

Case Study of a Non-Native English Speaker

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I first met Yanlin in the Academic Writing class. She is a 22-year-old Chinese graduate student in the GPED (Graduate Program in Economic Development) at Vanderbilt University. From her conversations with the instructor and other classmates, I noticed that though fluent, her English still has some space for improvement. As we got along with each other in and outside the class, she became my learner as well as my friend. During this semester's observation, I collected both her writing and speaking samples and did an analysis on her English acquisition. In this paper, I will briefly introduce my learner's linguistic background and describe her oral and written language abilities. Based on the analysis of the data, I will then assess her current stage of second language acquisition and elaborate on the factors that most influence her SLA. Finally, I will talk about the implications I have drawn from this case study.

Introduction to the learner

Born and raised in Chongqing, a central city of China, Yanlin's native languages are Mandarin Chinese and Chongqing dialect. She started learning English when she was in the 3rd grade, which means she has been learning English for about 12 years. To me, her oral English is proficient compared to most of the Chinese students that I know here. Besides English, she also knows some basic phrases in Japanese, Korean and French. The biggest motivation for her to learn English used to be the TV dramas in English such as the Big Bang Theory and Gossip Girl. Such dramas triggered her interest in learning English in her last year of high school, and she has made adequate growth in English since then. However, now her motivation has changed into better communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Yanlin just came to the United States this August. Since she has never been to other English speaking countries, the United States is her first exposure to an all-around English context.

Description of the learner's oral and written language abilities

Since I did not have much access to the formal settings where she spoke English, the speaking samples were mainly collected during our weekly conversations about various topics. The majority of her writing samples are formal and informal e-mails, paragraphs I asked her to write and some assignments for her economics classes.

In terms of her phonetics and phonology, she is quite good overall: She clearly pronounces almost all the syllables in English, making her speech very understandable. However, some Chinese accent interferes when she speaks English, which makes her oral English not native-like. Also, she has minor problems with the pronunciation of certain words.

Yanlin has a very good grasp of morphology. From analyzing both her speaking samples and writing samples, I found out her only problem in morphology is with inflectional affixes. This problem appeared most frequently when she was saying past tense sentences and sentences with third person singular. For example, she would make sentences like “And he just fly away from the spaceship and die in space alone” and “So we contact her and we went to her office” (see Appendix A, line 74 & 97). More examples can be found in line 75, 79, 104 and 147 (see Appendix A).

I saw Yanlin's development in her syntax, at least in some aspects of syntax. Her English classes in China in the past 12 years laid a solid foundation for her ability to orally and in writing form any type of simple, coordinate, complex, and complex-coordinate sentences. Nevertheless, there are still some drawbacks in her syntax which I will address later in the paper.

As to Yanlin's semantics, her vocabulary reached Tier 4 level (Collins, 2013a), since we as graduate students all memorized a huge number of sophisticated words in the preparation of the GRE test. However, she said due to lack of use of Tier 4 words in daily

communication, even in instructional content, she was gradually forgetting those words. Also, she sometimes faces difficulty in word choice, especially in academic English.

Yanlin demonstrates good knowledge of pragmatics in her speaking and writing samples. She can freely use English language for a variety of purposes such as negotiating relationships, persuading others and evaluating a solution to the problem (see Appendix C, lines 12-15; Collins, 2013b).

Below I want to talk more deeply about Yanlin's English language abilities in terms of phonetics/phonology and syntax.

Phonetics/phonology

Although Yanlin has acquired the pronunciation of the majority of the English words, she is still struggling with some phonetic problems. Like many Chinese English language learners, she occasionally pronounces the “th” interdental sounds /ð/ and /θ/ in an awkward way. For example, instead of pronouncing “they” “the”, she pronounced /zeɪ/ and /zə/ (see Appendix A, line 16); for “something” and “theory”, she pronounced /sʌmsɪŋ/ and /siəri/ (see Appendix A, line 13-14). From most of her speaking samples, she substituted the /z/ sound for the voiced dental fricative /ð/ and the /s/ sound for the voiceless dental fricative /θ/, especially in word-initial and within-word environments. However, she was better in pronouncing the /θ/ sound than the /ð/ sound: When it came to some words like “something” and “think”, she pronounced them quite well compared to words like “they” and “that” (see Appendix A, line 13-33). Sometimes she could even pronounce both sounds in a corrective way, the reason of which I am not yet able to explain. Also, she pronounced the /ð/ sound better with word-finally environments (see Appendix A, line 44 & 47).

As Justice (2004) stated, “not every language has the same phonetic inventory” (p. 30). For example, although Chinese and English share some phonemes such as /p/, /t/ and /d/, Chinese does not have the “th” sounds /ð/ and /θ/ that exist in English. So, although the “th”

sounds are real to a native English speaker, they are foreign to a Chinese native speaker. Since Chinese speakers are not used to the “th” sounds, they tend to substitute similar sounds in the Chinese alphabet that are psychologically real to them, ending up pronouncing /s/ instead of /θ/, and /z/ instead of /ð/ (Justice, 2004). Yanlin’s pronunciation of the “th” sounds is exactly the case for this reason. To most of the Chinese native speakers, the “th” sounds are a pain in the neck, and the teachers will stress this problem in the classroom over and over again. In the end, some students can get over this “pain”, but some are still struggling. Yanlin is one of the struggling ones and this pronunciation did not seem to have been improved over the semester, although she occasionally sounded right when pronouncing these sounds.

