A JOURNAL STUDY OF THE SPOKEN ENGLISH LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This journal study was conducted in an intermediate Spoken English (SE) course at a large Midwestern university. The purpose of the study was to describe and explore the SE learning experience of prospective international teaching assistants (ITAs) in order to improve the teaching and learning in SE courses. Five Asian student volunteers were selected to participate in the study. Journal writing served as the primary methodological tool. The participants wrote eight weekly journal entries on specified topics of their SE learning experience. Using the journal entries as a frame of reference, I conducted three interviews with each participant. In addition, I wrote classroom fieldnotes, conducted member checks, and included other data such as, video presentation notes, speaking practice notes, and Exit Interview notes.

Five main themes emerged. The first theme was that the participants’ prior EFL learning and obstacles in their interactions with native speakers did not allow them to practice their spoken language. The second theme was that pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency were main concerns in their SE learning. Third, instrumental motivation played an important role in their learning. Fourth, the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking towards learning SE. Fifth, reflection made a difference in their SE learning.
Five conclusions were made from these findings. First, reflection activities should be an important part of ITA SE courses. Second, ITA learners need to be encouraged to make positive changes in their thinking and attitude about learning SE, because these changes seem to have a beneficial effect on their language learning. Third, because motivation plays a significant role in the ITAs’ passing the university SE requirement, it is important that the learners think about what they are doing to accomplish this goal. Fourth, ITAs need to be more responsible toward, reflective on, and aware of their SE learning than they currently are in SE courses. Finally, increased awareness of factors in the EFL and ESL setting that affect the ITAs’ learning of SE will help instructors and tutors, as well as ITAs and their advisors or other professors, in understanding the SE learning process of ITAs.
Dedicated to my family
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Consonants:

- /p/ pay
- /b/ bat
- /t/ ten
- /d/ dime
- /k/ kite
- /g/ gone
- /f/ fun
- /v/ vote
- /θ/, /θ/ thank
- /θ/ then
- /s/ song
- /ʃ/, /ʃ/ share
- /z/ zebra
- /ʒ/ pleasure
- /dʒ/ chair
- /m/ joy
- /n/ nice
- /ŋ/ ring
- /l/ lace
- /r/ run
- /w/ window
- /y/ yawn
- /h/ house
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this chapter I will establish the background for my study by including a historical perspective of international teaching assistants (ITAs), my personal interest in the topic, and the purpose, significance, and delimitations of this study. Also included are research questions that guided this study. The foreign TA problem has received considerable attention in the past two decades and continues to do so. As early as 1968 “the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) noted a growing nationwide concern regarding the impact of international teaching assistants on United States universities” (Meesuwan, 1992, p. 10). The “foreign TA problem” describes the issues surrounding ITAs who teach in classrooms, provide lab instruction, lead class reviews, tutor, and other teaching related responsibilities at American universities.

Three general problems are associated with the foreign TA problem: “1. Cross-cultural communication and linguistic barriers; 2. Poor academic performances by undergraduate students; and 3. Social/cultural isolation of foreign students due to negative attitudes toward ITAs among students and faculty” (Rao Kulkarni, 1989, p. 56). Similarly, Bailey (1984a) identified five interacting variables related to the foreign TA problem:
1. Teaching assistants are responsible for a great deal of undergraduate instruction in varying capacities, even though they may not be highly experienced or highly motivated as teachers.

2. The 1970s witnessed an increased emphasis on TA training and on instructional accountability in American higher education, which contributed to an attitude of consumerism among undergraduate students and their parents.

3. Relative to the number of foreign graduate students particularly in math, engineering, and the sciences, declining proportions of American students in graduate schools have made foreign TAs more numerous and more visible. [Therefore, more foreign TAs with their own educational experiences and expectations are directly interacting with American undergraduate students who have different expectations of the teaching and learning process.]

4. Undergraduate students, while often having valid reasons to complain, sometimes respond to their non-native speaking TAs foreigness with an attitude of annoyed ethnocentrism.

5. International educational exchanges, including awarding of TAships to qualified foreign graduate students, are desirable in terms of tangible present-day rewards and less obvious long-term results, [such as the effect of their instruction on undergraduate learners and the motivation of undergraduate students to pursue graduate study in fields dominated by foreign graduate students]. (pp. 14-15)

My personal interest in this topic developed during my first three years of teaching spoken English (SE) to prospective ITAs at a large Midwestern university. Three quarters of the ITAs were from Asian countries (China, Korea, Taiwan, India, Japan, and Thailand), and the remaining one quarter included students from European, South American, and Middle Eastern countries. The students represented a broad range
of academic disciplines. As a result, my classrooms were a rich learning environment of cultural exchange, learning about other disciplines, sharing personal experiences, and observing SE progress.

In spite of what I perceived to be positive contributing factors to the ITAs’ learning of SE, I was beginning to sense the students’ frustrations and disappointments. To many of these prospective ITAs, SE learning is largely or perhaps solely measured by passing the SE Exit Interview (EI) and Mock Teaching Test (MTT). Furthermore, many of the ITAs want to pass these tests as quickly as possible in order to be certified to teach in their academic departments. However, only a small number are able to become certified in a relatively short period of time (two quarters). Some of them repeat the SE courses several times—spending up to a year or a year and a half before they pass both the EI and MTT. Often these “multiple repeaters,” as they are called in the SE program (SEP), are not able to appreciate and reward themselves for the incremental and personal gains they are making in their SE. Their frustrations and lack of motivation inspired me to pursue a phenomenological case study of the ITAs’ SE learning process. Moreover, it has helped me reflect on what learning means and entails. My evolving bias toward learning and second language (L2) learning in particular, is that it is a holistic and balanced process. In other words, standards and instrumentation are valuable and necessary, but at the same time, should be balanced with idiosyncratic learning that evolves within the natural rhythm of each individual learner.

Returning to the foreign TA problem, we see that it has been around since the early 1980s. Several factors contributed to the increase of foreign TAs in American universities in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s especially in such fields as chemistry, physics,
engineering, math, and computer science. The first factor has been the shortage of American graduate students to fill TA positions particularly in the hard sciences (Graham, 1992; Meesuwan, 1992; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1991; Rao Kulkarni, 1989; Boyer, 1987; Fisher, 1985; Bailey, 1984a). The second contributing factor was the influx of foreign students to American universities because of the technology, skilled personnel, and training that many American universities are able to offer (Rao Kulkarni, 1989).

Even though the shortage of American graduate TAs was remedied by foreign graduate recruitment, another problem soon began to loom, that is, oral English proficiency and teaching skills of foreign TAs (Bailey, 1984a). A quick solution in some university departments was to assign foreign TAs with poor communication skills to research assistantships and grading (Fisher, 1985). Still, the foreign TA problem did not go away. Nationally a growing number of undergraduate students and their parents began to complain about foreign TAs in student newspapers and letters to legislators (Bailey, 1984a). As a result of overwhelming complaints from parents, students, university administrators, and legislative officials, some universities felt pressured to improve the communication skills of nonnative (NN) TAs by establishing oral English proficiency requirements and training before ITAs assumed teaching responsibilities (Bailey, 1984a; Rao Kulkarni, 1989).

Furthermore, in 1987 the Educational Testing Service (ETS) designed the Test of Spoken English (TSE) to measure the potential ITAs’ SE proficiency before they begin their graduate studies. An older version of the TSE referred to as the SPEAK Test (Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit) “is administered in American universities and is graded by the faculty in the departments responsible for training the international
students who are offered teaching assistantships” (Rao Kulkarni, 1989, p. 65). Along with the development of the TSE and SPEAK tests, state-mandated and some institution-mandated ITA training programs emerged on American campuses in the 1980s. The objective of these training programs was to improve the ITAs’ SE proficiency, that is, “the ITAs’ pronunciation, syntax, intonation, presentation techniques, and cross-cultural communication skills . . . so that they [could] communicate in a style familiar to the undergraduates” (Rao Kulkarni, 1989, p. 67).

Three models of cross-cultural communication formed the basis of some of the ITA training programs. The first model, Model of Intercultural Adjustment (Grove & Torbioru, 1986; as cited in Rao Kulkarni, 1989), attempts to create a new mental frame of reference for the ITAs- so that they can develop appropriate behaviors within the new cultural/educational environment. The second model, Model of Cross-Cultural Balance (Shaw & Garate, 1984), recognizes that ITAs and American undergraduates (AUGs) have different expectations of each other based on their past educational experiences. This model tries to help potential ITAs reduce the gap between their expectations of AUGs and the reality of the American classroom (Bauer, 1996; Rao Kulkarni, 1989). Finally, the third model, Model of Linguistic Utopia (Pratt, 1998; as cited in Rao Kulkarni, 1989) tries to lessen language barriers that arise from cultural differences.

For example, the SEP at this Midwestern university is based on the first model, Model of Intercultural Adjustment (Rao Kulkarni, 1989). The program was established in the 1986-1987 academic year as a result of a state law enacted in 1986. This law required the board of trustees of all state-assisted colleges and universities to implement
a program that screens and trains new NN English-speaking TAs—especially those TAs that would have direct student contact, that is, classroom and lab instruction, individual tutoring, leading small group discussions, or clarifying lecture content (“Spoken English and the international TA”, 1986; Teaching Assistants’ Oral Proficiency Policy Act of 1986; Spoken English Program, written information).

Screening of prospective ITAs’ SE proficiency is done in one of two ways: 1) by scoring 230 or better on the TSE or SPEAK Test; 2) by passing a MTT on an assigned topic from their discipline. ITA candidates who do not score 230 or higher on the TSE or SPEAK Test nor pass the MTT must take appropriate SE coursework (Spoken English Program, written information; “Spoken English and the international TA”, 1986). Placement in SE courses is based on their TSE/SPEAK Test scores. ITAs scoring 190-230 are placed in the upper level SE course (SE 105) which mainly emphasizes teaching skills and individual pronunciation tutoring for any student who may need it. Prospective ITAs scoring 180-140 are placed in SE 104.5. In this course the ITAs work on their pronunciation and fluency. Finally, ITAs scoring below 140 are placed in the lower level SE course (SE 104) where they primarily focus on building their fluency, listening comprehension, and language base, as well as doing pronunciation practice. In order for ITAs who are enrolled in SE 104 and 104.5 to advance to SE 105, they must pass the SE 104 EI, and SE 105 students must pass the MTT to receive certification to teach in their departments. ITAs who fail either test are required to repeat the appropriate course (Spoken English Program, written information).

Not surprisingly, ITA candidates would like to be certified to teach as quickly as possible without having to repeat courses. The SEP teaching faculty is aware of the
urgency that some ITAs have for completing courses. On the other hand, the SE faculty does not want to certify any potential ITA to teach that is not ready. Some ITAs repeat one or two of the SE courses several times- sometimes remaining in the program for two or more years. These multiple repeaters may have persistent consonant substitutions, deletions of consonants or syllables, suprasegmental problems (rhythm, stress, and intonation), poor grammar, low fluency and language base, or lack of clarity, cohesiveness, and discourse markers. It is understandable why some of these repeaters become frustrated, bored, and unmotivated, as well as nervous about the financial pressures from their academic departments.

For this reason, much of the ITA research to date has looked at helping ITAs develop communicative competence and compensatory strategies to improve their comprehensibility (Halleck & Moder, 1995; Lee, 1994; Williams, 1992; Hoekje & Williams, 1992; Tyler, 1992; Graham, 1992; Sequeira & Costantino, 1989; Shaw & Garate, 1984; Zukowski/Faust, 1984; Bailey, 1984b; Bailey, 1983). Some of the compensatory strategies include: a) using the blackboard, overheads, and handouts; b) nonverbal communication, eye contact, and body movements; c) paraphrasing, discourse markers, elaborating key concepts, using focal stress on key terms, and a slower speaking rate; d) being informal, interactive, humorous, and friendly; e) gauging knowledge and learning styles of their students; and f) cultural awareness and awareness of personal biases. “Given the time constraints, and keeping in mind the needs of the native English-speaking undergraduates, the most effective means for an ITA to improve communication may be through pragmatic rather than linguistic means” (Hoekje & Williams, 1992,
p. 248). Furthermore, Hoekje & Williams add that “[I]t may be that NS [native speaker]-like behavior is not attainable, especially in the short time usually allotted to ITA training . . . [and] that training in the use of compensatory strategies is more effective than language instruction that uses NS behavior as a target” (p. 259).

However, two ITA studies by Halleck & Moder (1995) indicate that compensatory teaching strategies may not benefit ITAs who have too many difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and comprehensibility; instead these strategies may help those ITAs who have a threshold level of language ability. My five years of teaching experience in the SE classrooms affirms both arguments made by Halleck & Moder. On the one hand, some ITAs’ video presentations are clearly more comprehensible by using compensatory strategies to overcome their pronunciation and language base deficiencies. On the other hand, even though some ITAs with persistent and serious pronunciation or grammar problems are also able to improve their comprehensibility by using these strategies, there is still too much interference from their pronunciation or grammar problems. In addition to class work, these ITA learners often need individual pronunciation tutoring with SE tutors.

Consequently, I became interested in exploring the ITAs’ experience learning SE through journal writing. For example, I wanted to examine their feelings about the university’s SE requirement, the effects of not passing the 104 EI on their self-esteem, motivation, and continued learning, and the cultural, educational, and personal experiences that shaped their learning of SE. As Wenden (1986b) points out, “It is . . .
important that the students themselves be given opportunities to ‘think about their learning process’ so that they may become aware of their own beliefs and how these beliefs can influence what they do to learn” (p. 4).

At a more general level, we need to understand what will motivate the prospective ITAs to learn, and what will encourage them to appreciate the incremental and personal gains they are making with their SE. “For TAs and future faculty members, the task is to plan learning experiences that help all students feel their world views are accepted and valued, know that they form an essential part of the class, perceive themselves to be good students, and dare to try new tasks with expectations of success” (Chism, Cano, & Pruitt, 1989, p. 27).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore the ITAs’ experience learning SE in a 104.5 SE class at a large Midwestern university through the use of journal writing in order to improve the teaching and learning of ITA learners in SE courses. The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. What educational and personal experiences have shaped the ITAs’ learning of English?
2. What is it like for prospective ITAs to learn spoken English?
3. What are the ITAs’ feelings about the university spoken English requirement, and what motivations are guiding them to complete the spoken English course?
4. How does learning spoken English affect the ITAs’ linguistic self-image?
5. How do reflection and awareness activities in learning spoken English affect the ITAs’ learning?
Significance of the Study

A study of ITAs’ experience learning SE in a 104.5 course was important for several reasons. First, understanding and gleaning an essence of the meaning of the ITAs’ experience can help uncover other motivational factors and instructional implications in their learning of SE. Second, ITA researchers have looked at how compensatory strategies facilitate and expedite the ITAs’ comprehensibility in SE, but more investigation is needed on how reflection and awareness activities can also contribute to their learning of SE. Third, knowledge of their experience can also show how the university SE policy is affecting their identity and learning of SE.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was confined to classroom observation (fieldnotes), gleaning documents (journal entries, EI notes, speaking practice notes, video presentation notes, and member check notes), and interviewing ITAs (three 30 minute interviews) in a SE 104.5 course in a Midwestern university. One limitation of the study was its purposeful sampling strategy and the small number of participants (five ITAs). Nevertheless, as Patton (1990) states, “The purpose of a small [purposeful] random sample is credibility, not representativeness” (author’s italics, p. 180). Patton further adds that this sampling strategy tries to allay suspicions about why certain cases were chosen for study. In addition, “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (author’s italics, ibid, p. 185).
A second limitation of the study was combining roles of researcher and instructor while I collected data in the SE 104.5 course. My established role as an instructor in the SEP may have obscured my objectivity and attention to newness as a researcher. Additionally, my teaching responsibilities in the classroom took precedence over my researcher responsibilities. On the other hand, my role as an instructor in the SE 104.5 course was also a strength for this study. First, as the participants’ instructor, I was able to establish rapport very easily and quickly with them in the classroom, and this facilitated collecting their journal entries and conducting interviews with them during the quarter. Another strength was that my interest in this study emerged from within the teaching/learning situation, that is, the SE courses that I taught. John Elliott (1991, p. 69) defines action research as, ‘the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it’ (as cited in Alrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p. 4). In other words, I was interested in improving and developing the ITAs’ SE learning process. “The researching teacher is interested not merely in confirming insights once they are gained, but in further development in depth and analysis of understanding” (Alrichter et. al, 1993, p. 57).

A final limitation of the study was that the reflective activities in which the ITAs participated may have been unintentionally leading in regards to how they perceived their SE learning experience. I tried to guard against this problem by asking them in the last journal entry and also in the first and third interviews how the reflective activities affected them and their learning of SE. Finally, the cost of this study’s limitations may be minor in comparison to the contributions this study will make in ITA research, practice, and policy.
Summary

In this first chapter I provided a historical background of the problem, my personal interest in the topic, and the purpose, significance, and delimitations of the study. In Chapter Two I will define important terms that will be used in the text and review related research to this study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I will begin this chapter by defining key terms that were used in this study. Following the key terms, a brief explanation of the pronunciation symbols that were utilized in the data will be provided. However, the main purpose of this chapter will be to describe the theoretical background of this study by reviewing the research literature that played an important role in its design, data analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, I will concentrate on three main research areas, which are as follows: a) international teaching assistant (ITA) research, b) journal and diary studies, and c) learning strategies. These areas will comprise the subsections of this chapter. For each of these three areas, I will discuss only those studies that were related or influential and compare how they were similar and different from this study.

Definition of Terms

I would like to define key words that were used throughout the text. The definitions are a common meaning of the terms as used by researchers, practitioners, and learners in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and ITA research. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), SLA theory has three essential requirements:
“to explain the particular and variable capacity to acquire other languages (and . . . to relate that capacity to the acquisition of a first language); second, to connect the capacity and the processes of second language acquisition to human cognitive capacities and processes in general; and third, to explain the relationship between acquisition and that which is being acquired, the content and the strategies inherent in the language object and the communicative process” (p. x). Meanwhile, the field of ITA research primarily includes the development and administration of ITA programs at universities, training and testing of prospective ITAs, and evaluation of assessment measures. The other definitions that follow will facilitate understanding of the intended meaning of the terms in this study. When applicable, I will also include in parentheses the abbreviation that is commonly used for the term - the abbreviations will be used throughout the text. A definition is provided for the following terms:

**Foreign or International Teaching Assistant (ITA):** This term refers to foreign or international graduate students at American universities who have teaching responsibilities in their academic departments. In this study, ITAs refers to foreign students who are applying to become teaching assistants in their departments. In other words, international students who are in training to become teaching assistants.

**Spoken English (SE):** This implies the spoken language. In particular, I also use the term to encompass pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension.

**Spoken English Student or Learner:** This refers to a prospective ITA who is taking the required SE coursework.

**Spoken English Learning Experience:** This phrase is used frequently throughout this study. It refers to the learner’s meaning, practice, and understanding of learning SE in and outside of the SE classroom during the Winter Quarter of 1999. More specifically, the journal writing and interviews of this study defined this experience as the participants’ responses and discussion about nine topics of their SE learning.
**Spoken English Program (SEP):** This is an English as a Second Language (ESL) division in the College of Education at this university. This program services prospective ITAs by administering an English proficiency test to incoming SE students, providing SE coursework, assessing students at the beginning and end of quarter, communicating regularly with the ITAs’ departments, offering a conversation partner program (CPP) for SE students, and making available pronunciation tutoring for students with individualized spoken language needs. There are four courses offered for ITAs in the SEP- 104, 104.5 (also referred to as Arranged 104), 105, and 105.5 (also referred to as Arranged 105). The focus of the SE 104 class is on pronunciation, fluency, listening comprehension, cultural awareness, and presentation skills. Similarly, the SE 104.5 class addresses pronunciation, fluency, grammar, development of technical and subtechnical language, cultural topics, and presentation skills. The SE 105 class emphasizes teaching and presentation skills with minimal focus on pronunciation, and the SE 105.5 class provides more in depth and individualized instruction on teaching, pronunciation, and presentation skills.

**Exit Interview (EI):** This SEP assessment measure is administered to SE 104 and 104.5 students during Week Ten of the quarter. This interview is one of several measures that determine which SE course, 104.5 or 105, the ITA will place into the subsequent quarter. Each student is interviewed for 15 minutes by two SE instructors who ask questions about the student’s field of study, video presentations, class assignments, and conversation partner. The interview is tape recorded, and the interviewers also take notes on the student’s pronunciation, fluency, suprasegmentals (stress, rhythm, and intonation), listening comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, speaking rate, and general, as well as, field related topics. Once the interview is completed, the interviewers write final notes about the student’s SE and discuss their decision about the student’s placement. Usually the interviewers reach a consensus and the next interviewee is interviewed. If a consensus is not reached, a notation is made for the 104.5 coordinator or SE director to view the student’s video presentations. This assessment measure is then compared to each ITA’s SPEAK test score, class diagnostics, the instructor’s final report of the student, EI results, and possibly also a report from a SE pronunciation tutor. Then based on the consistency of these measures, a final decision is made by the SE director about the interviewee’s SE placement.

**Mock Teaching Test (MTT):** This assessment measure is administered to SE 105 and 105.5 during the eleventh week of the quarter. The 105 ITAs will conduct an eight minute lesson on a specified topic from their field of study. The ITAs’ audience consists of the SE director, several SE 105 instructors, a professor from the student’s field of study, and possibly a professor from an unrelated department. The ITA prepares the lesson and materials a half hour before the test. The test is videotaped by a SE instructor or tutor. The audience members take notes on the ITAs’ pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, interaction and
teaching skills, organization, and clarity of explanations. After the ITA has finished the test and left the room, each audience member shares their notes, thoughts, and evaluation of the ITA’s SE and lesson. A consensus is reached about the ITA’s performance. One of three decisions is made: a) SE Certification, which means that the ITA is ready to assume an ITA teaching position in his/her department; b) Conditional Certification, which indicates that the ITA needs additional practice in teaching, interaction skills, or pronunciation in a 105.5 class or with a SE pronunciation tutor; and c) Not Certified, which means that the ITA must repeat the 105 class.

Native Language: This is the dominant and cultural language of a speaker. Mother tongue is a synonym of this term. Often this is the first language (L1) of a speaker. It is also possible for a speaker to have more than one native language, in the case of bilinguals. The speakers of the language are called native speakers (NS), and for those individuals who are second language (L2 or SL) learners of the language, they are referred to as non-native speakers (NNS).

Target Language: This is another term used to refer to the L2 language that the learner is studying.

English as a Second Language (ESL): This phrase refers to English as it is learned in an environment where it is one of the primary national languages of a country, for example, in the U.S., England, Australia, or Canada.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): This is the English learned in a setting where it is not one of the official languages of a country. For example, the participants in this study all had EFL instruction in their native countries - China, Korea, and Japan. In contrast, their SE learning in the U.S. would be considered ESL.

Linguistic Self-Image: This term refers to how the participants felt about themselves while they were learning SE in the 104.5 course. In their journal writing and interviews, the participants described the changes they recognized in their attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way they felt about themselves.

Journal Entry: This was a handwritten, typed, or emailed response that I received from the participants during the course of this study. There were eight journal entries in total. In each entry, which was about one or two pages in length, the participants wrote about their thoughts, feelings, or experiences on specified topics of their SE learning. The journal entries were written in English. I collected their entries weekly and read them, but I did not write comments in them.
In addition to these key terms, there are other terms related to L2 learning and the SE course content that are defined as they are used in the text of the chapters. Now, I will explain the phonetic symbols that appear in the data of this study. A list of pronunciation symbols is included in the preface of this manuscript. This pronunciation guide presents the phonetic symbols that are used for consonant and vowel sounds in American English. A key word for each symbol is also given so that it will help in pronunciation of the sound. Some of these symbols are from the text *Well Said* (Grant, 2001), which is used in the SE 104 class at this university. For several symbols, there is also a variant symbol provided which appeared in the data.

To summarize, I have defined key terms that are used frequently in the chapters, and I have also briefly explained the phonetic symbols which appear in the data of this study. Now I would like to begin discussion of the ITA and SLA research that was related and important in the design, analysis, and interpretation of this study.

**ITA Research**

When I first began thinking about the design of this study, I read about ITA research in order to familiarize myself with the field and also to learn about the origins of ITA programs at universities. Therefore, I will begin by looking at studies that provide a historical background of ITA programs. These studies are important, because they give this study a historical foundation and better understanding of how the SEP at this university began and the SE proficiency requirements that were established for ITA learners.

Bailey, Pialorsi, and Zuikowski/Faust (1984) compiled eleven articles that addressed the communication difficulties of foreign TAs at American universities.
The articles present the “foreign TA problem” (the problems arising from cross-cultural communication and linguistic barriers, poor academic performance of undergraduate students, and social/cultural isolation of foreign students), the types of ITA training programs- which can vary from a one-day workshop to a one-semester program for orienting new foreign TAs, evaluation of a training course for ITAs, and instruments for assessing the oral English proficiency of foreign TAs. These articles explained how the “foreign TA problem” arose and the measures that were taken by American universities to orient new ITAs. Similar to other American universities during the 1980s, this Midwestern university developed an ITA training program as a result of complaints from students, parents, and alumni about the inadequate communication skills of foreign TAs. In particular, the complaints to this state’s legislators, urged the state to establish a law which mandated that all state universities, colleges, and community colleges establish a program to assess the oral English proficiency of all teaching assistants who will provide classroom instruction to students (Teaching Assistants’ Oral Proficiency Policy Act of 1986; “Spoken English and the international TA”, 1986). Those foreign students who are assessed as not being orally proficient must attain spoken English proficiency prior to teaching in the classroom. An important point to mention is that not all ITA training programs across the U.S. are mandated by the state’s law, although, many large universities have state and/or university mandated programs.

Two dissertation studies, one at Pennsylvania State University and another at Syracuse University, looked at how the ITA programs that were established affected the ITA learners. For example, in *The long shadow of neocolonialism: Experiences of Asian students on the American campus*, Rao Kulkarni (1989) presents the experiences and
perceptions of Indian graduate students regarding their academic programs and the experiences of Asian students in training programs for ITAs at an American university. The Asian students felt that the ITA training programs in English was a form of acculturation, because these programs were designed to ‘Americanize’ their speech and communication skills and at the same time, repress their cultural diversity. On the other hand, they agreed with the Indian graduate students that their educational and assistantship experiences would be valuable to enter the job market when they returned to their native countries. In short, Rao Kulkarni’s study provided another historical perspective on the objective of ITA training programs as viewed by ITAs themselves. Prior to this study, the ITA literature focused on the growth of ITA programs due to complaints of American undergraduate students, their parents, university administrators, and legislators about the foreign TAs’ communication problems in the classroom. Furthermore, Rao Kulkarni’s study gave me insight into the ITAs’ experience in the training program and more importantly, it made me realize that more research was needed about the ITAs’ experience.

Rao Kulkarni’s study was also informative about the three types of models that are used to develop ITA training programs. For example, at this Midwestern university the ITA program is based after the Model of Intercultural Adjustment, which attempts to encourage ITAs to change their behaviors so that they are appropriate for the American undergraduate classroom. The other two models are Model of Cross-cultural Balance and Model of Linguistic Utopia. Programs modeled after Model of Cross-cultural Balance try to balance the unbalanced equations in the relationship of ITAs and American undergraduates (AUGs), by focusing on training the ITAs in cross-cultural
communication and linguistic skills. The third model is based on the idea that linguistic practices of the dominant group in society will be the prototype for training programs. Some ITA programs may be influenced by one or more of these models. In other words, all three models require the ITAs to make changes in their cross-cultural communication skills in order to adapt to the American undergraduate classroom.

The similarity of this study with Rao Kulkarni’s was to glean the ITAs’ experience in the training program, that is, how they felt and what they thought about their experience. The main difference between the two studies is the focal point of the experience. This study focused on the SE learning of the ITA participants, whereas the participants in Rao Kulkarni’s study talked about their experiences in the ITA program and teaching American undergraduate students. However, one of the journal topics in this study asked the ITAs to describe their feelings about the university SE requirement and also how their SE learning affected their linguistic self-image. But, the main purpose of this study was to know more about the ITAs’ learning process in order to better understand and improve the teaching and learning of ITAs in SE courses. Another difference is that the participants in Kulkarni Rao’s study were Indian graduate students, American undergraduate students, and ITAs who had already undergone ITA training and were teaching undergraduate classes. In contrast, this study centered on prospective ITAs who were enrolled in a 104.5 SE course and their SE learning experience.

The other ITA dissertation study, *The exploration of international teaching assistants’ perspectives on their work* (Meesuwan, 1992), also investigated the experiences of ITAs, specifically their perspectives on teaching, the impact of their perspectives on instructional communication, and why and how they develop their
perspectives. Like Rao Kulkarni’s study, ITAs were given the opportunity to be heard. In other words, Meesuwan’s study contributed the ITAs’ perspective of their teaching to the ITA research. This study is similar to Meesuwan’s in that obtaining the ITAs’ perspective or experience was the main research objective. A grounded theory approach was used in Meesuwan’s study instead of the journal writing and case study and phenomenological approaches that were used in this study. The main difference between grounded theory and these other approaches is that grounded theory explores how the participants “think, how they come to develop their perspectives, and how they make decisions based on those perspectives” (Meesuwan, 1992, p. 19). Moreover, the findings and theories that result from the findings are grounded in real-world patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; as cited in Patton, 1990). In contrast, this study tried to unravel the participants’ SE learning experience and the meaning of this experience to them.

In addition, the six profiles of Indian and Arabic ITA participants in Meesuwan’s study were a model for creating profiles of the participants in my study. However, the profiles in my study are part of the narrative of the participants’ case studies, whereas in Meesuwan’s study the participants’ profiles are in a separate chapter from their meaning of teaching. Another difference to Meesuwan’s study is that I utilized journal writing as a data collection method. The journal writing made it possible for me to create rich case studies of the participants’ experiences learning SE, and at the same time, it encouraged the participants to reflect on their SE learning.
In summary, the two ITA dissertation studies and Bailey et. al (1984) provided a foundation for this study in understanding the “foreign TA problem”, the emergence of ITA training programs at American universities, and the experience of ITAs in training programs and as instructors in undergraduate classrooms.

**Journal Writing in SLA and ITA Research**

Since the learning objectives in SE courses are to build fluency, improve listening comprehension, acquire presentation skills, become familiar with cultural topics, and address the ITAs’ pronunciation difficulties, journal writing has not been used widely as a medium of learning in ITA courses or ITA research. However, in SLA research, journal or diary studies are prevalent, especially for developing language skills and learning course content, investigating affective variables and learning strategies of learners, and reflecting on educational and personal experiences. These studies have been of two types: a) introspective, self-observational study in which the diarist-learner (often the researcher of the study) records information about his/her language learning process and then analyzes his/her own journal for factors or variables that affect his/her learning process (e.g. Bailey, 1980; Bailey, 1983; Schumann & Schumann, 1977), and b) non-introspective study in which the researcher investigates a learner’s diary of the L2 learning process and analyzes the diary data. These diary studies are many times supplemented with other qualitative methods such as questionnaires, structured interviews, and classroom observation (e.g. Brown, 1983; Brown, 1985; as cited in Matsumoto, 1989).
In view of these two types of journal studies, this study is a non-introspective study, because I investigated the learners’ SE learning process through their journal writing and then did a content analysis of their journal entries. Journals can range on a continuum of unstructured to structured. I chose structured journal writing, since I was interested in investigating specific topics of the learners’ SE learning experience. Moreover, I supplemented the journal writing with semi-structured interviews, classroom fieldnotes, and other documents about the learner in the SE class.

Several SLA studies by Matsumoto were influential in the use of journal writing in this study. In Matsumoto’s study (1989) of a Japanese ESL learner’s diary, journal writing was the principal method of data collection. A 19 year old Japanese college ESL learner was instructed to make diary entries daily describing her ESL classroom learning experience while in the target language environment for a period of eight weeks. In addition to the journal writing, the learner also completed a questionnaire about her past foreign language experience and information about the ESL classroom lessons in the U.S. Also in this study, there were five foreign graduate student participants (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese), ranging in age from mid twenties to early forties, who were enrolled in the 104.5 SE class that I taught for a ten week period. Furthermore, the five participants in this study submitted only one journal entry per week about a specific topic of their SE learning instead of daily writing on their language learning. Data collection in this study was over a period of eight weeks. Like Matsumoto’s study of the Japanese learner, I also conducted interviews with the participants about their journal entries. The focus of my participants’ interviews was on their journal entries. Unlike Matsumoto’s study,
I decided not to use a questionnaire, because I collected other data such as, classroom fieldnotes and notes about the participants’ SE performance in speaking practices, EI, and video presentations. One of the significant findings of journal writing in Matsumoto’s study was also confirmed in this study, that is, the important role of self-awareness and self-analysis in the diarist’s L2 learning process.

In another study by Matsumoto (1997), 108 Japanese college students majoring in English at a college in Japan were administered three types of self-reporting tasks - diary keeping for one class of 36 students, structured questionnaires on learner strategies for another class of 37 students, and unstructured interviews on learner beliefs for the third class of 35 students. Those students who kept a diary wrote daily about their EFL learning experience in the classroom for ten weeks. However, the students’ journal writing was not structured as it was in this study. They could write about any aspect of their EFL learning experience, whereas my participants were given nine topics of their SE learning to reflect on and discuss in their journal writing. Another difference is that the participants in the journal writing group of Matsumoto’s study analyzed their own entries, which helped them organize their thoughts and become more conscious of their own learning and strategies, but in this study I analyzed the participants’ journal entries. It would have been interesting to see how much more the five participants in this study would have learned about their SE learning by analyzing their own journal entries.

Matsumoto found that after comparing the results from the three groups of learners, written retrospection through journal writing and questionnaires seemed to be more effective and beneficial to the learner than oral retrospection through interviews. Furthermore, the findings from Matsumoto’s study indicated that diary keeping was
effective in raising the learner’s consciousness of their own language learning process. These results suggested that combining diary-keeping and questionnaires/interviews would create optimal means of self-reflection in the learning process. Because I used a much smaller sample of participants, it was not necessary to divide the participants into several treatment groups. Also, I was the instructor and researcher in this study perhaps making it easier to establish rapport and observe the participants’ SE learning more closely. Another way in which this study differed from Matsumoto’s is that I wanted to know more than just the participants’ learner beliefs and learning strategies - I wanted to capture the process of their daily SE learning in and outside of the SE classroom. On the other hand, a similarity with Matsumoto’s study is that the participants in this study also felt that the journal writing and discussion in interviews benefited their SE learning by helping them become more aware and reflective of their language learning process.

To sum up, I have discussed two SLA journal studies that I utilized as models for designing this journal study. The focus in Matsumoto’s studies was the EFL and ESL classroom learning experience of the participants. The participants wrote daily about their language learning experience, whereas in this study the participants wrote about structured topics of their SE learning. Matsumoto also used questionnaires and interviews to collect data about the participants’ classroom learning. Instead of questionnaires, I wrote classroom fieldnotes and collected other documents about the participants’ SE learning. In Matsumoto’s study, as well as in this study, the benefits of journal writing as a device to encourage student reflection on the learning process was supported.
Now, I would like to discuss two ITA journal studies that played an influential role in analyzing and interpreting the data of this study. Huntley (1999) explained how she utilizes reflective pronunciation journals with ITA learners in her ITA courses. She began using pronunciation journals, because she felt that pronunciation practice that involves listening to and practicing problem sounds is successful in focused classroom practice or in the language lab, but students are rarely able to transfer this practice to real-life situations. In the pronunciation journals, the ITAs record their own selected activities for pronunciation improvement, consider the goal of the pronunciation activity, and monitor their own progress. A journal entry is submitted every two weeks listing activities they had done to address their own goals and also reflecting on how helpful and successful these activities were for them. Huntley has developed a practical and interesting way for ITA learners to select pronunciation activities that engage them in a meaningful way, allow them to become more responsible for their language learning, and raise their consciousness of the language learning process.

In this study the participants did not select their own pronunciation activities, because I usually assigned them from a list of texts and tapes that they could listen to in the language lab. Therefore, I did not use reflective pronunciation journals as Huntley does with her ITA learners, because the purpose of this study was to learn about the process of my participants’ SE learning which I felt was being overshadowed by the output of their learning. However, in several of the journal topics I asked the participants to reflect on and write about their SE progress, activities for improving their SE, compensation strategies they used in the presentations, and new learning they acquired in and outside of the SE classroom. Perhaps, combining the idea of reflective pronunciation
journals with some of the journal topics of this study would be an effective and practical way to incorporate journal writing as a learning medium in the SE courses for ITA learners. The ITA learners would benefit in two ways by combining these approaches. One, the learners would have the opportunity to practice pronunciation in real-life situations that they valued. Second, by setting goals, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on the benefits of the activities, it would help the ITAs become more aware of their language learning process. As Huntley indicated, her learners’ journal entries demonstrated that the students were becoming more aware of their pronunciation difficulties and finding personally relevant ways to improve them. Likewise, the participants in this study acknowledged the value of journal writing as an important tool for developing awareness of their SE problems.

In another ITA journal study by Stevenson and Jenkins (1994), journal writing was not as successful as a reflective device as it was with Huntley’s ITA learners and the participants in this study. The findings from Stevenson and Jenkins’ study indicated that the ITAs benefited from journal writing in their language fluency and confidence, and as stress management in their daily lives. The purpose of Steven and Jenkins’ study was to determine if journal writing could contribute to the ITAs’ needs of language proficiency, cross-cultural communication skills, teaching skills, and personal and institutional support. Twenty ITA students enrolled in two sections of ITA courses at a large Midwestern university were the participants. The ethnic representation included students from China, Taiwan, Egypt, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. The journal writing took
place during a ten-week course. The students were instructed to write in their journals daily in order to develop fluency through writing and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences.

Compared to my study which was structured in terms of what the participants would write about, in Stevenson and Jenkins’ study the participants wrote freely about their SE learning, because the researchers wanted to determine the usefulness of journal writing in contributing to the four objectives of the ITAs’ learning. Meanwhile, this study’s objective was to discover the SE learning process of the ITA learners in a SE 104.5 course. For this reason, I created journal topics that would address very specific topics of their learning. At the same time, an underlying objective of the journal writing in this study was to encourage student reflection and awareness in the participants’ SE learning. Perhaps, due to these objectives, journal writing was successful as a reflective activity in the participants’ learning process in this study.

Returning to the methodology of Stevenson and Jenkins’ study, the instructor, who was the second researcher of the study, read and responded to the ITAs’ journals every two weeks. In contrast, I read my participants’ journal entries every week- they only wrote one entry per week- but I did not respond to them, because I wanted to avoid making judgmental or evaluative remarks. At the end of the course, Jenkins’ students wrote a final entry evaluating the benefit of the journal assignment. Similarly, in my study I asked the participants to describe how the reflection activities in the journal writing and interviews affected their SE learning; I asked them this question in Interviews One and Three and in the last journal topic.
The findings from the study of Stevenson and Jenkins indicated that 80% of the students thought the journal assignment helped to improve their language skills. In particular, 65% believed the journal writing improved their writing skills, especially vocabulary development. Because they were mandated to write regularly in English, they were encouraged to think in English. Also, in the participants’ final evaluation of the journal writing, 50% mentioned personal support for managing stress. However, the amount of reflectivity in the participants’ journal entries was limited. The researchers speculated several reasons why the students did not write reflectively. First, the instructor may have been unrealistic in her expectations of the level of reflection. The students received some metacognitive training in recognizing their language and communication strategies, but it was limited and not maintained. Training in metacognition includes “both awareness raising or reflection on the nature of learning and training in the skills necessary to plan, monitor and evaluate learning activities” (Wenden, 1987, p. 166). Second, the students may have perceived the journal assignment as an informal document and as a result did not seriously reflect their learning. Third, the participants may have perceived the journal writing as a way to practice English and an instrument where they could express the stress in their daily lives. Certainly, all these reasons are plausible. I agree that perhaps more metacognitive training would have been helpful in encouraging reflection, but providing more structure and goals to the journal writing, as I did in this study and also as Huntley does with her reflective pronunciation journals, would probably have encouraged the ITA learners to perceive the journal writing as a formal document, a purposeful learning tool for setting goals and monitoring progress, and a medium in which to develop awareness of their language learning.
To summarize, the two ITA journal studies were helpful in the data analysis and interpretation of the data in this study, especially in evaluating the reflective learning value of the journal writing for the participants and how journal writing can be utilized in SE courses for ITAs and for future ITA research.

**Learning Strategies and their Relationship to Journal Studies**

Research in learning strategies was an important source in the design and data analysis of this journal study because of its focus on the learner and the language learning process. Learning strategy research in SLA emerged from a concern to identify the characteristics of effective learners (O’Mally & Chamot, 1990). Moreover, “Interest has been shifting from a limited focus on merely what students learn or acquire- the product or outcome of language learning and acquisition – to an expanded focus that also includes how students gain language- the process by which learning or acquisition occurs” (Oxford, 1990, p. 5). From this influence of learning strategies research, the objective of this journal study was to look more closely at the daily language learning process of ITA learners in SE courses. So in this respect, this journal study has a relationship to the learning strategy research.

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) define learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). Similarly, Wenden (1987) refers to learning strategies as “language learning behaviors [that] learners engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language” (p. 6). Wenden further explains that this term also refers to “what learners know about the strategies they use, i.e., their strategic knowledge” and “what learners know about aspects of their language learning other than the strategies they use, e.g.,
what personal factors facilitate L2 learning; general principles to follow to learn a second
language successfully; what is easy or difficult about learning a specific language; how
well or poorly they can use the language” (pp. 6-7). For example, one of the journal
topics of this study addressed the learning strategies that the participants were using to
improve their SE (Journal: Week Six). Another topic focused on how they processed the
input from other the spoken language of others (Journal: Week Four). In addition, the
topic for Week One dealt with their pronunciation difficulties in English. For Week
Seven, several participants discussed how changes in their attitude and thinking
facilitated their SE improvement. So, in effect, the SLA research on learning strategies
served as a basis from which to create the topics that I wanted to investigate in the
participants’ SE learning.

Techniques that are frequently used to assess students’ L2 strategies include
“informal or formal interviews, group discussions, language learning diaries, dialogue
journals between student and teacher, open-ended surveys, structured three- or five point
surveys of strategy frequency, and think-aloud procedures that require students to
describe their strategies aloud while using them” (Oxford, 1992/1993, p. 18).

Observational methods are often not included among these techniques, because learning
strategies are internal and therefore, invisible to the observer. As a result, learning
strategy research relies on the learners’ willingness and ability to describe their internal
behaviors, that is, cognitive and affective (Brown, 1989; Harlow, 1988; as cited in
which allow learners to record their thoughts, feelings, achievements, and problems, as
well as their impressions of teachers, fellow students, and native speakers. Diarists
become ‘participant observers’ in their own personal, ethnographic research” (1992/1993, p. 198). In other words, students’ “self-observation and self-reporting become, then, an avenue for inquiry into one dimension of the learning process” (Hosenfeld, 1976, p. 119).

By giving students opportunities to think about their language learning process, they can become aware of their beliefs about language learning and how these beliefs may influence what they do to learn (Wenden, 1986b). One of the aims of the journal writing in this study was to encourage the participants to identify their learning strategies in order to develop awareness of their SE learning and how they could improve it. Moreover, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) state that the “Use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction. These factors are important because learners need to keep on learning even when they are no longer in a formal classroom setting” (p. 291). This is also true for prospective ITA learners, since they will continue to learn SE in their teaching, academic courses, and personal life while in the target language environment. Also, because these learners have different needs and areas of their spoken language to improve, it will be beneficial for them to develop the skills and strategies to guide their own learning - thereby making their learning more personally relevant and engaging. Another aim of the journal writing was to unravel the process of the ITAs’ SE learning so that the teaching and learning could be ameliorated to SE courses. Helping the students identify their learning strategies, provides valuable information for SE instructors on what to incorporate into classroom activities so that the students can practice strategies and transfer them to new tasks.
Learning strategies can be divided into direct and indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990). Direct strategies are language learning strategies that directly involve the target language. These include: a) memory strategies which involve creating links, applying images and sounds, reviewing, and engaging in action; b) cognitive strategies which are practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output, and c) compensation strategies which can be described as guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Meanwhile, indirect strategies support and manage language learning without direct involvement of the target language. Indirect strategies can be subdivided into metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. “Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after the learning activity has been completed” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 8); monitoring can be defined as being aware of what one is doing. Affective strategies are responsible for regulating emotions, motivations, and attitudes, while social strategies help students learn through interaction with others (Oxford, 1990).

During data analysis of the participants’ journal entries and interviews, most of these strategies became evident. The main objective of this study’s journal writing was to involve the participants in reflection about their language learning process, in order for them to think about, plan, and evaluate their SE learning, in other words, learn to use metacognitive strategies. Regarding memory and cognitive strategies, the participants talked about how they practiced pronunciation of key words for the video presentations (Journal: Week Six) and how they processed information or meaning in other people’s
SE and their own (Journal: Week Four). Furthermore, the participants discussed the compensation strategies they used in their video presentations to overcome their pronunciation difficulties (Journal: Week Six). They also expressed their feelings about the SE requirement and why they wanted to pass the EI- in this way addressing affective strategies (Journal: Week Three). Finally, in their journal entry for Week Two, which was concerned with social strategies, the participants described their experiences of informal conversation and interaction with native speakers.

A study by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) that investigated the variables affecting the students’ choice of language learning strategies shows a sample consisting of 1,200 undergraduate students who were studying French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Italian at a large Midwestern university. Their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-three. The majority of these students were in their first or second semester of language study, twenty-three percent were in their third or fourth semester, and five percent were taking higher level courses. The main instrument used to assess the students’ learning strategies was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, also referred to as SILL (Oxford, 1986). It consisted of 121 items that required the learners to indicate how frequently they used certain language learning strategies. The learners responded to the items in a multiple-choice fashion from almost always to almost never, on a five-point scale.

Two research questions guided Oxford and Nyikos’ study. The first question was “what kind of strategies do university foreign language students report using?”, and the second question was “what variables (sex, course status, motivation level, and so on) influence the use of these strategies?” (p. 293). So their purpose was specifically geared to investigate the students’ language learning strategies, and what variables influenced
their use. In contrast, the main purpose of this journal study was to learn about the ITAs’ SE learning experience, that is, what was it like for the ITAs to learn SE in a 104.5 SE course. Another difference in this study is that journal writing was the primary device used to glean the participants’ SE experience. Also, I did not use the SILL nor any other inventory of learning strategies, because I collected documents about the participants’ SE from the speaking practice sessions, video presentations, and EI. Additionally, I conducted three interviews with the participants in order for the participants to expand and clarify their journal entries.

Another difference is that this study’s sample consisted of five participants—all Asian graduate students taking SE courses as training to become ITAs. The motivations for studying the L2 were also different. In Oxford and Nyikos’ study, seven out of the ten learners were studying the foreign language as a graduation requirement while for thirty percent of them, language study was an elective. The participants in this study were required by the university and this state’s law to take SE courses before undertaking teaching responsibilities in their departments.

However, there also seems to be a similarity between these two studies. For example, a finding in Oxford and Nyikos’ study was that motivation had a powerful influence in the strategy choice of the participants. In particular, those students who were more motivated used learning strategies more frequently and specific kinds of learning strategies more often than did the less motivated students. In addition, the students who elected their language study used learning strategies more often than those who were required to take it for graduation. Their findings about motivation confirmed Gardner’s (1985) statement that “Attitudes and motivation are important because they determine
the extent to which the individuals will actively involve themselves in learning the 
language . . . .  The prime determining factor is motivation” (p. 56). As an aside, Gardner 
further explains that the concept of motivation is “ concerned with the question ‘Why 
does an organism behave as it does?’” (p. 50). He adds that we can infer that an individual 
is motivated on the basis of two classes of observations. “ First, the individual displays 
some goal-directed activity, and second, that person expends some effort” (Ibid). The 
activities that the learner displays toward achieving their language learning goal are the 
strategies that he/she employs to accomplish the goal.

Returning to this journal study which also supports Gardner’s statement, I 
observed goal directed activity and effort on the part of the participants that indicated 
they were motivated and using strategies to improve their SE. For example, several of 
the participants participated actively in class activities and discussions. They also created 
opportunities to use SE with me before and after class and with other native or nonnative 
speakers. Moreover, they discussed in their journal entries and interviews the things they 
were doing to improve their spoken language (Journal: Week Six). So, similar to Oxford 
and Nyikos’ finding, motivation also played an influential role in the ITAs’ SE learning 
in this study. However, I did not do an analysis of the participants’ frequency of strategy 
use nor the particular variables affecting learning strategy use, because the focus of this 
study was not on learning strategies, but rather, the SE learning experience of ITAs. 
Three of the participants in this journal study described the financial pressures they were 
facing in their departments to pass the EI. Therefore, they were instrumentally motivated 
(had external factors) to pass the SE requirement. As their instructor, I observed their 
active participation in class, and they also discussed in their journal entries and interviews
the other strategies they were using to improve their SE. Unlike some of the participants in Oxford and Nyikos’ study who were motivated in their language study because it was an elective choice, in this study instrumental motivation, that is, SE was a requirement in order to receive financial support from their departments; thus, a powerful influence and incentive to learn SE and improve it by using learning strategies.

To summarize, the learning strategy research was helpful in designing the journal topics for this study and also in analyzing the participants’ data. Journal writing and learning strategies share a close relationship with each other, because they focus on the learner and the process of language learning. Journal writing is a self-observation tool used to uncover the beliefs and strategies of the learners and also trains them to utilize learning strategies in their language learning. Learning strategies are ways in which learners process information so that their learning is “easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Learning strategies are divided into two main categories- direct and indirect-depending on the involvement of the target language. Direct strategies are subdivided into memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, whereas, indirect strategies are subdivided into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. In this study, there were examples of these strategies in the participants’ data. I also discussed how the strong influence of motivation on the language learning process was similar in this study to Oxford and Nyikos’ (1989) study.

Summary

I began this chapter by providing definitions of key terms that are frequently used throughout the chapters of this dissertation. I also explained the pronunciation guide that
is provided in the preface of this dissertation for the phonetic symbols that appear in this study’s data. Then, I continued the chapter by reviewing selected SLA and ITA research that played an important role in the design, analysis, and interpretation of this study. The main related research areas that were reviewed included: ITA research, journal studies, and learning strategies. In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I refer to other important and relevant research that helps explain and interpret the participants’ data. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the methodology that was used to design this study.
Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the methodology that was used to design this study. I will begin with discussion of the qualitative approaches that I chose for the study. This will then be followed by a description of the site and participants, researcher role, data collection methods, verification, data analysis, and narrative. This chapter will provide the methodological background for the five case studies that will be presented in Chapters Four (Cases 1-3) and Five (Cases 4-5).

Phenomenological and Case Study Approaches

The original design of this study was based on a phenomenological approach. With this approach in mind, the purpose of this study was to describe and explore the five participants’ spoken English (SE) learning experience and what meaning they made of their experience. A researcher following this approach, “engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated . . . in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies- to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Having taught in the Spoken English Program (SEP) for five years, this study cannot be completely free of subjectivity. Therefore, I will describe the biases that I bring to the study in the section on the researcher role.
My interest in the phenomenological approach was its harmonious interaction of mind and body in the research process. As Polanyi (1961; as cited in Grene, 1969) states:

Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body, and the complex responses of our body to these impacts. (pp. 147-148)

Merleau-Ponty (1962) makes a similar comment:

Perception becomes an ‘interpretation’ of the signs that our senses provide in accordance with the bodily stimuli, a ‘hypothesis’ that the mind evolves to ‘explain its impressions to itself’. (p. 33)

More importantly, phenomenology is based on the perspective of the research participants by gleaning the essence and meaning of the experience from their vantage point. In this study the research question, “What is it like for perspective ITAs to learn Spoken English?” was an attempt to derive the participants’ meaning of the experience. Actually, the other four research questions and the eight weekly journal topics that the participants wrote about also attempted to gather the meaning of their SE learning experience. So, this interest in discovering the participants’ essence and meaning of their language learning experience was the main use of the phenomenological approach in this study.

Phenomenology began with the philosophical ideas and writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician, who began writing on the topic in 1913 and continued until his retirement (Creswell, 1998). Later scholars such as, Alfred Schutz, Aaron Gurwitsch, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty contributed to and modified Husserl’s work on phenomenology, but they never questioned the basic concepts of this philosophy (Dukes, 1984). As George Nakhnikian, one of the translators, indicates in the introduction to Husserl’s book, The idea of pheonomenology (1990), phenomenology began as Husserl’s attack on psychologism. Psychologism is defined as “the attempt to reduce the fundamental laws or rules of logic and mathematics to psychological generalizations about
the ways in which people actually think” (Ibid, p. x). Furthermore, unlike empirical psychology which is concerned with causal explanation of psychological acts, phenomenology is more concerned with describing the essence of psychological acts (Ibid, p. xii).

In addition, Moustakas (1994) highlights some of Husserl’s main points of phenomenological research, which include a focus on the appearance of things, a concern with wholeness, meaning derived through intuition and reflection, and descriptions of experiences. Husserl uses the greek word Epoche, the first step in the phenomenological process, to describe refraining from judgment when looking at things (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). An important point that Moustakas (1994) emphasizes about Epoche is that, “Although the Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases” (p. 90). The Epoche process tries to encourage an openness to perception through reflective-meditation. In reflective-meditation the researcher is receptive to preconceptions and prejudgments, but s/he does not hold on to them. In other words, the researcher allows subjective thoughts to surface and flow freely through consciousness but is careful not to be swayed by them (Moustakas, 1994).

After the researcher has bracketed his or her own experiences, the second process known as Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction, can begin. In this second process, “phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 33-34). In the third process, referred to as Imaginative Variation, the aim is to arrive at the essence of experience. The essence of an object, situation, or person is achieved by looking at all the possible angles or Horizons as Husserl refers to them and then synthesizing them into a whole. In this study, I tried to provide as much description of the participants’ SE learning experience from the journal

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entries, interviews, fieldnotes, membercheck notes, video presentation notes, speaking practice notes, and Exit Interview (EI) notes in order to provide rich descriptions, capture as many possible angles of their experience, and ensure reliability and validity.

In addition to the phenomenological approach, I also supplemented the research design with a case study approach. Louis Smith (1978) defines the case as a “bounded system” (as cited in Stake, 1994, p. 236). To elaborate on the definition, “A case study . . . is a detailed examination of one setting, one single subject, one single depository of documents, or some particular event” (Bogg, 1986; as cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 195). Furthermore, as Stake adds “the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (1994, p. 245). The bounded system of this study was the individual participants and their SE learning experience during the Winter Quarter of 1999. Because a case study is also characterized by thick description, searching for patterns of meaning, triangulating data, purposeful sampling strategies, and making the report into a story (Stake 1995, 1994, 1980; Creswell, 1998), the five case studies of the participants in Chapters Four and Five are stories of their SE learning experience that are thick in description, created from multiple data sources, and filled with patterns of meaning.

In summary, the underlying foundation of this study was a phenomenological and case study design. The main purpose of the phenomenological approach was to gather the participants’ experience of their SE learning, and the objective of a case study design was to report their experiences as individual stories. Their stories are filled with description, derived from triangulating data, and then followed by discussion of the main patterns of their SE learning experience. In this study the research questions and journal topics were deliberately created to uncover their SE learning experience.
Site and Participants

The study took place at a large Midwestern university, here to be called State University. Mainly recognized as a research university, it offers a variety of graduate and undergraduate programs. Because of the strength of various graduate programs, State University attracts a large number of foreign graduate students. During the Winter quarter of 1999 there were 9,166 graduate students enrolled on the main campus, and of this number, 2,189 or 24 percent, were international students (Graduate School statistician, personal communication, October 2000). According to State University’s Graduate School report (February 1999) and an article in the capital city’s daily newspaper (February 17, 1999), this university continues to recruit and admit international students because of a shortage of American graduate students especially in engineering and science. Many of these international students are supported by their departments as teaching assistants (TAs), research assistants (RAs), or university fellowships.

A 1986 state law (Teaching Assistants’ Oral Proficiency Policy Act) requires prospective international students whose responsibilities include classroom teaching, lab instruction, tutoring, or direct student contact to certify their SE proficiency before beginning their teaching duties. The State University’s SEP, an English as a Second Language (ESL) program unit in the College of Education, services these prospective international TAs (ITAs). I chose this site because of my three years teaching experience, at that time, in the SEP and also because of my familiarity with the director, staff, and other SE instructors. I was granted permission by the SEP director to conduct this study in my classroom (Appendix A: Letter to SE director). The director was also supportive in helping me develop the journal topics, providing historical and current information about the SEP, and editing the description of the setting and program. The possible benefits that the SEP gained from this study include: a) renewed interest and motivation for students who were
multiple repeaters in the 104.5 SE course, b) additional fluency practice for the ITAs who participated in the study, and c) instructional implications for the SE 104.5 course because of the increased awareness and reflection by ITA learners of their SE.

The total SEP student enrollment for the Spring 1998 - Winter 1999 period was 693 (SEP Director, 1999). According to SEP demographic figures in the Winter of 1999, the college distribution included engineering, math and physical science, biological sciences, and social and behavioral sciences (mostly economics). Students in chemistry, computer and information science, and electrical engineering comprised 30 percent of the SE Winter student enrollment.

Other demographic information (SEP staff meeting, personal communication, February 1999) across all SEP courses during Winter 1999 revealed 61 percent males, 39 percent females, and 80-85 percent Asian enrollment, which has been consistent over several quarters. In particular, the Asian enrollment includes 62 percent Chinese, 24 percent Korean, nine percent Taiwanese, two percent Indian, two percent Japanese, and one percent other.

The SEP offered a total of 17 sections in Winter of 1999. This total includes sections of 104, 104.5, 105, 105 arranged, and 693P45 (individualized pronunciation tutoring with a SE tutor) classes. The data I collected were from a SE 104.5, 12:30-1:18, class that met Monday through Thursday from January to March of 1999. The focus of the 104.5 course is on pronunciation, fluency development, and field-specific speaking and presentation practice. Additionally, the students discuss their video presentations in tutorials with the instructor, they meet weekly with the instructor for speaking practice, and do weekly community contact assignments where they speak with native speakers on a variety of topics. The 104.5 students also have an opportunity to meet one hour weekly with an American conversation partner offered by the SEP Conversation Partner program (CPP).
I was the instructor for this class. My teaching responsibilities included a 48-minute lecture, weekly ten-minute speaking practices, four tutorials during the quarter, two in-class diagnostics, conversation warm-up for the students before their EI, and three hours as a 104 Exit Interviewer during the tenth week of the quarter.

In the original design of the study, I planned to utilize a purposeful sampling strategy, that is, to select ten students for the class in order to maximize variation of ethnic background, field of study, gender, and the number of times the students repeated the course. “Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). The class size for the SE courses is generally from ten to twelve students. This number is manageable for teaching, and I thought this would also be true for collecting sufficient data and managing it. I consulted the 104.5 course coordinator about using a purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the students for my 104.5 section. The course coordinator places students in the various sections of the class during the first week of the quarter. There were 52 students enrolled in 104.5 during Winter Quarter of 1999, with four sections offered at 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 1:30 p.m.

The 1:30 class was a special class oriented to grammar- 50% of these students were Korean and multiple repeaters. In the 11:30 class there were also some students who needed to work on grammar and whom the coordinator described as having a bad attitude. The 10:30 class had less than ten students because the instructor for that class was teaching two SE courses. The coordinator selected ten students for the 12:30 section based on my request for diversification of ethnic representation, majors, and gender. However, some students on this class list were unable to enroll in the course because of time conflicts and move-ups to the SE 105 class. Therefore, due to these factors this study was not able to achieve variation of ethnic background. There were eight students enrolled in the class and
one audit student. The class consisted of two Chinese female students (economics and geological science), three Korean males (history and economics), two Korean females (family resource management), one Japanese male (agricultural economics), and one Taiwanese male (chemistry). Five of these students volunteered to participate in the study. Three participants were female (two Chinese and one Korean), and two participants were male (Korean and Japanese).

During the data gathering period, the SEP was housed on the first floor of the eastern side of the university’s football stadium. Currently the program is located in another campus building. Spoken English courses in Winter 1999 were held in two main classrooms in the stadium- a smaller room on the first floor and a larger room on the second floor. Both classrooms were furnished with a mounted videocassette recorder (VCR) camera, VCR player, a television (TV) monitor, an overhead projector, a transparency screen, blackboards on three sides of the room, a table and chair, and student desks. Currently classrooms utilize an identical setup.

All SE instructors utilize small tutorial rooms with a small table, two chairs, and a TV monitor with VCR to view and discuss the students’ videotaped presentations. During the video presentation tutorials, the instructor and student critique the student’s pronunciation, delivery, eye contact, and organization, and also practice pronunciation. The tutorial rooms are also used to administer SPEAK tests to incoming international students in the Spoken English program.

The beginning and end of the quarter are very busy times for the SEP. Before classes begin and incoming students are enrolled in courses, they take the SPEAK test to determine their placement. The SEP office coordinator schedules and administers the test. For this test, the student is required to perform various speaking tasks which are recorded onto a tape. This test is about 20 to 30 minutes long. After the student has completed the test, the trained and calibrated SEP staff (usually full-time SE instructors and also lecturers
who have undergone the training) listen to the student’s cassette and evaluate their pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and overall comprehensibility. Usually two instructors listen to the tape and give it a total score. Another instructor may also listen to the tape if there is a large discrepancy between SPEAK scores given by the two instructors. The largest number of SPEAK tests are administered before fall quarter commences. However, new students take the SPEAK test throughout the quarter too and the full-time instructors determine their SPEAK score. The only time they are not administered is during EI and Mock Teaching Test (MTT) weeks.

