Interview method development for qualitative study of ESL motivation

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Interview Method Development for Qualitative Study of ESL Motivation*

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The purpose of this paper is to present a potentially useful interview template for longitudinal, qualitative ESL motivation research. For this purpose, I recruited 10 Korean ESL learners in Toronto, Canada to investigate the differential effects of three types of interviews (i.e., open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interviews) for eliciting learners’ comments on ESL learning motivation. Each participant was interviewed two or three times over four months. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Thematic analyses based on Ratner’s (2002) meaning unit indicated that for initial exploratory purposes, open-ended formats are the most appropriate; whereas for subsequent investigations, semi-structured formats are the most effective. The beneficial washback experienced as a result of the interviews strongly supports the use of these methods, not only as research tools but as learning tools for enhancing learners’ metacognitive awareness of their own ESL learning and for their emotional stabilization.

[in interview methods/qualitative research/L2 learning motivation/longitudinal studies, 면담법/정성적 연구/제2언어 학습동기/종단적 연구]

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I. Introduction

In the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) motivation, questionnaire (e.g., Dörnyei, 2003) has been the major research methodology. In these types of research, the researcher or designated personnel (in many cases, an ESL teacher) usually visits ESL classrooms and distributes the questionnaire. After ESL students complete the questionnaire, it is collected and subjected to statistical procedures and analyses. The theoretical contributions of this research tradition to the field of existing second or foreign language education are impressive. In Canadian bilingual contexts, for example, Gardner (1985) holds that two major factors play a key role in second language1): integrative and instrumental motivation. In a general sense, the former was believed to have a more lasting and positive role for second language learners. In American contexts, another perspective from educational psychology has gradually gained prominence: Ryan and Deci’s (2000) distinction – amotivation, extrinsic, and intrinsic motivation. Despite some disagreements about the positive role of intrinsic motivation (e.g., Cumming, Kim, & Eouanzoui, in press; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000), the three distinctions were considered to reflect the degree of motivation per se from less motivated to more motivated.

This research tradition in the field of ESL motivation was not, however, without its limitations. First, from ESL teachers’ perspectives, it does not have many practical teaching implications. Specifically, most of the research remained in academia and a gap between practitioners (i.e., ESL teachers, program managers, and coordinators) and theorists in university made knowledge dissemination from research to practice relatively difficult. Second, as mentioned by Foley and Thompson (2003), Kim (2005), Ortega and Iberri-Shea (2005), and van Lier (2005), even though ESL learning takes considerable time, previous research has mainly focused on phenomena occurring in a short time span that is, the fact that an ESL learner is not very motivated at a specific time and location does not necessarily mean that in the future the learner’s ESL motivation will remain the same or vice versa. In this sense, ESL researchers need to develop a more comprehensive and longitudinal research tool in order to investigate ESL motivation.

1) In the Canadian context, the second language will be either French (French as a Second Language [FSL]) or English (ESL).
At the turn of the last century, some ESL researchers (Norton Peirce, 1995; Ushioda, 1993, 2001, 2003; Williams & Burden, 1999) detected this gap between ESL motivation theory and practice, and have since tried to adopt other alternative research methods. Among them, the interview seems to be the most powerful alternative in the sense that it directly taps into ESL learners’ complex evolution of ESL motivation with sufficient attention to learners’ (subjectively) perceived sociocultural milieu. Moreover, if interviews are regarded as a specific type of retrospective verbal protocol, they may be seen to offer great potentials for implementation, not only as research tools, but also as learning techniques or tools which influence learners’ learning processes through verbalization per se (cf. Swain, 2006).

Given these possibilities and benefits, the purpose of this paper is to present a potentially useful interview template for ESL motivation research. First, I will explain theoretical aspects of three types of interview formats (i.e., open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interview). Second, I will describe the overall plan for the study including participant profiles and data collection procedures. Then, the merits and problems of interview methods will be illustrated. Fourth, I will mention factors, which need to be considered by ESL researchers. I will conclude the paper by pointing to practical implications for the ESL classroom.

II. Interview Methods Used in L2 Motivation Research

A conventional distinction among a variety of interviews is open-ended, semi-structured, and structured formats depending upon the degree of formality: from less formal to more rigid formats (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the above category does not posit any solid conceptual differences, and for this reason, Smith (1995) only distinguishes two types: structured and semi-structured interviews. According to him, the only difference between open-ended and semi-structured formats is the degree of freedom allowed to the interviewer and the interviewee.

