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Korean Students' Perceptions of Free-talking and International Professors' Role Recognition*

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Free-talking in Korea has recently been emphasized as a way of improving students' speaking ability outside of the classroom. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of free-talking, to understand what type of roles were played by or allotted between Korean students and international professors (IPs) and to look for effective speaking strategies for utilizing free-talking. Participants of this study were 68 university students and 23 IPs. The data collected through a survey type of questionnaire were analyzed by this researcher and the main findings indicate that students and IPs have somewhat different viewpoints about their concepts of free-talking. Students expressed varying viewpoints depending on their experience and class (year). In terms of the benefits, usefulness, and satisfaction of free-talking, students and IPs seem to be in more agreement with each other although the two groups have conflicting perceptions in the particular operation of free-talking, especially in terms of preparation and feedback. Students stated that they feel anxious, nervous, and that they struggle with peer pressure while free-talking. However, they feel that through free-talking they build up confidence and increase their speaking ability. Regarding roles, most professors play a helpful role as a guide or facilitator while students want professors to provide more suitable materials and to tutor them by means of appropriate feedback and strategies as well-prepared teachers like a prompter, participant or tutor in the timely manner. Finally, this paper proffers a few practical suggestions for activating free-talking and a discussion of the pedagogical implications.

[free-talking/international professor(IP)/perception/speaking strategy/anxiety]

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I. INTRODUCTION

In these real-time World Englishes[1] when productive skills such as speaking and writing are so important, it is to our advantage to invest time and put intensive efforts into meeting such a language learning paradigm shift. Obtaining native-like proficiency is the ultimate goal of learning a second or foreign language such as English. To do that, students need to be exposed to situations where authentic language is used as much as possible. University-level English education is no exception. At almost all colleges and universities in Korea, there are a number of international professors (IPs)[2]. They teach students English in required or elective general English classes, called English Conversation, Screen or Cinema English or even in some major-related courses. In some cases, they are supposed to be available to meet with students outside of class to practice English through a phenomenon in Korea known as 'free-talking'. The university's emphasis on hiring many IPs is probably directly related to globalization wherein people use English communication worldwide. It is clear that English as a global language (EGL) is becoming the most common communicative tool in almost all fields. Graddol (2006) mentioned in his book *English Next* that more than two thirds of the world population is exposed to English. In line with this irreversable tidal wave, English in

[1] Today the term 'World Englishes (WE)' is more widely used since Kachru (1992, 1997) first named it. Along with the WE, English is also termed as a global or international English like an EGL (English as a global language) or EIL (English as an international language). The modern concept of international English is the product of centuries of development of the English language where English is not just one language but many different varieties. Thus English is becoming so much more widely used by speakers of English as a second or a foreign language than it is by only native speakers to the point that the number of varieties will gradually increase. Even American English speakers or British English speakers belonging to inner circle of Kachru (1997)'s three circles of English have many different dialects. WE consist of varieties of English used in globally diverse sociolinguistic contexts. The use of English by so many people from different regions of the world affects the way sociolinguistic histories, multicultural backgrounds and contexts of function influence the use of English.

[2] Many people in Korea seem to have an obsession with the term 'native speakers' of the English language. That expression is changing as more and more Filipinos and other nationalities from non-native English-speaking countries come to Korea to teach English. That is, with the increasing influence of using International English as WE, there are also people from other countries outside of Australia, the United Kingdom, America, Canada and New Zealand who are coming to Korea to teach English. The most common way of identifying people of this non-Korean teaching category in the past has been as 'native speaker' or 'foreign teacher/professor'. The former is no longer accurate given the reality of what has been said above. The latter is also not viewed as a compliment much less a professional title by any nationality outside of Korea. There is something that sends a negative vibe in calling someone 'foreign'. Therefore, 'international teacher/professor' seems more fitting in that it is inclusive of people of ALL nationalities teaching English as well as including those non-Korean teachers and professors to participate in the life of the school, city, community and province, along with using the term WE.

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Korea is often seen as a tool to measure whether elementary and secondary students should be accepted into a specialized purpose school or university, and later, whether university graduates should be hired to work for a better company. But this type of program shows students that English serves a much greater purpose and that is to be able to talk about a multitude of issues with people from countries outside of Korea. In this way, students are able to practice their English in a class that is taught only by an IP and then outside of class by meeting an IP usually in his or her office to practice speaking English in a more relaxed setting.

The question that ultimately comes to the surface is whether or not this uncontrolled type of English practice is effective. If so, how effective it is? Here in Korea, this type of speaking practice is called 'free-talking'. When this free-talking session[3] started, it was mainly just to give students a chance to practice outside of class what they were learning inside their class when there are only a few IPs working at the university. In some cases, the free-talking session is operated without much accountability, leaving some of its educational purposes unfulfilled. Meeting an IP inside or outside the classroom does not ensure that students have improved their communication skills in and of itself. Moreover, some IPs are left to their own understanding in the operation of free-talking without any basic guidelines provided by the university for a more productive free-talking session that gives stronger evidence that the energy and time students and professors invest through free-talking actually pays off.

