ONE-ON-ONE TUTORING IN AN EFL ENVIRONMENT: MEETING THE ACADEMIC WRITING NEEDS OF CHINESE TERTIARY STUDENTS

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Teaching International Languages

by
Joseph James Ettinger
Fall 2015
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughters Coralie and Jocelyn

who inspired me to embark on this journey,

and to my friends Yun and Shiming

who welcome me at the end of it.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Where to begin when one’s success in building a life is due to the generosity of so many others? I have received much; please indulge me as I acknowledge those who made my happiness a reality.

As I drafted this thesis I often thought of my daughters, Jocelyn and Coralie, who convinced me (in spite of my age) to pursue a higher education. They saved my life by showing me how to build a new one. I often thought of the many professors who supported me at every point, impressing upon me the power of encouragement. I often thought of Dr. Saundra Wright who opened the first door that would eventually lead me to my future career teaching English in China. More than once she gently steered me clear of potentially poor decisions. I often thought of my thesis committee—(Chairperson) Dr. Saundra Wright and (Reader) Dr. Ela Thurgood—who not only guided me in this research but provided the feedback to make my work truly meaningful. I often thought of the professors and staff of the English Department at California State University, Chico—the finest and most engaged on this campus. I often thought of my tutees in China, without whose contributions, in the form of many hundreds of pages of essays and hundreds of hours of time, this thesis would have little to discuss. I often thought of the profound generosity of Yun Song and Shiming Zhang whose open-handedness to this researcher while in China cannot be exaggerated—receiving a virtual stranger and treating him as a beloved friend. I often thought of my fellow TIL graduate
students and how they regularly provided a path for me when I was lost or confused. I often thought of my dear friend Zain Alhowaidi who never failed to rescue me from my self-doubt and who allayed my anxieties about preparing this thesis for submission. I often thought about Professor Du Wei who, because of her open mind and spirit, removed barriers to my research in China, as well as Professor Li Song who, with experience and wisdom, helped put the researcher’s findings, and difficulties, in proper perspective. How many others? I cannot count, but I can humbly express my happy gratitude.

To all of you I dedicate any good that I might accomplish in my modest efforts to bring English proficiency, and the promise that this can hold, to my future students.
PREFACE

This thesis is an exploration of both EFL writing instruction in the universities of the People’s Republic of China as well as one-on-one tutoring in this learning environment. Why this interest? For years I witnessed, in the context of one-on-one tutoring at CSU, Chico, how Chinese students frequently struggled to improve their academic writing proficiencies, as well as the persistence of their English-language errors and habits. Furthermore, in the context of Teaching International Languages MA coursework, I noted how language-learning theory failed to address this specific difficulty with sufficient clarity. I then began to ask questions about how Chinese university students learn English, and academic English in particular, in their home universities. Recognizing the linguistic chasm that separates the Chinese and English languages I wondered exactly what EFL writing instruction looked like on the other side of our world.

It is no secret at California State University, Chico that I am an avid proponent of one-on-one language tutoring. While cultivating a personal interest in the Chinese language and culture, within me grew a strong desire to research how tutoring would fit into such an EFL environment. Studies of EFL tutoring for academic writing in this environment are virtually nonexistent; at the same time I wanted to know what benefits, if any, writing tutoring could bring to Chinese university ELLs, and, if so, would they be measurable? Furthermore, how would one-on-one tutoring be received in
this EFL environment? To this end, and over the course of two and a half months, I conducted studies of one-on-one tutoring at two Chinese universities. Although this thesis will discuss more fully all aspects of this study, I can state here that the findings for one-on-one tutoring are quite encouraging.

But what about the first question—the nature of EFL writing instruction in China’s tertiary education? Through classroom observations as well as in reviewing the research of others this study explored this very topic, investigating English writing instruction with both a wide-angle view of English in China as well as in a review of pertinent literature that examines classroom practices. Language-learning theory has its place in understanding the complexities of EFL writing instruction, but ultimately, for understanding the reality of such teaching and learning, it is the classroom context which is most germane.
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ABSTRACT

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There exists an enormous demand for English language instruction in the PRC, and tertiary-level academic writing instruction is one facet that is often underserved. This study undertook to explore this need. First, at one university in the PRC the researcher engaged in observations of EFL writing classrooms, witnessing the affordances and constraints therein. Second, at two universities the researcher engaged in one-on-one tutoring with tertiary-level ELLs for their English academic writing skills. Such tutoring had the objective of gauging its reception in this EFL environment as well as measuring any potential improvements in students’ writing. This study found that EFL writing classrooms, while providing many positive affordances for students, contain limitations which effectively deny ELLs sufficient input and feedback on their individual EFL writing. Additionally, this study found that one-on-one tutoring, in addressing this
paucity, is both well received by students and can result in measureable improvements to their EFL academic writing. This study concludes with the recommendation that an EFL writing center be established at a select PRC university in order to broaden the possibilities of tutoring university students in the EFL writing skills and test for its potentially wider application.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

English in a Chinese Context

China’s Unprecedented Effort

During the twentieth century the English language grew to become the global *lingua franca* and there is every indication that its international role will hold well into the twenty-first century. Adjunct to this role is a call to further English-language education wherever there is interest and need (Pan and Block 391). Predictably, wherever English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) is taught there are unique challenges to teachers and students as well as to the institutions that bring them together. The degree of dissimilarity between a country’s native language and the English language, along with cultural differences and other local factors, work to determine just how steep the learning curve will be. In this regard, few educational endeavors match the challenge faced by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in its bid to foster English proficiency within its enormous population—and to do so as quickly as possible.

The challenges of teaching and learning English in this educational theater are many, yet of particular interest is how English writing is both taught and learned at the university level. There are many complicating China-specific factors influencing English and English writing instruction, including: an educational policy that is designed and driven from the top down; a complex college and university system which makes
decisions based on the content, as well as the results, of national examinations; a wide array of teaching philosophies, pedagogies, methods, and materials among EFL writing professors; a student population which is diverse in its educational goals and whose needs, it appears, are often not met by instructional realities; and finally, the sheer difficulty of learning English—a language in nearly every measurement very distant from Chinese. Yet the nation pushes forward. In its education policies China is racing headlong into the future as few nations have before, all the while pulling hundreds of millions of student-citizens along in this endeavor. Many aspects of English learning and teaching in China reflect a quiet, subsurface chaos—as if no one really knows exactly where this tremendous national effort will lead.

The Research Questions

Within the overall pedagogical framework of EFL instruction, one of the most difficult skills to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) is that of writing at the “academic level”—at what is generally described as university-level English written discourse (Jiang 95). In truth, acquiring and refining this discourse skill is difficult even for many native speakers of English; for non-native speakers to achieve any degree of proficiency is truly commendable. For Chinese ELLs in particular, and for reasons that include inadequate writing instruction and a wide linguistic chasm, the goal of proficiency in English academic writing is a tremendous undertaking.

In light of China’s unique effort to establish English as a kind of ‘national second language’ two sets of questions guided this research. The first concerns how EFL writing is taught in university classrooms: How is English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL)
writing actually taught in China’s universities? What are instructors’ orientations and approaches to teaching, and what are the affordances and constraints for instructors and students within their EFL writing classrooms? Against this backdrop of university-level EFL writing courses, and toward a better understanding of how to contribute to the learning of EFL academic writing, the second question asks: What benefits, if any, might one-on-one tutoring for academic writing bring to Chinese university students and would they be measurable? Furthermore, how would one-on-one tutoring be received by students in this EFL environment?

This thesis, and the research study that informed it, explore the environment which surrounds English academic-writing instruction in the universities of mainland China. It seeks to examine what actually occurs in English-writing classes in the PRC’s universities, and does so with the aim of contributing, through one-on-one tutoring, to the language-learning prospects of these students— principally where EFL academic writing is concerned.

Overview of this Thesis

Before exploring today’s EFL university classrooms in China there is much to be gained in sketching a larger picture of English-language instruction in this nation. To this end, this chapter includes a brief historical background of English-language instruction in the PRC, a background which explains how China during the 1970s and 80s found itself far behind other developing countries in terms of English literacy. As well, historical context gives us a better understanding of this nation’s current EFL instruction challenges.
Chapter II, in a wide-angle literature review of English writing instruction in the PRC, discusses many of the current EFL writing-instruction realities facing teachers and learners therein. In order to appreciate the language distinctions which make English such a problematic target language, this chapter will outline linguistic differences between the two languages and touch upon the debate regarding Chinese and Western rhetorical styles—distinct traditions of rhetoric often faulted for the Chinese’ difficulty in acquiring English academic writing proficiency. Because pedagogical orientations are fundamental elements in EFL writing instruction, there follows a brief discussion of second-language writing theory, looking at the paradigms that today inform EFL writing classrooms in China. Finally, we will look at current literature that explores the competencies and deficiencies of actual EFL writing instruction at the tertiary level in the PRC. In this review, of particular interest are studies wherein actual classroom instruction was observed, examining how students are introduced to and learn academic English.

Chapter III describes the methods employed in this research study, namely classroom observations of university-level EFL writing courses as well as one-on-one tutoring of Chinese students in their English academic writing skills. The tutoring component included an exit interview at one university and a questionnaire at the second, each designed to elicit feedback and commentary about how tutoring was perceived by the participating students. Chapter IV discusses the findings from the classroom observations as well as those from one-on-one tutoring. Regarding the observations in particular, and to a degree the tutoring as well, these findings are highly subjective, reflecting initial perceptions and subsequent analyses on the part of the researcher. The findings from tutoring also include ratings of (University 2) tutee’s essays. These essays
were rated by the researcher, as well as by two additional experienced tutors. Finally, Chapter Five discusses what the findings say with respect to the study’s two sets of research questions and makes recommendations for a next step.

Recent History of English-Language Instruction in China

A degree of historical context is in order because current language-learning challenges, particularly those faced by China’s front-line educators in their classrooms, can be addressed only with solutions which fit this nation’s unique cultural and historical context. The numbers alone impose limitations upon proposed solution(s) to these challenges: Within “Greater China” (mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) there are more than 112 million primary-school children studying English, and a total of at least 300 million learners of English within different levels of the education system (Li 36). This number of English-language aspirants nearly rivals the entire population of the US—the world’s third most populous country—and signals the importance that English represents for China’s future as well as the promise it holds for her citizenry.

Many of the current education challenges that face the People’s Republic of China have resulted from the country’s robust attempts to bring English-language teaching to the forefront of education (Hu 18). While this review does not intend to narrate the larger history of English language instruction in China (nor should it), viewing China’s recent-historical context allows one to better understand modern EFL instruction as well as the country’s current goals in their modern context. China’s recent history of English language instruction is one of extremes and is best considered within the political
and social contexts of the times, and having a working grasp of recent history helps one to better understand this dynamic, populous, and rising power.

The 1949 victory by the Communist forces, led by Mao Zedong, over the Nationalist forces ended China’s decades-long civil war and established the People’s Republic of China. The collective West, and in particular the US, had actively opposed the Communist Chinese’ efforts, whose victory resulted in a large political divide between these two nations. This divide expressed itself in many ways, including which foreign languages would be taught in Chinese schools. Throughout the 1950s learning Russian, the language of the USSR and China’s then-closest ally, was encouraged among China’s youth as a means to help China modernize. At the same time English, as the language of the ‘decadent’ West, was officially distained, with the result that by the early 1950s there was virtually no condoned English-language instruction in the PRC. This initial preference for Russian-language instruction quickly waned, however, when relations with the USSR soured in the early 1960s; the teaching of Russian fell into disfavor, and English slowly began to replace it (Fu 29).

In 1966 the advent of China’s Cultural Revolution—a decade-long period of political and social upheaval—ushered in a renewed and vehement official animosity towards all things ‘Western’, and the nation again purged itself of English-language instruction and texts. The death of Mao in 1976 saw the end of the Revolution and, once the country had regained its balance and ceased its cultural self-destruction, clearer heads prevailed (Hu 7). With the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution, China once again engaged in a concerted effort to modernize, and this time English was part of the effort—almost overnight becoming a kind of new ‘national target language’ (Hu 8).
Starting from Scratch

At this juncture in reviewing English-language instruction in modern China it is useful to pause and assess the situation China faced in the late 1970s: The People’s Republic of China, in its new drive to provide EFL instruction in its schools and prepare its enormous youth population to engage with the English-speaking world, had on hand virtually no English-language instructional materials, no English teachers, and no means of training teachers (Hu 7). In such challenging circumstances the first few years of English instruction were certainly ill-equipped and poorly executed—perhaps even chaotic. Classroom instruction itself was wholly inadequate (if not abysmal) but not through the absence of will and good intentions. Instead, it was a paucity of training and materials that made teaching difficult. Looking back from a current perspective, what is most noteworthy is the rapidity with which China overhauled its foreign-language education. Wei and Su report that out of a population of 416 million citizens who had studied or were currently studying a foreign language, 390 million studied English (11). In the astoundingly short time frame of 35 years China has fostered an ELL population of hundreds of millions and is proving quite successful in creating an educated and dynamic bilingual populace.

This unprecedented educational turnaround had its humble beginnings in the 1970s and 1980s, initially employing underqualified English teachers across the nation (Hu 8). With very limited resources, the government preferred to invest in student learning as opposed to teacher training—a trend that, to a lesser degree, continues today (Lee 143). Although China has over the years made enormous improvements in the preparation of its language instructors, “the quality of the teaching force is still rather low
and cannot adequately meet the demands of ELT (English Language Teaching) reforms initiated in recent years” (Hu 19). This description implies bleak realities for teachers, including a deficit of teacher training and professional development which bring in tow ineffectual approaches to EFL writing.

Top-Down Influences

These “ELT reforms” that Hu mentions refer to the 1983 mandate from China’s Ministry of Education (MOE) that English-language teaching begin in primary grades, in the belief that early exposure to English would lead to improvements in its later acquisition (Hu 17). In 2003, the Ministry again lowered the grade level for required English instruction, this time to the third grade (Reichelt 193). Additionally, the MOE has fostered a rapid increase in Content-Based English Instruction (CBEI) wherein the target language is used to teach subject matter and which, for English teachers and learners alike, appears to be a very positive development (Fu 27): The introduction of CBEI marked “a shift from a traditional skill-based approach in selecting and grading writing materials to a theme-based, content-focused approach” (Fu 30). The older theoretical orientations to teaching L2 writing were giving way to new perspectives. Hu, however, argues that although costly measures such as ever-earlier exposure to English and CBEI on the surface appear positive for EFL instruction, they have the very real potential of draining resources from other educational requirements while contributing relatively little in the way of English-language acquisition (18-19). These top-down solutions have sparse positive effect on the quality of teaching in actual classrooms. Hu’s comments suggest that, in the top-down perspective, the English language should fit within and
ultimately serve the larger interests of Chinese society and its government. English, as perceived and mandated by China’s MOE, is a tool by which the nation can engage more fully with the larger world, not a tool to change China itself. And in the top-down implementation of this tool a very important traction point of learning—the teacher-student-classroom dynamic—is often overlooked.

The People’s Republic of China and the English language are a modern demonstration of how language is central to our values and self-conceptions, even as a nation. This centrality is evident in the variability of China’s political postures towards English, and it is evident in the enthusiasm of China’s students of English. The fact that the current drive to embrace this global lingua franca is from above (as government policy) as well as from below (as personal goals) helps explain why this educational mobilization has been so successful. This research study, guided by its questions, seeks to more fully understand this phenomenon. First, however, it will examine the related literature that helps sketch the larger context of China’s relationship with English.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An Overview of English-Language Instruction in China

This review of the literature, in its exploration of EFL writing instruction for Chinese tertiary students, looks specifically at the challenges (both on a national scale and in classrooms) of teaching and learning such a complex skill. It begins with an overview of EFL writing instruction in the PRC today, noting some inherent tensions concerning issues of access to quality instruction and meeting students’ real needs for English academic writing skills. The English language provides two noteworthy linguistic features for Chinese ELLs: linguistic capital and linguistic hurdles, and these are also explored. Following is a discussion regarding contrastive rhetoric, an issue regarding English language learning by Chinese that has yet to be definitively settled. Second-language writing theory is also explored, especially in the EFL context. Finally, this review will look at three recent studies of EFL writing classrooms in the PRC and the instructors who lead them.

