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Lexical Productivity of Korean EFL Learners in Spoken and Written English

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This research aims to investigate the lexical productivity of Korean students in their spoken and written English by comparing it with that of British students. Forty-two Korean and British students (21 per group) participated in this study and undertook the spoken and written tasks involving descriptive narratives. Approximately 32,000 words of English data were subsequently collected and examined in terms of the STTR and the occurrences of 15 lexical features using the *WordSmith Tools* 4.0 software and also by a manual investigation. The findings showed that, firstly, the Korean students underused more than half of the features analysed in their speech but they overused other six features in their writing, compared to the British students. The overused features signify that the Korean students might have been primarily exposed to highly limited and formulised English expressions. Secondly, the Korean students had better lexical productivity in writing than in speaking. This implies that their overall English proficiency might be better in writing than in speech. Lastly, the Korean students inappropriately used more than half of the lexical features between their speech and writing compared to the British students. This indicates that, to a degree, the Korean students might write as the native English speakers would speak, or vice versa.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine the productivity of lexical features of Korean English learners in the spoken and written English.* Lexical features are the words used to encode and express speakers/writers' ideas in language, whereas grammatical rules structure the outer form of sentences or utterances (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, &

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Finegan, 1999; Hughes, 1996; O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2001; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985; Wales, 2001). For this reason, the total number of words or the use of specified lexical categories (e.g., adjectives, adverbs or nouns) has been often used for investigating characteristics of the content or vocabulary in a text (e.g., Beaman, 1984; Biber, 1988; Stubbs, 1996, Tannen, 1982). For example, Kennedy (2002) found that, in general, modals frequently appeared in face-to-face interaction, since they are used to 'soften' meanings and present subtle degrees of certainty or other attitudes. He also found that, however, modals in passive voice structures (e.g., *it can be fixed*) occurred significantly more often in 'informative' genres such as natural, pure or social sciences, but infrequently in 'imaginative' prose and spoken data. This shows that the structure of modal verb phrases is more likely to be determined by a genre, rather than by the mode of language, speech or writing. This kind of study indicates that a genre-based analysis of lexical features provides more specific information about the use of the features and has implications for pedagogic practice in language education.

In the same vein, lexical features are also used as subjects for investigating the English of non-native speakers (NNSs) or the differences between the English of native speakers (NSs) and NNSs (e.g., Granger, 2002; Shirato & Stapleton, 2007). For example, Uhm (1995) examined 'temporal variables' in Korean EFL students' spoken discourse; Altenberg and Granger (2001) compared the grammatical and lexical patterning of *make* in native and non-native English students' written corpora; and Daller, van Hout, & Treffers-Daller (2003) identified lexical richness in the spontaneous spoken English of two groups of German and Turkish bilinguals. Such studies, indeed, explore learners' lexical productivity or competence in language performance.

The traits of lexical productivity vary in relations to the research aspects studied such as being able to use spoken and written forms; grammatical positions; collocational patterns; frequency; appropriateness; or word associations (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Nation, 2001; Zareva, Schwanenflugel, & Nikolova, 2005). Among them, the frequency provides simple and clear indicators of the characteristics of a text and speaker/writer's competence in using linguistic features (Biber & Conrad, 2001; Biber & Reppen, 2002; Stubbs, 1996). Thus, the lexical productivity, as a component of language proficiency, can be represented by the frequency of lexical features in a text. Particularly, according to Hunston (2002), the comparison of the corpora of NSs with NNSs based on the frequency of linguistic features provides instances of learners' underuse or overuse of linguistic items and, in turn, shows to what extent learners' target language deviates from NSs' norms.

On the basis of these notions, this study was designed to investigate the lexical productivity of the Korean learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) according to the frequency of lexical features used in their spoken and written English. Their lexical productivity was further evaluated in comparison with that of British students. This study,

accordingly, would provide some evidence to find out the immediate needs of the Korean students in using the lexical features in English. Considering that it has been more than 10 years since the communicative English Language Teaching (ELT) policy was first adopted in schools, it would be timely and meaningful to evaluate the spoken and written English of Korean students. Indeed, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Korea shifted the emphasis of Korean National Curriculum of English from grammar towards speaking and writing by introducing communicative language teaching in the Sixth National English Curriculum in 1995 (MOE, 1997, 2000).¹ The Seventh National English Curriculum, which currently takes effect, has continued to focus on communicative English proficiency. In pursuit of the development of the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners, therefore, there has been a need to discover more effective ways to maximise the benefits of communicative ELT for Korean students. For this reason, this study aimed to examine the English of Korean university students and to identify their needs in speaking and writing, particularly in association with lexical features. The specific objectives of this research were:

- (1) To identify and compare the frequencies of a range of lexical features in the spoken and written English used by Korean EFL learners and native English speakers;
- (2) To explore the extent to which Korean students are able to distribute lexical features between spoken and written English as native English speakers do;
- (3) Based on the above, to identify the lexical productivity of Korean EFL learners.

In order to do so, English corpora of Korean and British students were developed and they were analysed by the Standardised Type Token Ratio (STTR) and 15 lexical features. The details are presented on the following sections.

