

# Korean Graduate Students' Technology Use and Language Interaction in an American University

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The study investigated how technology use of Korean graduate students affected their verbal interaction patterns in an American university. Korean graduate students established strong ties among themselves at school through virtual communities in cyberspace, which resulted in increased interaction in Korean. Furthermore, other technology uses made it possible for the participants to continuously access and enjoy Korean culture. The increased interaction in Korean resulted in decreasing necessity for English interaction on campus. In addition, the school websites and commercial business websites led them to depend on Internet-mediated communication in English. However, Internet-mediated communication resulted in a limited amount of output. It was doubtful that they enjoyed benefits in acquiring high level speaking proficiency by living and studying in an English-speaking country.

**Keywords:** [academic context/Internet-mediated communication/cyber communities/학문 추구 환경/인터넷 매개 의사소통/사이버 커뮤니티]

## 1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) research on interaction (Gass & Varonis, 1986, 1994; Long, 1981, 1983; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Pica, 1994; Pica, Holliday, Lewis & Morgenthaler, 1989; Varonis & Gass, 1985) addressed benefits of language interaction

between native and non-native speakers. Those studies reported that there occurred great incidences of meaning negotiation and modification between non-native and native speakers, which ultimately leads to modification of the interlanguage system of learners. The opportunities for learners to engage with their interlocutor in negotiation of meaning are significant to the language learning process. During negotiation, both non-native learners and native interlocutors can make their input and output more comprehensible, which is assumed to contribute to SLA.

One of participants in this study stated the reason for studying in the United States in her first interview, "One reason why I decided to study in the United States was to improve my speaking ability through interaction with Americans." All other participants in this study expressed their desires to have as many opportunities as possible to interact with American students while they were studying in the United States. They stressed the importance of verbal communication skills and their willingness to communicate with native speakers of English. According to studies on motivation (Ely, 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Genesee, Rogers & Holobow, 1983; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrod, 2001), learners who are motivated either instrumentally or integratively have a greater potential for success in language learning than learners who are not motivated. Learners' motivation is thought to lead to greater success in SLA, although effects of the two types of motivation vary in accordance with the context in which the second language is employed. Motivated learners are considered to create more opportunities to learn and use a target language. Participants in the present study were considered to be motivated in learning and using English through verbal interaction. In addition, they recognized benefits of verbal interaction in language learning that research on interaction claims. Nonetheless, observations in the present study revealed that lives and language interaction of participants were significantly affected by an academic context in

which they were situated. It should be noted that they were graduate students whose primary goal was to obtain a degree in various academic programs. Their identity as a graduate student played an important role in understanding their language interaction.

Drawing on feminist poststructural traditions, Norton (1997, 2000) claims that language learners are not fixed, rather in a state of flux. Language learners should be viewed as socially situated agents.

I have used the term investment to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. ... The construct of investment conceives of the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires. An investment in the target language is also investment in a learner's own social identity, which changes across times and space. (Norton, 1997, p. 411)

Additional studies (McKay & Wong, 1996; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002) view language learners as extremely complex social beings with fluctuating, conflicting needs and desires. Language learning should be understood within the social context in which they are involved. Individual learners cannot be easily dichotomized as motivated or unmotivated to learn and use a second language without examining the dynamics and complexity of learners' life experiences and contexts they are situated in. In this respect, language learners' changing identities across time and space provides insight into language interaction patterns of Korean graduate students in this study.

Research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) is also important in the present study. Most CMC research on language learning focuses on benefits in language classrooms (Blake, 2000;

Kelm, 1992; Kern, 2006; Smith, 2004; Waschauer, 1996) However, CMC research from communication focuses social effects of technology use and Internet. The Internet paradox study (Kraut et al., 1998) provided important preliminary evidence of the possible harmful effects of Internet use. The paradox was how a "social technology" used primarily for interpersonal interaction could increase social isolation, thereby decreasing psychological well being among its users. Internet use was associated with increases in loneliness and depression, and tended to increase stress. However, Hampton and Wellman (2002) found evidence of positive social impacts of Internet use. The researchers determined that CMC has not replaced existing means of communication, but it has added a new form of social contact to personal networks. Consequently, CMC increased social contact by introducing an additional means of communication.