University-Level English in China

English instruction, including English academic writing, at the university level in the PRC is important for many reasons, not the least of which in that it affects, or will affect, so many millions of students. These students will soon enough be working with
and leading many of the world’s enterprises, organizations, and institutions wherein communication in English will be helpful—if not essential. Today’s learners will be, as citizens of the PRC, a dominant force in our future and contribute much to the global quality of English (Ma 349). Even now Chinese youth actively work to improve their English-language skills; they understand that many of their professional opportunities will be tied, directly or indirectly, to this specific bilingualism (Fu 27). Another motivation for studying English is the linguistic capital that English offers within Chinese society, being of such value that knowledge of “standard English” is required for any real opportunity of social mobility (Li 35). Linguistic capital, as Pan and Block describe, translates directly into cultural and economic capital for individuals as well as for nations, and currently English is the capital of choice (393).

Because proficiency in English is seen as a viable means of self-betterment and of improving one’s prospects, this invites questions about the nation’s equality of access to English instruction. Hu discusses how, under Mao’s control, education in China was wholly inadequate but equitable, with rural regions and urban centers treated, and funded, equally (19; Fu 29). This is no longer the case and hasn’t been so for many decades. Population centers now enjoy the lion’s share of influence and funding for education, and this includes the lion’s share of access to English instruction. A nationwide survey of English proficiency found “there are significant differences in language teaching developments between the major cities and small cities, between north and south, [and] between key and non-key schools or universities” (Hu 20). Hu goes on to remark that, given the growing social gaps in Chinese society, this gap in educational
opportunity is but one more fissure in Chinese society which the government will have to attend to or possibly risk yet another source of public unrest (21).

The overwhelming majority of ELLs in China are studying their target language in a regular educational setting in one of the nation’s public schools or universities, and it is within public-sphere EFL instruction that this study focuses. There are, it should be noted, plenty of private language institutes in China where many of these same students receive supplemental instruction in English. These institutes usually cater to the affluent in urban areas, and for university-level clients they typically specialize in preparing aspiring students to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Both of these are standardized English-proficiency tests routinely required of non-native speakers for university admittance within the US, UK, and other English-dominant countries. Because these language institutes are costly to attend they mirror the growing inequality of access to English.

Proficiency in Academic English

For Chinese tertiary students an interest in English for academic purposes is what drives much of their interest and efforts (Xu 53). Research confirms that the specific desire for academic proficiencies, especially in writing, is commonly held by Chinese university ELLs across the nation, and that acquiring academic English is a core challenge for Chinese students seeking to advance in their target language (L. Cai 5). L. Cai notes that, despite decades of nationwide English-language instruction, academic English in China’s universities continues to disappoint—a deficiency attributed to
classroom instruction and experience. Her research shows that Chinese students, in particular English majors, feel that they are not taught the skills needed to produce academic-level research papers (L. Cai 15).

University-level English teaching is often oriented toward preparing students for semester-end examinations. Language teachers across the nation, willingly or not, employ texts and models that emphasize grammatical and syntactical concerns while overlooking academic writing in its real-world uses and aspect. “As a result,” L. Cai reports, “Chinese students are constantly reported as able to attain high scores on grammar-based tests yet unable to write acceptable English compositions” (5). University students realize this, and in her survey they express their dissatisfaction with the instruction and the outcomes. The skills these students struggle with are the very ones least frequently taught. Reviewing, critiquing, and analyzing academic sources are the competencies students reported as most in need of development. Without confidence in these skills they feel quite unprepared in using English academic vocabulary and phrasing, reporting that they can neither analyze English scholarly texts with sufficient academic rigor nor write in what they understand as academic style (L. Cai 15).

Simply stated, while proficiency in English is a coveted skill in China that can open many opportunities for social and professional advancement, this proficiency can be elusive. For students with access to adequate EFL instruction, fluency in academic English may appear a distant yet attainable goal; for those without such access, it might be unreachable. Moreover, classroom instruction seems to typically employ approaches that fail to emphasize academic skills, as well as operating under externally-driven constraints, such as examinations. In addition to the shortcomings of formal instruction,
China’s ELLs also face linguistic and rhetorical hurdles in developing their second-language writing proficiency, which we can examine here.

**Linguistic Hurdles for Chinese ELLs**

Proficiency in academic English, as noted above, is a challenge for non-native speakers of English (and for native speakers as well). To their disadvantage, Chinese students face additional linguistic challenges not encountered by many non-native speakers of English—challenges they must overcome in order to learn and use academic-level English in their writing. Crossing the linguistic gap between Chinese and English (native speakers of one becoming proficient in the other) requires extraordinary effort and patience. Yet this is precisely what is expected of Chinese ELLs in their tertiary education. The requirement to produce academic-level written discourse in a target language likely would cause anxiety in any number of English speakers: academic discourse (correctly or mistakenly) is widely considered to be the peak example of language and language proficiency and is commensurately difficult to master (Ma 350).

Superficial differences between Chinese and English make this learning hurdle quite obvious, but differences between the two contain even more language components than most people initially recognize. David C. S. Li highlights some of the more salient typological hurdles in English, which make proficiency the challenge that it is for Chinese learners (38):

- single / plural forms of nouns
- numerous verb tenses (and their specific uses)
- subject-verb agreement
- articles
- relative clauses
- subject / predicate structure
- sentence structure
- adverb / intensifier *too*
- *-ing and *-ed* adjectives
- conditional statements
These features alone make English acquisition difficult, yet these are not the only obstacles for native speakers of Chinese; there are other practices to learn and master, for example:

- The use of independent clauses as subjects.
- The use of postponed carriers.
- Non-standard ‘negative yes-no questions’.

Finally, there are larger elements which permeate nearly all uses of the language:

- Subject-prominence in English (vs. topic-prominence in Chinese).
- Writing systems: alphabetic English (vs. logographic Chinese).
- Differences in Anglo-English academic requirements (vs. Chinese requirements).

By recognizing the full range and depth of differences between the two languages one might appreciate the progress that many Chinese students have made in learning English, as well as understanding the deficiencies that many others still struggle to overcome. Yet linguistic differences, in many ways easier to label and define, are not the only impediments to Chinese tertiary students’ acquisition of EFL writing. Substantial cultural differences between China and English-dominant countries also create barriers to learning, and one which has received its share of attention is how rhetoric is employed in each language’s written discourse.

Balancing the Viewpoints on Contrastive Rhetoric

As outlined above, the linguistic gulf that separates Chinese, a Sino-Tibetan language, from English, an Indo-European language, is considerable. It includes many (if
not most) of the ways in which speakers use their respective languages, including phonological, lexica-grammatical, and to a certain degree even rhetorical levels.

Specifically regarding the EFL writing challenges that face Chinese learners, there has been considerable research on perceived rhetorical differences between English and Chinese writing traditions, as well as on these traditions’ potential influence on students today. A discussion of these rhetorical distinctions, as well as of recent research comparing how rhetoric is employed in student writing, has a place in this chapter; notions concerning Chinese rhetorical strategies and how Chinese rhetoric has traditionally been viewed in the Anglophone West ought to be addressed.

Rhetoric as a Social Construct

Social constructivism theory teaches that it is within “communities of like-minded peers” that knowledge is developed and shared (G. Cai 3). This model warrants consideration, at least in its surface implications, about how knowledge is reflected in our notions, definitions, and use of rhetoric. In his discussion of the historical evidence for ancient Chinese rhetoric, Guanjun Cai points to the Western-centered perspective that still dominates the study and teaching of rhetoric. Western perspectives have long viewed ancient China as lacking a noteworthy rhetorical tradition, with two factors largely responsible for this alleged paucity: the hierarchical nature of Chinese society and the ambiguous nature of the Chinese language (G. Cai 2). In other words, from this occidental perspective the Chinese (unlike the ancient Greeks) lacked a democratic catalyst in their past, as well as a language which could efficiently impart abstract
thought. The Chinese, then, are presumed to have had neither the means nor the tradition of public discourse and communication.

Returning to the social constructivist perspective, one can interpret this opinion of Chinese discourse as having been socially created by “like-minded peers” from a Western viewpoint. Even today, G. Cai argues, Western perspectives continue to describe Chinese rhetoric using Western standards (3). But rhetoric is not some universally definable and applicable concept or art; instead, wherever one finds it rhetoric reflects the culture that fostered (and still cultivates) it. With the understanding that a social paradigm colors and distorts one’s view and experience, one ought to resist comparing ‘apples’ to ‘pineapples’, so to speak. Yes they sound similar, but since they have less in common than their names imply the differences may lead one to disregard that, in the final analysis, they are both fruit. In this vein, (Western) socially-constructed knowledge can lead one to see rhetoric as solely that which comes to us from ancient Greek traditions of discourse. When comparing rhetoric across cultures, differences can obfuscate the base similarity.

Rhetoric is a broad concept which encompasses many types of cultural communication and argumentation. Furthermore, it is a social construct and a collective product—not an individual creation. Berger and Luckmann remind us of the social relativity of knowledge: “What is ‘real’ to a Tibetan monk may not be ‘real’ to an American businessman” (3). The knowledge that the monk incorporates in his life is that which makes sense in his society; the same for the American businessman. Their great distinctions do nothing to diminish either body of knowledge or the individuals that use them. By extension, then, what was ‘real’ for ancient Chinese writers as reflected in their
rhetorical strategies was likely quite different from what was ‘real’ for ancient Greeks in theirs. Thus, looking at deeper rhetorical foundations, the reality of Confucius was very different from that of Aristotle; the two ‘neither lived in the same social world nor were they ‘like-minded’” (G. Cai 4).

Studies in Contrastive Rhetoric

When Robert Kaplan sketched his now well-known (and well-disputed) diagram illustrating findings from his 1966 study of contrastive rhetoric, he pioneered a topic of research that has, to date, consistently yielded contradictory or inconclusive findings (Liu and Furneaux 75). After analyzing some 600 examples of EFL writing from a range of ELLs, Kaplan asserted that, since culture informs logic, it influences the rhetorical strategies of EFL writers (12). In other words, when writing in English ELLs typically bring to bear the strategies and discourse styles that they learned in their first language—strategies that reflect perspectives and even values of their respective home cultures and native-language educations. Furthermore, Kaplan points out, these strategies are often at odds with what is expected of them in their EFL/ESL writing (13). While Kaplan noted rhetorical patterns within each of his various distinct (and rather imprecise) language groupings (e.g., “Semitic”, “Oriental”, “Romance”, “Russian”), his descriptions of the rhetorical approaches of “Oriental” ELLs are germane to this discussion: Kaplan discovered that EFL writing by “oriental” authors often employed an indirect, circular rhetorical style and argumentation, as well as an inductive quality to logic (17).

Such a finding (unsurprisingly) invited further research. Liu and Furneaux list many subsequent studies that looked at the same issues in contrastive rhetoric, including
some which seemed to support Kaplan’s findings (e.g., Matalene 1985; Shen 1989; Cai 1993; Cortazzi and Jin 1997; Wang 2003; Cai 2007; and Xing, Wang, and Spencer 2008) (75). They also note many studies which “found that as far as the overall discourse organization is concerned, Chinese writing is not much different from English writing” (e.g., Mohan and Lo 1985; Taylor and Chen 1991; Kirkpatrick 1997; Liu 2005; Yang and Cahill 2008; and Chien 2001) (Liu and Furneaux 76). These studies, taken as an aggregate, have failed to convincingly corroborate Kaplan’s conclusions and seem to hint at a deep complexity to rhetoric across cultures.

Discerning the “divergent and, on many occasions, inadequate research design” contained in many previous studies, Liu and Furneaux undertook a study of their own (75). In theirs the two researchers sought convincing empirical evidence of indirectness or inductiveness in the academic essays of Chinese university-level ELLs. The researchers measured the discourse styles of Chinese university students majoring in English against the discourse styles employed by two distinct mono-lingual groups: one group of British and one group of Chinese university students. By looking at two indicators—the inclusion and placement of thesis statements within introductions and topic sentences within paragraphs—as evidence of directness or indirectness in rhetorical style, the researchers concluded that indirectness and inductive logic do not characterize the rhetorical strategies of Chinese university students. The researchers state that “little evidence was found to support the view of indirectness or inductiveness of Chinese writing”, and that “instead of being implicit or indirect, most of the Chinese students…took a direct approach in their English and Chinese writing” (Liu and Furneaux 91). If nothing else, through their comprehensive study Liu and Furneaux
suggest that, in an age of greater intercultural connectedness and English ascendency, the study of contrastive rhetoric is not as salient as it might have been 50 years ago.

Second-Language Writing Theory

The Perceived Divorce between Theory and Praxis

Tony Silva and Paul Kei Matsuda, prominent researchers in the interdisciplinary field of second-language writing, admit that writing theory suffers from an image problem, so to speak, in that professionals—teachers, researchers, administrators—often do not share the same viewpoint on theory. Many of them hold the “default view” of theory, believing that it lies solely in the realm of research, while praxis remains for those who engage in teaching. This (perceived) divorce between theory and actual practice in second-language writing, the authors bemoan, is enormous and requires redress; what most troubles the field is how to put the latest second-language writing theory into actual practice (Silva and Matsuda vii). This divorce is confirmed by researchers in China’s educational theater, and nowhere more starkly than in EFL writing instruction in China’s universities (Zhu 209). Luxin Yang and Shaofen Gao’s study reinforces one’s sense that there exists a disconnection between language-learning theory and actual classroom instruction in China’s EFL writing classrooms; that, as John Hedgcock writes, “there is a glaring gap between theories of writing instruction and actual practices of [EFL] classroom teaching” (232). It is not that EFL writing instructors see no value in contemporary writing theories, but instead they have very limited means to implement them. Xiaoye You, in her study of tertiary-level English writing classrooms in China, found that classroom realities as well as top-down, systemic constraints limit
instructors’ pedagogical options. Researchers like You have determined that theory simply has less utility in China’s EFL writing classrooms because of inherent limitations therein. In the eyes of many EFL writing teachers, “theory is mainly seen to be the work of scholars and empirical researchers, whereas practice is the work of teachers, many of whom may deride theory as irrelevant to their classrooms” (Yang and Gao 129). This perceived irrelevance will be explored in the literature on EFL writing instructors (in this current chapter) as well as in the findings from this current study (Chapter Four of this thesis).

Second-Language Writing Orientations

Over the past several decades distinct and evolving paradigms of how second-language (L2) writing is best taught have shaped both writing instruction itself and successive generations of instructors. Second-language writing instruction within EFL contexts has followed developments in English-dominant settings (albeit with a delay), echoing perspectives that had earlier gained traction in English-speaking regions. These second-language writing paradigms have each undergone shifts, largely informed by “changing conceptions of language in the field of linguistics and of learning in the field of psychology” (Gebbard 277). Looking at academic EFL instruction in Chinese university classrooms also means looking at instructors and their pedagogical orientations, and one purpose of this review is to describe the very paradigms that today inform, or may in the future inform, China’s tertiary-level EFL writing classes.