II. CORPUS DEVELOPMENT

Corpora of spoken and written English produced by Korean and British university students were developed for this research. The three primary issues in developing the corpora were to ensure that: 1) the data would be collected by the informants whose English abilities were considered to be average among Korean/British university students; 2) the spoken and written data would be linguistically comparable; and 3) the data would include rather various topics that are appropriate for the analysis by a range of lexical features.

¹ The Ministry of Education in Korea changed to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in February 2008. In this paper, the ministry will be simply referred to as the Ministry of Education (MOE).

1. Tasks Used in Data Collection

Four English tasks were prepared in order to collect spoken and written data. The tasks were chosen from Sookmyung Women's University-Multimedia Assisted Test of English (SMU-MATE, hereafter MATE). MATE is a selection of spoken and written English tests developed and administered by Koreans. MATE aims to have test-takers produce English samples in a variety of subject areas, which can be used to represent their overall English (van Vlack, 2002a). For this reason, MATE tasks cover different levels of difficulty in using English. The MATE speaking test comprises eight tasks taking 25 minutes. The test-takers begin with relatively simple tasks such as requesting some basic auto-biographical information (e.g., phone number, job or free time activities). The test then moves on to more difficult tasks such as asking for a description of a picture, the interpretation of information or an opinion. On the other hand, the MATE writing test consists of three tasks and participants are allowed 37 minutes to complete them. As with spoken tasks, they are linearly arranged from the easiest to the most difficult.

The reasons why MATE tasks were used in this research are, firstly, that it has been acknowledged and authorised by the Korean MOE as one of the successful standardized spoken and written tests of English developed by Koreans for Korean EFL learners (SMU-MATE, 2008). Secondly, MATE is appropriate for Korean EFL learners, since it provides familiar contexts to them with the use of English in Korean society. This may help to avoid the possible tension that would be caused by the students having to perform the tasks in English. Thirdly, MATE tasks make it possible to collect language samples containing different levels of difficulty of English because they are arranged according to levels of difficulty across a wide scope of subject matter (van Vlack, 2002a).

Among the MATE spoken tasks, the easiest task along with the three most difficult tasks were excluded. Accordingly, only four speaking tasks of relatively modest difficulty were chosen for data collection. The tasks used for the data collection were arranged to increase in level of difficulty and each task contained at least one picture to prompt a descriptive narrative. The key directions for each task were as follows (see Appendix I for one task including a picture):

Task 1. Describe the girl in the picture;

Task 2. Describe the daily routine of a drama writer according to the six given pictures;

Task 3. Describe the event based on the six given pictures;

Task 4. Explain the graph.

The four tasks were particularly chosen to collect descriptive narratives. Narrative is a non-reciprocal and commonly used text type when someone recounts an anecdote to

someone else (Beaman, 1984; Brown & Yule, 1983; Longacre, 1974). Since this text type occurs in both speech and writing, it provides linguistically comparable spoken and written data. For this reason, it has been often used in previous studies comparing the two modes of language (e.g., Beaman, 1984; Redeker, 1984; Tannen, 1982). Narrative, thus, is ideal to investigate the spoken and written English in an in-depth analysis in this research.

2. Participants

Forty-two female Korean and British university students (21 of each) participated in the data collection procedure. They consisted of the same sex to exclude any possible effects of gender differences on the language performance (see Itakura, 2002; Lumley & O'Sullivan, 2005). Initially, Korean female students at Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul were selected through a preliminary MATE speaking test. Among the 50 applicants, the 21 were selected for their 'Moderate High Level' English proficiency, where most of the applicants belonged to. They were third- and fourth-year university students, who were studying various arts or science subjects at the undergraduate level. They had all been learning English for approximately 10 years from primary school to university. Considering their English competence and educational backgrounds, it would be expected that their spoken and written English would show similar characteristics to that of the generality of Korean learners in higher education.

The British participants were chosen to be equivalent to the Koreans in terms of age and educational background. As a result, 21 British female students in their second year of undergraduate study at the University of Manchester, UK participated.² Like the Korean participants, the British students were invited to volunteer for this research regardless of their degree programs. This was intended to avoid any possible patterns of language use which might occur if the study area of the participants had been limited. For the British participants, no preliminary assessment of their speech was carried out. As they were university students, however, it was anticipated that their written and spoken English would be relatively 'standard'.

3. Procedures for Collecting Data

The selected tasks were carried out twice by the participants for gathering spoken and written data. They conducted the tasks first for speaking and later for writing, with a three-week interval between the two sessions. The same tasks were used twice to ensure

² While university in Korea usually consists of eight semesters in four years (or four semesters in two years of vocational college), most British university education consists of six semesters in three years.

the spoken and written English data would be linguistically comparable. In addition, the interval was applied to minimise the possible influence about writing caused by the familiarity on the tasks (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Time Allocations in Tasks

| | Speaking (Preparation/Response) | Writing |
|--------|------------------------------------|------------|
| Task 1 | 15 seconds/75 seconds | |
| Task 2 | 20 seconds/60 seconds | Total |
| Task 3 | 20 seconds/80 seconds | 40 minutes |
| Task 4 | 20 seconds/ 60 seconds | |

The time allocations to complete the tasks followed those given in the MATE test. Thus, the same thinking and response time of the MATE speaking tasks was applied to the speaking in this research (see van Vlack, 2002a and Table 1). On the other hand, when the tasks were used again for writing, the participants were given 40 minutes altogether to carry out the four tasks. This time limit was allocated because the moderate level MATE writing tasks are designed to be completed in 10 minutes each (see van Vlack, 2002b). As in the MATE writing test, the participants had to use their own judgment to allocate the given 40 minutes among the four tasks.