Also, she pronounced the word “from” in a strange way. Her “from” sounded more like /frɒn/, and this pronunciation also did not seem to have changed over the semester (see Appendix A, line 2, 13, 74, 79, 171 & 185). Yanlin’s pronunciation of “from” illustrates a difference in Chinese and English phonotactics. In Chinese, the majority of the syllable structures are CV or CVV (usually only ending with vowels). Although there are some syllable structures ending with one consonant, they only end with /n/ or /ŋ/, never with /m/. So Yanlin’s pronounced /frɒn/ probably because she is only familiar with /n/ in the end, not /m/.

In addition, an interesting phenomenon in Yanlin’s phonology is that she intuitively adds an /r/ sound where no /r/ should be pronounced. When I was asking her where she saw the movie, she answered, “We saw in /θiətə/ (theater).” (See Appendix A, line 36 & 45). She also said, “We have our /bʌdʒɪt/ (budget).” But she corrected herself immediately by saying /bʌdʒɪt/ (see Appendix A, line 157). Such phenomenon appears occasionally in her conversations. It reminds me of when I was learning English, many students in the class including me, noticed that a difference between American English and British English is the pronunciation of “r”: For example, while “person” is pronounced /pɜːs(ə)n/ in British

English, it is pronounced /pɜːsn/ in American English. Some chose to follow the American English pronunciation while some pursued the British English pronunciation. However, some of those who adopted American English pronunciation overused the /r/ sound and intuitively pronounced /r/ instead of some /l/ and /a/ sounds or add /r/ into the word. For this reason, Yanlin also emphasized the /r/ sound in certain words, but she would correct herself, which showed she was conscious about her problem with the /r/ sound.

Syntax

There are two major problems with Yanlin's syntax: improper use of determiners and run-on sentences.

Her improper use of determiners, or more specifically the use of the infinite article "a" and the finite article "the", is particularly evident in her writing samples. For example, she wrote in an e-mail on September 23rd: "The lecturer is from China Central Bank and he is the (should be 'an') expert of that area." (See Appendix B, lines 32-33). In a paragraph she was required to write on November 1st, she wrote: "... Information can spread much faster than before, which is (a) significant development in (the) information age." (See Appendix C, line 3). In her assignment in the microeconomics class on November 6th, she wrote: "With minimum wage, there will be a surplus in (the) labor market, which means unemployment." (See Appendix C, line 16). From Yanlin's writing samples, I found out that she occasionally omits the determiners, and is sometimes confused whether to use "a" or "the". In my opinion, this is because in Chinese, we present the infinite article and the finite article in a different way. Since there is no equivalence of "a" or "the" in Chinese, many proficient Chinese English language learners like Yanlin, though after years of English learning, are still at a loss whether or when to use "a" and when to use "the" in certain circumstances, because they are not able to draw upon their L1.

Yanlin had a great tendency to use run-on sentences that violate English sentence structure rules. The run-on sentences can be found almost in all her e-mails from August to early October. For example, in an e-mail she sent on September 20th, she wrote: “Professor Eden sent us the pages which the homework is on, are they the same problem sets on the 7th edition of the textbook?” (See Appendix B, line 23-24). On October 1st, she said in the e-mail: “I am Yanlin Feng, we discussed micro homework together this afternoon.” (See Appendix B, line 49). More evidence can be found in line 2, 10 & 46 in Appendix B. In these e-mails, she joined two independent clauses together as one sentence and put a comma in between, which violates the sentence rule as $S = NP + VP$ or $S = S + CC + S$ (Justice, 2004). I think the influence of Chinese sentence structure rules can best explain her use of run-on sentences: The rules of Chinese sentence structure allow run-on sentences under some conditions (e.g. The seemingly independent clauses are related even without coordinating conjunctions). However, in her e-mails from October 22nd to November 18th, run-on sentences never appeared (see Appendix B, lines 57-98). This development was likely due to her receiving corrective feedback on her run-on sentences in the assignment from the Academic Writing class.

Assessment of the learner's current stage

Based on my observation on Yanlin's English language development throughout this semester, she is in general at the stage of “productive use of the new language” in Tabors' (1997) Developmental Sequence for L2 Acquisition. As the data reflects, Yanlin can produce English systematically and fluently in her output (speaking and writing). Thus, I also consider Yanlin as at advanced levels (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Yanlin has acquired all the grammatical morphemes, but sometimes she makes mistakes in regular and irregular past tense and third person singular, especially in a communicative environment where the form of the language is not paid much attention to (see Appendix A,

line 74, 75, 79, 97, 104 & 147). In her writing samples, her errors of these grammatical morphemes are significantly fewer than in her speaking samples.

In terms of negation, she went all way through the 4 stages described by Lightbrown and Spada (2013). I can hardly find any errors regarding negation in her data.