Two diagnostics, a three minute impromptu topic and an accent inventory of a passage that the student reads, are administered to 104 and 104.5 students during the first week of class. Spoken English 105 students read an accent inventory and deliver a three to five minute prepared presentation. These diagnostics confirm the student’s SE placement as determined by the SPEAK test score. Spoken English instructors then rank students on the two diagnostics, and the SE director makes a final decision regarding any possible move-ups from 104 or 104.5 to 105. As a result, class enrollment usually stabilizes during the second and occasionally third week of the quarter.

During the second week of the quarter the CPP gets under way. A full-time SEP instructor coordinates the CPP with one or two undergraduate SEP student workers. The CPP staff visit classes, describe the CPP, and hand out information. Enrolled SE students are encouraged to sign up for an American conversation partner. The students who participate generally meet one to two hours a week with their partner and discuss their class assignments and other topics of mutual interest. The CPP staff and SE instructors always suggest that they discuss language and cultural topics. Matching students with a partner is finalized by the third week of the quarter. A CPP reception party is scheduled one afternoon of Week Three where students can meet with their conversation partners and SEP staff.
In the ninth and tenth weeks of the quarter SE 104 and 105 instructors finish the last 45 minute tutorials with students and write final student reports before students take their EI or MTT. During the tenth and finals weeks, as classes end, instructors conduct warm up conversations with 104 and 104.5 students before the EI, instructors in pairs conduct EIs, and the SEP full-time staff evaluate MTT for 105 and 105 arranged students. All SE pronunciation tutors and SE instructors participate in videotaping the MTT during Week Eleven. During this time the SE office coordinator schedules appointments for results of the EI, providing prep room testing materials for students before the MTT, and scheduling appointments for MTT results.

The pass/fail rates on MTTs in the Fall quarter of 1998 for 105 were 68 percent certified, 14 percent conditionally certified, and 12 percent not certified (SE staff meeting, personal communication, February 1999). Those not certified repeat 105 and possibly work with a pronunciation tutor. The pass/fail rates in the EI for 104 and 104.5 for that same quarter were 41 percent passed to 105, 58 percent went on to 104.5, and one percent remained in 104.

In contrast to the busy rhythms of the beginning and end of the quarter in the SEP, the third through eighth weeks of the quarter have a calmer schedule. The class schedule for SE 104 and 104.5 during these weeks includes three video presentations by students, three 45 minute tutorials outside of class time, fluency activities, pronunciation practice, listening exercises, tape recorded assignments, and mid quarter reports on student progress.

The director of the SEP has been with the program from its inception in 1986. She has kept the program on target with changes in testing and ITA development. Her educational background is in English, linguistics, and foreign and second language education. She publishes and presents papers regularly on ITA testing. The director manages to keep the program integrated, organized, and in pace with the rhythms of the quarter. Her strength is the rapport she builds with students, staff, tutors, university
departments, and the ITA research community. At the time of the study there were four full-
time staff members- three with a background in linguistics and one with TESOL (Teaching
English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification. There were also two lecturers, two
graduate teaching assistants, four TAs as tutors, and two part-time instructors. Currently,
there are four full-time staff, four lecturers, three graduate teaching assistants, four TAs as
tutors, and two lecturers as tutors. The pronunciation tutors are graduate students from the
department of speech and pathology. They work individually with SE students primarily
from SE 105 and 104.5 courses who need more focused work on pronunciation or fluency
related problems. The students meet with their pronunciation tutor twice a week for
45 minutes.

The SEP stays in regular and close communication with the students’ departments
for purposes of prioritizing student enrollment, testing, certification, student progress, and
any special needs of the student and his/her department. To sum up, I have provided a
description of the setting, program, and participants of this study. Next, I will describe
my researcher role and the biases that I brought to the study.

**Researcher Role**

The role of researcher in the classroom was a balancing act with the role of
instructor. My role was as a participant observer. Adler & Adler (1994) describe the
various roles researchers can assume when doing qualitative research. One of these is
complete membership role, that is, “those who study scenes where they are already
members or those who become converted to genuine membership during the course of their
research” (p. 380). My researcher role did not interfere or disrupt my teaching nor the
students’ learning, because all of the data was collected outside of the classroom (journal
writing and interviews outside of class time). Several years ago, I conducted an action
research study in a beginning level Italian university course that I was teaching. The
experience of doing research in class and the interplay of reflection and action with feedback from the students, was a positive learning experience. Even though this study did not have an action research design, there was reflection, intuition, and sense making.

I would like to provide some personal and professional background that shaped and influenced my role as researcher. I received a BA (1983) in Spanish with a secondary provisional teaching certificate and a bilingual endorsement from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. After receiving my BA, I continued on to a Master’s degree (1988) in Spanish Literature at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. I held a TA position in the Spanish department during the four years I worked on my MA. Upon completion of my MA, I was a lecturer in Spanish for one year at the University of Michigan in Dearborn, Michigan and three years at Wayne State University. As a lecturer, I was responsible for teaching three basic level Spanish courses per semester. In Fall of 1992, I resumed my graduate studies to pursue a Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education. During the time that I was working on my degree, I taught as a part-time Spanish instructor for nine months at a community college, a TA in the Spanish (three quarters) and Italian (two quarters) departments of this Midwestern university, and as a TA in the SEP.

My first main bias toward the study is my teaching experience in the SEP. I have taught in the program for seven years, and it was three years at the time of the study. This experience has been positive and enriching. The linguistics courses that I had in Spanish and English helped me with the phonetic content of the SE courses. Furthermore, the director, staff, and instructors encouraged and fostered my growth and confidence teaching in the SEP. As a result, I have had a strong loyalty to the SE staff and program. I believe the program is helping perspective ITAs to improve their pronunciation, develop cultural awareness of the American undergraduate classroom, and learn teaching skills that will help facilitate comprehensibility, rapport, and learning in the classes they will be teaching.
Despite my personal experience with the SEP, I tried to remain open and interested in the participants’ experience learning SE in the 104.5 course as a researcher and instructor in Winter Quarter 1999. I did this by establishing rapport with the participants in the classroom, tutorials, and speaking practices. Prior to the interviews, I read the participants’ journal entries and thought about information that I wanted the participant to elaborate on or clarify. Furthermore, during the interviews, I listened carefully, rephrased what the participants said, and summarized their responses, so that they felt comfortable talking about their SE learning experience. For example, during the first interview with the Korean, female participant (Ho Yeon), she explained that the SE requirement was tedious and stressful for her. It was hard to stay motivated, because she had repeated the 104.5 course several times. She added that the SEP should be more like the ESL composition program at State University, because there were no stressful assessment measures in those courses. In the notes of her interview, I wrote about my defensive feelings about these comments during the interview. I was aware of these feelings at that time, but I tried to remain open and encouraged her to talk about it.

In addition, I also have a personal bias toward the research topic which stems from my personal experience learning English as a nonnative (NN) speaker and from my professional training in Foreign Language Education. First, my personal experience learning English as a second language (L2) began when I six years old. My family and I immigrated to the United States in 1967. Like my other family members, I did not have any prior knowledge of English. I was placed in first grade. I recall my school experience from October to June of that first year as being visual, silent, and foreign. There was no ESL instruction at the school nor did I receive any extra help to learn English from the classroom teacher.

I remember listening but not understanding anything, not talking, falling asleep in class, and feeling, dressing, and looking physically different from the other children. A
funny anecdote that my mother told me was that when she and my father, who was learning English, went to visit the teacher at a parent/teacher conference that year, my classroom teacher told them that I was such a good student, because I was always quiet! In the field of L2 acquisition this initial period of listening and not talking when learning a L2 is referred to as “the silent period”.

In the second and third grades, I recall going to see the speech therapist twice a week while the other children remained in the classroom. I did not like going to speech tutoring, and I felt ashamed that I had to go. At that time, I did not understand how the pronunciation practice was benefiting me. Moreover, at the beginning of third grade, I was placed back into second grade because my language ability was low, and it was affecting my learning in other subjects. I cried and felt ashamed again. Gradually my English improved and my accent sounded more American. Having resolved the language problem, I began to experience a growing identity crisis the more acculturated I became to the American culture. A part of me wanted to be and do like all of my other American high school classmates. On the other hand, I was losing much of my speaking ability in Italian, and I was in denial about it. My undergraduate and graduate studies have helped me bring peace and balance to that identity crisis.

Another bias has been my professional training in Foreign Language Education as a doctoral student and also as a student of foreign languages. In theory and practice in this field, both as a student and instructor, the value and benefits to language learning using monitoring, reflection, and metacognitive strategies are apparent. In formal language learning of Spanish and Italian, I constantly monitored and reflected on spoken language, especially grammar, word choice, situation appropriateness, and pronunciation, and used strategies to create opportunities to use the language in and outside of the foreign language classroom. As an instructor, I have tried to incorporate my own experience learning foreign languages and the theoretical background into my teaching. I try to encourage my SE
students to become more aware of and monitor their SE by asking questions about their progress and difficulties in their video presentations during their tutorials. I guide their further learning by asking them to identify areas they want to improve and the strategies they will use to make the improvements in the presentations. I have observed in my SE classes that by helping the ITA learners become aware of their SE and setting learning goals, they begin to see their progress and control their own learning. More importantly, they develop more confidence as speakers.

In addition, my motivation for learning and teaching Spanish and Italian was integrative, that is, I did not learn these languages because I was required to, needed funding for my education, nor to obtain a job (these would be examples of instrumental motivation). Rather, I learned them because I liked the cultures and people.

A final bias toward the study was that I dated a Korean male graduate student, who was also learning SE- both through formal instruction and informal interaction with native speakers. I have become more understanding of students’ difficulties, frustrations, potentialities, and limitations in learning SE. He has made me realize that the students’ SE learning potential is always there, but it requires time, practice, effort, and motivation for its development.

Retrospectively, four main biases toward this study have been presented. The first is my loyalty and positive experience in the SEP. Second is my own experience learning English as a NN speaker as a small child. Third, I presented my experiences as a foreign and L2 learner, practitioner, and researcher. The last bias is that I have socialized with a Korean graduate student who was learning SE both formally and informally. All four biases represent my personal interest and motivation for conducting this study. One possible impact was to make this study more meaningful and emotionally engaging for me. Another possible impact was that I became more sensitive and understanding of the
participants’ SE learning experience, which may have in turn made them feel more comfortable relating their experiences. Furthermore, my experience in the SEP gave me confidence to carry out the study and also to establish rapport with the participants.

Data Collection

Before I describe the data collection methods that I used in this study, I would like explain how the study was introduced to the SE 104.5 class that I taught, and whenever necessary, I have interspersed the research methods that were utilized. I introduced the study during the first week of the quarter by telling the students that I would be collecting data for my dissertation about their SE learning experience. I distributed a letter (Appendix B) which described the objective of the study, the data collection methods, and the expected benefits of participating in the study. The previous quarter I had obtained permission to conduct the study from the university’s Human Subjects Office as a way of ensuring that the nature and procedures of the study were ethical and would not harm the students in any way. Furthermore, I explained that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they had the right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. Also, their participation would not affect their class nor EI performance. I gave those students who were interested in participating a participant release agreement to sign and turn in to me.

Initially, four female students turned in their participant release agreement. However, one of them moved up to the 105 class, and could not participate in the study. I was concerned that this small sample was not enough to conduct the study. During the second week of the quarter, I provided the class with more information about the study. In particular, I prepared a transparency that defined a journal and explained the instructions for writing the journal entries. (Prior to this class discussion, each of the three female participants had received a folder with written instructions for writing the journal entries and a list of the journal topics [Appendix D].)
I also reviewed the benefits of participating in the study, which included reflection and awareness about their experience learning SE, fluency practice, and the opportunity to participate in a qualitative study. Finally, I told the students that I would give each participant $25 for participating in the study. This was an incentive to attract more student participants and to also compensate the participants for their time and support. Later it was decided that each participant would receive $30-ten dollars after each interview. At the beginning of Week Three, a male Japanese student decided to participate in the study, and that same week a Korean male student, who had entered the class the previous week, also became a participant. Therefore, by the end of the third week of the quarter, there were five participants—three females and two males—from a class of nine students. At that point, I was satisfied with the size of the sample from this class. All five participants remained in the study throughout the quarter. They completed all the journal entries and participated in the three interviews.

The participants’ and SEP’s anonymity was maintained during the study and in reporting of the data in the dissertation. For any other future publications, it will also be maintained. I have used a pseudonym to refer to each participant in the reporting of the data. Their real name with their pseudonym is kept in a file folder in my personal residence. When making reference to them as a group, I mainly used the term “participants” and sometimes I also used “students”. I used the personal pronoun “I” when referring to myself as the researcher and instructor in the SE 104.5 course. In addition, confidentiality of the data was maintained during the study. The majority of the documents were organized and stored in file folders in my personal residence during the data collection period and presently. I kept a notebook to record my classroom observation field notes in a desk drawer in my university office in order to record notes directly after class, and I brought it home with me on the weekends. Moreover, I did not discuss the study with my SE and
other ESL colleagues while it was in progress. Information about the study was given to the SE director in brief, informal written and oral reports before (Appendix A), during, and after completion of the study.

Data was collected during a ten week period of the Winter quarter of 1999 (January to March). There were three main methods of collecting data, namely documents, interviews, and classroom observation fieldnotes. The documents collected included journal entries by students and researcher, speaking practice notes, video presentation notes, 104 or 104.5 EI notes, and membercheck notes (Appendix G: Excerpts of Speaking Practice, Video Presentation, EI, and Membercheck Notes). The journal entries were eight weekly journal topics about their SE learning experience that the participants reflected on, wrote about, and submitted. Originally, there were ten journal topics (Appendix D) - one for each week of the quarter - but in the fifth week of the quarter, I revised them to eight topics so that the participants could complete them by the end of the quarter. Week Six and the first part of Week Eight journal topics were combined. The following were eliminated: a) the topic for Week Nine, b) the second question for Week Five, and c) the third question for Week Eight.

The journal topics (Appendix C) were pilot tested in a SE 104.5. The class consisted of 10 prospective ITA learners (one Argentinean female, two Koreans - male and female, one Taiwanese female, one Japanese female, and five Chinese males). During two class sessions in October of 1998, the students were placed in groups of three and asked to read and discuss the readability and clarity of the 13 journal topics and then write their comments and suggestions. This was followed by a five minute class discussion about their feedback. The outcome of the first pilot was that several of the questions had to be reworded. For example, in the original question for Week Seven, I used the word “identity”, but the students did not understand what I meant, because that word was too ambiguous and general. The second question for Week Eight also had to be rephrased,
since the students were not clear about the terms, “reflection” and “awareness”. After discussing these comments with the SEP director, I reworded the questions for Weeks Seven and Eight.

In writing the journal entries, the participants submitted a one or two page entry, either by e-mail, handwritten, or typed, each week for a duration of eight weeks. I read their entries, but I did not write responses to them, because I wanted to avoid making evaluative judgments about the content of their entries, and also I lacked the time to write responses. Their journal entries were discussed during the three interviews that I conducted with the participants (Appendix E). The length of the journal entries varied among the participants. Some provided longer and descriptive responses while others were brief and general. The writing in the journal entries seemed to match their speaking ability.

For example, the Japanese male participant had the longest entries- on average about one to one and a half pages. His interviews also lasted longer than the other participants’, provided more detail, and sometimes meandered from the topic. One of the Chinese participants usually wrote short entries, but during the interview she was asked to elaborate about her entries. The Korean male participant was evasive or constrained in some of his journal entries, and it was necessary to keep him focused on the topic during the interviews. Basically, the three interviews covered the same topics and questions that the participants wrote about in their weekly journals. Therefore, the interviews served as a venue for the participants to elaborate, clarify, or change any of the responses they made in their journal entries.

As the researcher, I also wrote journal entries for the same topics that the participants wrote about, because I wanted to be aware of my own biases of the topics. The participants and I benefited from the journal writing in several ways. First, it was an efficient, structured means to collect information about the participants’ SE learning experience, which could later be pursued during interviews. Second, the journal writing
encouraged the participants to reflect on, develop awareness of, and evaluate their SE learning. Journal writing also served as an understanding of the daily teaching and learning process of ITA learners in SE courses.

The second data collection method was interviews. The interviews took place in a tutorial room of the SEP at the convenience of the participant. The first interview was during Week Five, the second during Week Eight, and the third during Week Eleven of the quarter. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were prepared in the Spring and Summer quarters (1999) after the data was collected. The interviews were about 25 minutes long. However, one of my participant’s interviews usually lasted from 30 minutes to an hour because he was talkative and enjoyed discussing unrelated topics.

Because the sample size was small, I interviewed all five participants with the intent to gather a variety of information about their SE learning experience (Appendix F: Excerpts of participants’ interviews). The participants were interviewed three times and one participant four times concerning a journal entry for Week Seven. I utilized a semi-structured format so that I could keep the interviews short, flexible, and related to the research questions of this study. I tape-recorded the interviews with the participant’s permission, and I also took notes. The interview notes were important for noting my observations and comments about the interview and participant, which would also be used as a reference for subsequent interviews, analysis purposes, and as data for the narrative in their case studies. I began each interview with a warm up to put the participant at ease. Afterwards, I asked the participant to explain, elaborate, or clarify the journal entries that they had written about, and this was sometimes followed by related questions from the interview protocols (Appendix E). At the end of the interviews, I summarized the participant’s information and asked if there was anything s/he wanted to add or change. Finally, I thanked the student and asked if s/he had any questions or comments.
For one of the Chinese participants, I was unable to summarize her first interview, because she needed to leave early. In the third interview, I also did not summarize the Japanese participant’s content since the interview had taken about an hour and five minutes, much longer than the other participants’ 30 minute interview. For all the participants, I prepared notes of their journal entries for Weeks One through Six and Interviews One and Two and at the beginning of Interview Three, I did a membercheck about this information with the participants (Appendix G: Excerpt of Membercheck Notes). The membercheck notes for the Korean male participant were thorough, descriptive, and typed. Moreover, during the interview, I had him read the notes and give me feedback. Because of lack of time, I wrote briefer membercheck notes for the other participants. Also, instead of having them read the notes, it was more efficient to ask them questions about unclear information or something that I wanted confirmed in the notes.

In addition to the student documents and interviews, I recorded classroom observational fieldnotes (Appendix F: Excerpt of Fieldnotes). I wrote fieldnotes for about 30 minutes after each class period in a journal notebook in my office. However, sometimes I was unable to because of tutorials with students or other teaching responsibilities. The fieldnotes kept as their focal point the main research questions of the study. Each entry has a date and a brief title to characterize the class period. Initially, each entry was divided into two sections. The first section included descriptive notes in as much detail as possible. The descriptive notes created an objective picture of each class session and included “portraits of the informants, a reconstruction of dialogue, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, and activities” (Creswell, 1994, p. 152). Any comments or asides that I made were bracketed as OC (observer comment).

The second section of each fieldnote entry was reflection. In this section I recorded my personal thoughts about each class period as described in the descriptive notes section. Reflective notes provide the researcher an opportunity to record and reflect on personal
thoughts such as, “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 121). Admittedly, I was not always able to write this section of the fieldnotes because of the lack of time due to my teaching responsibilities, especially as the quarter progressed. I also wrote research methodology notes to record the changes that were made to the original design and research methods of the study. I provided explanations about why the changes were made. For example, I noted the changes in the sample size, purposeful sampling strategy, revisions to the journal topics, and an additional interview for one of the participants.

To summarize, in this section I explained how the study and journal writing was introduced to the participants and the three data collection procedures that were utilized in this study. In my researcher role as participant observer, I recorded observational fieldnotes after each class period. Each entry included descriptive notes and sometimes also reflective notes. I also recorded research methodology notes of changes in the research design or methods of the study. Another data collection procedure was collecting student documents, which included: weekly journal entries on assigned topics, video presentation notes, speaking practice notes, and EI notes. Interviews of a semi-structured format were the third data collection method. There were three interviews about 25 minutes long and a fourth interview for one of the participants. The questions and discussion during the interviews were related to the participants’ journal entries.

**Verification**

I used the following strategies to ensure both internal and external validity in the study (Creswell, 1994):

1. *Triangulation of data* - There were multiple sources of data collected. These sources included: a) documents (journal entries from students and instructor, EI notes on students, speaking practice notes, video presentation notes); b) interviews (transcripts of interviews between students and instructor); c) observations (fieldnotes from the classroom, interview notes, and research methodology notes); and d) document analysis.
2. **Member checking**- I received feedback from the participants during the data collection and analysis process to ensure that my interpretations of their SE learning experience matched what they experienced.

3. **Long term observation**- I was at the research site collecting data and teaching in the 104.5 SE class four days a week for a ten week period in the Winter quarter of 1999.

4. **Clarification of researcher bias**- My own biases associated with the study have been stated in Chapter One in the section “Personal Interest” and also in this chapter under the heading “Researcher’s Role”.

Similarly, rich, thick, and detailed descriptions helped ensure external validity. In the phenomenological approach thick description is important and necessary in order to capture the many different multiplicities of something or someone (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, as van Manen (1990) states, “Phenomenology is, on the one hand, description of the lived through quality of lived experience, and on the other hand, description of meaning of the expressions of lived experience” (p. 25). Rich and detailed description also characterizes the case study design. It creates the story narrative of the case study. Finally, thick data in any type of qualitative research design can create transferability for the reader, that is, the reader makes judgments about whether the data can be applied to his/her own situation or personal experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Measures were also taken to ensure reliability. Three techniques were utilized to strengthen the study’s reliability. First, I provided to the dissertation committee a detailed account of the focus of the study, my researcher role, the participants’ position and basis for selection, and the context from which data was collected. I also explained in a letter to the participants the objective of the study, an explanation of their participation, the data collection methods, and benefits of their participation. Second, triangulation of data collection methods helped strengthen reliability as well as internal validity. There were enough sources of documents- journal entries, speaking practice notes, video presentation notes, and EI notes- in addition to the observations I made in my fieldnotes, to confirm
much of what the participants talked about in the interviews. Additionally, the interviews, interview summaries, and membercheck notes were important for having the participants expand, clarify, or make changes about what they had written in their journal entries.

Likewise, in Interview One and Three, I asked them how thinking and journal writing influenced their learning of SE. In the third interview, three participants initially misunderstood the question, and therefore, I had to rephrase it. Despite this misunderstanding of the question, they generally confirmed what they said about this question in the first interview. As far as reliability of the journal topics, the journal entries that the participants submitted provided data for this study’s five research questions. Moreover, the interviews had a semi-structured format, thereby making it easier to stay on the topic of the journal entries and have the participants explain, make changes, and provide examples. The third technique to ensure reliability was a detailed account of the data collection and analysis methods used in this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process as data was collected, interpreted, and written up (Creswell, 1994). Fieldnotes, journal entries, and interview transcripts were viewed continuously and notes were written to begin to find themes and patterns in the data. The majority of the analysis was done during the Fall quarter of 1999. Content analysis of the data was the main analysis procedure used. Originally, I planned to use a phenomenological approach to analyze and interpret the data, but it was confusing to write up with all the different sources of data that I had. Therefore, I simplified the process by using content analysis. In other words, I read and reread the participants’ data and my fieldnotes searching for themes. The coding procedure for reducing the data was based on the journal topics that the participants wrote about. A list of the topics is as follows:
I kept a handwritten list of these topics with the number coding. After reading the participants’ data many times I further subdivided the coding into a, b, c, d, e, f, et cetera to indicate themes for each of these topics and also included the participant’s first initial to indicate if this theme applied to him/her. Later, I prepared another handwritten list for each participant, which included the topic number code, the alphabet code for themes, and where the theme could be found in the data. For example, the first topic coding for one of the Chinese participants reads as follows: (1) – a) Week 8, p. 1; Interview 1, p. 1; Interview 3, pp. 1-2; b) Interview 1, p. 1; c) Interview 3, p. 1; f) Week 8, p. 1. This entry means that for the effects of reflection on learning, four themes are found in her journal entry for Week Eight and Interviews One and Three. The other participants’ lists are also coded in this way.

From these journal topic themes I then prepared a summary of the main patterns that the participants shared in common with visual displays and written descriptions of this information at the end of Chapter Five. I followed a similar coding strategy for my fieldnotes. I used the number coding for the journal topic and the alphabet coding for the themes. As I read each fieldnote entry, I wrote the date on another handwritten list with the number code, alphabet code, and participants’ initial, and page number of the entry. Finally, I reread several times the main patterns for each of the journal topics, and in this final content analysis of the data, there were five main themes that emerged from this study. These five themes and how they relate to the study’s research questions are discussed in Chapter Six.
Interpretation of the data, which I included in the description of the case studies and also in discussion and interpretation in Chapter Six, is influenced from my teaching experience in the SEP, my prior foreign language teaching experience, and my theoretical background in foreign language education. Interpretation involved providing explanations and examples, accessing teaching experience, presenting insights, making connections with relevant research, and taking intuitive risks about the meaning of the participants’ SE learning experience. Furthermore, it was helpful to rely on my connoisseurship (Eisner 1991) of the SEP, 104 and 104.5 course content, ITA students, and professional growth teaching SE courses to understand the participants’ SE learning experience, write descriptive narratives of their experiences, and delve into deeper interpretation of their data. In other words, because I was the participants’ instructor as well as the researcher, I was perhaps able to provide deeper interpretation of their SE experiences that quarter.

In sum, this section has explained the data analysis procedures that were utilized in this study, which consisted mainly of content analysis. Number coding identified journal topics and alphabet coding represented themes for the journal topics. A summary of the main themes for each of the journal topics is presented in Chapter Five and the final themes that emerged from this study are discussed in Chapter Six. Finally, I discussed my interpretation of the study’s data.

The Narrative

Reporting of the data is based on a case study design. Chapter Four will present Cases One through Three, and Chapter Five will cover Cases Four through Five and a summary of the patterns. The narrative effuses with description, explanations, interpretation, and a story-like quality. I presented a case study of the SE learning experience of each participant. Each case study begins with a profile of the participant followed by a description of their experience learning SE- the cases were developed from journal entries, interviews, fieldnotes, speaking practice notes, video presentation notes, EI
notes, and membercheck notes. The narrative of these case studies is organized by journal topics. Several narrative conventions were used in the case studies such as, varying the length and the embedding of quotes, emphasizing the senses in the descriptive text, and including explanations, interpretation, and summaries where I deemed it necessary in order to provide deeper insight and richness. Finally, the narrative of the case studies ends with a summary of the main themes, with visual displays and written descriptions for each of the journal topics, and previews research related to the themes.

Summary

In summary, the main purpose of this chapter has been to describe the methodology of this study. In particular, I discussed the two methodological approaches that were the foundation of the study, namely phenomenology and case study designs. Then, I described the site and participants, my researcher role, data collection methods, verification, data analysis, and narrative. Now, I would like to invite the reader to read and reflect on the SE learning experiences of the five ITA learners, who participated in this study, from my SE 104.5 class in Winter quarter of 1999.
CHAPTER 4
CASE STUDIES 1-3

Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to describe the spoken English (SE) learning experience of three of the five Asian students in the SE 104.5 class that I taught during the Winter quarter of 1999. In Chapter Five I will describe the SE learning experience of the remaining two participants and summarize the five case studies. In the summary of Chapter Five, I will highlight the common themes from the students’ responses to the journal topics and also introduce the research relative to these themes. In this study I was attempting to explore and describe the ITAs’ experience learning SE in a 104.5 SE classroom at a large Midwestern university. The participants were two Chinese females, one Korean female, one Japanese male, and one Korean male. I will use a pseudonym for each student: 1) Tadashi /tadaSiy/ (see preface for list of pronunciation symbols), Japanese male; 2) Xiaolan /Sawlan/, Chinese female; 3) Qizhen /tSiydZEn/, Chinese female; 4) Ho Yeon /howy´n/, Korean female; and 5) Seung-Ho /siyNhow/, Korean male. Their ages ranged from mid 20’s to early 40’s, and their length of time studying in the U.S. also varied. Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho indicated that they used their native language at home while they were studying at State University. I think that probably Tadashi and Ho Yeon also used their native language at home based on the data they provided.

During the quarter, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Seung-Ho wrote eight weekly journal entries and talked in interviews about their SE learning experience. I read their entries and wrote follow-up questions for the interviews. However, I did not write
comments in their journals. With Xiaolan and Tadashi, sometimes I had to ask them to identify some words in their journal entries, because their writing was not always legible.

A case study approach was utilized to organize and present these students’ experiences, thus yielding five parallel case studies. I selected this method of reporting, because it brings together each student’s experience of learning spoken English in a holistic fashion via a narrative format. As Stake (1995) explains, “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Merriam (1988) defined the particularistic of a case study as the “focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (p. 11). In this study, the focus and boundary for each case is the participant and his/her SE learning experience in the 104.5 class during Winter 1999.

Moreover, with this approach, “We try hard to understand how the actors, the people being studied, see things” (Stake, 1995, p. 12). It is important to mention that Stake developed a view of case studies that drew from naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods. These other reporting methods are also present in narrative of the five case studies, especially the phenomenological, which was the original design of this study.

With the student’s data will be my comments, interpretation, and explanation where it will provide further insight and enrichment for the reader. In this way, the reader will glean a more meaningful perspective of these students’ idiosyncratic experiences. “Ultimately, the interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasized more than the interpretations of those people studied, but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening” (Stake, 1995, p. 12). In addition to the primary data sources, which were the journal entries, classroom fieldnotes, and interviews, whenever it was possible, I tried to present a multiple perspective of their SE experience by: a) speculating possible reasons
for the participants’ behavior, b) presenting the views of the exit interviewers, SE director, and peer participants, or 3) referring to the membercheck notes, speaking practice notes, and video presentation notes.

These five case studies will include: a) a brief profile of the student, b) followed by data from journal entries, interviews, fieldnotes, membercheck notes, Exit Interview (EI) notes, and class performance notes, and c) summaries throughout the narratives. The underlying organization for the students’ data stems from the eight weekly journal topics. A list of the journal topics is provided below:

**Week 1**
What difficulties do you feel you have when you speak English?
In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?

**Week 2**
Describe the experiences you have had learning spoken English in your native country and in an English speaking country. Both:
- a) Formal Instruction
- b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers

**Week 3**
Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?
How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in spoken English in order to teach?

**Week 4**
When you communicate with other people in English:
- a) What do you pay attention to in their spoken English?
- b) What do you pay attention to in your spoken English?

**Week 5**
Describe the areas in your spoken English that you are . . .
- a) seeing progress in;
- b) not seeing improvement in.

**Week 6**
What types of things are you doing to improve your spoken English?
What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?
Week 7  As you are learning and using spoken English, what changes do you recognize in your attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way you feel about yourself?

Week 8  Describe several new things you have learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.

How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?

Case Study One: Tadashi

Profile

Tadashi, a Japanese male in his early thirties studying agricultural economics had been in the U.S. for almost two years. In Interview Three he recalled an anecdote about when he arrived in this city for the first time. He was picked up by a dormitory shuttle. There was an American “guy” from Boston with him. In conversation with the American, Tadashi stated that this was his first time here and that it must be a good place. But the American responded that there was nothing to see or of interest in this city. “Oh compared to Boston, . . . [this city] must be rural”, Tadashi said (pp. 14-15). The American did not understand what he said. “How many times I said rural, rural, yeah he can not, ‘What?’ ‘Can you spell it?’” (Ibid). Finally Tadashi spelled the word for him.

Tadashi received a BA in law and a MS in agricultural economics in Japan. Before coming to study in the U.S. he worked for three years in a Japanese engineering company that produced automation systems. While he worked there, he was required to take the company’s conversational English classes several times a week.

At State University Tadashi was a teaching assistant (TA) in a computer lab in the College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Science. He enjoyed listening to jazz, playing tennis, and travelling. Tadashi visited ten countries in Europe and a few in Asia.
He rented an apartment in a house near the east side of the campus. When he had time, he went down to the first floor of the house and talked to the friendly seventy-year old woman who was his landlady.

His large, clear-framed glasses were a perfect fit for his square-shaped face. He had wavy, dark brown hair with strands of gray. His beard was thin, and his cheeks had a reddish glow. There was a heartiness to his build, and his voice could project high effortlessly when he wanted the listener’s attention or was expressing his opinion. He generally wore casual pants and shirts in earthen tones such as stone white and lavender. His favorite color was blue.

He often arrived to class ten minutes late and barely above a whisper excused himself for being late as he walked to his seat across the room. Sometimes he was taciturn in class, but other times he was witty and humorous. His warm laugh was quite contagious.

Logic was very moving for him, especially when he read a mathematical or economical theory, or for that matter, anything that included logic. In Interview Two he briefly explained a simple logic example to me:

Yeah it doesn’t have to be very difficult one. For example,
uh you know a=b and b=c that means a=c. . . . This is very easy but beautiful. . . . Yeah I like this kind of logic yeah. (p. 12)

Finally he believed that a “female target” in a foreign culture was a great incentive for learning another language because for example, if he wanted to have an American girlfriend, he would have to study English harder. This would be “bigger [and] better than [an] academic incentive yeah; stronger than [an] academic incentive” (Interview Two, p. 20).

So far, I have presented a profile of Tadashi, that is where he is from, his educational background, work experience, current university studies, his interests, a description of his physical appearance, and some characteristics that define his personality. At this point, I would like to turn to a description of Tadashi’s experience learning SE in the 104.5 class. His journal entries and interviews, as well as my fieldnotes and class performance notes, are
the resources for this description. As a way of enriching his data and providing deeper insight, I will include comments, explanations, or interpretation where I deem it necessary.

**Spoken Language Difficulties**

Tadashi described the difficulties he had when he spoke English. In particular, he focused on the sounds that are used in English but not in Japanese.

(Journal: Week 1, p. 1)

It is very hard for me to pronounce correctly vowels and consonants we don’t use in Japanese. As you know, there are many those kinds of sounds, such as th, r, l, dZ, z and so on. And we have only 5 vowels, a, i, u, e, o [these vowels have some similarity with the American English vowels: a, iy, uw, ey, and ow].

Earlier when I recounted his anecdote of the conversation with the American from Boston, he said that he had to spell the word “rural” in order for the American to finally understand him. Incidentally, when I was transcribing that section of Interview Three, I also misunderstood what he was saying. I thought he said “ruler” instead of “rural”.

Furthermore, in my class notes of his speaking practices, video presentations, and in the EI notes for Autumn 1998 and Winter 1999, there were frequent examples of his problem distinguishing /r/ and /l/ in words. For example, in the following words he substituted /r/ with /l/, that is, /r/ → /l/: road, wrong, ready, concentrated, boring, nonrival, preference, price, reflects, and rate.

Moreover, Tadashi clarified that pronunciation was not an isolated matter. Listening and being able to hear the subtle difference in similar sounds in English is very important in pronouncing sounds correctly.

(Interview 1, p. 2)

T: I I I can not pronounce pronounce correctly and uh that that makes me uh impossible to distinguish when I listen. And uh because I can not distinguish when I listen, I can not pronounce correctly with the yeah with the uh how can I say that yeah ‘vicious circle’.
As he already mentioned, he had problems distinguishing these similar sounds in English: (th, s, S), (l, r), (v, b), and (ˊ, œ, a, ø) (Journal: Week 1, p. 1). His major pronunciation problem during the quarter had been with /r/ and /l/. Several times in the speaking practice notes I had written “good /r/” when he had pronounced it correctly in a word. Tadashi had made some progress with these consonants, but he was not always consistent in their pronunciation. In the EI notes for Winter 1999, the interviewers felt he was fluent enough to move onto SE 105, however they wrote that he needed a SE pronunciation tutor for his frequent consonant substitutions. From my six years of teaching experience in the SE program (SEP), I know that SE students who have difficulties with /r/ and /l/ or /n/ and /l/ will inevitably need more focused practice with a tutor, for one or more quarters, while also taking SE courses.

In addition to pronunciation, Tadashi had problems in composing sentences when he spoke in English. In Japanese the sentence structure is subject/ object/verb (SOV), whereas in English the structure is SVO. Tadashi discussed this marked difference in composition of English sentences.

(Journal: Week 6, p. 1)

Recently, I found that one of the reason for the difficulty in communication in English is from difference in composition of language. Even when I clearly understand the pronunciation and words of the speaker, it sometimes takes time to grasp the meaning of sentence if it is a difficult topic. This is true when I read books in English. I think the bigger the difference in the composition (can I say grammer [his spelling] ?) of a language from English, the more difficulty we tend to have in getting to think in English. I suspect this factor must not be smaller than that of difference in pronunciation.

When Tadashi spoke English, he was also concerned about using the proper expression. He thought that his vocabulary was not sufficient (Journal: Week 1). Interestingly, he reflected on some reasons why he had difficulty using appropriate words and expressions.
(Interview 1, p. 1)

T: I it takes me some time to hit on the uh uh find good expression to express my idea. So but but maybe there must be I I thought at that time I thought that there there must be some some reasons for that and uh. One of the reason is that I lack experience and uh another reason is probably I must be translating from Japanese to English uh unintentionally. So but I’m not fu fully accustomed to thinking in English. But uh uu and uh thir thir third point I mentioned was that’s not only when I speak in English. But even even when I speak in Japanese. I I’m like this uh sometimes I’m stuck, and I have to think and that I looking for what or and uh sentences. So in it’s pretty difficult in if it’s a problem of my thinking, practice, or my way of my way of speaking, my style of speaking. It it’s beyond your problem, right? It’s not not the responsible for the uh English teacher I think. So in short time, it’s difficult to uh to detect the problem. I think it’s uh three points (inaudible).

Even though it may have taken him some time to “hit on” a good expression or word, frequently in class, the journal entries, or interviews, he used some interesting vocabulary, colloquial expressions, or displayed a cultural savviness in his thinking. In other words, he really challenged himself to talk like a native speaker. Here are some examples of the words and expressions he used:

- vicious circle
- chicken
- female target
- think tank
- it must be in vain
- in the same way
- Oh, really?
- vague questions
- inferiority
- interracial
- roughly speaking
- multiplier effect
- the schedule is pretty tight
- as I said, economically speaking
- one to one
- and [the] sentence does not come out naturally.

In Interview Two it seemed that he was trying to recall the word “pushy”, but he kept circling around it with other forms of the word.

T: He’s very pushing guy, because he
F: He’s what kind of guy?
T: Pushing, pushing, push
F: Push, he’s pushy?
T: No no no, push. Push student to study hard.
F: Oh, so he pushes students to study hard. (p. 18)

In Interview Three he asked me to explain the difference between freedom and liberty. I was dumbfounded. How do you explain the subtle difference between those two words? In Japanese there is only one word for these words (Membercheck Notes and
Interview Three). Also, in the 104.5 EI for Winter 1999, one interviewer wrote that he had “impressive vocabulary”. A final example, indicative of his cultural savviness, comes from my class fieldnotes of February 1, 1999. I was asking the students a variety of questions to practice certain consonant sounds, and one of the questions had been, “Who’s a young king?”. Tadashi responded, “Bill Gates. . . sort of”.

To summarize, Tadashi described four major areas of difficulty in his spoken language. The first area was pronunciation. He had problems distinguishing the following consonants: (r/l, T/s, dZ/z, v/b) and vowels: (´, œ, a, ø). The most noticeable substitution was r/l. Second, because he could not consistently pronounce these sounds correctly, it was impossible to hear the difference in the sounds. His third area of difficulty was composing English sentences. Unlike Japanese sentence structure which is S/O/V, English sentence structure is S/V/O. Finally, he struggled with using appropriate words and expressions to express himself because he lacked experience, and he was not accustomed to thinking in English. However, there was a lot of evidence from his interviews, journal entries, my fieldnotes, and EI notes, that his vocabulary was quite impressive.

Formal Instruction and Interaction with Native Speakers

Tadashi’s formal English instruction in Japan emphasized reading, writing, translating, and especially grammar (Membercheck Notes and Interview Three). There was no focus on pronunciation or developing conversational skills in English. (Similar to Tadashi’s situation, many of the Chinese and Korean students who take the SE 104 or 104.5 course tell me that they have studied English in their native countries for about ten years, but they are still not able to speak English when they come here.)

(Interview 1, p. 7)

F: Okay. And what was the emphasis when you were studying in school, for example in junior high,
T: Mm hmm
F: high school,
T: Mm hm
F: and the university? What was the emphasis as you were learning
T: Oh
F: English in those?
T: Reading and uh translating
F: Ah
T: English to Japanese, Japanese to English,
F: Alright
T: and grammar
F: Uh huh
T: Uhmmm, I think not not pronunciation, not intonation, not not conversation be because teachers also have problem uh in conversation.
F: So they couldn’t converse then uh really well?
T: I think so yeah
F: Uh huh
T: yeah yeah they must have problem.

Moreover, during the three and a half years Tadashi worked for a Japanese engineering company, he was required to take the company’s English classes three times a week. The fact that he had to study English, did not make him eager to learn (Member-check Notes and Interview Three). Sometimes he had the classes in the evening after work. Actually in the evening he was too tired to concentrate on English. At other times, he had the class during work hours. The day class was much better because then he did not have to work, and it was easier to concentrate.

In these English classes he learned conversational business English, primarily how to talk to foreign clients, do business presentations, and explain the company’s products, in other words, making yourself understood by the customer. In contrast to his formal English instruction, he learned how to communicate in English, however, there was still no emphasis on pronunciation.

The company’s English teacher was a Japanese American female from Oakland, California. She had been in Japan for more than ten years and was accustomed to the Japanese way of speaking English. While in class or unofficially when they dated, she never corrected Tadashi’s pronunciation.
(Journal: Week 2)

I also had a good American friend in the company. She was an English instructor hired by the company. The problem of conversation with them was that they are basically good Japanese speakers. The English teacher is a Japanese American, and she stays in Japan for more than 10 years. Her English was very easy to understand because of her pronunciation, and she had so good an ear that she can understand very poorly pronounced English. She didn’t try to correct us. I mean she is too accustomed to English spoken in Japanese way.

(Interview 1, pp. 13-14)

T: Yeah she never corrected my mm she must know that my pronunciation problem of
F: Right
T: /r/ and /l/ and /th/
F: Right
T: /th/ sound or /Z/, /dZ/ sound
F: Uh huh
T: or man many but she never corrected.
F: Hmm
T: The she she publically she she could understand my English. . . .

For example, in Japan if he had said the word “rural”, his English teacher and other American friend would have understood him (Interview 3), but when he arrived in the U.S., he could not make himself understood by native speakers (Membercheck Notes and Interview Three). To his chagrin, he had realized that his English was not as good as he had thought. In Interview One (p. 14), Tadashi talked about this misconception of his English speaking ability.

T: Yeah yeah and I thought I thought I can speak English well
F: Hm
T: but because I could uh converse with her [company instructor] with him [another American friend he met in Tokyo] and her
F: Uh huh
T: so I misunderstand my English has no problem but uh when I came here I I I found that
F: (Laughs)
T: my my English is not so good.
F: Uhh that happens to a lot of natives a lot of people who come here.
T: Oh, really?
F: Yeah
T: (Laughs)
F: You’re not the only one! You’re not the only one Tadashi!
So, Tadashi had been under the impression that he spoke English well. In addition, Tadashi discussed his interaction with native speakers while he had been in the U.S. At the beginning of the Winter quarter, Tadashi was dating an American undergraduate student, who he described as being an artist from a large Midwestern city. If you recall, he had explained to me in Interview Two his theory about a “female target” being a better incentive to study English. Technically speaking, he had a muse for his English language learning, but she had not been very understanding and compromising towards other people and cultures. Usually the topics of their conversations were about her interests.

(Interview 3, pp. 37-38)

T: Uh I think he sh I think she must be thinking the same way, but I thought I’m compromising much. I try to adjust to her interest. I uh so I like music, and I like uh I don’t not so much but I I like art, pictures
F: Right
T: and uh we can talk about them yeah abo music or pictures or plays or movies. But but she never talks she never wants to talk about my topic my my field, about environment, or my uh economics or she just never try to enter that topic. So that that’s that’s not too good practice I thought and uh and another thing I find was that she she’s more insistent, insistent tuh uh wants to claim her idea and uh kind of showy showy. . . . I don’t know because I’m a Asian or it it’s just a very difficult problem to me to understand how or to be good friends with her. So I didn’t feel comfortable. She’s sometimes she looked, sounds arrogant to me.

As a result, he had stopped dating her, and his new “female target” was a Chinese economics student. In general, it was difficult for Tadashi to find the time to speak English with native speakers. His studies and TA job had priority, and when he wanted to unwind, he felt more comfortable being around Asians.

(Journal: Week 6)

I know I should speak and listen to English as much as I can (especially with the native speakers). However, it’s not easy to do so under the current situation [referring to his studies and TA job]. . . . Even when I want to relax I tend to spend time with Asians. I do not know why, but I can relax more with them than with Americans.
In summary, his formal English instruction in Japanese schools focused on reading, grammar, and translation. Tadashi attributed the lack of emphasis on pronunciation and conversation to the fact that the teachers had a problem speaking English. On the other hand, he had an opportunity to learn conversational business English while he worked for a Japanese engineering company. Nevertheless, his pronunciation was never corrected nor did he learn about the nuances of spoken English. Understandably, he had been under the impression that he spoke English well until his first shock in the U.S. with the word “rural”. Finally, his interaction with native speakers at State University had been limited because of the priorities of school and TA job, and also because he felt more comfortable being around other Asians.

Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview

Students in the economics department at State University are known for having a rigorous class schedule during their first year of graduate study. Most prospective economics international teaching assistants (ITAs) take 20-25 credit hours including a SE course. During Winter quarter of 1999, Tadashi was taking three economics courses and SE 104.5. He also worked 20 hours a week as a TA in a computer lab on campus. Basically, he answered students’ questions, which were difficult to understand because they spoke too fast, and offered assistance if they needed it. Tadashi never discussed the financial pressure to become certified in SE, however, he did talk about his tight class schedule and TA work. It was a hard for him to take four economic classes, work as a TA, and also take a SE class. But he had to because he was required to pass the 104.5 EI (Journal: Week 3).
In general, Tadashi felt that State University’s requirement for ITAs to be certified in SE was a necessary process, otherwise, he would have had more problems communicating with undergraduate students. However, he would have liked some consideration of his demanding class schedule and 20 hours a week of TA work.

(Journal: Week 3)

Even now, I have trouble with communicating with undergraduate student when they speak fast. If I did not do anything I must have more problems. But, the schedule is pretty tight. I was required to take 4 classes and to work as a TA. It depends on the person. I do not know why. If they take that into consideration, it is very reasonable to take English speaking classes.

I got a sense of his busy schedule, because he usually arrived ten minutes late to class, and for the third interview he was an hour late, because he had been correcting students’ papers. He had also turned in some of his journal entries late. Sometimes two of them at a time. Moreover, by the end of the quarter, he still had not submitted the journal entry for Week Six. Even though I had discussed that journal topic with him during the second interview, I wanted to triangulate the data. So for several weeks, I toyed with the idea of whether or not to request the entry from him. Finally, I sent him an e-mail message requesting the entry. Tadashi e-mailed me the entry with this preface:

(Journal: Week 6)

I am kind of surprised to have this message from you. I planned to pretend to have forgotten this duty, and I expected you would not ask me to do it any more. But actually you were a much more stubborn, insistent and tough woman than I thought. I heard Italian women are very passionate and enthusiastic, but not sticky [I think he meant to say picky] at all. It seems that you have completely become a typical “mid-west” woman. (Don’t take it serious. I am just praising you.)

In summary, Tadashi was already a TA in a computer lab at State University and would have had more difficulty communicating with undergraduate students if he had not taken any SE courses. So in his view, passing the 104 EI and becoming certified in SE was
a necessary process. On the other hand, from a realistic point of view, he was feeling burdened by the demanding economic class schedule, TA job, and SE class. He would have liked more consideration of his time schedule.

**Communication Focus**

Earlier Tadashi had talked about the “vicious circle” he found himself in with English pronunciation and listening. Of course, if he was able to hear the difference in sounds, such as r/l, b/v, T/s, or s/S, he could pronounce them correctly. But he was often dismayed, because he could not hear the difference in these sounds nor pronounce them correctly. Consequently, he began to watch the mouth and lips of the speaker because sometimes it helped him guess the words that he had difficulty understanding (Journal: Week 4). In Interview Two Tadashi discussed this topic some more.

T: Yeah because if if I watch your mouth
F: Uh huh
T: /v/ and /b/ is clear. . . . But but when I only listen to the sounds, it’s sometimes not clear because Japanese doesn’t have /v/ sound
F: Hmm
T: yeah and /l/ and /r/ /r/ yeah this is . . .
F: Does that help when you watch a person’s mouth when for the /l/ and /r/?
T: Yeah of course yeah
F: Okay
T: Yeah I think so, and uh /t/ /th/ sound and /d/ or /s/i/. (pp. 1-2)

Tadashi also paid attention to the speaker’s facial expressions in order to detect the nuance of the message and understand what the speaker was saying (Interview Two). He
commented that generally American people use more facial expressions than Asians. For instance, if they are talking about some bad news, they look really sad or disappointed. In contrast, they look very happy when they are talking about something happy.

In his own SE, Tadashi focused on pronunciation, grammar, and not hurting or insulting his listener.

(Journal: Week 4)

I try to make myself understood as well as possible. I pay attention to both pronunciation and grammar [his spelling]. I also try not to hurt or insult the listener, because I am a chickin [his spelling]. I also try to be as logical as I can. But, these two are true even when I speak Japanese. They are from my character.

In Interview Two I asked Tadashi to explain what he meant by “because I am a chickin”.

(pp. 6-7)

F: And you also say here, “I also try not to hurt or insult
T: (Laughs)
F: the listener, because I’m a chickin”. Can you explain
T: Right
F: that a little bit please?
T: Uh basically I (laughs) I don’t like to argue I don’t like to fight with people. I’m I’m not good at argument or quarrel?
F: Or quarrelling?
T: Quarrelling?
F: Uh huh
T: You say? Yeah. I’m not good at that I I want to avoid that those situations as much as I can yeah. So that makes me uh feel that I should avoid to insult or hurt people.

He provided a cultural explanation of why he did not like to argue, that is the Japanese do not have the custom of arguing with people (Interview Three). Japanese style tends to be compromising. They think about group harmony. “We . . . tend to regard ourselves as a member of some community always, community or society or class, or family” (p. 23) and their position in the group. For example, if someone is a “senior” (older) then it is very difficult to object to his idea or opinion. Furthermore, they always care about the environment or circumstance of the situation. So if Tadashi were asked the same question in different situations, his answers would vary.
I found it interesting that in my reflective notes of Interview One, I had the impression that he had been saying things to please me. For example, when I had asked him about how the journal entries were affecting his learning, he had commented that before this he had not been aware of his problems or difficulties. His response seemed rather dubious, since in his previous SE 104 class he must have received feedback about his pronunciation during the tutorials with his instructor and also when he got his 104 EI results. Moreover, at the end of the interview Tadashi said, “I hope the information is helpful.”

In contrast, in my reflective notes of Interview Two (February 26, 1999), “He seemed quite a bit more open this time. He didn’t seem to be concerned with giving responses that pleased me.” In fact, he suggested that for Week Five I should have asked a more specific question.

(Interview 2: p. 4)

F: So you couldn’t reach a conclusion?
T: Right right, and uh I don’t want to criticize your question but if if this question may be very good for to to make uh students think or reflect
F: Hm
T: their English practice English ability, but uh conclusion itself is not does not make any sense I think, because uh it it depends how how you how you ob observe things. If if you
F: Okay
T: look this way and this way it it looks very different. Things are very different and uh
F: Hmm
T: uh especially uh about myself or for for themselves uh it’s very difficult to be objective. It so it’s not easy to uh correctly uh judge my progress yeah. So I thought many many things uh for this question for this question but I couldn’t reach any conclusion, but conclusion is uh is I can say nothing yeah.

In addition, at the end of the interview, he challenged me on the design of this study. I was astonished by his forthrightness. Unabashedly, he went on to explain why the design was weak. First of all, he said that five participants were not enough to generalize the data. I explained that this was not a quantitative study, but instead a qualitative one. Its purpose
was not to generalize. I tried not to react defensively, but that was exactly what happened.
Secondly, he said that I needed to redo the study because all my participants were Asian.
That made the study biased. I should redo the study and include students from other
countries so the data would be more varied. Later on in the quarter he challenged me again
about the small sample size of my study. He still insisted that I needed a larger sample size.

To summarize, when Tadashi talked with other people in English, he watched their
mouth and lips to distinguish similar sounds like b/v, T/s, r/l, and S/s. It was also helpful for
him to watch their facial expressions to pick up on the nuances of the language and to
acquire an understanding of difficult words. Tadashi felt that compared to Asians,
Americans show more facial emotions when they talk. In his SE Tadashi paid attention to
pronunciation, grammar, and being sensitive to his listener so as not to hurt or insult him.
He gave me a cultural explanation of why he did not like to argue or challenge other
people’s opinions. In Japanese culture group harmony is important- an individual is
defined as a member of a group. He added that you should not challenge someone who is
older than you. Nevertheless, his behavior seemed more complex than he may have
realized. He certainly was confident and open when challenging me on the design of this
study two times during the quarter and also telling me that a more specific question would
have been better for Week Five.

Areas of Progress

In general, Tadashi felt that he had made progress in expressing himself in English.
As he explained in his journal entry for Week Five:

I feel I made progress in expressing what I want to say. Of course it is not enough, but my current situation is much better
than it used to be. In addition, as you know I have lots of problems in pronunciation and my vocabulary doesn’t have enough variety.
Even with these problems I think my speaking skill improved because I am better at managing to find out expressions and
make sentences. (p. 1)
Tadashi would have been pleased to know that another female student in the class had also noticed his progress in SE. As a matter of fact, Xiaolan was an economics student just like him, and they had been in the same SE 104 class the previous quarter too. She had commented on his pronunciation improvement during her second interview with me.

(Interview 2: pp. 5-6)

X: Hmm. And I can see that uh several students in our class  
[paper shuffling]
X: really uh correct some their accent or correct some their pronunciation
F: So you’ve noticed that about some students in our class
X: Yeah
F: this quarter.
X: I think yeah I think
F: Hmm
Y: such as Tadashi, we were in 104 together. . . . I think uh you know I think Tadashi actually improved.

Later in the interview, Xiaolan added that the previous quarter when Tadashi had telephoned her, she could not understand his English. She was surprised by this because he had been in the U.S. for more than two years.

Furthermore, reviewing my class notes of his three video presentations, I also saw an improvement in his SE ability. I had written a lot of positive comments for Tadashi’s third video presentation, for example:

- great organization of content on the board, good explanation of decision variable, rate of speaking has definitely gotten faster, confident, organized, expressive about content, and your grammar has also improved.

In my fieldnotes of Tuesday, March 2, 1999, I discussed in more detail Tadashi’s progress in his third presentation. These are the notes that I had written:

His topic was ‘Solving a linear programming problem by using a graph’. He was organized and his speaking rate was faster and more fluent compared to the other two presentations. He substituted D → z, a → ow (problem), a → O(model, profit), T → s (nothing). He did a comprehension check 1/2 [way] through the presentation. He explained terms as he explained the steps. . . . There was a noticeable improvement in his grammar. He used the expression ‘in the same way’. He was confident, organized, and expressive about [the] content.
So Tadashi’s perception of his SE progress was confirmed by observations in my fieldnotes and class notes of his video presentations, and also by one of his peers in the SE class. Finally, as Tadashi put it, “I think I must be on the process of being a good speaker, listener. I hope” (Interview Three, p. 30).

**Strategies to Improve SE**

Students in the SE 104.5 class had weekly community contact assignments whereby they had to interview Americans on cultural or university related topics. These assignments encouraged the students to interact with native speakers of English in order to learn about American students’ university life and perhaps more importantly, develop their SE fluency skills. In addition to the 104.5 class assignments, Tadashi was trying to do other things to improve his SE. Although, he candidly admitted that his priorities at the time were his studies and TA job. It was hard for him to think about how to improve his English when his concentration was elsewhere. In spite of that, he tried to listen to the national public radio (NPR) program, “All Things Considered”, from four to six in the evening or sometimes “Car Talk.” Another effort he made to improve his SE was to talk with his landlady. (Interview 2, p. 14)

T:  Okay. And uh other things I’m doing uh yeah I try to talk to the owner of the house.
F:  Oh!
T:  Yeah. She’s she’s always at home because she’s old.
F:  Oh she’s an older person?
T:  Yeah, yeah over 70 I think.
F:  Ohh!
T:  I can’t ask her but yeah so (laughs) if I want to uh talk with uh native speaker
F:  Uh huh
T:  uh uh I should go to the first floor, and she’s there.
F:  Uhh
T:  Yeah
F:  Is she friendly?
T:  Yeah very very good good woman.
F:  Hm
T:  She’s very very good yeah and very understanding about foreign students. Yeah I think yeah.
Tadashi also utilized some compensation strategies to improve the comprehensibility of his SE during his video presentations in the SE 104.5 class. For example, he used the blackboard or transparencies and did comprehension checks with the audience.

(Interview 2, pp. 15-16)

T: If if my pronunciation is not clear they they can uh just watch the transpa
F: Right
T: rency yeah OHP [overhead projector]. And uh I think I’m and I sometimes stop and uh ask them [paper turning]
T: whether they understood or not this.
F: You did that in the last presentation.
T: Yeah yeah
F: You did a comprehension check.
T: Yeah, and I think I did in the first one.
F: The first one too.
T: Yeah yeah
F: Okay
T: Mm and
F: What made you decide to do that? What made you decide to do that?
T: Oh my my uh my class of uh microeconomics and statistic. It’s it’s it’s taught by the they are taught by the same instructor.
F: Uh huh
T: He he’s an Chinese.
F: Okay
T: He’s a Chinese and he he he always say, “Is it clear?” and “Do you understand?”
F: Oh
T: or “Do you agree?”. He’s very good guy, great guy. I really respect him. I must be affected by him.

Moreover, in my notes of his three video presentations, I noticed that his SE was comprehensible because he was organized, defined key economic terms, and provided examples for the concepts. In my fieldnotes of January 22, 1999 I had written the following about his first video presentation:

In doing his presentation he made reference several times to Xiaolan’s presentation [another economic student]. He used hand gestures and stood by the transparency machine as he spoke. His pronunciation didn’t have the clarity of Xiaolan’s, but he used good examples and the organization of the material on his transparencies helped the comprehensibility of his language.
In summary, Tadashi was doing things to actively improve his SE. Even though his class and work schedule were tight, he tried to listen to NPR in the evenings. He would also talk with the 70 year old American woman who owned the house where he lived. He made the video presentations more comprehensible, by using transparencies and the blackboard to organize his content. Tadashi also defined economic terms, provided examples, and did comprehension checks with the audience.

**Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality**

It seemed contrary that as Tadashi learned more about his English, he felt less confident. However, as Tadashi explained in the journal entry for Week Seven and Interview Three, the more he learned English, the more he realized that his pronunciation and listening skills were incorrect. When talking to Americans in Japan, he had felt much more confident with his English. His confidence in speaking English was nurtured by the illusion that his English was good. Tadashi could converse with his Japanese American English teacher and another American friend in Tokyo, and they seemed to understand him. They never even corrected his English pronunciation. Painstakingly, when he came to the U.S., he realized that his English was far from perfect. “Lots of times when I speak English, they can not I I can’t make myself . . . understood by native speakers, so yeah, especially uh /r/ sound yeah” (Interview Three, p. 14). Some day when he becomes a really good speaker and listener, he hopes that he will be more confident and comfortable speaking English (Journal: Week Seven).

Furthermore, Tadashi agreed that a talkative and sociable L2 learner tends to be a good speaker and listener in an L2. However, his language learning goal surpassed that. According to him, being able to express your own opinion in another language requires a different kind of character and skill.
Tadashi thought that the ability to express one’s opinion and argue in a L2 were influenced by personality and culture. He seemed to be persistently trying to overcome the external and internal limits to truly communicating in English.

“Why do foreign people say ‘yes’ to native speakers?” I asked Tadashi in the third interview. He laid out several reasons for this tendency. First, they feel an inferiority to Americans, especially white Americans. It seems to be an agreed practice. Secondly, they lack the ability to argue. Even though, they have the logic, they do not have enough
skill to quarrel. The third reason is they are lacking in experience and the custom of arguing. Japanese style tends to be compromising. This is also true for Koreans. Chinese are a little different, but they are also not fond of arguing like Americans. Finally, he attributed failing to argue to a language problem. “Yeah most of the time what I’m afraid is even though I express my idea, but when they ask uh detail question or difficult question . . . it sometimes hard to catch the meaning, and sometimes it’s hard to express to . . . answer these questions. So . . . that’s very . . . that prevent me from arguing yeah” (Interview Three, p. 30).

In summary, Tadashi felt that as he learned more about his English his confidence level lowered, because he became aware of his mispronunciations and listening difficulties. In general, he was hopeful that he was on his way to becoming a good speaker and listener. In his view, bravely expressing his opinions and ideas in English was a loftier goal than simply being a good speaker and listener. He discussed some cultural reasons why this goal was difficult to achieve.

_New Things Learned_

Reductions and deletions were several new things that Tadashi learned in the SE 104.5 class. He was especially attentive to the class lectures on intonation and reduction of sounds, because these provided him with “some hints about why native speakers’ sentences are not clear” (Journal: Week 8). I will discuss some of the reductions and deletions that Tadashi and his peers learned about in the SE 104.5 class. The textbook for this course was, _Sound Advice: A Basis for Listening_ (Hagen 1988).

For example, in SE some commonly reduced words are gonna (going to), wanna (want to), hafta (have to), and gotta (got to). In reduced speech, that is not careful speech, the medial /t/ and /k/ in the consonant clusters /sts/ and /sks/, are often deleted, and the /s/
sound is lengthened, for example:  **risks** /rɪsks/, **rests** /rɛsts/, first sing /ˈɜːrsin/. In the /ths/ cluster the /th/ can become a /t/ or /k/ or it can be deleted as in the following examples: **months** /mʌnts/, **strengths** /strɛŋks/, and **fifths** /fɪfts/.