Ratner (2002) argues for four different types: informal interviewing, the unstructured (i.e., open-ended) interview, the semi-structured interview, and the fully structured interview (pp. 153-154). It is noteworthy that he has newly added informal interviewing, defining it as “a free-ranging discussion without any
structure. The interviewer simply explores various topics of interest without planning any specific questions or structure to the discussion” (p. 153). In Ratner’s (2002) view, informal interviewing may allow too much freedom for both an interviewer and an interviewee to control the discourse, and thus informal interviews may not be appropriate as a method of inquiry. Conversely, the fully structured interview bears much similarity to a simple questionnaire, which prevents the interviewer from soliciting related in-depth information from the interviewee. As a result, Ratner (2002) suggests that for the investigation of complex human psychology, the unstructured or semi-structured interviews would be the best choice.

In the field of second language learning motivation, only a few studies using interviews were reported (Ushioda, 1993, 1994, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999). Both Ushioda (1993, 1994, 2001) and Williams and Burden (1999) investigated French as a foreign language population. Based in Dublin, Ushioda (1993) interviewed 20 undergraduate French major students, and found that second language learners’ motivation was constantly influenced by their perceptions of self-efficacy “gained from prior L2 history” (p. 10). Ushioda’s successive second phase interview research is reported in her 1994 article, and identifies that the most influential motivational factor is “motivation attributed to earlier positive experiences” in a country where the target language is used (Ushioda, 1994, p. 81). In a similar manner, Williams and Burden (1999) investigated French language learning motivation from a different age group: primary or secondary school population. Due to the age factor, the interview was conducted during relatively short periods (i.e., 20 to 25 minutes) for each participant. They found that the participants’ attribution for second language success varied greatly depending upon the participants’ age that is, in younger participants, ages 10 to 12, the attributions were rather simplistic such as good listening skills and concentration; whereas in older secondary school participants, various attributional factors such as linguistic ability and peer or parental influences were identified.

Since the purpose of my current study was to develop an appropriate interview template, these theoretical considerations about interview methods, in general, and their application to second language learning motivation affected my current research. Specifically, referring to Ushioda (1993, 1994) and Williams and Burden’s (1999) interview questions, I drafted my initial interview template. However, equal
attention was paid to the participants’ unique sociocultural contexts, which have been emphasized by many Vygotskian constructivist researchers and educators (e.g., Engeström, 1987; Toulmin, 1999).

III. The Study

1. Purpose and Research Questions

With only the few exceptions mentioned above (e.g., Ushioda, 1993, 1994, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999), qualitative research on second language motivation is extremely rare, and what is worse is the fact that a solid methodological foundation for eliciting authentic responses that reflect the changes in ESL motivation over time has not been developed. In this respect, the general aim of this study was to develop appropriate interview template questions that would aid in the design of a template for future studies of ESL motivation having a qualitative orientation. To achieve this goal, three research questions were formulated:

1) Among three types of interview formats (i.e., open-ended, semi-structured, and structured formats), which one will be the most appropriate for qualitative inquiry on second language motivation?

2) What are the factors influencing the quality of the ESL motivation interviews?

3) How does each participant perceive the opportunity to verbalize their ESL learning in the interviews?

2. Participant Profile

To address the research questions, after receiving the permission of the Ethical Review Board at my university, I started recruiting 10 Korean ESL learners in Toronto, Canada. Among the ten participants, six of them were landed immigrants to Canada, and the other four were international visa students. I visited a government-funded ESL program, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), to recruit six Korean immigrants. For the recruitment of Korean ESL visa students, I posted advertisement letters on the bulletin board at six
different private ESL institutions in Toronto. Since I did not specifically focus on a specific age group, the participants varied in age from 23 years to 65 years. In general, compared to the visa students, the immigrant ESL learners’ ages varied from 31 to 65 years. Descriptive characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time Spent in Canada</th>
<th>Previous occupation in Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Mi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Private Reading Tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hye-Sun</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>Student (Major: Computer Science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se-Jin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>Video producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung-Yeon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2 Years/7 Months</td>
<td>Secretary/Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Ki</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>Banker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Mook</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5 Months</td>
<td>Student (Major: Accounting/Economics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi-Ryung</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1 Year/11 Months</td>
<td>Biology teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeon-Soon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5 Months</td>
<td>Student (Major: English Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Do</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3 Years/3 Months</td>
<td>Small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong-Sung</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3 Years/9 Months</td>
<td>Small business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Data Collection

After obtaining the participants’ written consent letters for the study, I interviewed each participant once a month and two or three times for four months (See Table 2). Interviews were conducted at a convenient time and place for each participant and lasted approximately one and a half hours. The interview format adopted three different types: open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interviews centering on a series of interview questions (See Appendix A). Because I assumed that the number of interviews and the interval between interviews for