Yanlin is proficient in question formation. I consider her to be at stage 6 – formation of complex questions (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Her correct and complete questions can be found in her e-mail samples in lines 45-46, 67-68 and 78-79 (see Appendix B). Although she said some questions in stage 1 and 2 (sentence fragments, formulae and declarative word order) in her conversations with me, I think these questions cannot suffice to prove that she is in stage 1 or 2 because in oral English, everyone, including English native speakers, forms stage 1 and stage 2 questions.

In terms of possessive determiners, I didn't find any errors concerning her use of "he" or "she", "his" or "her" and "him" or "her". So I consider her to be at the end of the post-emergence stage, because she achieved error-free use of possessive determiners both in speaking and writing (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Yanlin already demonstrated a very good sense of forming and analyzing relative clauses. Since she does not tend to use many relative clauses in her oral and written English, the data does not contain much information about it. However, I can tell she has no problem with relative clauses because I had her do some relative clause exercises and she made no error.

As to reference to past, she almost makes no mistakes in writing English, but in oral English she would unconsciously not change the verb tense when she was describing something that happened in the past. Sentences like "So we contact (should be 'contacted') her and we went to her office yesterday to get her signature" and "But the officer said that she think (should be 'thought') we can get it back before we leave" can exemplify this point (see Appendix A, line 97 & 104).

Learner's Theoretical Framework

From the linguistic perspective, Yanlin is a native Chinese speaker and she can hardly speak other languages besides Chinese and English. From the observation I found that her second language acquisition is largely affected by her first language Chinese. This first language influence is particularly obvious in her phonetics/phonology, morphology and syntax in English. For phonetics and phonology, she tends to build on the sounds in Chinese that she is familiar with to substitute the sounds in English that she is not used to, e.g. /s/ and /z/ for “th” sounds and /frɒn/ for “from”. For morphology, because there is no verbal inflection in Chinese, she sometimes omits the inflectional affixes in some sentences, especially in her oral English. For syntax, Yanlin is confused about the use of “a” and “the” in some cases, and she applies the rules of Chinese sentence structure to form English sentences, thus resulting in her run-on sentences. As Justice (2004) stated, “people learning a second language will unconsciously apply the rules of their first language to their second” (p. 30). Yanlin is a typical learner whose L1 has a tremendous effect on her L2.

Yanlin's second language acquisition was influenced by some factors in the behaviorist theory. For instance, she was required by her English teacher to memorize some dialogues and sentence patterns, because the teacher thought by learning those dialogues and patterns by heart, the students could form a “habit” of correct language use. Yanlin told me that this method did help her in her SLA.

In spite of the few factors in behaviorist theory that affected Yanlin's SLA, the cognitive perspective serves to best explain her language learning. She told me that when she was learning English in China, she received her English teacher's instruction on grammar rules in the classroom, and after that, the teacher would give the whole class piles of exercises both in writing and orally. Then she knew how to use that knowledge but was given little chance to further practice it. Only after she came to the United States did she get ample time and

opportunities to practice those grammar rules. After a semester's exposure to this all-around English environment, some grammar rules became automatic knowledge for her. Yanlin's learning method exactly reflects DeKeyser (1998, 2001, 2007) and other researchers' "information-processing" model: She started with declarative knowledge, which then became procedural knowledge through practice, and this knowledge eventually became automatized through more practice.

The interaction hypothesis in the cognitive perspective is evident in Yanlin's SLA. According to Yanlin, she lives with two female students, one of whom is from India and the other from Ethiopia. Because Yanlin has to communicate with her roommates in English, modified interaction and negotiation for meaning happen frequently, especially between her and the Indian student, who is a highly proficient speaker of English. As Yanlin said, even though she herself is a proficient English speaker in daily communication, the way her Indian roommate talks with her and the way she talks with her other Indian friends are different. Yanlin understands her Indian roommate quite well when she talks to her, but she hardly understands everything when her Indian roommate is on the phone with her Indian friend. Also, Yanlin learned a lot of new vocabulary through the interaction with her Indian roommate. For example, once she was telling her roommate about how her parents got married. She did not know how to say her father "wooed" her mother, so she used many other words to describe it. Through this negotiation for meaning, she learned the words "woo", "court" and "courtship" from her Indian roommate. Through "comprehensible output process", Yanlin also saw the limits of her English language ability and tried to find better ways to express her meaning – in this case, better vocabulary (Swain, 1985).

Practice also played an important role in Yanlin's SLA. This is best reflected by her writing samples. As I mentioned, we both took the Academic Writing class this semester. In the class, the instructor had us do a great amount of practice in writing both in the class and at

home and then he gave us feedback on our assignments. Taking her run-on sentences for example, I found that from August 19th to October 1st, almost every e-mail she wrote contains at least one run-on sentence (see Appendix B, lines 1-52). However, starting from October 22nd, her run-on sentences started to disappear (see Appendix B, lines 57-98). According to Yanlin, she benefited a lot from the practice and our instructor's feedback in our Academic Writing class. The ample opportunities to practice, along with her cognitive process in her mind, helped her to better the production of language.