III. METHODS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

In order to produce the analysable spoken discourses and written texts, the participants' speech was transcribed and their writing was typed up. In these procedures, no alteration was made to correct errors, misspelled words, repetitions or inappropriate expressions made by the participants. The transcripts of the speech of the 21 Korean and the 21 British participants were merged into a single text file respectively. The 21 written scripts of each group of participants were also merged. As a result, four analysable spoken and written corpora were created and composed of 32,291 words in total, as Table 2 shows.

TABLE 2
Number of Words in the Spoken and Written Data

| Data of Korean Students | | Data of British Students | |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|
| Speech | 6,430 | Speech | 8,047 |
| Writing | 7,116 | Writing | 10,698 |
| Total | 13,546 | Total | 18,745 |
| Total: 32,291 words | | | |

The data were analysed according to the STTR and the occurrences of 15 lexical features. The features were chosen since they have been considered as the linguistic features indicating the overall lexical characteristics of text, as shown in Table 3 (e.g., Baker & Eggington, 1999; Biber, 1988, 1995; Biber et al., 1999). Some of them have been individually examined in previous studies and have shown specific lexical aspects of text (e.g., D'Odorico & Fasolo, 2007; Gentner, 1982; Kennedy, 2002). Moreover, these features cover a wide range of lexical items and include almost every possible type of words except for grammatically functioning ones.

TABLE 3
Linguistic Features Analysed in this Study

| Linguistic Features | |
|-----------------------|--|
| STTR | |
| Nouns | Nominalisations Other Nouns |
| Verbs | <i>be</i> as a Main Verb Pro-verb <i>do</i> Other Nouns |
| Modal Auxiliary Verbs | Possibility Modals Necessity Modals Predictive Modals |
| Adjectives | Attributives Adjectives Predicative Adjectives |
| Adverbs | Downtoners Hedges Amplifiers Emphatics Other Adverbs |

In order for the frequency counts to be compiled, this research employed the combination of computerised analysis using the *WordSmith Tools 4.0* software and manual analysis. A computerised linguistic tool was required to increase the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis and a manual investigation was required to complement the automatic analysis where necessary. For example, once *WordSmith Tools 4.0* retrieved the segments of text which contained a search word (or a list of search words), they were manually examined to clarify whether the occurrences were valid for frequency counts (e.g., whether the occurrences were not simple repetitions in speaking). In this study, pause fillers as hesitation markers (e.g., *uh*, *umm* and *well*), repetitions and self-corrections were excluded from the frequency counts of 15 lexical features in the data. For the STTR, however, it was practically impossible to exclude these variables by a manual investigation due to the amount of data. Thus, the STTRs in the spoken data included redundant segments of utterances.

After the process of the automatic and manual investigations, the frequency index per 1,000 words of a lexical feature in each database was produced for being making comparisons (cf. Beaman, 1984; Biber, 1988). This proportional approach was required because the number of words in the spoken and written English of the Korean and the British participants varied so that the raw number of frequency of a lexical feature in each database was not comparable. The occurrences of a lexical feature in the speech/writing of the two groups of the participants, furthermore, were compared again by applying either a chi-square test or the Fisher's exact test. Thus, the features which showed the statistically significant differences between the English of the Korean and the British participants could be identified.

IV. DISTRIBUTION OF LEXICAL FEATURES

The 15 lexical features (except for the STTR) analysed in this study are categorised according to its main functions. In this section, the comparative analysis of the spoken and written English of the Korean and the British students based on the frequency indices of the features is presented in details.

1. Standardised Type/ Token Ratio

Before the participants' English was closely explored by the frequency of lexical features, an overview of the lexical aspect of their English was investigated by using STTR. Lexical richness, especially lexical variation, has often been measured by the Type/Token Ratio (TTR) (Read, 2000). The TTR is the proportion of different lexical items (types) to the total number of running words (tokens) in a text and is therefore indicative of the vocabulary size of speakers or writers. In this study, the TTR was investigated within a uniform number of tokens, that is, by the standardisation of the number of tokens following some previous studies (e.g., Baker & Eggington, 1999; Biber, 1988). The STTR is examined by means of *WordSmith Tools* 4.0 and indicates an average percentage of the occurrence of new types for every 1,000 tokens in a text. In line with *WordSmith Tools* 4.0, every different form of a word was considered as a type (e.g., *run* and *runs* were taken as two types) (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Standardised Type/Token Ratio (STTR)

| | Korean | | British | |
|--------------|---|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| Total Tokens | 6,430 | 7,116 | 8,047 | 10,698 |
| Total Types | 635 | 897 | 855 | 1,485 |
| STTR (%) | 24.22 | 32.13 | 30.16 | 36.82 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 2.175$, $p = .140$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 6.004$, $p = .014$) | | | |

