*영어어문교육, 15*권 **4**호 **2009**년 겨울

Learning a Second Culture through Interactive Practices: A Study-Abroad Language Learners' Experiences

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Lee, Eunsil. (2009). Learning a second culture through interactive practices: A study-abroad language learners' experiences. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 15*(4), 137-156.

This case study examines language learners' oral interactive practices and what they learn along with these practices. Language learners who study abroad take on the challenge of living in a foreign place and undergo difficulties in communicating and interacting with people in their new country. These difficulties, caused by cultural differences, are experienced most particularly in their daily interactions. Language learners' trials and efforts to learn English while dealing with a different culture and the difficulties are mainly observed for this paper. The process of learning a second culture is closely related to the process of learning a second language. Oral interactive practices can give the study abroad language learners opportunities to learn their target culture. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss how participating in interactive practices assists the learners in understanding their target culture while they deal with their difficulties inherent in studying abroad. This study adds weight to the notion that culture is an essential and major factor in learning a language, and that only active participation in interactions can be effective in learning both a language and its culture.

[culture learning/second language acquisition/second culture acquisition/interactive practices]

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a new culture is one of the aims for young students who go abroad to study a language. Korean students who want to learn English, for instance, would seek to live in a community where English is primarily spoken. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the number of Korean students who studied in the United States in

2008 was 127,100 and Korea was the largest source of foreign students in the U.S. (Yoon, 2009). The Korean students made up 14.8 percent of the total foreign student population of 859,100 (Yoon, 2009).

The importance of cultural learning in the study abroad context is obvious because with cultural learning, the students get to know underlying meanings of the language and acquire to have a good command of their target language's cultural connotations, feelings, and norms. Liu (1999) states, "Cultural understanding is an indispensable part of second or foreign language acquisition" (p. 207). Studying abroad provides a rich context for communicating and learning the cultural aspects involved in language learning because learners confront directly their target culture and can observe and participate in various oral interactions of their target culture (Freed, 1995; Carrier, 1999).

Such an opportunity enables the language learners to interact with English native speakers in order to learn the true meaning of words, actions, and socialization (LoCastro, 2003). Kinginger (2001) says that students learn "through interacting with people (or themselves, playing the role of social other) using the resources made available to them by their environment and culture" (p. 420). By looking into students' everyday interactions in the study abroad context, we can learn how they deal with cultural issues.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to reveal language learners' interactive practices in cultural experiences, while they are living in their target culture. This paper attempts to show that active oral interactive practices help learners understand their target culture, and understanding of their target culture also helps them improve their language skills. The implication is for language learners and teachers to have better understanding of the target culture. This study is based on the assumption that learning a language and culture are closely related, and each skill assists in developing the other.

Three research questions are investigated in this study: (1) What are the activities that Korean learners of English experience when they settle in their new culture? (2) What cultural differences do Korean learners of English observe when they live with American roommates? (3) How do oral interactive practices help Korean learners of English learn their target culture in a study abroad setting?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed in this paper is concerned with second culture acquisition (SCA), intercultural communicative competence, and interactional competence theory.

1. Second Culture Acquisition

Lantolf (1999) asks significant questions about cultural learning in SLA: "How are we to interpret acquisition when it comes to culture? Does it have the same meaning with respect to culture as it does in the case of linguistic development, or does it mean something different?" (p. 28). He argues that we can become successful second language learners, but we cannot really come to think and act like native speakers (p. 43). Lee (2006) agrees with Lantolf's point of view. Kim, a participant in Lee's study, says,

> As I said that you won't learn English even though you are in an English-speaking environment, it doesn't mean that you don't learn how to communicate in English. You can do that. But, you know, there are delicate feelings embedded in the words. You won't be able to learn those things… In one word, you won't be able to understand their humor. In other words, it's really hard for a Korean man and an American woman to fall in love with each other. It's emotion, feeling…culture. (p. 117)

In other words, people can develop second culture competence only up to a certain level. They may be able to learn to open their minds to embrace the differences, but they cannot feel the same way that native speakers feel. Even though students learn and cognitively understand the "rules" of the target culture, they may not want to or may not be able to think and act as native speakers.