Besides the cognitive perspective, I think Yanlin's SLA is also partly influenced by the sociocultural perspective. Her experience of English learning after she came to the United States reflects her "learning by talking" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Since most of Yanlin's classes in the GPED this semester were lectures where she hardly had the chance to talk and communicate with her classmates and professors, her only chance to talk on campus was the Academic Writing class. In almost each session of the class, the instructor let us look at each other's work and asked us to better the work by negotiating about the grammar and the content. Through the discussion, we fine-tuned our work both in grammar and content with the help of the instructor. In this class, Yanlin was exposed to learner-learner interactions where they "co-construct linguistic knowledge while engaging in production tasks that simultaneously draw their attention to form and meaning" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). By doing this learner-learner co-constructive work, Yanlin learned the language by using it. According to Swain (2000), "it is cognitive activity and it is social activity" (p. 97). Thus, though Yanlin's English learning is best explained by the cognitive perspective, it is also influenced by the sociocultural perspective.

Description of a specific instructional plan

When designing a specific instructional plan for Yanlin, I decide to take her age, motivation, goals, language needs and learner beliefs into consideration: She is an adult with

great cognitive maturity; Her biggest motivation for learning English now is better communication with people from different cultures; Her goal of learning English is to become a fluent speaker; Her language needs are based on her patterns of errors I identified through the data I collected from her; She wants more chance to practice her speaking and writing and wants corrective feedback on her writing but not speaking; She desires to improve her word choice both in speaking and writing.

Based on these factors, I would design a content-based English speaking and writing class. The class is mainly based on group or pair work (Lighbown & Spada, 2013). The placement of some native speakers in the group is important for her because when she interacts with a proficient interlocutor within her zone of proximal development (ZPD), she can perform at a higher level in her speaking (Vygotsky, 1978; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The native speakers can also foster the communication between people from different cultures, which is consistent with Yanlin's motivation. In addition, the placement of native speakers can help Yanlin with her semantics through negotiation for meaning, especially with word choice.

For Yanlin's syntax, the writing class would be very helpful. I would give her corrective feedback in her writing. Special attention would be paid to her use of finite and infinite article and her run-on sentences. Through my corrective feedback and her cognitive understanding, she would approximate accuracy in syntax.

Although earlier in the paper, I identified several patterns of errors in Yanlin's phonetics/phonology, it should not be the main focus of the instructional plan. For one thing, Yanlin and I both agreed that even though there is instruction on pronunciation, it would not be very effective because Yanlin's pronunciation is to some extent "fossilized" and cannot necessarily be corrected through instruction (Selinker, 1972). For another, Yanlin's main goal for learning English is to become a fluent speaker in communication. The patterns of errors I

described earlier in the paper hardly influence Yanlin's fluency and how she gets her message across.

Critical reflection on what I have learned from this project

From the whole semester's work on this project, I benefited greatly in the following aspects.

First of all, I see this case study project as my first time to put theory into practice in a research field. In my past study experience, I have read the book and the study results, but never had the chance to work with a learner and to observe his/her second language acquisition to verify the theories I learned in the book. From observing and analyzing my learner Yanlin, I was able to relate the linguistic and SLA theories to the real life – my learner's linguistic phenomena and her SLA biography. By carrying out this case study, my knowledge in both linguistics and SLA field was enhanced and it allowed me to raise new questions.

Second, I learned that we, as pre-service ELL teachers, should see our students in a holistic way. That means, we should not only see them as our students who are learning a second language, but more importantly, also see them as people who have their own different learner characters, language backgrounds and life stories. When I was doing this case study, I did not only observe my learner's phonetics, morphology, syntax and other linguistic perspectives, but I also had to take her language background (e.g. first language), her SLA environments and her personality and motivation into consideration when analyzing the data. All the linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural factors work together to shape my learner's SLA. Thus, from this project, I learned that we should see our students in a holistic perspective, taking various factors that affect their SLA into consideration.

Furthermore, this project serves as an experiment and a stepping-stone for my future teaching and research. From conducting this case study, I learned valuable research methods

such as collecting data by recording learner's oral production, transcribing and analyzing the data using the linguistic knowledge we learned in the classroom. This experience laid a foundation for my future work and research in a linguistic or SLA field. The one-on-one interaction allowed me to discover my learner, as well as discover myself. In this project, I spent ample time trying to know everything about my learner. In order to obtain the data I needed, I had to think of a variety of methods to foster my learner's output, especially oral English. For example, at the very beginning of the data collection process, my learner was reluctant to talk in English with me because she was anxious about speaking English. In order to lower her anxiety, I encouraged her by saying: "Oh come on, your English is perfect and I enjoy listening to you speaking English." It helped a little. Also, as time went by and we got along as friends with each other, she felt more and more comfortable talking with me in English. In order to elicit more information about a certain topic, I used discourse variations such as pressing and re-voicing (see Appendix A, line 37 & 39; A Primer, n. d.). Therefore, in the interaction with Yanlin, I also discovered more about what I could do to better develop the conversation and conduct the study. This experience is also very inspiring and informative for my future work with ELLs.

Meanwhile, I also learned that there are places where I could have done better in this study, for example, the variety of contexts. The context where Yanlin and I had interactions was mainly one-on-one conversations. Due to schedule conflicts and other reasons, I never had lunch with her or observed her when she was talking in English on the phone. The lack of variety of contexts resulted in very limited types of speaking data. I should take this lesson and try to create more types of contexts in my future work.

Implications for my future work with ELLs

Conducting this project was an enriching and rewarding experience for me. It gave me valuable implications for my future work with ELLs.