Table 4 shows that the total number of tokens, the total number of types and the STTR per 1,000 words were all higher in the English of the British participants than in that of the Korean participants, as one would expect. This evidently indicates the difference in vocabulary proficiency between the two groups. The statistically significant difference is, however, shown only in their writing ($p = .014 < .05$). According to Biber (1988), the greater variety of words in a text indicates that meaning is being expressed more precisely and, in turn, that clearer and more detailed information is being provided. In this regard, it seems that the Korean students were not able to present the information as thoroughly as the native English speakers were, in particular, in writing than in speech. Still, it is necessary to examine the distribution of specific lexical features to support this idea. Whether the Korean students are better in speaking than in writing holds true, thus, until the discussion of the analysis of 15 lexical features in this study.

2. Nouns

The analysis of nouns was carried out within two categories: nominalisations and 'other' nouns here. The nominal form is widely defined as a noun or noun phrase derived from part of a word or a clause. From a more limited perspective, it includes only derived nouns (Chalker & Weiner, 1998). The derivation of nouns involves adding affixation or modifying part of a word. On the basis of this notion, all words ending in *-tion*, *-ment*, *-ness* or *-ity* and their plural forms were investigated to identify nominalisations. Among them, words which were not nominalised (e.g., *nation* or *apartment*) were categorised into other nouns including all the other nouns except for nominalised nouns in the data (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Frequency Indices of Nouns (per 1,000 words)

| | Korean | | British | |
|-----------------|---|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| Nominalisations | .47 | 1.12 | .75 | 4.21 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = .448$, $p = .740^a$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 13.686$, $p = .000$) | | | |
| Other Nouns | 143.1 | 187.5 | 143 | 169.8 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = .000$, $p = .994$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 9.212$, $p = .002$) | | | |

^a: Fisher's Exact Test

Both groups of the participants used nominalisations and other nouns more often in their writing than in their speech, as shown in Table 5. As for nominalisations, their writing shows the statistically important difference ($p = .000 < .05$) and the occurrences of this feature were higher in the writing of the British students than in that of the Korean students, but their speech shows almost no difference. Chafe (1982) suggested that more informational and stylistically formal text types are likely to contain more nominalisations. In this sense, it seems that to a certain extent, the British participants communicated with a higher level of formality than the Korean participants did in writing.

The other nouns except for nominalised nouns also show the significant difference between the writing of the two groups ($p = .002 < .05$) and provide an interesting distribution. In writing the Korean students used the feature more frequently than their British counterparts did. This finding could be compared to the language development of children. A number of linguists have found that children in their language learning process use nouns more often than any other features including verbs (D'Odorico & Fasolo, 2007). According to Gentner (1982), it is because nouns indicate objects directly and form concrete concepts in language. Of course, the language development of EFL learners should not be fully understood on the basis of that of children. Still, it is possible to assume that those traits of nouns led the Korean students to use nouns often in their writing. From this perspective, it is notable that in speech the Korean participants used nouns as frequently as the British students did.

3. Verbs

In the present analysis, verbs were divided into three: *be* as a main verb, pro-verb *do* and 'other' verbs (see Table 6). *Be* as a main verb and pro-verb *do* were particularly analysed here since the frequent use of these features indicates certain characteristics of a text. Indeed, Biber (1988, p. 228) categorises *be* as a main verb to be a 'stative' form of English as this precludes the presence of an active verb. Similarly, pro-verb *do* substitutes for an active verb or verb phrase. These two features, thus, are regarded to create less complex structure and introduce relatively simple information. The *be*-verb forms as a main verb and the pro-verb *do* were identified individually to exclude those used in other functions. Other verbs included all other main verbs except for those two types of verbs in the data.

TABLE 6
Frequency Indices of Verbs (per 1,000 words)

| | Korean | | British | |
|--------------------------|--|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| <i>be</i> as a Main Verb | 34.37 | 34.71 | 30.07 | 24.40 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 2.131$, $p = .144$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 16.408$, $p = .000$) | | | |
| Pro-verb <i>do</i> | .47 | 1.26 | 2.98 | 1.40 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 12.156$, $p = .000$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = .060$, $p = .807$) | | | |
| Other Verbs | 77.3 | 95.4 | 90.6 | 93.2 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 8.155$, $p = .004$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = .248$, $p = .619$) | | | |

As Table 6 shows, the Korean participants used *be* as a main verb more frequently than the British participants did in both their speech and writing. In particular, the statistically meaningful difference occurs in the writing of the two groups ($p = .000 < .05$). Interestingly, while the writing of the British students included a lower number of *be* as a main verb than in their speech, the speech and writing of the Korean students showed almost the same occurrences of the feature. According to Biber (1995), *be* as a main verb reflects a verbal style of text as a result of involving less complex sentence structure. From this perspective, the Korean students overused *be* as a main verb in their writing. It suggests that the Korean students were not aware of the different degree of complexity between speech and writing as the native English speakers.