In terms of bilingualism and biculturalism, Kuiper and Lin (1989) say that one can be bilingual, but this does not mean one is bicultural. They studied Singaporeans who grew up speaking both English and Chinese. They found that these Singaporeans have problems in communicating with other native speakers of English from other nations such as the United States, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The reason is that "they command two linguistic systems, but only one cultural system" (Kuiper & Lin, 1989, p. 281). Their suggestion indicates the importance of cultural aspects of language learning. They say, "We doubt, given the complexity of the cultural information which is coded in formulae, that anyone can become truly bicultural after early childhood and therefore that anyone can become a native speaker of a second language after this time even if they sound as though they are" (p. 304).

People from two different cultures can experience difficulties in understanding each other because they may confront conflict and misunderstanding during their interactions (Im & Gu, 2005). What is appropriate in that particular situation in the target culture can be learned through various verbal and nonverbal interactive practices (Im & Gu, 2005). Lantolf (1999) argues, "At issue is not acculturation, that is, learning to function in a new

culture without compromising one's own identity or world view" (p. 29).

2. Cultural Learning

From a perspective in communication studies, adaptation or fitting into the target culture can be explained as acquiring intercultural communicative competence. The importance of intercultural competence has been emphasized in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Korea (Kim, 2006; Lee, 2008; Sung, 2008). These scholars agree that culture teaching should be integrated in language teaching, and teacher education and textbook development should deal with the target culture appropriately (Han & Kim, 2007; Jeong & Nam, 2005; Lee, 2005 & 2008; Park, 2004; Roh, 2005; Suh, 1997; Sung, 2008).

To develop intercultural competence in their target language, students may learn to understand the "intentional state of [native speakers]" (Kruger & Tomasello, 1996, p. 371); they argue that cultural learning is not simply learning how to act but learning how to think, and say things, "In cultural learning children learn not just about affordances of the inanimate environment but also something about the intentional states of adults-what they intend to do in performing certain actions or, perhaps, the strategy they are using or thoughts they are thinking" (p. 371).

Irwin (1996) says that, once one acquires competence, s/he will be capable of applying it in all interactions. When Johnson (2004) describes interactional competence, she provides an example by saying, "Once the individual acquired the interactional competence to participate in a formal interview, the individual will be able to transfer this knowledge to interactive practices in which formal interviews take place" (p. 97). Irwin (1996) explains communicational competence as "being able to appropriately adapt to a variety of different (contrasting) people and different (contrasting) communication situations or contexts" (p. 27).

3. Interactive Practices

The process of learning the target language and the target culture must include interactional competence. This will help students to be better able to interact with native speakers of their target culture. Kim (2001) says that with developed communicative, interactional, and cultural competences, learners can manage everyday interactions better in the new culture. He said, "They are also better able to experience different cultural worlds with an increasing ease, with a greater capacity to make deliberate choices of actions in specific situations rather than simply following the dictates of the prevailing norms of the culture of childhood." (p. 192)

Johnson (2001) says that interactional competence is a theory of knowledge and a theory

of second language acquisition. Young (1999) describes the definition of interactional competence as being "a theory of the knowledge that participants bring to and realize in interaction and includes an account of how such knowledge is acquired" (p. 118). Interactional competence requires "face-to-face interaction" (Hall, 1999; Johnson, 2004) and is developed when students participate in interactional practices in sociocultural settings (Hall, 1999; Johnson, 2004).

Hall (1999) proposes a framework of analysis that includes the elements of interactive practices. The first of the two categories of Hall's (1999) framework is the linguistic category that contains "topics, participation structures, trajectory of speech acts, formulaic opening, transitions, and closings" (p. 146). The second is the extralinguistic category that contains "settings, goals, and participants" (p. 146). Hall (1995) provides three steps in oral interactive practices: observation, reflection, and creation. Hall (1995, 1999) and Young (1999) believe that "[during these three processes,] the individual acquires many resources of various types, such as vocabulary and syntax, knowledge of how to manage turns and topics, and knowledge of rhetorical scripts and skills" (Johnson, 2001, p. 177).