Within a phrase or sentence, pronouns and auxiliary verbs beginning with /h/ such as he, his, her, him, had, and has will usually drop the /h/ and link with the preceding word: Can he go? /kæniˈəʊɡəʊ/, I told her /aɪˈtɔːld ˈr/. Has he done enough? /əz ɪdˈn ˈnənt?/. Another example of reduction is with past tense modals, that is a modal + have + past participle. The auxiliary “have” reduces to /ˈv/ before a vowel sound and /ˈv/ before a word beginning with a consonant. “They could have gone” sounds like /ˈdɛkiˈdʊgən/ and “I would have eaten earlier” sounds like /ˈaɪwʊd ˈv iˈɛntələr/.

Additionally, a medial /t/ surrounded by vowels and between a vowel and /l/ or /r/ is pronounced like a /d/, but much faster. This sound is known as a flap, because “the tongue tip touches the tooth ridge very quickly” (Hagen, 1988, p. 34). Here are some examples of words and phrases where this sound occurs: later, better, university, little, right away, what if, settle down, and I’ve got to go. A final example of deletion is with the consonant cluster /nt/. Many speakers usually drop the /t/ and use a flapped /n/ as in the following words: wanted, internet, appointment, shouldn’t, and enter.

In Interview Three Tadashi elaborated that even if you listen to the same sentence many times, if you are not aware of what is happening to the pronunciation or intonation, you can not catch the meaning of the sentence. But “if you let me know because this sound is . . . reduced, deleted, . . . yeah eliminated . . . that’s why this sentence sounds like this, then I . . . can . . . find . . . next time. **[T]he idea must be in my mind somewhere, and . . . I can refer to what’s happening there. . . .**” (p. 35). So it was very helpful for him to know about sound deletions and reductions in SE.
Effects of reflection on learning

Finally, I asked Tadashi, “How did writing the journal entries and doing the interviews about your SE affect your learning?” (Interviews One and Three). He responded that it was good practice to reflect on what he did when he spoke English. By doing that, he tried to be objective and insightful about his English. Otherwise, he never would have realized or thought about his pronunciation problems and the difference of sounds. Then, I asked him if he got that kind of awareness from his tutorials.

Generally, during the 45 minute tutorials the instructor and student watch the student’s video presentation and discuss problems related to pronunciation, grammar, and delivery. The purpose of this individualized feedback is to help the students develop an awareness, do focused pronunciation practice in the language lab or online, and begin monitoring their SE. Usually at the end of the tutorial, the instructor and student tape record troublesome words, phrases, or sentences from the student’s presentation, which the student can then listen to at home as Tadashi did.

When I get home . . . before I sleep I sometimes . . . listen to that tape and uh I just repeat . . . what you say uh yeah, like ‘problem’ (laughs) or ‘profit’ yeah. I do that yeah. It’s very good yeah, and I after you say that word and I after that I say for myself. And I can I found how different our pronunciations are. (Interview Three, p. 40)

Furthermore, Tadashi said that when he was pointed out pronunciation or intonation problems, he realized that these must have sounded weird or strange to native speakers. Without this feedback from the tutorials, he never would have realized that his English was not good. So it was a pretty humbling experience for him.

Unlike his other SE 104.5 classmates who did not participate in this study, he got a double dosage of feedback and reflection of his spoken language. For example, at the beginning of the third interview, I was doing a member check with Tadashi about the previous interviews and journal entries. My first question was, “Okay you say that your mouth . . . ‘can not move quickly enough to pronounce certain sounds, that is especially
true when an unfamiliar sound appears consecutively’. So when you say an unfamiliar sound, . . . can you give me an example of that?” (p. 1). He quickly enumerated some consonants: /th/, /f/, /r/, /w/, /v/, /s/, /z/, and /dZ/, /f/. He certainly seemed aware of his pronunciation problems.

In contrast, when I ask students during the tutorial, “What types of pronunciation problems did you notice in your video presentation?”, there are often several types of responses. The students may simply say that they had been too focused on the content to notice, or yes, they heard some problems without identifying any, or they may mention several pronunciation mistakes, but never assuredly listing a series of sounds. To summarize, Tadashi felt that it was good practice to reflect on his SE. As a result, he became attuned to his spoken language problems by writing, thinking, and talking about his SE in the journal entries, interviews, and tutorials.
Case Study Two: Xiaolan

Profile

Xiaolan was a Chinese female in her mid twenties studying for a Ph.D. degree in economics. She had been in the U.S. for six months. Although she had been admitted as a Ph.D. student, she was not really sure she could finish it (Interview One). Perhaps she would go back after two years with just a master’s degree, because she was going to be separated from her boyfriend, who was in China, for a long time. She talked to him regularly on the phone. They were planning to get married during the summer of 1999.

Having an accounting background, she had worked in a French bank for one year in China before coming to the U.S. It may be a problem for her to find a job in a state-owned company when she returns to China, because they only hire people directly from college or from other state-owned companies (Interview One). With her accounting experience, economics major, and speaking ability in English, she will have good work opportunities in a foreign-owned company since only few Chinese can speak good English (Membercheck Notes).

She was soft spoken and had a graceful manner. During her video presentations her gestures and movements were fluid and engaging. She had a calm presence and was quite comfortable teaching in front of a group, perhaps because her father was a French teacher. Xiaolan actively participated in class. Whenever I posed questions to the students, Xiaolan was often the first student to volunteer answers.

Her round face was framed by her soft, black shoulder-length hair that she wore parted on the side. The reddish, orange lipstick made her effuse with a simple, classic elegance. Xiaolan wore pastel colored sweaters with black cotton or brown colored pants and sometimes blue jeans with an off-white blouse that had a ruffled bodice. She had an intriguing red, silky string necklace that hid inside of her sweaters.
During Interview One, Xiaolan mentioned that she did not consider herself shy, but other people told her that she was too shy and should talk more. In Mandarin, her native language, she talked a lot with friends, but not with strangers. For example, during her trip to Florida, which was sponsored by the university group called International Friendship, she usually stayed quiet while the other people talked to each other. She enjoyed travelling and had visited other cities in the U.S. with this group.

Some of her vowel sounds, like other Chinese students, sounded British, for example, a → ɔ (model, profit, drop), œ → a (graph), a → ow (progress) (Video Presentation and Speaking Practice Notes). She could not find the difference between British English and American English especially with vowel sounds (Interview One). Often her SE was too formal, just like written English, as her conversation partner had commented the previous quarter (Journal: Week One). She was actually using the GRE vocabulary that she had learned. In preparing for the exam, they had to memorize 25,000 words in a period of three to six months (Journal: Week Two). As a matter of fact, her diligent preparation paid off. She received a high TOEFL score, which enabled her to be waived from taking ESL composition courses (Interview One).

When I spoke with her individually in tutorials or interviews, she had a confident manner and freely expressed her humor and opinions. In class she was also never afraid to speak and participate (Fieldnotes: January 20, 1999). In Interview One, Xiaolan told me that she felt more comfortable talking in English to students from Korea and Japan than she did with native speakers. Sometimes they would talk for one or two hours but with native speakers she could not find a common topic to converse about.

An example of her confidence was while I was warming up her and another classmate, a Korean female, before their EI. As a warm-up procedure, I was asking them some general questions to put them at ease. Xiaolan had gestured with her hands that she had “butterflies everywhere” (Fieldnotes: March 9, 1999). One of my questions to
Xiaolan was if she had called her boyfriend. The Korean student was surprised that Xiaolan had talked with him for three hours on the weekend. Actually, she was more surprised that Xiaolan had a boyfriend in only four months of being in the U.S. Xiaolan curtly responded, “Why are you surprised? He’s in China” (Ibid).

Spoken Language Difficulties

Regarding pronunciation, Xiaolan had problems with the following consonant clusters: /kw/ as in question, squirrel; /Zw/ as in usually; /dr/ as in draw, drawn, and /tSr/ as in natural (Journal: Week One and Interview One). The sound /Z/ gave her the most problems when she spoke English. In fact, everyone told her that she had difficulty with /Z/. One of the interviewer’s comments on her 104 EI said that she always made grammar and pronunciation mistakes because she tried to speak too fast- beyond her language communication ability. Her speaking rate in Mandarin was also fast, and her parents often reminded her to speak slowly so not to confuse the listeners (Membercheck Notes). Even though she could not speak English very well, sometimes unconsciously she spoke fast.

Moreover, Xiaolan talked about her “formalness” when speaking English. “My English conversational partner last quarter mentioned I cannot always find an appropriate word to express myself and my spoken English is too formal, just like written English. This may be because . . . I have learned English just through reading for so many years” (Journal: Week One). In addition, she had memorized a lot of words for the GRE and sometimes when she used some of these words, they seemed strange to native speakers (Membercheck Notes). So Xiaolan wanted to learn informal, casual English, that is, what words to use in casual talk. Despite this, her vocabulary was impressive. Here are some examples from the interviews and journal entries:
vehicle of communication, global idea, depressing experience, psychological obstacles, proper word, intentional learning, condensed language, language phenomena, subconscious thing, enhanced, seldom, precipitate, passive, enterprise, incentive, embrue, and meaningless; [several times she said systemly and systemically, when she was trying to remember the word systematically.]

To summarize, Xiaolan had problems pronouncing these consonant clusters: /kw/, /Zw/, /dr/, /Sr/, and especially the consonant /Z/. Sometimes, her pronunciation mistakes were a result of speaking fast. Another common problem was that her SE was too formal, like written English. She wanted to learn daily phrases and words that native speakers used in casual talk.

*Formal Instruction and Interaction with Native Speakers*

Xiaolan had two years of a formal SE class at Nankai University in China. The class was taught by a 22 year old American male who had just graduated from college. The last class before he returned to the U.S., the students asked him why he had come to China. His response was that his girlfriend had ended their relationship, and he wanted to go far away to forget her (Interview One).

Since there were about 25 students in that class, they seldom had a chance to speak with him directly. They were divided into three to four groups to discuss some topics. “However, it was really hard for us to express ourselves in English at that time; we usually discuss in Chinese (with sparsely English. Funny?” (Journal: Week Two). “Why do you think that happened, Xiaolan?” (Interview One, p. 7). Xiaolan explained that at that time their vocabulary was very limited, only perhaps 3,000 to 4,000 words. For example, everyone knew how to say, “What’s your name”, “Hello, are you feeling?” and “How old are you?”, but expressing their ideas was impossible.

Xiaolan also recalled the intense vocabulary preparation for the GRE exam (Journal: Week Two and Interview One). She had to memorize and read fast to enlarge
her vocabulary from 3,000 to 25,000 words in three to six months. As a result, these words were recognizable in context, but she seldom used them in her SE. In fact, if she had not taken the GRE, she would never have understood the journals and textbooks beyond the English textbook (Membercheck Notes). Xiaolan admitted that “most English words were passive” to her (Journal: Week Two). I was not sure what she meant by this. In Interview One she explained that her father, who was a French teacher, pointed out this problem to her. His vocabulary in French was no less than her vocabulary in English, however, the main difference was that he could use every word he wanted to, whereas she could only recognize words in reading. She found it impossible to use them in writing or speaking. “So that’s what you mean by passive then?” “Yeah passive. That it’s not mine, . . . it’s not mine (laughs),” she responded (p. 8).

When she first arrived in the U.S., she could hardly understand what people were saying (Journal: Week Two and Interview One). It seemed that their pronunciation was totally different from what she had learned in China. Furthermore, even though she tried to pronounce every vowel and syllable as clearly as possible, it did not work well. She realized that daily pronunciation was so different from what she had learned in the textbook. There were lots of reductions, deletions, and linking of words. Besides SE pronunciation, she felt nervous when talking to native speakers because they were like “judges” (Interview One). They knew all the mistakes she was making, whether her pronunciation was clear or correct, and if she was using the correct words. It was an interesting phenomenon that native speakers could not understand her, but somehow foreign students could understand each other.

In addition, Xiaolan added that it was not easy to find topics to talk about with native speakers. After “What good weather today!”, or “Have you done your homework?”, what should she say next? Xiaolan felt embarrassed that she could not find a common topic. Actually, Xiaolan was very talkative in Mandarin. Of course, this was partly
due to the difference in cultural background (Journal: Week One). Realistically speaking, it was more convenient to use Chinese, because there were so many Chinese students at the university.

(Interview Three, p. 6)

X: But here so many Chinese (laughs) students. We just after class we talk in Chinese. And lots of Chinese lots of some Chinese professor, we can ask our professor in Chinese. So, this is due to ourself. We sometimes reluctant to to use English. Of course, Chinese is more convenient to us.

F: This is when you talk about so you say that in your journal entries, ‘Although I’ve lived in the U.S., at least 60% of my language environment is still that of Chinese’.

X: Mm. My roommate is Chinese

F: Mm hmm

X: and my friends all my friend are Chinese. Therefore, and I can see that some Chinese students after perhaps they have been here for two or three years their spoken English still very bad.

In summary, Xiaolan talked about her formal SE instruction at Nankai University. The class was too large to speak English with the young American teacher. Often they discussed topics in small groups and sparsely used English. They were not at the level of English to express their ideas, just simple phrases and words. Additionally, she recounted the intensive vocabulary preparation for the GRE exam. Xiaolan recognized many words in context but was not able to use them in her spoken language. Initially it was hard for her to understand English when she arrived in the U.S. Later she realized that it was the deletions, reductions, and linking that had made English sound obscure to her. Another problem was that she felt nervous when talking with native speakers, because of her perception that they were judging her language and pronunciation. Aside from her nervousness, Xiaolan did not know what topics to talk about with Americans; it was difficult to find common topics of interest. Finally, from a realistic point of view, it was simply easier to speak Chinese with the many Chinese students and professors who were at the university.
Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview

In general, Xiaolan felt that the university’s requirement for international students to be certified in SE was indeed a necessary and reasonable one, since teaching was a kind of communication act (Journal: Week Three). So the first step was to express oneself clearly and freely in English. Moreover, the SE series for ITAs was well designed and helped them improve their SE abilities in every aspect.

Xiaolan enumerated several reasons why she wanted to pass the EI (Journal: Week Three and Interview One). First, it was a requirement in the economics department. In fact, if she could not pass the SE 105 Mock Teaching Test (MTT) during her first year, her stipend would be reduced 25%. The chemistry and economic departments were known for being exigent of their prospective ITAs. Recently, a chemistry student in the SE 104 class that I was teaching expressed similar sentiments. He was feeling pressured from his department, and if he could not pass directly into the 105 class, he would consider transferring to a chemistry department at another university.

Returning to Xiaolan’s situation, the economics department director said that if there was ever a class conflict of English and economics classes, she should choose the English class, that is, if she wanted to keep her income level (Interview One). So Xiaolan had no other choice. Although, she did not really think she could pass the SE requirement her first year.

There were a total of six Chinese “girls” in her department. All of them were first year students. The other five had passed SE 104 in the Fall quarter. Even though Xiaolan was the only one left, meaning that she had not passed to 105, she did not think she was the worst student. At the end of Fall Quarter 1998, when she got the results of her EI, she felt depressed because she had to retake 104. Incidentally, the EI notes for Fall 1998 indicated that she was on the borderline of 104.5 and 105. According to the interviewer’s notes, she
was a good communicator and fluent on a number of topics, but on the other hand, she needed to articulate more, and she had problems with vowel sounds combined with rhythm and grammar. The final decision was that she would go to 104.5.

Often, as in the case of Xiaolan, many SE 104 students perceive being in 104.5 as a sign of failure. They feel discouraged because they do not pass directly to 105. In general, only a small percentage of 104 students, from 20% to 30% in a class of ten or twelve, move onto 105. The majority progress to 104.5. The SE courses are designed to accommodate the language abilities of the students. Many of the incoming students’ Speak Test scores are in the lower or middle ranges and therefore, begin in 104, then continue with 104.5, and finally 105.

It is also important to mention that Xiaolan had personal and intrinsic reasons for her motivation to pass the EI (Journal: Week Three). One of the reasons was that she and her boyfriend were hoping to get married during the summer of 1999 in China. If she could not pass 104.5 during Winter quarter and 105 in the Spring quarter, she would not be able to go back to China during the summer, and they would have to postpone their wedding half a year. Another reason was that successfully passing the EI meant that she had really made progress in her SE. This had been one of her aims to come to the U.S. So she was eagerly looking forward to passing the interview.

In summary, Xiaolan felt that the university’s SE requirement was reasonable and necessary for ITAs. She had economic and personal reasons to pass the EI. First, her financial support from her department would be reduced 25% if she was not certified in SE within the first year. Second, if she did not pass 104.5 in the Winter and then 105 in the Spring, she would have to take a SE class during the summer, and therefore, she would not be able to go to China that summer and get married.
In other people’s SE, Xiaolan paid attention to the global idea. In Interview Two she explained that language was a vehicle of communication, that is, its purpose was to convey ideas and opinions. If she could not understand the whole idea of a sentence, then it was meaningless. For example, occasionally at the end of her two hour Economic class, she still did not know what the topic was nor why the professor had talked so long and excitedly. Therefore, she felt that understanding the global idea was very important, because knowledge is communicated in this way.

Another focal point of other people’s SE was to learn “something useful” for her own English. Her specific problem was that she could not choose the appropriate word to express herself (Interview Two). Actually, the words she used were too formal for SE. Therefore, she wanted to learn the words she should use. “How do you think you can learn those types of words, those informal, casual words?” I asked her (p. 2). Her response was, “One way is to I think hmm with the chance uh the chance for me to communicate with native speaker uh but not too much. So I think one important way is to watch TV (laughs)” She elaborated several examples of language she could learn from the TV programs, such as: a) formal language from the news; b) short, interesting, and condensed language from advertisements; and c) opinions and stories of ordinary people to movie stars on talk shows. Undoubtedly, there were a lot of valuable words she could learn watching TV. Finally, Xiaolan tried to imitate native speakers’ intonation by heart (Journal: Week Four).

In her SE, Xiaolan paid attention to the following items:

(Journal: Week Four)

1. pronunciation
2. choose the proper word
3. not to speak too fast. It’ll make them even confusing
To sum up, in other people’s SE Xiaolan listened for the global idea. It was depressing when she did not “know the whole idea of the people” (Interview Two). Furthermore, she tried to learn something useful especially informal, casual words. Television was a good source to learn a variety of these words. Intonation was another focal point in others’ SE. In her own English, she focused on pronunciation, choosing the appropriate word, and not speaking fast.

Areas of Progress

Xiaolan’s fluency had improved after practicing in class and with native speakers. According to her, fluency was “the easiest aspect to improve at first then the hardest aspect later” (Interview Two, p. 7).

Yeah. And since are our spoken English background is uh rather weak compared with students come from other countries. And when we just came here after several weeks we can, oh, we can! So may be very, how to say, very not so fluent but you you can after uh practice your spoken English several times with native speaker, you can feel very obviously that your spoken English improved. In that time it seem that talk once you improved but talk you improved. But after a time after a short uh period of time, it seem that you just step stop there.

As she had further explained, SE was similar to the written English experience. She illustrated this analogy with preparing for the TOEFL test. When they practiced the TOEFL for the first time, they could only answer about 25 out of 50 questions in the listening comprehension section. In a short time, maybe three or four days, she could answer 40 questions. After that, to improve was much harder. So at first, improvement occurred very quickly, but later there was no significant improvement. She described this lull as being “flat”. I explained to her that this leveling off was a plateau.

In addition, Xiaolan thought it was easier for a child or teenager to improve their English because they knew less about their own language and therefore, it was easier for them to forget it (Interview Three). For example, in a period of three months the child
could speak English very well and could almost forget Chinese. Another important point was that the child will usually go to an American elementary school where they not only have to use English for reading, listening, and speaking, but perhaps they are the only nonnative speaker in the class. In contrast, at the university there are many Chinese students and professors who they can talk to in Chinese. So, they are reluctant to use English. The mathematics teacher she had the previous quarter was from mainland China, and even though he had been in the U.S. for ten years, his SE was still bad. The American students could not understand him. As a result, he would say very little and just write the lecture on the board.

Xiaolan summed up that the “form” of her SE had been enhanced, but she doubted about the “content” (Journal: Week Five). In Interview Two she clarified what she meant by form and content.

X: Yeah, the content is (pause) uhh for example if I can if I write the accent
F: Uh huh
X: may be you can see my handwriting is very good.
F: Right
X: That the form, but when you read my essay wow it’s uh terrible (laughs) one. You mean my content.
F: So your ideas
X: Yeah, ideas
F: your thoughts
X: thoughts
F: Okay
X: Okay. (Inaudible) ideas, thoughts. (Pause) So, uh in 104 I think the focus of the uh of the teaching is to improve the form, to correct your
F: Mm hmm
X: pronunciation.
F: Right
X: Yeah, to (clears throat) practice your fluenc fluency. (pp. 9-10)

More specifically, in her pronunciation she had made progress with some individual sounds such as /Z/, /dZ/, and /h/ in the word usually (Journal: Week Five). She had also become familiar with linking, using the flap, and vowel reductions, but she still could not apply them in daily phrases when she spoke. It was a subconscious thing that needed more
practice. Finally, she felt that her intonation sounded more natural compared to when she first arrived in the U.S. She became aware of this improvement from her own videotape comparisons, probably meaning her 104 videotape from the Fall Quarter 1998 and the 104.5 tape from Winter 1999.

Xiaolan diligently used English in class by asking questions or sharing her comments and opinions during class activities and other students’ video presentations (Fieldnotes). As a note of interest, the interviewers for her Winter 1999 EI wrote that she was very fluent when discussing her video presentation topics (EI Notes). She had functional and metalanguage and asked them good questions. Moreover, she was able to distinguish concepts. Also her pronunciation was generally clear despite vowel errors and consonant deletions. Their final decision on her SE placement was the 105 class.

To summarize, Xiaolan had made some progress with her fluency and pronunciation. She had described a learning curve in her SE experience, that is improvement was accelerated and noticeable in the beginning, but slower thereafter. She felt some confidence about her “form”, fluency and pronunciation, but was rather dubious about the “content”, her expression of thoughts and ideas in SE. Nonetheless, her placement into 105 was another indication that she had made progress with her SE.

Strategies to improve SE

For Week Six, Xiaolan described several things she was doing to improve her SE. First, when she had free time she watched TV. Watching TV was a very useful way and perhaps the most extensive way to “imbrue yourself in [the] language environment”, and “[d]ay by day, you’ll cultivate some ‘sense’, (such as intonation, accent, . . . ) of the language by watching TV”. Second, she went to the language lab at least once a week to practice some special skills from the class textbook such as the flap, reduction, and linking and to correct some of her pronunciation problems. Previously, in Tadashi’s case study I
gave some examples of the flap and word reductions. I would like to explain some other

types of reductions that occur in SE. Generally speaking function words have vowel

reductions such as: for → /fˈr/, or → /ˈr/, to → /t/, you → /ˈy/, and → /ˈn, n/

can → /kˈn, kn/, your → /ˈy/r/, at → /ˈt/, and an→ /ˈn/. Frequently unstressed syllables in

words, especially words with more than one syllable, are also reduced to /ˈ/ or /\ (Hagen,

1988). Here are some examples: about /ˈbaʊt/, visit /ˈvɪzɪt/, common /kəˈmən/, escape

/ˈskɛɪp/, woman /ˈwʊmən/, and today /ˈdeɪ/.

Let me briefly describe several patterns of linking. Linking occurs within words

and across word boundaries to help create a smooth rhythm. One common pattern is

consonant-vowel (CV) linking, which often occurs across word boundaries, that is the final

consonant of a word links with the initial vowel of the following word (C•V) as in: drop

off, come•in, was •, if •’s late, she’s • on the phone, earlier •, it’s •an, and am • (Hagen,

1988). Another linking pattern is vowel-vowel (V•V). In this pattern words ending with

these vowel sounds- iy, ey, ow, aw, ay, oy - will link with the vowel of the word that

follows (V•V), for example: he•enjoyed, play•in, late, and go•across. There is also linking

of identical consonants (C•C). “This is when the final sound of one word is formed but

used for the following word. This makes the first word sound like half a word” (Hagen,

1988, p. 17). I usually tell my students to hold the consonant longer. Here are some

examples of linking identical consonants: take this•seat, felt•tired, I wish•she knew, come•

Monday, near•Russia, ask•questions, and been•no problem (Ibid).

Now I will return to the things that Xiaolan was doing to improve her SE. Thus far,

in fact, I have mentioned two things: watching TV and going to the language lab. Third, Xiaolan

completed the weekly SE 104.5 community contact assignments, because they provided her

the opportunity to communicate with native speakers. For these assignments the students
were required to interview one or more Americans at the university or off campus about specific topics related to university life. Finally, participating in this study enabled her to think systematically about how to improve her SE, and it also gave her the chance to practice speaking in English.

During her video presentations, Xiaolan did not use any intentional strategies to compensate for the shortcomings arising from her pronunciation. However, for each presentation, she tried to design a “well-organized” structure. “I’ve been aware that some excellent professors can make student understand very difficult content while others may make the easy contend hardly understood. This is partly due to the lecture structure” (Journal: Week Six). Actually, she was never nervous when she gave her presentations. So perhaps her natural manner also compensated for her shortcomings in the presentation.

As a matter of fact, in my class notes for all three of her presentations, I had commented on her calm presence and clear organization of the content. Some of those comments were: “calm presence, confident, warm smile”, “very organized and good use of framing” (Topic: Indifference Curve); “great framing of content”, “explanation on board was clear” (Topic: Transmission Mechanism); “great use of transitional words”, “calm presence, confident, clear voice” (Topic: Competitive Market). The gracefulness of her calm, natural manner was captivating as she talked and moved in front of the audience (Fieldnotes).

In summary, Xiaolan was doing some things to improve her SE such as watching TV, going to the language lab, doing interview assignments with native speakers, and participating in this study. As far as strategies to make her SE more comprehensible during the video presentations, she planned a well-organized structure and used a calm, natural manner for her delivery.
Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality

Like Tadashi, Xiaolan had also felt less confident about her SE after she came to the U.S. In the journal entry for Week Seven, Xiaolan explained why she had felt this way.

After searching my memory for the whole process of my learning and using spoken English, I think it somewhat ‘strike’ my confidence. Before I came here, I took it for granted I could speak fluent English very quickly. The second, although I lived in U.S., at least 60% of my “language environment” is still that of Chinese. Especially, after I failed to pass 104 exit interview last quarter, I felt so depressed. (Since I almost have full record to smoothly pass every kind of examination, competition, interviews before). I began to doubt my own abilities in languages, whether I am too confident in myself and adopting to new environment. Now, I felt a little better since I can see my progress in spoken English, although slowly, it shows hope.

Earlier I talked about foreign students’ feelings of failure especially with regards to not placing directly into 105 from 104. Usually towards the end of each quarter one or two students ask me, “What is the percentage of students who go on to 105 after the 104 EI?” My response is that on the average two or three students will go to 105 and the rest will go to 104.5. Of course I have also had quarters where five or more students move to 105. It mainly depends on the students’ incoming language ability and how much progress they make during the quarter. Occasionally, a few students have to retake 104 because their fluency and language base are too low.

At times I am also reminded that many of these foreign students are the “cream of the crop” in their countries. In countries such as China it may be difficult to obtain a visa to study in the U.S. Some students are refused one or two times before they finally obtain a visa. The GRE and TOEFL exams are another means of screening out students with lower scores. More than the majority of these students must acquire TA or RA positions in order to pursue their studies and support themselves in the U.S. There is certainly some competition in acquiring these positions. Therefore, these students have been extremely successful in competitive situations before arriving in the U.S. However after they arrive,
they realize to their dismay, that native speakers’ English is not like what they had learned in their country. In addition, another challenge to their self-esteem is that many of these SE 104 students place into 104.5 instead of going directly to 105.

As far as changes in her thinking, Xiaolan had made some progress in thinking in English instead of Chinese when she read, wrote, spoke, or listened (Journal: Week Seven). However, “under free situation” (Interview Three), that is, when she was not forced or did not need to use English, for example, before falling asleep, she always thought in Chinese. Another example was when she went over the macroeconomic notes. If she encountered some problems in the notes, she would think them through in Chinese. “When you . . . wrote these journal entries, did you think about them in Chinese?” (Interview Three, p. 7). Xiaolan’s response was, “Uh English”.

Furthermore, she knew some Chinese students who still read the translated version of the English textbooks in order to comprehend more precisely. She had overcome this need. Xiaolan was more comfortable reading the original text than the translated one. Another example was that before she had always looked up the meaning of a word in an English/Chinese dictionary. Now she could understand the new word better by looking it up in an English/English dictionary. Perhaps these two examples proved that her thinking skills in English had improved.

To sum up, initially Xiaolan felt less confident about her spoken English, but as she began to slowly see some progress, her hope was restored. The major change in her thinking was that she did not rely as much on translation from Chinese to English, especially when she read, listened, and talked. She was more comfortable reading the original text in English than a translated version in Chinese.
New Things Learned

During the quarter in the 104.5 class, Xiaolan learned some new things about SE pronunciation such as linking, reductions, and deletion of sounds, and this is what she said:

(Interview One, p. 9)

X: But here I found out you delete a lot of, if not you link
F: Mm hmm
X: and you uh weaken or reduce.
F: Right
X: Yeah I never learn before. So it seemed uh a little strange to me and too false and too obscure yeah.
F: So how do you feel then about learning these things like you’re learning about linking and how we reduce and weaken things?
X: Yeah it’s really useful and and if we don’t are not, how do you say uhh? I have a classmate he is here. I have a classmate here she’s a Chinese girl even when she took the uh our English examination last quarter she got 220 and that is very uh very rare for Chinese student. Usually can only 120, 30, 40.
F: Uh huh
X: Yeah and he he [she] said they are natural for her, that he [she] can when he [she] speaks with native Americans.
F: Uh huh
X: She can feel it, but I can’t unless you told me. (laughs)

Xiaolan thought that the Sound Advice (Hagen, 1988) textbook was really very good, because she had learned more systematically about the patterns of linking and reduction. Her roommate, who was also an economics classmate and a graduate of the same university in China, was taking the 105 class. Xiaolan had asked her if she was aware of the spoken language reduction that occurs with “he has” (an example of an “s” contraction). For example, in the phrase ‘He has suggested’, the “he has” is reduced to ‘He’s’ (Interview Two, p. 5). Her roommate was surprised. She did not know that this type of reduction occurs in SE. Evidently her roommate had gone directly from 104 to 105, where they focus on teaching skills and not spoken language patterns such as reductions, linking, blending, ellipsis, assimilation, and deletions which are taught in the 104.5 class. Therefore, Xiaolan realized that perhaps going directly to 105 was not so good, because you really miss out something.
In summary, Xiaolan learned some new things about SE pronunciation such as linking, reduction, and deletion of sounds. She realized that taking the 104.5 class was beneficial because of the things she had learned about the spoken language.

**Effects of Reflection on Learning**

Finally, Xiaolan talked about how writing the journal forced her to think about her SE problems and stimulated her incentive to learn.

(Journal: Week Eight)

I think, if [it] “forced” myself to think what are the problems I have and what I can gain from the experiences, so it stimulates my incentives to learn the spoken English with more efforts. For example, during our first interview, I talked about that I can find a better job when I go back China, if I can spend [speak] english well. You know I never thought it before.

(Interview Three, pp. 1-2)

Okay. Mmm. At the first quarter last quarter I admit that I spend less effort on spoken English, but I think partially because the volume, the load, study load of the economics is very heavy. And uh I think I should put my, how to say, more the major energy the efforts on the my major study and this quarter mm I joined your study and one of the questions is, how do think, I had to write as Journal Two of your study of spoken English. I think it force me uh to study first ah was, how to say, the good points, what’s the benefits of study spoken English. If you think you can gain lots of benefit from spoken English, certainly you will mm, how to say, uh have more incentive to study it in order to spend more energy on it. And I can before I didn’t uh think systematically what what is the benefit of study spoken English and at that time when I write while wrote journal and I think I thought and I found that it’s really very important and beneficial to study spoken English.

To summarize, writing the journal helped her develop an awareness and reflect on her problems when she spoke English. More importantly, it stimulated her to put more energy and effort in learning SE because there were good benefits to gain. Now I would like to continue with Case Study Three.
Case Study Three: Seung-Ho

Profile

Seung-Ho was a Korean male in his early forties. He had been in the U.S. a year and a half with his wife, seven-year old son, and three-year old daughter. They lived in the university’s married housing. His wife was busy driving the children places, and she had Bible study during the week. His daughter was taking ballet (Fieldnotes: March 9), and his son, who was in second grade, had received an award as a superscholar that winter (Fieldnotes: February 23). The previous year his son had three hours of ESL instruction every day in school. His pronunciation was good and sometimes he corrected Seung-Ho. He had even suggested to Seung-Ho that they speak in English. At the parent/teacher conference during the winter, his son’s teacher had said that he had made a lot of progress in a year and a half. Seung-Ho’s daughter and son spoke to each other in English and Korean to him and his wife.

Seung-Ho was working on his Ph.D. in military history, and his dissertation topic was turtle boats. He mentioned that in Korea a military historian has opportunities to be a faculty member, or a counsel to the president, or work in the Defense department, or in a historical museum (Fieldnotes: March 1). Seung-Ho had BA and MA degrees in history. He graduated from the Korean Naval Academy in 1986 and served on a battleship for one year. He taught naval academy midshipmen European History and History of Warfare for six years.

He enjoyed talking about history. In Interview One, he mentioned that North and South Korea would possibly reunify in about ten years. During his first class video presentation, he described a historian as a “bridge maker” of the past, present, and future. At the end of February, he had attended a lecture by a retired Korean Admiral who was
living in the U.S (Fieldnotes: February 9, 22, and 24). Seung-Ho explained to me the different titles of military personnel (Fieldnotes: February 24). For example, a general and an admiral, which are the highest ranks, each have four stars. Furthermore, the titles admiral and captain are used in the Navy and general and colonel in the Army.

His favorite colors were black and white, the colors of the Korean Navy. He enjoyed playing tennis and swimming. Seung-Ho also sang bass in the church choir on Sunday mornings (Fieldnotes: February 2). On Saturdays he watched a video, that he rented from a local library, with his family. Several times a week he mixed flour in his bread maker to make bread (Fieldnotes: February 3).

He wore small, frameless glasses, which were popular in Korea, and he had short, fine hair. His facial skin was the color of an earthen, clay pot. He usually had an expressionless, serious face. Perhaps this was due to his military training and his military history background (Fieldnotes: January 22). When he did smile, his whole face wrinkled up. Seung-Ho was short, limber, and in good form (Ibid). His body movements were flexible and fluid. Even when he was simply standing he seemed to project an ease and comfort. He generally wore a red, white, and blue colored polo jersey or a shirt and casual pants or faded blue jeans that were nicely pressed but with no lines. Unlike other students, he carried a dark leather handbag with a handle for his books.

At the beginning of his video presentations he wrote questions or key terms on the board and engaged the audience by posing questions and humorous remarks (Fieldnotes). However, later he was more serious as he lectured on his topic (Ibid). He actively participated in class, was well prepared, and sometimes asked pronunciation related questions in class like, “What’s the difference between saddle and settle?” or “What’s the pronunciation of /ts/?” (Fieldnotes: January 27). In particular, he wanted to know when the /s/ was pronounced like /z/. Another time he wanted to know the difference in meaning of “Do you have the time?” versus “Do you have time?” (Fieldnotes: February
During that same class period we were practicing intonation patterns in questions. Seung-Ho’s question to another Korean student was, “Have you ever visited northern Germany?” “Yes”, was the student’s reply. Seung-Ho asked, “Where?”. The student mentioned a city ending in “burg”. Interestingly, Seung-Ho explained that city names with the suffix “burg” meant castle and named other German cities with the “burg” ending. The Japanese student, Tadashi, wittily added, “Oh, like Pittsburgh!” (Ibid). My response to Tadashi was that there were no castles in Pittsburgh.

In a class discussion about living in a small family unit or an extended family, Tadashi expressed his preference for an extended family, which included grandparents, parents, and children (Fieldnotes: January 29). He further explained the Korean concept of family distance, known as Cho. According to this concept a couple has zero distance, whereas a child and parent has a distance of one, and siblings have a distance of two. In another class discussion on, “What types of values is it important to teach a child and why?”, a Chinese female student said an open mind (Fieldnotes: February 18). Seung-Ho’s rejoinder was that children already have an open mind; it is adults that need to learn how to be open-minded.

To summarize, I have described some personal information about Seung-Ho and his family, as well as his educational and professional background in the military. I would like to now proceed with a description of his SE learning experience during Winter of 1999.

Spoken Language Difficulties

An important point that Seung-Ho acknowledged was that many Korean students have difficulties with pronunciation, in particular the consonants /b/ and /v/, /p/ and /f/, /s/ and /s/, and others (Journal: Week One). Other sounds that frequently pose problems for Korean speakers are /l/ and /l/, /dZ/ and /dZ/, /dZ/ and /dZ/. Like his cohorts he also had difficulty pronouncing these consonants. Seung-Ho felt that this problem originated from
the difference in speech and behavior. I think what he meant by behavior was muscle training, that is, which facial and oral muscles are ordinarily used to produce the sounds of a language. In Interview One he elaborated more on the topic of pronunciation, especially emphasizing the importance of muscle functions.

S: So I heard about that one African language is very extraordinary case in the world. Usually we make winds or just uh uh from uh inside to outside. Just we can pronounce uh make wind inside (blowing air from mouth) like this yeah. We can’t mimic their voice and their language extraordinary case, but uh very interesting case in uh especially who study linguistics world linguistics. Uh in my case uh Korean language is different from uh English especially in terms of pronunciation and some word stress and the stressed vowels, uh consonants or function words something like that. So we can uh uh you know you know very well uh you know very well what the word for example uh bowl, yeah vowel but sometimes you can confused the bowel and vowel in the in a sentence.

F: Right
S: just as writing because this is one uh example of muscle training. So I think muscle training uh repeated mus muscle training is important for second language students. (pp. 4-5)

Muscle training involves the facial muscles, lips, and tongue. If a learner struggles with producing unfamiliar or new sounds, it becomes necessary to repeatedly practice the sounds in order to train the muscles to pronounce them correctly or as closely as possible to native speakers’ pronunciation. Incidentally, Seung-Ho was assigned a SE pronunciation tutor during the Winter quarter. He met with her twice a week for 45 minutes. I think she was the one who had explained muscle training to Seung-Ho. As a matter of fact, she had requested him to mimic and repeat his weak points, that is /b/ /v/, /v/ /b/ /b/ /v/, when he was walking or driving his car (Interview One).

Composing sentences in English was another area of difficulty for Seung-Ho. The main reason for this problem was due to the difference in Korean and English grammar structure. In particular, the word order in Korean sentences is subject/object/verb (SOV),
whereas in English the order is subject/verb/object (SVO). He added that Chinese students can learn English more easily, because the Chinese sentence structure is similar to English (Interview One). Seung-Ho provided an example to illustrate the different word order in Korean and English.

(Interview Two, p. 3)

F: Why do you pay attention to their questions?
S: Well, because uh usually Korean language and Korean grammar structure is different from the English. And I think Korean language and Japanese language is almost the same grammar structure uh just uh, for example, uh “I’m gonna”, “I go to school” in English.

F: Mm hm
S: In Korean, “I to school”
F: Hmm
S: Yeah
F: The object?
S: Yes, object is at front of verb. . . . “I school to go”, yeah.

Furthermore, Seung-Ho discussed other problems he had in his SE. Sometimes he did not know vocabulary, especially field-specific words to express himself or his ideas (Interview One). Another important thing was sentence stress, that is which word should be stressed in the sentence. In the Korean language, known as Hangeul (Journal: Week One), there is no sentence stress just long and short vowel sounds in words (Interview One).

In summary, Seung-Ho talked about several problems he had in his SE. One problem was with the same consonant sounds that other Korean students struggle with, namely /b/ and /v/, /p/ and /f/, /s/ and /ʃ/ and others. He attributed this pronunciation difficulty to the difference in Korean and English languages and more specifically to the muscle training that he received in his native language. As a result, he needed to train his speaking muscles to new sounds. Another problematic area for his SE was sentence composition. This was mainly due to the different word order in English (SVO) compared to Korean (SOV). Finally several other problems he mentioned were lacking field-specific vocabulary and knowing which word to stress in a sentence.
Formal Instruction and Interaction with Native Speakers

Like other Korean students in his country, Seung-Ho began his formal English education when he was thirteen years old (Interview One). Usually the Korean teachers in middle school, high school, and the university stressed grammar but not conversation. Seung-Ho thought it was strange that even though Korean students studied English for more than ten years, they still could not find the appropriate word or sentence to express themselves when they encountered an American on the street. At that moment they became confused as to what to say. Despite the fact that they could read and write English very well when they graduated from the university, they still had the problem of speaking (Journal: Week Two). He felt that this emphasis on grammar was bad for learning a foreign language. Conversation was more important. He also told me that some Korean students learn to speak English at a language institute after their university graduation. Nowadays, the Department of Education in Korea has changed their policy for English language instruction. Now Korean students begin to learn English, just the “ABCs” and short conversations, at ten years old.

As far as informal conversation and interaction with native speakers, he was taking two history classes during Winter quarter, and class discussion was an integral part of his courses (Journal: Week Two). The first class he took was a seminar class on military history (Interview One). He could only understand about 70 percent of the professor’s lecture. Gradually his listening comprehension increased to more than 90 percent. Sometimes the professor’s pronunciation was still too fast for him, but he tried to participate in class discussions more actively, and gave presentations as well. For example, he talked about the Korean War, and the result of the war in Korean contemporary history, and the Vietnam War. He gave a summary of a Korean novel entitled “White Badge” (1989) about the Vietnam War written by a Korean author, General Junghyo Ahn.
When he interacted informally with native speakers, he had few language problems because they generally understood what he was saying (Journal: Week Two). However, from my experience talking with him, it was not simply a matter of his pronunciation being comprehensible. His communication problem was deeply rooted in wanting to set his own agenda and not addressing questions directly in conversations. There are several factors that may have influenced this behavior in him. The first factor I suspect is his military background. In class he was reserved in showing emotion, and he carried himself with confidence and agility. In addition, during his video presentations he demonstrated leadership qualities in his voice, body, and rapport with the audience. A second factor was that he enjoyed talking—about his major and anything else. A final factor that may have contributed to his communication problem is his Korean male ego. In my reflective comments of the first interview (February 4, 1999) I wrote:

I had to get him back on track several times. He seemed to want to talk or incorporate his interest in history. He stayed and talked for 15 minutes after the interview.

In the second interview “he stayed more on topic this time instead of wondering off on his major area” (Reflective Notes of Interview: February 25, 1999). Moreover, I recall at the beginning of the quarter a conversation with the director of the SE program about Seung-Ho’s problem with answering questions. She had interviewed him to decide his placement in 104.5 or 105. She had commented that during the interview he would not respond to questions directly and provided very sparse answers. She felt that because his field of study was history, he had to be able to interact with students and encourage discussion by answering students’ questions. Her decision was that he would be placed in the 104.5 class so that I could work on that problem with him.

Furthermore, at the end of Winter Quarter 1999 one of the interviewers for his EI had qualms about passing him to SE 105, because he had not really answered the questions.
(EI Notes: March 1999)

Listens much better; interaction much improved. But still doesn’t really respond to questions. Much easier to understand than before. The listening comprehension is a real conundrum. I have qualms about passing him. (Interviewer: EEC)

Another SE instructor who also reviewed the recording of his interview had a similar feeling- his answers were questions, and he really did not answer and listen. She felt he was “reading a memorized term paper” (Interviewer, JCS). Nevertheless, the final decision was that Seung-Ho would progress to SE 105 with a pronunciation tutor. Incidentally, when he came out of his EI, I noticed his quietness and surprise on his face (Fieldnotes: March 9, 1999). He was very upset that the interviewers had not asked him anything about his video presentations, but instead about the Korean War and unification of North and South Korea. However, as another Korean student pointed out to him, these topics were related to his field of study. He did not respond.

To sum up, Seung-Ho’s English instruction in Korea emphasized grammar, in particular reading and writing, instead of conversation. He thought this emphasis was bad for learning a foreign language because students did not know what to say in a situation with native speakers. In his history courses at State University, class discussion and participation were crucial. His listening comprehension had gradually improved. He tried to share his ideas and thoughts about topics that were familiar to him such as the Korean and Vietnam War. Generally, he felt that native speakers could understand what he was saying. However from my experience with him and other faculty in the SE program there was a feeling that he did not answer questions, made comments that sounded memorized, and set his own agenda in conversations.
Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview

In the journal entry for Week Three, Seung-Ho explained how the SE course was essential for him in order to be a TA, because he had to be able to speak and understand English. Therefore, SE 104.5 was an important course for him to pass. Furthermore, this class would be very helpful in improving his language skill, especially his pronunciation of /p/ and /b/, /v/ and /b/, and /s/ and /f/. So he agreed with the university’s requirement for TAs to be certified in SE.

During the quarter I had the general impression in class that he was motivated to learn since he was always well prepared and participated actively (Fieldnotes). For example, on March 1 we were discussing a community contact assignment in class (Ibid). One student apologized for not having done the assignment, and the rest of the class was silent. However, Seung-Ho volunteered some information. He told us that in Korea the university faculty is well respected. In fact, an American professor he knew went to Korea for two months, and the professor said that Korean students “are number one (using his thumb to demonstrate)” (Ibid, p. 2). Furthermore, his motivation to learn and improve his SE extended to his individual speaking practices too. In the SE 104.5 class the instructors do a ten minute, tape-recorded speaking practice with the students every week outside of class time. During the speaking practice the student selects a topic from a list and talks about it for five minutes. Meanwhile the instructor takes notes and then provides the student feedback on grammar and pronunciation. Usually these corrections are tape-recorded on the student’s cassette tape. Returning to Seung-Ho’s speaking practices, he was fluent, had a good language base, and enjoyed talking about his major, which he was quite knowledgeable about (Speaking Practice Notes).

To summarize, Seung-Ho felt it was essential for him to speak and understand English to be a TA at State University. The SE 104.5 class would help him improve his
speaking ability, especially pronunciation of certain consonants. In class and his speaking practices, Seung-Ho demonstrated his willingness to learn and improve his SE by asking questions, being well prepared, and sharing his knowledge and experience.

*Communication Focus*

As Seung-Ho explained for Week Four, he paid attention to the situation-specific words in other people’s SE.

For example, when we discuss about school life, we can use many words about school life, major field, classes and so forth. When we discuss travel, we use many words about concerning travel, for example, historical sites, Museum, mountain, beach and others. I think these situation words are important to communicate with other people.

Another focal point was the interrogative words the interlocutor used. He explained why he paid attention to these words (Interview Two, p. 1):

F: Uh and you mention here in this part that you pay attention to their question words or in particular their questions especially what, how, why, when, and other such questions. Why do you pay attention to their questions?

S: Well, because uh usually Korean language and Korean grammar structure is different from the English. And I think Korean language and Japanese language is almost the same grammar structure uh just uh, for example, uh “I’m gonna” “I go to school” in English. In Korean, “I to school”.

On the other hand, in his SE Seung-Ho paid attention to his pronunciation, because he felt more comfortable whenever he focused on this problem (Interview Two). Initially he was nervous about his pronunciation, in particular his problems with /p/ and /l/, /b/ and /v/, and /ʃ/. Consequently, he memorized words and their pronunciation, but when he encountered a communication situation with other people, he sometimes forgot the meaning of these words. Seung-Ho also paid attention to the English word order in sentences,
because it was different from Korean, and vocabulary (Journal: Week Four). In his view, these things had improved, but they still needed more work and that was his objective during the Winter quarter. As a result, he felt comfortable when he talked with people.

To sum up, in other people’s SE Seung-Ho focused on situation words and interrogatives. Situation words were important because they provided a foundation for communication. Knowing the words about a particular situation or concept such as “museum” facilitates conversation between interlocutors. Question words also played an important role in stimulating his thinking of English sentence structure. Finally, in his SE Seung-Ho paid attention to pronunciation, word order, and vocabulary.

