April, 2008
Reviewed in May, 2008
Revised version received in June, 2008