Along with finding a more detailed framework including basic directions and procedures, it would be in everyone's best interests for us to experiment with some plausible suggestions to address the essential and structural problems we are becoming aware of so that the IPs play a crucial role in empowering students by facilitating free-talking in such a way that students become communicatively competent. Therefore, we should prepare some general guidelines indicating the overall purpose and objectives of the session. Also general strategies should be prescribed without losing the 'free' nature of free-talking sessions. This is in order to provide a sense of direction and consistency in the approaches. In this manner, there is some synchronicity, and therefore the session can be assessed comprehensively. To do such things we need to explore students' needs and perceptions of free-talking, first and foremost, along with the roles of students and IPs in order to operate a more improved session. Accordingly, the present study attempts to look at a wide variety of aspects about free-talking sessions

[3]. The term 'free-talking session' used here has been uniquely developed at a university in Cheonan where free-talking has been implemented into the English education program. It started simply as a way to give students more opportunity to practice speaking English outside of the classroom. Eventually it became part of the job description of IPs to free-talk as part of their required 20 contact hours with students. At the present time, IPs free-talk for six hours in addition to their regularly scheduled classes.

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perceived by students and professors. Also through a questionnaire survey, some feasible suggestions will be proffered for further research and better application affecting students' needs and necessity in a more active speaking fashion. The research questions are as follows:

1. What perceptions do students and professors have about the definition and concept of free-talking?
2. What perceptions and roles do students and professors have of the operation of free-talking?
3. What strategies would make free-talking more successful or effective?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Free-talking or Talking-free

Essentially, when it comes to free-talking in Korea, one usually assumes the situation will involve consistent, uninturrupted communication between the persons involved. However, one sometimes comes across situations where some students are reticent to participate in the free-talking session. The communication process breaks down as students are at a loss to maintain communication in the talking-free situation. Actually, The researcher has observed or often heard of the opposite situation where free-talking becomes 'talking-free' because an IP continues to speak himself or herself while the students just listen. The researcher has witnessed a number of students who are not willing to open their mouths even after being asked to talk about the issue being spoken about. After free-talking for many hours the free-talking session is likely to become talking-free for some students. Here we need to think about some questions and alternatives.

First, what is real free talking? Is it just free speaking or free conversation? In terms of this term, Kim and Brent (2011) expound that "Speaking is an important part of free-talking and so it is important to pay close attention to how much the students are speaking during the English-practice session outside of class. It is in analyzing these aspects that we gain some perspectives on what is really involved in speaking which could easily be overlooked, especially by a native speaker" (p. 25).

On the one hand, free-talking is such a common term in Korea that is has practically become a proper noun. It is a word that almost any Korean or IP who has been in Korea for any given amount of time is familiar with. According to students' and professors' role and strategy, free-talking could function as a class, a tutoring session, a study group,

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small talk or a discussion/debate session. When it comes to informing the IP who arrived just recently, it is difficult for anyone to make sense of this concept except to say that free-talking is free conversation. Then what is free conversation? Free-talking has become known in Korea as the way to practice speaking English with IPs. This trend has led to bringing people from other countries to be international teachers or IPs by the millions. The idea is that just by being exposed to native English-speaking, Koreans will be forced to speak in English, and thus Koreans will be enabled to put the many years they have studied English into practical use through conversation.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it assumes that an encounter with a person from a country outside of Korea will automatically enable the student to have natural conversation in English regardless of the fact that conversation styles are slightly different between Korean and English. Due to this respect, a more systematic approach to free-talking is needed. In other words, free-talking depends on how much the speaker understands the way and style that different people use to talk as well as the framework of a 'free' situation.

If we consider Thornbury (2008) we may begin to see free-talking, and the concept of practicing English outside the classroom, in a new light especially as it is applies specifically to the university setting in Korea. He contrasts 'controlled practice' with 'practiced control' and defines the latter in this way: "Practiced control, on the other hand, involves demonstrating progressive control of a skill where the possibility of making mistakes is ever-present, but where support is always at hand" (p. 63). He elaborates on this definition by giving the example of learning to 'ride a bicycle', in which case the student is learning to ride a bicycle on his or her own while the expert is there to guide the student in case he or she makes a mistake. In this way, the student is able to learn to speak English well in an environment where the student feels comfortable to make a mistake without ridicule while also having accountability in place to ensure that he or she speaks better than if they were alone or in an environment where others did not hold them accountable regarding mistakes they made (Kim & Brent, 2011).

Thus, basically free-talking is speaking without formal structure or rigid framework for the purpose of encouraging students to speak constantly. Considering Korean students' needs and particular aspiration for speaking naturally, the fundamental principal of the free-talking program is to encourage students to talk, as much as they can in a stress-free environment. By embracing the free-talking situation, students and IPs work together to prevent it from becoming a talking-free scenario.