It is noteworthy that the Korean participants used pro-verb *do* more often in their writing than in their speech, whereas the British participants used the feature more frequently in their speech than in their writing. As the significant difference appears in the speech of the two groups ($p = .000 < .05$), it is evident that the Korean participants underused the feature when they were speaking. Pro-verb *do* is often used in mutually understood contexts and informal types of speech (Biber, 1988; Quirk et al., 1985). Thus, it can be argued that the Korean students used pro-verb *do* in an inappropriate way between speech and writing.

As for other main verbs, the speech of Korean and British students shows the notable difference ($p = .004 < .05$). The speech of the Korean students included particularly low occurrences of the feature among the data. The British participants also used less number of verbs in their speech than in their writing, but the difference in the occurrences between the two modes was relatively small. It signifies that the Korean students had more difficulty in using verbs when they spoke than when they wrote in English. These types of problems were easily seen by the repetitions and self-corrections (and errors) in their speech, as these that occur in the following.

- (1) *He is watching dramas and analys, analysist, analysis, analysist dramas.*
- (2) *In the morning at the 6 o'clock, he often use, he often part, he often take a, takes a exercise in the park with her, with his neighborhood.*

The above utterances clearly show that the Korean participants were insecure about using proper verb forms, tenses and agreement. Their lack of confidence appeared more in speech than in writing and, as a result, the frequency of the verbs in their speech was considerably low.

4. Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Quirk et al. (1985) divide the modals into three groups according to their major functions: 1) those which show permission or possibility and ability, such as *can, could, may* and *might*; 2) those which show obligation or necessity, such as *must, have to, need, should* and *ought to*; and 3) those which show volition or prediction, including *will, would* and *shall* (p. 221). The present study used the same grouping of modal verbs (see Table 7).

TABLE 7
Frequency Indices of Modals (per 1,000 words)

| | Korean | | British | |
|--------------------|---|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| Possibility Modals | 1.71 | 5.20 | 3.73 | 3.18 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 5.151, p = .023$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 4.399, p = .036$) | | | |
| Necessity Modals | .31 | 0 | .37 | 1.03 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = .039, p = .999$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 7.987, p = .003$) | | | |
| Predictive Modals | .32 | 2.25 | 1.62 | 2.42 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 5.876, p = .015$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = .060, p = .060$) | | | |

Table 7 shows that the occurrences of possibility modals in the speech and writing of the two groups of the participants include statistically important differences ($p = .023 < .05$ in speech, $p = .36 < .05$ in writing). Possibility modals are more likely to be found in spoken language, since written language tends to include more precise and more positive information (Biber, 1988; Chafe, 1982). The English of the British students confirmed this notion, although the difference between their two modes of English was very small. However, the distribution of possibility modals in the English of the Korean participants was in sharp contrast, showing much higher frequencies in their writing than in their speech and in their British students' writing. It seems that the Korean students were inclined to present written information less precisely by adding an assessment of its possibility. This may mirror their attitudes towards presenting opinions as well as their English ability. According to Saviile-Troike (2003), "language is part of culture, and thus

part of the body of knowledge, attitudes and skills which are transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 5). In other words, language reflects values which are generally accepted within a particular society.

It should be admitted, of course, that studies on learners' speech/writing in their first/second languages and contrastive rhetoric studies are complex and have created controversy about how differently the learners express themselves in the two languages (e.g., Edelsky, 1982; Leki, 1991; Mohan and Lo, 1985; Wang, 2000). Therefore, the participants' writing or speaking styles should not be generalised by a single lexical feature. Still, it seems that the use of possibility modals reflects, to a degree, their attitudes. In Korean society, when someone expresses an opinion in a forceful manner, others often consider the person arrogant. Thus, Korean people prefer using more modest or humble forms of expressions. From this perspective, it can be explained why the Korean students used the possibility modals considerably more often in their writing, where the presentation of their ideas could be more carefully carried out than in speaking.

The total occurrences of necessity modals were very low across the data and particularly, there was no evidence of this feature in the written text of the Korean participants. The difference in occurrences of the feature between their writing and the British students' writing is statistically significant ($p = .003 < .05$). This implies that the Korean students avoid using necessity modals in writing as necessity modals deliver information in a too uncompromising manner. By contrast, the British students used this type of modal verb more often in their writing than in their speech. This opposite distribution of necessity modals between the two groups of the participants is in accordance with the occurrences of possibility modals. Indeed, it is suggested that while the Korean students tended to write in a less confident or less strong way, the British students were likely to use precise expressions more frequently when writing.

Unlike possibility and necessity modals, the Korean participants used predictive modals between the two modes of language in a similar manner to their British counterparts: both groups of students used this feature more frequently in their writing than in their speech. However, the occurrences in the speech of the Korean participants were very low and the speech of the two groups of the participants includes the statistically significant difference ($p = .015 < .05$).