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2) Participants’ real names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
each participant may affect the participants’ responses to interview questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Spradley, 1979), the interval and the number of interviews varied in my research design as shown in Table 2.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>June 2004</th>
<th>July 2004</th>
<th>August 2004</th>
<th>September 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Mi</td>
<td>$I_1$**</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hye-Sun</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se-Jin</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung-Yeon</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Ki</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyun-Mook</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi-Ryung</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeon-Sun</td>
<td>$I_3$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Do</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong-Sung</td>
<td>$I_1$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$I_2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **: Twenty-four interviews in total

*: $I_1$ = open-ended interview, $I_2$ = semi-structured interview, $I_3$ = structured interview

The questions were first developed with close attention to both ESL motivation literature and Vygotskian sociocultural theory. For example, the first category: ESL Motivation (See Appendix A) was comprised of a series of core-questions. Since the focus of sociocultural theory is the mediational process between a learner and his or her conducive environments or affordances (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004), core questions can be broadly categorized into questions on an individual participant’s ESL learning motivation (e.g., Interest—“Why are you interested in learning English?”; Goal—“What is your goal for learning English?”; Efforts—“To what degree are you committed to learn English?”) and questions on environmental influences (e.g., Impact factor(s)—“What do you think is the most important factor in learning ESL?”; English speakers and English community—“How do you feel about English-speaking people and the community you live in now?”). By asking the above questions, I made an attempt to investigate the dynamic interplay between the learner and his or her surroundings. Other macro categories (i.e., life history, relationships, social status, and identity, the context, the tool use, the participants’ ESL learning expectations, and the participants’
perceptions about the interview methods) were not included in the first interviews but gradually were developed and refined through the interview processes over four months.

In the open-ended interview, I did not predetermine the interview questions. That is, I conversed with the participants in a relatively casual manner. However, since I, as the researcher, kept the main interview questions in my mind and concertedly tried to find a conceptual link between the open-ended interview and the core questions in both during and after the interviews, it was qualitatively different from casual conversation or informal interviewing (Ratner, 2002). This point is resonated in Kvale’s (1996, p. 6) comments: “an interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose.”

For the second interview type (i.e., semi-structured interview), I asked participants core questions developed from the qualitative second language motivation literature (Ushioda, 1993, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1999) and Vygotskian activity theory (Engeström, 1987). If necessary, I asked further related and more detailed questions. Similar to the open-ended interviews, the participants’ responses were thematically analyzed and were incorporated in the template for subsequent interviews. In both the open-ended interview and the semi-structured interview, participants were encouraged to introduce and explore any relevant topic.

In the structured interview, all of my questions were strictly limited to the pre-determined interview template reflecting the recurring themes that were elicited from the previous open-ended and semi-structured interviews. However, I avoided superimposing my concepts of motivation, concerns, and discourse upon the participants’ responses.

After completing the interviews, I transcribed the audio-taped data in Korean. If necessary, they were translated into English. Both the original and translated transcripts were categorized into meaning units (Ratner, 2002) and were thematically analyzed. Ratner (2002, p. 169) underscores that “the meaning unit must preserve the psychological integrity of the idea being expressed. It must neither fragment the idea into meaningless, truncated segments nor confuse it with other ideas that express different themes.” Therefore, coherent and related comments were coded as one meaning unit. In a meaning unit, the participants’ comments were always included, and if necessary, my clarifying questions were
IV. Findings

In this section, I will demonstrate the major findings obtained from the interviews with close reference to interview extracts. As the original transcript was in Korean, I solicited the help of another Korean graduate student majoring in second language education to cross-check my translation, and thus increase the validity of the data.

As shown in Table 2, the first set of interviews conducted in June 2004 adopted an open-ended format. With relatively spontaneous discussion of ESL motivation with the participants, I revised, deleted, and added the core question items. For example, the items belonging to the context category were asked only in the first interviews for all the participants since repeating the same questions about their past experiences over a period time was unnecessary. Items in participants’ ESL learning expectations category were developed through the interviews since the participants clearly distinguished four skill areas (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) during the initial interviews and relied frequently on these skills for explaining their current aspirations toward English proficiency and subsequent efforts. In this manner, as the number of interviews increased, the interview questions came to be highly refined, reflecting each Korean ESL learners’ unique sociocultural background. In this regard, the revision process of the core interview questions can be conceptualized as a bottom-up approach whereby “the researcher interviews a small sample of individuals to gain an understanding of the topic and to gather items relevant to the topic of the study” (Johnson & Weller, 2002, p. 499).