It is important to create a supportive environment where ELLs feel comfortable speaking English and make mistakes. This environment includes a warm and welcoming class atmosphere and teachers' relationship with their students. My learner Yanlin was too shy to speak English at first, but as we got closer and closer as time went by and she regarded me as a friend that she could rely on, she began to comfortably talk in English with me. Learning from this experience, I will spend time getting to know every student, build a warm relationship with them and make connections to them in the classroom. Also, I will encourage the students not to be afraid to speak English and tell the class that it is ok to make mistakes and I will be ready to help them at any time.

From describing and analyzing my learner's patterns of error in several linguistic aspects made me aware of the importance of doing research on my students' L1. Students learning a second language are more or less influenced by their L1. For example, my learner Yanlin's SLA is largely influenced by her L1 Chinese. The influence of the linguistic phenomena and the rules in Chinese is evident in her English phonetics/phonology, morphology and syntax. Fortunately, I am also a native Chinese speaker, so I can draw on Chinese language features to explain her patterns of errors. However, I may face speakers of other languages than Chinese in the future when I teach in an ELL classroom. In order to know the similarities and differences between those languages and English, I need to equip myself with basic knowledge of those languages. Only in this way can I figure out where my students' errors come from and better address their difficulties to facilitate their English learning.

Furthermore, it is important for teachers to know their students' learner beliefs, and examine their expectations and goals. As Lightbown & Spada (2013) mentioned, "learners' beliefs about the kind of instruction that is best can influence their satisfaction and success" (p. 156). Yanlin told me that her current goal of learning English is fluency more than accuracy and she wanted the instructor to always give her corrective feedback in her writing

but not all the time in speaking. She found the Academic Writing class that we attended this semester met her expectations and she benefited a lot in word choice, grammar rules and speaking. Therefore, for my future instruction in an ELL classroom, before I start teaching, I will examine my students' learning goals and learner belief, then try to conduct my teaching in a way that satisfies most of the students' needs. I think this can maximize my students' learning outcomes.

Finally, teachers should decide when and how to give students corrective feedback according to different situations. Speaking from learner characteristics, my learner Yanlin, as a 22-year-old adult, has developed great metalinguistic sophistication and cognitive maturity, so providing explicit metalinguistic feedback would probably be most effective for her to improve her English. However, I noticed that she self-corrected her grammatical mistakes right after making them (see Appendix A, line 157, 166 & 170), and she told me that she was aware of most of the grammatical mistakes she made in the conversation. Considering this, I do not think I should give her too much corrective feedback in her oral English because she knows her problems. In written English, on the other hand, she wants corrective feedback because she thinks her writing can best reflect her grammar acquisition and she makes some grammatical errors that she herself is not aware of. Thus, corrective feedback in her writing would be beneficial for her improvement. Therefore, in my future classroom, I should take into my students' learner characteristics into consideration when I decide when and how to give them corrective feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

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Appendix A: Speaking Samples from Yanlin

Name: Yanlin

L1: Chinese

Age: 22

Participants: C (me) and Y (Yanlin)

October 4, 2013

(Background: In the afternoon, Yanlin was telling me about a speech that was going to take place that afternoon in her department.)

1. C: So who's gonna give you the speech this afternoon?
2. Y: It's a professor /frɒn/ (from) London. London College or College of London?
3. C: Oh, ULC?
4. Y: /dui/ (meaning "yes" in Chinese)!
5. C: A professor from ULC?
6. Y: Yeah.
7. C: So what is he going to talk about?
8. Y: The main topic is about Ambiguity Aversion in /dɪ'zɪʒn/ (Decision) /siəri/
9. (Theory).
10. Y: ... (explaining the theory in Chinese)
11. Y: Oh English?
12. C: (smiling) Yeah.
13. Y: Ok, the basic /siəri/ (theory) is /zæt/ (that) when people need to choose /frɒn/
14. (from) /sʌmsɪŋ/ (something), /frɒn/ (from) like a bunch of things, they are tending to
15. choose the things /zæt/ (that) the probability of /ziz/ (these) things they know, rather than
16. something /zeɪ/ (they) don't know /zə/ (the) probability.

17. C: So they don't tend to take risks. So...
18. Y: And maybe /zə/ (the) probability of the unknown thing maybe bigger or better
19. for him, but he will just tend to not choose that because he doesn't know /zə/
20. (the) probability.
21. Y: ... (explaining the theory in Chinese again)
22. (Yanlin took out her iPad and showed me an article that professor wrote who was
23. going to give the speech.)
24. C: So did you read this?
25. Y: No I haven't /rɪd/ (read), just to read /zə/ (the) abstract.
26. C: How many pages?
27. Y: Twenty-eight, I think.
28. C: So you're gonna read this and go to the meeting?
29. Y: Yeah. (laughing) I'm not sure I can understand /zɪs/ (this) paper.
30. C: But what does it have so much to talk about, only about not taking risks?
31. Y: /zə/ (The) professor did some experiments. He's like one of the founders in
32. game theory. and there are some... uh... Oh there is a expert risky, it's a
33. /feɪməs/ (famous) experiment and he just talk about /zɪs/ (this).
34. Y: ... (explaining the theory happily in Chinese again)

October 29, 2013

Note: "th" was mostly pronounced as /z/ and /s/ in word-initial and within-word environments, but /θ/ sound was pronounced better than /ð/.