5. Adjectives

Adjectives can be classified as attributive adjectives and predicative adjectives. Attributive adjectives pre-modify the head of a noun phrase; and predicative adjectives placed after a noun and supplement the character of the noun. Most adjectives are used in both ways, such as "*a pretty girl*" or "*the girl is pretty*", but some are used in one way only

(e.g., *he is the former chairman; the child is asleep*) (Chalker & Weiner, 1998). In this study, the two types of adjectives were separately analysed (see Table 8).

TABLE 8
Frequency Indices of Adjectives (per 1,000 words)

| | Korean | | British | |
|------------------------|---|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| Attributive Adjectives | 57.39 | 63.80 | 66.98 | 68.89 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 5.596$, $p = .018$ /Writing: $\chi^2 = 1.776$, $p = .183$) | | | |
| Predicative Adjectives | 20.68 | 21.50 | 14.04 | 13.46 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 9.439$, $p = .002$ /Writing: $\chi^2 = 16.851$, $p = .000$) | | | |

Although predicative and attributive adjectives serve similar roles in language, their distributions were found to be dissimilar. Firstly, the overall occurrences of predicative adjectives were much lower than those of attributive adjectives in the data. Secondly, the distributions of the two types of adjectives in the speech and writing of the participants show different patterns. While the British participants used attributive adjectives more often than the Korean participants, the Korean students used more predicative adjectives than their British counterparts. In particular, the speech of the two groups includes the statistically meaningful difference ($p = .018 < .05$) in the use of attributive adjectives. It is clear that the Korean students greatly underused attributive adjectives in speaking compared to the British students. On the other hand, in the use of predicative adjectives, the significant differences occur both in the speech and writing of the participants ($p = .002 < .05$ in speech, $p = .000 < .05$ in writing). Indeed, the Korean learners used predicative adjectives considerably more frequently in their English than the native English speakers. This result partly corresponds with the higher frequency of *be* as a main verb in the English of the Korean students than in that of the British students (see Table 6). Specifically, as the Korean students often used predicative adjectives, in turn, *be* as a main verb frequently appeared (or vice versa) in their English.

Comparing speech and writing in the data, the Korean and the British participants used attributive adjectives more often in their writing than in their speech. However, the occurrences of predicative adjectives show that the participants used the feature almost the same number of times in their speech and writing. It seems that while attributive adjectives are more like written features, the use of predicative adjectives are not much determined by the mode of language.

6. Adverbs

Adverbs are categorized into four specialized adverbs and ‘other’ adverbs for the present

analysis (see Table 9).³ Four types of specialized adverbs consist of downtoners, hedges, amplifiers and emphatics, and they are all markers of probability or uncertainty (Biber, 1988). To a certain extent, however, their roles are different from each other: downtoners (e.g., *almost, nearly*) and hedges (e.g., *kind of, maybe*) express a lowering tendency, whereas amplifiers (e.g., *very, completely*) and emphatics (e.g., *really, just*) show a heightening effect on the information that is being presented. In addition, downtoners and amplifiers indicate a more specific degree of probability, while hedges and emphatics simply show probability in general (Biber, 1988; Quirk et al., 1985). These adverbial items were individually analysed and the other adverbs, except for them, were analysed in this study.

TABLE 9
Frequency Indices of Adverbs (per 1,000 words)

| | Korean | | British | |
|---------------|---|---------|----------|---------|
| | Speaking | Writing | Speaking | Writing |
| Downtoners | .78 | .70 | 1.49 | 2.70 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 1.552$, $p = .213$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 9.046$, $p = .003$) | | | |
| Hedges | 3.74 | 5.06 | 8.95 | 2.61 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 14.756$, $p = .000$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 7.117$, $p = .008$) | | | |
| Amplifiers | 6.69 | 4.49 | 1.87 | 2.71 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 20.838$, $p = .000$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 3.995$, $p = .046$) | | | |
| Emphatics | 1.56 | 2.66 | 7.08 | 2.98 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 23.711$, $p = .023$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = .154$, $p = .694$) | | | |
| Other Adverbs | 10.89 | 20.52 | 31.94 | 33.00 |
| | (Speaking: $\chi^2 = 71.740$, $p = .000$ / Writing: $\chi^2 = 24.445$, $p = .000$) | | | |

As Table 9 shows, the most outstanding finding in the distribution of the four specialized adverbs is that the Korean students distributed the features inappropriately between speech and writing compared to the British students. The British students used the adverbs indicating precise certainty/uncertainty (downtoners and amplifiers) as features of writing, while using inexplicit expressions (hedges and emphatics) more in speech. On the contrary, the Korean students used downtoners and amplifiers as spoken features, while using hedges and emphatics as written ones. This may simply reflect the lack of native-like mode selection between spoken and written English of the Korean learners. Alternatively, it may demonstrate that the learners' attitudes in expressing their opinions in speech and writing were different from those of the British students, as was already discussed by the use of possibility and necessity modals (see section IV. 4.).

³ In the present analysis, the occurrences of place adverbials (e.g., *above, near* and *inside*) and time adverbials (e.g., *recently, early* and *immediately*) were not separately analysed but included in the total number of 'other' adverbs. It is because their usage was restricted by the nature of the tasks used in the data collection so their frequency would be less meaningful. Indeed, the picture-based tasks would largely define the extent of the physical and temporal contexts of the texts and, in turn, would determine the frequencies of these adverbs in the data.