A long-held structural conception of language, and the belief that learning a second tongue was simply a matter of practicing and learning a language’s structures, is
the basis for what we today call *current-traditional rhetoric*. This approach to language learning (and L2 writing instruction) had its formation and flourished in times when one’s oral command of language was considered most important (Russell 6). Current-traditional strategies of target language instruction guide learners from “lower-order” to “higher order” aspects of language, beginning with phonological, orthographic, morphological, and lexical elements. From these one moves up to sentence-level, paragraph-level, and eventually essay-level structures, a sequence often found in textbooks used in today’s EFL writing classes. Language learning in current-traditional approaches, Meg L. Gebbard describes, is “viewed as a process of habit formation in which the structural patterns of language could be learned through operant conditioning” (277). Gebbard’s “operant conditioning” is an appropriate descriptor of the current-traditional approach, particularly so when this approach is adopted for second-language writing instruction, wherein the learner’s brain is conditioned to produce the target language. L2 writing instruction, in the current-traditional paradigm, mirrors that of second-language oral instruction through its use of controlled and bound exercises, models to emulate, and similar structure-focused activities.

By the late 1950s, many researchers had moved away from the current-traditional rhetoric paradigm. Developing ideas that viewed language as an innate faculty, learned through exposure to natural speech, led to what is often labeled the *cognitive approach* to second-language writing instruction (Gebbard 278). In the cognitive viewpoint a focus on writers’ internal cognitive processes, and the actual practices which can lead to meaningful writing, should guide second-language writing instruction. These practices exhibit language learners’ cognitive engagement with the processes and the goal
of producing target-language writing, and typically include planning, drafting, reviewing, revising, and editing one’s work. This paradigm suggests instructional strategies that rely upon learners’ internal processes and engagement because, in this approach to instruction, second-language acquisition (including L2 writing acquisition) is essentially an internally-driven process (Tseng 25).

More recently, the cognitive paradigm has been the subject of criticism for its heavy, even decontextualized, focus on the writer and his or her internal ‘cognitive world’ while wholly ignoring the social contexts in which L2 writing is learned (Murphy and Sherwood 4). Drawing upon the earlier theories of Lev Vygotsky in psychology and Dell Hymes in linguistics, proponents of a social orientation for second-language writing instruction understand that writers are socialized into the literacy and discourse practices of a community, and in this case the practices are those of the target-language community. Learning to write in one’s second language, the social-constructionist perspective argues, cannot truly happen through rote target-language conditioning of the brain or in the rarified context of one’s cognitive grasp of that language, and furthermore is a perspective maintained by many L2 writing researchers (Chang 3; Ismail 73).

“Let all the Flowers Bloom”

These three paradigms, Khaled Barkaoui observes, “tend to focus on different aspects of L2 writing competencies and to emphasize the importance of learning and teaching them in different ways” (35). Barkaoui’s statement is indirect—almost offhand—yet insightful: The complexities of written discourse (and for our purposes here academic discourse) might be more thoroughly addressed by employing several
theoretical orientations. A “myriad of affective, linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors” are involved in second-language writing, making it a challenge to teach or to learn (Barkaoui 44). Multiple factors in learning L2 writing, then, are perhaps best addressed through multiple orientations towards teaching L2 writing.

Additionally, Barkaoui recasts these three paradigms as approaches to, or (as writing teachers might see them) as strategies for, second-language writing instruction. Strategies centered on texts themselves look to raise learners to higher levels of language proficiency in both linguistic and rhetorical conventions. Process-oriented strategies see activities and models on planning, drafting, and revising as key to acquiring L2 writing skills. A sociocultural orientation sees value in strategies that draw writers into their target spheres—“the genres, values, and practices of their target community” (Barkaoui 36). The author’s intention is to point out the connections between these diverse paradigms, orientations, and instructional strategies toward second-language writing.

There need not be only one path forward, and it is only in mastering all these competencies and aspects, he argues, that second-language writers reach full proficiency in their target language (Barkaoui 37). Neither one theory, nor one methodology, can completely illuminate the complexity of teaching and learning second language writing.

Indeed, the drive to find a single, universal second-language writing theory may simply be a misguided endeavor: “On what grounds do we insist on a formalized theoretical foundation for our many activities (in L2 writing)?” (Hedgcock 233). Writing is a complex process in itself and markedly so when one considers the range of genres available. Couple this with second-language acquisition and writing becomes too large
for one single learning theory; multiple theories provide a better paradigm. Harklau and Williams express this perspective clearly:

Different content theories and methodologies lead to different understandings and insights into the nature of second language writing. Just as important, they have different epistemological and methodological blind spots. The more theories that are available to us, the deeper and more multidimensional our understanding of the phenomenon is likely to become and the less likely we are to overlook important dimensions. (106)

Theories, by design, attempt to consolidate explanations of reality into concise, tidy, and verifiable packages. In like fashion, methodologies encompass the methods bound into studies or activities informed by theories. There is little to be gained by artificially limiting either. As James P. Lantolf puts it, “An important way of guarding against the dangers inherent in the absolutist world view in any sphere of human endeavor, including science, is to let all the flowers bloom, not just a chosen few” (739). So, in the end, perhaps the perceived divorce between the latest second-language writing theory and second-language writing instruction is not as bleak, or as important, as Silva and Matsuda describe. Instructors, in the end, might do well to draw upon any and all second-language writing theories they feel appropriate to the needs of their students.

Studies of EFL Writing Instructors and Their Classrooms

The Pressure to Acquire English Academic Writing Skills

Within the contexts of both their English-language coursework and their major coursework, as well as to meet the requirements of future careers, millions of Chinese university students from a broad range of disciplines regard the ability to write well in English as a crucial skill (L. Cai 5). That the learning of such skill requires hard
work and dedication does not dissuade them; simply stated, they need it and are often most eager and diligent to acquire it. During the course of this present research into EFL writing classrooms, as well as during tutoring sessions, dozens of such students expressed the importance of English writing to their futures. They live and study with the pressure to develop and refine their proficiencies in English, including academic English and “practical” English (i.e., English language use for the workplace). These students view English-writing skills in particular as a kind of litmus test by which one shows acceptable proficiency in the target language, and frequently their professors and future employers share this view. To paraphrase one comment, students see the other three language skills (speaking, listening, and reading) as having certain latitudes of “forgiveness” wherein with various strategies one can deflect or offset target-language deficiencies. Writing, and especially writing within academic contexts, affords very little forgiveness and the deflecting strategies are few. In many students’ view, only if one writes well in the English language can he or she feel confident in one’s target-language abilities.

It is true that writing in English often takes place in situations which give these Chinese learners enough time to refine their discourse; this, however, is not the case in the most critical contexts: graded in-class essays and decisive, gate-keeping examinations. Term-end exams, for both course grades and academic advancement, do not afford students the time or resources to reflect on or revise their writing. Regrettably, much rests upon students’ performance in these situations and one can easily imagine the disappointment and frustration—even grief—that can result from inadequate performance on these tests. With students’ high English-proficiency thresholds (whether real or imagined) and the unforgiving gatekeepers that are Chinese examinations, one wonders
how China’s English-writing classrooms materially help university students meet these challenges.

This question is at the core of several studies in the professional literature, two of which are particularly salient for their classroom exploration of Chinese EFL writing teachers’ pedagogical philosophies and practices, including how these are evident in class activities. In them researchers sought to understand what writing instructors are doing in their classes and why, and in conducting their studies visited university EFL writing courses in the PRC. A third study of interest focuses on English writing instructors’ educational preparation, including post-graduate professional training, and how instructors assess their own abilities and view their efforts. These three studies will be discussed in detail below and with an eye to how they describe and shed light on China’s tertiary EFL writing classrooms.

Into the Classrooms

The pedagogical orientations and practices of four EFL writing professors are at the heart of a 2012 study by Luxin Yang and Shaofen Gao. Within their report both classroom observations and instructor interviews reveal these teachers’ individual beliefs about, and approaches to, instructing Chinese university students in their academic English writing. An earlier study by Xiaoye You documents what actually takes place in university-level English writing classes, including instructor perspectives and descriptions of institutional constraints. You examines how writing is actually taught— instructors’ perceptions, personal teaching philosophies, or professional training
notwithstanding. Both of these studies shed light on the actual English writing contexts and instruction Chinese university students rely upon.

Before entering into the heart of their research, Yang and Gao make an noteworthy point about the key role English language writing instructors hold for their students, especially in contexts where outside English-language influence is very limited (e.g., rural universities): EFL teachers are the primary, if not only, meaningful language-learning resource for students of English and their teaching “impacts directly on how the latter learn to write and perform (in English)” (Yang and Gao 130). Understanding how L2 writing classrooms operate and the constraints inherent within them (or imposed upon them) is an important topic of research in that these classrooms, in what they offer and what they lack, figure largely in the successes or frustrations of China’s tertiary EFL students.

EFL Writing Instructors in Their Classrooms

Yang and Gao’s study of four EFL writing teachers reveals a wide range of instructor beliefs about how to best teach English writing. The study also documents a wide range of practices in the implementation of those beliefs, including emphasis on clarity in student writing; requirements that students’ work show logical and cogent thinking; and encouragement of students to think creatively and critically (Yang and Gao 134). This range of expectations illustrates (and the study itself emphasizes) how one’s graduate-level, language-instructor training, and the L2 writing theories concurrent with this graduate coursework, influence instructors’ viewpoints, beliefs, and practices (Yang and Gao 142).
Themselves reflecting a wide range of ages and years of teaching experience, the professors in the study also practiced a wide range of approaches to teaching English writing, including influences of current-traditional rhetoric, expressivism, and a product-and-process mixture approach (Yang and Gao 139-141). Whether one considers this ‘diversity’ or ‘discord’ in teaching approaches, the participants and the findings of Yang and Gao’s study give cause to reevaluate any assumptions about uniformity or conformity one might have about EFL writing instruction in China. As well, the four professors’ approaches on how to teach EFL academic writing informed their views on how their students should learn such writing. While all four agreed that writing is largely (though not entirely) a cognitive process, they differed on how teachers should guide students’ writing processes. Their viewpoints differed, ranging from emphases on creative thinking, grammatical accuracy, reading skills, self-critique, emotional involvement, teacher feedback, and the optimum number of drafts (Yang and Gao 133-134).

Within their study, Yang and Gao reference the few early studies of EFL writing classroom practices in the PRC, noting how other researchers found that teachers’ beliefs regarding EFL writing consistently informed their classroom practices. Like Yang and Gao’s own professor-subjects, instructors in previous studies had relied on current-traditional and process-product approaches. Yang and Gao reported that, in accordance with earlier studies, the most experienced teachers of English academic writing structured their classroom activities around students actually engaged in writing, reading, and group discussion activities, with a minimum of lecture (Yang and Gao 129).

One might note in these studies, as well as in the general literature, a dearth of social-constructionist perspective in EFL writing instruction in the PRC. As seen with
other theoretical orientations (e.g., the cognitive perspective) there appears to be a delay in the spread and adoption of new ideas about second-language writing instruction—ideas which typically originate in English-dominant countries. One can also point to a general and discipline-wide focus on Western pedagogical orientations and approaches, raising questions about possible ideas and orientations conceived outside of this Western focus and which do not receive exploratory attention in the English-language literature.

Yang and Gao touch upon an aspect of teaching infrequently broached in the professional literature—the moral aspect. “Teaching is not only intellectual in nature,” they write, “but necessarily involves a moral dimension” (Yang and Gao 143). The remarkable dedication of two participants in their study moved the authors to address this facet—instructors who spent “long periods reading and commenting on students’ writing because they believed that teachers’ devotion and engagement can influence students’ attitudes towards efforts in writing” (Yang and Gao 143). There are moral dimensions, the authors conclude, of responsibility, effort, and commitment that have a central place in the work of dedicated teachers—a refreshing observation which invites further dedicated research.

There are limitations to Yang and Gao’s study, including its small study sample (four university professors) and only one semester of classroom observations. The researchers’ work and findings, however, provide both solid groundwork and a replicable framework for those who would engage in a similar, and perhaps broader, study. Yang and Gao’s examination of how China’s English-writing instructors view teaching writing, and most importantly how they practice those views, exposes a pedagogical incongruity that confronts this nation’s university students in their English-writing goals. A broader
study might illustrate the pitfalls of this incongruity and even help lead to an expansion of professional training for EFL writing instructors.

Xiaoye You, in a 2004 study, observed English writing instruction at a Chinese university with a research focus on classroom practices, and, like Yang and Gao, opens with a brief discussion of second-language writing theories. Using a broader (and less precise) brush to describe pedagogical influences on China’s English writing instructors, You also depicts EFL writing instruction as growing out of, and for the most part solely informed by, new theories developed over the decades in North America; theories that have “gradually permeated non-English dominant countries and areas” (You 98). Good news, certainly, for L2 writing students in these “non-English dominant countries and areas” in that they will (eventually) benefit from writing instruction informed by fresh approaches. Yet You also describes how “when writing teachers...adopt these new approaches, oftentimes they have to make adjustments in order for the approaches to accommodate local needs and constraints” (98). These statements are particularly salient in light of her classroom observations, and her research findings, which make clear that “local needs and constraints” are indeed brought to bear upon EFL writing instruction. Her observations and analyses disclose the dominant roles that China’s National College English Syllabus (NCES), along with work-environment and administrative realities, play in what actually occurs in English writing classrooms. Similarly to Yang and Gao, You sought to answer questions about current teaching approaches in EFL-writing classes, and through her wider-view perspective she uncovers factors largely unnoticed or unreported in other studies.
Drawing heavily upon her university classroom observations, yet including instructor interviews and discussions with individual students, You portrays English writing instruction that is perhaps less of a revelation for her (given her teaching experience in China) than for those not acquainted with the realities of China’s tertiary-education system. At several junctures of her article You notes how English writing classroom priorities and activities are determined by an upcoming examination, in this case the College English Test Band No. 4 (CETB-4), rather than by the students’ actual EFL writing needs or wishes:

- “As the CETB-4 was drawing near, all sophomore classes focused on practicing writing for the test” (100).
- “[The instructor] offered some suggestions to her students for the upcoming CETB-4” (101).
- “Lecturing in Chinese is sometimes seen in English classrooms, especially when the CET is coming soon, because teachers find it easier for them to explain some language points in their native language” (101).
- “If there had been no pressure from the CETB-4, Mrs. Zhang (the instructor) said she would have let the students write on all the topics in the textbook” (102).
- “But, as many of the writing tasks [that teachers] gave to students were almost all simulations of the writing section of the CET…the students’ revisions and the teacher’s feedback were predominantly concerned about grammatical and lexical errors rather than explaining and discovering meaning” (102).
These statements illustrate one reality within China’s English writing classrooms: A looming CETB examination dominates classroom instruction and instructors’ choices and displaces what certainly would be more suitable activities.

You, in reporting her research, enlightens her readers by describing noteworthy classroom ingredients (often just details) that, while not directly related to instructor activities, nonetheless convey much about the backdrop and undercurrents of these courses. Her observations describe several instances in which the writing assignments and instruction itself are undermined by easily-obtained reference materials that, all too often, provide students with writing models to simply copy and turn in (You 105, 106). Additionally, in discussions with non-English-major students as well as in observations of their classroom proceedings You documents instances of student apathy towards assignments and lectures (You 100-102, 106).

Finally, You demonstrates that elements which might otherwise be considered tangential to teaching indeed bear upon instructors, determining their needs and responses. These elements include the relatively low status and low remuneration that China’s education system affords (Chinese national) English teachers (You 106). Inadequate pay often drives teachers to engage in outside instruction at private schools and language institutes, and illustrates a situation that certainly can lower teacher morale. At the same time (and almost adding insult to injury) university administrators can regard mandated English instruction as a nuisance, if not an outright encumbrance, to their institution’s larger pedagogical aims. You depicts how, during an interview, one university administrator described compulsory English classes as “a waste of money and manpower,” hinting at an underlying tension between university administrators and
language instructors (You 104). English coursework is mandated in the National Syllabus, putting university foreign-language departments, including English instructors, in the unsavory position of drawing university funds for what some consider to be unpopular or even detrimental programs. Teaching second-language writing is a difficult endeavor in itself, and teachers are further burdened with the possibility of adverse realities in the university workplace. As such, the outlook can be somewhat disheartening for these professionals who, through proficiency in the English language, work to broaden their students’ worldview and opportunities.