On the other hand, when it comes to the definition of free-talking, it is vital to define what free-talking is in terms of the structure when students meet with IPs because this notion forms the ways in which IPs set the ethos for practicing English outside of the

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classroom. The answer to this question of whether free-talking is a formal class, an informal class, a study group, a tutoring session, small-talk or discussion/debate will also form the expectations of the institution as far as how the instructor is expected to manage this type of English practice. It seems appopriate to look at some basic definitions of class, group-study and tutoring to arrive at the conclusion regarding this debate. Below are several terms showing the difference between how each of these words are defined in a general way which seem applicable to the subject of free-talking.

As the term is used in this study and as it relates to our discussion of free-talking, a class is where a group of students meet an IP for a limited amount of time to practice speaking in English and a tutoring session is where students learn English through face-to-face interaction with the IP. Another possible understanding of free-talking is as a study group where a group of people meet regularly in a casual setting to exchange ideas and information on a specific subject. A final category to consider is that of discussion and debate where students talk about an issue in a way that makes them think about why they believe what they believe which also forces them to challenge another person's viewpoint. When a person thinks of having a conversation in English, he or she may not automatically think of this category because we tend to think of conversation in terms of bonding with people and debate is sometimes counterintuitive to that relational development. However, one aspect of conversation that is vital to building relationships is the ability to express one's own thoughts without being disrespectful or sounding unreasonable to the other parties involved in the conversation.

2. Speaking and Its Strategies

A: How are you?
B: Fine, thank you, and (how are) you?

Of the many ways to greet people the above is extremely familiar to us. These kinds of expressions are still used and heard oftentimes from our students. Also the above is one of the first speaking initiators students learned under the influence of the Audio-lingual Method, focusing on the automated pattern drill. They just memorized some expressions and spit them out automatically without noticing the context. Those rote-memorized phrases are attributable to the 'controlled practice' a repetition of something to learn. That has been the first step to speaking. Autonomy is the goal of every English educator, Korean and non-Korean. Once a student gets to this level, free-talking can be much more liberating. It is at this point that IPs are most comfortable operating with their students. If you ask Koreans why they think they know the above sentence better than any other sentence, they are likely to say that it is because it wass

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spoken and learned that way when they first learned English. That may suggest something about repetition. However, it seems just as likely that the reason why Koreans are able to remember that sentence so well is because this statement includes several chunks which, when spoken in a rhythm, would seem to be easy to understand and remember.

Thornbury (2005, pp. 90-91) suggests the following six criteria for speaking tasks which we can recommend to those involved with helping students practice their speaking inside or outside of class.

1. Productivity: A speaking activity needs to be maximally language productive in order to provide the best conditions for autonomous language use.
2. Purposefulness: Often language productivity can be increased by making sure that the speaking activity has a clear outcome, especially one which requires learners to work together to achieve a common purpose.
3. Interactivity: Activities should require learners to take into account the effect they are having on their audience.
4. Challenge: The task should stretch the learners so that they are forced to draw on their available communicative resources to achieve the outcome.
5. Safety: While learners should be challenged, they also need to feel confident that, when meeting those challenges and attempting autonomous language use, they can do so without too much risk.
6. Authenticity: Speaking tasks should have some relation to real-life language use.

Considering the above criteria, one faces a number of situations each day. In fact, in our daily lives, one usually produces thousands of words a day in our mother tongue. However one actually simply utters very formulaic, that is, very fixed or semi-fixed expressions, by combining and chunking with a limited number of words over and over again. Somebody can simply speak less than one hundred words. Nevertheless, as a communication tool, "speaking a second or foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills" (Bailey & Savage, 1994, p. vii). In other words, speaking is an integrated interaction which goes with many combined factors. It must be a formidable task for Korean students. Korean students who wish to speak native-like, however, always say that they want more speaking time with an IP. They already know enough vocabulary to express themselves. Students have also learned many things about grammar from the English lesson they have experienced in school. However when students want to speak, they feel themselves stuck in a speech-absent, tongue-tied dilemma. We Koreans often feel like there is something we want to say that is on the tip of our tongues but we can't quite utter it.

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What is the problem with speaking? What are appropriate strategies for speaking? Speaking typically takes place in real time, with little time for detailed planning. Also speaking is interactive and requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking in turns. In a sense, speaking is like the turn-taking in playing a ping-pong game. We understand speaking involves a much more complicated process and different types of knowledge than just vocabulary and grammar.

What then is involved in speaking? Thornbury (2005) states "the first point to emphasize is that speech production takes place in real time and is therefore essentially linear. Words follow words, and phrases follow phrases. Likewise, at the level of utterance, speech is produced utterance-by-utterance, in response to the word-by-word and utterance-by-utterance productions of the person we are talking to" (p. 2). While learning English, students often fall into the trap of attempting to learn and use longer phrases or sentences. The gist of the longer phrases or sentences is how students try to express themselves by using multi-word units or items.