Considering the statistically significant differences between the English of the two groups of the students, the Korean students used hedges ($p = .008 < .05$) and amplifiers ($p = .046 < .05$) more often in their writing; and amplifiers ($p = .000 < .05$) more often in their speech than their British counterparts. The British students, on the other hand, used downtoners ($p = .003 < .05$) more often in their writing; and hedges ($p = .000 < .05$) and emphatics ($p = .023 < .05$) more frequently in their speech than their Korean counterparts. These results evidently show again that the Korean students and the British students used the specialized adverbs in different manners.

As for the other adverbs, the British students used a higher number of adverbs than the Korean students, showing significant differences both in their speech ($p = .000 < .05$) and writing ($p = .000 < .05$). In addition, while the difference in occurrences between spoken and written English of the British participants was relatively narrow, the Korean participants used adverbs about twice as often in their writing as in their speech. This is consistent with the findings that attributive and predicative adjectives occurred more often in their writing than in their speech (see Table 8). It seems that the Korean students had more difficulties in elaborating information proficiently when speaking than they did when writing.

V. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The STTR and the occurrences of the 15 lexical features in the spoken and written English of the Korean and the British participants were discussed so far. The overall distribution of the features is summarised as follows (see Appendix II for the summary presented in tables.).

1. Distribution of Lexical Features between the Korean and the British Students

It has been shown that, firstly, the STTR was higher in the writing of the British students than in that of the Korean students. Secondly, the Korean students did not use more than half the lexical features analysed as frequently as the British students did in their speech. Specifically, eight features among the 15 lexical features (except for the STTR) analysed appeared significantly more often in the speech of the British students than in that of the Korean students; and the Korean students used two features considerably more frequently than their British counterparts did. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that four features occurred significantly more often in the writing of the British students than in that of the Korean students; and six features appeared notably more frequently in the writing of the Korean students compared to that of the British students.

The above findings are, to a degree, unexpected: while the STTR was considerably lower in the writing (rather than in the speech) of the Korean students compared to the English of the British students, a higher number of underused lexical features were found in the speech of the Korean students, not in their writing. Among many other variables, it might be explained by a relatively large number of meaninglessly repeated words or segments of spoken discourse in the speech of the Korean students. Indeed, in the process of transcribing the spoken data, it was found that repetitions within utterances (e.g., *she tied, tied, she tied her hair with a violet ribbon*) and self-corrections as modified elements of speech which has already been produced (e.g., *he, he do, he does exercise in the park*) appeared more frequently in the speech of the Korean students than in that of the British students (see Lennon, 1990; Uhm, 1995). Regardless of these repetitions and self-corrections, the total types and tokens were calculated by *WordSmith Tools 4.0* (as explained in section III). This process causes the difference in the STTR between the speech of the two groups to be insignificant but the overall meaningful occurrences of lexical features to be lower in the speech of the Korean students. Repetitions and self-corrections are considered as communication strategies to continue or to clarify spoken discourse (Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000). In this regard, it is likely that the Korean students were not confident in verbalising lexical features in English.

From a different point of view, the overall lower occurrences of lexical features in the speech of the Korean students may be due to the immediacy of speech. According to Ellis and Yuan (2003, 2004), in the case of the learners of a second or foreign language with limited proficiency, the time factor in speech plays a significant role in their language performance. Language learners are able to use their linguistic knowledge fully only when they have enough time to frame it. For this reason, immediate responses, which are generally required in speaking, affect the learners' speech in negative ways. Considering that the participants were given only a few seconds to plan their speech in this study, it can be said that the time factor partly hindered the Korean students in using the lexical features.

Another aspect to be noted is that the Korean students overused six lexical features – other nouns, *be* as a main verb, possibility modals, predicative adjectives, hedges and amplifiers – in their writing and two features – predicative adjectives and amplifiers – in their speech. As is discussed earlier, the use of hedges and amplifiers could be influenced by the socio-linguistic aspect in Korean society. The other overused features imply, however, that the Korean students have been exposed to very limited English expressions. In other words, the Korean students may have practiced English mainly through pattern drills forming English expressions based on the given rules or lexical items in classroom. Thus, when they speak or write in English, their insecure English abilities may cause them to use those formulized English expressions repeatedly instead of creating various

expressions.

On the other hand, a higher number of overused features in the writing than in the speech suggests that a Korean students' ability to use lexical features might be driven by their writing, rather than by their speaking. Moreover, this could imply that the overall English competence of the Korean students might be better in writing than in speaking.

2. Distribution of Lexical Features between Spoken and Written English

Among 15 lexical features (except for the STTR), nine features showed contrasting mode distribution between the speech and writing of the Korean and the British students. For example, while pro-verb *do* occurred more often in the writing than in the speech of the Korean participants, this feature appeared more often in the speech than in the writing of the British participants. This contrasting mode distribution between speech and writing of the two groups of the participants implies that it is possible that, to a certain degree, the Korean students might speak as the native English speakers would write or they might write as the British students would speak, particularly in choosing lexical features.