A third study, conducted in 2010 by Icy Lee, looks specifically at how Chinese writing instructors view their own professional development and competence in teaching academic English writing. This study did not observe classroom operations; rather, it relied on questionnaires and interviews with four Chinese EFL writing teachers. As such, this enquiry reports the instructor’s own perspectives on their teaching efforts, and not those of an outside observer of those efforts. The survey questions were related to their educational experiences while studying to become language teachers as well as to ongoing professional training.

Lee’s study gauges the value and the effect of EFL teacher training (along with their accumulated classroom experience) on these teachers’ teaching practices and their perceptions of success (Lee 143). The author found that post-graduate professional development opportunities had a positive, encouraging effect on these teachers’ opinions of what they could achieve in their classrooms. It also had a beneficial effect of their levels of enthusiasm. Lee concludes that, concerning all four research subjects, “writing-
teacher education does have a role to play in the trajectory of EFL teachers’
development” (Lee 15).  

Lee’s finding that writing-teacher education contributes toward writing-teacher development juxtapositions against the reality for many EFL writing teachers: professional development for language instructors is in short supply in the PRC (Reichelt 195). The participants in her study reported that professional development training, in the form of MA coursework, provided them with a more critical view of conventional approaches to writing instruction—a perspective they were previously lacking. It also opened their eyes to the rich resource that is research literature as well as to see themselves as researchers and inquirers (Lee 153). Such commentary by the subjects in Lee’s study suggest that China has much to gain by including more teacher training in its long-term tertiary-education planning.

Lee observes an interesting aspect in EFL writing instruction in China that indicates its place in the education system: EFL writing is not treated as a separate skill until students reach university. This delay in the teaching of English writing skills results in teachers having little experience or even knowledge of composition, and students having even less (Lee 145). In coursework below university level what L2 writing is employed serves only as a tool to teach the target language, and when engaging learners in second-language writing “teachers see themselves more as teachers of language rather than teachers of writing” (Lee 154). This system-wide delay in second-language writing instruction contributes directly to the current state of tertiary-level EFL writing skills in the PRC: postponed L2 writing education creates a situation wherein university EFL
writing instructors face enormous challenges in making comprehensible and accessible this crucial skill.

Additionally, the author voices an imbalance in EFL writing research, where “much more attention has been paid to the needs of students learning to write rather than teachers learning to teach” (Lee 143). Lee’s article describes how the writing proficiencies of students, when discussed by the lay public or civic figures, usually draw criticism or concern, and how in a wider context “complaints about declining writing standards are escalating in different parts of the world” (154). Lee notes the results of China-specific research on EFL writing-teacher preparedness: Research surveys, as well as teacher assessments, show that China’s language instructors are weakest in their L2 writing skills (145). Overall, Lee portrays a Chinese reality in which students’ (and teachers’) writing skills are held to be in decline, yet writing instruction is typically delayed until university and then taught by instructors who do not receive the requisite training or support. It is this portrait of second-language writing instruction which made classroom observations all the more imperative for this current research study into how Chinese university students learn EFL writing and how tutoring might have a role.

The relative shortage of teacher-focused research notwithstanding, much of the professional literature that treats writing teacher education (and how training translates into improved teaching) “presents a rather pessimistic picture about the impact of teacher education” and stands in contrast to Lee’s own findings (Lee 144). In Lee’s analysis both the literature, as well as the participants in her study, acknowledge the process of teacher socialization, whereby new teachers adopt (or feel pressed to adopt) the practices, values, and attitudes of their more experienced colleagues. This adaptation
to an existing professional environment, Lee argues, effectively mutes or waters down the practice of newer theories or approaches to EFL writing instruction, and leads to the continuation of older perspectives (144). This last analysis by Lee does not fit well with the findings of Yang and Gao, who describe their four teacher-participants as employing the second-language writing approaches that they had learned as graduate students and, by their own accounts, retaining the second-language writing theories and practices learned in their graduate coursework (Yang and Gao 139).

Conclusion

Classroom-focused research, as well as instructor-focused research, into the actual practices and conditions of EFL writing coursework reveals a mosaic of educational realities for university students. While this composite picture is on the whole quite positive (especially in light of such instruction 35 years ago) one can see the challenges facing instructors in their professional (and perhaps moral) purpose of guiding students in making real gains in EFL writing proficiency—a proficiency which very well might influence their future prospects. This current study sought to enter this mosaic, albeit with very limited exposure, in order to explore the practices and conditions within EFL writing classrooms. Furthermore, it sought to do so from a perspective which viewed one-on-one tutoring as a potential supplement to these classes.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Turning Research Questions Into Research Findings

This research study of university EFL writing classrooms in China was motivated and informed by questions about the nature of these classrooms and how outside activities (e.g., one-on-one tutoring) might contribute to students’ EFL writing proficiencies. The first set of research questions that guided this study, “How is English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) writing actually taught in China’s universities? What are instructors’ orientations and approaches to teaching, and what are the affordances and constraints for instructors and students within their EFL writing classrooms?” has been initially explored in the literature review (Chapter Two). Through first-hand observations of EFL writing instruction, and documenting the opportunities and limitations within these classrooms, this current study also addressed these questions. Direct experience is unequalled when one wishes to understand a phenomenon, and the realities of university-level EFL learning in China could not meaningfully be appraised from afar.

In similar fashion the second set of questions, “What benefits, if any, might one-on-one tutoring for academic writing bring to Chinese university students and would they be measurable? Furthermore, how would one-on-one tutoring be received by students in this EFL environment?” also drives original research as part of this study. The
best method to address these questions, particularly in light of the scarcity of relevant research, was to engage in such tutoring with the target population—the very strategy and method employed within this study.

While the professional literature contains studies of EFL writing instruction, these often neglect to adequately describe or explore many important aspects of the classrooms—aspects that influence instruction and learning. Classroom observations as part of this study would serve to confirm, question, or add to those in the literature. In light of the tutoring component of this research, to rely solely on the observations and reporting of others would be a poor substitute for direct exposure to student learning within these classes. As for the tutoring component of this study, the professional literature is largely silent on the tutoring of tertiary-level EFL students for their academic writing skills. The purpose, then, for tutoring EFL students was to see how this activity might fit into their regular EFL writing instruction and coursework, as well as to gauge students’ receptivity to this method. Visiting EFL writing classes, and experiencing classroom teaching and learning at the exact junctures where they occur, could help inform the one-on-one tutoring component of this study.

This chapter looks at the methods employed in this research study. Discussions include descriptions of the universities visited and a brief sketch of China’s national public-university EFL writing curriculum—the very curriculum in place at these universities. These discussions provide a backdrop against which classroom observations and one-on-one tutoring can be viewed. The actual research methods employed in this study (classroom observations and tutoring EFL students) are then addressed, justifying
their selection and describing their implementation. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief description of the data and how it was collected.

**Background: The Universities**

The overall scope of this research study entailed visits to two universities in the People’s Republic of China during a portion of their 2015 spring semester. The reason behind selecting the two distinct institutions was to work with a wider variety of students than might be found at only one. China’s universities are individually ranked (through a rather complex method) to reflect the quality of education they offer, with a handful of schools designated as “first-tier” (at the highest level) followed by schools with “second-tier” or “third-tier” classifications. University admission is determined by one’s score on the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (the “GaoKao”), with students vying principally for first- and second-tier opportunities. This study sought to avoid the highest-level (first-tier) universities since English instruction (and student proficiencies) at this level might not be representative of the nationwide majority experience.

The first university visited, “University 1,” is a third-tier rural institution situated in northern China. It is a public university focused on serving roughly 19,000 undergraduates earning their four-year degrees, yet also houses a modest graduate population. While University 1 offers various academic programs in agricultural and biological sciences, the school also offers many other degree options, including (undergraduate) English. University 1 was the site for this study’s classroom observations as well as for tutoring. EFL writing-class observations were conducted at this institution.
because, as a mid-sized, third-tier university attentive to undergraduate education, it most closely represents the majority of institutions of higher learning in the PRC as well as the classroom affordances and constraints for the majority of Chinese university students. Additionally, University 1 offered a population of undergraduate English majors for tutoring research—a population unavailable to the researcher at University 2.

The second university, “University 2,” is a second-tier urban institution located in a major city in central China. It, too, is a public university offering bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs in a wide collection of disciplines to some 27,000 students, yet with general emphases on the sciences and technology. This university was the site for longer and more intensive tutoring (the results of which provided hundreds of pages of student writing). In contrast to the undergraduate tutoring subjects of University 1, tutoring at University 2 was conducted solely with master’s and doctoral candidates.

Background: Nationally-Mandated English-Writing Curriculum

While English majors take a variety of English-language courses that seek to build multiple skills, there are required courses designed specifically around EFL academic writing. The course curriculum for these classes is determined chiefly by the National College English Teaching Syllabus (NCETS), and as such this curriculum is nationally mandated. (This study sought access to these required courses with an eye to the generalizability of any findings.) The core of English undergraduate writing instruction typically consists of four semesters of academic writing coursework. The first two semesters focus on building paragraphs and essays, typically following a summary, narrative, descriptive, and expository writing sequence. Semesters three and four focus on
argumentative writing, research skills, and producing research papers. This curricular pattern would be the majority experience for the students in the observed classrooms as well as for University 1’s participants in tutoring.

Classroom Observations

At University 1 the classes available for observation were determined by the director of the Department of Foreign Languages. From a short list of options, and with sparse descriptions of these courses, four sections were chosen at random for classroom observations. These four courses were taught by three full-time instructors. In this study every precaution was taken, including avoiding interaction with others during class times, to ensure that observations would provide a representative and untainted glimpse into the EFL writing instruction that Chinese university students typically receive nationwide.

The three English writing instructors (two associate professors and one lecturer) on many occasions each conversed at length with the researcher, providing invaluable insights into their classes and their lives. To better safeguard the anonymity of these three instructors this thesis will refer to them as “Instructor A”, “Instructor B”, and “Instructor C”. All three instructors teach EFL academic writing courses, as well as other classes related to English language and Anglophone culture including pronunciation, US culture, and select history courses. In this study, four distinct writing classes were observed during a four-week, mid-semester period. Three courses were exclusively for English majors:

- A third-semester course focused on expository and argumentative writing (Instructor A)
- A second-semester course focused on narrative and descriptive writing (Instructor B)
- An elective course on business writing (Instructor C)

And one course was for non-English majors:
- A first-semester general English-writing course (Instructor C)

Justifications for Observations

Within the professional literature, studies of China’s university EFL classrooms typically focus on either instructors or students and within particular, focused parameters. These studies then address the data relevant to these parameters, often to the loss of seeing the larger picture of classroom dynamics. Learning (ostensibly) takes place in classrooms, amid complex dynamics and within a dedicated space, and it was determined that a more holistic view of classrooms would serve the purposes of this study. One notable exception to typical classroom research approaches is found in You’s study of university EFL writing classes (see Chapter Two). You doesn’t eschew interactions with instructors and students; in fact, she speaks at length with them. She does not, however, allow them to define or describe what she observes in the classes; how teaching and learning happen (or don’t happen). You describes this herself through what she sees, hears, and perceives. In a similar vein, this present study seeks to understand and describe EFL writing instruction as it actually plays out when teachers and learners are together.
One-on-One Tutoring

One-on-one tutoring for EFL writing was a key component of this study and at both visited universities students were invited to participate in such tutoring. The researcher’s approach to tutoring in these EFL environments, along with the methods and goals for the individual tutoring sessions, matched those learned and practiced when tutoring ESL students at his home university. Seven semesters of tutoring students within the parameters of a dedicated ESL tutoring center (along with an equal number of semesters in subject tutoring) at California State University, Chico has provided the researcher with sufficient experience and expertise to effectively engage his Chinese university subjects in one-on-one tutoring for their EFL writing skills. In tutoring within both ESL and EFL contexts, good practice is to see the student’s writing as a vehicle for addressing any English-language questions, concerns, or options that might arise. Additionally, tutoring ELLs in their writing skills provides for simultaneous (and naturally-connected) practice with other language skills, in particular listening and speaking skills.

The Tutee Populations

The tutoring portion of this study engaged two student/tutee populations, one from each university. Each population reflected distinct experiences and academic goals, and as such the two student groups provided the researcher with two distinct sets of ELL experiences and perspectives.

At University 1 ten students from three separate English writing courses participated in tutoring. These students were all sophomore or junior undergraduate
English majors, enrolled in either the second or third semester of their EFL writing coursework, and all had their English writing-proficiency needs directly tied to their immediate and future academic success. Volunteers were requested and the three instructors made a selection of volunteers that was representative of the range of writing proficiencies within their classes. The researcher worked with these students/tutees over a period of three weeks, meeting with each tutee twice weekly in 45 minute sessions and tutoring them specifically in their English academic writing skills. For each tutoring session the tutee was required to bring one new essay and, when applicable, a revised draft of the previous essay(s). Students were free to choose any topic for their essays, and to help spark ideas they were provided a list of prompts (from which many tutees chose essay topics).

At University 2 seven students from the college of physical sciences participated in tutoring. These students were all master’s or doctoral candidates in chemistry or physics, none of whom while in their undergraduate studies had taken English coursework above the national minimum requirements. These students had, instead, focused on their particular areas of interest throughout their entire university careers. Additionally, their needs for English writing proficiency arose from the university’s graduation requirement that they publish their research in English-language journals—a standard practice in the sciences (Xu 53). Again, volunteers were solicited and from all the candidates the researcher chose seven at random. The researcher worked with these University 2 subjects three times weekly in one-hour sessions. As with the tutees from University 1, these students were requested to arrive to each tutoring session
with one new essay and any revisions; likewise, they were free to select from the list of prompts or pick any topic to their liking.

Justifications for Tutoring

Research studies that examine one-on-one tutoring for academic writing skills in EFL environments are in short supply within the professional literature, a paucity which, to a large degree, inspired this current study. The second set of research questions that have guided this study asks how tutoring might supplement EFL writing coursework and classroom learning in China’s universities; hence tutoring became an indispensable component in answering these questions. Tutoring students in their EFL writing skills (and in their EFL environment) could not only offer data and perspectives the professional literature currently lacks, it could also provide a more concrete understanding of tutoring’s potential role in supplementing regular classroom instruction than any theoretical analysis could yield.

A Group Interview and a Tutee Questionnaire

Because gauging student receptivity to tutoring was an important component of this study, tutees at both universities were provided with opportunities to comment on their experiences with tutoring. At the conclusion of tutoring at University 1, all ten tutees participated in a group “exit interview”. In this group activity tutees were asked to respond individually to various questions about tutoring (see Appendix A). Likewise, upon concluding tutoring at University 2 the seven tutees were asked to respond to these questions; however, this time they were asked to (anonymously) complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The tutees given the written questionnaire had several days to consider
the questions, reflect on their individual tutoring experiences, and write as little or as much as they would like in response to the questions.