III. METHOD

This is a study of language and culture learning which needs to show an on-going process. A qualitative method was used because it works well when a study attempts to learn the processes and development (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Data was collected from two cases of two different field studies at different times, but in the same geographical area. The former study was a preliminary in preparation for the latter study. Participants' interactions in the events of cultural experiences were collected diligently through observations, field notes, tape recordings, and interviews.

The first was conducted from December 2001 to April 2002. This was an ethnographic study to investigate Korean short term study abroad student's challenges in language and culture learning experiences outside of the classroom. Later, during 2004, from August to December more in-depth investigations were made with different participants. The later work was continued to find out study abroad students' language and culture learning experiences, which was based on the findings from the preliminary work.

1. Participant Selection

Two participants, Young and Yun-Pil, were purposefully selected for this particular study. Each participant is a Korean woman studying English in an intensive language institute in a small and quiet college town in southwest Virginia, in the United States. Young

(pseudonym)'s story was collected for the research purposes in 2001 and 2002; as was Yun-Pil (pseudonym)'s in 2004. These two participants were selected for the reason that they had many things in common, such as their backgrounds, their choice of living environment, and their day-to-day activities, but except for their interactional practices. Their profiles are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Participant Profiles

Participants	Young	Yun-Pil
Age	In their mid 20s	In their mid 20s
Sex	Female	Female
Field Work Period	Dec.2001-April 2002	Aug. -Dec. 2004
Education	4-year university	4-year university
Interest in Career	Business	Graphic Arts
Level of Classes	Beginner	Beginner
Living Arrangement	4 bedroom apartment	4 bedroom town house
Roommates	American female university students	American female university students

The type of sampling that I used in this study is called as a purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). The purposeful (or purposive) sampling is different from random sampling, in that the participants who fit the purpose of the study are selected. The two participants were both newcomers to the United States when I met them for the study. This fact also met the purpose of the study because the shorter a language learner is exposed to a target culture, the more salient they feel about the culture s/he is experiencing (Ochs, 1996). Much can be learned from novice language learners who have just started to live in a native speaker's country.

2. Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from (1) observations, (2) field notes, (3) in-depth interviews, and (4) natural conversation taping. The participants were willing to discuss their lives during the field work and allowed the researcher to follow them around from one place to another, such as the mall, grocery stores, and their own apartments. Since both participants did not have their own vehicles, when they needed to go places to shop, eat, and study, the researcher willingly offered them transportation by car. This may have allowed the researcher a close look into their lives. Offering what they needed, for example, transporting them was a good method in becoming acquainted with the participants. Observation took place when Young and Yun-Pil interacted in a communicative situation and responded to their interlocutors. Observation notes were taken along with the field

notes.

For Young's case, field notes were taken from the day of her arrival in the U.S., and notes were continually written after any encounter with her. Writing a field note is important in many senses. First, a researcher may forget secondary activities that could be meaningful later. Second, researchers simply cannot remember every interaction. Third, notes can be useful during the first stage of planning a draft and analysis. Finally, notes can illuminate the original setting more closely even after a long time has passed. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) emphasize that field notes play an important role in collecting "key expressions and terms" from the participant's articulation of their learning experience and the researcher's reflections as well (p. 20).

The recorded data was collected by the participants and the researcher. The participants carried a cassette or mp3 players intentionally to record their dialogue with interlocutors. They could explain why they wanted to record their conversations and obtained oral permission from their interlocutors. Recording conversations between the participants and her interlocutors also happened in natural settings when the researcher accompanied them in their daily lives (See Table 2).