**Areas of Progress**

Seung-Ho talked about his progress in pronunciation and fluency, and here is what he said in the journal entry for Week Five:

```plaintext
My problem in speaking English was pronunciation. So I was concerned about this problem in this class. Now I feel some improvement about my fluency. And I can distinguish r/l, b/v, p/f, s/S and so forth. But these pronunciations are still problem for me. This takes time and practice, I think.
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From my experience with other SE students, who have difficulties with those consonant sounds and others such as n/l, d/Z, it is a matter of time and consistent practice in the lab, class, tutorials, or with a pronunciation tutor in order to see substantial improvement. The same is true for progress in fluency. The students must be active, open, and willing to practice their SE on a regular basis outside of the SE classroom. I have observed in the classes I teach that students from departments like chemistry, computer science, and economics at State University usually make tremendous gains in their SE during their first year. In fact, many of them pass the SE 105 Mock Teaching Test (MTT) and become certified to teach by the end of their first year, otherwise they will receive a reduction in their stipend. Understandably, these students complain about the
overwhelming pressure of being in such a situation, especially when they have demands from their major classes too. Yet, they have a strong incentive to improve their spoken language. From a teaching perspective it is quite satisfying to see the students’ progress and the positive effect that this pressure has on their SE development.

Seung-Ho also discussed some areas where he still needed more improvement, such as fluency and vocabulary.

(Interview Two, p. 5)

S: I also uh have some problem of fluency. Fluency eh is a is a problem for my speaking. So this is uh this will be takes time and practice I think. So fluency is first problem and some uh improvement of uh vocabulary and some eh is second problem I think. So (inaudible) usually I have to read uh many books and many articles before major class

F: Hm

S: every week. So before I came here uh just I read some articles, English articles just reading just some kind of compr just comprehension but uh nowadays uh why he uh write this word? Just he said or just uh write or just uh some uh just another word. Jus just I listen to the verb especially verb

F: Uh huh

S: and some yeah adjective that’s this is another yeah.

Seung-Ho explained that he thought about the particular words that are used in a written text to help him with the writing of his dissertation (Ibid). He added that usually Korean students think about pronunciation or some problem first in Korean. In his opinion, translating was not good. It was better to think directly in English. So this strategy of checking words in written texts was especially helpful for writing, and sometimes he used these words in his spoken language too. For example, in Chapter One of his dissertation on Turtle Boats, he discussed the outside shape and structure of the boats (Interview Two). Therefore, he used verbs like “describe”, “presume”, and “study”. The important thing was to think about what verbs and adjectives he should use. I think this careful attention to
verbs may have also reinforced the English sentence structure, namely the position of the verb in a sentence, because it was different from Korean, which is SOV. Perhaps, it had more benefits than he realized.

In all, Seung-Ho made some progress with his fluency and distinguishing r/l, v/b, p/f, and s/S. Nevertheless, pronunciation still persisted to be a problem for him, but he thought that time and practice would help remedy this problem. Fluency and vocabulary were other areas that also needed more improvement. He had gotten into the habit of paying attention to the verbs and adjectives in written texts, especially readings in his major field, because it was helpful for his dissertation writing.

**Strategies to Improve SE**

Seung-Ho was doing several things to improve his SE. As aforementioned, he was assigned a SE pronunciation tutor for Winter quarter of 1999, because he needed more focused work on p/f, b/v, dZ/Z, s/S, and answering questions directly. In addition, he listened to conversational English tapes while driving in his car. In the interviews, he explained how the tutoring and listening to tapes were beneficial for his SE.

(Interview Three, p. 1)

S: So fortunately I had uh some uh I had I put a check out my weak point and my pronunciation uh with tutor, L. E., before presentation. So this was very helpful yeah for my presentation and so now I feel more comfortable in speaking or some pronunciation than before this quarter I think.

(Interview Two, p. 8)

S: Yes, I have uh uh one uh cassette tape about uh conversation
F: Hmp
S: Its topic is “Side by Side” just in English at it’s American made. As I before I came here one professor suggest me this well program is very good.
F: Hmp
S: So I have uh copied all of them just uh 35 cassette tapes?
F: Ohh!
S: Yeah, so
F: Okay
S: there are two four book four volume
F: Okay
S: four volumes. I usually uh two always two tapes are in my car just the tape and
F: Hmp
S: uh my wife and I drive my son everyday at morning and afternoon.
F: From, to school?
S: Yeah, from school, just uh listen to the tape. It’s uh it’s very interesting I think. Sometimes my son, “What does that mean?” “That word”. Yeah and my daughter also, “What does that mean that word?” Yeah very interesting. It it also help for for my eh English speaking.

Besides his pronunciation tutor, his son also gave him corrective feedback on his pronunciation, for example, “Your pronunciation [is] not good”; “[it’s] not correct” (Interview Two, p. 5). Furthermore, Seung-Ho did other things regularly to improve his speaking, understanding, and pronunciation of English such as: a) watching the CNN news program and history channel, b) listening to radio talk shows and news before he went to sleep (Membercheck Notes and Interview Three), and 3) renting a videotape once a week to watch with his family.

I was also interested in the compensation strategies he used for his pronunciation difficulties in the video presentations. Seung-Ho told me that he considered many things, like eye contact, pronunciation, vocabulary, and special meaning words (Journal: Week Six). His main strategy was to emphasize the special meaning words, or key words, during the presentation by writing them on the blackboard or by asking students to remember them (Interview Three). For example, in the presentation on “U.S. Defense Planning between 1945 and 1965,” Seung-Ho used these special words to discuss the topic: “containment” (the name of a policy during the Truman administration; it was also nicknamed as “Half Moon”), “Joint Emergency War Plan,” “nuclear forces,” and “flexible response.”

While preparing for the presentation, Seung-Ho wrote down some ideas about his topic and thought about key terms in what he described as a mind map, that is, how they
connect to each other and other things so that they form the branches of a tree (Interview Three). As a matter of fact, he had used this method of organizing concepts when he taught his midshipmen at the Korean Naval Academy. After writing down ideas and terms, Seung-Ho tried to remember and think about how to explain the special words to his classmates, who were not history majors. Then he practiced and repeated the key words many times by himself and with his tutor, especially those words with the sounds: /z/ cause, /dZ/ strategy, and /Z/ decision, decision-making (Journal: Week Six and Interview Two). Most of these key words were about Military History.

To sum up, Seung-Ho was actively doing things to help improve his spoken language, among them: working with a SE pronunciation tutor, listening to English conversational tapes, watching TV and listening to the radio, renting videos, receiving pronunciation feedback from his son, and paying attention to verbs and adjectives in field related texts. Furthermore, he used one main strategy in his video presentations to compensate for pronunciation problems, namely emphasizing key words that he had thought about and practiced before the presentation.

Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality

Seung-Ho stated in his journal entry for Week Seven and Interview Three that he felt comfortable in his thinking skills in English, mainly during conversations and listening to lectures. Seung-Ho attributed this feeling to what he had learned about content and function words and sentence stress in the SE 104.5 class (Interview Three). Therefore, when he listened to a lecture in his history class, he could listen more carefully to the sentence focus. This had a tandem effect, that is, by recognizing which word was being
stressed, he felt more comfortable listening to the lectures. Furthermore, he usually thought about topics in English while he was walking or driving his car. At the same time, Seung-Ho felt an improvement in attitude, and it was especially important during his video presentations.

From an observation of my fieldnotes, he established good rapport and interest in his presentations by asking engaging questions such as: ‘What is history?’; ‘What is the distinction between . . . [prophet] and future?’ (January 26, 1999); ‘Have you finished your midterm exams?’, ‘What did you eat for breakfast?’, and ‘Why do you eat?’ (February 11, 1999). Moreover, Seung-Ho was adept at using humor. In his first video presentation he used an analogy of three islands, respectively named pizza, apple, and pig, to describe a historian as a bridgemaker of the past, present, and future (Fieldnotes: January 26, 1999).

Next, “Do you notice any change in your personality or how you feel about yourself as you’re using spoken English?”, I asked him in Interview Three. He responded in the following manner:

Uh just uh a little bit uh strange to say I did not. Uh I didn’t feel uncomfortable to strangers when I uh lived in Korea uh cause I when I first uh when I met uh foreign foreigners the first time uh I understand I could understand the the almost all about they’re saying, their words. But uh I at that time I still have some problem of my speaking not listening I think. (p. 9)

All and all, Seung-Ho felt a general improvement in his thinking skills, regarding conversation and listening to class lectures. He had been particularly concerned about his attitude during his video presentations. On the other hand, he did not really feel any changes in his personality.
New Things Learned

Seung-Ho learned several new things from his SE pronunciation tutor. She had made several suggestions about how to train his speaking muscles. One suggestion was to read one or two pages out loud from books or articles in his major field every day and place emphasis on his weak points, like /b/ and /v/, /p/ and /f/ and /s/ and /$s$/ (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). Another suggestion was to mimic and repeat difficult consonants like: /b/ /v/, /v/ /b/, /b/ /v/- in that manner while he was walking and driving (Interview One). His tutor also checked his pronunciation, which included consonant sounds, word stress, and thought groups, during their sessions by having him read out loud a sentence or paragraph at normal speed (Interview Three). This procedure may have encouraged him to develop self-awareness of his problem areas, especially problems he did not even know he had.

In summary, Seung-Ho learned some beneficial things about muscle training from his pronunciation tutor. Also, in a previous section I had mentioned that Seung-Ho had learned about content and function words and sentence stress from the SE 104.5 class. Knowing about sentence stress had helped him feel more comfortable listening to class lectures.

Effects of Reflection on Learning

Earlier I had talked about how Seung-Ho evaded questions; the SE director had first alerted me to this problem at the beginning of the quarter. She had specifically requested that I work with him on this issue in class and tutorials. Naturally, it was not an easy problem to eradicate. In Interview One and Interview Three when I asked Seung-Ho, “How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?”, he talked at length about going to the language lab, his tutor class, writing in his
major field, his presentation preparation, the previous SE 104 and 104.5 classes, the
different teaching styles of his SE classes, and the five Korean students in our class.

In fact, during Interview Three, I had to rephrase the question three times. I became so
frustrated with Seung-Ho not answering the question and working so hard to rephrase the
issue that I used incomplete sentences and an incorrect verb form:

a) F: How has thinking and writing about your spoken English
affected your learning of it this quarter? (p. 1)

b) F: So this quarter you’ve been writing and doing interviews
with me about your spoken English.
S: Mm
F: How has that influenced your learning of spoken English
this quarter? (pp. 1-2)

c) F: How about these the the journal entries that you’ve been
doing? How have they influenced your write, I want I
wanna get real specific here.
S: Mm hmm
F: How have how has writing about these topics
S: Mm hmm
F: and the interviews that you’re doing with me how have
they influenced your learning? (p. 3)

Then he started to talk about his weak points, in particular consonants and vowels,
and that he had not been able to recognize these problems the previous quarter. However,
he was still being vague about the influence of the journal entries and interviews on his
SE learning experience. Finally, out of frustration and impatience I asked him a leading
question.

(Interview Three, p. 4)

F: Can I say then that by doing this extra may be work
S: Mm hmm
F: by writing uhm about your spoken English experience and
by doing the interviews, it’s helped you to focus more on
your weak point?
S: Yeah
F: Would I would I be correct in saying that?
S: Yeah, I think so.

Either the question had not been clearly worded and as a consequence he had
misunderstood it, or perhaps he was not listening carefully, or may be it was simply
wanting to set his own agenda in the conversation instead of answering my questions. Although, I would like to mention that he had written a short paragraph about the influence of the journal entries and interviews on his SE in one of his previous journal entries several weeks before the third interview.

(Journal: Week Five)

During this quarter, fortunately, I have journal questions and interview with my instructor. I could find another weak point of my speaking. So this journal questions will be helpful for improving my English.

In summary, it seemed that the journal topics and to some extent the interviews were beneficial to Seung-Ho in reinforcing his awareness of his pronunciation problems. I think that in Seung-Ho’s case, it was a combination of his tutor class, the 104.5 class, and the journals and interviews that helped him recognize his problem areas in his spoken language and to make an effort to improve them.

Summary

The case studies presented in this chapter were narratives of the SE learning experiences of Tadashi, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho during Winter quarter of 1999 in a SE 104.5 course. Their stories were created from data in the journal entries, interviews, fieldnotes, membercheck notes, EI notes, speaking practice notes, and video presentation notes, as well as comments from SE peers, SE director, and my own speculations. Also included in their case studies were comments, explanations, and interpretation where it enriched and provided insight into their SE learning experience. Each case study began with a profile of the participant and was followed by data organized around the eight journal topics that the participants wrote about during the quarter. In order to make the narrative more reader friendly, I also interspersed summaries wherever they were necessary. Now, I would like to move on to Chapter Five where I will present two more case studies- the SE learning experience of Qizhen and Ho Yeon.
CHAPTER 5
CASES 4-5 AND SUMMARY

Introduction

The remaining two case studies are presented in this chapter. Their narratives are organized in the same way as the previous three case studies, that is, a profile of the participant followed by data for the eight journal topics. Comments, explanations, interpretation, and summaries are also included in the narratives. This chapter ends with a summary of the common themes in the participants’ SE learning experience. Visual displays and written descriptions were utilized to enhance understanding of the themes. In addition, the summary previews research related the participants’ SE learning themes. Relevant research will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

Case Study Four: Qizhen

Profile

Qizhen was a Chinese female in her mid twenties. She had an undergraduate degree in geological sciences and was completing a master’s in paleontology, “the study of geological life in the past” (Fieldnotes: January 19, 1999), in Spring of 1999. She was from Canton, the southern part of China, which is close to Hong Kong. Qizhen mentioned in Interview One that it was very common for Chinese people who spoke Cantonese as their first language to have problems pronouncing /r/ and /l/, because these sounds do not exist in
Cantonese. However, in Mandarin, the national language of China, there are a lot of /r/ and /l/ sounds. So even though, she had been in Beijing for four years, she still could not change her Cantonese dialect.

She had been in the U.S. for a year and a half. She was an RA for her advisor, who had done research in Antarctica (Interview One). Funding was a big issue in her department for choosing an advisor (Fieldnotes: March 1, 1999). She worked four hours a day in a lab on the western part of the university campus.

Her cheeks were rosy red and her hair was dark, long, and worn up away from her face (Fieldnotes: January 19, 1999). Black eyebrows, long eye lashes, and a bang framed her exotic, almond-shaped eyes. She had a small muscular build and enjoyed sports especially badminton and ping pong. She lookedstriking in red, black, and yellow-red and black were her favorite colors. She had pretty red beads with black dots that her sister gave her and a pearl necklace. Her wardrobe consisted of an olive green wool sweater, a bright warm yellow sweatshirt, a black turtleneck cotton sweater with a lime and white stripe across the chest and arms, a black and white thin-striped shirt, a white fitted cotton sweater, and snug, faded blue jeans (Fieldnotes).

She used to be a shy and quiet person, because she did not want to make a mistake (Journal: Week Five), but she realized this reticence kept her from practicing. So she tried to open up and talk to people. An interviewer for her Exit Interview (EI) of Fall 1998 commented on her timidness. “There’s something timid, yet intimidating about her interaction- she smiles...[and] laughs but is basically very serious...[H]er manner is for some reason unsettling” (EI Notes: Interviewer EEC). In contrast, in Qizhen’s EI for Winter 1999, an interviewer noted her confidence and sense of comfortableness. “This time I think a clear pass- explained really well - seems very confident and comfortable - even laughs with us” (Interviewer JCS). I also observed that she was trying to be open and
creating opportunities to utilize her SE. For example, Qizhen always greeted me and asked how I was doing at the beginning of class, and often she engaged me in a short conversation at the end of class (Fieldnotes).

Qizhen was kind, patient, and sincere. She believed that knowledge was a process of accumulation, and “in order to have accumulation you have to keep improving yourself” (Interview 2, p. 12). During Interview One, Qizhen asked me, “So uh do you think uhm in order to teach a spoken English language uh is it necessary for them to have some kind education from the uh language department?” (p. 15). My response was, “What do you think?” Qizhen said it was better that the instructors have language education because it was not only pronunciation that was involved but the teaching skill too. They have to have some strategies to handle different situations and different cases from different students. Furthermore, they need the capability to tell a student how to correct their pronunciation. For example, she had a friend who told her when her pronunciation was wrong, but he did not know how to correct her. So she just kept practicing until he said, ‘Oh, yes that’s it!’ . . . (p. 16).

Qizhen met with a SE pronunciation tutor twice a week for 45 minutes during the quarter. Quick and shallow breathing in her shoulders instead of her belly was causing a tightening in her throat and affecting her fluency and rhythm (Interview Three). She also had problems with l/r and S/s. After she started working with her pronunciation tutor, I noticed a change in Qizhen’s personality. In the tutorials, speaking practices, class, and interviews, she was becoming open, humorous, and using interesting colloquial expressions. For example, in Interview Two Qizhen used the expression “airhead” to describe what happened to her when she was in the EI, that is, she became nervous and had problems talking. Somehow I suspected that she had picked up this word from her pronunciation tutor. I talked to her tutor regularly, because her office was down the hall from mine, or I saw her in the SE office talking with the other staff members. Frequently, her tutor related
some humorous anecdote or joke to us. Her sense of humor was sometimes quirky but enjoyable. At any rate, I think she had a positive influence on Qizhen’s fluency and confidence in using SE. Even the SE secretary had noticed how Qizhen was more open and talkative when she came to the SE office.

Her video presentations were informative and stimulated interesting discussion from the other students. In fact, the other Chinese female student, Xiaolan, had mentioned how she had enjoyed Qizhen’s presentations. “I enjoyed . . . [Qizhen’s] presentation very much since I have thick interested in the formation and anything about our common home-earth” (Journal: Week Eight); “I think people always interesting in nature things, but not mathematics” (Interview Three, p. 2). Qizhen seemed to have a natural talent for teaching during her presentations. In my notes of her presentations I wrote comments about her framing and organizing the content well, asking rhetorical questions, doing comprehension checks, monitoring her pronunciation and grammar, summarizing her topic, and maintaining her composure when she answered difficult questions (Video Presentation Notes).

Usually when she was tired, not in a good mood, or feeling nervous her SE was “worse than usual” (Journal: Week One). The same problem happened to her Chinese roommate when she was tired (Interview One). When Qizhen had moved into the apartment with her, she had asked her roommate to talk in English with her, but she told Qizhen that she was too tired to speak. Even Qizhen could not talk when she was tired, because her tongue could not twist and speak as fast. Furthermore, Qizhen added that when you are tired you can not think clearly; in fact, sometimes your brain just goes blank. Of course, these factors will affect your fluency and vocabulary (Ibid).

To summarize, I have described where Qizhen is from, her major, several characteristics of her personality, a physical description and what she usually wore, her beliefs about language teaching, the strategies she utilized during her video presentations,
the positive influence of her pronunciation tutor, and how her tiredness affected her SE. Now, I would like to continue with a description of her SE learning experience during Winter quarter of 1999.

**Spoken Language Difficulties**

Qizhen had a variety of problems with her SE. First, when she was too tired, not in a good mood, or nervous, her SE was not good (Journal: Week One). Second, she was reluctant to have conversations with strangers, because she always became nervous in front of them and did not want to irritate them with her pronunciation. Qizhen had noticed that if her pronunciation was incorrect, they did not seem to be as patient (Interview Two). On the other hand, if she got used to someone, she knew they would be willing to put up with her mistakes. Third, it was hard for her to come up with a suitable word for what she was describing. Basically, she needed to build up her vocabulary so that she could communicate with people (Interview One). When people used slang or idioms she got frustrated because she did not understand them. Out of her concern to not irritate the person, she usually did not stop them to repeat or explain a word. So, she just pretended to understand, even though she knew this was not a good habit. From this experience, she realized that vocabulary was very important.

Fourth, her intonation was flat. It did not have enough change or variation (Ibid). Qizhen had worked on this problem the previous quarter, but obviously it did not work, since she had not passed the EI. Fifth, she habitually deleted consonants, especially when she came across a consonant cluster. She told me in Interview One that probably I was also aware of this problem. As a matter of fact, I mentioned that she was deleting syllables too. Finally, she had difficulty distinguishing /r/ and /l/, /w/ and /v/, and /s/ and /S/ when she spoke quickly. However, if these sounds were isolated in words, then she could pronounce them correctly. In summary, Qizhen enumerated the problems she had in her SE, namely
distinguishing certain consonants, deleting sounds in words, enlarging her vocabulary, improving her intonation, talking to strangers, and how her physical and emotional state affected her SE.

**Formal Instruction and Interaction with Native Speakers**

In China, she seldom had chances to speak English (Journal: Week Two). From a practical standpoint, the Chinese instructors emphasized reading and grammar, because the people had few opportunities to speak with native speakers of English (Interview Two). The most chances Chinese people had to use English was by reading. When Qizhen was in middle school, the students were required to sit in class and read out loud from textbooks in Chinese and English for an hour before classes began in the morning (Ibid). During her undergraduate study, there were three required classes for English reading and two formal national tests in English. If someone could pass the tests, they would receive a certificate for their English speaking ability (Journal: Week Two). Nevertheless, there were no formal instruction classes for SE. Before Qizhen came to the U.S., she wanted to develop her speaking skills in English. So she took some classes at a language institute.

(Interview One, pp. 7-8)

Q: Well, uh I think I took this uh spoken English class right before I came here
F: Uh huh
Q: I ho uh initially I hope it can help me to develop my uh spoken English. I found it didn’t help, because at that time I don’t think th peo uh the teachers there can really uh devoted into the uh to the teaching and that they just want to make money out of the student. It’s not a official official school. It’s just a
F: Oh!
Q: developed uh opened by someone else.
F: So it’s kind of like a business.
Q: Yeah, yes like a business.

Qizhen described the conversational activities in that class. The Chinese students usually talked to each other about some specified topic (Interview One). Sometimes the
topics they were given were not interesting. Also, there were not enough native speakers for one on one speaking, perhaps only one or two native speaker teachers. In addition, Qizhen did not think most of the teachers were majoring in language teaching, but rather they just came to China and told the language institute managers that they were capable of teaching English classes. They did not have any of their own teaching materials. Instead they used the materials given to them by the managers. In general, Qizhen did not feel these classes were helpful for her SE.

Qizhen had another opportunity to practice her English at a university club that met regularly to practice English. She described the format of their meetings.

(Journal: Week Two)

There was an association in my university when I was in China. Members always met in a certain time every week and talked to one another freely. They could choose any topic they had common interest. The gathering lasted 3 or 4 hours. I don’t know if it is helpful since I can easily predict the Chinese speakers by the same accent. At the same time, I got frustrated by my overloaded schedule and I didn’t have enough time to participate it. It is hard for me to meet native English speakers since dorms for Foreign students are separate that from the Chinese.

In Interview One, I asked Qizhen to explain why it was easy to predict the Chinese speakers by the same accent. First, they all talked in a British way she said. Second, the students had similar pronunciation or language problems. For example, even though a student could not pronounce something quite right, Qizhen could still understand what that person was trying to say, because perhaps she did not know the correct pronunciation or way of saying it either.

The next aspect was her interaction with native speakers in the U.S. Qizhen emphasized the lack of time, no interest in the topic of discussion, and feeling out of place.
(Interview One, pp. 10-11)

Q: I will do the experiment. I won’t have time to interact with uh native speakers. And uh after in the class in the classrooms I’d let me see I think I also have no chance to speak with them too. . . . Even though we may arrive the classroom uh before ahead of time,

F: Right

Q: but we just ask some kind of “How are you?” something like that

F: Right

Q: and we didn’t talk uh very deep

F: Okay

Q: and just mm I don’t think hav I I have enough chances to talk to them. Sometimes even uh they can the spea native speakers they talk yeah with each other,

F: Uh huh

Q: and I can not uh huh how to say that comical mmm no I can not uhm say something with them because may be I can not tha the topic they’re talking I’m not interested in.

Then, I asked Qizhen about her interaction with her professors. Sometimes even with them she could not find topics to talk about. With her advisor she would talk for about ten minutes, but the previous quarter she was in Antarctica doing research, so Qizhen did not have any contact with her. Qizhen added that two quarters previously, she went over to the K research center and ate her lunch with her advisor and the other female group members, who had also done research in Antarctica (Interview One). In this group they often talked about routine things like housework and children. Unfortunately, Qizhen did not have common topics to talk about with them either.

To summarize, Qizhen’s formal English instruction in China emphasized reading and grammar. Before she came to the U.S., Qizhen took some classes at a language institute and attended meetings of the university’s English club. Nonetheless, both of these supplemental activities were not helpful to improve her SE. In regards to her interaction with native speakers in the U.S., she really had few opportunities to use her SE because she spent four hours a day in the lab doing research. When Qizhen did have contact with native speakers such as classmates and professors, she often could not find common topics to discuss with them and felt out of place.
Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview

Qizhen discussed how she felt towards the university’s requirement for ITA’s.

(Journal: Week Three)

Theoretically, I understand the university’s requirement about the international TA. It’s necessary for them to have correct pronunciation and teaching skill. If he/she can’t make himself/herself understood the students will easily lose and they will feel frustrated about this and lose interests in the courses. This will result to the destruction of someone’s whole career.

Practically, I think the requirement is too strict. Changing a speaking habit is not easy and can’t be achieved over one or two quarters. It needs a lot of work. International students always have overloaded classes. If they have more time for practicing, they might improve quickly. But the reality always conflicts with my hope. I don’t know what I can do.

Moreover, Qizhen expressed two main reasons why she was highly motivated to pass the 104.5 EI. To begin, she realized the importance of SE as a communication tool to express herself and interchange opinions with others (Journal: Week Eight). Second, she was under stress to pass the interview, because her RA funding was running out. So she needed SE certification to become a TA in her department. Qizhen acknowledged that sometimes we need pressure to keep us motivated, as long as the pressure is not overwhelming (Interview Three).

In all, Qizhen considered the university’s policy about SE certification for ITA’s as a necessary means to correct their pronunciation and improve their teaching skill. Nevertheless, the requirement should be more flexible and take into account the student’s class load. Qizhen also described two motivations to pass the EI: a) it was an important communication tool, and b) she needed a TA position in her department.

Communication Focus

When Qizhen communicated with other people in English, she paid attention to their content words, especially the last content word (Journal: Week Four). Content words were important because they contained information. In fact, the last content word contained the
new information (Interview Two). Of course, she hoped to obtain all the information about the sentence, for example the non-content words too, because they composed part of a sentence and indicated the tense.

At this point I would like to digress from Qizhen’s communication focus and explain what content words are. The students in the SE 104.5 class learn that in SE content words are generally stressed. The speaker indicates stress by a rise in pitch, lengthening of the stressed syllable, and clarity of vowel sounds in the word. Content words include nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, negatives, interrogatives, and demonstratives. Non-content words are commonly called function words. “Function words are those whose meaning is primarily grammatical, and which are unstressed in spoken language and as a consequence are spoken quickly, quietly, with lower pitch and often with reduced vowels, that is with vowels with less distinct movement of the articulators- generally centralized” (SEP instructor, personal communication, March 2000). This group of words includes auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, possessives, pronouns, articles, and prepositions. Actually any particular word in a sentence or phrase in spoken language can be stressed if a particular meaning is being conveyed.

Qizhen explained some more why she listened to the stressed words.

(Interview Two, p. 2)

F: So here you talk a little bit more about uhm that you pay you pay attention to the words that people stress.
Q: Yes
F: Right?
Q: Yes. Because this uh word stress is hearings uh capture (laughs) capturing capturing your hearing.
F: Oh capture
Q: Capture (laughs), yeah
F: (Laughs) Capture your hearing, right?
Q: (Coughs) Yeah
F: Okay
Q: So they will prompt prompt into your your ap your mind.
F: They do. They do serve as prompts. Mm hmm. They serve as prompts. You mention that intonation is something else that you pay attention to because it can change the meaning of sentences.
Q: Yes. Sometime yeah sometimes they may use the same sentence but they will use some kind uh some kind ironic uh meaning.

I asked Qizhen if she was able to pick up any of those ironic meanings. She said that some of the more obvious ones, but it was hard to catch those that were ingrained with cultural meaning. For example, sometimes she did not know why her classmates were laughing at a joke.

In contrast, Qizhen paid attention to the content she was going to express and sentence structure in her SE (Journal: Week Four). Of course, if she was talking extemporaneously, there was no time to think through the details. Other SE students have also told me this in tutorials. According to them, it becomes so automatic to disregard pronunciation and grammar and just focus on the content of the topic. As Tadashi had pointed out, native speakers are not concerned about grammar or pronunciation, they just want to convey their meaning via ideas, opinions, and thoughts.

In summary, Qizhen paid attention to content words in other people’s SE. From these words, she obtained new and important information. Intonation was another focal point, because attitudes and emotions could be conveyed with it. Meanwhile in her SE, Qizhen focused on the content she wanted to express.

Areas of Progress

Qizhen was seeing progress in her pronunciation, especially her distinction of /r/ and /l/ (Journal: Week Five). In spite of confusing them at times, they were improving. Another example she provided was /t/ and /s/. She knew their pronunciation, but when she had to use them in a sentence, she could not always distinguish them. As a note of interest, during her second video presentation another Chinese female student had mispronounced the /t/ in the word “thin”. Qizhen repeated the word to this student with the correct pronunciation of /t/- ‘You mean . . . thin [/tIn/’ (Fieldnotes: February, 16, 1999).
Through practice her intonation, which used to sound flat, was also improving (Journal: Week Five). Timing, that is, thought groups and rhythm, was another important area of improvement. She used to read a sentence word by word instead of pausing between thought groups. This progress had a positive effect on her fluency. Finally, Qizhen was trying to overcome her shyness in speaking English. She realized that in order to develop her conversational skills, she needed to practice talking with people in English.

Regarding areas where she was not seeing any progress, Qizhen said that “some troublesome pronunciations . . . [were] still hanging around” (Journal: Week Five). In Interview Two (p. 7) she talked about these troublesome pronunciations.

F: What are those “troublesome pronunciations” that are still hanging around?
Q: Uh actually I those pronunciation I have improvement.
F: Uh huh
Q: Sometimes I also have the trouble with them,
F: Okay
Q: because I don’t think they’re set. Even though I make uh some improvement in it uh if they are in the in the sentence
F: Hm
Q: or in a complicated uh sen sentence struc uh sentence sentence
F: Mm hmm
Q: sentence, I will have trouble to pronounce it right.
F: So
Q: Especially I have to say it very quickly and if you uh extract it uh just wuh word by word,
F: Uh huh
Q: I might uh I might can I might able to speak it uh as quickly as I can.

According to Qizhen’s explanation, the pronunciations were not set, but the probability of saying them correctly had improved. Incidentally, Qizhen thought that the person who had developed the concept of probability was a good person. This concept was a positive outlook on her continued progress in SE. The fact that she was being a little more consistent in pronouncing l/r, S/s, and T/s correctly encouraged her. Finally, more practice and a good mood would increase her probability of pronouncing these sounds correctly.
To summarize, Qizhen had improved her pronunciation, intonation, timing, and overcoming her shyness. Nevertheless, even though her probability and consistency of pronouncing l/r, S/s, and T/s correctly had improved, she still needed continued practice to stabilize them.

 Strategies to Improve SE

Qizhen tried to express her content and pronunciation as clearly as possible when she spoke to native speakers (Journal: Week Six and Interview Two). In fact, she appreciated it when someone corrected her pronunciation, because in this way, she could try to say it correctly the next time (Interview Two). Furthermore, to develop her fluency, she tried to speak to native speakers as much as possible every day (Journal: Week Six). Also, she went to the language lab two to four hours a week to practice problem areas in her pronunciation (Interview Two).

During her video presentations she utilized transparencies to make her SE comprehensible, for example she pointed to the words on the screen if she had problems with their pronunciation or spelled them (Journal: Week Six). According to Qizhen, practicing the words for a few days before the presentation was not enough to pronounce them right. It was a long process to acquire correct pronunciation (Interview Two). Besides transparencies, Qizhen used other compensatory strategies to help her audience understand, such as framing devices and clear organization, pausing and asking questions, doing comprehension checks and summarizing the content (Fieldnotes).

In my fieldnotes I elaborated on her use of transparencies during her video presentations:

January 26, 1999

She stood behind the transparency facing the class as she spoke. She used large font size on the transparencies and used numbers to organize her content. . . . She referred to the
numbered points on the transparencies as she spoke. This created framing and comprehensibility of her content. . . . She asked a question at the end of her first transparency about why only one in a million living organisms becomes fossilized (‘Does it surprise you that only one in a million becomes fossilized?’). I looked at her and nodded my head. The second transparency outlined several points (1-4?) why this was the case. At the end of the second transparency she used a comprehension check to see if we now understood why only one in a million becomes fossilized.

February 15, 1999

Qizhen did her presentation second. She used rhetorical questions to frame her content and several times also paused to see if there were any questions about what she had said. Her topic was ‘The structure of the Earth’. She used three transparencies- a summary, outline form, and diagram of the parts of the Earth.

To sum up, Qizhen did use strategies to improve her SE. In daily conversations with people, she expressed herself as clearly as possible. She practiced pronunciation in the language lab several hours a week. In addition, her video presentations were well organized, interactive, and the content was made clearer through the use of transparencies.

Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality

Qizhen discussed the changes she saw in her attitude, thinking, and personality as she was learning and using SE. It seems that she really gave this topic considerable thought.

(Journal: Week Seven)

The following changes:
1) In my attitude: I realize that learning another language is a long term process and it is not easy. Sometimes, I got frustrated when I can’t make others understood. At the same time, I know that I need to improve my spoken English in order to facilitate my study and interact with others. I’m trying to overcome the frustration and try to think in positive way. I’m building up my confidence.

As far as thinking skill . . . [,] I think I’m still using Chinese way. I’m changing my thinking skill. At the beginning when I leasoned [listened] to others, I needed to change the sentence into
Chinese then catch the meaning. There is a delay between hearing and response. Now, as to those sentences without complicate structures/vocabulary, I can respond it in English.

As to personality, I’m becoming a little bit outgoing since I need to talk with people. Shyness/quietness doesn’t do any good for improvement at a language.

The way I feel about myself; try to encourage myself for the improvement of the spoken English.

I asked Qizhen if she thought it was fair to have to make changes in herself while learning SE. This is how she responded:

(Interview Three, p. 9)

Q: Mm I think it is fair. I think I think it’s lots of work for your time and effort. Mm I think you need to communicate with others
F: Mm hmm
Q: and try to get uh learn something from others. I think everybody has their own uh his own virtue.
F: Own virtue?
Q: Yeah, virtue. So you might learn something you might not have. So it’s good.

In addition, she felt quite happy being more open. Otherwise as she added, it would be very lonely for foreign students, if they could not make friends, because all of their old friends and family were far away from them. She had made some good friends while she was here, and her life was easier because of them.

In all, Qizhen had experienced some changes in her attitude, thinking, and personality. She was developing a positive attitude to language learning and thinking more in English. Finally, she was becoming outgoing and active in order to improve her SE.

New Things Learned

Qizhen learned several new things during the quarter of SE 104.5. From her pronunciation tutor she learned how to breathe deeply from the belly. Deep breathing
helped her fluency, rhythm, and intonation (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three).

I asked Qizhen if she had noticed a difference between breathing deeply versus from her shoulders. This was her response:

(Interview Three, pp. 3-4)

Q: Yes, sometimes. When I was uh in the extreme case.
   (Laughs)
F: So when you say, “When I was in this extreme case.”
Q: Yes
F: what do you mean by that?
Q: Uh if I eh im uh in the shallow breathing
F: Uh huh
Q: uhm, uhm (clears throat) my frequency for the breathing
   is very quickly. It’s very quick. At that time I’ve noticed
   that I have a problem with my fluency and rhythm.
F: So that seems to interfere?
Q: Yes
F: Cause interference then with your fluency?
Q: Yes
F: With fluency and what else did you say, rhythm?
Q: Yes

She also learned how to control pausing in sentences from her tutor (Ibid). Pausing involves breaking up a sentence or phrase into small units called thought groups and at the end of each thought group, there is a brief pause. These pauses allow the speaker to breathe, and also help the listener process what the speaker said. Pausing within thought groups disrupts the natural rhythm of SE and can make the message harder to process. Furthermore, in the SE class she learned about the flap, linking, ellipsis, and assimilation (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). These things she mainly learned from the 104.5 textbook, Sound Advice: A Basis for Listening (Hagen, 1988). Finally, Qizhen learned how to distinguish s/S, r/l, and ow/a (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three).

In summary, from her tutor Qizhen learned how to improve her fluency, rhythm, and intonation by breathing deeply and how to control pausing in spoken language. The Sound Advice textbook in the SE class was a good resource for learning about common spoken language patterns. Also in the SE class Qizhen learned the distinction of certain consonant and vowel sounds.
Effects of Reflection on Learning

As Qizhen discussed with me in Interview One and Three, writing and thinking about her SE, facilitated the awareness of her problems in grammar and pronunciation. Consequently, she needed to find out what to do to improve them. In addition, Qizhen realized the importance of SE (Journal: Week Five). First, it was a useful tool to express herself and exchange opinions with others. Second, she was under financial stress to receive SE certification in order to become a TA in her department.

At the same time, she needed to improve her pronunciation, idioms, vocabulary, fluency, and intonation as much as possible if she wanted to speak like a native speaker (Ibid). Finally, she had developed a style in her writing that included three parts: an “introduction (background, and importance of a certain thing), body (development of my topic) and a conclusion” (Ibid). Qizhen structured her three video presentations in this way too (Fieldnotes). As a result, her presentations were clear and easy to understand. It certainly compensated for her pronunciation problems, and the audience could understand her better (Journal: Week Eight).

To sum up, Qizhen had become aware of the importance of SE and her language problems by reflecting on her learning. In turn, this awareness had encouraged her to find ways to improve her spoken language. The organizational style that she had developed in her writing had positive benefits in her video presentations too.
Case Study Five: Ho Yeon

Profile

Ho Yeon was a Korean female around thirty years old. She had been in the U.S. for a year and a half. She got married just before Fall quarter of 1998. Her husband was also a Korean graduate student. She had met him in her dormitory. Due to their busy schedules he often helped her out with cooking. She was pursuing a Ph.D. in family resource management. She was a non-teaching TA in her department and assisted her advisor in research. During the first week of the Winter Quarter 1999, Ho Yeon took her qualifying exams. She had been worried about these exams and had not performed her best on the SE 104.5 diagnostics that were given that same week. In my fieldnotes I had observed the difference in her first video presentation and the impromptu diagnostic.

January 22, 1999

She talked a little quickly and with clarity, framing her content, and using transitional words. She also rephrased some points. She did much better than her impromptu a few weeks ago. She definitely was better prepared, fluent, and confident. She had her qualifying exam [that] she was worried about the week that we had our 2 diagnostics; she mentioned this to me in her tutorial a few days ago.

Ho Yeon had a warm smile and laugh. She had shoulder-length hair that she wore pulled back with a black, velvety ponytail holder (Fieldnotes). The week that she was sick she wore a red and blue baseball cap. Ho Yeon had small framed glasses and diamond earrings. She used a pale foundation and a light shaded lipstick. Her daily wardrobe consisted of black pants and bell-bottom blue jeans, a black down-filled coat, sweaters of an olive color, soft yellow wool, or oatmeal gray, a white turtleneck, a vest with an Asian/Indian motif, and a denim shirt. Her favorite colors were dark green, blue, and yellow.

She had visited ten or more countries in Europe and had laughed nervously as she named them in front of her peers (Fieldnotes). She wanted to get a faculty position at a Korean university because it was prestigious. What made these positions even more
desirable was that Korean faculty members have vacations in summer and winter. In addition to faculty positions, there were also opportunities as a research analyst, statistician, and marketing analyst. Information privacy and customer service on the internet were hot research topics in her field. After the quarter was over, Ho Yeon was going to attend a research conference in Chicago. Chicago has a large Korean community with many Korean restaurants. So, she was looking forward to this trip, because she would be able to eat some good Korean food there.

She was shy and reserved, but was trying to become open and friendly. Her language learning seemed to be more introverted (Fieldnotes). In fact during one class period she had suggested that “simple and interesting questions may help those students who don’t participate in class discussions” (Ibid: January 20, 1999). This was the second quarter that Ho Yeon was repeating SE 104.5 with me (Fieldnotes). She had a quiet confidence toward the material we were studying. She was improving the clarity of her pronunciation and self-monitoring. In a class fluency activity, I had paired Ho Yeon up with a Vietnamese male student to talk about a situation of a mother writing to a psychologist about baby boys wearing pink (Ibid). The Vietnamese student had been adamant that baby boys should not wear pink clothing. In contrast, Ho Yeon said that it was parents who created gender role perceptions. These are the reflective notes I wrote about her response.

(Fieldnotes: January 22, 1999)

I was very happy to see Ho Yeon openly and with a smile express her opinion about boys wearing pink. The important thing was that she talked and was not afraid to express her opposing view. She utilized some sophisticated language and ideas to express her view. She talked about how parents’ perceptions encourage set gender roles.

By the end of the quarter there was an observable change in her communication skills. She was definitely more open and active in speaking English.

When she had finished her EI for Winter 1999, she was smiling and sounded positive (Fieldnotes). “I pointed out my observation of this from last quarter. Last quarter
when she came out she wasn’t smiling and didn’t have much to say about the interview” (Ibid: March 9, 1999). In my Final Report notes of Winter 1999 I wrote that Ho Yeon “has made a lot of improvement in utilizing sophisticated sentence structure in the two quarters that I have had her”. Furthermore, the interviewers for her EI of Winter 1999 had written comments like:

(El Notes, March 8, 1999)

She takes charge, really works at communicating and remains cheerful and poised. Sometimes it’s a struggle, but she gets there. Monitors. (Interviewer: SS)

Really . . . see [a] change in communicative ability. She keeps at it till she gets across her point. She has improved a lot in fluency & expression. (Interviewer: EEC)

It is understandable from these positive notes why their final decision was that she would progress to SE 105.

In summary, I have provided a basic description of Ho Yeon, that is, her major, a physical profile, her future aspiration, interests, some characteristics of her personality, and the positive changes in her communicative skills. At this point, I would like to continue with a description of her SE learning experience in Winter quarter of 1999.

Spoken Language Difficulties

Ho Yeon discussed four main problems in her SE, namely: a) pronunciation especially those sounds that do not exist in Korean; b) grammar, in particular complex sentence structures and word order; c) using appropriate words; and d) word stress. She elaborated on these problems in her journal entry for Week One.

First- Pronunciation problem

Sometimes, I have used some pronunciation indistinctively, in particular, “p & f”, “r & l”, “v & b.” I think that I feel difficult to pronounce those because Korean does not have some pronunciation like “f, r, v, z”. It is nature that it is not easy to fixed my pronunciation since I am accustomed to Korean for 30 years deeply. I tried to make difference in these
pronunciations. But, sometimes I couldn’t pronounce in a right way, particularly, when I speak it in hurry, and unconsciously.

Second- Grammar problem

Sometimes, I am reluctant to speak English fluently because of my imperfect grammar. In particular, I feel that I am difficult in using complex sentence, idioms that Americans frequently have used in informal. Also, sometimes I can not communicate with Americans smoothly as much as I’d like to because I am not yet familiar with idioms and words Americans often have used. Since grammar structure in Korean is very different from American, it makes me to take time to make correct sentence. Thus, it hampers me to speak fluently.

Third- Using appropriate words, and Stress

I am confused in using appropriate words and word stress. It causes Americans not to understand what I am saying, so that I lose confidence in speaking English more. I think that because my thought is depended on Korean words so much, and I tried to transfer Korean word to English directly when I speak English, I couldn’t speak fluently if I couldn’t find appropriate words.

To summarize, Ho Yeon seemed quite aware of her spoken language problems. At the same time she realized that she needed more time and practice to correct her pronunciation and become more fluent (Interview One). Furthermore, confidence played an influential role to improve her speaking.

Formal Instruction and Interaction with Native Speakers

Even though there was an emphasis on English education in middle school, high school, and college in Korea, they did not provide opportunities to learn how to speak the language (Journal: Week Two). In recent years elementary schools have attempted to gradually offer SE to students. In Interview One Ho Yeon explained that the teaching emphasis was on grammar and writing, in order to obtain a high score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and GRE. In contrast, while she was at State University, the SE instructors taught her pronunciation, fluency, and grammar with more individualized instruction (Ibid).
When Ho Yeon was a college student in Korea, she had a few opportunities to talk with native speakers of English (Journal: Week Two and Interview One). For example, she met an American friend who had visited Korea. But if you wanted to speak English, it was necessary to go to a private language institute and take a SE course. The teachers at the language institute were almost all native speakers of English. The cost of attending was about $100 a month. However, the problem with these courses was that the class size was too large to be taught individually. Many students only said several sentences per class period (Interview One). Therefore, Ho Yeon did not think it was helpful for improving her SE (Journal: Week Two).

Of course, Ho Yeon had more chances to speak English in the U.S (Journal: Week Two). Usually she talked with her advisor, other professors, and classmates about her courses, research, and major (Interview One and Journal: Week Two). Nevertheless, there were not many opportunities to speak English informally. In fact, when American students spoke English informally, she often could not understand them because of idioms.

To sum up, in Korean schools the emphasis in English language instruction was on grammar and writing. Although the private language institutes provided SE courses, Ho Yeon did not think they were helpful, because their class size was too large to practice speaking English. In the U.S. Ho Yeon had more opportunities to use and learn about SE. Generally, her conversations with native speakers at State University were limited to formal topics related to her field of study. She had problems understanding informal language.
Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview

Ho Yeon agreed that the university SE requirement was a necessary one. However, she felt that pronunciation and fluency could not be attained at a native speaker level in a year or less.

(Journal: Week Three)

I think that international TA must speak English well and spoken English courses are good opportunity for international students to learn spoken English. Therefore, spoken English courses are necessary. However, it is hard for international students to be native speaker in pronunciation, and fluency for a short time (e.g. 1 year). Although international students can not pass exit interview, it is severe not to give some opportunity (financial aid or TA position). It can not be standard to evaluate the ability of students.

I think that as time goes by, non-native speakers will improve spoken English, if taken some spoken English courses. So, it may be appropriate for students to take several courses for 1 year. Depending on ability, it can be reduced. In my case, I have taken same course over 1 year. I think that it is not helpful to me if I take it again because it causes me to be tedious, discouraged and exhausted rather than positive effect. Thus, it is not effective way to let students take repeatedly. In my opinion, the policy of spoken English department should be changed like that of written English. It is necessary to consider whether this style is effective for students.

I asked Ho Yeon to describe the composition program’s policy at State University.

(Interview One, p. 10)

F: How is the composition program’s policy?
H: Uh, uh first of all they don’t have Exit Interview (laughs).
F: Okay
H: Uh so I can I can finish with one year. Uh so mm it it does um it doesn’t give more stress on me. Uhm (pause) but (laughs) but uh and also they have they have a fixed schedule like 107, 108, or or more advanced course more advanced course. Uhm so if I (pause) so I think the I think the advan uh no I think mm it’s not advantage. It isn’t uhm I uh I can I don’t have I don’t have a lot of stress from from composition.

Ho Yeon was under a lot of pressure to pass the EI by the end of Winter Quarter 1999, because her departmental financial aid would be discontinued if she did not pass (Ibid). So, it was very important for her to pass. Moreover, her advisor, for whom she was
an RA, told her that SE 104 and 104.5 were more beneficial because these courses would help her improve her basic speaking ability in English, whereas the 105 class focused on teaching skills. In their department there would be no opportunities to teach students. Therefore, she simply had to show that she was enrolled in an SE 105 course by summer or fall of 1999 (Fieldnotes).

In all, Ho Yeon understood the necessity of the university SE requirement for ITAs. At the same time, she felt that it was unrealistic to achieve native speaker fluency and pronunciation in a short time period and unfair to only evaluate the students’ ability by their EI result. In her case, she had become discouraged and frustrated because she had to repeat the 104.5 course several times. Finally, she was under a lot of stress to pass the course, otherwise her departmental financial support would be cut off.

Communication Focus

Ho Yeon paid attention to the use of words of native speakers and not so much to pronunciation, intonation, and stress (Journal: Week Four). According to Ho Yeon, vocabulary was important because if she remembered the words, she could apply them in her own English (Ibid and Interview Two). But if it was a word she had never used, the pronunciation would be difficult even though she understood and knew the meaning of the word (Interview Two). “Thoroughly” was a good example.

(Interview Two, pp. 1-2)

H: Yeah. Uh for example, uhm I I mentioned before in the practice speaking practice uhm I I the ‘thoroughly’ yeah. I I thought uh sometimes I thought I thought uhm before some someone use that word but I never use (laughs)
F: Okay
H: in my language. So I have some problem in pronunciation . . . exactly that word.
[pause]
F: Do you think that’s normal?
H: Normal?
F: Yeah
H: I don’t know (laughing). But uhm I think uh people learn
Sometimes she was confused about which word was appropriate for a particular situation (Interview Two). Nevertheless, knowing some practical and common words would be helpful when she spoke English. Furthermore, she paid attention to grammar, especially function words and verbal forms (Journal: Week Four). Of course, when native speakers were talking too fast and using a lot of linking, it was hard for her to understand, and as a consequence she would lose her attention span. Interestingly, she was more likely to pay attention continuously when non-native speakers were talking to the extent that she could distinguish the English of Korean, Japanese, Indian, and Spanish speakers from their pronunciation, intonation, and stress.

In her SE, Ho Yeon focused on pronunciation and the use of words (Interview Two). When she spoke English, her purpose was to make the receiver understand her words clearly. “What happens when you can’t make yourself understood?” I asked Ho Yeon (Interview Two, p. 2). One strategy was to avoid those words she could not pronounce accurately and use a simple or easier word (Ibid and Journal: Week Four). “Uhm I in that uhm I try to use another word, or some the word (laughs) the word . . . the easier word to understand . . . easier (laughs). Or some simple word (pause) mm (pause) yeah I think so (laughs)” (Interview Two, p. 2). Ho Yeon realized that people were able to understand her better than when she used a complicated word.

But it was very hard to only use a simple word to communicate a complex or academic term (Interview Two). For example, it was difficult to translate a complicated
Korean word into English. She had to choose a more complicated word in English. Unfortunately, she could not always find the appropriate word. When faced with such a situation, she usually murmured and hesitated—thus affecting her fluency.

Once again, Ho Yeon reiterated how important her pronunciation was in America by describing a restaurant situation.

(Interview Two, pp. 3-4)

In American (laughs) in American I feel the pronunciation is very very important to uhm very important, because uh sometimes uhm, for example in restaurant I order some food but the waitress can not understand my word (laughs); uh because my pronunciation is wrong (laughs). Uh so in that case uhm I’m frustrated (laughs) frustrated uh so I so when whenever whenever I face that situation yeah I have to pronounce [her pronunciation] pronounce exactly more exactly (laughs) and yeah since I think it is very necessary for me (laughs).

On the other hand, there were instances when students understood Ho Yeon even if she had mispronounced a word, especially a word where she had confused the /p/ and /f/. Regardless of these instances, Ho Yeon thought that pronunciation was important. Finally, she also focused on word order, verb tense, and function words when she spoke English. Recall that in Seung-Ho’s case study and also Tadashi’s, they also talked about sentence structure in English compared to Korean and Japanese. Both Korean and Japanese sentences are ordered SOV whereas English sentence structure is SVO.

In summary, Ho Yeon paid attention mainly to vocabulary in other people’s SE in order to learn some practical words for her own SE. However, if it was a word that she had never used before, she was likely to have problems pronouncing it. In that case, she would use a simple or easier word to make herself understood, but this strategy did not apply to all words. For instance, sometimes complicated words could not be simplified. Moreover, she really stressed the importance of pronunciation in her SE, because it was a necessary skill in
everyday situations like ordering food in a restaurant. In both her SE and other people’s, she focused on grammar, function words, and verb tense. Lastly, word order was another important focus when she spoke English.

Areas of Progress

Ho Yeon admitted that it was hard to evaluate her progress in SE, because perhaps someone else’s evaluation of her English was more exact (Interview Two). Generally, she felt that her progress was very slow. It was hard to progress rapidly (Journal: Week Five). Lots of time, practice, and experience were needed to make progress. She did say that compared to six months or a year ago, her English had improved a little bit, especially her pronunciation and word stress (Ibid and Interview Two). Also, she could speak English more smoothly than the year before.

I encouraged her to talk more on this topic. “Do you think that um you’ll see in that in another year you will see more improvement?” and “What areas do you think you’ll see improvement in?” (Interview Two, p. 5). This was Ho Yeon’s response:

(Laughs) uh I think I can speak more fluently, and I can I can pronounce more more exactly in some some difficult difficult pronunciation. And mm if I have if I have more chance to uhmm communicate with other other people uhm I can use I can use more uhm more practical word or more uhm a lot a lot of words American use. Mm I hope so (laughs).

Having had Ho Yeon in my 104.5 class for two consecutive quarters, Fall 1998 and Winter 1999, I observed a noticeable improvement in her motivation to learn and use SE. She had become more active and assertive about her SE learning by modeling other Chinese students in her SE class and major classes (Interview Four). It was interesting that in our SE 104.5 class there were two Chinese females, Xiaolan and Qizhen (also participants in this study), who were very assertive, active, and motivated about their learning. Both of them had financial pressures from their departments to pass the EI and move onto SE 105 as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, one of them was planning to get married in China
during the summer provided she passed the EI. Furthermore, Ho Yeon pointed out that Chinese students had a stronger motivation to learn and improve their English quickly than Korean students.

(Interview Four, pp. 1-2)

Yeah, I (laughs) observed that kin that student those Chinese students are more active and so they can improve fast than Korean students. And also if someone uh have more strong motivation uh kind of of the pass Mock Teaching Test or for example department put push push them (laughs) to pass Mock Teaching Test, they have they can have more strong motivation. So uhm they they I think they make themself to be more active or more uhm aggressive (laughs) in speaking English, and also uhm I I think if if people are active to speak uh active uh they can have more chance to speak English. So that uh that uh makes them that that makes uh people uhm to practice more and pronounce pronounce more so uh that uh help (laughs). I think that helps uhm people to improve uh some pronunciation and the use of English usage, yeah.

She mentioned that several of the Chinese students in her major classes were planning to stay in the U.S. So they had a strong motivation to learn English (Interview Four). On the other hand, almost all Korean students were planning to return to Korea as soon as they graduated. Consequently, their SE motivation was much weaker than the Chinese. Despite the fact that Ho Yeon would also be returning to Korea, she still felt it was helpful to have an active attitude to using SE, because from this openness she would attract more opportunities to speak English. As her instructor, it was quite satisfying to see her behavior and attitude change out of her own self-realization.

Regarding areas in her SE where Ho Yeon was not seeing improvement, she said that it was difficult to improve pronunciation (Journal: Week Five and Interview Two). For instance, even though she understood the difference between /t/ and /l/, /t/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/, /dZ/ and /z/, she frequently mispronounced them. Differentiating these sounds was still a
problem. The other problem that persisted was with fluency. It was hard to improve her fluency rapidly (Journal: Week Five). It seemed to take a lot of time to see progress in this area, but anyway she hoped to speak English fluently like Americans did.

To sum up, despite the fact that her progress in SE was slow, Ho Yeon did see improvement in pronunciation, word stress, and fluency compared to the previous year. There was an improvement too in her motivation to learn and use SE. She became more active and open by observing her Chinese peers in her classes. She observed that their strong motivation to learn was having positive and rapid effects on their SE progress. Ho Yeon still saw problems in her differentiation of certain consonant sounds and fluency, but she maintained a hopeful attitude, because she knew that it would take more time and practice to improve these things.

Strategies to Improve SE

Ho Yeon tried to improve her SE by imitating Americans (Journal: Week Six and Interview Two). They served as models of pronunciation and spoken language. Otherwise, she would have been limited by her Koreanization of English.

(Interview Two, p. 6)

H: I think it imitation is sometimes very helpful uh to improve my spoken English uh other otherwise uh I can otherwise I am limited to my own word my own own Koreanize (laughs) Koreanizing English yeah (laughs).
F: Koreanization of English?
H: Yeah (laughs)
F: (Laughs)
H: So some I think yeah it is (laughs) it is help helpful. Oh also when the the written English uh when when I reading some book or some magazine uhm if I memori if I memorize uhm sometimes the even though it is written English, uhm it is I can use I can use that in my speaking
English. Sometimes mm the they use they use mixed mixed form spo (laughs) spoken English and written English formal, informal uh particularly in magazine.

F: Yes
H: Yeah, if I can memorize uh the sentence, uhm I can use I can use I can apply to my speaking. So sometimes it’ll it is helpful (laughs) . . . to improve.

Actually she did not have much time to read magazines, but sometimes while searching the internet, she would learn a business or customer word that was used in daily life (Interview Two). She added that if she found a word or sentence in books or heard something on TV, she would look up the meaning and then try to use it in her English (Journal: Week Six).

In addition, she tried to make her fluency smoother and fluid by reducing the pauses between words (Ibid). In fact, her husband had pointed out the superfluous pauses in and between sentences in her video presentations the previous quarter (Interview Two). So based on his comments, she made efforts to speak as smoothly as possible. She realized that if she prepared and organized her presentation well, she did not have to pause and think so much. In general, her presentations were clear and well organized (Video Presentation Notes). She took advantage of transparencies to organize the topic. They were easy to read and follow. Furthermore, her explanations were thorough. She also monitored her pronunciation.

Another strategy to overcome her pronunciation difficulties in the video presentations was to prepare a list of words she would use (Journal: Week Six). First, she would check their pronunciation and stress in the dictionary. Then she practiced the words repeatedly out loud- pronouncing them slowly and paying special attention to the stress of the word (Journal: Week Seven). Incidentally, she had great focal stress on key terms in all three of her presentations (Video Presentation Notes).

(Interview Two, p. 7)

H: Uhm, yeah uhm if I prepare more particularly the the words I will use. I I list first of all the words ah the words
I will use in my presentation and then mm (laughs) and if if there is some new words or some difficult words to pronounce pronounce uhm I will I will

F: So you’ll look in the dictionary and practice a little bit?
H: Yeah and oh at the first video presentation uhm I I wrote some sentence or sentence I will (cleared throat) I’m gonna presentate present I’m gonna present. Uhm so and then I memorize some sentence, but I think it is not very helpful (laughs) for me, because uh when I when I presen when I’m presentating

F: Uh huh
H: in the front of the (laughs) in the front of the audience, I I tend to forget (laughs)
F: (Laughs)
H: the sentence the sentences I prepared. So (laughs) I don’t know why it is not helpful (laughing) for me, but uhm sometimes if I prepare prepare more uhm it makes me to speak uh smoothly and it and uh also I try to reduce some pause between sentence and some redundant word for instance uh, ey like this.

To summarize, Ho Yeon’s main strategy to improve her SE was to imitate the way Americans spoke. They were good, reliable models of spoken language. She also learned new words from written texts, that is books, magazines, the internet, and even from TV. She checked the meaning of new words in the dictionary and then applied them if possible in her SE. In the video presentations, she utilized several strategies to improve her comprehensibility. One strategy was to prepare and organize the content well. Once the topic was organized, she prepared a list of key words and practiced them. During the presentation she used transparencies as a visual element and focal stress to help the audience understand the topic. These strategies were quite effective in reducing the number of pauses and as a consequence, her fluency was much smoother.

Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality

Initially Ho Yeon thought it would be impossible to speak like Americans even if she made the effort (Journal: Week Seven). Gradually her thoughts changed as she began learning SE. She realized that her SE would improve by investing time and effort. However, during the Winter quarter she thought her progress was slow, because she did not
have much time to concentrate on English. Yet she still felt that, “I can get some fruit as
much as I made an effort to that” (Ibid). So a more positive attitude and effort were
important for her English.

Moreover, Ho Yeon noticed some changes in her thinking and personality (Journal:
Week Seven). She believed that organized thinking, an active personality, and a positive
attitude were helpful in creating more opportunities to speak which would in turn improve
her English. I asked her if she had noticed any results because of these changes in herself
(Interview Three). She could not say exactly, but she did feel that she had more chances to
speak English and sometimes her pronunciation was corrected by her instructor or someone
else while she was talking. So it also provided feedback on her pronunciation and grammar.
In addition, she explained that if she was thinking about complicated things, but did not
organize them in her mind, it would be difficult to speak fluently. By the same token, if she
had a passive attitude to speaking English or avoided opportunities to use it, the likelihood
to improve would lessen.

(Interview Three, p. 7)

H: Uhmm uh if I if I am passive attitude to speaking English uh I have few chance to few opportunity to speak English. So that uhmm that lessons yeah lessons uh to improve my English. Uh also the more active active attitude uh or the attempt attempt
F: Mm hmm
H: to speak English a lot yeah, it is very helpful to to improve to improve spoken English, because I can have a lot of chance. So it cause me uhm practice uh a lot. (Laughs)
F: Is that something that you became aware of or is it something that somebody pointed out to you or a combination of the two?
H: This no no (laughs) yeah I re I realize yeah that attitude is uhm important, because I uhm when I mm when I saw somebody uh who is very active, uhm he I think he is more likely to improve fast
F: Mm hmm
H: yeah than other than otherwise.

In Interview Four I asked Ho Yeon when she realized this. “Uhm I think I realized this very slowly (laughs) uhm but uhm the last last the two quarters ago, Uh in my
department and in the English class uh when I meet some (laughs) some students yeah I realized” (p. 2). Previously I mentioned that these students were Chinese peers in her major and SE classes. She compared them to Korean students.

(Interview Four, pp. 2-3)

F: What do you notice about their English?
H: Their English? Uh, yeah I think compared to Korean student they they speak they speak well (laughs) better than other students.
F: Ah
H: I think they all students say uh they will they will . . . stay in Unit United States Uni U.S.A.
F: Uh huh
H: for whole life.
F: Ohh
H: (Little laughter) yeah she is not gonna back to (laughs) China.
F: Mm hmm
H: So she she feel the Eng the spoken English very important for her for her life to success in United State uh State
F: Okay
H: States. So uh she is very aggressive at attitude to learn spoken English. So I (laughs) so when I talk with her uh yeah, I feel very (laughs) very surprised (laughs), and so that kind of motivation uh I think may make her to have more active and more aggressive att attitude yeah to learn spoken English. And and also we have three [other] China Chinese students. Uh they have same they they have uh they uh so they will stay here (laughs) [too] . . . .

During the interview I shared with Ho Yeon my observation of the change in her learning behavior the two quarters that she was my student. “You’ve started to become more active and more open um in speaking English” (Interview Four, p. 4). For example, I recall seeing her in the hallway by the vending machines talking to other international students who were not her classmates. In speaking activities in class, she participated more actively. I was sensitive to this change in her, because the previous quarter she was much more reticent and passive about using SE in class and probably outside of class too. So the assertive and active learning behavior of her Chinese peers was a positive and effective modeling tool for Ho Yeon’s spoken language.
Moreover, I was interested in knowing from Ho Yeon what teachers could do to help students realize that an active attitude and behavior were important for learning English (Interview Four). She provided several suggestions. First, the teacher could simply explain to the students about the importance of being active and open towards their SE learning. The teacher could also encourage the students to participate more. For example, if the student was shy or had no idea about a particular topic, they needed to prepare more and make an effort to be active. So information and preparation were essential for being active and participatory.

In all, Ho Yeon did undergo some change in her attitude, thinking, and personality as she was learning SE. She realized that investing time and effort in her English would have fruitful outcomes. Secondly, she realized that organizing her thoughts, gathering information, and preparing well were very helpful to speaking fluently and participating in discussions. Also, she developed a positive attitude and practiced active behavior towards using English. This assertive behavior she learned from her Chinese peers in classes. Finally, she suggested how a teacher could impart this information to other SE students.

New Things Learned

One realization Ho Yeon made was that knowing something about a topic enabled her to speak more fluently in English.

(Journal: Week Eight)

I think that the knowledge or enough information affect considerably on my spoken English. If I have lot of information about something, and know exactly about some topics, then I can speak fluently. Otherwise, I am more likely to be hesitating to talk to others. Similarly, in my presentation, if I am confident to say about some topics, I seem to speak more fluently.

Another realization was the importance of pronunciation to communicate with others. For instance, the word “Kurdish”, she had assumed that she did not know this word. On one occasion when her conversation partner had talked about the Kurdish people,
Ho Yeon had not understood. It turned out that later on when Ho Yeon discussed “Kurdish” with her husband, he told her that it was the same thing as the Korean word Krud (Interview Three). Actually, she already knew this word. It was just pronounced differently in Korean. So in effect, she thought this was a practical example of the importance of pronunciation. In summary, Ho Yeon made some important realizations during the quarter, namely the importance of knowledge and organized thinking for fluency, pronunciation for communication, and an active, positive attitude for increasing her opportunities to speak in English.

Effects of Reflection on Learning

Thinking and writing about her SE learning experience gave Ho Yeon an opportunity to evaluate her SE. She discussed the relationship between writing and spoken language:

(Journal: Week Eight)

I think that writing also affects my spoken English, because good writing can indicate good grammar skill. Also, good writing show good organized thinking. Thus, I believe that writing skill is correlated with spoken English.

From the above entry and her responses to my questions in Interview Three, I got the impression that Ho Yeon had misunderstood the question for Week Eight which was, “How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?”. I think she attempted to show the relationship between writing and speaking. Of course, grammar skills and organized thinking are qualities of good writing, and they definitely also affect a nonnative speaker’s fluency and comprehensibility. Nevertheless, the intent of that question was to gauge if there was any influence on her SE learning, that is: Was she reflecting on and evaluating her spoken language?; or Was the increased awareness causing her to self-monitor and make corrections in pronunciation, grammar, and other language based problems?. Finally, I asked Ho Yeon, “If (pause) if you hadn’t . . .
written about the topics that I gave you, and if you hadn’t thought about these topics, what
do you think you’re learning [of SE] would of been like this quarter?” (Interview Three,
pp. 2-3). She responded in the following manner:

H: Yeah, I think (laughs) I think (pause) I first of all uhm (pause)
[paper shuffling]
H: (laughs) first of all uhm that journal entry is very helpful
for me
F: Okay
H: yeah to speak English, because I have chance to think
more and access my Eng spoken English uh spo spoken
English: uh also the evaluate uhm (laughs) yeah my
English my English. So uh that the thinking about my
spoken English the opportunity of my English or the
past experience about spoken English and the writing
something about that topic is very helpful to uh uh
help uh provide some chance to evaluate myself. So
uhm it is absolutely (laughs) uhm affect my spoken
English.
[pause]
H: Since I think thuhm the opportunity to to think about
think about that
F: Mm hmm
H: or some tim so if some uh to investing time uh to uh to
organize to organize something (pause) uhm would affect
so much uh
F: Uh huh
H: my speaking English.

With this response I felt more confident that she had understood the question. At
the same time perhaps it was what I had wanted to hear, but from the other participants
responses to this question, that may not have been the case. The others had also mentioned
increased awareness and self-reflection of their SE. To summarize, Ho Yeon did feel that
writing and thinking about the journal entries gave her the opportunity to assess her spoken
language. So it clearly affected her learning of SE that quarter.
Summary

Now, I would like to summarize the main themes from the five case studies. For each journal topic, I will present the common patterns of the five participants’ SE learning experience and preview the research literature related to these patterns. Visual displays will be included to represent the data.

Spoken Language Difficulties

Within this topic, three main themes surfaced from the participants’ data:
a) Pronunciation, b) Composing Sentences, and c) Vocabulary. I will begin with pronunciation. A common area of difficulty for all five participants was consonant sounds, especially those consonants that did not exist in their native language. Table 5.1 provides examples of consonants that Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan had problems pronouncing.

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tadashi</td>
<td>th, r/l, v/b, dZ, z, s/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
<td>p/f, r/l, v/b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qizhen</td>
<td>r/l, w/v, s/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seung-Ho</td>
<td>r/l, v/b, p/f, s/S, dZ/Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaolan</td>
<td>Z, kw, dr, Zw, tSr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Pronunciation

For instance, in Japanese, Korean, and Cantonese (spoken in Canton and Hong Kong) there is no distinction of /r/ and /l/. The natural tendency for these students was to substitute /r/ → /l/ or sometimes vice versa. Another example of substitution was for the consonant /v/. The Korean and Japanese students often substituted /v/ with /b/, that is /v/ → /b/. For Qizhen and Xiaolan, the Chinese speakers, pronouncing the /w/ was difficult.
Like many other Chinese students in the SE classes, they confused /w/ and /v/. “At the beginning of words, they produce what sounds like a /w/, pronouncing a word such as ‘west’ as ‘vest’” (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. 116).