1. The Comparison of the Three Interview Formats

Among the ten Korean ESL learners, I used all three formats for Hyun-Mi (immigrant) and Hye-Sun (visa student) (See Table 2). That is, for the first interview format, I adopted an open-ended interview; for the second set of interviews, a semi-structured format was used; and for the third set of interviews, a structured format was implemented. The most observable difference among
these different formats was the degree of formality. The structured format was the strictest, which limited the responses to the interviewer’s questions. However, it soon turned out that the adoption of a structured interview format was impossible in a practical sense. Despite the interviewer’s initial reminder that participants’ responses should be limited to the question itself, they often forgot the initial reminder as the interview progressed. As the interviewer, I felt that repeated reminding of the restricted nature of the format might potentially threaten the harmony or mutual rapport developed through the interview process. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hyun-Mi did not perceive a difference between the semi-structured and the structured interview format.

Extract 1: I: Interviewer, H: Hyun-Mi
1. 307 I: If you think back to our last interview [i.e., semi-structured interview], what do you think about today’s format?
1. 308 H: Well, it’s a bit redundant.
1. 309 I: You mean, compared to the last interview?
1. 310 H: Well... Hmm... Just not that different. No difficulty and it was almost the same.  
   (Structured interview, August 2004)

This point seems to illustrate a confounding result asserted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who suggest that when the research topic has been refined succinctly in previous studies and researchers are already familiar with the field of inquiry, a structured format would be appropriate (p. 269). Nonetheless, as Extract 1 illustrates, the different format neither was practically possible for the interviewer to adopt nor was perceived on a differential basis to the interviewee. This corroborates Ratner’s (2002) speculation that for qualitative inquiry in psychology, either open-ended or semi-structured formats will be appropriate.

In sum, an open-ended format seems relevant for the initial developing stage of the interview template. Newly identified factors or themes referred to by participants during the open-ended interview format were carefully reflected in the modification of the interview template. For example, the first month interview data strongly suggested that the participants’ comments on ESL motivation was firmly rooted in specific English learning or use contexts and the interlocutor(s) (e.g., ESL instructor, peer ESL students, and roommates) involved in such contexts.

3) The numbers in the left column indicate turns taken. Underlines are my emphasis.
Thus, more questions on relationships, social status, and identity were added and modified through the next interviews. In this sense, open-ended formats can be utilized especially in the initial developmental stage of an interview template for securing a subsequent semi-structured interview format. However, in a practical sense, except for the recurring themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which are mentioned by many participants, other branching concepts are hard to generalize. This may negate the merits of the open-ended format.

Moreover, the structured format proved to be inapplicable to longitudinal, qualitative ESL motivation research. The difficulty lies in the uncontrollability of the interviewee’s spontaneous but related remarks on a specific interview question. Since the interview took more than one hour, which is considerably longer than many previous second language motivation research interviews (e.g., Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2005; Williams & Burden, 1999), the interviewer’s frequent reminder of the strict format may run the risk of ruining the interviewee’s willingness to participate in the interview itself. Given this, a semi-structured format seems to be the most appropriate once an interview template is established through an active use of multiple open-ended interviews.

2. Factors Influencing the Quality of the ESL Motivation Interview

1) Age Gap

In open-ended formats, in some cases, the interviewer’s timely intervention is not possible. The most typical case is in interviewing older persons. In Extract 2, obtained from Yong–Sung’s (age: 65) data, the interviewer’s efforts to intervene in rather off-track comments by Yong–Sung do not seem effective. Yong–Sung works as a part-time office maintenance personnel at night.

Extract 2: I: Interviewer, Y: Yong–Sung
2. 155 I: Then do you have any opportunity to speak in English when you are doing the office cleaning?
2. 156 Y: Well. There are cases when I need to ask something, and I need to talk with the security guard at the security desk. In some cases, well… I would like to say that if a young man wants to do this kind of job, I always say if you think this work is hard, then don’t do it. If you are willing to do this work for more than six months, OK do this work. But never continue to do this work for more than one or two years. Old persons like me
just think this work is the only option, but younger generations should do whatever they want to do here by learning what Canadians do for a living. If they continue to do this manual job for more than two years, they can’t escape from it. So just do it within one or two years. I always say. Once I talk to these men in their 40s and 50s, well... Later on, they say that I’m right. A man, who did my job before, now owns a business in the package delivery industry...

2. 157 I: Well, I guess it isn’t...
2. 158 Y: It’s not a post office. He specializes in big size packages.
2. 159 I: Well, I don’t think...
2. 160 Y: So, I always say that you can’t make money without a “hungry-spirit.” You must work very hard whether it is at a good job or at a bad job. But nowadays, this is not the case. Newcomers especially these days come here for a better life quality. More than 90 percent of them. When they first arrive here and see the landscape here, it’s great. Huge land... And lawns... But once they go to the job market, however hard they submit their CVs to many many places, there’s no response. They don’t have any career in Canada. So they fail. One more thing is, this is my speculation, but, even a small job posting is connected with human relationship. So if you don’t know any Canadian person who can connect you with the job market, your chance will be zero... [Yong-Sung continued his monologue more than 5 minutes.] (Open-ended interview, June 2004)

In Extract 2, Yong-Sung’s comments are relatively long but fragmented. He seems to follow his own train of thought. Since he was totally immersed within his own thoughts, which were not related to the interview question, in Turn 2. 157, I tried to cut his comments, but ironically, Yong-Sung mistook it as the workplace of the person he was mentioning and further developed his comments in Turn 2. 158. Then, I made my second attempt to revert the topic to keep the interview on track in Turn 2. 159, but Yong-Sung, at this time, did not seem to listen to my comment and continued his monologue.