TABLE 2
Data Collection

Participants	Young	Yun-Pil
Period	Spring 2002	Fall 2004
Observation	Interactive practices in various situations	
Field Notes	78 pages of hand written journals & additional 15 pages of fully printed journals	13 pages of fully printed journals (After hand written journals were typed out)
Self-recording	once – at the rental office	three occasions - (1) with her conversation partner: (a) going to a concert, (b) making an appointment, & (c) after the concert
Recording by Researcher	Three occasions - (1) at the mall, (2) rental offices, & (3) grocery shopping center	once - at the student health care center
Interview	Three times - (1) Jan. 26, (2) Feb. 24, & (3) April 6 - 2002	Three times – (1) Sep. 5, (2) Nov. 12, & (3) Dec. 15 - 2004

While portions of the observations and the recorded conversations were collected, in-depth interviews were added into the study. Three interviews were conducted almost every month with Young, starting in January, 2002. Three interviews were conducted with Yun-Pil in the researcher's apartment and at a bookstore coffee shop on September 5, November 12, and December 15, 2004. The interviews were informal and semi-structured. Interview questions were open-ended, as these types of questions can give the participants opportunities to think about their behavior and their ideas in an informal way (Merriam,

1998). The participants in this study were able to describe their learning experiences exclusively. Interviews usually lasted for one and a half hours, and the interview questions were prepared along the field work process, so as to be systematic. After tape recording the interviews, the data was transcribed, saved as a file, and stored at the researcher's house.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, direct quotations from the interviews, excerpts from the recorded conversations, and observational comments from the field notes were used to provide highlights of the participants' interactive practices in culture learning. Findings are the answers of the research questions regarding: (1) participant's initial settling activities, (2) cultural differences observed while living with American roommates, and (3) oral interactive practices.

1. Settling in the New Culture (Young's Case)

It took much effort for the language learner to move into a new community and settle down. Even coping with ordinary daily activities was not easy for her. The participant Young was required to confront many orientation activities from day one of her arrival, such as meeting her Korean relatives' family at the airport, shopping for necessities at Kroger (a big grocery supermarket), and receiving an introduction to American life from her relatives (Field notes-printed, December 19, 2001, p. 2). Once Young arrived in town, she was straight away interacting with people in English. She questioned what was culturally appropriate in these situations in many of her interactions.

Young faced unfamiliar interactions and new communication events with her interlocutors. Sometimes her relatives helped her to understand the documents she needed to fill out and communicated in English on her behalf at times. Most of time though, she needed to decide what to do or what to say by herself in these new situations (See Table 3).

TABLE 3

Young's Initial Settling-down Activities

Day	Major Activities
Day one (December 19, Wednesday)	Arrival at the airport Shopping at the grocery shop Meeting with Korean relatives Dinner and conversation
Day 2 ~ Day 12	Shopping at the mall Eating at a restaurant Internet search for a place to live

	Meeting with possible sub-leasers and looking around the places
Day 13 ~ Day 16	Trip to Atlantic City with her relatives
Day 17 ~ Day 20	Opening a personal bank account Participating in the International Conversation Meeting Searching a place to live - continued
Day 21	Moving out and starting to live in an apartment with three American college girls
Day 26	First day at English Language Institute (ELI)
Other days	Buying health insurance, Attending classes, Paying a bill, Getting a driver's license, Making appointments and going to a health center, Seeing a doctor, Ordering at a fast food restaurant, Going to a party, Shopping and Refunding, Socializing with her roommates, Taking public transport, Going to church, Participating in holiday events (Easter, Christmas, or International Day), etc.

One of the most important settling activities for Young was finding a place to live. On the nineteenth day of her arrival, Young found a possible place to move in. She had been searching sublease posts with her relatives and sent about 15 e-mail messages regarding potential accommodation. Young received around six to seven replies to her queries. She wrote e-mail messages or telephoned the sub-leasers. She was actively involved in searching for her place to live (Field notes-printed, January 6, 2002, p. 10). She visited a number of places, and one of them was Sabrina's who showed her everywhere in the apartment. Sabrina seemed very friendly and even asked what music Young listens to and what Young does during her leisure time. Young responded and asked how much the rent was. Young said that Sabrina was very nice but spoke too fast. (Field notes-printed, January 6, 2002, p. 10).