Furthermore, voiced fricatives and affricates - /v/, /D/, /z/, /Z/, and /dZ/ - do not exist in Chinese (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). Xiaolan mentioned having problems with /Z/ and consonant clusters, which Chinese does not have in initial or final position (Ibid). Another difficult consonant distinction was /s/ and /S/ for the Japanese, Korean, and one of the Chinese students. “In Korean, /s/ is pronounced as either /S/ (before high and mid front vowels [iy, i, ey, E]) or as aspirated /s/ in most other positions. Thus, words such as ‘seat’ and ‘sheet’ may sound the same (like ‘sheet’)” (Ibid, p. 139).

In addition, as Ho Yeon had indicated, Korean does not have /f/, /r/, /v/, and /z/ (Journal: Week One). So the distinction of /p/ and /f/ was problematic for Ho Yeon and Seung-Ho. Korean speakers tend to substitute /p/ for /f/ and /b/ for /v/ (Ibid). Actually, Korean does not have voiced fricatives /z, v, Z/. Distinguishing dZ/z and dZ/z was mentioned by Tadashi and Seung-Ho. Tadashi also had problems with /th/, which includes both the voiceless /T/ and the voiced /D/. He would substitute /T/ → /s/ and /D/ → /z/ or /dz/. Even though Xiaolan and Qizhen did not mention the /T/, from my fieldnotes, video presentation notes, and speaking practice notes, there was evidence that they had problems with this sound too.

The difficulty for these students with /r/, /v/, /w/, /Z/, /l/, /S/, /dZ/, /th/, and /z/ may stem from the fact that these sounds are not used in their native languages. As a consequence, their facial muscles and tongue were not accustomed to producing these unfamiliar sounds. As Seung-Ho had suggested, repeated muscle training through practice and repetition of the sounds would help second language learners (Interview One). Nevertheless, an important point that Tadashi addressed was the interrelationship of pronunciation and listening.
(Interview One). Being able to hear the subtle difference in similar sounds is a basic step in pronouncing the sounds correctly. Tadashi had described it as a “vicious circle”, because if he could not distinguish the sounds when he listened, it was impossible to pronounce them correctly.

Actually, these particular pronunciation problems can be explained by the linguistic notion of markedness. Markedness is defined as the “complexity, relative infrequency of use or departure from something that is more basic, typical or canonical in a language” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 101). About twenty years prior to Eckman’s Markedness Differential Hypothesis ([MDH] 1985, 1977), Lado (1957) began to study the effects of first language (L1) transfer on second language (L2) learning, especially the transfer of the L1 sound system into the L2 system. Transfer can be defined as the influence of the learner’s native language resulting from similarities and differences to the target language (Ellis, 1994; Odlin, 1989).

In learning the sound system of a foreign language one finds sounds that are physically similar to those of the native language, that structure similarly to them, and that are similarly distributed. ‘Learning’ of such phonemes occurs by simple transfer without difficulty. On the other hand, one also finds sounds that are not part of the sound system of the native language, that structure differently, or that are differently distributed. Learning of these occurs more slowly, and difficulty with them is more persistent. (Lado, 1957, p. 12)

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) arose from this belief that linguistic differences could predict where learning would be difficult: “Where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur, where they were different, negative transfer, or interference would result” (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 53). Years later, Eckman (1985, 1977) proposed that the CAH should be revised and include a notion of degree of difficulty based on the principle of markedness from universal grammar.

The problems for the CAH include cases in which difficulty exists, but there are not corresponding differences between the NL [native language] and TL [target language]
(Richards, 1971; d’Anglejan & Tucker, 1975); and instances where differences between the NL and TL do not cause problems in learning (Gradman 1971). . . . The MDH attempts to remedy the problems of the CAH by claiming that, although differences between the NL and TL are necessary to explain difficulty in (SLA), such differences are not sufficient for an adequate explanation. (1985, p. 3)

Furthermore, in the MDH (Eckman, 1977) the “areas of difficulty that a language learner will have can be predicted on the basis of a systematic comparison of the grammars of the native language, the target language and markedness relations stated in universal grammar,” and the first of three predictions in this hypothesis states (Ibid, p. 321):

a) Those areas of the L2 which differ from the L1, and are more marked than the L1 will be difficult.

According to Kean (1986), what is at issue in “transfer is not the native language versus the target language, but rather the domains of transfer from the native language which are sanctioned at any point in the evolution of the learner’s target language competence” (p. 90). She identified two sources of language transfer. In the first type of transfer, which is called ‘blind transfer’, “a learner has simply failed to take cognizance of some relevant property of the target language which is at variance with the native language, and so is only capable of exploiting native knowledge when the linguistic exigencies demand exploitation of that property” (p. 87). Moreover, she adds that this type of transfer is inevitable because learners can not attend to all aspects of the L2 input at all times, that is, learning is not instantaneous. The second type of transfer is called ‘short-sighted.’ ‘Short-sighted’ transfer occurs because the learner is not able to “make the necessary distinction between the native realization of the property and the target one” (Ibid). Kean noted that markedness considerations can play a role in this type of transfer.

The second theme in spoken language difficulties for Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho was composing sentences. They discussed the different sentence structure in English, which is SVO, compared to Japanese and Korean which both have a SOV structure. For Ho Yeon, the different word order often hampered her from speaking fluently (Journal:
Week One). It took time for her to compose a sentence correctly. In Seung-Ho’s case, he paid attention to the speaker’s question, in particular the interrogative, in order to help him with the word order in English (Interview Two). According to Tadashi, because of the difference in sentence composition in Japanese and English, it took time to process the meaning of a sentence even though the pronunciation and words of the speaker were easily understood (Journal: Week Six). These cases of sentence structure allude to the second prediction in Eckman’s MDH (1977, p. 321):

b) The relative degree of difficulty of the areas of the L2 which are more marked than the L1 will correspond to the relative degree of markedness.

In sum, the principles of markedness seem to explain the problems Qizhen, Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Xiaolan had in English pronunciation and sentence structure.

The third pattern of spoken language difficulties for all five students was a lack of vocabulary to express themselves. Xiaolan’s SE was too formal (Journal: Week One). She had learned a lot of vocabulary through reading. However, she lacked the words, idioms, and phrases that are used informally (Membercheck Notes). What she needed to develop was her sociolinguistic competence for other situations and settings. Canale (1983, p. 7; as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 165) defines sociolinguistic competence as, ‘the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts’. For example, Xiaolan needed to learn the appropriate words or phrases for making small talk with peers in classes, or talking about an informal topic with her conversation partner.

Similarly, Tadashi was concerned about using the appropriate words and expressions (Journal: Week One). He enumerated several reasons why it took him time to find the right word: a) his lack of experience, b) translating from Japanese to English, and c) his personal habit of thinking before speaking (Interview One). Perhaps more than the other participants, Tadashi thought deeply about his language learning and offered
explanations of why, how, or what he was doing in order to express himself in English. This process of being aware and evaluating demonstrated a metacognitive awareness of his language learning. “‘Metacognitive’ means beyond, beside, or with the cognitive” (Oxford, 1990, p. 136).

Language learning strategies researchers have taken the basic classification scheme proposed by Brown and Palinesar (1982) for metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies and applied it to second language learners and studied the types of strategies they use to learn (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Wenden, 1991, 1986, 1983; Oxford, 1990; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; O’Malley et al., 1985a, 1985b; Chamot, 1987). Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as, “Specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p. 8). Learning strategies also refers to what language learners know about the strategies they use (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Specifically, “[m]etacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well one has learned” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 137).

Tadashi seemed to be using metacognitive strategies in his learning of SE. He explained in his first journal entry and also in Interview One three reasons why it took him so long to find the appropriate word or expressions to use. So he was not only aware of his problem, but also why it was occurring. Even though it may have taken time to find the right word, it did not deter him. In his interviews and speaking practices with me he was very talkative. As a matter of fact, the transcripts for his interviews are much longer than the other participants. I was always struck by the variety of words and colloquial expressions he used to express his thoughts and ideas in response to my questions or speaking prompts.
Returning to the other participants, Seung-Ho sometimes lacked field-specific words to express himself (Interview One). Qizhen also had problems coming up with the appropriate word (Interview One). She needed to enlarge her general vocabulary to communicate with others, and at the same time understand what they were saying, especially slang and idioms. Once again, the L2 learner’s sociolinguistic competence plays an important role in their interaction with native speakers in different contexts and situations.

Like the other participants, Ho Yeon was confused about using the appropriate word when speaking English (Journal: Week One). Her confusion seemed to be caused by depending too much on Korean words, that is, translating Korean words directly into English. If she could not find the right words, her fluency was affected. Ellis (1994) explains that “‘L1 transfer’ occurs when the ‘influence’ results from the learner’s mother tongue. Two types of transfer are commonly identified: borrowing transfer (where the L2 influences the L1) and substratum transfer (where the L1 influences the L2)” (p. 711). Studies by Kellerman (1978, 1977) and Jordens (1977) suggest that L2 learners utilize transfer as a strategy to compensate for their lack of L2 knowledge (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Another study by Taylor (1975) indicates that a “learner’s proficiency level is a factor in determining when transfer will occur” (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 105). Ho Yeon was still very dependent on her native language and hence, translated many Korean words directly into English. She did not have a strong enough language base or experience speaking in English to know which words and expressions were appropriate. Therefore, it is understandable that she was relying on L1 transfer to compensate for her word choice problems.

To summarize, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Tadashi, Seung-Ho, and Ho Yeon shared a common feeling of not knowing the appropriate word or expression to use in English. This may have been partly due to their underdeveloped sociolinguistic competence and because of language transfer. I will now turn to the next journal topic.
Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Seung-Ho said that their English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction in their native countries emphasized one or more of these areas: grammar, writing, reading, or translation. Spoken English pronunciation and conversation was not a learning focus in their formal English instruction. Table 5.2, which follows, represents the emphasis for each student.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qizhen</td>
<td>Reading and Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
<td>Grammar and Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tadashi</td>
<td>Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Translating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seung-Ho</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Formal Instruction in English

Seung-Ho began studying English when he was thirteen years old (Interview One). However, the Korean English teachers emphasized grammar throughout his school experience. So even though many Korean students could read and write well in English, by the time they graduated from the university, they still continued to have problems speaking the language (Journal: Week Two). Ho Yeon’s formal English instruction was similar to Seung-Ho’s. There were no opportunities in the Korean school setting to learn how to speak English (Journal: Week Two). She explained that the focus was on grammar and writing in order to help students prepare for the TOEFL and GRE exams. In Japan, Tadashi’s eight years of EFL education included reading, writing, translating, and especially grammar (Membercheck Notes, Interview Three, and Journal: Week Two). He speculated that perhaps the reason the Japanese English teachers did not teach English conversation nor pronunciation was probably because they had problems conversing in English (Interview One). Similarly, Qizhen seldom had chances to speak English.
(Journal: Week Two). Realistically speaking, her Chinese instructors stressed reading and grammar in English, since she and other Chinese people had few opportunities to talk with native speakers (Interview Two).

By looking at the ESL (English as a Second Language) - EFL continuum presented by Dubin and Olshtain (1986), we can understand why Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Seung-Ho’s experiences in formal English instruction lacked an emphasis on spoken language and pronunciation.

At one end of the continuum is an English speaking setting where the language is spoken natively by most of the population, examples are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia . . . . At the other end of the continuum there are countries where English is taught as only one of several foreign languages available to students within the school system, even though in practical terms it may be recognized as the most important foreign language: Japan, People’s Republic of China, Italy, Brazil and others. (pp. 7-8)

The point being made with this continuum, ESL versus EFL, is that the language setting and other factors such as, attitudes, patterns of language use, and political and national context, have a strong influence on the curricular objectives and curriculum of English instruction. This continuum may explain the common lack of conversation and pronunciation in these students’ formal English instruction in their home countries since they came from EFL backgrounds.

In spite of having two years of a formal SE class at Nankai University in China, Xiaolan’s experience is similar to the other four students, because the students in her class usually talked in Chinese with some sparse English (Journal: Week Two). In addition, the size of her SE class was relatively large, around 25 students, and hence this limited the amount of individual speaking contact with the American instructor. Usually they were divided up into small groups to discuss topics, but it was hard to express themselves in English at that time. After reflecting on why it was so difficult for these students to speak in English, I concluded that the EFL setting and the curricular objectives have to be considered in this situation too. These are questions that I asked myself about their small
group discussions in order to arrive at some understanding of why they were having difficulty speaking in English: a) What type of vocabulary preparation did the students receive to discuss the topics?; b) Were there grammatical themes to these topics, and if so, was the grammar reviewed prior to discussion?; c) What were the communicative objectives for the students?; d) What motivating factors, in and outside of the classroom setting, encouraged the students to speak in English? These questions remain unanswered, but they attempt to provide insight about Xiaolan’s EFL setting.

Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi had an opportunity to supplement their formal English instruction with conversational speaking practice in a language institute or school, university group, company language classes, and with native speaker friends while they were in their native countries. Table 5.3 below provides this information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Group</th>
<th>Qizhen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language School</td>
<td>Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Language Institute</td>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Language Classes</td>
<td>Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Friends</td>
<td>Tadashi, Ho Yeon</td>
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</table>

Table 5.3: Supplementation to Formal Instruction

Ho Yeon had a few opportunities to talk with native speakers, for example an American friend who had visited Korea (Journal: Week Two and Interview One). Nevertheless, she said that if you really wanted to speak English, you had to go to a private language institute and take a SE course. Unfortunately, the problem with these classes was the large class size, and many students only said several sentences during the entire class (Interview One). Therefore, she did not think it was beneficial to improving her SE (Journal: Week Two).

Qizhen also took some classes at a language school, however like Ho Yeon’s experience, the classes were not helpful. Qizhen enumerated several reasons for their ineffectiveness. First, their discussion topics were not always interesting (Interview One).
Second, there were not enough native speaker teachers for individualized speaking practice. Third, the foreign teachers who taught there had no training in language pedagogy nor their own teaching materials. So essentially the managers of this school ran it like a business. They were not concerned about the students’ learning.

Moreover, at Qizhen’s university in China there was an English association that met three or four hours every week to practice English (Journal: Week Two). Qizhen had participated in this group for a short time, but could not continue because of her heavy class load. Also, she doubted if this practice was really helpful, since all the students were Chinese and had the same accent in English (Ibid and Interview One). She pointed out that despite their incorrect pronunciation or language problems, they could easily understand each other because of their common problems.

During the several years that Tadashi worked for a Japanese engineering company, he had to take the company’s English classes three times a week (Interview One). The focus of these classes was to learn conversational business English in order for the employees to make themselves understood by their customers. Even though there was no emphasis on pronunciation, Tadashi had learned how to communicate in English. He had become friends with one of the company’s English teachers who was accustomed to the Japanese way of speaking English, and her English was easy to understand too (Journal: Week Two). Furthermore, she and another American friend never corrected his English pronunciation, especially /r/, /l/, /θ/, /Z/, and /dZ/ (Interview One). So Tadashi thought that he spoke English well.

In summary, Qizhen and Ho Yeon supplemented their formal English instruction by taking English classes at a language school, while Tadashi took his company’s English classes. For Qizhen and Ho Yeon these classes were not effective in improving their SE. In contrast, Tadashi did learn how to communicate in English from his company’s classes and practice with his English teacher. However, by not having his pronunciation corrected,
Tadashi had fossilized some incorrect pronunciation, especially of some consonants. The term “fossilization” in SLA research describes these incorrect forms that learners like Tadashi retain in their target language. Selinker (1972) defines fossilization as:

Linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL [native language] will tend to keep in their IL [interlanguage] relative to a particular TL [target language] no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL. (p. 215)

Fossilization can occur because of several reasons. One, the learner does not have any formal instruction and basically learns the language on his own. Two, the learner receives no corrective feedback or perhaps does not attend to corrective feedback and thus maintains incorrect pronunciation or grammatical forms as in Tadashi’s situation. Three, the learner may be resistant to corrective feedback because of acculturation issues, that is they do not want to identify with the L2 culture and therefore, resist attaining native like forms. Qizhen’s experience in the English club at her university is similar to Tadashi’s in that no corrective feedback may have been provided and as a result, some fossilization probably occurred. Qizhen had mentioned that the students in the group could understand each other in spite of their spoken language problems. She and the other students in the club were reinforcing fossilization of incorrect pronunciation and grammar because they were not correcting each other nor was anyone else providing corrective feedback.

Furthermore, describing their experiences of informal conversation and interaction with native speakers in the U.S., Qizhen, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi presented obstacles they experienced. These obstacles can be divided into two main categories: a) feeling nervous and b) limited contact with native speakers because of time, topics, and lack of openness. For example, Qizhen did not have time to interact with Americans because she spent four hours a day doing experiments in her lab (Interview One). Even when she arrived early to class, conversations with other students were very superficial, just “How are you?” or something like that (Ibid, p. 10). If the students were discussing a particular topic
or relating something comical, she was not interested in their discussion. Qizhen added that sometimes she could not find topics to talk about with her professors. For instance, several quarters ago she ate lunch with her advisor and other female group members who ate together regularly (Interview One). Their topics of discussion were housework and children. Sadly, Qizhen did not have common topics to talk about with them either.

In the case of Xiaolan, she felt nervous when she talked to native speakers (Journal: Week One). She explained that she felt this way, because she thought that people were judging her English, in particular her pronunciation and whether she was using the appropriate words (Interview One). The nervousness that Xiaolan experienced when speaking to native speakers is referred to as language anxiety. There are three types of anxiety that can affect a L2 learner (as cited in Ellis, 1994):

1) trait anxiety - a quality of the learner’s personality (Scovel, 1978),
2) state anxiety - this apprehension is induced in response to a situation (Spielberger, 1983),
3) situation-specific anxiety - a particular type of situation causes feelings of anxiousness such as public speaking, tests, etc. (Ellis, 1994)

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a) developed a model to describe the role that anxiety plays in language learning. This model explains that the relationship between anxiety and learning is affected by the learner’s stage of language development and by situation-specific learning experiences. Generally, Xiaolan experienced situation-specific anxiety, because she lacked the confidence and language ability to be able to communicate in a variety of situations with native speakers. Like Qizhen, Xiaolan did not know what to say after asking simple questions about the weather and homework. Actually, it was much more convenient to talk in Chinese with the Chinese students and professors at State University (Interview Three). Xiaolan added that 60% of her language environment was still Chinese even though she was living in the U.S.
Moreover, Xiaolan had described a continuum of her SE performance as influenced by her level of nervousness. “I found that I can speak English best when I just speak to myself and second best when I speak to some one whose native language isn’t English and worst when I talk to native speakers” (Journal: Week One). Interestingly, from the classroom, interviews, tutorials, and speaking practices with Xiaolan, I had the impression that she was confident, open, and active about speaking in English. She never seemed nervous or self-conscious of her English when she spoke in class or alone with me. I think that may be she felt safe speaking English in the classroom because of the other ITAs. Also, she had financial pressure to pass the EI, so she needed to speak more if she wanted to improve her fluency and pronunciation.

Ho Yeon used English when she interacted with her advisor, other professors, and classmates (Journal: Week Two and Interview One). However, the topics of their conversations were usually limited to her major. There were not many opportunities to speak English informally. Incidentally, if American students were talking informally, that is, using idioms and daily language, Ho Yeon had a hard time understanding them.

In general, Tadashi did not have enough time to speak English with native speakers, because his studies and TA job had priority that quarter (Journal: Week Six). At the beginning of the quarter he had dated an American undergraduate student, but it turned out that she was not very understanding of other people and cultures (Interview Three). The topics of their conversations centered around her interests, ignoring Tadashi’s. He acknowledged that when he wanted to relax, he felt more comfortable spending time with Asians than Americans (Journal: Week Six).

In summary, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi presented the obstacles they encountered for interacting with native speakers. The conversational topic limitations that Xiaolan, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and to some extent Tadashi addressed are related to the research on foreigner talk discourse (FTD). This discourse includes conversational adjustments that
native speakers make when talking to non-native speakers. Conversations have a tendency to be brief and simple (Gaies, 1981; Long, 1981b; Arthur et al., 1980). Both Xiaolan and Qizhen described brief and superficial conversations with peers in their classes. It was difficult to get beyond simple questions because they did not know what else to say. Furthermore, in FTD there is a preference for impersonal topics such as, classes, careers, and places of residence (Scarcella, 1983). Ho Yeon mentioned talking only about classes and her field of study with her cohorts and professors. She did not have much opportunity to talk about personal topics with them.

The conversational dynamics of Tadashi and the undergraduate female he dated may also relate to the FTD research. I have a suspicion that the undergraduate female he dated may not have tried to make conversational adjustments to account for Tadashi’s spoken language problems, and I also suspect that she did not allow him to negotiate conversational topics. Here are several important questions to consider about their conversations: a) Did she limit their topics to her interests out of her own selfishness?; b) Was she impatient with his English speaking ability and therefore took over conversational topics?; c) Did she try to make conversational adjustments; d) Did he try to negotiate topics with her?; and e) Were there some cultural and gender expectations on both their parts as to how to negotiate topics? I think we can only speculate possible answers to these questions. However, for the first and last questions, I can respond that Tadashi did say that she was “showy”, arrogant, and not very compromising (Interview Three).

One final note: Tadashi, Xiaolan, and Qizhen demonstrated their need to learn English and their intentions to interact with native speakers. Yet, in many ways they felt more comfortable around other Asians, and it was much easier to speak in their native language, because there were many Asian students and professors on campus. “In some cases, learners may be subject to conflicting attitudes. On the one hand they wish to learn the L2 because it is seen as a way of assimilating into the majority culture, while on the
other they wish to maintain their L1 as a way of affirming their own identities” (Ellis, 1994, p. 200). In some ways, Tadashi may have been more of an adventurer in the L2 culture than the other participants. He dated an American undergraduate female for a short time, and he often used colloquial expressions in his SE. In addition, he tried to overcome his L1 cultural limitations when speaking in English, in particular arguing and defending his point of view. On the other hand, he said that he felt more comfortable being around Asians, and he had a bad impression of American women from his own personal experience.

Qizhen tried to interact with American students in her classes and with a lunch group in her department, but she realized that she did not have things in common with them. She expressed feeling as an outsider because the students in her classes always seemed to be in groups and their topics were not interesting. Qizhen had a similar experience with the lunch group. All the women in this group had done research in Antarctica, and they usually talked about children and housework. Qizhen could not relate to these topics. So she stopped attending the group.

Xiaolan wanted to improve her English by interacting with native speakers, but she really did not have time nor the confidence to do it. She did some travelling with a group at the university called International Friendship. During one of the trips, she listened and talked very little. More than the majority of her time at the university was spent with other Chinese students and professors. It was simply more convenient to speak in Chinese.

*Feelings about University Requirement and Exit Interview*

All five participants agreed that the university’s SE requirement for ITA’s was a required and necessary process. The participants were aware that it was a departmental and university requirement to be certified in SE in order to become a TA. However, I doubt they knew that this requirement was in response to a state law in this Midwestern state. In order to capture a holistic view of their SE learning experience, I thought it was important to
include how they felt about the requirement, and what factors were motivating them to become certified in SE. Generally, the main motivating factor for many of the SE students is to obtain a TA or sometimes a RA position in their departments. Nevertheless, it is interesting to know why they want to be certified. Table 5.4 provides information about their feelings and motivational factors. To begin, there was a feeling among Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen that the policy needed to be more flexible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Required and Necessary Process</td>
<td>Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealistic and Inflexible</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Factors to Pass</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4: Feelings about SE University Requirement

For example, Ho Yeon thought that it was unrealistic for an ITA to attain native level pronunciation and fluency within a year or less (Journal: Week Three). Moreover, it was unfair to evaluate the students’ ability on whether or not they passed the EI. Qizhen also felt that the requirement was too strict (Journal: Week Three). Several factors needed to be considered. First, changing a speaking habit could not be achieved in one or two quarters. Second, ITAs were overburdened with classes and did not have enough time to practice their English. Of course if they had more time to practice, they could improve their SE quickly. But that was not their reality. Similarly, Tadashi had a tight schedule (Journal: Week Three). His department required him to take four classes and SE, which added up to 25 credit hours per quarter. He also worked 20 hours per week as a TA. He would have appreciated more consideration of his demanding schedule.

In addition, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan highlighted external incentives- what is referred to as instrumental motivation (Gardner and Lambert 1972, 1959) in SLA research - to pass the EI. More specifically, financial and departmental pressures were the external factors motivating Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan to pass as quickly as possible.
Ho Yeon was under tremendous pressure to pass the EI by the end of Winter Quarter 1999 (Interview One). If she did not pass, her departmental financial aid would be discontinued. There were two main reasons why Qizhen wanted to pass the EI, one of them being that her RA funding was running out (Journal: Week Eight). Therefore, she needed SE certification to become a TA in her department. The other reason was that SE was an important communication tool to express herself.

Similar to Ho Yeon and Qizhen’s situations, Xiaolan had financial reasons for wanting to pass the EI. In the economics department, an ITA’s monthly stipend would be reduced 25 percent, if they did not become certified in SE by the end of the first year (Journal: Week Three and Interview One). The department director had encouraged Xiaolan to focus on her English if she wanted to maintain her income level (Interview One). Xiaolan had also expressed more personal, intrinsic reasons to pass. One of them was that she and her boyfriend were planning to get married in the Summer of 1999 (Journal: Week Three). If she did not pass, she would not be able to return to China in the summer and that would mean postponing the wedding. The other reason was that one of her objectives for coming to the U.S. was to make progress in her SE. Therefore, passing the EI symbolized that she had made progress.

To summarize, there was a general agreement among the five participants that the SE requirement was necessary. However, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Tadashi questioned the inflexibility and reality of the requirement. They pointed out that learning SE required a lot of time and practice, not simply a year or less. Furthermore, they had busy class schedules and TA or RA work as well. Finally, Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Ho Yeon discussed the financial pressures they had to pass the EI.
Communication Focus

Communication focus included two parts: a) what the participants attended to in other people’s SE, and b) what they paid attention to in their own SE. As Table 5.5 illustrates, in other people’s SE, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan paid attention to the particular words the speaker was using. According to Ho Yeon, paying attention to the speaker’s vocabulary was important, since she could apply those words in her English (Journal: Week Four and Interview Two). However, if it was a word that she had never used before, pronouncing it would be difficult (Interview Two). Qizhen had a more specific listening focus, that is, content words, especially the last content word which contained the new information (Journal: Week Four and Interview Two). Moreover, Qizhen added that the content or stressed words were important, because they captured your hearing (Interview Two). In other words, they directed one’s mind to the essential information.

1. In other people’s SE:
   
   Paid attention to the speaker’s words
   
   Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan

2. In their SE:
   
   Paid attention to pronunciation
   
   Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, and Qizhen

Table 5.5: Communication Focus

Meanwhile, Seung-Ho paid attention to the situation and interrogative words in other people’s SE. Situation words about school life, major field, classes, travel, and historical sites, to name a few, were basic tools for communicating with other people (Journal: Week Four). Furthermore, question words like what, how, why, when, and others were another listening focus for Seung-Ho, primarily because the word order in Korean was different from English (Interview Two). Xiaolan was concerned about learning some useful,
informal words for her English (Interview Two). Not having many chances to talk with native speakers, Xiaolan relied on watching T.V to learn these words. For example, Xiaolan could learn: a) formal language from the news; b) condensed, interesting language from commercials, and c) opinions and stories from a variety of people on talk shows.

To sum up, the words used by the speaker were an important focal point for Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan because they facilitated comprehension, communication, and application in their own English. It is interesting to note that even though these students had this common theme, their approaches were different. Their different approaches may be due to the focus and strategies they were using to make progress in their SE. For instance, Xiaolan was learning informal, casual words by watching TV, and likewise, Ho Yeon was interested in common, practical words. In contrast, Seung-Ho paid attention to situation and interrogative words to help him with meaning and English word order. In the case of Qizhen, she paid attention to content words, because these were the words the speaker stressed and that carried information.

An important observation of Xiaolan and Ho Yeon is that they used other people’s words as input for their own SE. Input and interaction studies in first language acquisition provide some support for the idea that input affects language development (e.g., Barnes, Guttfreund, Satterly, & Wells, 1983). Furthermore, Ellis (1994) states that:

L2 acquisition can only take place when the learner has access to input in the L2. This input may come in written or spoken form. In the case of spoken input, it may occur in the context of interaction (i.e. the learner’s attempts to converse with a native speaker, a teacher, or another learner) or in the context of non-reciprocal discourse (for example, listening to the radio or watching a film). (p. 26)

L2 studies, which focused more on the relationship between input and accuracy, also lend support for the effect of input on L2 learning (Long & Sato, 1983; Lightbown, 1983; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle, 1982; Long, 1981b; Lightbown, 1980; Hamayan & Tucker, 1980; Larsen-Freeman, 1976b, 1976a). Additionally, Sharwood Smith (1986) distinguishes between input that provides meaning to learners and input that helps learners go further.
along in their interlanguage development. For Ho Yeon and Xiaolan the spoken input, especially vocabulary, they received by talking to people or watching TV, was important for their own SE development. It was a resource for learning new words. Meanwhile, Seung-Ho and Qizhen picked up the meaning from the spoken input. By listening to particular words, such as interrogatives and content words, it helped them comprehend what was said, and it also directed their thinking to new information.

Another important point that Seung-Ho made was about shared knowledge of a topic to understand its meaning and communicate with others. This shared knowledge, also known as background knowledge (Schema Theory, Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), has been studied intensively in SLA reading and writing research. Of course, it is applicable to spoken language too. Naturally, comprehension and fluency are facilitated in a conversation if the interlocutors know something about the topic. They can tap into their previous knowledge structures and make meaning (Omaggio Hadley, 1993). Seung-Ho realized that situation words were basic tools for communicating about many different types of topics. I think his strategy of grouping words together about a particular topic was an efficient, more meaningful, and faster way of developing his SE. Knowing words related to the sea and navigation, historical sites, museums, the beach, and so on helps create a common basis with which to communicate with others.

The second part of the issue addressed what the students paid attention to in their own SE. Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Xiaolan focused on their pronunciation. Seung-Ho was initially nervous about his pronunciation, especially the consonants /p/ and /f/, /b/ and /v/, and /S/ (Interview Two). To remedy his pronunciation problems, he memorized words and their pronunciation, but sometimes he forgot the meaning of these words. Nevertheless, Seung-Ho felt more comfortable whenever he focused on his pronunciation problem. In his SE, Tadashi focused on pronunciation, grammar, and not
hurting or insulting his listener (Journal: Week Four). Tadashi paid attention to pronunciation and grammar in order to make himself understood as well as possible.

Ho Yeon put emphasis on her pronunciation, because her objective was to make the listener understand her words clearly (Interview Two). One strategy she utilized was to avoid the words she could not pronounce accurately and instead use a simpler or easier word (Ibid and Journal: Week Four). Although, she admitted that it was difficult to use a simple word to describe a complex Korean term (Interview Two). In addition, Ho Yeon had provided an example of how important pronunciation was for daily activities like eating in a restaurant in the U.S.

Xiaolan also included pronunciation among the things that she paid attention to (Journal: Week Four). A problem that was pointed out to Xiaolan after her EI of Fall 1998 was that she spoke too fast, and consequently her language was even more confusing (Interview Two and Journal: Week Four). Definitely, a fast speaking rate can interfere with a non-native speaker’s pronunciation and comprehensibility.

Even though Qizhen focused primarily on the content and sentence structure of what she was going to express (Journal: Week Four), she was still concerned about her pronunciation, because she did not want to irritate others (Interview Two, pp. 5-6).

And I also noticed that uh if we don’t have correct pronunciation they [native speakers] might not have enough tuh patience. . . . I don’t want to irritate others because of my pronunciation. (Laughs)

In all, Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, and Qizhen paid attention to their pronunciation in order to make their spoken language comprehensible for the listeners. Two concepts in Schema Theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), bottom-up processing and top-down processing (Rumelhart, 1980), lend some understanding to these learners’ spoken language focus. Top-down processing, a high order process, focuses on the general knowledge of a topic or situation, whereas bottom-up processing concentrates on individual features such as words, individual sounds, word order, grammar, and sentence structure.
Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Xiaolan seemed to be concentrating on the latter, that is, specifically on their pronunciation to make themselves understood. In contrast, Qizhen and to some extent Tadashi focused on top-down processing in their SE. In other words, they paid attention to the content and how the content affected the listener.

This theory is significant in explaining the level of spoken language development of these students. It helps us to see that these students are focusing on the individual parts of the language to communicate. As Tadashi had pointed out, native speakers “don’t have to think about grammar or pronunciation or anything, they . . . just . . . concentrate on what they should say or what they want to say” (Interview Two, p. 5). By receiving instruction on pronunciation, these students and others can progress to higher level processing, namely, expressing their ideas clearly about a situation or topic in a holistic fashion. It is necessary to note that many of our SE students are already attempting to focus on top-down processing in their spoken language as some of them have told me in their tutorials. In fact, when they do their video presentations, they often disregard unintentionally pronunciation and grammar, because they are focused on the content they want to express. Nonetheless, their pronunciation and grammar problems can cause interference of comprehensibility. So these language problems do need to be addressed.

Areas of Progress

Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, and Tadashi discussed the improvement they had made in their pronunciation and fluency. But at the same time, these areas plus vocabulary still needed more progress. The five participants felt that time and practice would help them to continue making progress. In general, Ho Yeon’s progress was slow (Journal: Week Five), but compared to six months or a year ago, she had improved her pronunciation, word stress, and fluency (Ibid and Interview Two). However, she added that fluency and
differentiating /r/ and /l/, /f/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/, /dZ/ and /z/ continued to be difficult. Ho Yeon needed more time, practice, and experience to see progress in these areas. Qizhen saw improvement in her distinction of /r/ and /l/ and /T/ and /s/ (Journal: Week Five).

In addition, Qizhen commented that even though these troublesome pronunciations were “still hanging around”, the probability of pronouncing them correctly had improved (Interview Two). Timing, that is, rhythm and thought groups, was another area of improvement for Qizhen, and this had a positive effect on her fluency. She also realized that if she wanted to develop her conversational skills, she had to overcome her shyness in speaking English.

According to Xiaolan, fluency was the easiest aspect to improve in the beginning, but later it became the hardest to make progress in (Interview Two). She alluded to a learning curve in her explanation of why this happened. It seems that at first progress occurs rapidly in fluency, because you can practice with native speakers after several weeks of being in the U.S. But after a short time, your progress levels off, and it becomes harder to improve fluency. Nevertheless, Xiaolan had improved her fluency due to practicing in class and with native speakers (Journal: Week Five). She had also indicated some progress in pronunciation of /Z/, /dZ/, and /Zw/, and her intonation sounded more natural. On the other hand, she had doubts about her progress in expressing her ideas and thoughts in English (Interview Two). She felt that her SE was still too formal (Journal: Week Five). Meanwhile, Seung-Ho was able to distinguish better r/l, b/v, p/f, and s/S, and his fluency had also improved (Journal: Week Five), but these things and vocabulary still needed more time and practice (Ibid and Interview Two).

In general, Tadashi acknowledged improvement in expressing himself, in particular using colloquial expressions and composing sentences (Journal: Week Five).
His spoken language was much better than it used to be. In fact, Xiaolan had commented in her second interview about the progress she saw in Tadashi’s SE, especially his pronunciation. Moreover, during the quarter I had observed Tadashi’s gradual improvement of his SE in his three video presentations (Video Presentation Notes and Fieldnotes). Yet, in Interview Two Tadashi told me that he was inconclusive about which areas he had made progress in and which ones he had not. He really could not say. In his opinion, perhaps a more specific and concrete journal question would have resolved the ambiguity for him.

In summary, there was a general feeling among the five students that they had made progress in pronunciation and fluency. Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho provided a bottom-up view of their progress—particular features such as pronunciation, intonation, and timing, whereas Tadashi utilized a top-down view to evaluate his progress in expressing himself. At the same time, these students realized that more progress was still necessary in pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. The SLA notion of “backsliding” (Selinker 1972) seems to apply to all five participants, especially in pronunciation. Selinker uses this term to describe how on some occasions L2 learners produce the correct target-language forms while on other occasions they use incorrect forms. Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Tadashi were all backsliding with the differentiation of certain consonants, for example: r/l, b/v, p/f, T/s, dZ/Z/z, and S/s. In contrast, Y had difficulty with /Z/ and some initial consonant clusters.

Nonetheless, all of them were improving these sounds. As Qizhen explained, these troublesome pronunciations were “still hanging around”, because they were not set (Journal: Week Five and Interview Two). For example, if a word with a difficult sound was in a sentence, especially a complicated one, she would have problems
pronouncing it correctly. However, if the word was isolated, she could pronounce it easily and quickly (Interview Two). Qizhen’s example seems to resonate with the other four participants too. Incidentally, many of my SE students constantly tell me that it is simply easier to pronounce sounds in isolated words than in sentences. Usually, when they are speaking in conversations, they forget about pronunciation and grammar. Finally, all the participants realized that more time and continued practice were necessary to improve their pronunciation.

*Strategies to Improve SE*

Table 5.6 summarizes the types of things Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen were doing to improve their SE. The three major areas that all the participants shared in common were class discussions, community contact assignments, and participating in this study. Class discussions and community contact assignments pertained to the requirements of the SE 104.5 class. These two areas and participation in this study were not directly addressed by all the participants. This information mainly came from my fieldnotes, observations, and grading of their performance in the SE class. Therefore, I will choose illustrative examples from these other categories. My reasoning for this decision is that the other categories provide interesting, insightful, and richer descriptions of the participants’ strategies to improve their SE.
TV, movies, videotapes, radio, internet
language lab
SE pronunciation tutor
books, articles, magazines
talking to people
class discussions
conversation and practice tapes
reading out loud
self-monitoring
imitating native speakers
community contact assignments
participating in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV, movies, videotapes, radio, internet</td>
<td>Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language lab</td>
<td>Qizhen, Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE pronunciation tutor</td>
<td>Qizhen, Seung-Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books, articles, magazines</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talking to people</td>
<td>Tadashi, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Seung-Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class discussions</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Tadashi, Ho Yeon</td>
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<tr>
<td>conversation and practice tapes</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Tadashi</td>
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<tr>
<td>reading out loud</td>
<td>Seung-Ho</td>
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<tr>
<td>self-monitoring</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imitating native speakers</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community contact assignments</td>
<td>Xiaolan, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participating in this study</td>
<td>Xiaolan, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6: Strategies to Improve Spoken English

First, Qizhen and Seung-Ho were assigned to a SE pronunciation tutor for Winter Quarter 1999 because of their special pronunciation needs. They met with their tutor twice a week for 45 minutes. Qizhen and her tutor worked on r/l, s/S, and breathing deeply (Interview Three). Meanwhile, Seung-Ho and his tutor focused on p/f, b/v, d/Z/Z, s/sh, and muscle training of the speech organs for producing these sounds (Interview One).

Next, Xiaolan was doing several things to improve her SE. During her free time she watched TV, since it was a good way to immerse herself in the language environment (Journal: Week Six). She also went to the language lab several times a week to practice things like, the flap, reduction, linking, and correcting her pronunciation. Furthermore, by
doing the weekly community contact assignments, Xiaolan had an opportunity to talk with native speakers. Finally, participating in this study helped her twofold, that is, she could think about how to improve her SE and practice speaking too.

In addition to the tutoring, Qizhen self-monitored her spoken language, because she tried to express her content and pronunciation as clearly as possible (Journal: Week Six and Interview Two). She even appreciated it when someone corrected her pronunciation, because then she could pronounce it correctly the next time (Interview Two). Also, Qizhen tried to speak with native speakers every day, and she went to the language lab two to four hours a week to practice pronunciation.

For Ho Yeon, imitating Americans was a good way to improve her SE, otherwise she relied on her Koreanization of English (Interview Two). Several of my Korean SE students have told me that this English is referred to as Konglish. Furthermore, Ho Yeon mentioned that she learned business or customer words on the internet (Ibid). Sometimes if she found a word in a book, magazine, or heard it on TV, she would check the meaning and then try to memorize it for her English (Ibid and Journal: Week Six).

Besides his weekly pronunciation tutoring, Seung-Ho listened to English conversational tapes while driving his son to and from school (Interview Three). Moreover, his son gave him corrective feedback on pronunciation (Interview Two). While doing research for his dissertation, Seung-Ho paid special attention to verbs and adjectives in the books and articles that he was reading. Additionally, Seung-Ho watched news and history programs on TV, listened to the radio, and rented a videotape once a week.

With the little time he had to concentrate on English, Tadashi listened to some radio programs on NPR and talked with his landlady (Interview Two). In addition, sometimes he listened to and repeated the words on the practice tapes from his tutorials before going to sleep (Interview Three). Tadashi also had an American girlfriend at the beginning of the
Winter quarter. Unfortunately, she always wanted to talk about her topics and interests—not at all compromising. As a consequence, Tadashi had walked away with a bad impression of American women (Journal: Week Eight).

To sum up, the steps that Tadashi, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan were taking to improve their SE are examples of learning strategies designed to facilitate their language learning. Learning strategies can be divided into three major types: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987). Metacognitive strategies make use of knowledge about cognitive processes and are an attempt to regulate learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Ellis, 1994). Cognitive strategies are the steps or operations used in problem-solving that involve analysis, transformation or synthesis of the materials being learned (Rubin, 1987). Social/affective strategies concern the ways in which learners choose to interact with other learners and native speakers (Ellis, 1994).

Qizhen, Seung-Ho, Xiaolan, and Ho Yeon provided examples of a cognitive strategy known as repetition, which involves imitating a language model. One main language model for Qizhen and Seung-Ho was their pronunciation tutor, while for Ho Yeon and Xiaolan native speakers were their models. Also, listening to SE tapes in the language lab was another source of modeling for Qizhen and Xiaolan. Moreover, English conversational tapes and tutorial practice tapes were good ways to improve pronunciation and spoken language for Seung-Ho and Tadashi respectively. Seung-Ho also used a strategy called advance preparation, a metacognitive strategy, with his pronunciation tutor to prepare for his video presentations, that is, checking his pronunciation of key terms. Furthermore, Xiaolan, Tadashi, and Qizhen described another metacognitive strategy, known as self-management, to create situations for intentional learning such as watching TV and movies, and talking with native speakers.

Oxford (1990) divides learning strategies into two main categories: direct and indirect. “Compensation strategies”, a subtype of direct strategies, are the things language
learners do to offset their weaknesses in the L2. Table 5.7 presents the compensation strategies used by the five participants to overcome their pronunciation problems during the video presentations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visuals and blackboard</td>
<td>Qizhen, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasize key words</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehension check</td>
<td>Qizhen, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice words</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>check with tutor</td>
<td>Seung-Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think about organization</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitor behavior and gestures</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Xiaolan, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ask audience questions</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak slowly</td>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use more common words</td>
<td>Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduce pauses and redundancy</td>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-correction</td>
<td>Seung-Ho, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7: Compensation Strategies

For example, Qizhen pointed to words on the transparency if she had problems with pronunciation (Journal: Week Six). She did not think that practicing the words several days before the presentation was enough to pronounce them correctly. In addition to transparencies, Qizhen framed her content, had clear organization, asked questions, did comprehension checks, and summarized (Fieldnotes). Like Qizhen, Tadashi utilized transparencies, comprehension checks, and the blackboard (Interview Two). He modeled comprehension checks from his Chinese economics teacher, who used them frequently in class. In general, Tadashi’s presentations were comprehensible, because he was organized, defined terms, and provided examples (Video Presentation Notes and Fieldnotes).
To compensate for her pronunciation problems, Ho Yeon first prepared a list of key words and practiced them out loud (Journal: Week Six). Then, she considered how to organize the content, because in that way she did not have to think and pause so much during the presentation (Interview Two). Her husband had suggested that she reduce the amount of pauses in her presentations. From my observation, Ho Yeon’s presentations were clear, thorough, and well organized (Video Presentation Notes). She also monitored her pronunciation, used transparencies, and had great focal stress on key terms.

In contrast, Xiaolan claimed that she did not really use any intentional strategies, but rather talked naturally during her presentations (Journal: Week Six). However, she did try to employ a well organized structure, since this contributed greatly to the students’ understanding. Generally, Xiaolan was calm, gracious, engaging, and organized (Video Presentation Notes and Fieldnotes). Moreover, her explanations on the blackboard were clear.

Seung-Ho’s main strategy was to emphasize the special meaning words by writing them on the blackboard and asking the students to remember them (Interview Three). Before the presentation, he thought about the key words in what he described as a mind map. He had used this organizing method when he taught in the Korean Naval Academy. Then, after writing down some ideas and words, he practiced the words many times by himself and with his pronunciation tutor, especially words with the sounds /z/ /dZ/ and /Z/ (Journal: Week Six and Interview Two).

To summarize, all five participants were using compensation strategies to offset their pronunciation difficulties during their presentations. The main strategy that
they all utilized was transparencies or the blackboard to facilitate comprehension. The other common strategies were good organization, emphasizing important words, and monitoring behavior.

Changes in Attitude, Thinking Skills, and Personality

During Week Seven, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan reflected on and wrote about the changes they recognized in their attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way they felt about themselves as they were learning and using SE. There were several themes that surfaced from their entries and interviews on this topic. One main theme was that Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho had an overall feeling of improvement in their attitude and thinking. Another important theme was that Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi talked about being open, active learners of SE. A theme that both Tadashi and Xiaolan discussed was feeling less confident about their SE. The last theme—among Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho—was that they were relying less on translation when they used English. Table 5.8 summarizes these themes.

| 1) A general feeling of improvement | Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho |
| 2) More open, active learner | Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi |
| 3) Less confident | Xiaolan, Tadashi |
| 4) Relying less on translation | Xiaolan, Qizhen, Seung-Ho |

Table 5.8: Changes in their Attitude, Thinking, and Personality

A common observation for Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi was that they were becoming more open, active learners. For instance, Qizhen was more outgoing, because she needed to talk to people (Journal: Week Seven). She realized that shyness and quietness were detriments for improving her spoken language. So she tried to encourage herself to
improve her English. In general, she felt happier being open (Interview Three). At the same time, she was aware that learning another language was a long term process and frustrating. She was trying to overcome her frustration and think more positively.

Similarly, Ho Yeon believed that an active personality, a positive attitude, and organized thinking helped create opportunities to speak and improve her English (Journal: Week Seven). She added that another benefit from being open was that sometimes her pronunciation or grammar was corrected by someone (Interview Three). Ho Yeon became aware that an active attitude was important to improving English from observing her Chinese peers in her classes (Interviews Three and Four). Compared to Korean students, the Chinese students spoke English well. In fact, some of these students were planning to stay in the U.S., so they were very motivated and aggressive about learning SE (Interview Four). Even though she was planning to return to Korea after she graduated, Ho Yeon felt that she could benefit from a more active, assertive attitude to learning English.

As a matter of fact, the change in her attitude and behavior was quite noticeable. Ho Yeon had been a student in my SE 104.5 class during Fall 1998 and Winter 1999. In the Winter quarter, she was much more active, open, and assertive about speaking English in and outside of the classroom compared to her reticence during the previous quarter (Interview Four). Finally, Ho Yeon suggested some things teachers could do to help students develop an active attitude to learning English. The first thing was to simply tell the students that being active benefited their SE learning. Second, the teacher should encourage the students’ participation by having them prepare and gather information about an unfamiliar topic, and then they had to make the effort to be active. Ho Yeon stressed that information and preparation were essential for participating.

Both Qizhen and Ho Yeon realized that having an active and open personality would help them develop their SE skills. Ehrman (1990), Strong (1983), and Naiman et al. (1978) have looked at the role of extroversion in language learning, in particular in acquiring
The first hypothesis about the relationship between extroversion/introversion and L2 learning (as cited in Ellis, 1994). This hypothesis states that extroverted learners will do better in acquiring BICS. “The rationale for this hypothesis is that sociability (an essential feature of extroversion) will result in more opportunities to practise, more input, and more success in communicating in the L2” (Ibid, p. 520). The second hypothesis states that introverted learners will develop better their cognitive academic language ability (CALP). “The rationale for this hypothesis comes from studies which show that introverted learners typically enjoy more academic success, perhaps because they spend more time reading and writing” (p. 520; see Griffiths, 1991b).

Tadashi agreed that a talkative and sociable L2 learner tends to be a good speaker and listener in the L2. On the other hand, being able to express your own opinion in another language required a different kind of character and skill (Interview Three). He added that even though you may talk a lot with native speakers that does not necessarily mean that you are able to express your ideas. Tadashi felt that personality and culture influenced one’s ability to express opinion and argue in a L2 (Interview Two). Essentially it meant breaking the limitations imposed by the native and nonnative cultures. Only in that way was it truly possible to be a confident speaker of the L2.

He has addressed an important point which may not be explicit in the meaning of “sociability” or BICS in the first hypothesis and that is, “How does a culture define sociability?”, and “What expectations, rules, and boundaries does a culture place on interpersonal communication?”. In order for learners of the L2 to have access to a wide variety of input and situations, they need to be aware of how the native speakers have been socialized to communicate with each other by their culture. For instance, he thought that foreign people tend to agree with native speakers instead of expressing their own opinion. Tadashi provided several reasons for this tendency. First, foreign people feel inferior to
white Americans. Second, they do not have the experience and custom of arguing. He explained that Japanese and Koreans are compromising, and Chinese people are not fond of arguing either. In his case, he also attributed the failure to argue to his language problem. He was afraid that if they asked him a difficult question, he would not be able to catch the meaning and therefore, he could not argue (Interview Three).

A point which Tadashi did not address has to do with the second hypothesis, CALP. Previously I mentioned that the culture of the L2 learners and their EFL setting have a strong influence on the EFL curriculum. Many SE 104 and 104.5 students in my classes, as well as the five participants, have expressed their strong preparation in reading, writing, and grammar in their schools. Likewise, they prepare these areas even more in order to pass the TOEFL and GRE entrance exams for graduate programs in American universities. As a result, these learners develop strong CALP skills in English. Even though they have prepared their academic skills in English in order to survive in the American university setting, many of them are bereft in their SE ability. So based on these points regarding the BICS and CALP hypotheses, I would say then that it is a combination of how the L2 learners are socialized by their cultures to interact and communicate with others and also an emphasis on acquiring academic skills in English that affect these students’ L2 learning.

I would like to expand some more on the issue of culture. Second language research has looked at the influence of culture on the learner’s writing style in the L2 (Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Connor, 1996). Moreover, as Tadashi explained with his example of arguing, culture also influences the learner’s spoken language. “The way people think, speak, write, and behave is certainly influenced by the culture in which they are brought up, and certain cultural differences indeed exist” (Kubota, 1999, p. 15). Tadashi’s observation underscores the need for reflection and consideration for these
cultural factors that also affect spoken language when teaching students SE. Littlewood (2000) did a survey study looking at Asian and European students’ attitudes towards knowledge, evaluation of learning, and teacher as the authority figure. His findings suggest that Asian students adopt a passive attitude in the classroom as a result of their educational contexts rather than their inherent dispositions. In Tadashi’s example we can see that this passive attitude pervades outside of the classroom and in interactions with native speakers. He provided some cultural reasons for the passive, affirming behavior towards Americans, namely that they, “they” being Japanese and other Asian cultures, lack the experience of arguing and as in his case, the language base to carry on an argument or defend their point of view.

The issue of culture in TESOL is also explored by Atkinson (1999). He points out that when we dichotomize Western and Oriental cultures as emphasizing individualism, self-expression, and critical thinking versus homogeneity, harmony, and group behavior respectively, culture becomes static and unchanging and the individual in culture is lost. Tadashi alluded to this dichotomy in his example of arguing. Interestingly, from my interaction with him, I saw evidence of assertive and argumentative behavior when he challenged me on the generalizability of this study. As he argued, the study had a low and unvaried sample making it impossible to generalize the study’s findings (Interview Two). Furthermore, it did not help explaining to him that this was a qualitative study. Another time when I had requested the journal entry for Week Six, which Tadashi had forgotten to turn in, he wrote in the entry’s preface that I was stubborn and insistent for having requested it.

I do not think that factors such as gender and hierarchy can be ruled out in comprehending the interactional dynamics in the above examples. My position of authority was as a native speaker of English, SE TA, female, working on my Ph.D. degree, and doing
a qualitative research study. I wonder how he would have interacted with a white male native speaker who had a similar or higher position of authority. Would he have exhibited the same type of behavior?

Kubota (1999) argues that the Japanese education system has been labeled as group oriented, stressing harmony, emphasizing rote learning and memorization, and lacking in critical thinking and creativity. However, she illustrates that in elementary subject areas such as music, body movement, language, and in problem solving in math or science, Japanese children are encouraged to think creatively and individually. Kubota does not deny that those other characteristics exist, but the important point that she makes is that what matters is who is defining culture, and “what kind of power relations exist between those who define it and those who are defined by it” (p. 17). Furthermore, she addresses the cultural dichotomy of knowledge, that is, Western countries favor extending knowledge, whereas Asian cultures prefer to conserve knowledge. In this paradigm, the East is always behind the West. In addition, “the Other [Asian cultures] is locked into a very rigid category of ‘not us’ [Western culture] and does not evolve and change in history or transform particular power relationships” (Ibid). According to Iwabuchi (1994; as cited in Kubota, 1999), these images of the Other are constructed through colonial Orientalist discourse, which creates unequal relations of power, and also by the Other itself.

These critical points that are raised in Kubota’s article may provide some understanding of Tadashi’s comments about foreigners feeling inferior and passive to white Americans. There seems to be an extension of the Western power relations in knowledge to how white Americans also interact with foreigners, in this case Asians. Tadashi had explained that many Asian’s passive behavior towards Americans can be attributed to the lack of experience in arguing and for him, as well as for others, the language skills to argue or defend their point of view. Nevertheless, Tadashi attempted to go beyond these power relations and limitations set by the cultures. In his interactions with me, which included the
interviews, speaking practices, and tutorials, and also in class, he had a confident, assertive manner and tone of voice while expressing his opinion or defending his arguments. Still, I cannot deny that his behavior may have been different with a white American male, but I am not convinced that it would have been any different.

In general, Seung-Ho felt some improvement in his attitude, thinking, and personality (Journal: Week Seven). He did not use adjectives like open, active, and assertive, but he did say that he was comfortable with his attitude and thinking skills, especially in conversation and listening to class lectures (Ibid and Interview Three). In addition, it was helpful for him to think about some topics in English when he was walking or driving his car.

In contrast, Tadashi and Xiaolan experienced less confidence in their SE after coming to the U.S. Xiaolan had taken it for granted that her English was fluent (Journal: Week Seven). However, after not passing the 104 EI in Fall 1998, she began to doubt her SE abilities. In fact, she had felt depressed, because she had always passed every kind of examination or competition. She admitted feeling more hopeful that quarter, since she was able to see some gradual progress in her SE. Interestingly, as Tadashi learned more English, he felt less confident, because the more he learned, the more he realized how incorrect his pronunciation and listening skills were (Journal: Week Seven and Interview Three). He had perceived his English to be much better. Tadashi realized that his English was not perfect when native speakers could not understand him, especially when he pronounced words with /r/ (Interview Three). Perhaps, he was in the process of becoming a good speaker and listener, and when he did become more confident, he would be able to express his own ideas and not avoid arguments, or say “yes” to everyone.

The process of becoming a good speaker that Tadashi referred to is in effect interlanguage development of the learner (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1971; Nemser, 1971). Learners traverse through stages in learning the L2. At any particular point,
if we sample their language development, we can see that they are making increments on the interlanguage continuum. Of course, the endpoint is to try to master the target language as that of a native speaker. All of the participants in this study made gains in their SE development, especially with pronunciation and fluency. Of course, as they mentioned, they also experienced some backsliding in pronunciation, but despite that they did see signs of progress. In fact, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Qizhen talked about their goal of speaking English like native speakers. So in effect, the journal topics and interview questions that I asked the participants were an attempt to help these learners become more aware of their SE progress and encourage them to continue making progress.

A common theme regarding changes in thinking skills for Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho was that they were relying less on translation when they spoke or listened to someone. For example, Xiaolan had made some progress in thinking in English when she used English instead of always translating into Chinese (Journal: Week Seven). Nevertheless, she admitted that when she did not need to use English or encountered a difficult problem in her notes, she thought in Chinese (Interview Three). Even though Qizhen was still using the Chinese way in her thinking, meaning translating, she could respond directly in English for sentences without complicated sentence structure and vocabulary (Journal: Week Seven). Finally, Seung-Ho had also mentioned that he thought about topics in English while walking or driving his car (Journal: Week Seven).

In summary, there was a general feeling of improvement in Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho’s attitude, thinking, and personality as they were learning and using SE. Despite feeling less confident, Xiaolan and Tadashi also expressed hopefulness about their SE, because they were making progress. In particular, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi had discussed being more open and active learners of their SE. The last area of commonality for Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho was attempting to think more in English.
New Things Learned

One of the issues that the five participants discussed for Week Eight was what they had learned in the SE class, in tutorials, with their conversation partner, or other people outside of the SE program. Table 5.9 is a list of the main types of learning that occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Techniques to help pronunciation</th>
<th>Seung-Ho, Qizhen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intonation, reduction of sounds</td>
<td>Tadashi, Qizhen, Xiaolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Importance of Pronunciation/SE</td>
<td>Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho, Qizhen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9: New Things Learned

Seung-Ho had learned about training his speech organs from his SE pronunciation tutor. His tutor had suggested that he read out loud from books or articles in his major field every day (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). Another suggestion she gave him was to repeat difficult sounds such as /b/ /v/, /v/ /b/, /b/ /v/, while he was walking or driving his car (Interview One). Similarly, Qizhen learned how to breathe deeply to improve her fluency, rhythm, and intonation from her pronunciation tutor (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). She also learned how to control pausing in sentences from her tutor (Interview Three). Moreover, Qizhen learned such things as the flap, linking, ellipsis, and assimilation from the SE class (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). For both Qizhen and Seung-Ho their pronunciation tutors served as language models. They practiced the suggestions made by their tutors. This modeling is an example of a cognitive learning strategy (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 1987).

Ho Yeon realized the importance of pronunciation when she communicated with others (Journal: Week Eight). She provided two examples. The first example was about a restaurant situation (Interview Two). If the waitress did not understand her because of incorrect pronunciation, it became very frustrating for Ho Yeon. Therefore, she needed to pronounce words correctly. The other example was about Kurdish people (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). Her conversation partner had used the word Kurdish
in their conversation, but Ho Yeon had not understood it. Later when she discussed the term with her husband, she realized that she already knew that word in Korean. Consequently, pronunciation and having knowledge about a topic enabled her to speak more fluently in English.

Xiaolan also learned new things about SE pronunciation such as linking, reductions, and deletion of sounds (Interview One). She found out that in the U.S. there is a lot of linking and reducing of sounds in spoken language. She learned these things from the SE 104.5 textbook, which she thought was very good. Her roommate, who had gone on directly to SE 105, was not aware of language phenomena like the “s” contraction- ‘He has suggested’ would be pronounced ‘He’s’ (Interview Two).

Similar to Xiaolan, Tadashi learned about reductions and deletions from the SE class. He had paid special attention to the class lectures on intonation and reduction of sounds, since they provided clues as to why native speakers’ sentences were not clear (Journal: Week Eight). Tadashi added that even if you listened to the same sentence many times, if you were not aware of what was happening to the pronunciation or intonation, it was impossible to catch the meaning (Interview Three). So, having knowledge about sound deletions or reductions was helpful for his SE comprehension.

To summarize, Seung-Ho, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, and Tadashi learned something new to help their SE pronunciation, fluency, and listening comprehension. In the examples of Qizhen, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, and Tadashi there is support for the benefits of formal instruction (Long, 1983c) on their L2. In addition to the SE class, Seung-Ho and Qizhen also received formal instruction on pronunciation from their SE tutors. In the case of Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Tadashi, they had learned about reductions, linking, and other pronunciation things in the SE class.

Besides pronunciation, Ho Yeon mentioned the importance of knowledge about a topic, which helped her understanding of what native speakers were saying and her
own fluency. In her example background knowledge or Schema Theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983) is underscored. By creating or making ties to already existing knowledge, it becomes easier for L2 learners to improve their listening comprehension and speaking ability in English.

Effects of Reflection on Learning

Finally, the last aspect of the participants’ SE learning experience was how thinking and writing about their SE affected their learning of it during the Winter quarter of 1999. I asked the participants this question in the first and third interviews and also in Week Eight of the journal. Overall, Tadashi, Qizhen, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho said that thinking, writing, and talking about their SE experience helped them reflect, become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in SE, and evaluate their progress. Table 5.10 summarizes these themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection of Problem Areas</th>
<th>Tadashi, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of Awareness</td>
<td>Qizhen, Seung-Ho, Tadashi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of SE</td>
<td>Ho Yeon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.10: Effects of Reflection on Learning

For example, Tadashi thought it was good practice to reflect on his SE, because by doing so, he became more objective and insightful of his English (Interviews One and Three). Otherwise, he never would have thought about his pronunciation problems and sound differences. When I asked him if he also acquired this awareness from the tutorials, he admitted that yes he had. In fact, he was humbled and realized that his English was not good.

By thinking and writing about her SE experience, Qizhen became aware of her pronunciation and grammar problems and thought about what she could do to improve her SE (Interviews One and Three). Moreover, Qizhen realized that SE was a useful tool
to express herself and communicate with others (Journal: Week Five). One of the things that she applied from her writing style to her video presentations was clear organization (Fieldnotes). Consequently, her presentations were easier to understand, because it compensated for her pronunciation problems.

For Xiaolan, writing the journal forced her to think about her problems and stimulated her learning (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). For example, if she could speak English well, she would be able to find a better job when she returned to China (Journal: Week Eight). She really had not thought about that before. Therefore, writing the entries helped her to think systematically of the benefits of studying SE, and thus, it improved her incentive to learn.

Similarly, Ho Yeon felt that thinking and writing about her SE experience gave her the opportunity to think about and assess her English (Interview Three). She added that thinking and writing about her past SE experiences and opportunities provided her the chance to evaluate herself. So investing time and thought absolutely affected her SE. In addition, Seung-Ho also became aware of his weak points in speaking by writing the journal entries and doing the interviews (Journal: Week Five).

Diary and journal studies have been used to provide introspective and retrospective information about learners’ individual differences (Bailey, 1991; Fry, 1988) such as beliefs about language learning, affective states that influence their learning, and general factors (age, language aptitude, motivation, general intelligence, personality, etc.), and learning strategies (Parkinson & Howell-Richardson, 1990; Brown, 1985; Bailey, 1983; Foss & Beitzel, 1988; Grandcolas & Soule-Susbielles, 1986; Lowe, 1987; Matsumoto 1987, 1989; Rubin & Henze, 1981; Sternglass & Pugh, 1986) which include reflection, awareness, and evaluation of their language learning.