Speaking is much less focused on a perfectly flowing sentence than writing is. Korean students seem to be obsessed with speaking the perfect sentence in English, thinking otherwise they would rather not speak at all in many cases. All that is required is for students to use phrases in such a way that they can properly emphasize what they want to talk about. Oftentimes students can use hesitation markers such as um, well, uh, sort of, and like. Luoma (2005) gives some guidelines for other types of conversations which could easily occupy an entire semester of free-talking. If IPs are interested in exchanging information, it seems that a common theme of storytelling is the most common form of conversation according to Luoma (2005), which could involve using a number of steps to guide the students into deeper and deeper dialogue with the IP. Meanwhile, the IP could also deal with issues related to politeness which is a common misunderstanding between IP and students. In a specific Korean university setting, an informal gathering between an IP and a small group of students, for the purpose of open conversation in English in an environment of practiced-control where students learn how to have a conversation about a variety of subjects they have chosen themselves.

III. METHOD

1 Participants

A total of 68 students, 38 freshmen and 30 sophomores majoring in English participated in this study. All students participated in free-talking sessions as part of a requirement for their major. They responded to a questionnaire consisting of both

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multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The survey was administered in the middle of the Spring semester of 2011. The students' English ability was varied, though most students were at the lower intermediate level, knowing many words but struggling to form sentences or comprehend the meaning of common or slightly difficult English expressions. In other words, they were average students who knew the meaning of single words, but when they tried to speak, they felt as if it was impossible to come up with the proper words in the proper place to convey a specific meaning. These students had experienced free-talking with an IP either this semester or a previous semester. Freshmen students majoring in English still struggled with the same basic English-fluency issues while sophomores had some free-talking experience along with studying in their major. In the case of freshmen students, they did not make studying English a priority because they were taking general subjects as freshmen and they just had to fulfill another English course requirement in the liberal arts curriculum.

IPs participating in this study are required to free-talk with students for around six hours or more every week. These professors have a variety of methods for utilizing the time in which they enable students to practice speaking English through their free-talking session. The professors have a variety of viewpoints about free-talking, with some accepting all kinds of free-talking students while other professors are required to free-talk with the majority of students in the department they are assigned to. IPs participating in this survey have a variety of backgrounds, some of whom are formally trained to teach English as a foreign language and some of whom are not. It seems that most of these professors first started teaching English as a foreign language when they came to this university.

2. Instrument and Procedures

1) Instrument

The main instrument for this study was a questionnaire used to identify the characteristics of the students' and IPs' perceptions and roles. Students and IPs responded to the questionnaire with mostly similar items with some exceptions. In order for students and IPs to express their thoughts and opinions about a free-talking session conducted at a university for more than 10 years, both bad and good, the questionnaire included open-ended items as well as 5-level Licket items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, and 5 = strongly agree). Also in order for students to be able to fully express themselves regardless of their English ability, the researcher decided to translate the survey into Korean and then asked them to answer the questions in Korean.

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The IPs also participated in this research with the help of the Department of International Affairs at the same university, which oversees them. They have been working at the university for various lengths of time ranging from less than 6 months up to more than ten years. The IPs' liaison distributed the surveys to the IPs via e-mail, explaining the purpose of the survey. Although they were expected to respond to the questionnaire, twenty-three out of thirty-two IPs working at the university responded to the survey. The period of conducting the survey was for about three weeks to seven weeks after starting the free-talking program that semester.

2) Procedures

Students were told to look for their IP at the first whole students' meeting, forming a free-talkingmate. In the process of enrolling in free-talking, most of the students chose one or more among their free-talking professors who were assigned to their department. Some students looked at different department' professors for their free-talking professors. The first step for students was to choose a date and time for free-talking during the first or second week of the semester. The IPs checked the attendance each session and were required to submit the attandance and observation report to the Division of International Affairs after finishing the semester. The observation sheet, which was utilized during free-talking sessions included attendance, weekly topics handled and comments on each session.

Surveys were distributed to students and IPs participating in this study in the middle of the semester (7 weeks after starting the semester). Students who participated in this study also answered a questionnaire related to the survey questions during class. These questions would not be the same as the survey questions but addressed some of the same issues. The questionnaire was used to learn about students' and IPs' perceptions and their roles in free-talking. Questionnaire responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics were obtained for the survey items.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

Thus data for the students was collected from 68 university students (freshmen N=38 and sophomore N=30) who participated in the free-talking program during the 2011 Spring semester. They responded to a somewhat comprehensive questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice items and open-ended items. The data for the IPs was collected to survey perceptions of the participants regarding free-talking sessions and to understand the roles the IPs and students played. The multiple–choice questionnaires, consisting of 21 items for the students and 13 items for the IPs, were administered to the participants