Young did not choose Sabrina for her roommate. She kept searching for a place. Young clearly talked about her inquires about subleasing with the sub-leasers on the telephone. She was learning how to ask questions about subleasing from this process and how to use some useful words; for example, new words like utility, electricity, furnished, etc. She said that she had also learned how to negotiate and talk on the phone. The mission "searching for a place to live" was good interactive practice for Young (Field notes-printed, January 7, 2002, pp. 11-12). Young moved into a new place in January 9 and resided with American college girls, Sarah, Kathy, and Alison.

Many of the activities that Young experienced in the beginning were new to her, but they were must-do activities and also presented possible communicational interactions for her. Language learners may ask someone else to help them confront these issues, using the defense of not being able to speak or understand English. However, Young said that her experience was harsh but worthwhile because she was becoming independent and still able to pursue her goal of improving her second language (Interview, April 6, 2002). Young was learning to understand that she needed this process, and active involvement with the process was the key to improving her language and culture competencies, even though the

process required her to make errors and mistakes, negotiate, and feel awkward and embarrassed.

2. Living Together for Interactive Practices

Sharing a residence with American people was not an easy way of learning for the Korean learners of English, even though it surely offered opportunities for the language learners to observe and practice new ways of living in the target culture. Here are some observations that the two participants of this study made while they were living with American people.

The two participants of this study, Young and Yun-Pil, lived in a small college town with a total population of 30,000 of which 24,000 were students (see http://www.ps.vt.edu/emplyment/blacksburg/). In this quiet, rural university town, Young and Yun-Pil both chose to live with female college students. They were typical college girls who liked parties, drinking, playing loud music, and dancing in their houses during the weekends. Some of them would hold parties on one weekend and go out for parties the next. Some of them worked part-time during weekdays and weekends to support themselves.

Both Young and Yun-Pil had chances for interactive practice with their new “friends” -in the hallway or living room of their houses. Especially during the first few weeks, the participants and their roommates interacted more through talking about how to share things in their apartments. Through this, they got to know each other a little bit and discovered different ways of living, thinking, acting, and eating. Young was more adventurous than Yun-Pil in the sense of seeking chance for conversation. Young offered her food to her roommate, but Yun-Pil hid her food from her roommate. The following is an example of different interactional practices between Young and Yun-Pil.

1) Young’s Case

One day Young offered the Korean snack, dried fish, to her roommate, but she refused her offer. Young thought that Kathie did not know how delicious it was, so she explained that the fish tasted like bacon. Young said, “This is Korean bacon.” The roommate wanted to know what the food was made of. After Young’s answer the roommate said, “You’re so strange.” (Interview, January 26, 2002). Young was just trying to offer what she liked, but Kathie did not want to take a risk. This is a possible scenario that the language learner offers and the native speaker interlocutor refuses. Young felt embarrassed (Interview, January 26, 2002).

Here is another example observed by Young. In Young’s case, she was occasionally invited to roommates’ parties in the first week or so, and she could observe how U.S.

college students socialized at various parties for birthdays, dinner, and drinking. Young said in her first interview, “They [her roommates] went out a lot. They went to bars I think. [When I went out with them] I had to spend $10.00. I think I need money to be friend with them… I wanted to stay home and learn English at home” (Interview, January 26, 2002). Going to parties was costly, and Young preferred meeting her roommates in their apartment.

2) Yun-Pil’s Case

In contrast to Young in 2002, Yun-Pil in 2004 was quite cautious about not bothering her housemates. Yun-Pil constantly worried that her Korean food caused smells that were unpleasant to her housemates. For a long time she did not eat Korean foods with strong smells, like *kimchi*, in the house. Yun-Pil said that if she ever needed to cook, she tried to find a time when her housemates were not in the kitchen. She never ate with them. Rather she ate alone in her room or in the living room while watching TV when no one else was around (Interview, September 5, 2004).

Yun-Pil’s house was rather quiet. She found that her housemates were rarely at home. They were busy studying, going to parties, and working their part-time jobs. They did not seem to have time to take care of the house since it was messy and dirty. Yun-Pil thought about complaining to them about the dirty toilet and a sink full of unwashed dishes, but she cleaned up instead, thinking that she needed to keep a good relationship with her housemates. She was worried about hurting their feelings by suggesting that they clean up (Interview, December 15, 2004).