As Fulwiler (1980) describes the journal, it exists “somewhere on a continuum between diaries and class notebooks: where diaries are records of personal thought and
experience, class notebooks are records of other people’s facts and ideas. Like the diary, the journal is written in the first person; like the class notebook, the journal focuses on academic subjects the writer would like to learn more about” (p. 17). Fulwiler adds that the journal can have a narrow focus, that is, the content of one discipline, or a broader focus, the person’s whole experience. In all, a “student’s journal can be a documentary of both academic and personal growth, a record of evolving insight as well as the tool used to gain that insight” (Ibid, p. 18). The purpose of the journal in this study was twofold: 1) to help the five participants gain insight into their SE learning experience and 2) a record of that experience to discuss with them in their interviews with me.

Another important pedagogical function of diaries or journals is that, ‘when teachers ask students to introspect about learning, comment on the class, and communicate about what they are learning, students get more involved in the course and make connections between themselves and the course materials’ (Porter et al., 1990, p. 227; as cited in Halbach, 2000). In this study I saw evidence of the participants’ increased interest and awareness of their learning in my fieldnotes and their journal entries as well as interviews.

More specifically, Stevenson and Jenkins (1994) and Huntley (1999) have used journal writing in the training of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). For example, Huntley used reflective pronunciation journals with students in her ITA courses in which they recorded activities that they engaged in to improve their spoken language comprehensibility. In Stevenson and Jenkins’ study, they used daily journal writing with 20 ITAs to determine whether the students perceived journal writing as an instrument to develop their language proficiency, cross-cultural learning, teaching skills development, and personal and institutional support.

In contrast to Stevenson and Jenkins’ study where only 30% of the learners reflected on their teaching, in my study I selected eight weekly journal topics for the participants to write and think about, because I wanted them to focus on the process of
their learning during the quarter. Basically, because this study was based on structured topics that the ITAs would write about, the topics helped the participants develop self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-evaluation of their L2 language learning that earlier diary studies also found (Bailey 1983, 1991; Lowe, 1987; Matsumoto, 1989; Rubin & Henze, 1981). This study is significant in that the structured journal writing created a holistic perspective of the learner’s SE learning process, that is their strategies, difficulties, feelings, motivating factors, progress, styles, attitudes, formal instruction, new learning, and the affects of thinking and writing on their learning, whereas prior studies have focused on limited aspects such as beliefs and attitudes about language learning, learning strategies, pronunciation, building fluency, and teaching. In order for the five participants to have insight on the process of their SE learning experience, it was important for them to think, write, and talk about their learning in a global manner.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the SE learning experience of the five participants in my SE 104.5 class during the Winter quarter of 1999. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe their SE learning experience. I would like to summarize the major findings of their experiences. These findings are based on the data I collected from journal entries, interviews, fieldnotes, membercheck notes, EI notes, video presentation notes, and speaking practice notes. In the area of spoken language difficulties, there were three main themes: a) pronunciation, b) vocabulary, and c) composing sentences. In pronunciation, the five participants had problems pronouncing consonants that did not exist in their native language. Besides pronunciation, all five students mentioned not having enough vocabulary in English to express themselves. Furthermore, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho discussed the problems with composing sentences in English, because Korean and Japanese have SOV structure compared to SVO in English.
For formal instruction in English, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Seung-Ho said that their EFL instruction in their native countries emphasized these areas: grammar, writing, reading, or translation. In addition, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi discussed the supplemental opportunities they had in English, which included participating in a university English club, attending a language school or private language institute, taking company English classes, and interacting with American friends.

Regarding their feelings about the SE university requirement, all five participants agreed that it was required and necessary. Despite this, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen felt that the policy was unrealistic and inflexible. Several factors contributed to their feeling. First, it was unrealistic for an ITA to achieve native like pronunciation and fluency within a year or less. Second, ITAs had overburdened class schedules and some of them also worked in labs, tutor rooms, or as graders and did not have enough time to practice their English. Besides their feelings about the requirement, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan talked about the external factors—financial and departmental pressures—that were motivating them to pass.

The participants’ focus on other people’s SE was the speaker’s words. Ho Yeon and Xiaolan said that listening to the speaker’s words was important for learning new words, which they could apply in their English. Meanwhile, Seung-Ho and Qizhen paid specific attention to certain types of words such as, situation words, interrogatives, and content words because they provided meaning, indicated word order, and presented new information. In contrast, in their SE, Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Xiaolan focused on pronunciation in order to make themselves comprehensible. Even though Qizhen focused primarily on the content and sentence structure of her SE, she also paid attention to her pronunciation because she did not want to irritate her listeners.

Next, in areas of progress all five participants discussed their improvement in pronunciation and fluency. Nevertheless, these two areas still needed more improvement.
For example, Ho Yeon continued to have problems in fluency and differentiating /t/ and /l, /l/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/, and /dZ/ and /z/. Qizhen’s troublesome pronunciations - /l/ and /r/, /T/ and /s/ - persisted in spite of her improvement. For Xiaolan, fluency was a challenge because at first progress was easy, but later it became harder to improve. Although Tadashi pointed out his progress in composing sentences and using colloquial expressions, he later became inconclusive about his areas of progress. Like Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho had made progress in fluency and pronunciation of /r/ and /l, b/v, p/f, and s/s, but these things required more time and practice. In general, all five participants thought that more time and practice were necessary to make progress in pronunciation and fluency.

Additionally, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho were using strategies to improve their SE. The three main areas they shared in common were participating in class discussions, doing the community contact assignments, and taking part in this study. Instead of discussing these areas, I provided examples of other interesting strategies that they were using to improve their English. For example, Qizhen and Seung-Ho met with a SE pronunciation tutor twice a week during the quarter. Their tutors helped them primarily with consonant sounds and deep breathing exercises for Qizhen to help her with suprasegmentals, that is, rhythm, intonation, and fluency. In addition to her pronunciation tutor, Qizhen self-monitored her SE, talked with native speakers, and went to the language lab several hours a week. Xiaolan talked about watching TV as a way of learning new words and going to the language lab to practice pronunciation. Meanwhile, Ho Yeon imitated Americans’ SE. She also learned words from the internet, books, magazines, or TV, and tried to memorize them for her English.

Besides his weekly pronunciation tutoring, Seung-Ho was doing other things to improve his English, such as listening to English conversational tapes while driving his car, having his son correct his pronunciation, watching TV, renting videos, listening to the
radio, and paying attention to the words while he was reading. In contrast, Tadashi did not have much time to concentrate on English, but with the little time he had, he would listen to the radio, talk with his landlady, and listen and repeat the words on his tutorial tapes.

Another area was the compensation strategies that the participants used in the video presentations in order to help their comprehensibility. One strategy used by all the participants was visuals or the blackboard. For example, Qizhen pointed to words on the transparency to make her pronunciation clearer. Furthermore, she used clear organization, included comprehension checks, asked questions, and summarized. Similarly, Tadashi utilized transparencies, comprehension checks, and the blackboard. He was also organized, defined important words, and gave examples. Before the presentation, Ho Yeon prepared a list of key words and practiced them out loud. During the presentation, Ho Yeon was well organized, monitored her pronunciation, used transparencies, and used focal stress on key words. In contrast, Xiaolan used the blackboard, talked naturally, and employed a well organized structure. Like Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho thought about the key words before the presentation and practiced the words by himself and with his tutor. Then while he was presenting, he emphasized special meaning words by writing them on the blackboard.

Regarding the changes in attitude, thinking skills, and personality, there were several themes that surfaced. One theme was that Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho felt improvement in their attitude and thinking. In fact, I observed a positive change in Ho Yeon’s attitude and behavior during the two quarters that I had her (Fall 1998 and Winter 1999). A second theme addressed by Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi was being open, active learners of SE. Both Qizhen and Ho Yeon realized that being open and active would create more opportunities to develop their SE. Tadashi took this idea a step further and discussed some cultural limitations that would have to be overcome if a L2 learner really wanted to express his ideas and opinions in the L2. Another theme dealt with relying less on translation when Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho used English.
The last theme was that Tadashi and Xiaolan felt less confident about their SE. They had perceived their English to be much better. Xiaolan began to doubt her SE abilities after not passing the EI in Fall 1998. However, she did feel a little hopeful during the Winter quarter, since she saw some gradual progress in her English. As Tadashi learned more about his English, he realized how incorrect his pronunciation and listening skills were. Moreover, he realized his English was not perfect, because native speakers could not always understand him, especially when he pronounced words with /r/.

The next area in the participants’ SE experience was what they had learned in the SE class, in tutorials, with their conversation partner, or other people outside the SE program. One type of learning that occurred in the classroom for Tadashi, Qizhen, and Xiaolan was about the reduction of sounds. In particular, they learned about the flap, ellipsis, deletions, assimilation, and linking in spoken language. As Tadashi had explained, these reductions provided clues as to why native speakers’ sentences were not clear. This knowledge was helpful for his SE comprehension as it probably was for Qizhen, Xiaolan, or other foreign students.

From their SE pronunciation tutors, Seung-Ho and Qizhen learned techniques to help their pronunciation. Seung-Ho’s tutor had suggested two things he could do to train his speech organs. One was to read out loud from books or articles everyday. Another thing he could do was repeat difficult consonant sounds such as /b/ /v/ while he was walking or driving. From her tutor, Qizhen learned how to breathe deeply to improve her fluency, rhythm, and intonation. She also worked on the /r/ and /l/ and how to control pausing in sentences with her tutor.

The importance of pronunciation when communicating with others was important for Ho Yeon, as well as Seung-Ho and Qizhen. Ho Yeon provided two specific examples about this. For example, in a restaurant it was important to have clear and correct pronunciation so that the waitress could understand her, otherwise
it became very frustrating for Ho Yeon to order food. The other example was with the word “Kurdish” in a conversation with her SE conversation partner. Ho Yeon had not understood this word, but later she found out from her husband that she already knew that word in Korean. Consequently, Ho Yeon learned that pronunciation and knowledge about a topic enabled her to speak more fluently in English.

Finally, in the last area of the participants’ SE learning experience, which was how thinking and writing about their SE affected their learning of it, there was an overall feeling among the participants that thinking, writing, and talking about their experience helped them reflect on their English, develop an awareness of their problem areas, and evaluate their SE progress. Tadashi thought it was good to reflect on his SE, because it gave him objectivity and insight into his English. By thinking and writing about her experience, Qizhen became aware of her pronunciation and grammar problems and what she could do to improve her English. Similarly, Xiaolan was forced to think about her problems and the benefits of studying English by writing the journal entries, and as a result, this awareness stimulated her learning. Likewise, Ho Yeon felt that thinking and writing about her SE experience encouraged her to think about and evaluate her English. So investing time and thought had positive benefits on her SE. Like the other participants, Seung-Ho developed an awareness of his weaknesses in speaking by writing the journal entries and doing the interviews. In Chapter Six, I will continue discussion on interpretation of the data, particularly the main themes that emerged in the final analysis, review related research, and also discuss how the data and research literature relate to this study’s research questions.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The study’s five research questions will be the major organizing principle for this chapter. The final themes that emerged in the five participants’ language learning experience will comprise the subsections. There will be brief summaries at the end of the discussion of each question and throughout the section where necessary. Finally, this chapter closes with a summary of the main findings for the research questions in this study. Chapter Seven contains the conclusions based on these findings, explores implications for future research and teaching, and offers recommendations.

Review of the Study’s Purpose

Journal writing, which has been tried but not extensively used in SE courses for international teaching assistants (ITAs), was the principle method of data collection in this study. Journal writing in this study was a tool by which to acquire a deeper understanding about the participants’ SE learning process and also encouraged them to reflect on their learning. At this Midwestern university, SE 104, 104.5, and 105 are important required courses for prospective ITAs. As an instructor of 104 and 104.5 courses, I saw the end product of these courses- that is, how many students moved to 104.5 or 105 courses or remained in the same course based on their Exit Interview (EI) assessment, but I felt that the other instructors and I were not looking closely enough at the daily learning of the students. In other words, I was interested in knowing more about the process of their learning, for example their former SE learning, motivations, progress,
difficulties, learning and compensation strategies, new learning, changes in their linguistic self-image, and how reflection affected their learning. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this study was to describe and explore the ITA’s experience learning SE through the use of journal writing.

The five participants’ journal writing produced rich portraits of their language learning experience through reflection on eight weekly journal topics. These topics are reviewed below:

Week 1  What difficulties do you feel you have when you speak English?

    In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?

Week 2  Describe the experiences you have had learning spoken English in your native country and in an English speaking country. Both:
    a) Formal Instruction and
    b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers

Week 3  Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?

    How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in spoken English in order to teach?

Week 4  When you communicate with other people in English:
    a) What do you pay attention to in their spoken English?
    b) What do you pay attention to in your spoken English?

Week 5  Describe the areas in your spoken English that you are . . .
    a) seeing progress in and
    b) not seeing improvement in.

Week 6  What types of things are you doing to improve your spoken English?

    What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?

Week 7  As you are learning and using spoken English, what changes do you recognize in your attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way you feel about yourself?
Week 8

Describe several new things you have learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.

How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?

With this study, these five participants’ SE experiences provide valuable information about how to improve the teaching and learning in SE courses for teachers, researchers, and prospective ITA learners. So in effect, this study makes a positive contribution to the fields of ITA development and research, second language acquisition (SLA), and any other field or subject area that utilizes journal writing as a method of a deeper understanding and reflection of the learning and teaching process.

Main Themes

In the process of doing a final content analysis of the participants’ data, there were five main themes that emerged. The first theme was that the participants’ English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction in their native countries and obstacles in their interaction with native speakers of English did not fully allow them to learn and practice their SE. The second theme was that pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency were the participants’ main concerns while learning SE. Motivation, which was the third theme, played an important part in the participants’ SE learning. The fourth theme was that the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking while learning SE. Finally, the fifth theme was that reflection did make a difference in their SE learning. Now I would like to integrate discussion of these themes with this study’s five research questions, because the questions are what caused these themes to emerge.
Discussion

Research Question #1:

What educational and personal experiences have shaped the ITAs learning of English?

A. EFL Instruction

The five participants’ EFL instruction affected their SE learning. In particular, there was no real emphasis in their native schools on developing spoken language skills, but rather English instruction that emphasized grammar, writing, reading, or translation. In the previous chapter EFL setting was described as those countries in which English is taught only as a foreign language within the school system. Usually, the student data information that I receive each quarter from my SE 104 students about their former English learning indicate the same types of emphasis. The journal topic for Week Two and discussion in Interview One provided a description of the five participants’ formal English instruction in their native countries. What I found interesting about Tadashi, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, Qizhen, and Ho Yeon’s formal English instruction was what was emphasized, how it was emphasized, and what they thought about it. More specifically, their prior experiences, along with related research which I have included, gave me a deeper understanding of their EFL instruction, spoken language ability, and their SE learning needs. The relevant research supports the results of their experiences and explains the limitations and changes occurring in their EFL settings.

For example, Seung-Ho, who was the oldest of the participants, began to study English at thirteen, as did his Korean cohorts. Throughout his EFL instruction, his teachers emphasized grammar. He pointed out that by the time Korean students graduated from the university-believing they could read and write very well-they still had problems speaking. Unlike some other Korean students, Seung-Ho was generally comprehensible, fluent, and confident when he spoke English despite his grammatical and pronunciation problems.
He had an intuitive and experiential sense that the objective of the Korean EFL curriculum needed to change in order to help Korean students communicate in English. He had discussed with me a few changes that the Ministry of Education was making in English language instruction in his country. For example, the alphabet and short conversations, were offered at the age of ten for Korean elementary students.

In 1994, the South Korean government decided that English language instruction would begin in third grade of elementary schools (Li, 1998). This policy would commence in 1997, and so they began to train prospective EFL elementary teachers. English language instruction in elementary schools was one in a series of new policies that the Ministry of Education published regarding English learning and teaching. In 1992, the South Korean Ministry of Education had published “The Sixth National Curriculum for Middle Schools” (Grades 7 - 9) and the “The Sixth National Curriculum for High Schools” (Grades 10-12) (Ibid). These policies, also known as the Communicative Curriculums, would guide Korean English teaching from 1995 to 2010. In this new curricula, communicative language teaching (CLT) would replace the audiolingual method in middle schools and the grammar-translation method in high schools (Choi, Park, & Kim, 1986; as cited in Li, 1998). CLT is characterized as having a focus on communicative functions, meaningful tasks, and language that is relevant and realistic to the learners in a secure and nontargeting atmosphere.

Li (1998) explains that the South Korean government had placed English learning and teaching high on its agenda in order “to ensure that South Korea . . . [would] play an active and important role in world political and economic activities” (Ibid, p. 681). In effect, the government wanted to prepare its people to communicate in English with those who did not speak their language. Interestingly, Seung-Ho’s observations and thoughts about English instruction that emphasizes communication concurs with the changes that the South Korean government was attempting to implement in the school systems. Even
though these changes in the English language curriculum in South Korea did not affect Seung-Ho or Ho Yeon’s prior English instruction, it is important to highlight them in order to see how developing communicative ability will affect future Korean students who become prospective ITA learners in SE courses.

Seung-Ho may have personally realized this need for change in the Korean English curriculum from his contact with native speakers while he served in the Korean navy. Perhaps his worldly contact with people gave him an awareness of the practical and communicative value of English. Also, as a Ph.D. student of military history at State University, discussions and presentations were an essential part of his graduate courses. It was important for him to express his ideas, contribute to discussions, and present information about modern Korean history. It did not seem to be a daunting task for him to talk in English about his field of study. In fact, he enjoyed talking about his major. Probably from his training as a historian - “a bridgemaker of the past, present, and future”- he accepted the present necessity for Korean students to communicate with native speakers, because many of them are planning to pursue graduate study in the U.S. or other English speaking countries.

Ho Yeon had a similar experience as Seung-Ho did with her formal English instruction. She also talked about having no opportunities in Korean schools to acquire speaking ability in English, because the teaching goal was to help the students prepare for the TOEFL and GRE exams by emphasizing grammar and writing in English. If these EFL learners’ needs (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986) are considered, it is understandable why a focus on exam preparation is necessary, especially if many of them are preparing to study in MA and Ph.D. programs abroad, as Ho Yeon had done. Furthermore, the National University Entrance Examination in South Korea also includes an English
section (Li, 1998). The English section of this exam, which is grammar-based in nature, consists of grammar, reading comprehension, translation items, and listening comprehension. As one of the secondary school teachers in Li’s study indicates:

This exam [the National University Entrance Examination] has had tremendous influence on the English teaching in South Korea. As soon as students start middle school, they have a clear goal in mind- to pass the National University Entrance Examination. Teachers also have a clear goal in mind- to help students succeed in the Examination. Because it only tests students’ grammar knowledge and reading ability, both students and teachers are interested in grammar and reading in English classes. (Young-Cheol, July 26, 1995, p. 692)

Clearly, the focus on exam preparation, whether it be the national exam and/or TESOL and GRE exams, has been a very influential factor on the EFL instruction in South Korea, as Ho Yeon pointed out. Seung-Ho said if Korean students wanted to acquire speaking skills in English, they had to go to a private language institute. As a matter of fact, Ho Yeon probably took a SE course at a private language institute, because she was planning to study in the U.S. However, it was not helpful, since the class size was too large-the students were only able to say a few sentences per class. Large classes are not only a problem for speaking English in language institutes but in public school classrooms too. Usually South Korean high schools contain around 48-50 students per class (Li, 1998). Because there are so many students, one secondary school teacher commented that ‘it is not possible for the teacher to give each of them [individualized] attention as required by the communicative method’ (p. 692). The teacher added that the desks and stools are fixed to the floor, so that it is impossible to rearrange seats for group discussions. This may have also been true of the desks in the language institute. From her experience in the private language institute, Ho Yeon realized that the class size would have to be smaller if the students were to have more practice speaking in English.

In contrast to the English language education in Korea, Ho Yeon pointed out that there was much more individualized instruction in the SE courses at State University. The
SE instructors taught her pronunciation, fluency, and grammar with more individualized attention. The instruction in the SE courses is purposively designed to provide the students with a lot of individualized teaching. First, the maximum class size is twelve students per class for SE 104, 104.5, and 105, and often the 105.5 class will have even fewer students. On average there are from nine to twelve students in a class. Second, the students receive individualized instruction in tutorials - four tutorials for SE 104 and 104.5 students and five for 105 students. Usually the tutorials are 45 minutes in duration.

In addition, the 104.5 students have weekly ten minute speaking practices, which are tape recorded, with their instructor. They talk for about five minutes on a speaking prompt while the instructor takes notes. In the remaining five minutes the instructor gives them feedback on their pronunciation, grammar, and fluency related issues. At the end of the quarter the 104 and 104.5 students also do warm up conversations with their instructors before taking the EI. Some 104.5, 105, and 105.5 students also have individualized tutoring twice a week with a SE pronunciation tutor because of their special pronunciation and fluency needs. Finally, all the SE students have the opportunity to meet with an American conversation partner one to two hours a week to discuss their class assignments, cultural topics, and any other topics of mutual interest.

Overall, as Ho Yeon had observed and experienced, the prospective ITAs in the Spoken English Program (SEP) at State University receive individualized instruction. The main reason for this emphasis is that the ITAs must become certified in SE in order to have instructional contact with undergraduate students, as required by this state’s law. Therefore, the ITAs must be comprehensible and fluent. Since many of them have different types and degrees of pronunciation, grammar, and discourse related problems, individualizing the instruction is necessary. For example, I worked on grammar, word stress, v/b, p/f, l/r, and dz/z with Ho Yeon during the Winter quarter of 1999 (Video
Presentation Notes and Speaking Practice Notes). Furthermore, the ITAs must also develop the teaching skills and rapport to teach American undergraduate students, such as being engaging and interactive, and encouraging students’ questions. These skills also require individualized instruction, because the ITAs are at different levels of developing their teaching skills, as I have observed in the SE 105 Mock Teaching Test (MTT) during the past five years. So, in addressing the needs of the ITAs, it is essential to individualize the instruction.

Generally, in the ESL academic setting where the foreign students need to acculturate and survive academically, individualized attention on the students’ language needs is prevalent and vital. “Although individual needs and wants must be taken into account in both EFL and ESL settings, they are more pronounced in the ESL one in those cases where learners have moved to a new environment in which the target language plays a crucial role in the overall process of acculturation” (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p. 25).

Having a RA position with her advisor, Ho Yeon had to communicate with him about research on a regular basis. In fact, he had stressed the importance of the 104 and 104.5 classes, because these courses were helpful in improving her fluency and pronunciation. In her department, there were no TA positions, but her advisor and other department faculty members still recognized the importance of SE ability and required it for their foreign RAs. For instance, I had two other Korean females from her department take SE 104 and 104.5 classes with me.

Ho Yeon and Seung-Ho’s former English language instruction in South Korean schools confirms the research literature on the Korean EFL setting. In other words, prior to the 1990s, the students were not encouraged to acquire English speaking skills, because the emphasis was on preparing students for the national exam and TESOL or GRE exams. However, Seung-Ho did allude to the communicative focus that was being implemented in the English language curriculum within the past ten years.
Tadashi’s EFL instruction in Japan emphasized reading, writing, translating, and especially grammar. He speculated that the reason his Japanese teachers did not teach English conversation or pronunciation was probably because they had problems with them. In the EFL setting it is harder to practice and maintain English fluency. “The lack of exposure to a real English-speaking setting inevitably limits the quantity and quality of input. It may delay the whole process of acquisition, or it may limit the ultimate level of proficiency” (Takada, 1999, p. 14). If Tadashi’s instructors had difficulties developing their English speaking ability because of the lack of input, educational support, resources, or time to practice, then they may not have had the confidence or training to develop this skill in their students. Medgyes (1994) asserts that this limited ability in English influences the non-native teachers’ poor self-image and their reliance on grammar-based instruction (as cited in Saito-Abbott & Samimy, 2001).

Sano, Takahashi, and Asaji (1984) explain that for most Japanese learners, “English is not and will never be an instrument to do something with, but one subject in the whole curriculum, which aims to promote the overall development of . . . [their] future citizens” (p. 170). They add that many Japanese teachers’ adherence to grammar and the textbook in their English language instruction is due to the “limited exposure to English, the competitive entrance examination that students have to take, which requires accurate knowledge of grammar, and the great linguistic differences between English and Japanese” (p. 173). By the same token, these factors then influence the pedagogical training in English instruction that the Japanese teachers receive. Takada (1999) states that on the one hand, Japanese EFL teachers are faced with the formidable challenge of meeting the practical needs for English proficiency, especially for Japanese business people, but on the other hand, language acquisition is limited by the lack of exposure to
authentic English for the learners and EFL teachers. Therefore, it seems that Tadashi’s speculations about his Japanese English teachers’ speaking ability is confirmed by this research.

Another important consideration is how Tadashi’s Japanese English teachers perceived themselves as EFL teachers of English. If they felt inferior in their English skills compared to the native speaker standard, then this could have also deterred them from using communicative approaches in the English classroom. A graduate student who had participated in a pilot graduate seminar for nonnative-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999) addressed this issue of nonnative English teachers’ perceived inferiority to the native speaker. He wanted to convince the Korean EFL teachers in his educational setting to take ownership and become empowered in their English learning. They should not feel inferior to the native speaker model- they had a right to its ownership and usage too. Medgyes (1994) highlights several advantages of nonnative teachers of English, such as being a role model for the learners, a member of the same culture, and someone who can understand the learners’ needs (as cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 1999).

Furthermore, Tadashi’s Japanese EFL teachers may have lacked confidence about their English speaking ability due to the native speaker expectations of students or their parents. For example, another student who had participated in the pilot graduate seminar (Ibid) reflected on this desire of students and parents to want native speaker teachers in the Korean EFL setting:

In EFL settings like in Korea, most English teachers in public schools are non-native speakers of English. Though it seems obvious that they have some advantages over native speakers, many of the parents and students wish to have native speakers. Many of them may know that a native speaker is not an ideal teacher. But they feel and think that way and, therefore, want native speakers as their teachers? . . . How can I convince them that I may be a better teacher than a native speaker?’

(Steve, LD, February 6, p. 423)
Even though the preceding examples were about EFL teachers in the Korean language setting, I think that the points raised by the two graduate students are applicable to Japanese teachers of English or other international teachers who teach EFL. However, I doubt that Tadashi was aware of these educational, societal, and intrinsic factors that may have made it difficult for his Japanese teachers to emphasize speaking and pronunciation in their English language teaching.

Furthermore, during the three and a half years that Tadashi worked for a Japanese engineering company, he was required to take the company’s English classes three times a week, and this is where he learned conversational business English. These classes were geared to teaching the employees how to communicate with foreign clients about the company’s products and also deliver presentations. This situation seemed ideal for Tadashi to realize the benefits of learning English, but he expressed mixed feelings, because it was one thing to learn English of his own accord and another to be required to learn it. Despite these mixed feelings, I suspect he took interest in learning English, because he dated one of his teachers. She was a Japanese American female from Oakland, California who had been in Japan for ten years.

In Chapter Four, I mentioned that for Tadashi meeting a female target in the foreign language was more of an incentive to learn the language than pursuing an academic goal. It seems that learning English was more interesting for Tadashi by socializing with his English teacher. In Campbell’s (1996) diary study of learning Spanish in Mexico, she also socialized with her teachers. After reviewing her journal entries, Campbell saw that socializing with the teachers was clearly the most important influence on her language learning in Mexico, “more important than . . . [her] classroom study, associations with the family . . . [she] lived with, or anything else” (Ibid, p. 206). Campbell added that by socializing with the teachers, she became a socially equal member
of their group. She progressed in her acquisition of Spanish because she used the language in “meaningful and psychologically/emotionally charged situations” (p. 214).

Similarly, by socializing with his English teacher, Tadashi became engaged in his English learning. It was no longer something he had to do, but rather something he enjoyed doing of his own volition. He found it very easy to understand his English teacher and talk with her. She was accustomed to the Japanese way of speaking English, and she was a good Japanese speaker too. She never corrected his pronunciation. Consequently, Tadashi developed confidence in his SE ability. It is surprising and even puzzling that she never corrected his pronunciation. If the main focus of the class was to learn how to communicate and be comprehensible with the company’s clients, it seems unbelievable that she would not correct a gross error like the r/l distinction in a word, for example road → load. Incidentally, “the distinction between /l/ and /r/ in English is notoriously difficult for speakers of languages such as Japanese and Korean, which do not have that phonemic distinction” (Odlin, 1989, p. 115). The Japanese and Korean languages only have one liquid, /l/, in their phonemic inventories (Archibald, 1998). Tadashi’s pronunciation problem of r/l must have been much worse when he was in Japan. Even Tadashi pointed out that his teacher must have been aware of his pronunciation problems, and he was also puzzled that she never corrected his pronunciation.

Research by Mann (1986) suggests that Japanese speakers can distinguish these sounds (as cited in Odlin, 1989). It depends on the perceptual acuity of the individual. Individuals with a high phonetic sensitivity “will be able to overcome most of the inhibiting influence of phonological patterns in the native language” (p. 115). It seems that Tadashi did not have a high phonetic sensitivity. He struggled with the distinction between r/l in the 104.5 class. Even though he was improving, he still
frequently substituted r → l. Perhaps he just needed more time and practice to overcome the influence of the Japanese phonological patterns on his distinction between r/l in English.

After having SE 104 and 104.5 students from southern China, Japan, and Korea who have problems distinguishing r/l, I know how confusing it can be to understand them. Even if no other issue in pronunciation was addressed in Tadashi’s conversational English classes, at least this one should have been, because it interferes with comprehensibility. The r → l substitution can change the meaning of a word or sentence (for example, “we’re happy → we’ll happy”), cause a misunderstanding, or in severe cases a breakdown in communication (SEP instructor, personal communication, November 2000).

Trying to further understand why this type of error was not corrected by Tadashi’s Japanese American teacher, I recall SEP instructors telling me several times that we adapt ourselves to the SE students’ pronunciation and way of speaking during the quarter we teach them, and so we may overlook their pronunciation and grammatical mistakes. I have taught in the SEP for six years, and I admit that I have become accustomed to many types of errors. In fact, I even try to compensate for their pronunciation errors by guessing, sometimes disregarding, or relying on the sentence context to understand them. Consequently, some of their pronunciation problems do not always interfere with my comprehending them, but at other times it can be so confusing that for several seconds I am unaware of whatever else they say.

Another point to address about Tadashi’s Japanese American English teacher is that because she was in the EFL setting, she made an effort to acculturate herself and try to understand the Japanese way of speaking English. She had been in Japan for ten years and was probably very accustomed to many types of errors and overlooked them. In the ESL setting not everyone makes the effort or has the patience to understand what a foreign person is saying. That is exactly what happened to Tadashi when he came here. He
found out that he could not make himself understood, especially words with the /r/ sound like “rural.” He realized that his English speaking ability was not as strong as he had previously thought.

In Qizhen’s formal instruction in English, the Chinese instructors had stressed reading and grammar, because these skills were more practical for Chinese people since they had few opportunities to talk with native speakers. They were more likely to read in English than talk with a native speaker. As a matter of fact, “most Chinese students will never visit an English-speaking country or interact with English-speaking people” (Anderson, 1993, p. 472). Anderson illustrates other obstacles to teaching English communicatively in China, such as: a) Chinese middle schools usually have 50 to 70 students per class, b) middle school English textbooks are designed to teach grammar, reading, and writing with little focus on speaking, c) the Chinese English teachers are responsible for preparing their students for the English section of the national examination, which does not test communicative skills, d) they lack properly trained teachers or foreign teachers, e) the teachers also lack the appropriate texts and materials, and finally, f) most older teachers and learners would oppose the communicative approach because it defies traditional practice (Maley, 1984; as cited in Anderson 1993). So, this research provides a broader understanding of why reading and grammar were emphasized in Qizhen’s English instruction.

Similar to the teaching and learning changes in English in South Korea, Qing Liao (2000/2001) indicates that in the early 1990s China’s State Education Development Commission (SEDC) and Chinese EFL teachers began to adopt a communicative approach to English language teaching (ELT). For example, in 1992 the SEDC introduced a functional syllabus, which emphasized communicative teaching with a list of communicative functions to be taught. Also during the same year, SEDC published, in cooperation with the publisher Longman, a textbook series for communicative teaching.
“The syllabus and textbooks required teachers to teach communicatively in classrooms” (Qing Liao, 2000/2001, p. 6). In addition, in the late 1990s the Matriculation English Test (MET), which is one of the National College Entrance Exams- also developed by SEDC - began to include a section on Language Use. This section measured the four language skills used for communication; for example it included role plays, reading comprehension, and communicative writing. Two other measures were also taken to ensure that CLT was effective, namely, teacher training and publication of the advantages of using CLT.

However, it is important to highlight that adoption of this communicative approach was only within the last ten years. When Qizhen was in middle school, she learned only how to read English. During her undergraduate study, which was probably during the mid 1990s, there was still an emphasis on English reading- there were three required courses for reading. Besides these courses, they had two formal national tests in English, which were grammar based. Furthermore, reading may have also been the focus because Qizhen and other students needed reading, writing, and grammar skills for the TOEFL and GRE exams in order to pursue graduate study in the U.S. Even if Chinese students do not plan to study abroad or have contact with native speakers, reading ability in English is necessary for researchers, scholars, and other professionals, since “English is the international language of science and technology and 85% of all information in worldwide informational storage and retrieval networks is in English” (Anderson, 1993, p. 472). Therefore, foreign language study in China, especially being able to read foreign texts, is an essential tool for the development and change of the country’s economic system (Burnaby & Sun, 1989), particularly with respect to English.

Before coming to the U.S., Qizhen took some SE classes at a language school. The conversational topics in the class were not interesting, and there were not enough native speakers for individualized speaking practice. Being an EFL setting, it was probably difficult for the language school to find qualified native speaker teachers.
for their SE classes. Actually, “most of the foreign language teaching in China is done by the Chinese themselves” (Anderson, 1993, p. 478). On the other hand, in the Chinese higher education institutions, foreign experts have been made more available, but there has been a preference to admit “foreign language specialists who are qualified in literature or linguistics rather than those qualified in applied linguistics/second language education” (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 223). Belonging more in the business sector, the language school that Qizhen attended may not have had access or have been able to attract the experts that the higher institutions do. So perhaps because of the shortage of native speakers, regardless if they were qualified or unqualified to teach, the language school was probably satisfied to have any native speakers who had sojourned to China to teach their English classes. Earlier, I referred to a Korean graduate student who had raised the point that students and their parents in the Korean EFL setting wanted native speaker teachers. The Chinese learners may have a similar attitude. If the language school was aware of this, they could have capitalized on it by hiring any native speakers to teach their classes in order to lure students.

An important point that Qizhen brought up about the language school was that it was run like a business. Their main aim was to make money with little or no concern about the students’ learning. Also, Qizhen mentioned that their conversational topics were not interesting suggesting that the foreign language materials were probably not contemporary or authentic, which would have made the learning more engaging for the learners, because authentic materials are current, real-life oriented, communicative, and learner centered. “The commonsense idea that materials which are interesting aid learning has been documented for content subjects (Shirey & Reynolds, 1988 [as cited in Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p. 491]).” Like the Chinese educational setting, the language school that Qizhen attended may not have had many opportunities to obtain foreign language materials created by native speakers (Burnably & Sun, 1989).
Unlike Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho, and Qizhen, Xiaolan had two years of a formal SE class at her undergraduate university in China. At the same time, her experience was similar to theirs, because the students in her class spoke very little English. Xiaolan’s instructor was a young American male in his early 20s, and more than likely, he was not trained or experienced in teaching EFL. If he had been, he would have prepared vocabulary, grammatical structures, or other skills and materials that the students would need to learn for their group discussions. By preparing the students in this way, they would have been able to express themselves in English during the discussions. Yet, it is also possible that he did not have access to the appropriate EFL materials or resources.

Perhaps because native speakers of English are not readily available (Burnaby & Sun, 1989), Xiaolan’s university may have been willing to hire any native speaker to teach their SE classes. Interestingly, in the Chinese educational institutions distinctions are made between the English learning objectives depending on which students are taking the class and what their purposes are for learning English. For instance, the Chinese teachers in Burnaby and Sun’s study “made a distinction between teaching (a) university students majoring in English, (b) university students majoring in other subjects who also took English as a course in their program, (c) students who were learning English specifically to prepare for an imminent trip abroad . . ., and (d) all other students learning English (mostly secondary students)” (p. 225).

According to these teachers, communicative methods are appropriate for those students who are planning to live or study in an English-speaking environment, but not for the other students. For the other students, it is more useful to provide them with the English skills they will need for the kinds of work they will do in China, such as reading technical articles and translating documents. “In other words, the Chinese use their own methods not just because contextual constraints make it difficult for them to use communicative methods but also because it suits their students’ purposes” (Burnaby
& Sun, 1989, p. 227). In Xiaolan’s case, I think she took the English class as a course in her program of study, although it may have been a course for students planning to do graduate study abroad. Xiaolan mentioned having to enlarge her vocabulary for the GRE exam in a period of several months, which she and other students did on their own.

In the formal English instruction of all five participants there were factors from the EFL setting that influenced the grammar-based focus in their English education. Dubin and Olshtain (1986) discuss four factors that affect the target language curriculum: a) the language setting, b) patterns of language use in society, c) group and individual attitudes, and d) political and national context. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Dubin and Olshtain present an ESL - EFL continuum to describe the language settings where English is a target language. “The position of the particular language setting along the continuum is an indication of the degree of support which the learner can find in the immediate environment” (p. 8). Dubin and Olshtain add that the highest support for a learner of English is available in an English speaking setting, that is an ESL setting, while the lowest support is in the setting where English is only taught as a school subject, in other words in an EFL setting.

The language setting for Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, Qizhen, and Xiaolan was an EFL one. As the participants indicated, English education in China, Japan, and Korea begins in middle school or high school and continues through the university, and English is taught as a foreign language. In the descriptions of their formal English education, Seung-Ho, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen talked about an emphasis on reading, writing, grammar, and translation in their schools. This emphasis suggests that in their societies there was little or no use of English for communication. On the other hand, recent research indicates that patterns of use appear to be changing in Korea, Japan, and China. Their societies’ attitudes about what the emphasis should be and how to study English were undergoing changes. Even though the participants were not affected by
these changes, future students from their countries probably will be, and they may become prospective ITA learners in SE courses. These changes then have implications on the future teaching and learning of ITAs.

Seung-Ho said that a new English education policy had been implemented in Korea during the past five years. They began to offer basic English instruction in elementary school. During the 1990s the South Korean Ministry of Education had published other policies for English learning and teaching. These policies included replacing the audiolingual method in middle schools and the grammar-translation method in high schools with a new curricula based on CLT. The Korean political and national context was influential in bringing about these changes in the English language curriculum. As Li (1998) explained, the South Korean government saw English teaching and learning as a vital tool for ensuring its active and important role in world political and economic activities.

Seung-Ho seemed to have an open and positive attitude toward changing the focus from grammar to conversation in Korean EFL instruction. I think he probably realized this from his worldly contact with people while serving in the Korean navy, discussions and presentations in graduate courses at State University, and from his observations of other Korean students. He had pointed out that many Korean students could not communicate with native speakers. He felt that the main emphasis should be on conversation and then grammar.

Another change in patterns of English usage is evident with the upsurge of language schools or private language institutes in Korea and China as mentioned by Ho Yeon and Qizhen. These schools and institutes may suggest their societies’ recognition that the learners need to acquire English speaking ability for professional or personal reasons. In spite of Ho Yeon and Qizhen not finding the SE classes at these schools to be beneficial, it reveals the necessity for students to seek alternative
ways to learn how to speak the language. Moreover, the “need for diplomats, bureaucrats, trade officials, and in-country tourist guides to deal face-to-face with speakers of foreign languages, particularly English, has drastically increased” (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 222) in China, and I would suspect that this is also true for Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries.

From a business perspective, the language schools are a lucrative venture which provide the consumers with a need that was not being fulfilled by the English language curriculum in the schools. Still, even though there may be the recognition and desire to use a communicative approach in the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese teaching institutions, the following obstacles have impeded its implementation and practice: a) large classes, b) national examinations and other exams, like the TOEFL and GRE, which do not test communicative ability, c) shortage of properly trained teachers, d) lack of appropriate EFL materials, e) limited exposure to English for teachers and learners, f) perceptions of teachers, and g) expectations of students and parents. “Although bringing the outside world into the classroom is not possible in the EFL setting, teachers can prepare EFL learners for further learning as independent learners in an English-speaking environment” (Takada, 1999, p. 14).

In Tadashi’s language setting, there also appear to be changes in patterns of English usage. For example, he was required to take his company’s conversational business English classes during the three and a half years that he worked for them. The company needed their employees to speak in English with their foreign clients. Probably other Japanese companies, who dealt with foreign clients, were doing the same thing. At first, Tadashi was reluctant to learn English in these classes. But his attitude changed after he began socializing with his English teacher. His learning became more personalized and meaningful. By interacting and using English with her, he developed confidence about his
SE ability. Both Tadashi and I found it puzzling that she never corrected his English, especially his pronunciation of r/l. Maybe she was so accustomed to how Japanese speakers spoke English that she overlooked his mistakes and was able to understand him.

The SE class that Xiaolan took at her university for two years was also an attempt by the university to recognize that there were changes occurring in the patterns of English usage in the Chinese society. Despite the fact that the students in her class used very little English, the university realized that the students needed to learn how to speak the language. For instance, before coming to the U.S., Xiaolan had worked in a foreign owned bank in China. She had gotten the job because of her accounting background and English skills. The managers at these banks looked for employees with an English background, because it was easier to train them in accounting than teach them English.

In all, the five participants’ prior formal English experiences in the school and business settings corroborate some of the existing research literature on the EFL setting, that is, a grammar based instructional focus. Additionally, the research literature provided a richer explanation to the experiences they recounted. Now I would like to turn to the second part of Research Question #1, which includes the personal experiences that shaped the ITAs learning of English.

B. Obstacles to Interaction with Native Speakers

The journal topic for Week Two also addressed the participants’ personal experiences while learning English. In particular, the participants described their informal conversation and interaction with native speakers. As they described these experiences, Qizhen, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi identified two main obstacles: a) feeling nervous around native speakers and b) limited contact with native speakers due to the lack of time, topics, and openness. For example, Xiaolan felt nervous and spoke English poorly when
she talked with native speakers, because she thought they were judging her English, especially her pronunciation and the appropriateness of words. In contrast, she felt less nervous when talking with other nonnative speakers. A possible explanation why Xiaolan felt less nervous is research by Gass and Varonis (1985) who maintain that nonnative (NNS) speakers do not lose face when interacting with other NNS, because in these interactions they can practice their language skills and negotiate meaning in a nonthreatening forum (as cited in Shehadeh, 1999).

In addition, situation-specific anxiety (Ellis 1994) may explain why it was scary and risky for Xiaolan to talk with native speakers. “When anxiety is limited to the language learning situation, it falls into the category of specific anxiety reactions. Psychologists use the term specific anxiety reaction to differentiate people who are generally anxious in a variety of situations from those who are anxious only in specific situations” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986, p. 125). More specifically, Horwitz et al. draw a parallel between foreign language anxiety and three performance related anxieties within an academic or social context: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation. They define communication apprehension as a type of reticence caused by fear or anxiety about communicating with people. Meanwhile, test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety which stems from fear of failure. Finally, Watson and Friend (1969) define fear of negative evaluation as ‘apprehension about others’ evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively’ (as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Xiaolan experienced communication apprehension, also called communication anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), because it was difficult to find interesting topics to talk about with native speakers. For example, after asking about the weather or homework, she did not know how to keep the conversation going. It was embarrassing not being able to find a common topic of interest, since in her native language she was very talkative. In
other words, as Horwitz et al. (1986) discuss, communicating in the second language becomes problematic due to the limited range of meaning and affect that the language learners can communicate. As a consequence, they experience a disparity between the “‘true’ self as known to . . . [them] and the more limited self as can be presented at any given moment in the foreign language” (p. 128). This may explain why 60% of Xiaolan’s language environment was still Chinese even though she was in the U.S. Undoubtedly, it must have been less stressful, anxiety provoking, and threatening to Xiaolan’s self-expression and self-concept to interact and communicate with other Chinese students in their native language. At the same time, greater quality and frequency of interaction with native speakers (Clément, 1987), may have helped Xiaolan feel more self-confident and motivated to use SE.

Xiaolan also had a fear of negative evaluation when speaking to native speakers. She was afraid that they were like judges pointing a finger at her incorrect pronunciation and inappropriate use of words. For example, her previous conversation partner had told her that her SE sounded like formal, written English- “talking like a book” (Y. Lee, personal communication, March 2001), which is also common for other international students. I would not be surprised if that comment had made her feel self-conscious and critical of her spoken language. Reiterating Gass and Varonis’s (1985) research, perhaps Xiaolan felt less anxious when speaking English with other nonnative speakers, because they were making similar pronunciation, grammar, or word choice mistakes as she was, and in all likelihood, they were more understanding and patient of her SE. Also, as nonnative speakers, they may have used more repetition, explication, and over-explicitness (Tarone & Yule, 1987) when communicating with each other. In sum, Xiaolan’s nervousness and anxiety when interacting with native speakers is supported and explained by the research on NNS interactions, situation-specific anxiety, and communication anxiety.
Ho Yeon had more opportunities to interact with native speakers, such as her advisor, other professors, and her classmates, but their conversations were limited to her major. In Long’s (1981b) study of foreigner talk discourse (FTD), the topics that native speakers discussed with nonnative speakers were briefer and present oriented. Moreover, the native speakers used more questions to initiate topics with the nonnative speakers. Ferguson (1971) describes “foreigner talk” as a kind of talk that speakers of a language use with outsiders who are perceived to have a limited command or no knowledge of the language (as cited in Arthur et al., 1980). Arthur et al. in their study of ticket agent responses to nonnative and native speaker callers found that the ticket agents tended to modify the form and content of their discourse when speaking to a caller with a foreign accent in order to facilitate communication. For example, the ticket agents used shorter responses, simpler grammatical sentences, and limited vocabulary with the nonnative speaker callers. In the same way, it seems probable that Ho Yeon’s professors and classmates were using FTD when they interacted with her. It may simply have been easier for both parties to limit the conversations to her major, because it was a common point of interest and knowledge, and comprehensibility was likely to be ensured.

Ho Yeon did not have many chances to speak English informally. As a result, she had a hard time understanding informal, daily language used by American students. Like many other foreign students, socializing with Americans may be limited because of time, lack of familiarity with cultural and social practices, self-consciousness of their SE, fear of seeking out American friends, and outsider status. I also recall another SE instructor telling me that some cultural groups, in particular Korean students at State University, tend to socialize within their own group. They receive support and encouragement from this strong bonding, and it helps them survive and accomplish their academic goals.
As Ho Yeon pointed out, almost all the Korean students return to Korea after graduating. So, because of their temporary residence in the U.S., they are not active and “aggressive” about learning and improving their English. Similarly, they may not be interested in interacting with native speakers. In fact, Schumann (1976) identifies length of residence in the target language environment as a factor in social distance. He defines social distance as “the individual as a member of a social group which is in contact with another social group whose members speak a different language” (p. 135). It is assumed that the greater the social distance between the two groups, the more difficult it will be for the second language learning (2LL) group to learn the language of the target language (TL) group.

Cohesiveness and size of the 2LL group are other social factors that affect 2LL (Schumann, 1978c). “If the 2LL group is cohesive, its members will tend to remain separate from the TL group, and if the 2LL group is large, intragroup contact will be more frequent than intergroup contact” (p. 166). Xiaolan had alluded to the cohesiveness and large number of Chinese students and professors at State University. As a matter of fact, most of the time she spoke in Chinese. Consequently, these social factors may have reduced Xiaolan and Ho Yeon’s opportunities to utilize SE in informal situations and settings, as well as in the academic ones. Therefore, their experiences lend support to Schumann’s research on social distance in 2LL.

Tadashi did not have enough time to speak English with native speakers since he had a busy schedule with his classes and TA job. Tadashi had dated an American undergraduate student at the beginning of Winter quarter, but much to his disliking, she dominated their conversations. His impression of her was that she was “showy”, arrogant, and not very compromising. I suspect that there were some elements of cross-cultural communication interfering in their interactions. As Tannen (1983) points out, “we are exposed to different ways of talking depending not only on the country we grow
up in and the language we speak but also on regional, ethnic, class, and even gender influences” (p. 2). Moreover, Tannen identifies eight levels of communication differences: when to talk; what to say; pacing and pausing; listenership; intonation; formulaicity; indirectness; and cohesion and coherence. Both Tadashi and the American female probably had different cultural expectations of their interactions. Tannen (1979) adds that, “People’s expectations about how others will talk are inextricably intertwined with their expectations about how others will or should act” (p. 10). Tadashi comes from an Asian culture that values harmony, where confrontation and conflict are avoided, and hierarchy plays a major role in ensuring it (Tannen, 1998). Consciously or unconsciously, he may have expected her to follow these customs in their interactions. In contrast, the American female was probably influenced by factors from American culture such as individuality, argumentation, criticism, opposition, and directness in interactions (Ibid & 1983) and may have projected these expectations onto Tadashi.

This was a very different situation from the socializing that he did with his English teacher while he worked for the engineering company. In that situation, the teacher, who became his friend, was Japanese American. She was familiar with and accustomed to social interactions in that culture. Moreover, I would conjecture that from her EFL teaching experience, she had developed patience and tolerance of his language problems, and she probably encouraged him to speak and listened attentively.

In contrast, the American undergraduate student may not have had the cultural sensitivity and patience for his SE. Tadashi had commented that she had not traveled. So perhaps this was the first time she had socialized with a foreign student, and she did not know how to manage foreigner talk with Tadashi. Having traveled to several Asian countries and Europe, Tadashi’s worldly experience and cultural background probably made him aware of her lack of openness and uncompromising behavior. Also, both she and Tadashi might have had cultural expectations of how to raise conversational topics.

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Tannen (1993) suggests that topic raising may be affected by differences in pacing and pausing. For example, “A speaker who thinks the other has no more to say on a given topic may try to contribute to the conversation by raising another topic. But a speaker who was intending to say more and was simply waiting for the appropriate turn-exchange pause will feel that the floor was taken away and the topic aggressively switched” (p.179). So, perhaps there was a misunderstanding of pacing and pausing for Tadashi and the undergraduate student.

Another possible cause of their communication problems may be that Tadashi did not like being a listener, because it made him feel “one-down, like a child listening to adults or an employee to a boss” (Tannen, 1999, p. 212). At the same time, the American undergraduate student may have become frustrated with his pronunciation and grammatical mistakes and therefore, dominated their conversations. The worst possible explanation is that she could have been culturally arrogant and was not interested in learning what Tadashi had to say. Similarly, Tadashi may have had expectations of what women are supposed to be like- garnered from his cultural identity- and the American undergraduate may not have fulfilled or followed these expectations. Because his stay in the U.S. was temporary, he may not have been interested in or open to adapting his behavior with women of the target language culture.

Interestingly, from my interactions with Tadashi in tutorials, speaking practices, interviews, and observations of him in the SE class, I perceived him as confident, assertive, interesting, and sometimes bold. He was very talkative during the interviews. In fact, they were usually 30 minutes longer than the other participants’ interviews. It is surprising that the undergraduate student would have so much topical control of their conversations. On the other hand, I realize that our interactions were different than theirs, since I was interested in learning about his SE learning experience- so he needed to talk and be the focus of our conversations.
In summary, in these examples of Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi’s personal experiences learning English, there were two main constraints in their informal conversation and/or interaction with native speakers: 1) a lack of time, topics, and openness, and 2) feeling nervous around native speakers. Xiaolan attributed her nervousness when talking with native speakers to her belief that they were judging her SE. In particular, her anxiety may have resulted from communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. I suspect that because of these factors, she spent much of her time speaking Chinese with other Chinese students at State University. In contrast, Ho Yeon interacted with professors and students in her department, but their conversations were generally limited to her major. There was probably influence from foreigner talk in her interactions with her colleagues, such as keeping the conversations brief and simple, in the present, and focused on her field of study. Finally, Tadashi had little time to interact with native speakers because of his TA job and classes. At the beginning of the quarter, he had dated an American undergraduate female. However, it was not a positive experience, since she was not interested in hearing about his field of study, experiences, or interests. Some factors from the research on cross-cultural communication and foreigner talk provide some explanation of what may have affected their conversations, for example: what to say, when to say it, and how to say it, and how to act.

Research Question #2:

What is it like for prospective ITAs to learn Spoken English?

There were five journal topics that addressed this research question, namely, the journal topics for Weeks One, Four, Five, Six, and Eight. The data in the participants’ journal entries and interviews (One, Two, and Three) for these five topics provided a description of what it was like for them to learn SE. The main theme that emerged from
this data was that pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency were important concerns in their SE learning experience. I will begin with the participants’ data for Week One, which dealt with their spoken language difficulties, and then continue with the subsequent topics related to this question.

A. Pronunciation

In the journal entry for Week One and interviews One and Three, the participants presented three main problems in their spoken language: 1) pronunciation, 2) vocabulary, and 3) composing sentences. In this section, I will focus on pronunciation—since the journal topic emphasized this area and much of class time was spent on it. A common pronunciation problem for all five participants was consonant sounds that did not exist in their native language, such as /r/, /v/, /l/, /l/, /s/, /z/, /th/, and /z/. For example, Tadashi, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho had difficulty distinguishing r/l, because Japanese, Cantonese, and Korean do not distinguish these phonemes. A phoneme can be defined as a single distinctive sound of a language (Durand, 1990, Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 1996). Some other examples were b/v and p/f for Ho Yeon and Seung-Ho, s/S for Tadashi, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho, and initial consonant clusters with /w/ and /l/, such as /kw/, /dr/, and /lw/ for Xiaolan. In Chapter Five, I explained that the theory of markedness (Eckman, 1985, 1977), the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1957), and the concepts of “blind transfer” and “shortsighted transfer (Kean, 1986) provided possible explanations of why these students were having difficulty pronouncing these phonemes (see section on Spoken Language Difficulties).

Moreover, as Kean (Ibid) and Odlin (1989) suggest, “Transfer is not always native language influence” (p. 27). According to Odlin, one factor that many contrastive analyses have not taken into account is cross-linguistic frequency of sounds. “While there is no particular vowel or consonant phoneme found in every language of the world, some sounds
are extremely common. . . . The significance of such cross-linguistic facts for second language acquisition is that there seems to be a rough correlation between the frequency of a sound and its difficulty for adults learning a second language” (p. 120). With regards to the cross-linguistic frequency of the above phonemes, many world languages have these sounds; however, in this study the participants did not have these phonemic distinctions in their native language. For example, Mandarin, which Xiaolan spoke, has the phoneme /r/ whereas Cantonese, spoken in Southern China, does not. Because Qizhen grew up speaking Cantonese, she had difficulties pronouncing /r/ in Mandarin and in English.

Other important factors to consider in transfer are perceptual acuity and phonetic mimicry. Since people differ in their phonetic sensitivity, “[O]nly individuals with especially high phonetic sensitivity will be able to overcome most of the inhibiting influence of phonological patterns in the native language” (Odlin, p. 115). Likewise, “Individuals vary considerably in their capacity to mimic sounds in a foreign language (Pike, 1959) and research by Purcell and Suter (1980) indicates that this capacity is a significant predictor of pronunciation accuracy” (Ibid, p. 132). Being able to hear and feel the difference in the sounds is a fundamental step in being able to mimic them. For Tadashi, this interrelated process was a “vicious circle”. Because he could not hear the difference in r/l, he could not pronounce them correctly and vice versa. In perusing the speaking practice and video presentation notes for Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho, Tadashi, and Qizhen, I counted three occurrences of r/l substitution for Ho Yeon, three for Seung-Ho, eleven for Tadashi, and three for Qizhen. From this information, it seems that Tadashi may have had a lower perceptual acuity of the sounds, and this may explain why he substituted more frequently r/l in words. This finding lends support to the research on perceptual acuity and phonetic mimicry.

Moreover, Avery and Ehrlich (1992) consider biological, socio-cultural, personality, and native language factors that are known to affect the acquisition of the second language
(L2) sound system. Beginning with the biological factor, they briefly review the ‘critical period hypothesis’ which explains the difference in learning languages between adults and children, in particular in achieving native-like pronunciation. Yet, some adult learners are able to achieve native-like pronunciation, and for other adult learners “the degree of pronunciation accuracy varies considerably from individual to individual” (Ibid, p. xiii). It is probable that Tadashi, Xiaolan, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Ho Yeon would not have struggled so much with pronunciation if they had studied English when they were young children, because lateralization, which is completion of cerebral dominance (Lenneberg, 1967; as cited in Tarone, 1978) - seemingly to occur before the age of five- affects language learning. In particular, “with lateralization the brain loses its capacity for language learning, and this loss affects pronunciation of the L2 more than the syntax or vocabulary of the L2” (Tarone, 1978, p. 27).

Another difference between children and adults is that children have more fluid language ego boundaries and will be able to identify more easily with speakers of the target language (Tarone, 1978). In contrast, adults have more rigid language ego boundaries. They have already developed a cultural identity, and their accent identifies them as a member of their cultural group. Interestingly, both Ho Yeon and Seung-Ho had talked about being able to recognize where other foreign students were from based on the accent they had in English- this seems to concur with Tarone’s research on adult cultural identities.

The socio-cultural factor is thought to explain why some adult language learners are successful and others are not at achieving native-like pronunciation. “It has been claimed that the more strongly second language learners identify with members of the second language culture, the more likely they are to ‘sound’ [original quotations] like members of that culture. Conversely, if it is important for learners to preserve their own cultural identity, they may hold on to their foreign accent as a marker of this identity” (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. xiv). With all five participants, their main aim was not to
assimilate into the L2 culture. They were simply pursuing graduate degrees at State
University and would be returning to their native countries after completing their degrees.
To a great extent, the participants seemed to preserve their own life style and values rather
than adopting those of the target language. Research by Schumann (1978c) on social
distance and socio-cultural factors addresses these issues. On the other hand, because
of two strong motivational factors, namely financial support from their departments and the
university SE requirement, they had to take SE courses in order for their spoken language
to be comprehensible and certifiable to teach. Therefore, they were instrumentally motivated
to improve their pronunciation, but it is probably safe to say that they were not integratively
motivated to sound like native speakers of English.

The personality of the language learner is another factor that affects the acquisition
of the L2 sound system. For example, more opportunities to practice pronunciation are
available to learners who are extroverted, confident, and willing to take risks, because they
create more chances to interact with native speakers. On the other hand, those learners who
are introverted, inhibited, and unwilling to take risks have fewer opportunities to practice
their pronunciation. All five participants were making the effort to talk more and practice
their pronunciation with native speakers, their SE pronunciation tutor, 104.5 classmates,
or with me in tutorials, speaking practice sessions, and interviews.

One factor about the native language influence that Seung-Ho had addressed was
that he had difficulty pronouncing b/v, p/f, d/z, s/z, and l/r, since his facial and oral muscles
were not accustomed to making these sound differences. As Avery and Ehrlich (1992,
p. xv) point out, “the pronunciation of sounds depends on the proper use of the
musculature in the mouth. Thus, adult learners may be unable to produce new sounds
because they have never exercised their mouth in the particular way required to pronounce
certain English sounds”. Seung-Ho recognized that he would have to train his speaking
muscles to the new sounds, which would take time and practice. Even though the other four participants did not talk about this factor, it was probably also true for them, especially the l/r distinction which was problematic for Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi.

Another difficulty that may arise from the native language influence is the rule for combining sounds into words. “This type of difficulty can occur even when a particular sound is part of the inventory of both English and the native language” (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, p. xv). For example, Xiaolan, whose native language was Mandarin, had problems with initial consonant clusters such as, /kw/ in question, /Zw/ in usually, and /dr/ in draw and medially /tS/ as in natural. Avery and Ehrlich explain that “Chinese has no consonant clusters in initial or final position” (Ibid, p. 117), and they also do not have the sound /Z/. Therefore, Xiaolan had to learn how to produce new syllable types that contained these consonant clusters.

To sum up, there seems to be native language influence in explaining why all five of the participants had problems pronouncing consonants that do not exist in their native language. In particular, Eckman’s Markedness Theory, which evolved from Lado’s Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, provided support for this influence. In addition to these possible explanations, Kean presented the concepts of blind transfer and short sighted transfer to show that other factors can influence transfer. Specifically in the above section, I introduced other factors that can influence transfer which may or may not interact with native language influence, for example cross linguistic influence, perceptual acuity, and phonetic mimicry. These two latter factors may explain why pronunciation and listening comprehension of r/l were problematic for Tadashi. Perceiving a phonetic difference in the sounds /r/ and /l/ was a necessary precursor for Tadashi to produce the /r/. Finally, Avery and Ehrlich presented other well known influences on the L2 sound system, for example biological, socio-cultural, personality, and native language factors of the learners.
B. Vocabulary

The journal topic for Week Four was divided into two parts: a) what the participants focused on in other people’s SE, and b) what they paid attention to in their SE. Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan paid attention to the words the speaker was using. In particular, the speaker’s words were important input for their SE development, communication, and comprehension. In essence, these learners were attending to one aspect of the speaker’s spoken language. The citations that follow explain why the participants focused on one particular aspect, such as the speakers’ vocabulary. “It is generally acknowledged that not all of input is available for language processing, that much of input is ‘noise’” (VanPatten, 1990, p. 287). The term “intake” describes the “subset of the input that the learner actually perceives and processes” (Ibid). Similarly, Corder (1967) defines input as, “what goes in”, and this input that the learner controls can be called his/her intake (as cited in Ying, 1995). Sharwood Smith (1986) describes linguistic input as having a dual function. At one moment, the learner’s main objective may be to interpret for meaning in a given interchange of messages. “At the same time, there will be linguistic input which is relevant to the current state of the learner’s competence, . . . [and which] may contribute to the substantiation or reflection of some current hypothesis about the target language system” (p. 243). In the early and intermediate stages of second language learning, the learners are more likely to pay attention to meaning of the informational content instead of form, and the conscious attention that they give this aspect becomes available as intake for their language development (VanPatten, 1990).

As far as their speaking ability is concerned, all five of the participants were at an intermediate stage of their SE development, as indicated by their SE 104.5 placement. To reiterate, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Seung-Ho, and Xiaolan focused more on the meaning of the input, thus supporting the beliefs and findings of the above research. Interestingly, compared to the other participants, Tadashi seemed to have more fluency, confidence,