The Data

This research study sought data that would shed light on how EFL writing instruction is actually effected in Chinese tertiary classrooms and how these learning environments might aid or hinder English learners, as well as data that might illustrate the effectiveness of (and receptivity to) one-on-one tutoring for these learners’ EFL writing skills. The data collected from both portions of this research include:

- Researcher notations made during the course of EFL classroom observations
- Remarks, explanations, criticisms, etc., made by instructors and students during the course of conversations with the researcher
- Researcher notations made during the course of one-on-one tutoring sessions
- Tutee responses during a group exit interview at the end of tutoring (University 1)
- Tutee responses to a questionnaire distributed at the end of tutoring (University 2)
- Samples of tutee essays, in particular their initial and final essays (University 2)

Conclusion

One important and overarching criterion for this study’s methods was for the researcher to be as close as possible to the loci of EFL writing instruction; observations of classroom instruction and tutoring ELLs in academic writing both meet this criterion.
Other important criteria include generalizability of data and findings (for which this study sought learning venues representative of the majority experience for China’s tertiary students) and testing the utility of one-on-one tutoring for these students’ EFL writing skills. The methods chosen for this study were informed and guided by the research questions as well as by the above criteria, and the findings from these classroom observations as well as tutoring will be presented and discussed in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study looked at Chinese university students and their acquisition of English writing skills, and did so from two perspectives—the classroom setting and the tutoring setting. In this chapter, the findings from these two settings will be explored. First, the data from classroom observations, which include descriptions of what the researcher saw and heard, are presented. This is followed by data from tutoring, which include discussion of a group interview, questionnaire responses, tutee writing samples, and researcher observations of tutoring sessions. It must be recognized that this study, by its very design, reflects a notable degree of subjectivity and is largely qualitative in nature (although a quantitative analysis of rater concurrence is provided toward the end of this chapter). As such, the findings must be interpreted through these limitations. These limitations notwithstanding, this chapter can be prefaced by stating that data gathered regarding the actualities of EFL writing classrooms is in agreement with the literature. Furthermore, data from the tutoring portion of this study point to a positive role for its inclusion in helping China’s tertiary students advance in their academic English writing.

Observations of Writing Classrooms

As described in Chapter III, observations were conducted at University 1 in three EFL writing courses for English majors, as well as in one EFL writing course for non-English majors. The purpose of these was to observe undergraduate English writing
classes that might typify EFL writing instruction in China’s public universities, and in this derive findings that would have a meaningful degree of generalizability. The findings are, in general, presented as they relate to instructors. This viewpoint is taken because of the leading roles instructors have in their classrooms; affordances for and constraints upon instructors likely affect the nature and even the quality of classroom instruction. EFL writing teachers provide stable focal points when studying how teaching happens in EFL writing classrooms, while their students provide sketches of the effectiveness of that teaching.

Following an introduction to the three instructors and the student population, the findings from these classroom observations are divided into five categories:

- Physical features of classrooms
- Pedagogical orientations of the instructors
- Material classroom constraints on teaching and learning
- Pressures from outside the classroom and from within
- Support for instructors

While the findings portray generalities and details alike, they all bear some influence upon classroom teaching and learning. Viewed as an aggregate they depict many of the EFL writing classroom realities that teachers create, as well as those they simply abide.

The People Involved: Instructors and Students

Instructor A taught a third-semester course in academic English focused on expository and argumentative writing. Her students, about 65 in number, were sophomore
and junior English majors. Instructor A’s teaching style might best be described as subdued; in the classes observed she usually remained at the lectern and the microphone, using the class computer to show and describe models of the current assignment’s elements. She has a thorough, even commanding knowledge of the rhetorical elements of English academic writing and emphasizes these elements for her students, explaining how they can serve writers’ rhetorical and academic purposes.

Instructor B taught a second-semester course in academic English focused on narrative and descriptive writing. Her students, about 60 in number, were largely sophomores. Instructor B’s proficiency in English, and especially the breadth of her vocabulary, came to the surface in her lessons. She regularly reminded her students that language study leads to language proficiency only with the requisite effort by learners. Instructor B is energetic in her teaching, and with a potent voice neither does she remain behind the lectern nor does she have need of the microphone. Additionally, Instructor B made excellent use of mobile technology in her class, sharing class materials—even lengthy documents—through WeChat, a mobile messaging application quite popular in China.

Instructor C taught an elective business writing course for English majors, nearly all 55 of them juniors and seniors. Additionally, she taught a first-semester general English writing course for freshmen non-English majors—a large class with around 80 students. A recent recipient of her master’s degree, Instructor C was the instructor with whom her students seemed most at ease, evidenced in the easy-going discussions they regularly had. Instructor C is quite soft spoken, usually employing the microphone to address her classes. Instructor C guided her students with clear, straightforward
instruction; she avoided the more theoretical aspects and rhetorical features of academic English. She encouraged her students to likewise write in straightforward fashion, eschewing what they might believe to be “academic English.”

A noteworthy feature confirmed through classroom observation is the uniformity of China’s university student population. In contrast to many US universities where older students are a familiar sight, it is exceedingly rare (if not unheard of) to find mature students in China’s public universities. Interactions with students highlighted the homogeneity of age, and to a large degree socio-economic status as well, on China’s public-university campuses. This demographic uniformity is visible in all classrooms, including EFL writing classes.

Important to this study is how such homogeneity translates into classrooms of younger students who, by and large, have little life experience outside of school. Through conversations with students it was noted how this lack of larger experience limited many students’ appreciation of their instructors’ objectives, or even a long-term perspective on their university studies. At times it appeared that they simply didn’t comprehend the larger purposes behind class assignments and activities.

Classroom Constraints and Affordances

The Physical Classrooms

Alongside the centrally-mandated nature of coursework, there are other fundamental elements commonplace in most of China’s classrooms. One of these is the layout and design of classrooms themselves; yet, while similar in design not all classrooms are equally equipped. Of the classes under observation, two had regular
(single-level) seating and the other two stadium seating. More importantly, two of the classrooms were equipped with computer and projection capabilities, along with chalkboards, while the other two afforded only chalkboards. Access to smart classrooms is determined by an academic hierarchy among the instructors, with full professors having first priority and lecturers last.

While teachers (unsurprisingly) occupy the front of classrooms, they also teach from a raised platform whereupon one finds a lectern and a microphone (and any audio-visual equipment the classroom might afford). This description fits the classes observed as well as the overwhelming majority of classrooms at both universities. When questioned about this arrangement, students remarked that, in their experience, nearly all classrooms in China were like this.

One particular feature of Chinese university classrooms that warrants further discussion are the microphones. They are useful for addressing large classes (the norm in China’s schools) but, because these devices tend to encourage monotone, subdued speech, they seem to effectively dampen instructor enthusiasm and discourage animated discourse. The effect of microphone use in lectures was striking in that it would reduce the instructor’s speech to almost a murmur, an effect that is perhaps unhelpful in capturing and holding the attention of a youthful audience. In fact, one might conclude that microphone use in classrooms effectively disengages many students. Not all teachers rely upon microphones, but in classes where they are used microphones appear to work against effective teaching.
Pedagogical Orientations and Practices

As discussed in Chapter II, second-language-learning researchers and instructors alike report that EFL writing teachers often view writing theory as far removed from their classroom realities. Consistent with the professional literature, the three instructors in this study displayed a similar ambivalence to L2 writing theory, per se, when it comes to elements in their lessons and activities in their classrooms. In separate conversations, these instructors confided that they feel their teaching work is removed from the theories they studied in their graduate coursework. Equally, all three felt distant from newer developments and discussions in the field. “I’m not sure,” stated Instructor C when asked which theoretical orientation best describes her approach to teaching EFL writing. “In China, classes make English teachers draw from everything they have, all their resources, all their ideas.” She continued, “I think that writing becomes easier as [students] keep practicing. Without practice they have no real progress.” She qualified this assessment as relevant to English majors. As for her non-English majors, she remarked, “The hardest part is to make them see the reasons for studying English writing. Speaking and listening are more interesting, relevant for them.”

Observations with Instructor C took place within two classrooms, and her approach to EFL writing instruction differed between these two student populations. For her English majors (in the business-writing course) Instructor C was more interested that her students should view models of EFL business writing in order to appreciate the core elements within each example. Her students would regularly attempt to fashion their own examples while retaining these core elements, but would do so in their own particular writing styles and with their own messages. In contrast, with her non-English majors
Instructor C spent considerable time discussing and writing out examples of various sentence- and paragraph-level features of English writing. In this respect, a focus-on-form was her approach for these students. This observation of Instructor C’s EFL writing approach for non-English majors coincides with Xiaoye You’s reporting on similar classrooms, wherein current-traditional approaches (including a focus-on-form) dominate writing instruction (108).

Responding to the same question about her theoretical orientation, Instructor B stated that one’s teaching approach in itself might not be quite so important: “Students have to apply their mental energy to learning English writing. That is how they learn. Successful students learn by writing and then analyzing what they have, trying to find ways to improve it.” In Instructor B’s view, language learning happens largely inside of students where they have to wrestle with the concepts and material. The teacher simply plays the roles of facilitator and mentor in this process.

The comments offered by Instructors B and C are accurate reflections of their classroom practices as observed in the course of this study. Both instructors often opened classes with a talk about a particular English writing element, style, or genre, and subsequently had their students write in-class essays. During this time they routinely toured their classrooms, and while the instructors could not read or even review each individual student’s writing they made themselves available for questions and assistance. In essence, Instructors B and C perceived that students learn L2 writing by doing L2 writing, and as often as they could within their classes these instructors had their students engage in this writing.
As with her colleagues, Instructor A’s classroom practices also reflected her pedagogical orientation. To the same question about theoretical orientation she responded, “Students need to see how writing is done, just like in their own language Chinese. [They need to] understand how they can start and the whole process of writing. It’s like a journey.” Instructor A’s use of the term “process” captures well how all three teachers approach their EFL writing instruction; during class observations they approached writing instruction from a process-product perspective. The three instructors each practiced their process-product orientation differently and they engaged in classroom instruction with equal distinctions. Instructor A’s lessons, for example, relied heavily upon models and writing samples, and continually reminded students of the formal processes of writing: researching, planning, drafting, and revising. Instructors B and C, as noted above, used fewer models and more in-class drafting. In the end, however, all three instructors taught their students that writing begins, grows, and improves as one applies knowledge, thought, and energy. Through their individual lessons and class activities each emphasized that the written product is the aggregate of multiple thoughtful engagements with writing, an emphasis shared with the EFL writing professors in Yang and Gao’s own classroom study (130).

Material Constraints on Teaching

The textbooks that EFL writing instructors employ in their classrooms can represent a stumbling block to creative teaching, even if only because instructors are not free to choose which textbook(s) they use. The university mandates one textbook series for all four core EFL writing courses, a policy the three instructors deplore because it
largely leaves teachers outside of the decision-making process. You, in her study of EFL writing classrooms, alludes to a common perception in China that university administrators receive “gifts” from publishing houses for selecting their textbooks (104). One should consider this allegation as unsubstantiated, yet whether this public perception is actually true or not is immaterial; as a generally-accepted belief alone it does harm. All three participating instructors expressed how little they liked the required textbooks series simply from a pedagogical standpoint, and the thought that these texts were selected under dubious circumstances made them all the less palatable.

More germane to the discussion of classroom constraints is the matter of class size, a reality which effectively dominates EFL teaching and learning at University 1. As noted above, student enrollment in the observed classrooms ranged between fifty-five and eighty students each. With instructors typically teaching four courses per semester, they cannot give meaningful feedback on individual student work (frequently no feedback is given), nor can they consider the learning needs of individual students. In effect, other than what they can glean from course lessons and classroom activities, students are left to learn EFL writing skills with very little direct assistance from instructors. On their end the instructors push forward with their course lessons, all the while with few meaningful indications whether or not students are improving in their writing skills or even grasping the lesson material. Observations confirm what is generally recognized in the professional literature, namely that large class sizes can negatively affect student learning. But observations also highlight that this detriment is pointedly so in second-language writing courses where instructor input and guidance are elemental—and largely missing. As Yang and Gao describe, for English language learning in general (and likely
more so for English academic writing) students’ greatest resource is their course instructor (130). When a de facto barrier separates teacher from learner, in this case the simple impossibility of attending to all students’ needs, then learners are left largely to their own devices.

Pressures from Outside

In the PRC all university instructors, regardless of discipline, adjust to the realities that press from outside their classrooms as well as from within—pressures from the larger administrative systems above and from their students below. In the course of classroom observations these pressures appeared to be present for EFL instructors as well, and especially so in EFL writing courses.

Semester-end examinations, particularly for non-English majors or in foreign-language departments where teachers do not write their own examinations, are one of these pressures from above. Perhaps because of the ubiquitous presence of exams within China’s educational system their presence seemed natural to the students and teachers within the classrooms observed, and questions regarding their true utility were muted. This research also found, through the instructors’ own admissions, that such examinations determine much of what teachers do (and what they don’t do) in their classrooms—their personal pedagogies notwithstanding. For EFL writing courses these exams take the form of essay examinations, and when these assessments are not prepared (or not exclusively prepared) by the instructor, classes and lessons tend to prepare students for the upcoming exam(s).
At University 1 examinations are a large determiner of students’ course grades. They are also a determiner of teachers’ perceived effectiveness, and as such class-wide poor performance on an exam or high student-failure rates will reflect poorly on the instructor and even the university (to say nothing of the effect on students), a reality confirmed by You (107). All parties involved—administrators, instructors, and students alike—seem to be acutely aware of the importance that final exams hold and it is through this amplified awareness that exams “bully” teachers into teaching to the test. The untoward influences that course examinations’ have on lesson activities is confirmed in You’s observations of classroom instruction, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Additionally, from a pedagogical perspective, these exam pressures can greatly limit instructors and their lessons, and in doing so serve neither administrators nor students. Instructor C related how, with the intention of expanding her students’ language horizons, she introduced a course segment on English-language poetry. The pushback was not from administrators, she said, who might not have even cared; rather, it was from her students: “One student in particular,” she recounted, “stood up and challenged me why I would introduce material that is unrelated to the final exam.” Still present in her voice was Instructor C’s disappointment that her attempt to foster a better and deeper understanding of their target language fell upon deaf ears and narrow minds—ears and minds attuned to what the next exam would require. It was not that her students did not want to learn, she concluded, but that they recognized the gatekeeping nature of course examinations and were reluctant to put their time and energy into what they considered to be peripheral learning.
An additional top-down constraint is the markedly hierarchical structure of universities, something made apparent at the onset of research study at University 1. Even though the researcher’s visit and the research study itself had been approved well in advance, and despite the support of the Department of Foreign Languages, every aspect of this research study had to first receive the direct approval of the university’s Director of the Office of Foreign Affairs, who had to be convinced of its purpose and veracity. It was notable that the Office of Foreign Affairs even overstepped the Department of Foreign Languages in deciding which instructors could participate in this study.

Upon relating to Instructor B these experiences with the Office of Foreign Affairs, she confirmed the researcher’s conclusions regarding a clear hierarchy. Even routine affairs, she explained, are regularly reported to administrative directors for approval. She added that this propensity for reporting to superiors is characteristic of public institutions and even private companies in China. The result for teachers, she concluded, is a feeling of subjection. Personal initiative is dampened in a system that requires regular approval from above, and personal initiative is a valuable trait in teachers.

This experience with, and any conclusions about, institutional hierarchy at University 1 must be balanced by acknowledging the freedom that the participating instructors enjoyed inside their classrooms. All three spoke of the ability to run their classes largely as they wish, albeit toward the goal of preparing students for their exam(s). Instructor A stated that the Department of Foreign Languages practices little oversight into classroom workings, and regarding the mandated yet unpopular course textbooks both Instructor B and Instructor C openly confessed that they use only certain
sections within them. Instructor A, for her part, felt it her duty to cover all chapters within the texts, but admitted that this was her own pedagogical choice. Within their classrooms, one noted that these EFL writing instructors had wide latitude to approach instruction and employ activities as they wish; however, in light of the larger hierarchical reality of campus life, this appeared to be an empowerment that ends at the classroom door.

Finally, a quiet yet constant expectation that presses upon many instructors is to publish original research. As described above, privileges are afforded to full professors and the path to professorship includes additional graduate coursework as well as a requirement to publish multiple articles. For instructors to continue teaching under “lecturer” or “assistant-professor” classifications keeps them from fully enjoying opportunities (and even facilities) on campus. Choices of courses and classrooms will be determined by those above, and when this results in these instructors being placed in unpopular courses, or in classrooms without technology, this likely affects their enthusiasm and ability to teach.