3) Discussions

From their experiences of living with American college girls, Young and Yun-Pil discovered that sharing a house or an apartment with their American roommates did not necessarily mean that their living conditions would automatically give them learning opportunities. Living with local people can be an ideal setting, as English language is heard and spoken all the time; however, it can become just a mere exposure when participants try to avoid possible problems through interactions. Mere exposure to the target culture may not help students understand the viewpoints, behavior, and products of the culture (Foreign language standards learning in Virginia public schools, 2000, p. 3).

This was a difficult experience for them. They felt embarrassed when their expectations were not met and uncomfortable when they were too cautious about cultural differences. It was full of risks which could hurt their feelings or put them into awkward moments. Meaningful interactions for learning did not just happen. In a cross-cultural living arrangement, like Young and Yun-Pil’s, the language learners should be aware of

differences from the target culture of course, but at the same time they should try out their own cultural practices to let their roommates know that they too can learn from them living together.

3. Active Participation in Oral Interactive Practices

In this section, I would like to discuss the effectiveness of active participation in oral interactive practices in culture learning along with language learning. Young was the participant who was more active and adventurous in oral interactions than Yun-Pil in many communicational events. However, it did not mean that Yun-Pil failed to interact with her conversation partner. Both participants showed their efforts to interact with their interlocutors to learn the culture and language. The examples of Young and Yun-Pil's interactive practices will be followed by discussions on the effectiveness of active participation.

1) Young's Case

The first example is of Young, who would take on a challenge of having a conversation with strangers because she believed that was the best way to learn English. One Friday afternoon in March, Young walked to the mall, and she suddenly engaged in a conversation with a mid-aged woman who had shiny, straight, medium-length, and blond hair. The woman was a total stranger to Young, but they stopped and started talking because Young commented on her beauty when she passed by. The woman replied by saying, "Thank you. You have nice hair, too. You're so pretty, too. People say that I'm pretty. I'm 54 years old. I like children… I like dogs. I have a dog. Look at my nails. They are real. I'm going to a nail shop. It's expensive but worth it" (Field notes-handwritten, March 15, 2002).

This might be an extreme example of a language learner interaction with a stranger. I was with her when she was engaged in this conversation. Talking to a total stranger in this situation was surprising and strange to me. Through this incident it is clear that Young wanted to do her best to explore U.S. culture by meeting new people. She said that she had set a goal when she came to the United States. Her goal, as she revealed in her first interview, was "speaking only English." (Interview, January 26, 2002).

Before she came to the United States, Young had been warned many times that if she socializes with only Korean students, she would not achieve her goal of improving her English. She actually avoided Korean students at the English Language Institute for the first few weeks. However, it did not take too long for her to realize that avoiding other Korean students on purpose did not help her improve English or learn the target culture (Interview, January 26, 2002). What helped her most was using English as much as

possible with people around her: ELI teachers, shopping clerks, conversation partners, volunteers, roommates, roommates' friends, international students, and Korean students as well.

Here is the second example of Young's active participations in oral interactions with international students and an American volunteer college student. In the lunch lounge at her language institute, she was found eating *gimbab* with her international classmates. They were talking about similarities and differences between Japanese *maki* and Korean *gimbab*. Her Japanese classmate said that *maki* was their food, and her Korean classmate said it was Korean food. Her Mexican classmate said that they were similar but not exactly the same. They made Angela, a volunteer college student at the language institute, eat *gimbab*. She wanted to check what ingredients were in *gimbab*, and made sure that there was no meat. She asked people around her if she would need water, as she was reminded how spicy *gimchi* was. She ate and said it was pretty good (Field notes-handwritten, March 1, 2002).