Research on interaction and CMC, on the one hand, was concentrated on language learning and acquisition of second language learners from educators perspectives. On the other hand, another strand of research on Internet or technology focused on social aspects of technology use. An overview of CMC literature reveals very little research on how the use of the Internet and technology in everyday life of language learners affects their language interaction patterns either in English or in their native language in an foreign academic context. Hence, the present study might lead language educators to pay attention to phenomena which will be addressed in the paper, helping to bridge a gap that exist in research from different disciplines.

## **2. Methodology**

### 2.1 Research Design

This is a case study using an ethnographic approach (Creswell, 1998), which was employed to interview and observe six Korean graduate students from various academic disciplines in their first semester of studies in an American academic context. The ethnographic approach was appropriate because the aim of this study was to understand and interpret language interaction experience of Korean graduate students through participants' perspectives (Dobbert, 1982; Erickson, 1984). In conducting the study, I employed in-depth interviews and observations. The present study investigated how technology use of Korean graduate students affected their language interaction either in Korean or in English. Under the purpose of the study, the research questions were: 1) What factors influence Korean graduate student's degree of verbal interaction either in English or in Korean in and outside of class and 2) In what context do Korean graduate students participate, if ever, in verbal interaction either in English or in Korean in and outside of class?

## 2.2 Participants and Researcher

Six Korean graduate students voluntarily participated in the study for one semester. All of them were newcomers who did not have any previous academic experience in an English-speaking country, ranging in age from 25 to 32. They were free to withdraw at any point during the study. Selecting participants, I sought a balance between genders and between fields of study. Six participants were chosen in the fields of English literature, engineering, business and public health as a master's or doctoral student.

Three of them achieved a TOEFL score of 260 or above in a computer-based test and the rest of them achieved a score of between 237 and 259. All of them submitted a GRE or GMAT score depending on a program. The TOEFL scores of two doctoral

students in English literature were highest. Only one student in MBA reported two speaking test scores (score 40 out of 60 each) at the beginning and at the end of the first semester.

When I began collecting data for the study, I had been studying as a doctoral student at the same school where this study took place. I had also obtained my master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at the same school. Having been a Korean newcomer at the same school, I may have traveled a similar path to that of the Korean participants in this study. Due to my own experiences as a Korean graduate student at the same school, I realized that it was difficult to maintain an objective point of view in the data collection process. Thus, I kept reflective memos as a researcher, which made it possible for me to find and control my own subjectivity.

### 2.3 Data Source and Data Analysis

The data for the study was composed of the primary and secondary data source. The primary data included interview transcripts and fieldnotes from various observations in class, on and off campus. Only primary data were analyzed. Other data were considered as the secondary data such as speaking test scores, TOEFL scores, course schedules, video-taped interactions, reflective memos written by the researcher, and personal communication with the participants' classmates or friends.

Four formal interviews were conducted following a modified three-interview structure: focused life history, the details of experience, and reflection on meaning (Seidman, 1998). The purpose of the first interviews was to obtain general information about participants and their life in the United States. I focused on participants' reflections on language interaction and behaviors in the three subsequent interviews. Additional informal interviews were done on the day each participant was observed. Consequently,

questions in informal interviews were mostly context-specific questions for my personal curiosity and verification. With respect to observations, I took the stance of a passive participant during the in-class observations. However, I took the stance of a moderate or an active participant during the out-of-class observations (Spradley, 1980).

Data collection and analyses were ongoing and recursive for one semester. When analyzing the data, a data-driven approach was employed rather than a theory-driven approach (Boyatzis, 1998). First, in domain analysis, I identified factors and contexts that influenced language interaction and use through reading interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes. Second, taxonomy analyses were conducted using identified domains. Taxonomies were reread and cross-examined, and double-checked by the participants in order to find overarching themes. Finally, recurrent themes emerged from the analysis processes. All the participants were identified by pseudonyms they chose.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

Findings of the present study have divided into two parts. In the first part, I will present how technology use influenced language interaction of the participants in Korean. The second part will be focused on how Internet-mediated communication changed their interaction patterns in English.