Disappointingly, and even paradoxically, the requirements to achieve a higher classification can be difficult to fulfill. As Instructor A commented, research “takes time and requires resources that the university actually doesn’t have.” Instructor C spoke of research she is currently engaged in and disclosed some of the limitations she faces, in particular a virtual inability to access English-language research articles. Thus, while instructors might be rewarded for original research, with a severely-limited ability to learn about the newest research in her field the prospect of publishing—and professional advancement—becomes an even more distant goal.
Pressures from Within

In an early conversation Instructor A she related that “many of [her] English-major students had chosen English by default.” She explained that there are cases in which students might have been indecisive about what to study, or perhaps had been excluded from their first choice(s) because of lower university entrance exam scores. Such students, she explained, might choose English simply because it appears to be an acceptable option rather than due to a strong interest in the language. In part, the consequences of their default choices fall upon English instructors (and more pointedly upon English writing instructors) in a certain percentage of marginally-motivated students. Within the classrooms themselves a distinct variability in student interest could be witnessed; depending on the class activity, anywhere from ten to fifty percent of the class might be visibly disengaged, e.g., looking at their phones or chatting quietly (or not so quietly).

It is remarkable how open and unguarded these displays of indifference can be. While “apathy” does not describe typical behavior in EFL writing classrooms, students often do not mask their disengagement and teachers continue with their lessons in spite of it. Clearly there are culturally-accepted classroom behaviors at play here; all the same, as Instructors B and C shared, it is disheartening to see indifferent students among their audience. All three instructors, rather than blame their students, criticize a “dysfunctional” tertiary-educational system that “fails to make available what truly interests these students.” In addition, all three instructors tended to blame themselves, and their “lackluster lessons,” for student disengagement.
These observations and findings ought not to give a misimpression of EFL writing classrooms, and this report of student dispiritedness deserves a balancing description. One should not imagine widespread, regular, or continual apathy among students. While there were times when a considerable percentage of students seemed distracted, these typically occurred during extended student presentations or in the midst of a particularly dry lecture. More often than not, student comportment reflected general interest in the lesson and the activities. Classroom observations and discussion with students led the researcher to perceive that students’ behavior in their EFL writing classrooms was not an accurate barometer of their interest in learning English.

Teacher Support

In her study, You discusses the low salaries that university English teachers in China receive, compelling many to seek outside employment. Such is the case for one of this study’s participants. Instructor B, in addition to teaching four university English courses, teaches English privately to several groups of younger ELLs in nearby towns. She invited the researcher to accompany her throughout the course of a day during which time she provided English classes to groups of children aged six to ten years old, as well as to a group of secondary-school students. Instructor B teaches privately twice a week, earning more money than she does working at the university; she did not offer an explanation for continuing with her university employment. There are, it can be noted, benefits in public-service employment such as health insurance and a pension, benefits which are valued and not lightly discarded.
The underfunding of language instruction can also be seen in language-classroom resources: At University 1 half of EFL writing courses are held in classrooms without a computer or audio-visual capabilities. This, Instructor A assured, is not the case for other disciplines. This statement could not be corroborated, and furthermore the researcher independently noted examples of wider underfunding of some university services. One outstanding example was the copy and printing center for the university: one room, not much larger than a generous closet, staffed by three employees who coaxed printing from overworked machines. English language instruction, it appeared, was not the only victim of underfunding. In the end, however, whether or not university largess unfairly ignores the needs of EFL instruction, the instructors who confided these sentiments feel a degree of discrimination from university administration, something which cannot but influence their professional lives.

There is one additional element in the professional lives of English writing instructors, as shared by Instructor B, which influences how they work. The EFL writing teachers do not share teaching ideas, techniques, or useful materials among themselves—a dearth of cooperation that she laments greatly. Instructor B would gladly exchange classroom visits and teaching resources with colleagues but, she relates, there is no corresponding interest. She alludes to a climate of quiet competition among instructors, a climate which is not limited to the Department of Foreign Languages. Instructors are “territorial”, she concludes, and protective regarding their own teaching and perhaps of their university positions.

The preceding observations are but an incomplete, composite glimpse into EFL writing classrooms. While they fail to describe all the affordances and constraints
Within these learning venues, the concerns discussed help portray a larger picture of EFL writing instruction and learning in China’s public universities. Additionally, they provide a framework within which to place one-on-one tutoring and to measure its application toward furthering the efforts of students and instructors alike. Generally, this larger picture describes an incomplete learning environment wherein textbooks and lessons can fail to engage learners in interesting ways and where ELLs frequently are not afforded individual feedback on the EFL writing.

One-on-One Tutoring

Introduction

In addition to classroom observations a second and equally important component of this research study entailed tutoring students at both universities in their English writing skills. EFL writing tutoring drew its purpose from the realities of EFL writing classrooms: The classroom constraints and affordances described in this chapter determine much of the success of EFL writing instruction and learning, and one-on-one tutoring sessions for EFL academic writing sought to equips any pedagogical limitations or constraints within these classes.

The findings from the tutoring research will be described and detailed in three sections:

- The researcher’s perceptions of tutees’ receptivity to tutoring
- Tutees’ responses and comments at the conclusion of tutoring
- Rating University 2 tutees’ initial and final essays
Researcher’s Perceptions of Tutees’ Receptivity to Tutoring

Within the Departments of Foreign Languages at both University 1 and University 2, and among the students who volunteered as tutees, on-site tutoring for EFL writing skills was virtually unknown. Such direct and focused support for ELLs exists only at select public universities and is far removed from the educational experiences of the overwhelming majority of tertiary students in the PRC. This scarcity of English writing tutoring, and in particular the opportunity to work with a native speaker, translated into volunteers who did not know exactly what to expect from tutoring sessions but who, all the same, volunteered in overwhelming numbers.

The data (from the tutoring component of this study) indicate that student reception to both the idea of, as well as the actual engagement in, tutoring was extremely positive. A total of seventeen students/tutees from both universities were selected (from a pool of hundreds of volunteers) and, out of this initial population, all seventeen completed the study’s tutoring component with zero tutoring sessions missed—despite the additional essay-writing burdens placed on tutees. With great consistency all tutees verbally expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to be tutored for their EFL writing skills as well as with the actual functioning of the tutoring sessions themselves.

The researcher found that tutees quickly understood and accepted the unique role that a tutor plays in L2 learning. Additionally, they recognized how the support and contributions of their tutor could materially and meaningfully draw out their English-language skills and in doing so improve their EFL academic writing. At both campuses, then, the researcher found that tutoring tertiary-level ELLs for their academic writing
skills was received with enthusiasm and diligence, evidenced by the enormous volunteer pool and the performance by all tutees in their tutoring obligations. Additionally, during tutoring sessions their enthusiasm was reflected in their frequent verbal comments of satisfaction.

Tutees’ Comments and Responses Regarding Tutoring

At both universities, upon the conclusion of the tutoring component, all tutees were asked to provide feedback and commentary on their experiences with tutoring. As described in Chapter III, at University 1 the tutees were given a group interview while at University 2 (for reasons that will become clear) the tutees were provided with a written questionnaire. In both instances the questions asked were the same (see Appendix A), and in both instances the tutees’ perceptions of tutoring for their EFL writing skills were the topic of interest.

University 1: A Group Interview. The group interview for tutees at University 1 was held in the same space that tutoring had taken place, and included the attendance of all ten students. A group interview format was chosen since, during the three previous weeks of tutoring, an atmosphere of open and positive communication had marked the tutoring sessions. With good rapport clearly established, it was believed that Chinese students’ general tendency to be silent in groups would not present a problem. This belief and the subsequent choice of a group interview, it quickly became clear, were unfortunate missteps in the performance of this research. While the individual tutoring sessions had each enjoyed very good communication between tutor and tutee, the dynamics of a group
interview did not share this open communicative atmosphere—something the researcher had failed to anticipate.

One can categorize this group interview as a failure, wherein even ardent coaxing by the interviewer did little to elicit much more than one-word responses from the interviewees. It appeared that the situation was too unwelcome for these tutees, being a complete change from what they were accustomed to in the tutoring sessions. It is not an exaggeration to state that, within this group setting, the previously-established positive rapport between tutor and tutee virtually disappeared. Toward the conclusion of the interview, however, a few students ventured to give somewhat more complete answers to the interviewer’s questions. Because of the brevity of their answers, the artificial nature of the setting, and the observable uneasiness of the interviewees, the tutees’ replies were considered to be of limited validity for the purposes of this research study, yet they still merit some discussion.

Regarding the utility of tutoring for aiding ELLs in their academic writing, several tutees ventured to respond positively, with one making the comment that one-on-one tutoring is “very helpful for English-major students here in China to help with essays.” Furthermore, these students confirmed that this utility is seen within several language skills, especially with listening and speaking skills (“help with pronunciation” was mentioned by several tutees). “The extra essays we had to write helped us to learn,” was one comment to address general skills improvement in learning English. When asked if they would feel comfortable receiving tutoring from one of their English professors, all respondents indicated that they would not feel comfortable, and certainly less comfortable than they had felt with their tutor.
This last comment can be illustrated through a visit by Instructor B to one afternoon’s tutoring sessions. To satisfy her curiosity about how tutoring in this research study actually worked she asked permission to sit through several sessions, promising to observe only and not intervene in the tutoring. This promise, however, was quickly forgotten and Instructor B soon began to add her comments and suggestions on the tutees’ essays. The researcher immediately noted that, in the presence of an English professor, the tutees became more reserved with their comments and discussion. Indeed, there was a rapid change as soon as she walked into the room. Tutees would listen to Instructor B’s comments—which were very appropriate to the tutees’ essays and their writing needs—but they would not do much more than nod in agreement. In short, in each session the communication was one-way: from the professor to the tutee. There was no discussion. This brief episode with Instructor B reaffirmed findings from this study (discussed below) that the rapport and the relationship established between tutor and tutee is an important and necessary dynamic in successful tutoring sessions, without which open communication is greatly impeded.

**University 2: A Written Questionnaire.** At University 2, in order to avoid a repeat of the University 1 group-interview debacle, a written questionnaire format was chosen for tutees to give feedback and commentary. The questionnaire given to the seven tutees at University 2 requested their comments regarding the benefits (if any) of tutoring for EFL academic writing, as well as their views on any unique role that such tutoring might potentially hold for the writing skills of ELLs. The questionnaire was anonymous and as such tutees were encouraged to respond with candor. All seven tutees responded to all items on the questionnaire, and taken as a whole the responses show that tutoring for
EFL writing skills has a very welcome, positive, and constructive place alongside students’ regular EFL writing coursework. Following is a sampling of tutees’ questionnaire responses.

Questionnaire Responses

Question 1: The first questionnaire item addresses tutees’ perceptions about which, if any, parts of their second-language writing saw improvement as a result of tutoring. In their responses, tutees affirmed that tutoring brought material improvement(s) to many elements of their writing, including vocabulary, word order, the meanings of words and phrases, and essay structure. Six out of the seven tutees reported improvements in multiple areas. A typical tutee response:

- “But now, I feel that I have concentrated on the structure and logical of the article, especially for the relationship between sentence and sentence, or paragraph and paragraph.”

Question 2: Responses to the second question showed that tutoring for English academic writing brought other target-language benefits as well. In asking tutees if reading, listening, and/or speaking skills also improved, all respondents said that L2 writing tutoring helped with these skills, with listening and speaking skills seeing the most mentioned areas of improvement. Typical tutee responses include:

- “During the communication, the tutor gave many examples to help me understand what he said, which helps my listening. He also asked me questions about my essays, talked with me about my confusion and gave me chances to introduce myself, which help me to practice my speaking.”
"For the listening skills...tutoring helps me familiar with the accent of real person. For speaking, it makes me more open up to speak, help me practice how to express myself."

Question 3: Because this study sought to test and measure tutoring within the backdrop of regular EFL writing coursework and classroom realities, the third question asked tutees to compare classroom instruction and tutoring, noting the advantage(s) of either or both. All seven respondents saw distinct advantages in tutoring, and their comments mention the accessibility of the tutor for direct, focused assistance. Additionally, four tutees noted that classrooms have their own advantages, largely a result of the social nature of classroom learning. For classroom advantages, typical tutee responses include:

- "The advantages are that we can communicate with our classmates and learn different ways to express our opinions from different people."

And for tutoring advantages, typical tutee responses include:

- "One-to-one model makes students more concentrate on learning."
- "The advantages are that I can achieve specific advices for my essays including vocabulary, word order, meanings of words and phrases, and the structure, which are more efficient than classroom learning."

Question 4: Six respondents, in addressing question four, reported that they felt more confident in their English writing skills as a result of one-on-one tutoring. Additionally, five tutees indicated that their increased confidence in EFL writing made them feel more confident in other courses. Typical tutee responses include:
“Mostly, I feel confident because I find a way to keep improving my writing even without tutoring anymore. Secondly, help me realized there is nothing to fear about, after my first version I can revise it repeatedly, that makes good writings.”

“There’s no doubt that confidence in my English writing can help with other courses.... I will not be afraid to make a presentation in English. With the improvement of language skills, I am able to concentrate on English courses and easily get the key points.”

Question 5: The final question asked tutees if tutoring fostered a positive learning relationship between tutor and tutee. All seven reported that the tutoring dynamic did indeed create a relationship that aided in language learning. Typical tutee responses include:

“I think that the tutor-to-student relationship help me very much not only for English writing but also for my listening and speaking. Good relationship free me from the nervousness and we can talk to each other at will.”

“This relationship is much more comfortable for us to communicate. I will not be afraid to make mistakes during tutoring. Language is the tool for us to communicate with each other. We have learnt much more when we used language to express ourselves both in writing and speaking. The relationship makes us more willing to learn and use language.”

In Appendix A is a copy of the questionnaire, and in Appendix B are the transcriptions of student responses, containing a breakdown of the questionnaire and the responses from each tutee, along with examples of typical and noteworthy comments. In reviewing these responses please note that any numbers included in the analyses are
always out of a total of seven respondents. As a composite picture, the researcher can state that responses and comments by tutees at University 2 show a favorable response to tutoring and provide evidence of its potential role and its effectiveness in helping tertiary-level ELLs advance in their writing proficiencies.

**Rating Tutees’ Initial and Final Essays**

As described in Chapter III, the students at University 2 received four weeks of one-on-one tutoring for their EFL academic writing, meeting thrice weekly, and to each session tutees arrived with a new essay as well as with the revision(s) of earlier writing. The second set of this study’s research questions includes a query regarding the measurability of any changes or improvements in tutees’ EFL writing. Therefore, as a component of this study five of these tutees’ initial unrevised essays were evaluated against their final unrevised essays, comparing these writing samples before and after four weeks of tutoring. (The two remaining tutees did not submit their final essays, leaving five sets of essays eligible for comparing and rating.) The purpose of these comparisons was to gauge if tutoring brought about positive changes to any of the tutees’ EFL writing proficiency, and if so would these changes be qualitatively measureable or definable.

**The Rating System and Justification.** For these comparisons, each pair of essays (the initial and the final) was rated for general inferiority, comparability, or superiority in seven different categories: grammar, vocabulary, syntax, paragraph structure, overall organization, comprehensibility, and academic writing (see Appendix C). The ratings were performed by three graduate students (the researcher being one), all with considerable experience at CSU, Chico in tutoring ESL university students in their
academic writing. The rating sheet asked raters to look at these distinct criteria when comparing the tutees’ initial and final essays, and to do so using their own understanding of University-Level Academic Writing (ULAW). Raters were asked to decide if one essay (the final essay) was inferior, comparable, or superior to the other essay (the initial essay) in terms of university-level academic English. (The essays were presented to the raters in randomized order to avoid a rating pattern.) In the data from these ratings, for each particular question the researcher’s own rating (Rater #1) will be given, accompanied by an indication which of the other raters (Raters #2 and #3) is/are in agreement with Rater #1.