It was interesting to see how Young took a chance to talk to Angela among students at the language institute. The international students made Angela eat the food, but they went silent when she commenced a time for conversation. At that moment, Young asked her a question: "What does this mean? Fate in our love is fate." Angela said, "God has brought us together. That's fate." Young wanted more explanation, and Angela said it depended on situations, and the situations varied. Young asked more about other expressions such as 'faint,' 'knock out,' 'dying to sleep,' etc. The conversation went for around 10 minutes (Field notes-handwritten, March 1, 2002). When I came into the lunchroom on another occasion, Young was talking to Japanese girls. She definitely used English at free time as well. Young also seemed to enjoy talking to a Chinese male student. Talking to international students allows for more intercultural conversations (Field notes-handwritten, March 20, 2002).

When the focus was on seeking and participating in oral interactive practices, she would increase her chances of learning. One of the most readily available interactive practices was shopping, which is the third example of Young's interactive practices. Over many shopping experiences, she learned that she could get a refund even after she used the item for a few days in the United States. In excerpt 1, she still asked a shopping clerk if she could get a refund.

Excerpt (1) Recorded by researcher in February 24, 2002

1. Young: One more question? If you don't mind?
2. Clerk: Not at all.
3. Young: (laugh) If I don't like this, until when can I exchange this?
4. Clerk: Whenever you need to, you know. Tomorrow if you'd like. Or next

week, you know, couple of weeks from now. Just you know, whenever you need to. I'll be fine.
5. Young: Thank you very much.
6. Clerk: You're welcome. You'll have a nice evening.
7. Young: Thank you.

2) Yun-Pil's Case

The fourth example comes from Yun-Pil's phone conversation. As compared with Young, Yun-Pil seemed little shier and more reserved. She waited until she felt comfortable. She tended not to challenge herself. Yun-Pil recorded her part of the phone conversation by herself. I provided Yun-Pil's case to show how she needed to confront more challenges in order to accomplish her purpose.

Excerpt (2) Self-recording in November/December, 2004
Hi, how are you?/ Fine/ Uh/ Ah, always, you know./ Yeah, Hhhhh/ Ah, no, Hhhhh/ Pardon?/ Friday/ Um, okay/ I'm sorry./ I'm sorry./ Okay. / Um. Um, okay./ Um. Um, yeah. / Excuse me?/ What did you say, party?/ Oh, really?/ Okay. / What kind, what kind do you, / OO know? / Oh, okay/ Okay/ Um, um.

Another face-to-face conversation between Yun-Pil and her conversation partner (CP) shows that Yun-Pil responded with understanding, but still did not try out sentence-long talks. This is an excerpt from Yun-Pil's self recording that includes the scene of going to a concert. On the way to a concert they were going to Starbucks to meet CP's friend. Yun-Pil seemed to understand CP's comments clearly, but she still needed to challenge herself to understand CP's intention and expectation.

Excerpt (3) Self-recording in November/December, 2004
1. CP: Have you been to the Starbucks before?
2. YP: Yeah.
3. CP: Yeah. I love Starbucks. Hhh.
4. YP: I like.
5. CP: Do you know that they take credit card?
6. YP: Yeah.
7. CP: Do you?
8. YP: Yeah.
9. CP: Okay good cause I have no money cause we had to pay rent, and I paid the electricity bills, and then my roommates pay me back.

10. YP: Uh!
11. CP: So they have to pay me back.
12. YP: Uh.
13. CP: And then I bought everybody concert tickets.
14. YP: Uh.
15. CP: So.
16. YP: Hhhh (cough)
17. CP: Hhh. I have no money.
18. YP: Oh, how much
19. CP: Oh, no. Don't worry about it.
20. YP: Uh!
21. CP: It's okay.
22. YP: So I buy, I buy your coffee.
23. CP: Oh, YP, that's okay. Hhhh.
24. YP: why?
25. CP: That's okay.
26. YP: I'm not okay.
27. CP: You're not okay?
28. YP: Yeah. Hhh.
29. CP: All right. I couldn't want to Hhhh.
30. YP: I wanted to buy your coffee (cough).
31. CP: Hhhh. Okay. My friend (3:31)
32. CP: She's going to meet up us here later, then we'll go to the concert.
33. YP: Uh.
34. CP: She will be here probably in about 15 minutes or 10 minutes.
35. YP: Okay.