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in the middle of the semester. Mainly the participants' perceptions and roles were analyzed according to items of the definition of the free-talking which were the fundamental questions, preparations, feedback, and facilitating guidance. This criteria is based on Harmer (2001)'s seven roles of the ideal teacher: a controller, an organizer, an assessor, a participant, a resource provider, a tutor and an observer. The purpose of this analysis is to identify students' and professors' specific perceptions and roles, and compare the disparities and make some suggestions to further improve the session.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to look at a wider variety of aspects about free-talking sessions perceived by students and professors. It seeks appropriate speaking strategies for activating free-talking effectively through a questionnaire survey in order to operate a more improved actual session. To examine students' and IPs' perceptions of the definition of free-talking, the researcher explored what type of roles were played by or allotted between Korean students and IPs. The following are the results of the present study on the basis of the three questions.

Q1: What perceptions do students and professors have about the definition and concept of free-talking?

TABLE 1
Definition Perceptions of Free-talking between Professors and Students N(%)

Definition Perceptions	Professors	Students	
		Freshmen	Sophomores
Class	4(17.39)	1(2.63)	4(13.33)
		5(7.35)	
Tutoring session	3(13.04)	4(10.53)	5(16.67)
		9(13.24)	
Group study	1(4.34)	8(21.05)	8(26.67)
		17(25.00)	
Small talk	15(65.21)	25(65.79)	13(43.33)
		37(54.41)	
Discussion/debate	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
		0(0)	
Total	23(100)	38(55.88)	30(44.12)
		68(100)	

Regarding the first question, as Table 1 shows, while 54.41% of the students regarded

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free-talking as small talk, 65.21% of IPs thought of free-talking as small talk at a slightly larger rate, thinking that students learn everyday English in a relaxed and comfortable environment without much pressure. Interestingly enough, among students, the responses between freshmen and sophomores are significantly different. The freshmen, most of whom experienced free-talking for the first time this semester, responded with a much lower number of the students in the field of a tutoring session and a class even though the order of responses is the same as those of the sophomores in the order of small talk, a group study, a tutoring session, and a class.

This implies that those who have experienced free-talking have a wider variety of needs in their speaking in terms of activities and strategies. In other words, as students desire to utilize free-talking activities as a more in-depth group-study and individual language training through one or two-on-one tutoring sessions beyond small talk. Eventually we can assume that they want to have a good command of English speaking enough to gradually do group study after improving their English through small talk.

The table above also shows that students and IPs alike view free-talking the least as a class. But the fact that a few view it this way could lend itself to doing some free-talking sessions in this way, especially if students have a particular purpose in mind for learning English. The second possibility of ways to view free-talking by a minority of students and IPs is as a tutoring session. It was surprising to see that any IPs view free-talking in this way since some IPs seemed adamant that free-talking is not a class. Clearly, the largest gap between students and IPs was in that nearly 25% of students view free-talking as a group study whereas only 4.34% of IPs view free-talking in this way. This suggests that free-talking could be utilized in a more academic style that addresses English in a manner related to something students are interested in, such as how to initiate friendship with a person from another country or simply how to have an authentic conversation in English. Although many students and IPs alike indicated that they view free-talking as a sort of small talk, it is interesting that there is about an 11% gap between students and IPs, indicating that more IPs view free-talking as small-talk than do students.

Q2: What perceptions and roles do students and professors have of the operation of free-talking?

According to descriptive item statistics in Table 2, participants responded most positively to items 3, 4, 1, 14 and 5 in that order which are over the mean of 4.0. These items supported the students' needs, interests, desires, and the necessity of free-talking for improving their speaking abilities. In other words, students thought of free-talking as a useful tool to develop themselves in preparation of their future career.

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TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics on the Students' Responses to Free-talking

Item no.	Item	Mean	SD
3	I want to develop my English communication skills through free-talking.	4.38	.82
4	I think the current free-talking program is necessary for my future career.	4.31	.85
1	I am interested in free-talking in English.	4.25	1.05
14	I think the free-talking program is very useful for improving students' speaking skills.	4.06	1.00
5	I want to attend and practice free-talking-related activities.	4.02	1.05
15	I am satisfied with the free-talking session with my current free-talking professor.	3.54	1.20
20	I think it is helpful for me to continue to speak if partner(s) help(s) me open my mouth when I am not sure of what to say next.	3.48	1.03
10	I can understand topics discussed during free-talking sessions.	3.42	.86
19	I think it is helpful for me to continue to speak if an IP helps me open my mouth when I am not sure of what to say next.	3.42	1.06
11	I can understand what the free-talking professor says in my free-talking session.	3.35	.84
16	I think my speaking ability has improved thanks to the current free-talking program.	3.31	1.15
13	I can answer questions asked by the IP.	3.29	.81
8	I enjoy free-talking in small groups.	3.22	1.05
12	I can ask my free-talking professor questions.	3.14	.95
17	I think my listening ability has improved thanks to the current free-talking program.	3.00	1.09
9	I can express myself in English through free-talking.	2.98	1.01
6	I don't feel nervous engaging in free-talking with an IP.	2.92	1.30
7	I feel confident that I can do well in small-group free-talking.	2.85	1.02
18	I was given feedback by the IP during the free-talking session.	2.77	1.06
2	I feel confident when I free talk with an IP in English.	2.83	.93