In this regard, an open-ended interview format functions as a double-edged sword: sometimes it plays a beneficial role in further uncovering under-developed concepts, but at other times, this merit negatively affects the progress of an entire set of interviews. This format seems effective only when both the interviewer and the interviewee have sufficient sensitivity to the other party’s verbal account and are ready to modify the whole discourse considering the addressed question on ESL motivation.

Moreover, as shown in Extract 2 by Yong-Sung’s lengthy monologue, age gap between the interviewer and the interviewee is noteworthy. As Wenger (2002) reiterates, it is true that “each older interviewee is one person,” and the interviewer needs to “respond to each interviewee on an individual basis” (p. 261)
regardless of their seniority. However, this should not be equated with the fact that an older interviewee such as Yong-Sung can be interviewed with the same ease of younger Koreans. In East Asian cultural norms, younger people need to be respectful to older persons, and this usually means that the former should not cut into the latter’s speaking. Given this, an open-ended interview format, especially between a young interviewer (i.e., early 30s in my case) and an older interviewee, does not seem to have much restraining force toward the interviewee. Conversely, between an older interviewer and a younger interviewee, the interviewer’s intervention becomes relatively easier.

2) Hawthorne Effect

Even without the need to cite Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principle, it may be natural for the participants to want to support for the interviewer’s research. Not surprisingly, at the end of each interview, when asked about their emotion during the interview, many participants mentioned that they had anticipated that their interview data could be well used for the research. In some cases, they were not sure whether they responded to the interviewer’s questions in a logical manner. For example, Se-Jin comments as follows:

Extract 3. I: Interviewer, S: Se-Jin
3. 279 I: By the way, during the interview, did you have any other topics you wanted to talk with me or you wanted to emphasize?
3. 280 S: No. I didn’t. Well… I guess you may have lots of difficulty to summarize what I’ve talked to you today. I think I mumbled this and that… I do hope this [interview] can be of some help to you. (Open-ended interview, July 2004)

Even though this is a result of good intentions from the participants, it sometimes yields negative consequences, namely a “Hawthorne effect” explained by Dörnyei (2001, p. 235): “sometimes the excitement and the increased attention caused by the fact that there is a research project going on may affect the participants’ output beneficially.” In order to counterbalance the Hawthorne effect, as the interviewer, I emphasized that there was not a single appropriate way to respond and I needed their candid and sincere responses to my questions. Moreover, before beginning the first interview question, even in the structured interview format, some warming-up questions were addressed to the participants.
to establish a comfortable and supportive atmosphere. Extract 4 illustrates such a typical introductory warming-up phase.

Extract 4. I: Interviewer, H: Hyun-Mi
4.1 I: Today’s interview questions will be more or less the same, but the format will be different. But you can respond to my questions the same way you did last time. Nothing’s that different. I won’t give you additional related questions, so please give me succinct and candid responses, you know. In which level are you in in your LINC class?
4.2 H: Level three.
4.3 I: Aha, you are still at the same level.
4.4 H: No, no. I was promoted, from level 2 to level 3.
4.5 I: Ah, that’s right. Right. I guess your English teacher has changed. Well, how many students are in your class, and among them how many are Korean students?
4.6 H: Hmm. Uh… I counted the number of students, and 18 students were in today’s class. Among them, well… Koreans are… hmm… around 10.
4.7 I: Wow, 10 Koreans?
4.8 H: Yes.
4.9 I: Quite a lot!
4.10 H: Right. [laugh] As a matter of fact, two of them are Chinese. I mean their nationality, but they speak fluent Korean. So I count them in. They have no difficulty in communicating in Korean.
4.11 I: They must be Korean-Chinese.
4.12 H: I guess so.
4.13 I: OK, I see. Then why are you interested in learning English in a LINC class?
   (Structured interview, August 2004)

However, even with such meticulous attention to prevent the Hawthorne effect, sometimes, participants’ good intentions apparently make the validity of the interview data dubious. We can observe this phenomenon clearly in Yong-Sung’s first interview.