I included this excerpt to show that the language learner should embrace active interactive practices to learn intentions or expectation from the person whose culture is different, through asking questions, confirming meanings, and checking appropriateness. From this excerpt, I was not sure whether CP might want Yun-Pil to reimburse her for her ticket money, so that she could buy herself a coffee.

3) Discussions

Cultural learning requires an understanding of how to interact appropriately with the people from other cultures. The oral interactive practices that participants experienced show that culture learning is not only from talking about culture, but also from learning

how to talk. Language learning in the target culture takes place when the learners culturally interact with people from another culture, using their target language.

When the participants succeeded in conversational interactions, they felt they understood more about their interlocutors and themselves. Yun-Pil said, in her third interview that, she felt much more comfortable after she had engaged her housemate Jennifer in a conversation and found that her housemates treated her just like anybody else in the house. Her concerns about not interrupting her house mates gradually changed into understanding and considering their perspectives. Therefore, it is important for language learners to keep interacting and learning even when there are difficulties caused by differences in cultures, so that they can gain power to survive and continue to learn (Interview, December 15, 2004).

V. CONCLUSION

Upon arrival in a new culture, these Korean learners of the English language began to accumulate experiences with expectations that they would improve their English language abilities, make friends with their roommates, and study hard. Experiences of culturally awkward moments sometimes discouraged the participants and caused them to be reluctant to seek further interactions (Lee, 2008).

Young was sure that if she was surrounded by Americans, she would learn to speak English faster and better. An environment of hearing and speaking only English was what she expected and wanted to be familiar with (Interview, January 26, 2002). She actually participated actively in interactions with her roommates, which brought many meaningful observations and learning about her target language and culture.

The other participant, Yun-Pil shared many things in common with Young in terms of her educational background, age, and financial status. Their living choice was similar. Like Young, Yun-Pil also tried to take advantage of opportunities to use English as much as possible by living with American girls (Interview, September 5, 2004). However, her case did not bring ample interactive practices because of her cautionary approach to cultural differences.

In my participants' real lives, there were more things going on than simply attending classes at the language institute and studying English. It was the cultural differences that they needed to learn and overcome, in order to be motivated to communicate and interact more with the people around them and to develop their proficiency in both the target culture and the language. Continuous interactions were followed by understanding the people and the culture they met and experienced.

Once they understood the people from the target culture through interaction, they

became open to other interactions. Learning the target language eventually "helps them to increase their awareness and openness to people who speak other languages and who may view the world from a different perspective" (Foreign language standards learning in Virginia public schools, 2000, p. 3). It is also critical that cultural understanding has to be mutual; therefore, the culture studies should include both parties' views and observations.

This study was limited in terms of the number of participants and their learning places. They had a full life, but I could not examine everything they did and everywhere they went. I could only see their interactive practices outside of the classroom, in places such as their home, shopping centers, and the lunch lounge of the language institute. In those places, I hoped to gather information of learning in a natural situation. Natural situations allow learners to more freely practice and explore cultural learning. I still believe that their living places were rich environments for language and culture learning because they allowed many good opportunities to develop their new cultural skills.

In conclusion, even though this study was limited to two participants over different time periods, the students' experiences in cultural learning shows that participation is important when engaging in interactive practice to learn the language and the culture. As such, this study tries to show that students' active participation in interaction can lead them to learn and understand the veiled meaning of the spoken language of their interlocutors. Once their interactions accumulate, and more and more successful interactions are experienced, they can become independent learners who continue interacting in the target culture to learn more.

This study includes part of these Korean learners' enduring efforts and trials in understanding the relationship between interactive practices and culture learning, and culture learning and language learning as well. More in-depth studies of Korean learners' experiences should be completed in the field of Second Culture Acquisition research. In future research, Korean students' critical reflections about cultural experiences should be examined to show language learners' successful and powerful ways of learning.

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Received in October, 2009
Reviewed in November, 2009
Revised version received in December, 2009