a stronger language base, and an awareness of colloquial and idiomatic expressions, but he needed to pay attention to other people’s pronunciation in order to distinguish similar consonant sounds. I suspect that Tadashi was much stronger in speaking ability, because of his interactions with native speakers. However, because his pronunciation was not corrected, he had not developed a feel for the distinction between r/l. What worked best for him was to watch people’s mouths and lips and their facial expressions in order to have a better understanding of the sounds and nuances of the words. This behavior seems to suggest that Tadashi’s perceptual acuity of certain consonant sounds, such as r/l, was low.

Many of my SE students tell me that even when they are speaking, especially in the video presentations or in conversations with native speakers, they tend to focus on the content they want to convey; consequently, they forget about grammar or pronunciation. Communicating meaning is the basic intention and effort of communication and the “linguistic form is the tool used to reach the goal” (Salaberry, 1997, p. 439). For many SE students, like the participants in this study, focusing on one particular aspect appears to be true for both speaking and listening. “Clearly, learners have limited processing capabilities, and the processing needed for one task competes with processing space for another” (Braidi, 1995, p. 155).

In the examples that follow, I discuss the communication focus of Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho when they listened to other people’s SE. Their examples reveal confirmation of the above research and also support those studies that were mentioned earlier. For Ho Yeon and Xiaolan learning new vocabulary words such as common, daily words from other people’s SE and watching TV was a convenient, practical, and efficient way to develop their SE. Certainly they may have been familiar with many words because of their preparation for the GRE and TOEFL exams, but often Ho Yeon’s struggle was not knowing which word would be appropriate, especially since she translated a lot of
words from Korean to English. Hence, listening to other people’s words was important for deciding which words were appropriate and then applying them in her English. In Xiaolan’s case, she complained about not being familiar with informal, casual words. Perhaps this explains why she did not know how to make small talk or maintain a conversation with native speakers. Consequently, for Xiaolan, watching TV became a valuable resource for learning many different types of words in daily language.

As Seung-Ho also mentioned, words were basic tools for communicating. Moreover, situation and interrogative words were especially important when Seung-Ho listened to other people’s SE. He explained that question words alerted him to the English word order, which is different from Korean. In some respect, this was rudimentary attention to form, in particular the sentence structure. His attention to word order suggests that words, in particular their meaning, are also influenced by where they are located in a sentence- something that VanPatten’s (1990) research did not address. In other words, it is not always possible to separate meaning from form. For Seung-Ho, focusing on interrogatives became a way of simplifying the input so that he could focus on meaning. Furthermore, Seung-Ho discussed the importance of situation words, since they represented background knowledge. Schemata, or prior knowledge of a topic, enabled Seung-Ho and his interlocutors to engage in a conversation and to understand each other. Gass and Selinker (1994) identify four factors that make it easier for certain features to be assimilated as intake- they include: a) frequency, b) affect, c) prior knowledge, and d) attention (as cited in Ying, 1995). According to Gass and Selinker, prior knowledge is ‘knowledge of the native language, knowledge of other languages, existing knowledge of L2 [second language], world knowledge, language universals, etc.’ (as cited in Ying, 1995, p. 299).

In Seung-Ho’s case, prior knowledge can be described as the familiarity of words related to situations, places, or things- essentially what probably would be considered
world knowledge. For example, words related to the sea, navigation, historical sites, museums, and others. Perhaps grouping words together around particular topics was what Seung-Ho had described as a mind map, which organized and showed the connections and interrelationship of words in an efficient and meaningful way in order to recall them. Qizhen developed a specific listening focus from taking the SE 104 and 104.5 classes. She learned from these SE courses that the last content word in a phrase or sentence of spoken language usually contains the new information. This new learning facilitated her comprehension, and probably also helped her to apply this focal stress pattern in her SE. Like Seung-Ho, she had found a simpler way to better comprehend the content by listening for key words the speaker was stressing. This seems to demonstrate that she was beginning to process information as native speakers do, that is, paying attention to the stressed words in sentences and phrases which carry the meaning.

Similarly, Sharwood Smith (1986) says that “Where the focus is on communication, as it usually is, the first L-2 based mechanisms the learner is going to develop will presumably be ones that will enable him or her to identify content words” (p. 244).

Several important things seem to be suggested with Seung-Ho and Qizhen’s focus on particular words. First, like native speakers of English, Seung-Ho and Qizhen realized the importance of meaning transported by words. Second, they were aware that certain types of words carry more meaning than others, and sentence order, word groups, and focal stress alerted them to these words. These important words are called content words (see Chapter Five, section on communication focus for Qizhen). So, these findings confirm the research of Sharwood Smith and Gass and Selinker. Third, unlike Xiaolan and Ho Yeon who used the input, that is, the speaker’s vocabulary, to develop their own spoken language, Seung-Ho and Qizhen seemed to be more concerned with processing the meaning of the speaker’s words. Perhaps these foci suggest different levels of
speaking ability of these participants. From my classroom observation and interviews with these participants, my impressions are the following: a) Xiaolan was strong in formal vocabulary usage; b) Seung-Ho was fluent when discussing his field of study; c) Ho Yeon organized her content and was careful about self-correcting pronunciation and grammar; and d) Qizhen tried to use colloquial and idiomatic expressions to express herself.

To sum up, when Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, and Qizhen interacted with others, the input they processed, namely the interlocutor’s words, was valuable in terms of comprehending the meaning and expanding their SE. More than likely, because they were at an intermediate stage of their SE learning, attending to meaning was an essential and basic tool for communicating. Their focus on the speaker’s words provides support for VanPatten’s research, which has suggested that students in the early and intermediate stages of L2 learning are not able to focus simultaneously on meaning and form without sacrificing some or all of the meaning in the process. However in Seung-Ho’s case, paying attention to word order and the words helped clarify the meaning for him. Ho Yeon and Xiaolan listened carefully to the words of the speaker in order to know how to use and apply them in their SE. On the other hand, Seung-Ho and Qizhen attended to the speaker’s words for purposes of understanding the meaning. Seung-Ho considered background knowledge as a valuable tool that facilitated communication with others. Finally, Qizhen had developed a more sophisticated listening focus, that is paying attention to the primary sentence focus like native speakers do. As Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, and Qizhen progress with their interlanguage ability, what they attend to in their interlocutor’s spoken language will also become more refined, such as observing the form, nuances of meaning, and multiple aspects of the spoken language automatically.
In their own SE, all the participants talked about paying attention to pronunciation. This seems contradictory, because earlier I mentioned that many SE students and the participants were concerned about the content when they spoke English. Perhaps one of their intents was to pay attention to pronunciation, especially since they were taking SE classes and realized the importance of it. From my observations of the participants, they did seem to be trying to monitor and correct their pronunciation during the video presentations, class pronunciation activities, speaking practice sessions, and interviews. However, sometimes they just simply forgot, or perhaps they needed more practice and time with difficult sounds, or may be as Braidi’s study suggests, learners have limited processing capabilities. Probably all of these factors are true.

Nevertheless, Tadashi’s example of mispronouncing the word “rural”, Qizhen’s carefulness not to irritate others with her incorrect pronunciation, and Ho Yeon’s experience ordering food in an American restaurant suggest that they were aware of how important pronunciation was in order to be comprehended by their listeners. In effect, these examples provide support for Elson’s (1992) research which indicates that “Pronunciation is clearly a central factor in students’ success in making themselves understood” (p. 229). Elson further explains that perhaps because the ESL learner is sensitive to correctness and the need to communicate successfully, his/her self-image and sense of accomplishment is very dependent on understanding and being understood. As a result, there can be “a high degree of frustration for the speaker or listener who might see each moment of incomprehension as a personal fault and responsibility” (p. 230).

As Ho Yeon explained, her objective was to make herself understood by the listener. A practical example of the importance of pronunciation for her was ordering food in an American restaurant. It became frustrating if the waitress did not understand what she wanted to order. Tadashi also discussed his awareness of the importance of pronunciation when he arrived in the U.S. The word “rural” was his first big shock
regarding not being able to distinguish r/l. Therefore, in producing the target language while speaking with native speakers in the U.S., Tadashi was prompted to consciously recognize his pronunciation problems. Research by Swain (1995) addresses how learners attend to output when producing language in their interactions with others, especially native speakers. Tadashi mentioned that if he had not taken the SE courses, he would have had more problems communicating with students in the lab, where he worked as a TA. What this seems to suggest, as Long’s research (1983c) has already pointed out, is that formal instruction does make a difference, and actually, it accelerates the language learning process of the language learner. By having taken SE courses, Tadashi received constant feedback about his pronunciation, developed an awareness, monitoring skills and compensatory strategies for his SE problems, and regular, constant practice of pronunciation in the SE courses and language lab. Qizhen had noticed that if foreign students did not have correct pronunciation, native speakers might become impatient and irritated. She did not want to irritate her listener(s). Seung-Ho had expressed nervousness about his pronunciation of certain consonants in English, in particular the p/f, b/v, and S. Since his major was history, he had to participate in discussions and give presentations in his graduate courses. Perhaps this was why he felt nervous about his pronunciation.

Xiaolan also paid attention to pronunciation, since several SE instructors had pointed out that she spoke too fast and that made her language confusing. This finding confirms Swain’s (1993) research which indicates that, “Feedback can lead learners to modify or ‘reprocess’ their output” (p. 160). This feedback brought to Xiaolan’s awareness the need to slow down her speaking rate and to pronounce words clearly. Swain suggests that learners “need to reflect on their output and consider ways of modifying it to enhance comprehensibility, appropriateness, and accuracy” (p. 161).
Because the “primary goals of pronunciation training are intelligible speech and effective communication” (Miller, 2000, p. 13), the five participants received constant feedback on their output—especially their pronunciation, grammar, and delivery skills—in the SE class, weekly speaking practices, and tutorials. Also, the intent of the feedback was to have the participants, as well as other SE students, develop speech awareness, self-monitoring and self-correcting skills (Morley, 1999), and compensatory strategies. The SE 104 and 104.5 classes helped them become aware of the importance of pronunciation in communicating with others. Furthermore, these courses provided them feedback on their specific pronunciation problems and what they needed to do to address these problems. Incidentally, Seung-Ho and Qizhen had received more feedback on their pronunciation during the quarter, since they had worked with a SE pronunciation tutor.

To sum up, all five participants tried to pay attention to their pronunciation, because it was a fundamental aspect of making themselves understood. Even though they were not always consistent or able to do so, pronunciation was an intended focus in their SE. I observed their attempts and efforts in pronunciation in the SE classroom and interviews, as well as in the examples that I provided about Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho. Moreover, factors such as feedback from native speakers, SE instructors and tutors, in addition to the necessity of communicating clearly in classes or other situations, and the strong emphasis on pronunciation in the SE courses encouraged these participants to pay attention to it in their SE.

C. Progress in Pronunciation and Fluency

Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, Seung-Ho, and Tadashi said that they had made improvement in pronunciation and fluency. They felt that with time and practice, pronunciation and fluency would continue to improve. Similarly, as Miller (2000) indicates, “Progress in pronunciation happens in stages and does not proceed linearly” (p. 13). It is
a gradual process. Despite the fact that her progress was slow, Ho Yeon had improved her pronunciation, word stress, and fluency. Qizhen had commented on her improvement of /r/ and /l/ and /T/ and /s/, but these pronunciations were not set - they were “still hanging around”. Miller (Ibid) and Grant’s (1999/2000) research provide a possible explanation of why Qizhen’s pronunciations were not set and also why Ho Yeon’s progress was slow.

According to Miller, the early changes that occur in improved listening or increased pronunciation awareness, may not show up immediately in speech. Learners may “approximate features before they produce them clearly . . . [and they] may only partially integrate new features into spontaneous speech” (Grant, 1999/2000, p. 18). Grant suggests that by providing the learners with a communicative context for pronunciation activities increases the likelihood that they will integrate pronunciation features into their daily communication. In other words, activities in which the learners are practicing pronunciation in authentic, contextualized language such as, in sentences, short dialogues, and topics related to their field of study or interests.

Xiaolan had commented that fluency was easy to improve in the beginning, but later the progress leveled off. Her language learning curve can be explained by Selinker and Lamendella’s research. From a macrobehavioral perspective, Selinker and Lamendella (1978) view interlanguage (IL) learning as involving a cline progression. According to them, the difference between ‘cline’ and a ‘continuum’ “is that a continuum presents a more or less regular gradient of change, while cline progressions manifest an irregular gradient marked by the existence of stable configurations possessing specifiable durations and periodicity [cf. the stable “plateau” of Nemser (1971)]” (p. 173). In other words, cline progression is marked by “an irregular, but continuous gradient of change within a single IL diasystem” (p. 182). For Selinker and Lamendella, an IL diasystem indicates that interlanguage learning is a dynamic evolving system. Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Tadashi’s pronunciation and fluency skills may be characterized by
this cline progression - therefore lending support to Selinker and Lamendella’s research - because there was a definite improvement as they had noticed, but these skills would continue to evolve.

Using a simple analogy, learning progress is like taking a step forward and then taking a step back, walking quickly and sometimes walking slowly, jumping or running ahead, and occasionally stopping. This analogy was especially evident in the participants’ pronunciation progress. Qizhen and Seung-Ho had made progress with l/r, s/T, rhythm and intonation, and b/v, p/f, s/S, and l/r respectively, but in the words of Qizhen the pronunciations “were not set”. With Tadashi’s pronunciation of r/l there were times when he was very consistent in the pronunciation and at other times there were profuse examples of r → l substitutions. In the case of Ho Yeon, she had gotten into the habit of self-correcting her pronunciation. Even though Xiaolan’s pronunciation progress seemed to stay about the same during the quarter, her gracious manner and good organization made her SE comprehensible.

As Xiaolan explained, in fluency she had made progress in very fast increments after several weeks of being in the U.S., but her progress slowed down and then plateaued after a period of time. As Selinker and Lamendella (1978) explain, in order for the language learner to be successful, he or she must know “when to ‘let go’ of the level initially chosen and ‘opt up’ to a higher level NFS [neurofunctional system] which is actually the most appropriate basis for learning more complex TL [target language] linguistic phenomena” (p. 181). Once again, lending support to Selinker and Lamendella’s research, Xiaolan may have realized that she needed to ‘opt up’ to a higher level of fluency, and perhaps this explains why she was concerned about learning informal, daily vocabulary to communicate in a variety of situations, especially since her conversation partner had said that her SE was too formal.
Miller (2000) equates learning a new way of speaking to playing the piano or acquiring an athletic skill. In fact, Seung-Ho pointed out that it involves training the speaking muscles to perform new behaviors, and this is done through repeated practice and mimicking. Miller suggests that the learners first need to improve their listening skills, which can be problematic, as it was for Tadashi, because he could not hear the difference between r/l. Changing or not changing speech patterns is affected by motivational (instrumental and integrative motivation), educational, personal, and cultural factors. It is probably safe to assume that for all the participants the educational factor, that is, pursuing a graduate degree at an American university, was a pragmatic and requisite motivation for making changes in their spoken language. Their ideal goal may have been native-like fluency and pronunciation, but none of them intended to stay in the U.S. after completing their degrees. As Xiaolan mentioned, 60% of her language environment was still Chinese. Tadashi also felt more comfortable around other Asian students when he wanted to relax. Qizhen commented that she felt like an outsider in classes with American students, because they were always in groups. Due to the large Asian population—especially Chinese and Korean—at State University and limited free time, it was simply easier to interact within their own cultural group. Thus, fulfilling the university’s SE requirement may have been an instrumental motivation to improve their speech patterns and acculturate into the TL group.

In essence, “Change is affected by how much responsibility the student takes, how much the student practices outside of class, and how ready the student is” (Miller, 2000, p. 13). Essentially, all five participants were taking responsibility for making changes in their SE by becoming open and active, developing self-awareness and confidence in their spoken language, and practicing. For example, I saw noticeable improvement in Ho Yeon’s participation in class and use of English with other nonnative speakers outside of class. Both Xiaolan and I had noticed Tadashi’s progress in pronunciation and grammar during
the Winter quarter. Xiaolan had observed it during telephone conversations with him, whereas I became aware of it during his three video presentations. Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho also participated actively in class. More than the other participants, Qizhen and Seung-Ho initiated conversations with me before or after class. Tadashi and Seung-Ho enjoyed talking the most during their interviews, which was beneficial for developing their fluency. The SE pronunciation tutoring that Qizhen and Seung-Ho received during the quarter seemed to have improved their pronunciation and their confidence in speaking English - from my observations of their behavior in the classroom and when I met with them individually in tutorials, speaking practices, and interviews. Miller (2000) suggests that the following characteristics be included in the definition of progress:

- Gaining pronunciation awareness
- Improving listening skills
- Identifying personal targets
- Improving the ability to self-monitor for specific targets
- Discovering and correcting their own errors
- Improved understanding of speech on TV, radio, in movies etc.
- Using corrected pronunciation patterns more frequently
- Utilizing tools for clearing up misunderstandings
- Gaining confidence and comfort speaking English
- Taking responsibility for their own speech changes (p. 13)

To some degree, all the participants were demonstrating some or all of these characteristics in their SE progress. They were taking steps to improve their SE by utilizing compensation strategies in their video presentations, and demonstrating new learning they acquired in or outside of the SE class. These were the journal topics for Week Six and Week Eight, respectively. During the quarter, Qizhen and Seung-Ho worked with a SE pronunciation tutor on r/l, s/S, and breathing deeply for Qizhen, and p/f, b/v, d/Z, s/S, and muscle training for Seung-Ho. For training his speech organs, Seung-Ho’s tutor had suggested he read out loud every day and also repeat difficult consonant sounds while he was walking or driving. Qizhen’s tutor had taught her how to breathe from the abdomen, because this deep breathing would help improve her fluency, rhythm, and intonation.
Probably, this individualized attention on their pronunciation helped Qizhen and Seung-Ho gain more pronunciation awareness, confidence in speaking English, and correct pronunciation.

Qizhen also self-monitored her spoken language by expressing her content and pronunciation as clearly as possible, and she appreciated having her pronunciation corrected. Meanwhile, in her video presentations she made comprehension checks and used transparencies to make her words more comprehensible. To improve his SE, Seung-Ho listened to English conversational tapes in his car and the radio before going to sleep, and he watched the news and history programs on TV. In his video presentations he emphasized key words by writing them on the blackboard. Ho Yeon found that imitating Americans’ speech patterns was a good way to improve her SE. She realized that pronunciation and knowledge about a topic were important factors in communicating with others. In her video presentations she self-corrected pronunciation errors, used clear transparencies, organized the content well, and used focal stress on key terms.

Xiaolan learned new words by watching TV. In the SE class she had learned about linking, reductions, and deletions of sounds, which she practiced - in addition to other pronunciation practice - in the language lab several times a week. For the video presentations, Xiaolan talked naturally and organized the content well, because this facilitated her listeners’ comprehension. Similarly, having learned about reductions and deletions from the SE class, Tadashi was able to comprehend native speakers’ sentences better. Tadashi found time to listen to radio programs and talk with his landlady. He also listened to the practice tapes from his tutorials. From a Chinese professor in the economics department, Tadashi had learned how to do comprehension checks in his video presentations. His use of the blackboard and transparencies, as well as examples, helped his presentations to be intelligible.
Finally, an insight that emerges from the above is that their SE learning was an evolving process in which the participants’ motivations, progress, set backs, learning strategies, new learning, limitations, and potentialities became more evident. This process view was salient, because the structured journal writing encouraged them to reflect on their language learning experience. In learning what it was like for these prospective ITAs to learn SE, which was the second research question of this study, the focus became the process of their spoken language learning.

**Research Question #3:**

What are the ITAs’ feelings about the university Spoken English requirement, and what motivations are guiding them to complete the Spoken English course?

A. Motivation

The third main theme that emerged in the participants’ SE learning experience was that motivation played an important role. The participants’ journal topic for Week Three and Interview One provided reasons why they wanted to pass the Exit Interview (EI) and how they felt about the university’s SE requirement. The first subtheme was that Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho felt that the university’s SE requirement was required and necessary. Perhaps this requirement in itself was a strong motivation for these participants. In fact, as Ely’s (1986) research suggests, fulfilling a language requirement can be a goal that stimulates student action. Nonetheless, as Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen indicated, the policy was unrealistic and inflexible, because it takes time to acquire native-like pronunciation and fluency. Since they had busy class schedules and lab work, it was difficult to devote time and practice to improving their SE. Moreover, Ho Yeon felt it was unfair to evaluate their ability solely on whether or not they passed the EI. The third subtheme, as mentioned by Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan, included pragmatic reasons for wanting to pass the 104.5 EI.
Compared to their motivations for learning English as a foreign language in their native countries, factors in the second language environment probably inspired more interest and motivation in the participants. These factors included the second language environment, the university’s SE requirement, the need for financial aid from their departments, personal reasons, feedback on their progress in and outside of the SE classes, and reflection of their SE in tutorials and in this study. Likewise, Oxford and Shearin (1994) point out that, “The learner of the second language is surrounded by stimulation, both visual and auditory, in the target language and thus has many motivational and instructional advantages”, whereas the foreign language learners “are surrounded by their own native language and have to go out of their way to find stimulation and input in the target language” (p. 14).

Gardner (1985) states that motivation involves four aspects: “a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes toward the activity in question” (p. 50). Lee, Locke, and Latham (1989) describe a goal as the object or aim of an action that has a valued, future end state. With these beliefs in mind about motivation as a goal, the five participants’ goal was to pass the 104.5 EI, which, in fact, they did at the end of Winter Quarter 1999. Although the EI was the stimulus that gave rise to their motivation, individual differences in motivation itself were reflected in the participants’ effort, desire, and attitudes toward achieving this goal. Similarly, Gardner’s (1985) research has looked at these factors in goal achievement for language learning.

Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan expressed clear instrumental desires to pass the EI. Instrumental motivation involves purposeful language study with a utilitarian value ascribed to linguistic achievement, whereas in integrative motivation, the language learner is interested in learning about the other cultural community to the point of becoming an accepted member of that group (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) - in other words, an “individual’s positive affective predisposition towards the second language community” (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985, p. 24). These participants’ main concern was to improve
their SE in order to pass the EI, because their departmental financial aid was contingent on it. Instead of financial reasons – which Seung-Ho had not indicated, he had expressed a pragmatic reason to pass the course, that is, he wanted to be a TA in his department.

Because all five participants had a specific goal set regarding their SE learning, they directed their attention, effort, persistence, and strategy development toward attaining this goal- factors found in the research of Lee et al. (1989). In the previous section, I enumerated what the participants were doing to improve their SE. In Goal Theory, the combination of goals and performance feedback has been found to increase motivation substantially (Bandura, 1991). Having a specific goal in mind and receiving constant feedback about their SE in tutorials, speaking practices, and class activities, and reflecting on their SE in the journal entries and interviews of this study, may have kept the participants motivated in their SE learning during the quarter. Perhaps the feedback and reflection also helped them realize that there were benefits to studying English, as it did for Xiaolan.

The main theme in this data was that motivation played an influential role in the participants’ SE learning. All of them felt that the university’s SE requirement was necessary, but several of them also felt it was unrealistic and inflexible. This requirement in itself seemed to be a motivation for them to pass the 104.5 EI. Second, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan were instrumentally motivated to pass, because they needed financial support from their departments. These participants, as well as Tadashi and Seung-Ho, had a clear goal in mind. Having a set goal helped them create strategies and opportunities to improve their SE.
Research Question #4:

How does learning Spoken English affect the ITA’s linguistic self-image?

A. Positive Changes

The fourth main theme of this study was that the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking while learning SE. This data came from the journal entry for Week Seven and Interview Three (and also Interview Four for Ho Yeon). Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Ho Yeon displayed a positive, open, and focused attitude toward improving their SE. As their instructor, this seemed to me to manifest their strong motivation to pass the EI that quarter. As a matter of fact, Ely (1986, p. 3) defines strength of motivation as the “degree to which an individual desires to learn the second language”. In the previous section I mentioned that Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Ho Yeon needed to pass the EI in order to receive financial support from their departments. Consequently, this desire affected their attitude and thinking about their SE learning.

Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho, and Qizhen described an overall feeling of improvement in their attitude and thinking. For instance, Ho Yeon and Qizhen talked about becoming more active, open learners, because these changes in their thinking would create more opportunities to speak and improve their SE. Qizhen expressed feeling happier being open and outgoing. As a matter of fact, Qizhen’s SE pronunciation tutor, talked about these new changes in her. Meanwhile, Ho Yeon realized the importance of an active, assertive attitude by observing Chinese peers in her classes. Her peers’ modeling of positive attitudes and behavior was beneficial for Ho Yeon in terms of renewing her motivation and improvement of her SE, especially after repeating the 104.5 course several quarters. She had experienced a lot of stress and frustration, and a lack of motivation about repeating this course. Ho Yeon acknowledged that progress in her SE was affected by investing more time and effort in the course.
An important observation that I made during the quarter was that both Ho Yeon and Qizhen participated actively in class and engaged in conversation with me or other students too. Educational psychologists, Ames and Archer (1988), in their motivation theories for the classroom believe that a mastery structure, that is a clear criterion or objective, of student performance helps the students realize that success is based on their own efforts (as cited in Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Since the EI was a criterion referenced measurement, whether Ho Yeon and the other participants passed, depended on how much time and effort they invested in their SE improvement. Perhaps something else that may have affected their positive attitude and openness was my efforts as their instructor to create a classroom atmosphere that nurtured their confidence and willingness to use their SE in and outside of the classroom. Thus, a combination of a positive attitude, time, and effort may have motivated these participants to achieve their goal of passing the 104.5 EI.

The motivational model in Tremblay and Gardner’s (1995) study of secondary students enrolled in French courses suggests that there are three mediating variables in the relationship between language attitudes and motivational behavior, namely: a) goal salience, b) valence, and c) self-efficacy. According to these researchers, one possible explanation for the relationship of goal salience and attitudes was “the idea that positive language attitudes will orient students to develop specific language learning goals,” whereas students who have negative attitudes “are more likely not to give much consideration to what they would like to achieve. . . .” (p. 515). Regarding the influence of attitudes on valence, it suggests that when learning is valued, higher levels of motivation will result. Valence is the subjective value associated with a particular outcome (Lee et al., 1989). Language attitudes also influence the third mediator, self-efficacy, which in turn influences motivational behavior. Bandura (1982) defines self-efficacy as one’s judgment of ‘how well one can execute courses of action required to
deal with prospective situations’ (as cited in Locke & Latham, 1990, p. 68). All the participants were making effort and using strategies to achieve their goal of passing the EI. These strategies were reviewed in the discussion of the second research question. Moreover, the “joint effect of self-efficacy and goals on performance is affected not only by what one is trying to do but by how confident one is of being able to do it” (Ibid, p. 72). The participants realized that their SE would improve with time and practice. In fact, during the quarter, I observed their improved SE comprehensibility, especially pronunciation and fluency in their video presentations, which in turn gave them more confidence about their spoken language ability. I am not absolutely certain, but they may have been aware of some of these improvements, because we discussed some of these things in their tutorials, speaking practice sessions, and interviews.

Initially, Xiaolan had felt less confident about her SE. Since Xiaolan had not placed into SE 105 the previous quarter, she was discouraged, especially after having a successful record of passing examinations, competitions, and interviews. Placing into 104.5 instead of 105 meant failure to her. Up to that point she had experienced continuous success as a result of her high ability. Consequently, need for achievement seemed to be a personality trait of Xiaolan. Also, one of her goals for coming to the U.S. to study was to speak English well. In effect, this finding lends support to Dörnyei’s (1994) research which indicates that, “Individuals with a high need for achievement are interested in excellence for its own sake, tend to initiate achievement activities, work with heightened intensity at these tasks, and persist in the face of failure” (p. 277). Perhaps this also explains why she was sensitive and self-conscious speaking English around native speakers. Xiaolan felt they were judging her SE ability, which was connected to her self-esteem and identity.
Upon seeing progress in her SE during Winter quarter, she felt better and hopeful as she had written in her journal entry for Week Seven. Her progress seemed to have restored her effort and motivation to pass the EI. Bandura (1991, 1986) points out that success requires a resilient and robust sense of self-efficacy, because difficulties, impediments, setbacks, failures, and frustrations are commonplace in human accomplishment. Therefore, an individual needs resiliency in order to renew effort following failed attempts. As a matter of fact, Xiaolan participated actively in class, her video presentations were well organized and clear, and she was usually the first participant to turn in the journal entries. She was aware of her ability to pass to SE 105. Xiaolan had commented about the other five Chinese women in the economics department who had passed the 104 class the previous quarter (Interview One). In her opinion, she was certainly not the worst student among them.

Before coming to the U.S., Tadashi’s motivation to learn English was most likely to socialize with his English teacher and another American friend. It was not necessarily that he wanted to become an accepted member of the target language community, but rather to enjoy the communicative, entertaining value of talking with friends. Tadashi was fond of travelling and learning about different cultures. From the frequent and pleasant interactions with his two American friends in Japan, he had concluded that his speaking ability in English was quite good. Consequently, his self-confidence in his ability to use the second language developed. This finding concurs with Clément and Kruidenier’s research (1985) which indicates that self-confidence is an important “determinant of motivation to learn and use the second language” (1985, p. 24). However, when Tadashi came to study in the U.S. he felt less confident as he became aware of his incorrect pronunciation and weak listening skills. Dörnyei (1994) points out that self-confidence is closely related to the concept, self-efficacy. Earlier, self-efficacy was defined as a person’s judgement of their ability to do something. Even though Tadashi’s confidence
had waned and his SE ability was lower than previously perceived, he thought that he was in the process of becoming a good speaker and listener suggesting that he was hopeful of his ability and potential to develop good speaking and listening skills.

Tadashi also measured confidence by being able to express his ideas openly, which included engaging in arguments. To some extent, I would conjecture that his interest in adopting this communicative pattern seems to reflect an integrative motivation, that is, he wanted to be accepted and treated equally by Americans. Tannen (1998) describes Western culture, in particular the U.S., as having a “pervasive warlike atmosphere that makes . . . [individuals] approach public dialogue, and just about anything . . . [they] need to accomplish, as if it were a fight” (p. 3). Tadashi also became aware of this cultural pattern from his observations and interactions with Americans. In contrast, “Asian cultures, such as Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese, place great value on avoiding open expression of disagreement and conflict because they emphasize harmony” (Tannen, 1998, p. 213). Harmony in Asian culture is realized by avoiding rigid dualisms, whereas Western culture emphasizes polarized opposition. Supporting this idea of harmony, Tadashi wrote in the journal entry for Week Four that he tries not to hurt or insult his listener. On the one hand, his cultural identity seemed to prevail, but, on the other hand, he wanted to adopt a new cultural pattern. Tadashi stated that when he becomes a more confident speaker of English, he will be able to adopt these argumentative patterns without feeling culturally restricted from his own culture or the target language culture. Interestingly, Tadashi had already begun to adopt more assertive, critical, and argumentative skills when communicating. I provided some examples in Chapter Four of how he had challenged me on the methodological design of this study. Tadashi thought that what was holding him back from incorporating more of this pattern was his language ability.
The final emerging theme for this data was that the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking while learning SE. The changes they recognized in their attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way they felt about themselves were addressed in their journal entry for Week Seven and Interview Three (and also Interview Four for Ho Yeon). Closely tied to and affecting their motivation to pass the EI were their attitudes about learning SE. In particular, Ho Yeon and Qizhen had discussed acquiring an open, active, and positive attitude to using English, because it would create more opportunities to use and learn the language. Gardner and Tremblay’s (1995) research suggests that a positive attitude helps the learners establish a goal and strategies to achieve it while learning the second language. In addition to the pragmatic reasons, Xiaolan seemed to have a high need for achievement in speaking English well- a goal for coming to the U.S. In contrast, for Tadashi, there was a friendship and travel orientation to learning to speak English well, and perhaps also an integrative motivation to be able to express himself confidently with native speakers by using their communicative patterns of speaking, namely, arguing. Actually he was acquiring this skill and seemingly, was on his way to becoming a more confident speaker.

Research Question #5:

*How do reflection and awareness activities in learning spoken English affect the ITA’s learning?*

A. Reflection

The last main theme of this study was that reflection and awareness activities did make a difference in the participants’ SE learning. In particular, the participants indicated in their journal entry for Week Eight and Interviews One and Three that reflecting, writing, and talking about their language learning experience was helpful in becoming aware of their
strengths and weaknesses as well as evaluating their SE progress. In Allison’s (1998) study of EFL learners who kept a course diary, there was also a positive appraisal of the journal writing activity. The journal writing helped these learners clarify concepts or ideas, and apply the concepts to texts. I would conjecture that in this study, particularly with pronunciation and language base skills, the participants were able to focus on their difficulties and think about how to make improvements in their spoken language. For instance, as Qizhen became aware of her pronunciation and grammar problems, she also thought about how to improve them (Interviews One and Three). Similarly, Huntley’s (1999) ITA students complete reflective pronunciation journals where they “record their own choices of activities for pronunciation improvement, consider the goal of the activity, and monitor their own progress” (p. 18). As a consequence, their journal entries demonstrate that they were becoming increasingly aware of their spoken language difficulties and are finding personally relevant ways to overcome them.

Journal and diary studies are recognized as tools for language learners, researchers, prospective teachers, and established teachers with respect to self-awareness, evaluation, and improvement (Brown, 1984) and also for discovering personal variables involved in learning a second language (L2) (Schumann & Schumann, 1977). Academic uses of journal writing have flourished in the composition classroom as a prewriting or heuristic tool during the development of the writing-process movement and have extended out across all disciplines and educational levels (Gannett, 1992). A variety of names have been used to describe academic journals, such as “learning log, daybook, dialogue journal, word-processed journals, think books, notebooks, personal journal, literary logs, classroom diary, double-entry journals, process journals, and language logs” (Ibid, p. 20). ‘Journal’ has apparently, been the preferred term in most composition and education parlance.

I chose the word ‘journal’ since it was the term commonly used in the readings on process learning, non-introspective studies in L2 learning, action research, and qualitative
research methods. ‘Diaries’ tend to be associated with personal thought and experience, whereas ‘journals’ have an academic association (Fulwiler, 1980). Nevertheless, journal studies are often recognized as diary studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). In language research and pedagogy, diary studies have been used to document three broad areas: 1) language learning experiences, 2) student teachers’ reactions to academic courses, and 3) language teaching experiences (Bailey, 1990).

Diary studies can range from least structured types, whereby the learners can write about any aspect of L2 learning experiences, to very structured ones, which direct the learners to focus on certain aspects of the learning process that are of interest to the researcher (Matsumoto, 1994). In other words, the “‘degree of structuring’ refers to the extent to which the researcher controls the form and content of the informant’s verbalization” (Matsumoto, 1993, p. 43). This study was a structured type, because the participants wrote and talked about eight aspects of their SE learning experience, that is, topics associated with a process view of their language learning. In Matsumoto’s study (1997) of Japanese college students majoring in English, the following types of retrospective self-reporting tasks were utilized: a) diary-keeping, b) structured questionnaires on learner strategies, and c) unstructured interviews on learner beliefs.

Somewhat similar to, but also different from Matsumoto’s study, my study utilized structured diary-keeping and semi-structured interviews based on the participants’ journal entries—several of the journal topics did address learner strategies. One of the benefits of Matsumoto’s study was that the learners analyzed their own entries. A student in the study commented that the diary-keeping helped her observe the processes of her language learning—in particular, she had the opportunity to analyze her own learning and strategies. Since the journal topics in my study were especially designed to have the five participants focus on and analyze specific aspects of their SE learning, I did the content analysis of their journal entries.
The five participants’ development of awareness of their spoken language was not solely due to thinking, writing, and talking about their language learning experience in their journals and interviews. The SE class, tutorials, EI results, and pronunciation tutors also encouraged the participants’ reflection, awareness and evaluation of their spoken language. Korthagen (1985), in discussing reflective teaching and pre-service teacher education in the Netherlands, mentions that learning does not always occur in a conscious way. If reflection in learning is involved, five phases are distinguishable: “(a) action, (b) looking back on the action, (c) awareness of essential aspects, (d) creating alternative methods of action, and (e) trial” (p. 12). These five phases seem to be applicable to the SE 104 and 104.5 classes. A learning objective in these classes is for the students to develop awareness of their pronunciation, grammar, and fluency- and in so doing, utilize strategies to improve and compensate for their spoken language difficulties. For these students, action implies speaking in English, that is, communicating their ideas and knowledge. Looking back on the action implies thinking about their pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, organization, and overall comprehensibility. Awareness of essential aspects of their spoken language involves paying attention to mistakes in consonant or vowel sounds, suprasegmentals, vocabulary usage, and grammar. Alternative methods of action for SE learners means making corrections and employing compensatory strategies to facilitate their comprehensibility. Trial involves practicing the correct forms and trying to incorporate them in their language when speaking with others.

Besides the learning awareness emphasized in the SE class, the five participants were encouraged to think deeply and actively about their language learning in this study. In Chapter Three, regarding the discussion of methodology, I explained how the participants were introduced to the journal writing component. The participants felt that journal writing and talking about their experiences helped them think about their SE ability and also
evaluate their progress. Likewise, in Brown’s study (1985) of adult learners of Spanish, writing it down probably made the awareness very evident (as cited in Bailey, 1990), as it probably did for my participants. In addition, Mangelsdorf (1989) draws parallels between speaking and writing in L2 classrooms and curricula. As she explains, the students in her ESL compositions courses were able to test hypotheses about their reading of *1984* in class discussions. “When language learners test hypotheses, they adjust their language and ideas according to feedback from their respondents” (Mangelsdorf 1989, p. 140). She discovered that oral and written language produced interaction between students and teacher to find and express ideas in English. Similarly, in the journal entry for Week Eight, Ho Yeon also had talked about the relationship between writing and speaking. For her, good writing demonstrated good, organized thinking, and this skill was important for speaking.

Moreover, journal writing in teacher preparation courses is viewed as a discovery process- “a way to explore ideas, generate and connect ideas, change preconceived notions, and connect abstract ideas and experiences” (Porter, Goldstein, Leatherman & Conrad, 1990, p. 227). In addition to this writing-learning connection, journal writing provides data also of the language learning process (Carroll, 1994). Because the original design of this study was phenomenological, journal writing was seen as a useful data collection method that would portray the participants’ experience of learning SE.

When conducting a language learning or teaching diary study, the diarist usually “provides an account of personal language learning or teaching history” and “systematically records events, details, and feelings about the current language experience in the diary” (Bailey, 1990, p. 219). For example, the researcher or learner records anything that is perceived to be important about the learning experience, such as impressions of the people and culture of the target language, the teacher and students in
the language class, fears and frustrations of the learner, and difficulties or successes that the learner experiences (Bailey, 1983). What made this study distinctive was the use of journal writing to gauge the participants’ experiences, their feelings about the experiences, and the impact of the experiences on their language learning—especially their learning of SE during the Winter quarter of 1999, their past formal and informal instruction, pronunciation difficulties, communication focus, motivating factors, progress, learning strategies, new learning, changes in attitude or thinking, and the effects of reflection. In other words, the five case studies in Chapters Four and Five created a window into the participants’ SE learning process, since journals emphasize the process of learning (Porter et. al, 1990).

Another positive effect of journal writing is that learners’ awareness of their needs increases and this helps both teachers and learners improve their self-evaluation skills (Carroll, 1994). For example, the journal questions and interviews helped Seung-Ho find weak points in his spoken language (Journal: Week Five). So in effect, the journal questions were helpful in improving his English. As one student pointed out in Stevenson and Jenkins’ (1994) study of journal writing and ITA training, ‘[I]t sometimes made me feel like I am diagnosing my own situation, feeling the points of my weakness, and getting the prescription from both sides, that of the lecturer’s as well as mine’ (p. 107). On the one hand, for Seung-Ho, there were positive benefits occurring from writing and talking about his pronunciation and language difficulties. He was aware of his pronunciation problems and attempted to correct them in class and with his pronunciation tutor, but his problem of not answering questions, setting his own agenda, or providing scanty explanations persisted the entire quarter.

For Ho Yeon, investing time and thought in her SE gave her the opportunity to assess her ability, and this reflection definitely affected her spoken language. As Carroll (1994) states, “If teachers and students are together reflecting on and theorizing about their shared practice, each will contribute to the other’s understanding” (p. 21). In my study,
journal writing was the vehicle for the participants’ reflection, which in turn helped me reflect on their learning. While reading their journal entries and discussing them with the participants in the interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of their SE learning and also how I could improve the teaching and learning in the SE class. A point of interest about Ho Yeon’s SE experience is that she had been my 104.5 student the previous quarter. During the two quarters that she was in my 104.5 class, I observed a growing awareness of her spoken language progress. Ho Yeon and I talked about this in her fourth interview. From a pedagogical point of view, it was satisfying to be able to share my observations with Ho Yeon and to hear her talk about the changes in her attitude and openness about her learning. These factors played an important role in her improvement (Journal: Week Seven, Interviews Three and Four).

Connor-Greene’s (2000) empirical study of the effectiveness of journal writing in a college psychology class suggested that journal writing enhanced the students’ learning as reflected by their test scores. The journal writing also fostered better understanding and application of concepts. In addition, the students’ “comments indicated that the journals were a successful stimulus to active learning” (Connor-Greene, 2000, p. 45). Similarly, Xiaolan had remarked how the journal writing had fostered her thinking about the positive benefits of studying SE, and thus, stimulated her learning (Journal: Week Eight and Interview Three). Because she had been depressed about not being placed into 105, she had lost motivation and self-esteem about her learning and SE ability. However, writing and thinking about her SE had restored her interest and motivation to learn it. Likewise, a Japanese college-level ESL learner, who kept a language learning journal while in the target language environment, also experienced hope, self-encouragement, and a determination to work harder as the result of awareness of her own improvement (Matsumoto, 1989).
Porter et. al (1990) highlight other benefits of journal keeping in teacher preparation courses that include: a) students can get help with areas of difficulty, b) journals promote autonomous learning, c) students gain confidence and insights, d) they have a communication medium for interaction with their teacher and other students, and e) journals encourage learners to reflect on how they are managing their learning. Essentially, journals encourage students to be introspective and to communicate about what they are learning (Nixon, 1996). For example, Tadashi described thinking about his SE as good practice, because it gave him objectivity and insights about his pronunciation problems and sound differences. He had also acquired this awareness from the SE tutorials. Interestingly, Tadashi’s journal entries for weeks one, two, five, and six were long and rich descriptions of the journal topics. I suspect that these long and rich descriptions may have been partly due to his loquaciousness. His interview transcripts were usually much longer than the other participants. Perhaps he may have also possessed a reflective predisposition about his learning. In fact, he had been quite insightful about the cross-cultural factors that affected his ability to express and defend his opinions when talking to Americans.

In Korthagen’s (1985) study of reflective teaching and preservice teacher education, the conclusions suggested that those learners who were more predisposed to reflection benefited more from the reflective thinking and writing. With respect to my participants, I do not think that Tadashi necessarily benefited more from the journal writing than the other four participants. All of them acknowledged that reflection heightened awareness of their SE learning. I think that Tadashi was able to articulate more of his experience, because he was talkative and had a stronger language base. Perhaps, he also had more self-awareness, but it would be untrue to say that the others did not benefit from the journal writing. All the participants created rich, insightful portraits of their SE learning experience through their journal entries and interviews, and from my observations of them in the SE
104.5 class. On the one hand, the findings of Tadashi’s experience seem to confirm Korthagen’s research, but nonetheless, the other four participants’ journal entries and interview discussions were engaging, rich descriptions of their language learning process. In short, the five participants’ SE learning experiences, as portrayed in their journal writing, are portraits of individual learners who demonstrated idiosyncratic reflections of their learning.

The last research question of this study was, “How do reflection and awareness activities in learning SE affect the ITAs’ learning?” The main theme of this section suggests that reflection did have a positive effect on the participants’ learning, because by writing, thinking, and talking about their SE learning they became increasingly aware of their language learning process, namely, their strengths, weaknesses, and progress as indicated in their journal entry for Week Eight and Interviews One and Three. As the participants’ instructor and researcher of this study, I also observed the benefits of their increased awareness. From my classroom observations, these reflection and awareness activities seemed to create more motivation and incentive for the participants to learn in the SE class - in particular in their video presentations, pronunciation and fluency activities, and possibly also practice outside of the SE class- because the journal writing empowered them as learners. Furthermore, their reflections helped me understand better their spoken language problem areas, frustrations, motivations, limitations, potentialities, and what they were doing to improve their spoken language. As a result, I was able to think about what I could do to facilitate their learning and the learning of other SE students too.

This study has confirmed the reflective learning benefits that other diary or journal studies in the field of SLA, teacher education programs, and other subject areas have also found such as, increased awareness, stimulation of active learning, improved self-evaluation skills, managing one’s own learning, process view of learning, and a resource for teachers to understand student learning. The purpose of the journal writing in this study was twofold.
Methodologically speaking, its aim was to unravel the participants’ language learning experience, and this was achieved by having them write eight topics of their SE learning. In that sense, it was a structured journal writing study. From a pedagogical and learning point of view, the purpose of the journal writing for these learners was to raise their consciousness of their language learning process.

In thinking and writing about her SE experience, Qizhen developed an awareness of her problem areas and also how to make improvements. For Xiaolan, the journal writing made her aware of the benefits of studying English and consequently, renewed her incentive to learn. Meanwhile, both Ho Yeon and Tadashi felt that reflecting on their SE was a good opportunity to be objective and evaluative regarding their spoken language. Perhaps, what they meant by “objective” is that they were able to think about many aspects of their spoken language which ordinarily they may have not thought about. Ho Yeon also talked about the relationship between speaking and writing. Like the other participants, Seung-Ho became more conscious of his strengths as well as weaknesses when he spoke English. However, one persistent problem that he did not seem to be aware of or make efforts to correct was not answering questions directly nor completely. One final point is that the journal writing in this study can not take full credit for the SE awareness that the participants developed. The participants were also encouraged to think about their learning in the SE class (by means of tutorials, speaking practices, and other feedback), SE pronunciation tutors (for Qizhen and Seung-Ho), and EI debriefing. But I would venture to say that perhaps 60% or a slightly higher percentage of their reflective learning can be attributed to the journal writing and discussion in the interviews of this study.
Summary

In this chapter, I discussed and interpreted the main themes of the participants’ journal entries and interviews that pertained to each of the five research questions guiding this study. Also included in the discussion and interpretation was research related to the findings and questions. The data that I collected from the five participants, by way of journal writing, interviews, and fieldnotes and tying in relevant research, provided interesting and valuable insights on the SE learning process of these prospective ITA learners. They were a means of understanding the daily learning of ITA students in SE courses and how to improve the teaching and learning in these courses. The structured journal writing on eight weekly topics produced rich portraits of the five participants’ SE learning experience in which five main themes emerged in the final content analysis.

Now I will briefly summarize the main findings for each question. For the first research question, *What educational and personal experiences have shaped the ITAs’ learning of English?*, the main theme that emerged from the participants’ data was that the EFL setting and obstacles in their interactions with native speakers did not permit them to practice their spoken language. The participants indicated that the EFL instruction in their native countries had emphasized grammar, writing, reading, or translation. Some possible reasons why grammar based instruction was emphasized instead of speaking and pronunciation include: large classes, national examinations, shortage of properly trained teachers, lack of appropriate EFL materials, and limited exposure to English. Nevertheless, new English Education policies in Korea and China during the 1990s have attempted to change the focus to communicative based teaching and learning. More than likely, many of these changes were implemented after the participants had already completed their EFL education. However, it is important to mention these changes, because they will probably affect future SE students from their countries, and which will then have an impact on the teaching and learning in SE courses.
Regarding the participants’ informal experiences learning English, it seems that the growing popularity of language schools in Korea and China and conversational English classes in Japanese companies suggest that their societies’ objectives and usage of English language learning is changing. Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Tadashi addressed some of the weaknesses of the language schools and company English classes. Some of the same obstacles impeding communicative language teaching and learning in the educational setting seem to be affecting the business sector as well.

Moreover, the participants also described their personal experiences of informal conversation and interaction with native speakers in the U.S. Qizhen, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi talked about obstacles they encountered during these experiences such as, a feeling of nervousness around native speakers and limited contact because of lack of time, topics, and openness. For example, Xiaolan experienced communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation when she spoke with native speakers. Meanwhile, Ho Yeon’s brief, simple, and present-oriented conversations with fellow graduate students and professors may be a result of foreigner talk. For Tadashi, there seemed to have been cross-cultural communication factors that had affected his conversation and interaction with the American undergraduate female he had dated.

The second research question was, What is it like for prospective ITAs to learn Spoken English? The main theme was that the participants were concerned about pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency in their SE learning. There were five journal topics that dealt with this question. Pronunciation was one topic. The five participants had problems pronouncing consonant sounds that do not exist in their native language. Some possible reasons why these sounds were difficult are: a) native language influence, b) cross-linguistic frequency of sounds, c) perceptual acuity and phonetic mimicry, and d) biological, socio-cultural, or personality factors. Another journal topic was communication focus. In other people’s spoken language the participants focused
on the words, that is, vocabulary. It seems that because the participants were at an intermediate stage of learning, attending to meaning was a basic tool for communicating.

In contrast, pronunciation was an intended focal point in their own SE, since it was a central factor in making themselves understood. I used the word, “intended” because conveying meaning would often override their paying attention to pronunciation. Nevertheless, the participants provided examples of why pronunciation was important, and they also received feedback about pronunciation in the SE classes, from pronunciation tutors, and other native speakers. Progress was another journal topic that the participants addressed. All five participants saw progress in their pronunciation and fluency, because they were utilizing learning and compensatory strategies in addition to new learning to bring about the progress. They also had personal, educational, and motivational reasons to improve their spoken language. At the same time, they felt that their pronunciation and fluency required more time and practice, since changes in speech patterns do not occur automatically and linearly.

Next, I would like to review the findings for the third and fourth research questions. The third question was, *What are the ITAs’ feelings about the university Spoken English requirement, and what motivations are guiding them to complete the Spoken English course?* The fourth research question was, *How does learning Spoken English affect the ITA’s linguistic self-image?* In this study, the ITA’s linguistic self-image was defined as changes in attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way the participants felt about themselves. Because several of the participants’ attitude about SE affected their motivation to complete the SE requirement, I will summarize the data and themes for these research questions together. The main theme for the third research question was that motivation had an important impact on the participants’ SE learning. All the participants thought that the university SE requirement was necessary. In fact, the requirement was in itself a motivation
to complete the course for all five of them. But Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen also felt that the university’s SE policy was unrealistic and inflexible. Moreover, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, and Xiaolan had expressed instrumental motivation to complete the SE 104.5 course, that is, in order to receive continued financial support from their departments. Similarly, Seung-Ho had expressed a pragmatic reason to pass. Simply put, he wanted to be a TA in his department, and this course was the way to achieve his goal. Tadashi seemed to display more of a friendship, travel orientation to learning to speak English well.

The main theme that emerged for the fourth research question was that the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking towards learning SE. Ho Yeon and Qizhen realized that an open, active, and positive attitude was beneficial for their learning, since it created more opportunities to use and receive feedback about their SE. Positive attitudes seemed to help learners establish a learning goal and strategies to achieve it.

The last research question was, How do reflection and awareness activities in learning Spoken English affect the ITAs’ learning? The main theme in this data was that reflection did make a difference in their SE learning. Reflection and awareness activities in this study were operationalized by journal writing and conducting interviews with the five participants. For all the participants, thinking and writing about their SE learning experience during the Winter quarter had raised their consciousness of their language learning process. For example, Qizhen was aware of problem areas in her English and how to improve them. Xiaolan had learned the benefits of studying English. Meanwhile, Ho Yeon and Tadashi had developed objectivity toward their learning, and Seung-Ho became aware of his strengths and weaknesses. The participants’ reflection in the journal entries and interviews were also a helpful resource for me to understand more about their SE learning, factors that affected their language learning, and how I could improve the teaching and learning in the SE class.
In this consciousness raising aspect, this study concurs with the results of many other diary and journal studies, that is, journal writing encourages the learner’s awareness of the learning process. What has made this study distinctive is that it was very structured, meaning that the participants wrote about eight specific topics that created a process view of their language learning. Other journal studies, especially journal studies of ITA learners, have not been as highly structured as this one was. As a result, this study makes a contribution to the field of ITA development and research, because the five participants’ language learning experiences were a means to a deeper understanding of the daily learning of prospective ITAs in SE courses, which is often overshadowed by whether they pass the EI, and how the teaching and learning in these courses can be improved.

One final point to be made is that journal writing cannot be credited for the participants’ heightened awareness of their language learning process, because the SE class, tutorials, pronunciation tutors, and EI debriefing, also fostered this sense of awareness in these participants. Just the same, the writing helped concretize it. Now, a critical question to answer is, “How can insights gained from journal writing and the SE class, tutorials, etc. be separated?” First, one important distinction is who is making the insights. Generally speaking, feedback on SE in the class, tutorials, tutoring sessions, or EI debriefing is given to ITA learners by an instructor or tutor with the hopes of encouraging the learners to make improvements and also develop awareness, monitoring, and self-evaluation skills of their spoken language. In contrast, journal writing encourages learners to manage their own learning. In other words, the journal writing empowers the learners with their language learning process. Journal writing also helps the learners to reflect on and understand the process of their language learning, whereas in the SE class, tutorials, or tutoring sessions often instruction and feedback is concentrated on particular, relevant aspects of SE learning with a goal in mind, namely passing the EI. I think that feedback and insights from SE instructors or tutors are valuable and necessary in order to guide the learners’ spoken
language development, and just as important is student reflection in journal writing, which can help them direct their own learning, develop awareness, and gain confidence about their language learning. Working harmoniously together in SE courses, these methods can combine the process and product views of learning. So that the end product, which is the EI, does not outweigh the daily, process learning of prospective ITA learners in SE courses. Chapter Seven presents the conclusions based on the findings of this study, explores implications for future research and teaching, and offers recommendations.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This last chapter will present conclusions based on the main findings of the study, explore pedagogical implications, review this study’s limitations, and offer recommendations for future study. I would like to begin the chapter by reviewing the context and uniqueness of the study, the methodology that brought it to fruition, and the main themes that emerged in the data analysis.

Review of the Study

In Chapter One I provided a historical context for this study by explaining the growing impact of international teaching assistants (ITAs), especially in the fields of chemistry, physics, engineering, math, and computer science, at American universities. The problems of oral English proficiency and teaching skills of ITAs who teach in classrooms, provide lab instruction, lead class reviews, tutor, and any other teaching related responsibilities at American universities became known as the “foreign TA problem”. Factors such as the shortage of American graduate TAs- particularly in the hard sciences- and the influx of foreign students due to American universities’ technology, skilled personnel, and training, contributed to the increase of foreign TAs
during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. To address the foreign TA problem, some state-mandated and institution-mandated ITA training programs emerged on American campuses in the 1980s in order to establish oral English proficiency requirements and training for ITAs. Before potential ITAs begin their graduate studies, they are administered the Test of Spoken English (TSE) or SPEAK Test (Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit), which were designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS), to measure their spoken English (SE) proficiency.

The SE program (SEP) at this Midwestern university was established in the 1986-87 academic year in response to a state law enacted in 1986, which requires prospective international students whose responsibilities include classroom teaching, lab instruction, tutoring, or direct student contact to certify their SE proficiency before beginning their teaching duties. Therefore, prospective ITAs are screened for SE proficiency by taking the TSE or SPEAK Test or passing a Mock Teaching Test (MTT). Those ITA candidates who do not score 230 or better on the TSE or SPEAK or pass the MTT must complete the appropriate SE coursework. Prospective ITAs enrolled in SE 104 or 104.5 must pass the Exit Interview (EI) in order to advance to SE 105, and SE 105 or 105.5 students must pass the MTT to become certified to teach in their departments.

Many ITA students at this university, particularly in chemistry, computer science, physics, and economics, have an urgency to complete the SE requirement, because their departmental financial support is contingent on it. Consequently, many ITA learners and instructors in the SE courses perceive learning as an end product. In other words, learning is measured by passing the EI or MTT. This product orientation to learning seems to overshadow the process of the learners’ spoken language development. As an
instructor of 104 and 104.5 courses in the SEP for the past six years, I have observed and 
thought about this focus, and I came to the conclusion that the other instructors and I 
were overlooking the daily SE learning of the ITAs in our courses. Moreover, I sensed 
frustration, boredom, financial pressures, and a lack of motivation among 104.5 students 
who were repeaters or in some cases, multiple repeaters of the course, as a result of not 
passing the EI.

Hence, I was interested in knowing how I could improve the teaching and 
learning process in the 104 and 104.5 courses in order to address these problems. Before 
attempting to resolve these problems, it was essential to know more about the ITAs’ 
former English instruction, motivations, spoken language difficulties, communication 
focus, feelings about the SE requirement, progress, changes in attitude and thinking, new 
learning, learning strategies, and how reflection and awareness activities could benefit 
their learning. My interest in the process of their language learning is what inspired this 
study. When I first began to think about the design of this study, I read about student 
portfolios, process learning, student centered learning, and qualitative research methods. 
From these readings, I gathered that journal writing promoted process learning, learner 
awareness, and learner autonomy. Therefore, journal writing was the primary 
methodological device, as opposed to questionnaires or other data collecting methods.

Moreover, because the objective of this study was to generate the ITAs’ SE 
learning experience, journal writing would serve as a window into their language learning 
world. So, ultimately the purpose of this study was to describe and explore the ITAs’ SE
learning experience through the use of journal writing in order to improve the teaching and learning of ITA learners in SE courses. The following research questions guided this study:

a) What educational and personal experiences have shaped the ITAs’ learning of English?

b) What is it like for prospective ITAs to learn Spoken English?

c) What are the ITAs’ feelings about the university Spoken English requirement, and what motivations are guiding them to complete the Spoken English course?

d) How does learning Spoken English affect the ITAs’ linguistic self-image?

e) How do reflection and awareness activities in learning Spoken English affect the ITAs’ learning?

and these five questions were the foundation from which the following journal topics were created:

What difficulties do you feel you have when you speak English?  
In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?

Describe the experiences you have had learning spoken English in your native country and in an English speaking country. Both: 
  a) Formal Instruction, and 
  b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers.

Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?

How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in spoken English in order to teach?

When you communicate with other people in English: 
  a) What do you pay attention to in their spoken English?), 
  b) What do you pay attention to in your spoken English?

Describe the areas in your spoken English that you are: 
  a) seeing progress in, and 
  b) not seeing progress in.
What types of things are you doing to improve your spoken English?
What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?

As you are learning and using spoken English, what changes do you recognize in your attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way you feel about yourself?

Describe several new things you have learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.

How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?

The study took place in a SE 104.5 course during the Winter quarter of 1999 at a large Midwestern university. Before the quarter began, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the students for this class in order to maximize variation of ethnic background, field of study, gender, and the number of times they had repeated the course. During the first few weeks of the quarter, several students moved up to a higher SE course, some dropped, and some did not show up. As a result, variation of ethnic background was affected. Hence, five Asian student volunteers, from a class total of nine Asian students, were selected to participate in the study. There were two Chinese females from the departments of economics and geological sciences. There were two Korean participants, male and female, who were studying military history and family resource management. The final participant was a Japanese male majoring in agricultural economics. The participants wrote eight weekly journal entries in English on specified topics about their SE learning experience. I did not write responses to their journal entries, because I wanted to avoid making evaluative comments about their SE experience.
Using their journal entries as a frame of reference, I conducted three semi-structured, tape recorded interviews with each participant during the quarter. With the Korean female participant, I conducted a fourth interview, in order to get more information about her journal entry for Week Seven. In addition to the interviews and the participants’ journal writing, I wrote classroom fieldnotes, conducted member checks, and included other pertinent data such as, video presentation notes, speaking practice notes, and EI notes.

The methodological design of the study was based on a phenomenological and case study approach. The intent of phenomenology is to glean the essence and meaning of the experience of the participants, whereas a case study is a detailed examination of a bounded system, in this case a subject and his/her experience. Based on these two approaches, I created research questions and journal topics that would elicit the meaning from the experiences of the participants. In particular, journal writing was the important tool that produced in-depth portraits of the five participants’ SE learning experiences. An initial content analysis of the participants’ journal entries, interviews, and other data yielded themes for each of the journal topics.

Concerning the participants’ spoken language difficulties, the following themes emerged: a) pronunciation, b) vocabulary, and c) composing sentences. Beginning with pronunciation, the five participants had problems pronouncing consonants that were nonexistent in their native language. Also, all the participants lacked English vocabulary to express themselves. Three of the participants had problems with composing sentences in English, because Korean and Japanese have SOV (subject, object, verb) word order whereas English has SVO.
For formal instruction in English, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Seung-Ho said that their EFL instruction in their native countries emphasized grammar, writing, reading, or translation. In addition, Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi had other opportunities to learn and practice English in their native countries such as, participating in a university English club, attending a language school or private language institute, taking company English classes, and interacting with American friends.

Regarding their feelings about the SE university requirement, all five participants felt that it was required and necessary. Despite this, Ho Yeon, Tadashi, and Qizhen thought that the policy was unrealistic and inflexible. As they explained, it was unrealistic for an ITA to achieve native like pronunciation and fluency within a year or less. Furthermore, ITAs had overburdened class schedules and some of them also worked in labs, tutor rooms, or as graders and did not have enough time to practice their English. There were also financial and departmental pressures that were motivating them to pass.

The participants’ communication focus in other people’s SE was the speaker’s words. For Ho Yeon and Xiaolan, listening to the speaker’s words was important for learning new words they could apply in their English. Meanwhile, Seung-Ho and Qizhen paid attention to certain types of words for example, situation words, interrogatives, and content words, because they provided meaning, indicated word order, and presented new information. In their SE, Seung-Ho, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, and Xiaolan focused on pronunciation so that they could make themselves understood. Even though Qizhen concentrated more on the content and sentence structure of her SE, she also paid attention to her pronunciation, since she did not want to annoy her listeners.
In the area of progress, all the participants discussed their improvement in pronunciation and fluency. However, these areas still needed more improvement. For example, Ho Yeon continued to have problems in fluency and distinguishing /r/ and /l/, /l/ and /p/, /v/ and /b/, and /dZ/ and /z/. Qizhen’s pronunciation problems with /l/ and /r/, /l/ and /s/ continued in spite of her improvement. For Xiaolan, fluency was challenging because at first, making progress was easy, but later it became harder to improve it. Interestingly, Tadashi was ambivalent about his progress. Initially, he discussed his progress in composing sentences and using colloquial expressions, but later in the discussion he became inconclusive about his areas of progress. Similar to Ho Yeon, Seung-Ho had made progress in fluency and pronunciation of /l/, /b/, /p/, /f/, and /s/, but he needed more time and practice to improve these skills. In general, the participants thought that more time and practice were necessary for progress in pronunciation and fluency.

Furthermore, Tadashi, Ho Yeon, Qizhen, Xiaolan, and Seung-Ho were using strategies to improve their SE. Three strategies they shared in common were participating in class discussions, doing the community contact assignments, and taking part in this study. I also provided examples of other interesting strategies that they were using to improve their English. For example, Qizhen and Seung-Ho met with a SE pronunciation tutor twice a week during the quarter. Their tutors worked on consonant sounds with them and also deep breathing exercises for Qizhen, which were helpful for her rhythm, intonation, and fluency. In addition, Qizhen self-monitored her SE, talked with native speakers, and went to the language lab several times a week. Xiaolan