This result could happen partly due to the different attitudes between Korean and native English speakers in communication (as discussed in section IV). For instance, while Korean people prefer presenting their thoughts by using indirect expressions, native English speakers tend to provide information in a precise way especially when they write. In addition, this could result from the high number of underused lexical features in the speech of the Korean students which is discussed above. They underused many of the lexical features in their speech, and, in turn, the frequencies of the features in their writing seemed to be relatively high, resulting in the features' appearance as written features rather than spoken ones in their English.

VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the lexical productivity of Korean students in their spoken and written English by comparing their English with that of British students. Due to the single text type of the data (spoken and written descriptive narratives) and the nature of informants (female only participants of similar age group), the findings should not be much generalised. However, this study offers detailed data about the STTR and the distribution of 15 lexical features in the spoken and written English of a group of Korean EFL learners.

The main findings show some problematic aspects on developing communicative English ability of Korean EFL learners in terms of using lexical features. Indeed, the

Korean students had more difficulties in speaking than in writing English; they were likely to overuse certain linguistic features; and they were confused to use lexical features properly between speech and writing. Although this study did not investigate the usage of lexical features in relation with pragmatics or contextual meanings in the text, the frequency of occurrences of the lexical features evidently shows that the Korean EFL learners were insecure about using lexical features overall in their English, especially in speaking.

Pawley and Syder (1983) state that, even after achieving a certain level of English proficiency, language learners are likely to have more difficulty in selecting appropriate lexical items than in constructing sentence forms. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Korean students need to increase their competence in vocabulary and have more opportunities to use their lexical knowledge within meaningful contexts. In order to do so, English class needs to be more frequently involved with speaking and writing on a wide range of topics. In addition, extra efforts should be made to meet the learners' immediate needs in using English.

In this sense, this study provides practical evidence for understanding the use of lexical features by the Korean EFL learners. Teachers can use not only the overall findings but the distribution of individual lexical features in this study as their reference. For example, in this study it was shown that the Korean students notably underused verbs, adjectives and adverbs in relatively easy topics. Given this result, teachers may design activities which require the students to use and practice more frequently used vocabulary, and may spend less time to teach infrequently appearing words in textbooks. It is hoped that, eventually, this study can contribute to teachers and material developers for developing the most appropriate and effective, pedagogical ways to improve Korean EFL learners' English competence.

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APPENDIX I.

One of the Four Tasks Used in Collecting Spoken Data in this Study

TASK 2. Explain the daily routine of a drama writer

One of your friends is a soap opera writer. Your friend Mary wants to know what his daily routine is like. You may use the pictures below as a source of ideas. Firstly, you will have 20 seconds to think about your answer. Then, after you hear a question, you will have one minute to respond. (20 sec/60 sec)

(20 second pause)

Describe the writer's typical day



The illustrations show the following activities:

- 6am:** A man in a blue jacket is exercising outdoors in a park.
- 8am:** A man in a white shirt is cooking in a kitchen while a woman in a green shirt watches.
- 9am:** A man in a blue shirt is sitting at a desk in an office, working on a computer.
- 2pm:** A group of people are sitting around a table in a meeting room, discussing work.
- 8pm:** A man in a white shirt is sitting on a sofa in a living room, watching television.
- 10pm:** A man in a white shirt is sitting on a bed in a bedroom, reading a book.

Prompt: "What is the drama writer's daily routine like?"

(60 second pause)

APPENDIX II.

A Summary of Distribution of Lexical Features Analysed

1. Significantly More Frequently Occurred Features in the Speech of Korean or British Participants

| Speech | |
|---|---|
| Features Used More Often by Korean Participants than British Participants | Features Used More Often by British Participants than Korean Participants |
| Predicative Adjectives | Pro-verb <i>do</i> |
| Amplifiers | Other Verbs |
| | Possibility Modals |
| | Predictive Modals |
| | Attributive Adjectives |
| | Hedges |
| | Emphatics |
| | Other Adverbs |

2. Significantly More Frequently Occurred Features in the Writing of Korean or British Participants

| Writing | |
|---|---|
| Features Used More Often by Korean Participants than British Participants | Features Used More Often by British Participants than Korean Participants |
| Other Nouns | Nominalisations |
| <i>be</i> as a Main Verb | Necessity Modals |
| Possibility Modals | Downtoners |
| Predicative Adjectives | Other Adverbs |
| Hedges | |
| Amplifiers | |

3. Features with Conflicting Mode Distribution between the English of Korean and British Participants

| Features Favoured More in the Speech than in the Writing of Korean Students/ Features Favoured More in the Writing than in the Speech of British Students | Features Favoured More in the Writing than in the Speech of Korean Students/ Features Favoured More in the Speech than in the Writing of British Students |
|--|--|
| Necessity Modals | <i>be</i> as a Main Verb |
| Downtoners | Pro-verb <i>do</i> |
| Amplifiers | Possibility Modals |
| | Predicative Adjectives |
| | Hedges |
| | Emphatics |

Applicable levels: secondary and tertiary education

Key words: lexical productivity, Korean EFL learners, spoken English, written English, lexical features

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