Extract 5. I: Interviewer, Y: Yong-Sung
5. 300 I: OK, sir. I think I’ve asked you all the questions. How was the interview? Did you have anything or a specific topic you didn’t have a chance to talk to me about?
5. 301 Y: No. I didn’t. There’s nothing like that. I just talked naturally. Well. I wanted to emphasize beneficial factors that will be helpful for immigrants to live here… Uh. If possible, I don’t want to talk bad sides to new immigrants. For instance, they came here to live and make a living here, but it would be no good to repeatedly hear negative sides of Canadian society. So what I mean is, only good things need to be talked and bad things should not be mentioned. Only good things…
   (Open-ended interview, June 9, 2004)
It is understandable for older people to encourage the younger generation (including me, the interviewer) by emphasizing positive aspects of immigrant life in a new surrounding. However, it is apparent that his initial good intentions must have affected Yong-Sung’s other comments throughout the interview, and accordingly, I had to pay extreme attention to this in interpreting and analyzing his interview data.

3. Beneficial Effects of Interview Methods

Most interviewees expressed their gratitude after the interview to the interviewer for giving them an opportunity to critically reflect on their English learning in Toronto.

Extract 6. I: Interviewer, H: Hye-Sun
6. 508 I: That’s it. How did you feel during the interview? Were you not comfortable by any chance? Or were you stressed out?
6. 509 H: No, not at all. I was rather interested during the interview because I did not have any interviews like this before. Of course, all I mentioned today I had in my brain, but it is now thought-out and summarized. Actually I don’t write a diary, so this can well summarize what I did during the past one month. Now I can see what I did! It was a nice opportunity. This is what I thought an excellent opportunity.

(Structured interview, September 2004)

As illustrated in Extract 6, Hye-Sun perceives the interview as a site for recollecting learning activities in Canada during the past one month. The interview process acts as a metacognitive tool for ESL learning, and in such cases, we can expect positive washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993) of the interview method to the participants’ ESL learning experience. Hye-Sun’s comments in Turn 6. 509 are similar to what Ridley and Ushioda (1997) found in a foreign language classroom in Ireland. They hold that getting second language learners to articulate their own motives for learning through the medium of interviews helps them recollect their learning process and accordingly enhances their perception of learner autonomy (p. 30). Moreover, if interviews are understood as retrospective verbal protocol, Extract 6 provides strong evidence of the mediational impacts of interviews on learners’ cognitive process by raising their critical awareness in ESL learning. Accordingly, Swain (2006, p. 110) emphasizes that “verbal protocols cannot be used neutrally as
a method of collecting data, but instead they need to be considered as part of the “treatment” when making claims about learning and development.”

An interview can also function as an opportunity for emotional catharsis for the participants. This is especially important for ESL learners who are relatively marginalized from other members of the host society. In a new society, both immigrant LINC learners and visa ESL students do not have sufficient cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), which were considered as simply given resources before they moved to Canada. Feeling that they left their ethnolinguistic capital back in Korea, they endeavor to construct new capital in Canada, which might be a daunting task unattainable within a short period of time. Given this, even by simply providing them with the site for their opinions to be heard and valued can function as a pleasant experience and accordingly form a strong therapeutic effect on research participants’ emotional stability. In Extract 7, Hyun-Ki’s comment corroborates this effect.

Extract 7: I: Interviewer, H: Hyun-Ki
7. 365 I: How was the interview? Did you have something to say about a specific topic during the interview?
7. 366 H: No, I don’t have anything more to say. You know what? I talked a lot today because I usually don’t have much chance to chat with other people. What I mean, it’s a while since I met another Korean guy like you. You seem to be around the same age as me. So… I just wanted to talk to you about this and that. [laugh] I have nothing more to say. I talked a lot really. (Semi-structured interview, July 2004)

In Extract 7, Hyun-Ki first admits his isolation for communication, then expresses his gratitude for having a chance to meet a compatriot of the same generation. Finally he expresses his willingness to discuss any topic, in which he has something in common with the interviewer. Given both Extracts 6 and 7, undoubtedly, having an opportunity to be interviewed, regardless of interview formats, provide participants a valuable metacognitive tool and a stronghold for emotional stabilization.

4. Researcher/Interviewer Dilemma: To What Degree Does the Interviewer Need to Help the Interviewees?

In general, practitioners in interview methods have emphasized that the
interviewer needs to distance himself/herself from interviewee(s). The rationale for this is to guarantee objectivity of the research topic inquired. For instance, warning against unbridled subjective justification of the use of feminist research interviews, Reinharz and Chase (2002, p. 230) underscore that “the interviewer’s purpose in conducting the interview is not to create such a bond but to elicit and listen closely to the interviewee’s life experiences.” In a similar vein, in the study, I was trying to keep an optimal distance between the participants and myself. That is, since I did not want to be perceived as a stereotypical emotionless lab scientist, I attempted to establish emotional rapport with them. However, I could not support their ESL learning per se since I did not want to influence my participants’ cognitive activity by instructing them on language learning strategies, which I already have extensive knowledge gained from both second language acquisition theory and my own language teaching/learning experiences. As a result, I intentionally avoided my participants’ frequent solicitation of appropriate or “the best” learning methods.