(Background: Yanlin went to the cinema three weeks ago. I was asking her about her first experience in a U.S. cinema.)

35. C: Where did you see the movie?

36. Y: We saw in /θiərtə/ (theater).
37. C: Uh huh, that's the latest movie? When did you see it?
38. Y: Weeks ago, three weeks ago.
39. C: Tell me about the movie, like who did you go with, how long it took to get
40. there?
41. Y: Yeah, and how long the movie was and what happened in that movie? A lot of
42. questions.
43. C: Yeah.
44. Y: Ok. We went there three weeks ago I think, with (/wɪð/) three of my
45. classmates. And we went to green hills, the regal /θiərtə/ (theater) here. We took
46. the bus. It took us like twenty minutes here I think.
47. Y: The movie starred with (/wɪð/)... Starred IN actually, George Clooney and Sandra
48. Bullock, the two academy winners. They both played as astronauts. And they are
49. in this spaceship in space. One is the astronaut and the Sandra is the... What's
50. that? A doctor for the spaceship? Her responsibility is to fix the spaceship. But
51. when they are working outside the spaceship, the Russia launched a satellite, I
52. think, that's a satellite.
53. C: Russia?
54. Y: Yeah, Russia launched a satellite, but it goes to the wrong orbit.
55. C: Uh huh.
56. Y: So it crushes. And crushed the Russian spaceships or something I don't know.
57. Anyways, it's created a lot of space junks. And the space junks just like spread
58. and cause a lot of crashes, including crash into the spaceship, the American
59. spaceship.
60. C: so the crashes all go into the American spaceship?

61. Y: Yeah, all of the other astronauts died.
62. C: Why?
63. Y: Because they are in the spaceship, but they didn't find the chance to escape.
64. C: In the Russian spaceship?
65. Y: No. The satellite caused a lot of space junks, and the space junks just spread in
66. the space and it... uh... they just ran into the spaceship. So everyone in the
67. spaceship died. What's that word? Collide? Clash?
68. C: Collide?
69. Y: Ok. So George and Sandra need to find a way back to the earth.
70. C: So only two of them...
71. Y: Yeah only two of the astronauts survived. And then they first they found the...
72. the Russian... What's that word? International space station? ISS, ISS (nodding).
73. But when they want to get in there, George Clooney lost the attachment. So he
74. just fly away. And he just fly away /frɒn/ (from) the spaceship and die in space alone
75. and Sandra Bullock get into the spaceship of the Russia. But somehow there is a fire
76. in there. So Sandra Bullock had to escape again, in a little spaceship, deattached
77. (detached) from this big one...
78. ...
79. Y: So he need to get away /frɒn/ (from) Tiangong before it crash down.
80. C: Crashes down.
81. Y: Uh huh.
82. C: So finally she gets back to the earth? And that's the end?
83. Y: And that's the end.

Note: “th” was mostly pronounced as /z/ and /s/ in word-initial and within-word environments, but /θ/ sound was pronounced better than /ð/.

(Background: Yanlin told me that she was going to spend the Christmas in Europe. I was asking Yanlin about her trip to Europe on Christmas on the phone. Then she decided to come to me and tell me about it face-to face.)

84. C: Yeah I was asking you about the trip to Europe.

85. Y: Something about the visa?

86. C: Yeah the visa and the ticket. I remember you mentioned Detroit.

87. Y: Oh yeah. Uh... Italy has a lot of embassies in... uh, one embassy but a lot of

88. consulates in America. And the visa interviewing is ... how to say, distributed.

89. All of the American states are distributed to each consulates. So Detroit, the

90. consulate of Italy in Detroit is...

91. C: Is in charge of ...

92. Y: Is in charge of Tennessee. But we found out on the official website of

93. consulate of Italy in Detroit. You don't need to go there, you can mail your

94. documents to the consulate in Detroit. The only thing you need to do is to find the

95. dependent consultant office near where you live. So we found that there is an

96. office in Nashville. This officer is a professor of Italian in Belmont University.

97. So we contact her and we went to her office yesterday to get her signature. And

98. we mailed all of the documents today in the morning.

99. C: So you didn't get your visa yet?

100.Y: No, we need to wait two or three weeks to get it... get it back.

101.C: When are you flying?

102.Y: In three weeks (laughing).

103.C: Ok.

104.Y: But the officer said that she think we can get it back before we leave because

105.there's some other people, they do this, they get their visa back in one week.

106.C: So you didn't do anything before... You just need to send the documents to

107.her?

108.Y: Yeah.

109.C: And you don't have to do the interviews?

110.Y: Yeah. But if you are in NY, you need to do the interview thing. You need to

111.go to the embassy there. I don't know.

112.C: Oh.

113.Y: We think because... maybe because that Detroit is in charge of the states

114.mostly in the middle, so the transportation may be not that convenient for them

115.to... all of them to go to Detroit to get this, so they can mail the documents to

116.there.

117.C: Ok. So what documents do they need?

118.Y: I have the checklist (finding her checklist).