watched TV as a way of learning new words and went to the language lab to practice pronunciation. Meanwhile, Ho Yeon imitated American’s SE, and she learned new words from the internet, books, magazines, or TV.

Seung-Ho was also doing other things to improve his English, such as listening to English conversational tapes while driving his car, having his son correct his pronunciation, watching TV, renting videos, listening to the radio, and paying attention to words while he was reading. In contrast, Tadashi had little time to spend on English. So, whenever he could, he listened to the radio, talked with his landlady, and listened and repeated the words on his tutorial tapes.

Another area was the compensation strategies that the participants used in the video presentations- these strategies improved their comprehensibility. One strategy used by all the participants was visuals or the blackboard. For example, Qizhen pointed to words on the transparency to make her pronunciation clearer. In addition, she used clear organization, included comprehension checks, asked questions, and summarized. Similarly, Tadashi utilized transparencies, comprehension checks, and the blackboard. Also, he was organized, defined important words, and gave examples. Before the presentation, Ho Yeon prepared a list of key words and practiced them out loud. During the presentation, she had good organization, monitored her pronunciation, used transparencies, and used focal stress on key terms. Likewise, Xiaolan used the blackboard, employed a well organized structure, and talked naturally. Seung-Ho also thought about the key words before the presentation and practiced the words by himself and with his tutor. Then while he was presenting, he emphasized special words by writing them on the blackboard.
Several themes emerged for changes in attitude, thinking skills, and personality. One theme was that Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Seung-Ho felt improvement in their attitude and thinking. As a point of interest, I observed a positive change in Ho Yeon’s attitude and behavior during the two quarters that she was my student (Fall 1998 and Winter 1999). A second theme addressed by Qizhen, Ho Yeon, and Tadashi was being open, active learners of SE. Both Qizhen and Ho Yeon realized that being open and active created more opportunities to practice their SE. Meanwhile, Tadashi discussed some cultural limitations that a second language (L2) learner needed to overcome if he really wanted to express his ideas and opinions in the L2. Another theme was relying less on translation when Xiaolan, Qizhen, and Seung-Ho used English. The last theme was that Tadashi and Xiaolan felt less confident about their SE. Xiaolan began to doubt her SE abilities after not passing the EI in Fall 1998. However, she began to feel a little hopeful during the Winter quarter, because she saw some gradual progress in her English. As Tadashi learned more English, he realized that his pronunciation and listening skills were not perfect, especially since native speakers could not always understand his pronunciation of /r/ in words.

The next area in the participants’ SE experience was what they had learned in the SE class, in tutorials, with their conversation partner, or other people outside the SEP. For example, Tadashi, Qizhen, and Xiaolan learned about the reduction and linking of sounds in the SE class. As Tadashi explained, these reductions provided clues as to why native speakers’ sentences were not clear. So this knowledge was helpful for his SE comprehension as it probably was for Qizhen and Xiaolan too.

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From their SE pronunciation tutors, Seung-Ho and Qizhen learned techniques to help their pronunciation. Seung-Ho’s tutor provided two suggestions for training his speech organs. One was to read out loud from books or articles everyday. Another was to repeat difficult consonant sounds such as /b/ /v/ while he was walking or driving. From her tutor, Qizhen learned how to breathe deeply, how to differentiate /r/ and /l/, and how to control pausing in sentences.

A third type of learning for Ho Yeon and Seung-Ho was the importance of pronunciation when communicating with others. Ho Yeon provided two examples about this. For instance, in a restaurant it was important to have clear and correct pronunciation when ordering food. The other example was with the word “Kurdish” which Ho Yeon had not understood during a conversation with her SE conversation partner. Later she found out that she already knew that word in Korean. As a result, Ho Yeon realized that pronunciation and knowledge about a topic enabled her to speak more fluently in English.

Finally, for the last journal topic of the participants’ SE learning experience, there was an overall feeling among the participants that thinking, writing, and talking about their experience helped them reflect on their English, develop an awareness of their problem areas, and evaluate their SE progress. Tadashi thought it was good to reflect on his SE, because it gave him insight into his English. By thinking and writing about her experience, Qizhen became aware of her pronunciation and grammar problems and what she could do to improve them. Similarly, Xiaolan was forced to think about her spoken language problems and the benefits of studying English by writing the journal entries. As a result, this awareness stimulated her learning. Likewise, Ho Yeon felt that thinking and writing about her SE experience encouraged her to think about and evaluate
her English. Investing time and thought would provide positive benefits for her SE. Similar to the other participants, the journal writing and interviews helped Seung-Ho become more aware of his weaknesses in speaking.

After doing a final content analysis of the participants’ data, five main themes emerged from this study. The first theme was that the participants’ prior EFL learning and obstacles in their interactions with native speakers did not allow them to practice their spoken language. The second theme was that pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency were main concerns in their SE learning. Third, instrumental motivation played an important role in their language learning. Fourth, the participants experienced positive changes in their attitude and thinking towards learning SE, through their ITA course. Fifth, reflection made a difference in their SE learning. Finally, an important point to highlight is that these themes emerged from the data because of the nature of the study’s research questions and the emphasis on structured journal writing.

Even though these five themes from this study are not new or different in second language acquisition (SLA) or ITA research, I would like to discuss how they are significant for the ITA learners. Most researchers and practitioners in these fields have research, teaching, or learning experience of these L2 learning themes. In the previous chapter, I presented SLA research about EFL learning in Japan, Korea, and China. The research indicated that speaking and pronunciation skills are not emphasized in these countries because of such factors as, national examinations, large classes, lack of authentic materials, and untrained instructors in SE. Although in recent years an attempt has been made in educational institutions to emphasize communicative language teaching
in the teaching and learning of English. Knowledge of these changes is important, since they will affect future ITA students and perhaps pedagogical changes will be necessary in SE courses.

Ho Yeon became aware of these pedagogical differences in EFL and ESL learning when she took SE courses at this Midwestern university. In SE 104 and 104.5 courses, she received a lot of individualized instruction because the class size was small, and she also had regular tutorials with her SE instructor. Reflecting on this topic gave Ho Yeon the opportunity to verbalize and clarify thoughts about the differences of her prior and current SE instruction. Likewise, Seung-Ho, Qizhen, Tadashi, and Xiaolan also discussed the differences of English instruction in their native countries. So by writing and talking about their former English instruction in this study, the five participants gained a better understanding of their prior English learning, and perhaps how it related to their current SE learning experience.

In addition, SLA research on social distance, foreigner talk discourse, and language anxiety suggest that L2 learners interact minimally with native speakers in the ESL environment, because most of them return to their native countries after completing their studies, many universities have large foreign student populations that encourage native language usage, conversations with native speakers tend to be brief and limited to certain topics, foreign students are unable to express themselves and their identity fully, and they fear negative evaluation of their SE skills. The participants verbalized similar limitations when they interacted with native speakers, for example lack of time and common topics of interest for Qizhen, language anxiety and a large Chinese population
at the university for Xiaolan, limited topics and brief conversations for Ho Yeon, and lack of time and cross-cultural communication problems for Tadashi in his interaction with an American undergraduate student.

The significance of this for the participants was reflecting on and expressing how they felt about and dealt with the limitations and the strategies that they utilized to compensate for them in order to improve their SE. This information can help SE instructors understand the difficulties and frustrations that ITA learners encounter when interacting with native speakers, and at the same time, journal writing can encourage the learners to think about other strategies to improve their SE. For example, Seung-Ho listened to English conversation tapes and practiced consonant sounds with his tutor and by himself. Meanwhile, Xiaolan watched TV programs, and Tadashi listened to the radio and his tutorial tapes. Ho Yeon learned common words from the internet, and Qizhen practiced pronunciation in the language lab and with her tutor. All of them participated actively in class and used compensatory strategies in their video presentations. Several of them also engaged in conversation with me or other foreign students.

Furthermore, it was not surprising that the participants were mainly concerned about their pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. Coming from EFL settings where pronunciation and speaking are given little attention, it seems natural that the ITAs would focus on improving these skills in order to survive in the ESL academic environment and also because they are required to if they want to become ITAs. In the ITA and SLA literature it is known that L2 learners will have difficulty with English sounds that do not exist in their native languages due to such factors as, language transfer, markedness, cross-linguistic frequency, perceptual acuity, phonetic mimicry, and the proper use of
the speech organs. So SE instructors have come to expect that ITA learners will have problems with certain sounds. For instance, Korean ITA learners will have problems with p/f, b/v, s/S, l/r, and d/Z, whereas Chinese learners will have difficulty with w/v, T/s, and Z/z and n/l or r/l for those from southern China.

However, many ITA learners do not have this awareness of their pronunciation or other spoken language problems as SE instructors and ITA or SLA researchers do. In their EFL learning many of them do not study and practice pronunciation or speaking skills. Therefore, it is not necessary for them to think about their pronunciation problems. Often ITA learners can not hear the difference in English sounds such as, r/l for Tadashi. Because Tadashi could not hear the difference in these sounds, it was difficult to produce r/l. He described this difficulty as a “vicious circle”. By journal writing, all the participants in this study developed more awareness of their SE problems. For example, Seung-Ho discussed how the journal writing helped him identify his weaknesses in SE. An important point that Qizhen made was that by being more aware of her pronunciation problems, it helped her think about what she could to do to resolve them. This supports the need for ITA learners to engage in reflection of their pronunciation and spoken language difficulties in order for them to have more awareness of their SE learning and how they can begin to improve it.

It was not new knowledge in SLA research or for SE instructors that instrumental motivation plays a significant role in the ITAs’ SE learning. For example, Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Qizhen, talked about the departmental financial pressures they had to pass the 104.5 EI. Xiaolan also expressed a personal reason why she needed to pass the EI that quarter, namely that she wanted to get married in the summer. So, because of the small
size of the SE courses and the emphasis on individualized instruction, then it seems necessary for the SE instructors to know about their ITA learners’ individual reasons for wanting to pass the EI, since their reasons and level of motivation vary. From a pedagogical perspective, there are benefits of instrumental motivation on the ITAs’ learning, for example, increased interest and efforts to learn and improve their SE as I saw for Xiaolan, Ho Yeon, and Qizhen. Journal writing can be the important tool that encourages the ITA learners to be more conscious of their motivations and also the medium where they set and monitor goals for their SE learning.

Research on extroversion/introversion and motivation have shown that L2 learners who have an open, active, and positive attitude towards the language learning goal will experience positive effects on their language learning. In fact, Qizhen and Ho Yeon talked about how being open and active created more opportunities for them to practice their SE. However, Tadashi raised an interesting point related to being sociable. He felt that overcoming cultural limitations from the native and target language cultures is what makes a L2 learner a good speaker. These are essential topics for ITA learners to explore and reflect on in their journal writing, especially since they rarely have the opportunity to think about their feelings, attitudes, and cultural limitations on their SE learning. Being aware of these aspects of their SE learning, can help them resolve psychological obstacles on their SE progress.

Finally, this study has also confirmed the benefits of reflection on the learning process that prior research on journal writing or diary studies in SLA research and across many disciplines have presented. However, this study is different from other journal or diary studies, especially among ITA journal studies, in that it was highly structured - the
five participants of this study wrote and talked about nine aspects of their SE learning. These topics were purposefully created in order to uncover the process of language learning, and student reflection through the journal approach which ultimately produced valuable, descriptions, insights, and interpretation of the participants’ SE learning experiences. In contrast, the emphasis in the SE 104 and 104.5 courses seems to be on feedback from SE instructors in the classroom, tutorials, speaking practices, and EI debriefing, as well as feedback from SE pronunciation tutors. This feedback is used to guide the ITA learners to reflect on their learning, develop self-awareness, monitor their spoken language, and progress as L2 learners. This journal study of the SE learning experience of ITAs tried to improve the ITAs’ language learning process by empowering the participants through reflection on their own learning.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that the rich, deep portraits of the five participants were an important means to understanding the daily language learning process of ITA students in SE courses, the five ITAs became more conscious of their SE learning experience through journal writing, and that reflection activities can improve the teaching and learning in SE courses. So in effect, this study has made a contribution to the field of ITA research, development, and training. In summary, I have reviewed this study’s historical context, purpose, research questions, journal topics, methodology, main findings, and significance.

**Conclusions**

The conclusions are based on the main findings of the study. The main purpose of these conclusions will be to reflect on how the teaching and learning of ITAs in SE courses can be improved, which will be discussed in the section on implications. The
first conclusion is that reflection activities should be an important part of ITA SE courses. If one of the main purposes in these courses is to guide the ITAs’ SE development, then it seems necessary that these learners are actively reflecting on their learning, something that typically does not occur in ITA courses. Reflection activities will benefit the ITAs in several ways. One, they will help the ITAs and SE instructors focus on the daily process of their language learning, which has been given less attention due to the importance of the EI. Two, ITAs, who are experiencing frustration, lack of motivation, and boredom in the SE courses, will have an outlet in which to express their feelings and direct their own SE learning by reflecting, developing awareness, and evaluating their own progress. Three, the SE instructors will be better able to think about their teaching and how to improve it, as a consequence of the ITAs’ reflection, because this new source of information will facilitate a better understanding of the ITAs’ learning.

The second conclusion is that the ITA learners need to be encouraged to make positive changes in their thinking and attitude about learning SE, because these changes seem to have a beneficial affect on their language learning. So, how can the ITAs make these changes? Perhaps, by paying attention to the process of their SE learning through journal writing and other reflection activities, the learners will realize that learning in SE courses is not only measured by passing the EI or MTT. Instead, the ITAs will be more inclined to a broader perspective of learning SE, and more importantly become empowered with their own learning. A balanced focus on the process and product views of learning in the SE courses will probably create a more comfortable environment in which the ITAs can learn, and the benefits of this type of focus may be positive changes in their attitude and thinking about SE.
The third conclusion is that because motivation plays a significant role in the ITAs’ passing the university SE requirement, it is important that the learners think about what, specifically, they are doing to accomplish this goal. Many ITA learners are instrumentally motivated to complete this requirement, because they need financial support from their academic departments. Moreover, a main objective of the SE 104 and 104.5 courses is for the ITAs to develop their SE skills to the level that they are sufficient to pass the EI, and then in SE 105, the ITAs acquire the teaching and interaction skills necessary to become certified in SE by passing the MTT. Therefore, SE instructors need to take a more responsible role than they have been in helping the learners set and monitor goals by using reflection activities in the SE courses and tutorials. Other than focusing on their language learning process, reflection activities may encourage the ITA learners to establish mini goals, evaluate their progress, and try new strategies to accomplish their ultimate goal during the learning process. Since learning is a distinctive, individual activity for each learner, the length of time required to accomplish the SE requirement will vary for each ITA.

The fourth conclusion is that the ITAs need to be more responsible toward, reflective on, and aware of their SE learning than they currently are in the SE courses. A lot of feedback is provided to SE students about their spoken language through various assessment measures, feedback from instructors and tutors in the SEP, SE conversation partners, and advisors or other professors in their departments. Much of this feedback is related to pronunciation, fluency, grammar, suprasegmentals, vocabulary, and discourse strategies. In addition, because the content of SE 104 and 104.5 focuses on these skills, the learners probably become more aware of the importance of pronunciation, fluency,
vocabulary, and grammar. However, what seems to be lacking is the opportunity for ITA learners to take a more active role in evaluating their own progress, monitoring their language use, and reflecting on their language learning. So in effect, student reflection can be an important supplement to feedback and instruction from SE instructors, pronunciation tutors, and other individuals. Other benefits of learner autonomy in the SE courses might be increased interest in and motivation toward their learning.

The fifth conclusion is that increased awareness of factors in the EFL and ESL setting that affect the ITAs’ learning of SE will help SE instructors and tutors, as well as ITAs and their advisors or other professors, in understanding the SE learning process of ITAs. Reflection activities for ITAs in SE courses can be a viable means of acquiring this valuable information, which can lead ITAs- and other individuals in the academic environment who interact with them- to deeper insights, better understanding and rapport, and more thoughtful efforts and strategies needed to overcome the obstacles that impede their SE progress. Acknowledging, thinking about, and commenting on these factors through journal writing or other reflection activities will perhaps enable the ITAs to better understand how they can continue to make progress in SE. Furthermore, reflection activities will probably create an atmosphere in the SE classroom that is accepting and understanding, and at the same time, challenges them to direct their own learning.

Implications

From these conclusions, I will discuss pedagogical implications for ITA SE courses, advisors of ITAs, and SE textbook writers. Also, I will address how the university can support the ITAs’ SE learning. I will begin with teaching and learning
in ITA SE courses. Currently in the SE 104 and 104.5 courses at this Midwestern university, the ITAs engage in minimal student reflection on their language learning. For example, they complete a self-evaluation form about their video presentations and transcribe the content of the presentations, which are then discussed in the tutorials. These activities are intended to help the ITAs develop self-awareness of their spoken language. Admittedly, these courses are tightly filled with activities, assignments, and course content with little room for reflection activities, because preparing for the EI is an important curricular objective in SE 104 and 104.5.

As the findings of this study indicate, more attention also needs to be given to the process of the ITAs’ language learning. Therefore, in place of the weekly lab logs, where the students record the amount of time they spend listening to exercises from the class textbook or other materials, it may be more beneficial for them to write weekly journal entries about their SE learning. This reflection activity can be in the form of oral (tape recorded) or written (dialogue) journals, whereby the SE instructor and ITA learner have ongoing communication throughout the quarter. The purpose of this activity would be for the ITAs to reflect actively and regularly on the process of their SE learning, develop awareness of their spoken language, and evaluate their SE progress. This student reflection could also help the SE instructors acquire a better understanding of the ITAs’ learning.

For example, the journals could help the SE instructors identify and monitor more closely their students’ SE difficulties, frustrations, learning strategies, goal setting, and progress. This information could then be used to assign the appropriate pronunciation practice in the language lab or online for each student, guide further learning in fluency.
activities or pronunciation practice in class, and help the students set SE goals for their video presentations. The journals could also be a source of information of the common SE problems or concerns of the class as a whole, which the instructors could address as mini-lessons in class. The journals might also be a way for the instructors to provide further motivation for the students’ SE learning by writing responses or comments in the journal entries and thus, maintaining closer rapport with each individual student. Finally, the instructors could use the journals as a way to stimulate discussion and reflection of the students’ SE in the tutorials.

Student reflection can also be an important part of the SE 104 and 104.5 tutorials. The main purpose of the tutorials in these courses is to discuss and critique the video presentations and provide additional pronunciation practice. In addition to, or instead of the self-evaluation form about the video presentations, the instructor should ask the students questions that encourage reflection and awareness. For example, these are the types of questions I ask my SE 104 students during the second tutorial, where we discuss and critique the first video presentation:

**How was your first presentation?** Discuss: general comments, and pronunciation, grammar, organization, and delivery of the presentation.

**Describe some positive things about your presentation.**

**How will you improve the next presentation?**

a) What will you focus on improving?

b) What strategies will you use to make these improvements?

In short, these types of questions encourage the ITAs to think about their SE pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and delivery of the presentation, that is, their overall spoken language. The students will likely benefit from student reflection in the tutorials.
in several ways. First, the tutorial will be more student centered, thus allowing the ITAs to practice speaking and develop confidence about their SE. Second, the ITA learners will have more responsibility for their own learning, evaluate their own progress, direct their own further learning, and acquire the skills of self-monitoring and compensatory strategies necessary to overcome their spoken language difficulties.

Furthermore, SE pronunciation tutors can also utilize reflection activities during their tutoring sessions with ITAs. One way to incorporate these types of activities in the tutoring sessions is to have the learner write a journal entry about each of their tutoring sessions and possibly also answer questions in the journals about their SE on such topics as spoken language difficulties, communication focus, progress, learning and compensatory strategies, and new learning. Because the tutoring sessions face time constraints, that is, twice a week for 45 minutes during the ten week quarter, perhaps the tutors can discuss, every two or three weeks, the ITA’s responses in the journal entries, or just simply ask follow-up reflection questions to the ITA about his/her SE learning in the classroom, tutoring sessions, or activities outside of the SEP.

By adding reflection activities in the SE 104 and 104.5 courses, tutorials, and pronunciation tutoring sessions, the process of the ITAs’ language learning will be given more attention, which is important for pedagogical reasons, and more importantly, the ITA learners will develop more autonomy and awareness of their learning.

Academic advisors, department TA coordinators, and other professors of ITAs can also cultivate reflection of the ITAs’ SE learning, especially as it relates to professional development within their field of study. These reflection activities, namely questions and perhaps also brief reports (which may include goals, strategies,
and evaluation of SE for each quarter) that elicit student reflection, can take place during discussions in group meetings, individual appointments, e-mail, or encounters in the classroom or other relevant situations and places. Whether these activities take the form of informal questions or written reports, the important point is that the ITAs think regularly about how their spoken language is progressing, what they are doing to improve it, what systematic goals they have established about their SE learning for that quarter and for subsequent quarters, how their SE learning relates to their professional goals, and what type of guidance or support would they like from their advisor and other professors for their SE learning. This student reflection will probably keep the advisor and other professors more attuned to the ITAs’ SE learning and enhance their ability to assist in students’ language development. Likewise, the ITA learners will be encouraged to think about the relevance of their language learning within the context of their field of study.

Textbook writers of SE for ITA learners can also play a vital role in promoting student reflection. Interestingly, the new edition of the SE 104 textbook that is being used in the SEP at this university has some student reflection activities. For example, Chapter One contains a pronunciation profile of the student, interview questions, a needs and attitudes assessment, and a task requiring the setting of personal language learning goals. However, this chapter is not included in the 104 course calendar and, therefore, is not covered in class. Furthermore, in Chapter Two there are some exercises that ask the students for examples of key technical or professional words they often use. Meanwhile, at the end of Chapter Four, there is a self-evaluation form about explaining a graph. At the end of Chapter Six, the students can complete a Mid-Course Self-Evaluation about
their SE learning. Additionally, in the appendices on vowels and consonants, there are short exercises where the students identify vowel and consonant sounds that are difficult to pronounce.

These are a few examples of how the author has attempted to make student reflection an important and relevant part of the ITAs’ SE learning. The results of this study could contribute to further progress in this area. Perhaps in this way, the ITAs can begin to see the direct application of what they are learning, and at the same time, they can develop a growing awareness of their language learning process. Other SE textbook writers for ITA learners can also benefit from this example by including reflection activities and exercises that help the learners think about, develop awareness of, and evaluate their SE. A possible benefit of doing this for the textbook writers would be a heightened interest and use of their textbooks in the SE courses. Finally, the ITA learners will only profit from these reflection activities in the textbook if the SE course coordinators make room for them in the course calendar, and the SE instructors utilize them in the classroom.

Some universities, like the research site for this study, have a SEP that was established as a result of a state law. This university’s ITAs are tested in oral English proficiency before beginning graduate studies and, depending on their TSE or SPEAK Test score, will be required to take SE coursework. The SEP and academic departments invest time and effort to guide the ITAs’ SE development so that their language will be comprehensible and their teaching skills acceptable for American undergraduate students. Yet, there seems to be little effort or sensitivity to understanding the cultural background of the ITAs, their demanding class schedules, and the SE requirement that they often
must complete in a short period of time-otherwise, their departmental financial aid will be affected (especially, in chemistry, physics, economics, and computer science departments at this university).

Moreover, the idea of World Englishes, which outside of the U.S. is an important, growing phenomenon, does not seem to be addressed in many ITA environments. This term “symbolizes the functional and formal variations, divergent sociolinguistic contexts, ranges and varieties of English in creativity, and various types of acculturation in parts of the Western and non-Western world” (Kachru, 1997, p. 212). Instead, the focus is solely, on making ITAs change their spoken language skills to meet the oral English proficiency standards required by the school or the state. Oral proficiency standards in English are important and necessary, because teaching and learning cannot be facilitated in the classroom without clear, direct, and interactive communication. On the other hand, more effort needs to be put forth by American undergraduate students and the university to develop sensitivity, tolerance, and interest in the ITAs’ culture and SE learning.

One way in which the university can provide support for the ITAs’ SE learning is for the ITAs to take part in the freshman orientation program or a similar program, whereby undergraduate students and ITAs can interact, learn about each other, and establish better understanding of their cultures. This can be coordinated between the ITAs’ academic program and undergraduate orientation program. Another means of possible support is for the university to develop a one quarter required course for all undergraduate students on cultural sensitivity and tolerance, especially at universities
with many foreign undergraduate and graduate students, and where ITAs teach undergraduate courses reaching students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Another supportive measure for the ITAs, during the quarter they are teaching or prior to it, would be to distribute a questionnaire to the undergraduate students about the following topics: experiences with foreign students or people, foreign languages they have learned, knowledge or experience of the ITAs’ culture, expectations they have of the instructor, and expectations the instructor should have of them. Subsequently, the ITA can lead a discussion of the questionnaire responses during a class period, on a class listserv, or via email.

This support on the part of the university would probably send a message to the ITAs that they are making an effort to understand who the ITAs are, what challenges they are facing in the new environment, and how they can help the ITAs in this process. One of the benefits for the university for supporting the ITAs’ SE learning would be a better understanding of who these students are, and in turn, this rapport would be a means of retaining current ITAs and recruiting new ones. Another benefit to the university might be increased satisfaction of undergraduate students of their ITAs’ teaching and SE communication skills in their courses. At the same time, the university’s support may help the ITAs realize that their diligence, efforts, and progress are being acknowledged and as a result, motivate further SE learning.

This next type of university support addresses SE learning for nonteaching foreign undergraduate and graduate students. A concern that some professors and foreign students have expressed is the importance of SE communication skills, both speaking and
listening, in order to adapt to the American academic environment and successfully complete their study requirements. Speaking ability and listening comprehension are important parts of the learning process in class discussions, group projects, class and professional presentations, interaction with advisor and other professors during office hours, and for taking care of administrative and personal matters. For large universities, and perhaps even smaller colleges, it may be impractical to require all foreign students to take SE courses, possibly due to funding, testing, and the student’s degree requirement concerns. Instead, many universities require incoming undergraduate and graduate foreign students to take a writing proficiency test in order to determine if their writing ability is suitable for the academic discourse community. If the students do not have a certain proficiency level, they are required to take the necessary ESL composition coursework.

Writing skills are essential across many departments and programs, but perhaps more attention should also be given to the foreign students’ speaking and listening comprehension skills as some professors and foreign students have expressed. One possible way in which these skills can be addressed is by integrating some SE skills in the ESL composition courses. For instance, the foreign students can be required to do two or three presentations, five to eight minutes in length, of their written work and readings during the quarter. Preferably, with assistance from the university’s SEP or a similar ESL program, the ESL composition program can develop the spoken language objectives, teaching and content materials to prepare the students for oral presentations, and evaluation methods of their presentations. Furthermore, feedback on the students’ presentations can be provided in writing, and then, followed by discussion in the tutorials.
that the composition instructor has with the students. Articulating ideas, thoughts, feelings, or information clearly is important in writing and speaking. So, this can be a good opportunity to integrate these skills in the ESL composition coursework in order for foreign students to improve their overall communication skills.

Limitations

This study is not without some limitations, but what it has to offer outweighs its limitations. One limitation of the study was its purposeful sampling strategy and small number of participants (five Asian students). As a consequence, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to all ITAs taking a SE 104.5 course or some comparable course at another university. However, the degree of transferability, which “is a direct function of the similarity between . . . two contexts” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 124) makes the findings of this study applicable to other contexts and ITA learners. In other words, this study’s thick descriptions of the five participants’ SE learning experience provides others interested in transferability with a base of useful information from which to make their own interpretations. As an instructor in the SEP at this Midwestern university, my sense is that there seems to be a high degree of transferability or “fittingness” (Ibid) of these ITAs’ experiences to other SE students that I have taught in SE 104 and 104.5 courses, current students that I am teaching, and perhaps, to future SE students that I will teach. It stands to reason that transfer to similar teaching/learning contexts in other ITA programs is quite likely.

A second limitation of this study is that I combined the roles of researcher and instructor while I collected data in the SE 104.5 class during the Winter quarter of 1999. These combined roles may have obscured my objectivity and attention to newness as a
researcher. On the other hand, as the participants’ instructor, I was able to establish rapport with them in the classroom. This teacher/student relationship perhaps facilitated their journal writing and discussions with me during the interviews. My rapport with the participants as their instructor may have helped them feel comfortable sharing and being open about their feelings, experiences, and thoughts about their SE learning. Furthermore, as the instructor, I brought to my researcher role, connoisseurship (Eisner 1991) of the SE course, that is, knowledge of the content, teaching materials, and nature of the course, experience and familiarity with SE students and the SE program (SEP), and observation of my own progress and growth in the teaching of 104 and 104.5 courses. In short, I had a feel, taste, and appreciation of what teaching and learning in a SE course entails. According to Eisner, appreciation of something means to experience its qualities and have some understanding about it. In addition, he states that, “Connoisseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (p. 66). This connoisseurship helped me provide a more thorough analysis, explanations, and interpretation of the participants’ language learning experiences.

A final limitation is that the reflective activities in the journal writing and interviews may have led the five participants to perceive their SE learning experiences only within a reflective, self-awareness framework. Yet, the findings of this study lend support to the reflective learning benefits that other journal or diary studies have also found. I also took measures to ensure that the journal writing was contributing to, and
not detracting from the study. For instance, I asked the participants several times (Interviews One, Three, and the journal topic for Week Eight) how the journal writing was affecting their learning. Thus, the costs of these limitations were minor in comparison to the contributions that this study has made to ITA research, practice, and training.

**Recommendations**

Previously, I mentioned that journal studies of ITA learners have not been tried extensively. The structured journal writing in this study was an attempt to know more about the daily language learning process of ITA learners in order to improve the teaching and learning in SE courses. Something that I was not able to achieve in my study was to create a varied ethnic sample of participants. All five of my participants were Asian (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese). It would be interesting to replicate this study with a larger sample of ten or more students and with participants of European, South American, African, and Middle Eastern backgrounds and see how these factors would affect the study. Another recommendation worth trying is to have the ITAs do their own content analysis of their journal writing in order for them to discover the themes of their SE learning experience. I suspect that this would yield even more student reflection and awareness, as well as interesting insights and interpretations from a student perspective.

Also, I was unable to interview the ITAs’ advisors or TA coordinators in their departments about their SE progress, TA or RA responsibilities, class performance, presentations, conferences, or meetings. It would be interesting to include this data in the journal study, because it would provide an added context for the ITAs’ language learning
process, in particular how it relates to their field of study. Another suggestion for research is to do a tape recorded journal study with ITAs, especially since the SE courses focus on spoken language skills. The ITA learners would probably benefit from this in terms of fluency, confidence, and expressing themselves more clearly. Having the SE learners do tape recorded dialogue journals is another research option worth pursuing. So, with or without structured topics, the instructor would respond to the content of the ITAs’ oral entries on tape throughout the quarter. This ongoing communication would probably be interesting in terms of reflection and insights for the ITAs and instructor.

A final recommendation emerged from one of my participants’ discussions in the last interview. He said that language learning and being a good speaker involves not only being open, active, and sociable, but more importantly, overcoming the limitations imposed from one’s own culture and the target language culture. Investigating the cultural limitations that the ITAs encounter in their SE learning is an interesting and valuable topic to pursue.
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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE SPOKEN ENGLISH PROGRAM

Dear____________________:

As we have discussed informally, I would like to conduct a qualitative study in my Spoken English 104.5 classroom during the Winter quarter of 1999. I am requesting a 104.5 course because the study will involve the students in reflective and self-awareness activities that require a threshold level of language ability. This study will fulfill the requirement for completing my Ph.D. degree.

The purpose of this study is to describe what it is like for prospective ITAs to learn Spoken English in a 104.5 Spoken English course. The procedure will be a phenomenological and case study design. The nature and procedures of this study will not be harmful to the students nor disruptive to their classroom learning. The anonymity of the students and the Spoken English Program will be preserved in the reporting of data in the dissertation and any other future publication.

Student participation in the study will be voluntary and will in no way affect their class performance. I will obtain permission to conduct the study from the university Human Subjects Office so that the students’ rights are protected. Students will sign a participant release agreement.

I would like to request permission to use a purposeful sampling strategy to select ITAs for my section of the SE 104.5 course. This strategy will enable me to achieve maximum variation of ethnic background, field of study, gender, and number of times the students have repeated the 104 course.

Data collection will be conducted primarily outside of class time and scheduled around the students’ convenience. Students will write weekly journal entries, and they will participate in three 25 minute interviews. Also, there will be documents collected (student data sheet, 104 Exit Interview notes, student journal entries, speaking practice notes, and video presentation notes).
The expected benefits of this study to the Spoken English program are ITA students’ reflection and increased awareness of their learning, some possible instructional implications from these reflective activities, fluency practice for the students, and perhaps some renewed interest and motivation for multiple 104 repeaters.

Sincerely,

Fernanda Capraro
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RELEASE AGREEMENT

Dear Potential Participant:

The following information is provided to you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study of ______________. Under the direction of Professor ___________, I am conducting a qualitative study in this Spoken English 104.5 course this quarter. The study is entitled, A Journal Study of the Spoken English Learning Experience of Prospective International Teaching Assistants. The purpose of the study is to describe what it is like for prospective ITAs to learn Spoken English in a 104.5 SE course. I am conducting the research in order to fulfill the process of completing a Ph.D. degree.

Your participation will involve a period of eleven consecutive weeks (January to March of 1999). Data will be collected weekly and also at three points during the quarter- at the beginning, at the midpoint, and at the end of the course. Data collection will take place outside of class time and will not interfere with nor affect the instructor’s assessment of your class performance.

Data collection will involve: a) documents (student data sheets, weekly journal entries by students and instructor, 104 Exit Interview notes, video presentation notes, and speaking practice notes); b) three 25 minute interviews (transcripts of interviews between students and instructor); and c) classroom observation fieldnotes and reflection notes of interviews (made by the instructor). Individuals involved in the data collection will be the instructor.

There are no know risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researcher. In the reporting of the data in the dissertation or any subsequent publications, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. This data will be kept on computer disks and file folders in my personal residence for a period of five years.

The expected benefits associated with your participation are reflection and awareness about your experience learning Spoken English, fluency practice, and the opportunity to
participate in a qualitative research study. Do no hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed.

Sincerely,

________________________ __________________________
Professor Fernanda P. Capraro
Principal Investigator Co-investigator
APPENDIX C

PILOT TEST OF JOURNAL TOPICS

Pilot Test (Fall 1998)
SE 104.5

The following questions and statements will be journal topics for a study that I will be conducting in the SE 104.5 course during the Winter quarter of 1999. Please read and write notes about the readability and clarity of the topics. We will then discuss your comments and notes.

1. What difficulties are you having with your Spoken English?
2. Which particular pronunciation problems are you aware of?
3. Describe the personal and education experiences you have had learning Spoken English.
4. What factors are influencing you to pass the Exit Interview and the Mock Teaching Test?
5. How do you feel about the university Spoken English requirement?
6. When you communicate with other people in English: a) What do you pay attention to in their Spoken English? b) What do you pay attention to in your Spoken English?
7. Describe the areas in your Spoken English that you are . . . a) seeing progress in; b) not seeing improvement in.
8. What types of things are you doing to improve your Spoken English?
9. What is happening to your identity as you are learning Spoken English?
10. What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation problems?
11. Describe several new things you have learned in Spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.
12. Describe what it has been like for you to learn Spoken English this quarter?
13. How do you think the reflective journal topics have affected your learning of Spoken English
The following questions and statements will be used in a study that I will be conducting in the SE 104.5 course during the Winter quarter of 1999. Please read and write notes about the readability and clarity of the topics.

1. What difficulties do you feel you have with your Spoken English? In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?
2. Describe the experiences you have had learning Spoken English. Both: a) Formal Instruction, b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers
3. For what reasons do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?
4. How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in order to teach?
5. When you communicate with other people in English: a) What do you pay attention to in their Spoken English? b) What do you pay attention to in your Spoken English?
6. Describe the areas in your Spoken English that you are . . . a) seeing progress in; b) not seeing improvement in.
7. What types of things are you doing to improve your Spoken English?
8. As you are learning and using Spoken English, do you recognize any changes in your attitude, personality, or sense of identity?
9. What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?
10. Describe several new things you have learned in Spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.
11. Reflect on your learning of Spoken English this quarter. For example: a) How do you feel about what you learned, b) how you learned, and c) what you want to learn?
12. In what ways has thinking and writing about your Spoken English affected your learning of it?
APPENDIX D

JOURNAL ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS AND JOURNAL TOPICS

Instructions for Journal Entries

You will find attached a list of journal topics for this quarter. Each week you will be writing a journal entry on an assigned topic. These entries will be written outside of class time. The purpose of these writing assignments is to help you think about and describe your experience of learning spoken English this quarter. For each journal entry you have the option of: 1) sending it by e-mail; 2) typing it; 3) writing it in longhand; or 4) recording your entry on a cassette tape. Please keep your writing to a maximum of one page for each weekly topic, and if you decide to record your response, please keep it to a maximum of five minutes for each one. In this assignment, your ideas, feelings, and thoughts are the important things, not your grammar or spelling.

Every Monday, I will collect your entry assigned the previous week. For example, Week 1 topic will be collected on Monday of the second week, Week 2 topic will be collected on Monday of the third week and so forth.

If you have any questions about the topics, please feel free to ask. I will make a copy of each entry you turn in and give the original back to you. Please keep your originals, because at the end of the quarter you will be summarizing your spoken English learning experience.

Journal Topics:

WEEK 1  What difficulties do you feel you have when you speak English?
         In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?

WEEK 2  Describe the experiences you have had learning spoken English in your native country and in an English speaking country. Both:
         a) Formal Instruction,
         b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers
WEEK 3  Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?  
How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in spoken English in order to teach?

WEEK 4  When you communicate with other people in English:  
a) What do you pay attention to in their spoken English?  
b) What do you pay attention to in your spoken English?

WEEK 5  Describe the areas in your spoken English that you are . . .  
a) seeing progress in;  
b) not seeing improvement in.

How are the weekly journal questions affecting your learning of spoken English?

WEEK 6  What types of things are you doing to improve your spoken English?

WEEK 7  As you are learning and using spoken English, what changes do you recognize in your attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way you feel about yourself?

WEEK 8  What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?  
Describe several new things you have learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.

In what ways does the learning that you have done in this course relate to other courses you are taking where English is spoken and expected?

WEEK 9  Reflect on your learning of Spoken English this quarter.  How do you feel about . . .  
a) what you learned?  
b) how you learned?  
c) what you want to learn?

WEEK 10  How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?

Journal Topics (Revised)

WEEK 1  What difficulties do you feel you have when you speak English?  
In particular, what pronunciation problems are you having?
WEEK 2  Describe the experiences you have had learning spoken English in your native country and in an English speaking country. Both:
a) Formal Instruction,
b) Informal Conversation and/or Interaction with Native Speakers

WEEK 3  Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview? How do you feel about the university’s requirement that all international TAs must be certified in spoken English in order to teach?

WEEK 4  When you communicate with other people in English:
a) What do you pay attention to in their spoken English? 
b) What do you pay attention to in your spoken English?

WEEK 5  Describe the areas in your spoken English that you are . . .
a) seeing progress in;
b) not seeing improvement in.

WEEK 6  What types of things are you doing to improve your spoken English? What strategies are you using in your video presentations to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?

WEEK 7  As you are learning and using spoken English, what changes do you recognize in your attitude, thinking skills, personality, or the way you feel about yourself?

WEEK 8  Describe several new things you have learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, with your conversation partner, or other people outside of the Spoken English program.

How has thinking and writing about your spoken English affected your learning of it this quarter?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol I
Project: Spoken English Learning Experience of ITAs

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer
Interviewee:

Questions:

1) What experience do you have speaking English, both instruction and conversation and/or interaction with native speakers?

2) Why do you want to pass the 104 Exit Interview?

3) How do you feel about the university spoken English requirement?

4) What pronunciation and language problems are you aware of when you speak English?

5) How is writing these journal entries affecting your learning of spoken English?
Interview Protocol II
Project: Spoken English Learning Experience of ITAs

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Questions:

1) What types of things have you been doing this quarter to improve your spoken English?
2) What areas in your spoken English are you seeing progress in? When you talk with native and nonnative speakers in English, what do you pay attention to in their speech? In your speech?
3) Are you seeing any changes in yourself as you are learning spoken English? Explain.

Interview Protocol III
Project: Spoken English Learning Experience of ITAs

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Questions:

1) What strategies are you using in your video presentations to help compensate for your weaknesses in spoken English?
2) What new things have you learned in spoken English this quarter in the Spoken English classroom, tutorials, from your conversation partner, or outside of the Spoken English Program?
3) How has thinking and writing on the various journal topics affected your learning of spoken English? Explain.
APPENDIX F
EXCERPTS FROM JOURNAL ENTRIES, INTERVIEWS, AND FIELDNOTES

In order to avoid making this document voluminous, I randomly selected excerpts from the participants’ eight journal entries and three interviews. For each participant, I will provide an excerpt from one of their journal entries and interviews. The complete journal entries and full interview transcripts are available by e-mailing, capraro.2@osu.edu. I have also included two excerpts of the classroom fieldnotes that I wrote during the Winter quarter of 1999 as part of the data collection methods. The complete notes can also be obtained by e-mailing the above address.

Excerpts from the participants’ journal entries: I have not made any grammatical or spelling corrections in the participants’ journal entries.

Seung-Ho

WEEK 4
When I communicate with other people in English, I pay attention to their questions, especially, what, how, when and others. Sometimes I confuse these questions. And I also pay attention to the situation words, for example, when we discuss about school life, we can use many words about school life, major field, classes and so forth. When we discuss travel, we use many words about concerning travel, for example, historical sites, museum, mountain, beach and others. I think these situation words are important to communicate with other people.

Also I pay attention to my pronunciation. I feel comfortable whenever I pay attention to this problem. And I pay attention to my sentences and vocabulary. As we know, the sentence order of English is different from Korean language. At any rate, this is my problem to solve this quarter.

Tadashi

WEEK 1
Roughly speaking, I have two major difficulty in speaking English. They are pronunciation and composition of English sentences. Firstly, let me tell you about
problems in pronounciation. It is very hard for me to pronounce correctly vowels and consonants we don’t use in Japanese. As you know, there are many those kinds of sounds, such as th, r, l, dZ, z and so on. And we have only 5 vowels, a, i, u, e, o.

I also have difficulty in distinguishing similar sounds when I listen to English, such as (th, s, ʃ) and (l, r) and (’ , œ, ə, ø) and (v, b). These problems are kind of “multiplier effect”. Because I can’t distinguish sounds when I listen, I can’t pronounce correctly. Because I can’t pronounce correctly, I can’t distinguish sounds when I listen. It’s what you call “vicious circle”.

As for English composition, I sometimes get stuck and it takes time to make sentences. I think that is because I don’t think by using English. I must be translating from Japanese to English unintentionally. Also, I more than often find myself looking for proper expression. I think my vocabulary is not enough, and I don’t have custom of using various expressions, too.

However, I tend to get stuck even when I speak Japanese. This tendency is clear especially when I try to be as correct as I can. I tend to think before I speak. And the bad thing is it takes time because I am stupid. So, it is important to know the cause of problem. Lack of fluency in English not necessarily resulted from English problem. There can be some kinds of “personal problems”.

Xiaolan

WEEK 3

(1) This is the requirement of our Department. If I can’t pass the 105 (teaching test) in the first year, my stipend in the second year will be cut by 25%.

(2) This is the hope of both my boyfriend and me. If I can’t pass 104.5 this quarter or 105 next quarter. I can’t go back China this summer quarter, then we have to postpone our wedding half an year later.

(3) To successfully pass the exit interview also represent that I’ve really made progress in my spoken English. This is one aim (beside major study) for me to come USA.

So, I am eagerly looking forward to pass the interview.

How do you feel . . .

I feel it is indeed a necessary and reasonable requirement since teaching is a kind of communication act. To express oneself clearly and freely in English is the first step for international TA. The spoken English series for int’l student is well designed and does help us to improve our spoken English abilities from every aspect.
Ho Yeon

WEEK 8

I think that the knowledge or enough information affect considerably on my spoken English. If I have lot of information about something, and know exactly about some topics, then I can speak fluently. Otherwise, I am more likely to be hesitating to talk to others. Similarly, in my presentation, if I am confident to say about some topics, I seem to speak more fluently.

And, I realize that the pronunciation is more important to communicate with others. For example, when I talked with my conversation partner, she talked about ‘Kurdishi’ people. But, I failed to understand what she is saying. I thought I’ve never heard about ‘Kurdishi’ word before, so that I couldn’t talk about that topic because I had no idea about that. However, after the time, I realized that I already have known about that before in Korea. Because the pronunciation is different from that in Korea (Korean pronounces it differently), I did not recognize that is same thing as I’ve known.

As I mentioned before, more organized, more informative, and more active thinking is helpful to my spoken English.

I think that writing also affects my spoken English, because good writing can indicate good grammar skill. Also, good writing show good organized thinking. Thus, I believe that writing skill is correlated with spoken English.

Qizhen

WEEK 5

The areas in my spoken English that I’m seeing progress in:

1. Some specific problem with my pronunciation, such as r ↔ l. Even though I confuse them sometimes, I do improve my distinction between them. Another example, T ↔ s. I know how to pronounce them, (I sometime can’t distinguish them when I have to fit it in the sentence

2. I improve my intonation. My intonation used to be very flat. It is improved through practice.

3. Timing (Pause between the though group.) I used to read a sentence word by word. This help me with my fluency.
4. I overcome my shyness for my spoken English. I was very shy/quiet person because I didn’t want to make mistake. This keep me away from practice. Now, I’m developing some conversation skill with others, which help me.

Not seeing progress:

5. Some troublesome pronunciations are still hanging around

Excerpts from the participants’ interviews: I have not made any grammatical corrections in the participants’ responses. I will use an abbreviation for the participants’ names and also for my name in the interview dialogues.

Qizhen

Interview #2 (February 25, 1999, p. 2)

F: So here you talk a little bit more about uhm that you pay you pay attention to the words that people stress
Q: Yes
F: Right?
Q: Yes. Because this uh word stress is hearings uh capture (laughs) capturing capturing your hearing
F: Oh capture
Q: Capture (laughs), yeah
F: (Laughs). Capture your hearing, right?
Q: (Coughs). Yeah
F: Okay
Q: So they will prompt prompt into you’re your ap your mind
F: They do. They do serve as prompts. Mm hmm. They serve as prompts. You mention that intonation is something else that you pay attention to because it can change the meaning of sentences
Q: Yes. Sometime yeah sometimes they may use the same sentence but they will use some kind with uh some kind ironic uh meaning
F: Hmm. Are you able to pick up any of those ironic meanings? For example,
Q: Yes to some obvious. Mm hmm
F: Some more obvious ones?
Q: Yes, but as uh as to the uh as those who deep enough to the culture background
F: Okay
Q: Ih it may be hard for me to catch it.
Ho Yeon

Interview #4 (April 28, 1999, pp. 1-2)

H: Okay, I think the motivation and personality make that kind of attitude, yeah the (clearing throat) activity. Uh for example, (laughs) uh when I compare Korean student and Chinese students I think in my subjective standpoint (laughs) uh the Chinese students are more likely more active than Korean.

F: Hmmm

H: I yeah that is my subjective (laughs) pers yeah standpoint. Uh so I think they have I don’t know they have more strong motivation to improve their spoken English than Korean. Uh I don’t know what they are more active and more aggressive (laughs) aggressive (laughs) uh but yeah the compared to different country. Yeah, I (laughs) observed that kind of student those Chinese students are more active and so they can improve more fast.

F: Hmm

H: than Korean students. And also if someone uh have more strong motivation of the pass Mock Teaching Test or for example department put push them (laughs) to pass Mock Teaching Test, they have they can have more strong motivation. So uh they think they make themselves to be more active or more uhm aggressive (laughs) in speaking English, and also uhm I I think if if people are active to speak uh uh they can have more chance to speak English. So that uh that uh makes them that that makes uh people uhm to practice more and pronounce more so uh that uh help (laughs). I think that helps uh people to improve uh some pronunciation and the use of English usage, yeah.

F: Okay

H: So I think that kind of attitude very (laughs) helpful (laughs) for students to practice English.

F: When when did you realize this?

H: When did you realize this?

F: Mm hmm

H: Uhm I think I realized this very slowly (laughs) uh but uh the last last the two quarters ago?

F: Uh huh

H: Yea, yes (laughs). Uh in my department and in the English class uh when I meet some (laughs) some students yeah I realized.
Interview #1 (February 3, 1999, pp. 2-3)

F: Okay. Um (pause) in your first journal entry you talked about um difficulties that you have when you speak English and you talked about how you become nervous depending on who you’re talking

X: Yeah

F: to. Um would you like to talk about that a little bit?

X: Hmm a little bit.

F: So when do you feel the most comfortable speaking in English?

X: With myself.

F: Okay

X: Sometimes I will speak to myself.

F: Mm hmm

X: I just force myself to practice. I don’t think I can speak more fluently when when I speak with somebody else somebody else and sometimes if I talk to such as students from Korea, from Japan

F: Uh huh

X: we can talk quite a long time perhaps one or two hours and if I speak to native speaker

F: Mm hmm

X: I uh (laughs) I don’t know why I can’t find a common topic

F: Uh huh

X: and I feel very embarrass.

F: Uh huh

X: Yeah, oh what a good weather, have you done your homework?

F: Right

X: Yeah, then I don’t know what should I say next,

F: It’s hard thinking about things to talk

X: Uh, yeah

F: about.

X: and about when I talk to native speaker uh I think I know they’re native speaker. So they can know very exactly all the mistakes I make.

F: Mm hmm

X: Any why whether my pronunciation is clear or is correct, whether whether my Engl uh whether the words I choose is correct. So I’m a little nervous. Just

F: Hmm

X: something like that they’re judge I will (laughs) they’re judge I’m a (laughs) a person that’s not a not a uh not a person be judged but a little finger and uh ther um there is a very interesting phenomena. I don’t know whether you know it. Some sometimes uh such as I spok I speak English but native speak native speaker can’t understand me and the foreign student can understand each other (laughs).
Interview #3 (March 19, 1999, pp. 38-40)

F: Let me ask you just final question
T: Yeah yeah
F: and then we’ll just end. Uhm going back to the question that I’ve started off with. How has uhm writing the entries and doing these interviews
T: Mm hmm
F: affected your learning of spoken English this quarter?
T: (Mumbling) difficult question this this (inaudible)?
F: Yeah
[pause]
T: So I I I try to mm I try to be objective. I try I need more insight into my into what I’m doing when I speak English that’s a good
F: So it you need to be you “I need more insight into what I’m doing?”
T: Yeah right and uh I otherwise I never had any that kind of chance to reflect my English skills and uh I think I could find some problem uh in the in the process in the process of detecting my problems yeah. I I could find my fault. I could find my defect so that that’s a good chance I think yeah.
F: Uhm did you get any of that kind of awareness from your tutorials?
T: Tutorials? Mm uh tutorials for video presentation?
F: Mm hmm
T: Uh yeah yeah. Uh when I’m pointed out my pronunciation or intonation problems, I realize that that they’re weird or strange to native speakers. Uh otherwise I I never I can’t I can’t mmm I can not realize that that my English is not good. So it’s it’s pretty uh humbling (laughs).
F: It’s pretty what?
T: Humbling
F: Humbling
T: Yeah yeah and uh you you always uh correct my pronunciation and you uh pronounce that correctly with me.
F: Mm hmm
T: It’s very good good good practice, good good lesson I think
F: Hmm
T: and uh I wh when I get home be before I sleep I sometimes li listen to that tape and uh I just repeat wh what you say uh yeah, like “problem” (laughs) or
F: (Laughs)
T: “Profit” yeah I I do that yeah. It’s very good yeah, and I after you you say that word and I after that I say for myself. And I can I found how different our pronunciations are.
F: Hmm
T: So that’s quite yeah happy (?) yeah good lesson yeah. It was very good.
F: Okay. We can stop it there.
Seung-Ho

Interview #2 (February 25, 1999, pp. 9-10)

F: Uh m in your video presentations you’ve done two so far this quarter, right?
S: Mm hmm
F: One one and two. What strategies are you using to compensate for your pronunciation difficulties?
S: Yes, also I have some there are many kinds of uh many kinds of words cause /z/ and /ɻ/ and /dʒɪə/ and /dʒɪə/. Uh for example, decision or strategy
F: Mm hmm
S: or decision-making
F: Mm hmm
S: Yes, something like that
F: Especially in your field
S: Yes, especially in my field
F: Right?
S: With battles, yeah. With some uh uh word if I if I have my weak point weak point that’s uh that was so if I practice this I read the uh I repeat these words these words many times so
F: So you practice some of the words that you’re gonna use in your presentation?
S: Yeah
F: Is there anything else that you do to help to help compensate for your difficulties?
S: Mm especially my major field is very special I think that I’m not familiar with the my field Military History because there is no class about Military History in Korea
F: Hmm
S: Just uh only international or political history, social history, economic history, and others. As I said there are no civilian military historian in Korea now. That’s that’s very extraordinary case in the world I think. So uh Military History is very some kind some
F: Hmm
S: in some respect Military History the World Military History is uh still not familiar for me (slight laughter)
F: Hmm
S: Yeah, not very familiar with me but uh I have to read many kind of many books about Military History yeah
F: So you need to do more reading?
S: Yes, more reading and uh
Excerpts from classroom fieldnotes: I did not edit spelling or grammar mistakes in these notes.

1/22/99 An economic discussion between Tadashi and Xiaolan

Three students presented their first video presentation in class yesterday. The students were Ho Yeon, Xiaolan, Tadashi- three of them participants in the study. Tadashi volunteered to go first. He went up to the front of the classroom and prepared the transparency machine. His transparencies were handwritten and not neatly written- not in straight lines and perhaps written in a hurry. He tends to wear stone-colored clothing-colors that have clarity and an earthy purity to them. His cheeks do tend to have a warm glow and he has a thin beard as would be common for an Asian male. Their bodies are not prone to have a lot of hair. He began his presentation on a basic economic concept. Xiaolan made a comment that his presentation was like hers. She hadn’t presented yet. Tadashi and Xiaolan went back and forth trying to decide if they were talking about the same thing. At one point Tadashi or both asked if that was alright that their topics were similar. It was alright with me. Anyway they finally came to the conclusion that they were covering slightly different things. So Tadashi proceeded to present his topic. I began writing notes as he spoke. He made a humorous comment and at first, kept his arms folded in front of his chest. Xiaolan was sitting two seats to my right began to softly comment that maybe she should go first because it would provide foundation for Tadashi’s presentation. I interrupted Tadashi and said that Xiaolan wanted to suggest something. Tadashi stopped and discussed with Xiaolan her suggestion for her to go first. He was agreeable, collected his transparencies and let Xiaolan do her presentation first.

Qizhen was in class yesterday. She was in the seat next to mine on the right. She kept her hands covered over her forehead and eyes during much of the class. I had a tutorial with her later that afternoon from 2:50-3:15. At the beginning of the tutorial she commented that it was warm and removed her olive green wool sweater; she had a black and white thin-striped shirt buttoned all the way to the top. Her eyes have an exotic almond shape to them with striking black eyebrows and eyelashes.

Seung-Ho wears his hair very short and it seems to be fine. His complexion is very clear, an earthen pot color, and he wears frameless small glasses. He always appears to have an expressionless, serious face, perhaps its his military training in the Korean Navy and his study of military history. He is limber, in good form, short, and his body movements are flexible and fluid. He wore a blue and watermelon red (softer) colored sport raincoat. Perfect for yesterday’s mild rainy weather. I had a tutorial with him after class. When I asked him at the end of the tutorial about participating in the study he commented that it would help his learning. He asked me if I knew what cybercards were and proceeded to explain what they were. He said that he would send me one that evening. I said that I had seen some that the SE director had received. When I checked my email this morning I noticed he had sent one.
Getting back to the video presentations, Tadashi did his presentation second. Before he began he and the cameraperson, also Japanese, said some things softly to each other in Japanese. They seemed to be talking about his videotape because he was looking at the camera as he spoke. I didn’t comment on their use of Japanese. Sometimes I realize that it is much quicker and easier to use one’s native language. The interchange was soft and pleasant sounding. Some of the other students laughed softly realizing that they were speaking to each other in Japanese. In doing his presentation he made reference several times to Xiaolan’s presentation. He used hand gestures and stood by the transparency machine as he spoke. His pronunciation didn’t have the clarity of Xiaolan’s, but he used good examples and the organization of the material on his transparencies helped the comprehensibility of his language. His voiced /th/’s were substituted with /dz/. He also had some l/r substitutions which is common for Japanese speakers.

Ho Yeon was the last presenter in yesterday’s class. She wore black pants and an olive/autumn grass color sweater. Her neck length hair may have been pulled back in a pony tail. Her complexion is foundation pale, and she had on her small framed glasses. She used 2 (?) transparencies with large type and centered in the middle of the page. She moved from besides the transparency machine to I think behind the table [OC (observer comment): may not recall well]. At one point leaning against the table with her hands out in front of her laying on the front of her body. She talked a little quickly and with clarity, framing her content, and using transitional words. She also rephrased some points. She did much better than her impromptu a few weeks ago. She definitely was better prepared, fluent, and confident. She had her qualifying exam she was worried about the week that we had our 2 diagnostics; she mentioned this to me in her tutorial a few days ago. She ended her presentation returning back to the first transparency with some summarizing remarks.

The last 10 minutes of class the students worked in pairs on a fluency activity. Each pair received a card about a situation that was described to a psychologist. The students had to discuss possible suggestions to give to the writer about his/her particular problem. Tadashi and a Korean female talked about divorce and how in their countries the child of divorced parents is ridiculed or ostracized by others. Tadashi said children suffer when the parents get a divorce and that the child takes the last name of the parent with whom s/he lives.

Ho Yeon and the Vietnamese student talked about baby boys wearing pink. The Vietnamese student was adamant about boys not wearing pink, whereas Ho Yeon said that is parents who create these gender role perceptions. She smiled and opening gave her viewpoint even though her partner clearly felt that boys should not wear pink.

Reflective

I liked the discussion that occurred between Xiaolan and Tadashi about their video presentations. I didn’t interfere; I let them negotiate and come to some agreement. It gave them an opportunity to utilize language in a negotiative function as well as taking
charge of their topics. Even though Tadashi and the other Japanese student used some Japanese with each other, I didn’t feel that it went against the purposes of the class. It was very quick and easy for them to make that interchange. Plus I want to create an atmosphere that is positive, comfortable, and allows the students to take initiative with their language and who they are. I was very happy to see Ho Yeon openly and with a smile express her opinion about boys wearing pink. The important thing was that she talked and was not afraid to express her opposing view. She utilized some sophisticated language and ideas to express her view. She talked about how parent’s perceptions encourage set gender roles.

Monday, March 1, 1999 “Think Tank”

Xiaolan turned in Week 7 journal entry in class. I gave Tadashi the names of grammar books that he had asked about for his friend. I have Seung-Ho another copy of the revised topics and explained that on his last entry I had noticed that he wrote the older version of Week 5 entry. I emphasized using the revised version to write the entries.

We began reviewing thought groups (the handout from last week). Ho Yeon correctly pronounced contraceptive and I said it’s pronounced conerceptive. (I just checked in SA [Sound Advice, course textbook] in nt reduction; so actually I was right. I was thinking that perhaps I had made a mistake with this pronunciation). Xiaolan had problems with how to pronounce “pseudonymous”. I couldn’t remember how even though I had looked it up. Tadashi was a little slow reading his sentence and mistressed the word, child-rearing (OC: it may have been someone else). The female student sitting next to Ho Yeon said psychologist instead of sociologist as she was reading. Ho Yeon said sociologist after that student read the word. Seung-Ho mispronounced “colleagues”. I repeated that word after he finished reading. He also didn’t use a flap in poverty. I pointed out to use a flap and he repeated with /pə'verɪj/.

We continued with Unit 10 of SA. I did listening practice exercises for the whole unit. Xiaolan didn’t hear the –s at the end of drives (What drives him crazy?). She had a puzzled look on her face. I wrote the sentence on the board. Ho Yeon missed spend; she thought there was an –s ending (Consumers spend more money than before). I also wrote the first part of that sentence on the board. Seung-Ho got He’s (is).

Qizhen explained what a runny nose is. When you have a cold it’s what comes out of your nose.

In the remaining part of class we talked about the community contact assignment. Xiaolan hadn’t done hers. She apologized for not doing it. Seung-Ho actively provided information when the class fell silent. He said that in Korea faculty is well respected. A professor he knows went there for two months (m´nt´ś; his pronunciation). The professor said the students are number one (using his numb [thumb] to demonstrate). Seung-Ho also said that as a military historian there are opportunities to be a counsel to
the president, defense department or a historical museum in addition to a faculty position. Ho Yeon would like to be a faculty member in Korea because they have vacations in the summer and winter. She laughed and smiled as she said this. Ho Yeon also said there are opportunities as a research analyst, statistician, and marketing analyst in her field. The female Korean student sitting next to Ho Yeon said that [because] a professor earns more because actually Ho Yeon wants to be a faculty. They are respected in Korea. Tadashi said that as Ho Yeon mentioned there are faculty positions and research positions in “think tanks”; I repeated the word to make sure that’s what I heard. He repeated it again clearly pronouncing the voiceless /th/ in think and /t/ in tank.

Qizhen talked about Global warming and reconstructing the weather model (?) as future topics in her field. She further mentioned that this model hasn’t been reconstructed since the sixteenth century. Seung-Ho mentioned 2 topics- terrorism and regional conflicts as future hot topics of the 21st century. He added that there are 3 types of terrorism: revolutionary, international, and domestic. He gave the example of the IRA - killing 3,000 people in 30 years as international terrorism. I asked him to explain revolutionary terrorism. What he explained sounded like a “coup de etat” and he confirmed it.

Qizhen said that funding is a big “issue” for choosing advisors. Seung-Ho mentioned that you choose your advisor based on your period, and country of interest. There are 6 military historians in his department. Ho Yeon mentioned that information privacy and customer service provided on internet are hot topics of research in her field (FRM [Family Resource Management]).
APPENDIX G

EXCERPTS OF SPEAKING PRACTICE, VIDEO PRESENTATION, EXIT INTERVIEW, AND MEMBERCHECK NOTES

I have provided an excerpt for each of the following categories: a) speaking practice, b) video presentations, c) Exit Interview, and d) membercheck notes. The speaking practice and video presentation notes were part of the participants’ SE 104.5 class requirements, and I also used them as documents in this study. The Exit Interview notes were written by two SE instructors, who were the interviewers of the participants’ Exit Interviews. I also wrote membercheck notes of the participants’ journal entries and interview data in order to conduct a membercheck during the third interview of this study. The complete set of notes are available by e-mailing capraro.2@osu.edu.

Speaking Practice Notes: These notes were taken during an individual speaking practice session with Seung-Ho.

1/21/99 Individual Speaking Practice

Grammar I take (I’m taking)
Tense there are (there was)
b → v rebellion
East learning (Eastern learning)
Peasant’s war
Grammar Spain revolution (Spanish)
s → s ships
v → b invaded
turtle ship
p → f Parker
s → s problems
v → b advisor
tS → dZ ancient
**Video Presentation Notes:** These notes were taken during Tadashi’s third video presentation in the SE 104.5 class.

March 1999 Video Presentation #3

*Solving linear programming problem by using a graph*

D → z that, there
a → ow problem
a → O model, profit
‘r → ar per, firm
t → q constraint
stress computer chips
T → s nothing

great organization of content on the board
good explanation of decision variable
rate of speaking has definitely gotten faster!
good definition of terms as you explained the steps
good comprehension check
confident, organized, expressive about content
good use of “in the same way”
your grammar has also improved

**Exit Interview Notes:** These notes were taken by two SE instructors during Ho Yeon’s Exit Interview.

Winter 1999 Exit Interview

Really see change in communicative ability. She keeps at it till she gets across her point. She has improved a lot in fluency & expression.

Rater: EEC Placement: 105

She takes charge, really works at communicating and remains cheerful and poised. Sometimes it’s a struggle, but she gets there. Monitors. Needs to keep working on gr [grammar] and get feedback. Also l/r.

Rater: SS Placement: 105
Membercheck Notes: These notes are an excerpt of the summary of Qizhen’s SE learning experience based on her journal entries one through six and Interviews One and Two. The “you” or “your”, “me” or “my”, and “I” in these notes refer to the participant.

Qizhen Chinese Female March 1999

Pursuing MS in geological sciences (paleontology) - completing this Spring
been in the U.S. for (1 1/2 years, Sept. 1997)
from Canton (Southern part of China)
jet black hair, dark eyes and eyebrows
long hair with bangs, wears pulled back away from face with barrette; was shy and quiet
but has become more open; feels personality plays a role in her spoken English

WEEK 1

• your mood and tiredness affect your spoken English; may not be fluent if tired and nervous; it affects your fluency and can not think clearly; the words just slip away
• don’t feel comfortable speaking to strangers because you get nervous
  ex. sound like an airhead especially in exit interview because the interviewers are taking notes and that makes me nervous; my friend said to not focus on what other people are thinking but I still get nervous
• need to build up your vocabulary, in particular general vocabulary
  ex. you get frustrated when you can not understand slang or idioms that people use
• you pretend to understand to keep the conversation going and not irritate anyone
• don’t have enough intonation; pattern that is not American; it’s kind of flat; not enough change in intonation range; it’s a regular rhythm; worked on the problem last quarter but it didn’t seem to have worked
• you always delete consonants especially in consonant clusters; “I always leave some of them out”
• It’s hard to distinguish r/l, w/v when you speak fluently. If they are taken out of sentences, you can focus on them and pronounce them right. r/l are common pronunciation problems for Chinese speakers who speak Cantonese whereas Mandarin has a lot of r and l.