However, items 18, 2, 7, 6, and 9 are less than the mean of 3.0. These responses indicate that students have some discontent about themselves, professors and the program operation. In other words, students want to get helpful feedback from their

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free-talking professors while also having helpful interaction with their fellow peers as indicated in their responses to items 18, 19, and 20.

Items 2, 7, 6, and 9 are closely related to the confidence, anxiety and peer pressure. In the process of communication, one has some interrupting factors in terms of speaking. Under the lower confidence, high anxiety or nervousness, and strained peer pressure, students feel speaking itself is very difficult, especially for low-level students. Thus professors endeavor to reduce students' anxiety and peer pressure by facilitating their communication skills in a more relaxed and comfortable setting. Also professors need to pay more attention to their particular students' language anxiety. Kim and Kim (2010) suggest that in the case of university settings, university learners felt anxious when classmates spoke fluently. So IPs have to handle this aspect carefully to motivate students participants in free-talking. In general, students take part in free-talking activities in groups of 2-5 students. It is common for one or two of those students to be able to speak English more fluently than the others. That kind of situation exerts the huge influence of peer pressure or may cause other students to lose their confidence when it comes to speaking in English. Thus teachers need to coordinate the amount of time fluent speakers are able to talk, give the appropriate opportunity in a group to non-fluent speakers first, or make free-talking groups based on similar levels. When it comes to anxiety, Scovel (1978) divided anxiety into two types. Oxford (1999) called debilitative and facilitative anxiety harmful and helpful. We try to take advantage of learners' anxiety as a helpful or positive factor in doing a speaking activity by keeping good rapport between professors and students, and forming a relaxed and comfortable setting.

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics of the IPs' Responses to Free-talking

Item no.	Item	Mean	SD
11	I enjoy free-talking with my current free-talking students.	4.30	.82
12	Free-talking has some benefits for students in order to improve their English speaking skills.	4.30	.70
8	The free-talking program is very useful for improving students' speaking skills.	3.87	1.06
4	I usually let the students choose the topic when they come for free-talking.	3.61	1.03
10	I can tell firsthand that my students' speaking ability is improving thanks to the free-talking program.	3.61	.94

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2	The most difficult part of free-talking with students is getting them to open their mouths.	3.48	1.34
7	I provide tasks or instructions during free-talking sessions.	3.35	1.03
6	Free-talking is more beneficial if IPs prepare for it beforehand.	3.26	1.01
9	I am satisfied with the current free-talking program.	3.26	1.10
1	Free-talking that requires the international professor to prepare beforehand is not really free-talking.	2.91	1.16
3	I don't usually plan what to free-talk about before students come.	2.74	1.32
5	Students who are required to attend free talking sessions are more motivated to speak in English than students who attend free talking sessions voluntarily.	2.26	1.14

As shown in Table 3, IPs perceived the free-talking operation as a positive and beneficial program, overall. Interestingly enough, professors responded that they don't see preparing for free-talking as being necessary, perhaps thinking that if professors are supposed to prepare for free-talking that it is not really *free*-talking. They seem to just focus more on the term '*free*' in the session. As shown in Table 1, professors and students perceived the concept of free-talking differently. However, IPs also responded that if they prepared for free-talking in advance that it would be more beneficial. These responses show their conflicting opinion with the same task or role. Those who are responsible for free-talking with students need to be well-prepared for their role regardless of whether it is as a leader, an organizer, an assessor, a participant, a resource provider, a tutor or an observer. If professors don't plan what to free-talk about in advance, they might act only as an observer or assessor, something that limits our role. Concerning item 1, free-talking that requires the IP to prepare beforehand is not really free-talking, many professors agree with this question. Although this sounds like a good idea, it lends itself to little accountability and the potential for equal frustration both from the perspective of the student as well as the perspective of the professor. Students can choose the free-talking topic like their responses to the survey. That method is very appropriate in light of reflecting the students' interests and concerns. Students also responded that if they prepare for the free-talking beforehand, it will be more effective for them to improve their speaking ability (see item 9 in Table 4). In this way they need a careful guide to show them how to speak. That is why they want to seek out a fruitful strategy for speaking.

Many professors showed their positive agreement in terms of the benefits, usefulness and satisfaction of free-talking as shown in items 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. On the other hand, students responded that they wouldn't participate in free-talking if it were not required. Professors responded with a similar attitude that students who are required to attend

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free-talking sessions are less motivated to speak in English than students who attend free-talking sessions voluntarily (see item 5 in Table 3). In light of their conflicting opinions with their desire of improving their speaking ability and free-talking benefit, students themselves do not sincerely want to invest their time and effort in speaking, considering that more than half of the students don't spend time practicing their speaking on a daily basis.