#### **3.1 Technology Use and Korean Relationship**

In 2003, a cybercafé for newcomers to the school was created at a popular website among Koreans. This cybercafé consisted of approximately 250 members and held off-line meetings before their

departure from Korea. About 50 of the community's 250 members were present at each off-line meeting (Personal communication with the first web master, February 25, 2004). The off-line meetings were held in order to provide students with the opportunity to make many acquaintances, which occasionally developed into friendships. The members of the cybercafé exchanged information about their lives at the school and in the United States, including information on housing and auto purchases, for instance.

Other types of cyber communities such as alumni or religious cyber communities existed among Korean graduate students. Religious cyber communities were closed to outsiders, demanding requisite membership in the real communities in order to join and pursued a specific goal shared by all members. They contributed to leading newcomers to an existing Korean connection at the school or in the larger community. Additionally, alumni cyber communities aimed at promoting solidarity among alumni and students at school. The members of the alumni cyber communities were dispersed in different locations across the United States and South Korea.

Historically, bonding among Korean students had existed at the school. Usually, it took some time for newcomers to engage with other Korean students at the school. However, the newcomers in 2003 showed that they had already established relationships with other newcomers before they had left Korea. Such ties were often strengthened in the United States. At the onset of the study, I overlooked the fact that some participants had known one another for a very short time. Furthermore, I did not realize that Bo-Ram (Public Health, Master, 26 years old) and Eun-Jeong (English Literature, Ph.D., 28 years old) shared common friends through the cybercafé. In addition, Bo-Ram and Eun-Jeong knew each other although they had not contacted each other personally. It was of great surprise that all the persons whose names are

italicized in interviews had known one another.

Researcher: Your uncle<sup>1)</sup> must have helped you purchase your car, right?

*Bo-Ram*: No, I bought it without him [her uncle], with help of *Dong-Ho* oh-ppah. We went to buy *Joo-Whan* oh-ppah's car but he didn't find what he liked. I chose my car there, instead. I just followed them, though.

Researcher: When you settled down here, did you do it without your uncle?

*Bo-Ram*: Yes. When I bought my car, I went there with my friends I had known in Korea [through the cybercafé]. I didn't need many things here. I had only to buy a car and a couple of things because I live in a dorm.

From the 1st interview on October 8

*Eun-Jeong*: *Hyun-Jung* found our apartment with *my friend* [*Young-Soo*] who I met in Korea.... Anyway, she leased the apartment with his help. We [Eun-Jeong and her roommate] kept in touch when she was looking for an apartment. ... When we moved in the apartment, my roommate's friends and my friends I had known in Korea [through the cybercafé] helped us with moving, and my upper-classmate helped me with buying a car.

From the 1st interview on October 7

When Bo-Ram and Eun-Jeong settled in the United States, they received a great deal of help from other Korean graduate newcomers who had arrived earlier.

International orientations at the school started on August 18, and the fall semester started in August 25. After the attacks of

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1) Bo-ram's uncle lived in the same city in which the school was located.

September 11, international students could not enter the United States more than one month before their scheduled university orientations. The participants arrived in the United States in the first or second week in August. Less than one month after arriving in the United States, many Korean graduate students including the participants had developed close relationships with other Korean students. Furthermore, the relationships transcended program or departmental boundaries at the university. I could not figure out how the participants and their friends came to know each other in a very short time. Only a few of the relationships made sense because they were in the same department in the university or they were in the same school in Korea.

I coincidentally found about the cybercafé during informal conversations with new students. I asked the participants if they had joined the cybercafé, and if they attended the two off-line meetings in informal interviews other than scheduled four interviews.

Researcher: Did you join the cybercafé and attend the off-line meetings in Korea?

Sang-Jik: Yes, I did. You know my Korean friends. I met them in the meetings. I attended both of the meetings. Later, people in engineering fields had a personal meeting other than the off-line meetings so we were close before we came here. ...

Researcher: How did you know about the cybercafé?

Sang-Jik: It's a trend to make cyber communities in Korea. I knew that a lot of cyber communities were made by students who planed to study in a university in the United States. When I surfed, usually a search word was the name of city where a school was located. Other students did the same thing, as far as I know.