The nature of this rating method was considered an acceptable, and even appropriate, complement to the tutoring potion of this study in that both these components (while admittedly subjective) evaluated the tutees’ writing from a holistic perspective. In each tutoring session, the tutor used the tutee’s essay as a vehicle for discussing any and all pertinent aspects of English academic writing that might arise from the essay itself. These sessions did not focus strictly on any particular aspect(s) of language (e.g., grammar, organization, etc.), but rather looked at the tutee’s writing in its entirety and in terms of university-level writing expectations. The tutor approached each essay as a whole, helping tutees to better express (at an academic level) their thoughts and arguments within their target language. Making any warranted improvements and suggestions for their writing were the goals of each tutoring session. The rating method likewise considered each essay holistically and asked experienced raters to give a subjective opinion about its overall quality with respect to ULAW. Additionally, it asked raters to then judge between the initial and final essays in terms of general superiority,
comparability, or inferiority. For each category raters were invited to give justifications for their ratings.

The Findings from Raters

As an aggregate, the ratings determined by Rater #1 point to generally consistent improvements in English academic writing across the entire spectrum of initial-to-final essays, and remarkable improvement to the academic writing proficiencies of several students in particular. Additionally, as a whole, the ratings determined by Raters #2 and #3 also indicate considerable improvements in the tutees’ English writing skills. Looking at an example of initial and final essays can help illustrate these findings, wherein several elements of language usage and essay construction (for example, improvements in grammar and essay organization) can be illustrated. Exact transcriptions of the five tutees’ initial and final essays, along with the ratings for each pair, can be found in Appendix C.

For the majority of tutees, and to varying degrees, their essays’ overall organization and argumentation improved, something, which the initial and final essays from “Kate” exemplify.

“I think romantic love is the best reason for choosing a husband or wife. When I was a little girl, I liked to read fairy tales such as Cinderella, The Frog Prince and Snow White. The stories are really romantic and all have a happy ending. And even now I have grown up and I still love these fairy tales.

I hope I could own a romantic love. A romantic husband can make life full of surprises. I would never feel boring. Not all men are romantic, and a man who is romantic is always considerate, attentive and dependable. Romantic love makes
marriage life happier. Only in the romantic love, we may think of marriage. I am looking forward to meeting my Mr. Right and starting a romantic love.
That’s all I could think about romantic love is the best reason for choosing a husband or wife, now.

“Kate” (Final Essay)

Would the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects be a good or bad thing for the nation? Explain why.

Perhaps for most Chinese citizens, the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects is a bad thing for the nation. Because these dialects have distinctive national and local characteristics and they are significantly important parts of Chinese culture heritage. However, I still hold the positive view on the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects.

With a vast territory and huge population, China is home to thousands of dialects and several minority languages. As is known to all, dialects are languages spoken only by the local people and they vary greatly from places to places. There is no doubt that no one can speak or understand every dialects. Therefore it is fairly difficult for people from different parts of China to correctly understand each other and easily communicate with each other. Consequently dialects make communication even harder. Since the purpose of language is to make communication possible, we need to avoid using dialects and to build a popular and easy-to-understand communication. Besides, dialects also have many bad words and they may have side effects on building a civilized society. On the contrary, if we all speak mandarin, the standard language, people all over the country are able to interact with each other more easily and the whole country will be united increasingly tightly. Then how convenient our life will become.

In a word, I do not think it is a bad thing for the nation if all of China’s language dialects disappear.

While both of Kate’s essays show at least some basic paragraph structure and essay organization, her final essay is far more coherent in its discourse and style. As well, the author remains on message throughout, resulting in a far more comprehensible essay which fits more completely with expectations of university writing. In addition to improvements in essay discourse and organization, Kate shows advancement in her English grammar with a far lower density of errors.
Concurrence Between the Three Essay Raters

Although by design the essay ratings relied upon the raters’ subjective judgements, there are some numerical data that support their subjective conclusions, especially in light of the concurrence in their findings. With the essay pairs of 5 tutees under analysis, and 8 questions to be addressed in the rating process, a total of 40 (5 x 8) possible measurement points exist to each rater. There were 6 questions regarding the superiority, comparability, or inferiority of different writing elements within the essays, representing 30 (5 x 6) of these measurements, with the additional 10 (5 x 2) questions related to qualitative measurements vis-à-vis the raters’ understanding of ULAW. Again, this analysis will present the findings of Rater #1, then look for levels of concurrence with the other two raters.

Out of the 30 ratings that compared writing elements, Rater #1 found the tutees’ final essays to be superior to their initial essays in 22 specific measurements, and found the essays to be comparable in eight specific measurements. Correspondingly, the rankings by Raters #2 and #3 represent 60 (30 x 2) possible points of concurrence in the above findings. Out of this possibility of 60, Raters #2 and #3 agreed with Rater #1 on 53 measurements, reflecting 88% concurrence with Rater #1’s findings.

Of the five questions related to the essays’ proximity to ULAW, Rater #1 found that 4 final essays were closer to ULAW than their corresponding initial essays, with one pair of essays found to be comparable. In this finding all raters were in agreement, reflecting 100% concurrence. To summarize the essay ratings, Rater #1 (the researcher) found that there were distinct improvements in the writings of all five tutees. While subjectivity characterized these analyses of tutees’ writing, the degree of rater-
concurrence regarding their general English writing improvements, and their proximity to ULAW, point to the reliability of Rater #1’s findings.

Conclusion

Data from classroom observations as well as one-on-one tutoring were the focus of this study’s findings, and each of these data sets provides a wealth of insight into how China’s tertiary ELLs are taught and might better learn EFL writing. In addition to viewing how these students learn English academic writing in their classrooms, one-on-one EFL writing tutoring, as described in the tutees’ responses and witnessed in their writing, directly addresses a real pedagogical need in this EFL environment. Within their classrooms, students have adequate learning materials, good lessons, and dedicated instructors. What they most lack is sufficient feedback or discussion about their individual writing and writing proficiencies. For all the tutees who participated in this study, one-on-one tutoring meets this need quite well and tutees’ written comments and essays themselves attest to this fit. What these findings mean, in terms of actually making writing assistance available to the ELL population and doing so in meaningful ways, will be explored in the last chapter.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Study’s Purpose, Methods, and Findings

Here, at the conclusion of this thesis, it is appropriate to revisit the research questions that informed this study, as well to look forward to possible tangible contributions. These questions captured the researcher’s interest and, more importantly, they seek meaningful understanding of (and contributions to) this population’s goal of English writing proficiency. The first set of questions concerns EFL writing classrooms: How is English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) writing actually taught in China’s universities? What are instructors’ orientations and approaches to teaching, and what are the affordances and constraints for instructors and students within their EFL writing classrooms? Understanding the realities of these classrooms is crucial to understanding how well Chinese university students progress in their EFL writing skills. As well, these classrooms can shed light on how to best help these ELLs acquire the English academic writing skills they desire, as well as the potential role that one-on-one tutoring might hold—which is the focus of the second set of research questions: What benefits, if any, might one-on-one tutoring for academic writing bring to Chinese university students and
would they be measurable? Furthermore, how would one-on-one tutoring be received by students in this EFL environment?

This pairing of data sources—EFL classrooms and EFL students—was selected because, toward the purpose of finding effective techniques in aiding the EFL writing skills of this population, EFL classrooms were the principal venue for English writing instruction in which tutoring was an untested technique. Furthermore, the researcher wished to acquire and study data that could possibly lead to real-world recommendations and solutions, and thus avoid solely recommending a (commonplace and sometimes rather weak) call for additional studies. More studies of tertiary-level EFL classrooms would be very useful, and certainly more data regarding one-on-one tutoring are needed to refine any proposed solutions; however, this study and its methods were designed and directed toward pinpointing tangible solutions. Finally, the findings, to a large degree, support the purpose of the study and the methods employed.

Implications

The Needs of Chinese Tertiary Students

The findings from the observation portion of this research study largely agree with the professional literature in many aspects of English writing instruction within China’s university classrooms. This study found a strong and widespread desire on the part of university students to materially improve their EFL writing proficiencies. The study also found that this desire, for the most part, was not adequately met through students’ English writing coursework largely because classroom constraints upon both teachers and students (e.g., large class sizes) make meaningful individual feedback and
guidance a virtual impossibility. The gap between what EFL writing classroom instruction was able to realistically provide, and what students needed in order to improve in their EFL writing proficiencies, was broad. While students’ perceptible motivation within these classrooms was, on the surface, generally modest, this was quite possibly more a reflection of classroom dynamics than their inherent interest in acquiring EFL writing skills. Many of these students perceived the need to gain proficiency for their own academic and career futures, and this need pressed upon many of them quite heavily.

Meeting these Needs

One-on-one tutoring, especially with a native English speaker, addresses these students’ needs very well. Tutoring can provide the English writing guidance and feedback that Chinese university ELLs need and desire. Tutoring performs the role(s) that their professors likely would, were they able, through reading, discussing, and improving students’ writing. Tutoring draws out of EFL students the language skills they often already possess. It demonstrates to these students that they can indeed write well in their target language, and that the guidance found in tutoring helps them discover this. Tutoring facilitates improvement by drawing it out of students rather than outright teaching them, and the essay samples in Appendix C demonstrate this—especially with the lower-proficiency writers. Tutoring for English writing skills simply unlocks the knowledge that many of these students already have in their heads and, so to speak, places it in their hands.
Expanding the Reach of Tutoring

Despite the limited nature and small scope of this study, the findings strongly indicate that one-on-one tutoring for EFL writing can meet many of the needs of China’s ELL students in their academic writing. It bears mention that the tutoring portion of this study did not engage in unique or specialized tutoring techniques, nor did it work with unique populations. In other words, the tutoring practiced in this study can be easily replicated and expanded, and done so at virtually any welcoming university. The implications from this study—and especially in light of the favorable responses to and improvements from tutoring—are that one-on-one tutoring as practiced in this study should be replicated and EFL writing tutoring should be expanded for China’s tertiary-level ELLs.

The researcher would like to forward a viable path toward bringing the benefits of native-speaker writing tutoring to this ELL population. One method for expanding the role of one-on-one EFL tutoring is the possibility of bringing US university students directly into Chinese universities where they would serve in two capacities: Firstly, these US students would serve as EFL writing tutors for Chinese learners; and secondly, these students would train more advanced Chinese ELLs to serve as writing tutors for peers who are less proficient in their English writing skills. Expanding the reach of one-on-one tutoring into China’s immense tertiary-education system faces enormous and untold hurdles, to be sure, to its acceptance and implementation. For the researcher, this challenge is beyond the ability of one person; yet in looking at tutees’ reception of tutoring, and the benefits they derive from this learning
activity, the attempt is warranted and the enthusiasm is there. Within the constraints of what is possible and the promise of what can be achieved through tutoring, the researcher recommends, as described above, the implementation of a pilot tutoring project at one university in the PRC wherein the establishment of an EFL writing center can serve as a testing ground for refining EFL writing tutoring in its Chinese context and for possible amplification to other universities.

Conclusion

The important role, and the real possibilities, that the English language holds for many in the non-English-speaking world make learning this global second language the goal of many, and perhaps nowhere more so than in China. At the same time, the challenge that English proficiency presents to these learners, via linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural differences, is great and, again, perhaps nowhere more so than in China. This study sought to explore this challenge at the classroom level and, concurrently, at the individual level. Above all, it is the hope and intention of the researcher that this exploration should lead to meaningful and concrete steps toward furthering the EFL writing proficiencies of China’s tertiary-level students, and that one-on-one writing tutoring should prove to be instrumental in achieving this end.


APPENDIX A
This questionnaire asks you to think about your experience with tutoring during the past few weeks and respond to some questions. Please write as much as you want—your thoughtful responses are very important to my research.

1. There are many parts to writing in a foreign language, including: vocabulary; proper word order; the meaning(s) of words and phrases; and the structure of essay writing. Thinking about your own writing, 

   Do you feel that tutoring helped you in any of these areas?
   Yes No

   If yes, which ones?
   vocabulary proper word order meaning of words / phrases
   structure

   Which area do you think has improved the most?
   vocabulary proper word order meaning of words / phrases
   structure

   Can you describe the improvements you see in your English writing?

2. Language learning is comprised of four important skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking;

   In addition to writing, did tutoring for writing help you with any other language skill(s)?
   Yes No

   If yes, which one(s)?
   reading listening speaking

   If yes, please describe how tutoring helps with other language skills:
3. When you compare learning English writing in a classroom to learning English writing with a tutor,

*Do you see benefits or advantages to *classroom* learning?*

Yes  No

*If yes, what are those benefits or advantages?*

*Do you see benefits and advantages to *tutoring?*

Yes  No

*If yes, what are those benefits or advantages?*

4. **Written language** (and especially academic language) is in many ways different from spoken language. Thinking about your own English writing skills,

*Has tutoring increased your *confidence* in your English writing skills?*

Yes  No

*If yes, can you describe why you now feel more confident?*

*Can increased English writing confidence help you in other university coursework?*

Yes  No

*If yes, how can confidence in your English writing help with other courses?*
5. The **relationship** and the communication between **tutor and student** can be very different than those between teacher and student. Thinking about your experience with tutoring in English writing,

*Do you think that tutoring offers a **positive relationship** between tutor and student?*

Yes               No

*If yes, do you think this tutor-to-student relationship is especially helpful for learning language skills?*

Yes               No

*If so, how does this relationship help with learning a language?*

*Thank you for your responses! If you have any comments you would like to add about this experience with tutoring, please write them here!*
APPENDIX B
1. Question number one asked tutees if tutoring had helped with any of the many aspects of second-language (L2) writing (e.g., vocabulary, word order, word/phrase meaning, and essay structure), and if so which one(s). The question asked respondents to describe any improvement(s).

All tutees responded that tutoring helped in at least one area of L2 writing and most reported improvements in several areas, including vocabulary, proper word order, meaning of words and phrases, and structure. Four respondents identified “essay structure” as receiving the greatest improvement.

“First and most importantly, I have much improvement in structure than before. Before I took the tutoring I was poor to handle the structure, now I’m better.”

“But now, I feel that I have concentrated on the structure and logical of the article, especially for the relationship between sentence and sentence, or paragraph and paragraph.”

“After finishing English [tutoring] the most obvious change for me is that I am not fear about English writing any more. I have mastered the basic language and writing structure, so that I can finish a short essay easily and quickly.”
2. Question number two asked tutees if tutoring for L2 writing had helped them in any other language skill(s) (e.g., reading, listening, and/or speaking) and if so which one(s). The question asked respondents to describe how tutoring helps with these skills.

All tutees responded that tutoring for L2 writing helped with other skills, with listening and speaking skills being the most mentioned skills that saw improvement.

“During the tutoring, the skill of listening has been practiced without any pressure. I feel comfortable to listen and I am able to understand very well. Communication between my tutor and me pushes me to speak. I would not feel embarrassed when I make a mistake because no one else is in this class, except the two of us.”

“During the communication, the tutor gave many examples to help me understand what he said, which helps my listening. He also asked me questions about my essays, talked with me about my confusion and gave me chances to introduce myself, which help me to practice my speaking.”

“For the listening skills…tutoring helps me familiar with the accent of real person. For speaking, it makes me more open up to speak, help me practice how to express myself.”

“But after this [tutoring], I gain confidence that I could find some favorite stories to read and I don’t worry my listening and speaking anymore.”

“When I talk with [the tutor], I feel that my oral English has improved much.”
3. Question number three asked tutees to compare any advantage(s) of classroom learning with that (those) of tutoring in regard to learning English writing, with four respondents seeing certain advantages to classroom learning.

“...such as students can talk with each other when they come across some questions no matter the academic or real life.”

“The advantages are that we can communicate with our classmates and learn different ways to express our opinions from different people.”

“It’s more efficient to teach many students, but tutoring can be time consuming.”