Q3: What strategies would make free-talking more successful and effective?

TABLE 4

Descriptive Statistics on Students' Free-talking Strategies

Item no.	Item	Mean	SD
10	Free-talking is beneficial in terms of improving students' English speaking skills	4.03	.94
2	I prefer casual/daily conversation to a more formal lesson during free-talking.	3.92	1.00
5	The topics we talk about in free-talking are usually familiar.	3.63	.86
9	Free-talking is more effective if IPs prepare for it beforehand.	3.54	1.05
6	The IP talks about topics I'm interested in.	3.42	1.06
11	It is more helpful for me to have an IP who also teaches one of my regular classes.	3.42	1.17
3	I would rather free-talk in a group than alone with an IP.	3.32	1.17
7	Required free-talking inclines students to be more intentional about free-talking.	3.32	1.28
4	The most difficult part of free-talking is speaking to the IP.	3.17	1.17
1	Free-talking that requires students to prepare beforehand is not really free-talking.	2.92	1.12
8	I would not free-talk with an IP if it were not required.	2.32	1.31

As far as free-talking preparation is concerned, students have the same opinion as those of professors in item 1. That is, students also responded that free-talking is an open and unplanned program. However, from item 9 in Table 4, students think free-talking is more effective if IPs prepare for it beforehand. Like IPs' responses, this is a conflicting attitude towards learning something as a learner. In terms of the potential usefulness of free-talking, students responded positively. Students prefer free-talking in a group over being alone with the IP (see item 3). Concerning the topic and instructor, they prefer the

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same topic and professors as those of the regular classes. This implies that students want to speak more about familiar content they already learned with the same speakers whom they built rapport with previously.

In Tables 3 and 4, we discovered that students found it very difficult to open their mouth in front of the professor. This in turn leads to the professors' roles and strategies. In the question about the IPs' role, 'What do you think the IP's main role is during free-talking?', IPs also responded that their main role during free-talking is to act as a guide and facilitator, helping students to enjoy learning a foreign language, to feel at ease with speaking English, to build students' confidence, to encourage students to speak English, to make learning English enjoyable, to correct major errors which inhibit communication, to develop students' specific individual weaknesses, to help students overcome the fear of speaking and to expose students to native-speaker pronunciation with as natural a speed as possible.

However, their roles vary from one situation to another according to students' levels and needs. IPs also have a difficult time getting students to open their mouths. Therefore we need to seek effective speaking strategies for students to open their mouths naturally according to the students' levels. Professors are required to develop a detailed program to cater to meeting students' needs and fulfill the requirements of their roles as an organizer or mentor. Most IPs responded that their main role is to be a guide or facilator, while students are required to prepare for their task of speaking through useful and effective speaking skills. Thus professors also provide the proper resources for speaking such as website addresses or any useful communicative tasks that students can use in their daily practice of English. As a resource provider, before students come to the professors' offices, IPs need to choose some proper lexical chunks and communication lists about a certain topic they want to speak about. They may have a variety of views about this suggestion. Students and professors need to have mutual accountability in place to ensure that they try to make a common effort to develop their free-talking program successfully since they have much in common, as their survey responses prove.

Table 5 shows professors' basic strategies for making students open their mouths while free-talking. As in item 2 of Table 4, IPs find it extremely difficult to get free-talking students to open their mouths. To do that effectively, as Table 5 shows, they make use of the 'Question-Answer' method (65.22%) mainly during free-talking. They also utilize several ice-breaking methods such as card games, laminated pictures of objects and dice. When students are hindered by a so-called communication barrier in a situation of 'on the tip of their tongue', the professors provide a wide variety of methods in order to elicit out of students what they are trying to say. They try to make significant amounts of effort by combining some methods depending on the students' levels or the

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topic. More than half of the professors try to have students speak in a specific order to actively participate in free-talking.

TABLE 5

Professors' Strategies and Activities for Activating Speaking

Item no.	Item	N	%
1	What kind/type of methods do you use to operate the free-talking session most effectively?		
	a. Game	3	13.04
	b. Interview		
	c. Question-answer	15	65.22
	d. Action-based activities		
	e. Other: combinations of the above	5	21.74
2	How do you elicit responses from your students when they are unsure of what to say next?		
	a. Guess what they are trying to say.	3	13.04
	b. Ask them to write down their answers when they don't know what to say.	3	13.04
	c. Wait for the student to fully form his/her thoughts.	7	30.43
	d. Constantly interrupt the student so that he/she doesn't feel helpless.	1	4.35
	e. Guide students to utter what they seem to talk about naturally.	3	13.04
	f. Combinations of the above	6	26.09
3	How do you ensure that students are actively participating in free-talking sessions?		
	a. Constantly examine students faces to see if they have the 'deer in the headlights' look.	1	4.35
	b. Ask students to write words down that they have to look up in their dictionaries.	3	13.04
	c. Do as little speaking as possible.		
	d. Try to have students speak in a specific order (ex, clockwise/ counterclockwise, unspecified order).	12	52.17
	f. Combinations of the above	7	30.43