From Informal interview on November 14

Bo-Ram, Eun-Jeong, Jong-Hyun (Computer Science, Master, 30 years old) and Sang-Jik (Civil Engineering, Master, 29 years old) joined the cybercafé and attended one or both of the meetings. Min-Ho (English Literature, 28 years old) and Do-Kyoon (Business, MBA, 32 years old) joined the cybercafé but did not attend the meetings. However, Min-Ho found his housemates through the bulletin board and contacted them via e-mail. All the participants in this study joined the cybercafé and obtained information on school life and life in the United States regardless of attending the off-line meetings.

Jong-Hyun: Someone posted information about subscribing to xxxx [cellular phone service provider] on the bulletin board.

Researcher: So is that the reason you chose xxxx among many service providers?

Jong-Hyun: No, it is the only service provider which allows someone without a social security number to subscribe to their service. Many students [newcomers] wanted a cellular phone right after their arrival. It takes one month for us to get a social security number after submitting an application form. I couldn't have a cellular phone because of a social security number. Then someone posted that we could have cellular phone service without a social security number. Its service was more expensive than others'. But I could get it anyway.

From Informal interview on November 14

As Jong-Hyun stated in the interview, the bulletin board of the cybercafé made it possible for new students to share information as soon as anyone obtained information and posted it. The cybercafé dramatically increased interaction in Korean and decreased their need for interaction in English in order to obtain

necessary information on school life and life in the United States. However, Min-Ho and Do-Kyoon were less dependent on the cybercafé than the other participants when settling in the United States.

An examination of the participants' experiences revealed that they received help from a variety of different groups. First, alumni of Min-Ho's department in Korea helped him negotiate obstacles to settling in the United States. He contacted his graduate school alumni through their cyber community. Second, Do-Kyoon joined a MBA alumni cyber community as a new student. Second-year MBA students helped him and other new students in the MBA program to get settled. Third, the remainder of the participants settled with other newcomers who joined the cybercafé at xxxx. Although the students gained information about what they should do from different groups, all of the students used Internet technology to contact those groups. Furthermore, the participants developed close relationships with the people who had helped them settle in a very short time.

Sang-Jik: I'm very comfortable being with Korean friends. We share things in common such as studying and living abroad, and struggling to adjust a new educational system in our first year of our studies. I'm not alone here and I have friends here. I don't know how I might feel if I did not have my friends. I might have had a harder time.

From the 4th interview on December 9

Sang-Jik started his relationship with Korean students in school through the cybercafé and the relationship transformed into a friendship in the United States. The friendship provided Sang-Jik with consolation that he was not alone. Sang-Jik added, "For me right now, they [Korean friends] are more important than

language itself [English]. I know I am losing a lot of opportunities to interact with American students while I spend time with my friends. ... I might not have gone through all difficulties without them." The Korean participants in the present study put academic priority over English itself, as a result, establishing their primary identity as "a competent graduate student" while they stayed in the United States for their studies. Achieving their academic goals was considered more important than improving speaking abilities in English through interaction with native speakers of English. The relationship with other Koreans at school appeared more important than anything else.

Other than the influences of cyber communities, Jong-Hyun stated that other technology uses also influenced his life in the United States.

Jong-Hyun: What I was surprised with here was that I was more exposed to Korean than English at school. I expected in Korea that I might not use English very often but I didn't expect that I would use Korean all the time here [in the United States]. We can watch Korean soap opera on the Internet, download mp3 files of Korean pop music and listen to them. When I was in Korea, I usually listened to American pop songs and watched foreign movies. However, here, I listened to Korean pop music and watched Korean movies. I feel and enjoy Korean culture more in the United States than in Korea.

From the 2nd interview on October 15

Other Korean students at school mostly surrounded Jong-Hyun. When he and his friends got together on weekends, they drank beer, listened to Korean pop music, and spoke Korean. The other Korean participants were no exception.

Bo-Ram: I chat with my friends in Korea on xxxx messenger at

night. Because I live in a dorm, I always have an Internet connection in my room. Whenever I boot my computer, xxxx messenger is automatically logged on. I miss my friends in Korea though I have a lot of friends here. They [friends in Korea] let me know what has changed and what music is popular in Korea.

Researcher: Why don't you call them?

Bo-Ram: I call them on weekends but during weekdays, they work for a company. So it is not easy to call them. But we can chat even during their office hours.