Extract 8. I: Interviewer, S: Se-Jin
8. 264 S: My LINC teacher says that we should not use a dictionary. He says just listen to the sound of the word coming from his mouth and we need to think in English. If we look up a word in an English-Korean dictionary, it’s not good, he says. But I’m not sure. Still whenever I come across a new word, unless I’m 100 percent sure about the meaning, I always try to find the word even at my house. What do you think? Is it good or bad?
8. 265 I: Well… It depends. You know. It depends on each language learner’s learning style. By the way, what is the most stressful factor while you are learning English? (Open-ended interview, July 2004)

In Extract 8, even though I could have suggested vocabulary learning strategies, I intended to avoid that by simply providing very general comments and diverted the question. This seems to pose grave problems when we consider the fundamental question of “what is research for?” (Auerbach & McGrail, 1990). The purpose of this study is to develop an interview template for ESL motivation, and in the end to facilitate and maintain ESL learners’ motivation. However, ironically, I could not support my participants’ ESL learning. From a participatory action researcher’s perspective, Auerbach (1994 in Cumming, 1994, p. 694) aptly phrases that “so-called neutral, objective research reinforces unequal power relationships: Its purposes, methods, and uses may serve the interest of university–based academics in terms of publishing, tenure, and broadening the
knowledge base of the field but do little to benefit those being researched.”

V. Summary and Implications for the ESL Classroom

Interviews have not been actively used in the field of ESL motivation research with only a paucity of exceptional qualitative studies (e.g., Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda, 1993, 1994, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999). What is worse is that since the research participants in previous research were neither ESL visa students nor immigrant ESL learners, the existing interview template cannot be directly applied to many ESL learning populations. I conducted the study realizing the need for direct inquiry into ESL students’ motivation from sociocultural theory perspectives. The finalized version of the ESL motivation interview template is now being used for another longitudinal case study of Korean ESL learners in Toronto, Canada (Kim, in preparation).

1. Summary

Throughout the administration of the open-ended formats, the researcher (often the interviewer himself/herself) needs to constantly revise previous interview templates, which is a deductive and grounded-theoretic approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In doing so, questions can be accurately tailored, and adequate phrases understandable to participants gradually emerge.

The answers to the three research questions are as follows:

1) Participants did not differentiate interview formats; nor did the different formats affect participants’ responses to the interview questions. In the phase of initial exploration, open-ended formats needs to be carefully administered. However, in a general sense, a semi-structured interview format seems to be appropriate once the core questions pass the initial piloting phase. First, this will enable the researcher to compare different participants’ comments relatively easily vis-à-vis open-ended formats. Second, it can guide novice researchers to be able to finish the interview without digressing too much from the core questions inquired.

2) Among other factors, particularly in interviewing participants from an East Asian background, participants’ ages need to be seriously considered and
acknowledged. In the case of a great age gap between interviewee and interviewer, the open-ended format should be minimally used. Moreover, in order to counterbalance a Hawthorne effect, during the interview the interviewer needs to emphasize that he or she wants to collect participants’ candid remarks, and in any case the interviewer does not expect pre-fabricated answers.

3) Participants were aware that interviews provide opportunities to think critically about their ESL learning and to maintain emotional stability to uphold their ESL learning motivation.

2. Implications for the ESL Classroom

The beneficial effects of the interview method (i.e., metacognitive tool and emotional stabilization) have the potential to empower ESL learner. This can be achieved by two stakeholders of ESL learning: by ESL teachers and by ESL learners themselves. First, through the use of the interview template shown in Appendix A, ESL teachers can understand the students’ current unique social situation in unfamiliar contexts, past learning history, and learning expectations, all of which exert huge influence on ESL learners. If ESL teachers can identify an individual learner’s unique sociocultural contexts, classroom activities will be differentiated reflecting on these contextual factors. Second, each ESL learner needs to understand that interviews have facilitative roles directly related to their own ESL learning. Extracts 6 and 7 suggest that interviews, when considered as a specific type of (retrospective) verbal protocols (Swain, 2006), can be both a research method and an enhancer of ESL learning itself on condition that it is perceived either as a metacognitive tool for ESL learning or as a device for emotional stabilization.