119.Y: You need the application form. You need your passport and the copy of your

120.passport. And you need a photo, the copy of your state ID or driver's license

121.which can prove that you live here.

122.C: Uh huh, but can I have my passport?

123.Y: No, but passport can't prove that you live in the U.S.

124.C: But what did you get?

125.Y: Yeah I have this driver's license learner permit, so I just copied (showing me

126.her driver's license learner permit).

127.C: So if I don't have the driver's license and I don't have the ...

128.Y: Oh you can use your student ID. And we also sent the I-20 form to them.

129....

130.C: How much money do you need in your financial statement?

131.Y: Oh, there is a chart saying that how much you need for travel to there.

132.Actually just need more... no... not... no more than 100 dollars I think.

133.C: Oh.

134.Y: Yeah, because you have prepaid the airline tickets, the train tickets, and the

135.accommodation, the hotels sort of things, so maybe this you don't need so much,

136.and you have credit card or something.

137.C: Do they have to know you have prepaid the...

138.Y: Yeah you need to give them the airline tickets, the train tickets, the hotel

139.confirmation, so...

140.C: So before you apply for the visa, you have to get your transportation and

141.accommodation done?

142.Y: Yeah the whole schedule done.

143.C: So what if you have bought the tickets and then for some reason you didn't get

144.your visa?

145.Y: (laughing) I hope that won't happen to me.

146.C: when did you decide to go to Europe? Who made you decide that?

147.Y: I think the whole preparation begins late October? Or in the early November.

148.Yeah after we went to Atlanta.

149.C: What made you want to go to Europe?

150.Y: I've always wanted to go to Europe. But when I was in China, compared to

151.the...

152.C: Visa procedure?

153.Y: Yeah, and the money you need to go there. Because if you want to travel to

154. Europe for twenty days – that’s our whole schedule – you need to pay like

155. 20000... over 20000 yuan.

156.C: But here? do you have your budget?

157.Y: Yeah we have our /bʌrdʒɪt/, /bʌdʒɪt/ (budget) (correcting herself right away

158. by speaking it out very clearly and slowly). First we want to keep the budget

159. below 2000, but we find out no, it’s not gonna work. Now it’s 2500, maybe that’s

160. still not enough, so maybe 2800.

161.C: Yeah because you have to include the food.

162.Y: Yeah the food and the entry fee?

163.C: Yeah.

December 6, 2013

Note: “th” was mostly pronounced as /z/ and /s/ in word-initial and within-word environments, but /θ/ sound was pronounced better than /ð/.

(Background: In the late afternoon, I was having coffee with Yanlin on campus. We were talking about our family. She was talking about her father’s job and how her parents met each other.)

164.C: What did your father do? What was your father?

165.Y: My father was a teacher when he first graduated. Because uh... in that time...

166. uh an undergraduate students is really uh... was pretty rare in that age. And he

167. studied economics... economics management. And in that age all the

168. undergraduate students can get the work... get the job assigned by the

169. government. So my father was assigned to be a teacher in a school. And this

170. school is owned by the government. So they can teach uh... they taught the

171. students /frɒn/ (from) the... people who already worked in the government. But my

172.father didn't want to be the teacher. He told to the principal that: "I didn't go to a
173.university to become a teacher. I want to do something uh... more meaningful, or
174.more valuable for him."

175.C: Uh huh.

176.Y: So the principal promised him that because now, the school was...

177.C: So your father told the principal that he didn't go to the university?

178.Y: Yeah he didn't want to, he didn't go to the university for becoming a teacher
179.after graduation.

180.C: Oh, ok.

181.Y: So the principal promised my father that... because right now the school was
182.short of teachers. So he principal promised that uh... my father can change the
183.jobs after a while, after they got enough teachers in the school. So like after I
184.think one year two years, my father now, he's working in the government. And...
185.because my mom was graduated /frɒn/ (from) the normal school, so my mother
186.was also in the...

187.C: Your mom graduated...

188.Y: So that was where they met each other.

189.C: Oh (surprised)!

190.Y: And that was when my ... uh... my father pursued?

191.C: Chased (laughing)?

192.Y: No I think, woo?

193.C: Uh (confused)?

194.Y: Woo, W-O-O (laughing).

195.C: Oh, ok.

196.Y: And that's all.

Appendix B: Writing Samples from Yanlin (E-mails)

August 19, 2013

1. Dear Officer,
2. I am Feng yanlin, my Commodore ID is 000324826. I have submitted the
3. insurance waiver form to the Koster, but the insurance fee is still on my bill. I
4. have asked Health Center and they told me that I should ask you about this. So I
5. am wondering how long will it take to remove this fee of my bill?
6. Have a nice day!
7. Sincerely,
8. Feng Yanlin

August 30, 2013

9. Dear Sir,
10. I have filled the claim form, please see the attachment. Please let me know if
11. there are other things I need to do to get the refund.
12. Thank you for all your work!