From the 2nd interview on November 7

Bo-Ram used a chat program for synchronized communication with her friends in Korea. Technology use made it possible for her to conveniently and easily maintain her relationship with her friends in Korea. In addition, Bo-Ram often called Jong-Hyun and Sang-Jik and came to the library to meet with them at night. When I was in her car with her, she was listening to a CD of Korean pop music. She downloaded the music from Korean music websites and burned CDs on her notebook computer. It was similar in case of Do-Kyoon. He read Korean newspapers and checked the Korean stock market everyday on the Internet. Min-Ho and Eun-Jeong also read Korean newspapers on the Internet and showed sensitivity to Korean politics.

Eun-Jeong: I didn't read Korean newspapers as eagerly as I do here. However, I read all the newspapers on the Internet in the library when I have time. I sort of feel an obligation to know what is happening in Korea. People say that we become a patriot in a foreign country. I think the saying is right.

From the 4th interview on January 11

All the participants were physically located in the United States,

but their lives were directed by Korean events and culture. The Internet and other technology, such as computers and mp3 players, made it possible for Korean students to access Korean news and culture regardless of their physical distance from their home country.

In an investigation of the Argentine Mailing List (AML), Boczkowski (1999) showed how users and technologies interacted to create a national virtual community which shaped national identities. AML members discussed ordinary national issues such as politics, sports, cultural trends, in not-so-ordinary circumstances: they were located all over the world and conducted their discussions by e-mail. Similarly, the Korean graduate students established a cyber community in order to gain information about their studies in the United States. The students did not discuss national issues in the cyber community. Rather, they shared information pertinent to their lives and studies in an American university.

To some extent, their community in cyberspace contributed to strong bonding among Koreans at the school, and maintenance of their cultural and national identities in a foreign country. As Sang-Jik stated in his interview, the participants were in need of emotional support from other Korean students so as to deal with difficulties caused from studying in an unfamiliar environment. Their attachment to Korean student communities was contradictory to their expressed desire to acquire improved English communication skills. Nevertheless, the rationale was that their difficulties in the first year of study led them to seek out emotional support from Korean student communities and to put more value on those communities even though they lost some opportunities to improve their language skills.

### 3.2 Other Internet Uses and English Interaction

Although the Korean participants reached to language proficiency the school required for academic works, their listening proficiency was not sufficient, as a result, preventing them from participating in verbal interaction with native speakers of English on and off campus situations. Observations revealed that living and studying in the United States did not necessarily lead them to verbal interaction with native speakers of English or foreign students who spoke a language other than Korean. Internet-based services and websites let the participants become less dependent on verbal interaction in English and more dependent on Internet-mediated (i.e. reading and writing) interaction in English. In this study, the term *Internet-mediate communication* refers to a way of communication via the Internet. The reason for choosing Internet-mediated communication instead of CMC was the nature of communication via the Internet was different from that of CMC in an amount of output and an role of learners in the interaction.

Internet use in everyday life changed the Korean graduate students' ways of interacting in English on and off campus. The websites which affected their interaction in English included their school website and other commercial websites, such as shopping and travel websites. Regular observations indicated that the Korean graduate students mostly stayed on campus and spent most of their time on studying in the libraries or in class. Therefore, the school was the place where most English interaction took place. However, their Internet use decreased their need for verbal interaction in English on campus.

During in-class observations, it was noted that four out of six participants printed out lecture notes, in advance, from department home pages or from a web server at the school that hosts an e-learning software platform. Through the server, students and faculty had access to course classroom tools and