Based on the findings of this study, we can talk about some key issues. Perhaps a more effective free-talking program would be more balanced by requiring IPs to share the load of the students they are free-talking with so that IPs would be free-talking with an equal amount of students. The second way this free-talking English practice session could be improved is if there is more consistency between what each IP does during his or her free-talking time. In some instances people 'dumb down' their English in order to have a conversation on another person's level. That sounds good in a way but if that IP does not try to increase the student's level by using task-oriented activities, that student will continue to operate on the same level.

This leads to the purpose of this project, to see what a free-talking session would look like if the students taking a Conversation or Screen English class met with the same IP for free-talking. Furthermore, that IPs would prepare well so that students would be able

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to sense their English-communication ability improving and they could also meet with other IPs who are free-talking with students in similar ways. In this way, students would feel more fulfilled about the time they are spending practicing English outside of class while the IP would also feel fulfilled in what he or she were doing outside of class to meet students in order to improve their English-communication skills. We need to develop free-talking session on a learner-centered basis according to students' speaking levels. Therefore, professors need to approach the session differently, from a small-talk type to discussion/debate including role-play. By doing this we can implement this session not through textbook language but through real-life language that people use on the street. In other words, in contrast to students preparing for the paper-based exam focused on reading and listening, where they spend most of their time depending on the language chosen in their books, students would be required to expand their linguistic skills outside of the book, that is, towards real English such as speaking or writing with IPs in person or on the computer.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

If speaking is so much a part of daily life that we take it for granted (Thornbury, 2005) then why does it seem so difficult to speak in English? One of the basic answers is that we have not experienced enough speaking-based lessons in school. However, in this day and age, speaking skills are a must, along with writing skills. The current study examined students' and IPs' perceptions of the definition of free-talking to explore what type of roles were played by or allotted between Korean students and IPs, and to seek appropriate speaking strategies for activating free-talking effectively.

The data analysis collected through the survey questionnaire shows that students and IPs have slightly different opinions about the definition and concept of free-talking. Even among students there were differing views according to experience and grade. In terms of the benefits, usefulness, and satisfaction of free-talking, students and IPs have a higher degree of common ground although the two groups have conflicting perceptions in the operation of free-talking, especially regarding preparation and feedback. Students responded that they face anxiety, nervousness, and peer pressure while free-talking. They need to be encouraged by the IPs' attentive efforts for reducing anxiety and peer pressure through careful coordination in group formation or time allotment of a student since a person affected by peer pressure may or may not want to belong to the same group.

With reference to roles, most professors play the role of a guide or facilitator, while students want professors to provide more suitable materials and to tutor by giving them

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appropriate feedback and strategies as a well-prepared teacher comparable to a prompter, participant or tutor at the proper time. Well-prepared IPs try to develop their free-talking operation ability through consecutive feedback and a reflective meeting between one another. Students also have the commissioned responsibility to intentionally try their best to open their mouths by preparing for free-talking beforehand. Free situations in free-talking can be maintained only through effectively performing our roles and tasks.

Speaking English in Korea through 'free-talking' as a particular term is to give students a particular chance to practice communicating with an international English speaker outside of class about what they have been learning in class. If students are at a certain level that may suffice, then it seems there may be more effective ways of practicing English with students outside of class. Free-talking is to find an alternative to this dilemma seeking to intimidate Korean students, to connect practicing English outside of class with what is being taught in class, expanding the exposure time for practicing English in 'real talk'.

Finally, for the study to be considered herein, it suggests that if the same IP who teaches students in class also practices English with them outside of class, there will be more consistency and enough time for building up rapport and confidence. For instance, students will encounter the IP multiple times, and when they have questions they could not have asked in class they can ask those questions 'freely' during the practice sessions outside of class. Another suggestion is that we need to share and incorporate more of an overall framework including basic directions, procedures and strategies through reflective seminars or workshops, either in the middle of the semester, or at the end of the semester with every IP.

It is definitely a feasible suggestion to address some essential and structural problems we face in the process so that the IPs play a pivotal part in making students facilitate their communicative competence. Therefore we feel that some general guidelines indicating the overall purpose and objectives of the program should be adjusted. Also general strategies should be identified without losing the 'free' nature of the sessions. This is to allow some sense of direction and consistency in the approaches undertaken by the professors. This implies some synchronicity, and that therefore the program can be assessed comprehensively and reset newly by mutually exploring students' needs and perceptions of free-talking, and students' and IPs' role for better program operation.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary and Tertiary

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