However, since ESL teachers do not have much freedom in initiating, developing, and assessing this method in their classroom, the use of interview methods needs to be fostered by their institutions as well. ESL teachers and administrators need to reflect on the beneficial effect of interviews in their curriculum design. For example, in the last week of each session, a teacher or another designated person can schedule an individual interview with his or her ESL students. Considering ESL students’ limited English proficiency, a bilingual interviewer who shares a common first language and cultural knowledge would be
preferable. Another option for implementing interview methods into ESL classrooms will be ESL students’ peer interviews. They can interview each other as one of class activities or as one of course requirements. Nonetheless, the systematic in-house interviews would not be firmly established unless ESL learners are sensitized to the importance of verbalizing their own ESL learning experience. In this sense, a concrete institutional effort to raise ESL learners' awareness of the value of the interviews needs to follow.

References


van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A


Appendix

Interview Template (Final version, October 11, 2004)

1. The ESL Motivation
   1) Why are you interested in learning English?
   2) To what degree are you committed to learn English? Please give examples.
   3) How do you feel when you are learning English as a Korean ESL learner in Toronto?
   4) What is your goal for learning English?
      ① What are your goals for learning English today?
      ② What is your long-term goal for learning English?
   5) What do you think is the most important factor in learning ESL?
   6) What do you think is the difference between learning English in Korea and in Toronto?
   7) What are your perceived challenges in developing high English proficiency?
   8) How do you feel about English-speaking people and the community you live in now?
   9) Who are you studying English for? Yourself? Your parents? Or someone else?

2. Life History
   (During the past one month,)
   1) What is your most pleasant memory as a language learner? Please describe it.
2) What is your most unpleasant memory as a language learner? Please describe it.

3) (During the past one month,) as a language learner, who has been the most influential person?

4) (During the past one month) what personal or family incidents have affected you most in your English learning? (e.g., marriage, divorce, bereavement)

5) What ambitions and plans do you have for the future? How is it related to English language learning?

6) Have you ever been tempted to stop studying English?

7) Why do you keep studying English?

3. Relationships, Social Status and Identity

1) How do you feel about your ESL teacher(s) now?

2) How do you feel about your Korean ESL classmates in Toronto?

3) How do you feel about your ESL classmates from other countries?

4) What kind of relationships do you have with your family (or landlord/lady or roommates) in Toronto?

5) How do they help you to learn English?

6) What kind of relationships do you have with your local community in Toronto?
   ① How does the local community influence your English learning?

7) What kind of relationships do you have with your ESL teacher(s) in class and out of class? (Explain it separately)
   ① How do they help you to learn English?

8) What kind of relationships do you have with your ESL students in class and out of class? (Explain it separately)
   ① How do they help you to learn English?

9) Tell me about how you socialize with other local people in your community in Toronto.
   ① What is the most frequent occasion?

10) What is the main obstacle to socializing? Tell me about how you socialize with other ESL students in Toronto.
    ① What is the most frequent occasion?
    ② What is the main obstacle to socializing?

11) How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL
learner in front of other people who share the same ethnic background and language?

12) How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL learner in front of other ESL students from other non-English speaking countries?

13) How do you feel about yourself when you are identifying yourself as an ESL learner in front of other English-speaking local people?

14) Is this feeling in three above-mentioned cases different? If so, what do you think is the source of difference?

15) Do you have a specific identity or “voice” when you learn or use English? Does it reflect who you are? (your personal or ethnic identity)

   ① Is it different from your identity when you use your mother tongue?
   ② Are you trying to change this? Do you want to differentiate you living in Toronto from past you who lived in Korea?

4. The Context (only asked in the first interview)

1) How do you feel about the changes that have taken place in your country over the past 5 years or so?
   How have the changes affected your life as an English learner?

2) What are the major differences in English language learning between your country and Canada?

3) What do you think the major political changes in your country are?
   How do you think it is related to your life as a language learner?

4) What do you think your and your family’s socioeconomic status is?
   How do you think it is related to your life as a language learner?

5. The Tool Use

1) What tools do you use to help you learn English? (e.g., materials, such as dictionaries, books, computer softwares, audio-tapes; mental strategies, such as mental outlines, heuristics; human resources)
   ① How and why do you use them? Please give examples.

2) Do you get any help from the use of the Internet? If so, please give examples.

3) For what use do you use the Internet?
6. The Participants' ESL Learning Expectations

1) What is your expected English proficiency level?

2) Among the four areas (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing) in English, what is the most needed and important area for you?

3) To develop your prioritized area mentioned above, what effort do you make?

4) Generally speaking, what will be your problem in English learning?

7. The Participants' perceptions and emotions about the interview methods

1) How did you feel about the interview? (participants’ emotion)

2) Were there things you wanted to say in the interview but didn’t get a chance to say?

3) What were these things?

4) Why weren’t you able to say them during the interview?

예시언어(Examples in): English
적용 가능언어(Applicable language): English
적용 가능수준(Applicable levels): Tertiary

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