course materials. The students majoring in English literature were the only participants not to use either the departmental website or the web server because their professors did not use them for classes. In most other classes, lecture notes were posted on the server so that the students could print them out. The students brought their printouts to classes and took extra notes in the margin. Although not all the professors used this technology, the Korean students certainly took advantage of technology to compensate for their limited listening ability. When participants were asked to self-evaluate their class comprehension, they reported that they understood approximately 60 to 70 percent of their classes. In this regard, they received great help from this technology in class comprehension. However, the use of technology resulted in decreased opportunities in verbal interaction because neither synchronous CMC such as on-line discussion nor asynchronous CMC such as e-bulletin boards was operationalized at the web server. As Jong-Hyun stated, "I can access to all the materials from class later. Though I don't understand assignments in class, I can find detailed information on the assignments professors posted on class home pages" (from the 3rd interview). The availability of information on the Internet made it possible for him to avoid asking his classmates about assignments he did not understand in class. The use of technology was prominent in engineering fields and business. For example, Jong-Hyun, Sang-Jik, and Do-Kyoon rarely sought help from classmates, which would require verbal interaction in English. In addition to software such as the Internet home pages and websites, the use of hardware has also influenced Korean students' life on campus. Bo-Ram, Min-Ho, Jong-Hyun and Do-Kyoon all owned notebook computers that they used to access university-provided wireless Internet connections. Therefore, the students could use the Internet at school even when desktop computers in libraries were not available.

Once the in-class observations indicated that the use of technology in classes changed the Korean students' interaction pattern in English, I paid closer attention to their Internet use at school. The most frequently visited site was a web-based, personal portal to on-line school resources the students needed. The service provided students with all the documents, academic records and procedures, a guide to student life at school, and regulations needed to work through the administrative processes. The service made it possible for the students to take care of school business without physically visiting department offices or other offices, which would require verbal interaction in English.

In addition to the school website, other websites let the Korean students choose Internet-based interaction rather than verbal interaction in meeting their needs off campus. For instance, students frequently got driving directions from Yahoo. It provided additional ways for the Korean students to circumvent verbal interaction in English. Do-Kyoon and Jong-Hyun showed a stronger propensity toward using the Internet than the other Korean participants. Do-Kyoon went to Florida during a fall recess at school. He made all of his flight, hotel, and rental car reservations through an Internet website.

Do-Kyoon: I went to Florida with my wife during the fall recess.

Researcher: Did you contact a travel agency? Or [overlap with Do-Kyoon]

Do-Kyoon: I didn't have to do it. I did it by myself at xxxx website. Just click a couple of times, and that's it. It was easy and convenient. All the information that I need was on websites.

From the 4th interview on December 10

All he needed was to find right websites for travel and compare prices for airline tickets among websites. Once he decided on a

website for airline tickets, he made reservations for a hotel and a rental car on the same website. Later, he printed out directions from the airport to the hotel, and other information on attractions he could enjoy there. During the whole process, he did not have to depend on verbal interaction with English-speaking people. Jong-Hyun also liked to use on-line shopping websites.

Jong-Hyun: I bought a CD player on e-bay. I got a good deal there though it was a used one. When I need something, I usually buy it from Internet websites. They offered a better price than if I bought it at a store. I have favorite websites for shopping. I usually do not go shopping except for grocery shopping.

From the 1st interview on September 16

Whenever Jong-Hyun used on-line shopping, he lost the opportunity to speak with native speakers of English in stores. He used on-line shopping for the convenience of shopping without physically going to a shop, not for the purpose of avoiding verbal interaction in English. Even though English interaction in stores was simple in quality and in quantity, his Internet use eliminated the need for face-to-face verbal interaction in English in such situations. Even though the degree of preference was different from that of Do-Kyoon and Jong-Hyun, Sang-Jik also showed preference to use business websites for customer service of a cable TV and a cellular phone service provider.

Sang-Jik: I pay my bills at Internet websites. One day, the bill payment of my cellular phone was blocked so I emailed customer service. They replied that I had to talk to a customer representative on the phone because they had to confirm my identity for a security reason. Usually, I take care of those businesses items on the Internet

unless it is not possible.

From the 3rd interview on November 16

It should be noted that the nature of communication via the Internet on and off campus was different from that of CMC in language education in a sense that the participants were not involved in meaning negotiation through CMC (Blake, 2000). Observations and interviews revealed that the participants' Internet use and interaction via the Internet did not put them in a active position in language learning and language use in terms of the amount of output they produced. However, Internet websites of the school and other service companies provided plenty of comprehended input, which was claimed to contribute to language acquisition (Gass, 1997) although the use of Internet eliminated opportunities for the participants to be involved in verbal interaction in English. The participants should be aware that the use of Internet conflicted with their strong desires for improving speaking abilities because comprehended input they were exposed to did not certainly lead to improved speaking competence.

Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) stated that the Internet reflected, facilitated, and foretold a transition away from door-to-door group interaction in neighborhoods. The Internet has accentuated a change toward networked individualism. Face-to-face interaction moved to CMC whether it is synchronized or not. Although the phenomenon of Internet use is not new, it was addressed in this study because the participants were situated under the unusual circumstances of living and studying in a foreign country. Internet use by the Korean participants in this study influenced their interaction patterns changing from verbal face-to-face interaction to Internet-mediated interaction, which decreased their frequency of verbal interaction in English on and off campus. I point out that Internet-mediate communication

contradicted their strong desire for improving speaking ability in English while staying in the United States for their studies.

The Korean participants' use of technology such as the computer and Internet contributed to Korean bonding at the school and the maintenance of Korean culture in their everyday life in the United States. The virtual communities in cyberspace facilitated the Korean graduate students' attachment to other Korean students in an American academic context, which was considered more important for them to successfully complete their first semester, and to receive good marks in their courses. Kraut et al. (1998) claimed that Internet use for interpersonal interaction increases social isolation, loneliness, and depression. To the contrary, the Internet use of the Korean participants led them to become involved in cyber communities and thereby resulted in increased social interaction among Korean graduate students at school. While their involvement in cyber communities increased social contact with other Koreans in the United States, their increased social interaction with other Korean graduate students might have increased social isolation from American society. However, the Internet did not increase loneliness and psychological depression among Korean graduate students in the academic context in which they were situated. Furthermore, the Korean bonding contributed positively to students' ability to live and study in the United States. Nevertheless, the Korean bonding conflicted with the participants' desire to improve their verbal communication skills in English because it resulted in a decrease in opportunities for social contact with native speakers of English on and off campus.

In addition, the Korean students' frequent use of the Internet in their academic and daily life decreased the frequency of verbal interaction, not because they intended purposely to avoid verbal interaction in English, but because they enjoyed the convenience of the Internet. They were not conscious that their frequent Internet use changed their opportunities of verbal interaction in English.

Rather, they thought of Internet use as a normal convenience in their everyday life. However, examining the nature of interaction via the Internet revealed that the participants were rarely required to produce output. It was certain that they were provided with plenty of comprehended input. However, as Swain (1995) has argued output does push learners to process language more deeply than input alone. As a particular type of pushed output, uptake in CMC did not necessarily lead to acquisition of new lexical items (Smith, 2005). Hence, it is questionable that the participants' interaction via the Internet without pushed output lead to speaking competence they desired.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The advancement of Internet technology radically changed the interaction patterns of the Korean participants in the present study. Firstly, Internet cyber communities played an important role in reinforcing ties among Korean newcomers, which was conducive to successful completion of the first semester in an university in the United States. However, the increased interaction among Koreans resulted in decreased interaction in English, which contradicted their strong desires for improving speaking abilities through verbal interaction. Secondly, Internet-mediated communication decreased the necessity for verbal interaction on and off campus. The participants and other Korean newcomers established strong connections through contacts in the cybercafé. Additionally, other types of cyber communities existed among current graduate students, playing a secondary role by encouraging newcomers to become further involved in Korean communities. Cyber communities resulted in an exchange of information, which increased initial interaction in Korean. The newcomers did not need to interact with school administration in English to obtain information that they

would need to get settled at the university, which consequently decreased the participants' need to interact in English.

Additionally, the school website and business websites influenced the Korean students' interaction patterns. Such websites made it possible for them to circumvent verbal interaction in English and to depend on Internet-mediated interaction. However, the participants were not aware of the way in which these websites had influenced their interaction and lives on and off campus. The findings of the present study suggest perspective or current students in foreign countries need to be aware that uses of the Internet and other technology for a convenience in everyday life can lead to unexpected consequences, contrary to a desire for improving speaking proficiency through verbal interaction in a foreign language. They need to deliberately make efforts to improve speaking ability and communication skills in English such as making them involved in meaning negotiation through interaction. One of the limitations in the present study is that it was not investigated how Internet-mediated communication of the participants changed their speaking competence for a prolonged time. Thus, it will be necessary to observe these or other graduate students for more than one semester so that changes in their attitudes, behaviors and speaking competence can be tracked and recorded as they progress in their studies.

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