September 14, 2013

13. Dear Anne,
14. I have signed up for the First Friends Program and got this e-mail address from
15. ISSS. My name is Feng Yanlin, a first year student in GPED, Graduate Program
16. in Economics Development. I am from Chongqing, southwest in China. Really
17. looking forward to tomorrow's picnic, have a nice day!
18. Here is my phone number: 615-481-5684
19. Best wishes,

20. Feng Yanlin

September 20, 2013

21. Hi, Dong.

22. I am Feng Yanlin, from the GPED class. I have a question about this week's

23. assignments. Professor Eden sent us the pages which the homework is on, are

24. they the same problem sets on the 7th edition of the textbook? Cause I only have

25. the 7th edition.

26. Thank you and have a good weekend!

27. Feng Yanlin

September 23, 2013

28. Dear Professor Eden,

29. I am a student in your macroeconomics class and I am writing to you to ask for

30. permission about being absent for your next class.

31. The reason that I cannot be in your class next Monday is that there will be a

32. lecture about government policy at the same time as your class. The lecturer is

33. from China Central Bank and he is the expert of this area. I am really interested

34. in the topic and I think it will definitely help my macroeconomics learning.

35. I would be very appreciated if you can give me the permission. Thank you.

36. Your student,

37. Yanlin Feng

September 26, 2013

38. Dear Paula,

39. I am Feng Yanlin, who live in west end manor apt c11. I have a question about
40. the rent paying. Can I transfer the money to your company via internet bank? I
41. think it might be more convenient.
42. Waiting for your reply.
43. Thank you!

September 27, 2013

44. Thank you for your reply. If I want to use this bill pay, what is the company's
45. name and the address? And could you please tell me how to make you know that
46. who pays the bill, can I add our apartment name as the "nickname"?
47. Thank you for your time.

October 1, 2013

48. Hi,
49. I am Yanlin Feng, we discussed micro homework together this afternoon.
50. This is my e-mail address. Can you please send me last year's exam paper?
51. Thank you so much!
52. Have a nice evening!

October 6, 2013

53. Sorry to keep you waiting this long, I just checked my e-mail. Tuesday would be
54. great! Looking forward to seeing you!
55. Best wishes,
56. Yanlin

October 22, 2013

57. Hi Anne,

58. I have talked to Yang and it would be great if we can get together at your home

59. for dinner on Friday evening.

60. Best wishes,

61. Yanlin Feng

November 10, 2013

62. Dear officer,

63. I am an international student who currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee. We

64. want to travel to Europe this winter vacation and we plan to stay in Italy for the

65. longest time. We want to know whether we need to book an appointment for the

66. interview and do we need to book the flight to Italy as our first stop or we can

67. enter Europe from other Schengen (Schengen) countries? And can we get our visa

68. in Chicago since it might be more convenient for us?

69. Best regards,

70. Yanlin Feng

November 12, 2013

71. Dear Professor Muccini,

72. We are international students who currently live in Nashville. We plan to travel to

73. Europe this winter vacation and we will stay in Italy for the longest time. So we

74. want to apply for Schengen Visa from Italy Embassy.

75. We find the information on the website that we only need to sign the application

76. form in front of dependent consular office instead of going to Detroit, is the

77. information correct?

78. If so, when will it be convenient for you if we want to meet you in person and

79. sign the forms?

80. Best Regards,

81. Yanlin Feng

November 12, 2013

82. That's great! But we cannot get the travel signature from ISSS until this Friday.

83. Do you think this meeting can be arranged on next Tuesday or Thursday? And I

84. also have a question about the visa fee. I heard that we can send a payable check

85. to the embassy with our other documents, is that true? Or how can we pay the

86. fee?

87. Best Regards

88. Yanlin Feng

November 18, 2013

89. Dear Professor Muccini,

90. I am preparing the documents needed for the visa application. I have a question

91. about the airline tickets.

92. We plan to fly to Lisbon first and take the train to Barcelona, then take the plane

93. to Rome and take the train from Milan to Paris at last. However, we have a little

94. problem booking the train tickets right now and might not be ready before the

95. meeting. Can we just bring the airline tickets (Nashville--Lisbon and Paris---

96. Nashville) to you on Thursday?

97. Best Regards,

Appendix C: Writing Samples from Yanlin (Articles and Assignments)

November 1, 2013

Situation, Problem, Solution, Evaluation Draft

1. In recent years, social media has totally changed the way of communication
 2. in China. With social media, like WeiBo, information can spread much faster
 3. than before, which is significant development in information age.

4. However, this change in communication is not all good. Because of the new
 5. technology, people can also spread lies and rumors easier and faster out of their
 6. own benefits. Those types of information can mislead people. Even worse, it
 7. might lead to social panic.

8. Therefore, governments are taking actions against the problem. They made
 9. some regulations of information communication online, including punishments
 10. for people who spread rumors. Moreover, they have held some suspects in
 11. custody after regulations were released.

12. Nevertheless, such regulations are difficult to evaluated. First of all, it will
 13. cost a lot of time and money to distinguish lies and rumors from the massive
 14. information on the Internet. On the other hand, some governments just take
 15. advantage of the regulations to cover their own scandals.

November 6, 2013

The answer to a question in Yanlin's homework for the microeconomics class

16. With minimum wage, there will be a surplus in labor market, which
 17. means unemployment. If the government is smart enough to figure out
 18. whose marginal cost is below w and allocate the minimum wage jobs to
 19. then, which will generate the highest surplus, this will be the most

20. reasonable allocation rule.