Additionally, all seven respondents recognized distinct advantages in tutoring for learning L2 writing skills.

“Different students have different requirements. In this way, everyone can be well taken care for. I may be easier for the tutor to find the problems in students’ English study.”

“It provides me more time to talk with my [tutor], and if I have a question that I can ask him immediately.”

“I can get solution faster with a tutor than learning English writing in a classroom.”

“One-to-one model makes students more concentrate on learning.”

“During tutoring we can talk or discuss with each other. It can not only benefit our listening and speaking but also enhance friendship.”

“The advantages are that I can achieve specific advices for my essays including vocabulary, word order, meanings of words and phrases, and the structure, which are more efficient than classroom learning.”
4. Question number four asked tutees if tutoring for L2 writing had helped increase their level of confidence in their writing skills and, if so, to describe this increased confidence. Additionally, tutees were asked if any increased confidence might be visible in their other coursework. Six respondents report increased confidence in their English writing.

“Mostly, I feel confident because I find a way to keep improving my writing even without tutoring anymore. Secondly, help me realized there is nothing to fear about, after my first version I can revise it repeatedly, that makes good writings.”

“The English writing scare me very much before, because I don’t know how to write an essay. Though I could finish an essay, sometimes, it only has no more than 150 words and the content is very bad. But when I finish [tutoring], I know at least how to write an essay and I can finish an essay with 250 words quickly.”

“Actually, encouragement from my tutor helps a lot. In the past, I always thought my English level is too low to communicate with others. Now, I realize that this problem can be solved in the near future if I endeavor to improve my language skills.”

“There’s no doubt that confidence in my English writing can help with other courses…. I will not be afraid to make a presentation in English. With the improvement of language skills, I

“The confidence achieved from English writing brings me the confidence to express myself. It helps me to communicate efficiently with others. Since the confidence brings chain reaction, I become more positive in other courses.”
5. Question number five asked tutees if tutoring fostered a positive relationship between tutor and tutee and, if so, how this might aid in language learning. All seven respondents stated that this positive relationship did exist in their tutoring experience and furthermore that it is helpful to language learning.

“I think that the tutor-to-student relationship help me very much not only for English writing but also for my listening and speaking. Good relationship free me from the nervousness and we can talk to each other at will.”

“I think tutor and student are much closer than teacher and student. It’s hard for teachers to read every details of every paper of every student. But tutors can do that, they can see what problems exist and help students work on it.”

“Not only can improve the writing ability, but also helps to the improvement of reading ability and oral English.”

“This tutor-to-student relationship makes me feel comfortable and relax to study English. I think tutoring is far more than a kind of English writing courses because of this relationship. It makes me enjoyable to spend time on English writing and my language skills are gradually improved at the same time.”

“This relationship is much more comfortable for us to communicate. I will not be afraid to make mistakes during tutoring. Language is the tool for us to communicate with each other. We have learnt much more when we used language to express ourselves both in writing and speaking. The relationship makes us more willing to learn and use language.”
“Alice”

1. In terms of grammar the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
2. In terms of vocabulary the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
3. In terms of syntax the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
4. In terms of paragraph structure the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
5. In terms of overall organization the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
6. In terms of comprehensibility the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 3]
7. Overall, the final essay comes closest to ULAW. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
8. “Moderate, with several noteworthy improvements” best describes the degree of improvement in the final essay. [Concurrence: Rater 2]

Raters’ comments:

Grammar: Alice’s final essay shows fewer errors; however, the two essays are largely in different tenses which may partly account for this. Final has some similar mistakes as the initial essay, but fewer of them. Her initial essay had trouble with verb tense; generally, final essay had better grammar.

Vocabulary: Final had slight improvement, but still noticeable.

Syntax: Better use of multiple and more complex clauses found in final essay.

Paragraph structure: Her final essay shows greater consistency with ULAW structure (topic sentence / evidence / concluding sentence). Her initial essay did not use paragraphs.

Night & day difference between the two. In final, paragraphs are present and used purposefully in accordance with convention.

Overall organization: Alice’s final essay shows improvement in its essay structure, with introduction, good body paragraphs, and a conclusion. There is a clear message and purpose in the essay. The improvement in essay structure aids in comprehensibility.

The final essay has a better introduction, and uses transitions well. Marked improvement in final essay. Clear intro / body / conclusion structure and awareness of essay organization conventions.

Comprehensibility: Clear thesis and thematic thread that is consistent throughout final essay.

Overall quality: Her final essay more closely follows expected / standard ULAW structures and form.
Final essay shows dramatic improvement with regards to paragraph parsing, clarity, directness, and proper sequencing of ideas.

**General comments:** Alice is relative proficient in her English writing. It is noteworthy that tutoring brought about only moderate changes to her writing as seen in these examples. Still, improvement is there, particularly in essay organization.

The writing moved from clunky, loose, and diary-like in the initial essay to smooth, tight, and more academic in the final.

“Alice” (initial essay)

*Now I am a doctoral candidate of Chemistry, having a life around our laboratories, canteens and dormitories. There is no obvious difference between my daily life. Sometimes I feel confused. I don’t know where my life is going just like many other people. For me, it is due to I don’t know what I want. In my highschool, Chemistry was the only branch of learning that I was good at and I spended much time on it. So when I had to choose my major in university, I choosed Chemistry. I thinded that it might be more simple and easier for me to learn than other branches. But when I actually studied in university, I found I was wrong. No majors might be simple, they are all much more complex than I expected. And I found I didn’t like chemistry so much as I expected. At the same time, I found that I had no branches that I like best or that I wanted to learn. So I didn’t change my major. In the fourth year of university, I found it was hard for female learning Chemistry to find a job. Besides, I didn’t know what job I wanted to do. With the time past, it was still one question confused me. So I choosed to further studied for the Master’s degree and now the doctoral degree. Now there is no like or dislike, I just continue to study my subject. I was planed to spend more time to find out what I like or what I really want during my school life. But, as a result, I am still confused with the pressure of graduation. I make myself in a dilemma. Sometimes I ask myself where my life is going and whether I should change the way I live. But I still have no answer, because I don’t know what I want. I don’t know what life I want to have or what job I want to do. If we know what we want, we’ll make much preparation for it and try our best to get it. Then all the behaviors will make sense. There will be a goal of our life. We’ll then actually know what we are doing and where our life is going. The life will be full...*
and meaningful. Sometimes we might face difficulties, but we’ll try to solve them and go on with no fear or confusion.
“Alice” (final essay)

I have a regular life everyday, having classes in classrooms, conducting experiments in laboratory, having meals in canteen, and taking rest in dormitory. There are no obvious changes with the days continuing. Sometimes I feel bored about my daily life and would like a little change. There are three things I would change about my life.

The first thing I want to change is that I would like to go to bed early. Most times when I lie down and try to find out what time it is, it is after one o’clock in the morning. The next day, I’ll feel sleepy and tired the whole day. I may make simple mistakes and waste time to make up for them. I can not complete my tasks efficiently and have to sleep late; then life comes into a vicious cycle. As a result, I would go to bed earlier than before, firstly.

The second thing I would like to change is that I need to take exercise more. Sometimes I’ll feel like a robot with my four limbs stiff if I work in my lab for a long time. At the time the weather changing, I may fall ill easily. Exercise helps to build up the strength of our bodies, improve our body function, and enhance our flexibility and coordination. That’s the reason why I want to take more exercise than before.

The third thing I want to make a change is that I would often contact with my friends. I’m not good at communicating with others or opening a topic. Sometimes staying quiet may lead an awkward moment, so I seldom contact with my friends who are not in my side. With the time passed, our life may become different from each other and have few common topics and goals. We may become confused about how to get along with each other. This would be sad and regretful. I wouldn’t like such things to happen in my life, so I should change. I would contact with my friends frequently.

I hope through these changes about my life, I would enjoy my work efficiently, keep in good health, and share my life with my friends; then I will live a ful and comfortable life.
“Belle”

1. In terms of grammar the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
2. In terms of vocabulary the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 2]
3. In terms of syntax the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
4. In terms of paragraph structure the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
5. In terms of overall organization the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
6. In terms of comprehensibility the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
7. Overall, the final essay comes closest to ULAW. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
8. “Substantial, with many noteworthy improvements” best describes the degree of improvement in the final essay. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]

Raters’ comments:

Grammar: Belle’s final essay shows much improvement. She demonstrates increased proficiency with English grammar by deftly handling a more complex topic while employing more complex grammatical structure, e.g., her use of modals.
Belle’s final essay has much-improved punctuation over her initial essay.
The essays would be roughly comparable but for two notable incomplete sentences in the initial essay.

Vocabulary: The vocabulary in her final essay is much more sophisticated in order to match her topic.
Negligible differences between the two essays.

Syntax: Belle’s final essay doesn’t suffer from any notable syntactical errors, unlike her initial essay.
Initial essay has incomplete sentences, something not found in final essay.

Paragraph structure: Her initial essay lacks paragraph structure, a writing element greatly improved in the final essay. She largely makes use of topic sentences and retains the message with paragraphs.
No real paragraphs in the initial essay.
Awareness of paragraph conventions are missing in the initial essay, present in the final.

Overall organization: Clear improvements in her final essay, presenting and arguing her message in a format closer to ULAW.
The final is far more focused than the first essay.
Comprehensibility: Belle’s final essay is remarkably improved in terms of the reader’s understanding of her message. This is due to Belle’s staying on message.
Lack of punctuation and a very short introduction makes the initial essay difficult to understand.
General comments: It is interesting how Belle attempts a far more difficult argument in her final essay; the initial essay skimmed a familiar topic, but the final essay required use of evidence and analysis to carry its argument.

The final essay shows awareness of grammatical and syntactical precision.

“Belle” (initial essay)

[Which festival or holiday in China is my favorite and why?]

China is an ancient country with a history of five thousand, and many traditional festivals formed during this time. The Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, Tanabata Festival, which are the most famous Chinese seven traditional festival and Each festival has its own characteristics and all of them have a long history and very rich contents, such as people preparing beautiful clothes, usually the red colour, and delicious food, on Spring Festival, holding dragon boat races on Dragon Boat Festival and so on. Every festival has its allusion, as Dragon Boat Festival is in memory of Qu Yuan, Tanabata Festival own a legend of cowherd and girl weaver, et.al. In order to celebrate and make a memory of these festivals, Chinese can get a short vocation for getting together with parents or going out for a trip.

Trip is my favorite, and I like go out during the Spring and Autumn for their happy weather.
How to quit smoking

Smoking is popular in the world today. Smoking, sometimes, is fashionable especially for young adults. They model themselves on their father or on some celebrities who smoke; and these youth smoke to imitate. In China, most smokers are males, they need cigarettes for social communication or to free themselves from society pressure. Although every package of cigarettes has written the words: “Smoking is harmful to health,” smokers can not easily give up. Although smokers recognize the dangers of their habits, they ignore them.

Cigarette contains nicotine, which is the reason that smokers cannot quit smoking so easily, though they know smoking does harm to health. Smokers who want to give up smoking completely must have a strong will and must tell themselves that smoking can not only harm their health, but also does harm to those who living with them. Living with smokers means living with second-hand smoke, and it does more serious harm to the health than smoking itself. In order to keep everyone healthy, smokers must have a strong will to quit.

During the time that smokers quit smoking they find their bodies crave the nicotine and they want to smoke again. When their bodies craving for nicotine, they can find the other food, like melon seeds or beans to eat. In my opinion, it’s more advisable that keep a strong will and a replacement food at the same time when the smokers do quit smoking.
“Brandon”

1. In terms of grammar the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
2. In terms of vocabulary the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
3. In terms of syntax the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 2]
4. In terms of paragraph structure the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
5. In terms of overall organization the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
6. In terms of comprehensibility the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
7. Overall, the final essay comes closest to ULAW. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
8. “Moderate, with several noteworthy improvements” best describes the degree of improvement in the final essay. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]

Raters’ comments:

**Grammar**: Brandon’s final essay shows improved grammar, and notably the improvements are seen in a wide range of his grammatical choices.
While grammar within Brandon’s initial essay tended to obscure content, in the final essay the grammar errors were not a hindrance to meaning and communicative intent.

**Vocabulary**: His final essay shows a wider range of vocabulary, with a couple of noteworthy word choices, e.g., “coerced”, “fairness”, “disturbed”.
Final essay fixes the problems of awkward / inappropriate diction and word choice.
His final essay uses slightly better vocabulary and with significantly fewer mistakes.

**Syntax**: His final essay contains improvements in sentence construction. While Brandon employs complex sentences in both essays, he does so more successfully in the final one.
His initial essay attempted many sentence structures but did use them well.
**Paragraph structure**: Brandon demonstrates improved topic sentences as well as concluding sentences in paragraphs.
Night and day difference. The final essay demonstrates awareness of the function and purpose of paragraph breaks.

**Overall organization**: He stays on point in his final essay—an improvement over the initial—with a very good conclusion.
His final essay is a little more clearly organized and presented.
His final writing shows awareness of basic organizational conventions.

**Comprehensibility**: Both essays are understandable, but the final one is an improvement because of its more cohesive nature.
Final essay is better, mostly because of clear grammar improvements.
Improvement in just about every way.
**Overall quality:** Brandon’s final essay reflects better the expectations of ULAW. Spelling, grammar, and organization all saw much improvement in Brandon’s final essay.

**General comments:** It is noteworthy that Brandon makes considerable improvements in orthography in his final essay, something which did not receive much attention in the tutoring sessions. Brandon’s final essay is clearly argued more cogently.

The final essay saw improvements in every important domain of college-level writing.

“Brandon” (initial essay)

*The topic I choose is, “Is it ever a good idea to lie to children?” In my point of view, the answer is of cause, no. We should never lie to children.*

*In all culture, I believe, honest is a precious character. We all like to make friends with honest people. Chinese people believe that every character can be rised from one’s childhood. What one was taught and trained in childhood will root in oneself for the whole life time.*

*With out a doubt, parents do a great impact on children. Children spent most time with parents, parents is the best ones to learn from. What did parents do, what did parents say, how the parents behaving, they see and they learn. So parents should well control themselve to be a good model.*

*When parents communicating with their children, the one thing should be mostly minded, in all behaviors, is words.*

*We konw how words can deliver most information, how it makes people happy and how it hurts the person we love or hate. So when we speak a word, be careful.*

*Now back to the business. I think its hard for people to totally avoid telling lies in many situation its “we have to”. There are bad lies to a bad purpose, and white lies go towars good purpose. But fundamentally, lie is a lie. Ling is not good, we don’t have to argue that.*

*Many parents used ling to children when they “have nothing to sovle this problem”. Like parents always say “I’ll take you to the playgroud next time”, “I’ll buy you sugar if you stop crying” and sometimes they won’t. Children did what they told, but*
they didn’t get what they want. What’s worse is they can do nothing about it, “my parents lie to me, but I can do nothing”.

When children get used to lies, bad consequences come along. Firstly, they won’t totally trust in their parents. Secondly, they may think “there is nothing bad to me to lie”, since parents can always get rid of troubles by lying. Thirdly, when parents tell their children to be a honest people, children may think “yourself lie a lot”. For parents, once lying to children, they can keep lying. and one day when they say “you have my words” again, no one is listening.

In a word, it’s totally wrong thing to lie to children, in any situation.
Not allowing smoking in public places and office building is becoming a common idea, which is good. I believe this for several reasons.

Firstly, banning cigarette will improve both the smokers’ and non-smokers’ health. We all know smoking is not healthy, people who smoke much may have more probably to have problem in their lungs. When smokers smoke in public, they can also make other people physically uncomfortable or even have disease. Baning cigarette in public will make smokers have fewer opportunities to smoke, so less damaging to their and non-smokers’ health.

Secondly, banning cigarette in public is good for the fairness of society. Some people like cigarettes, some people hate cigarettes. People should have the rights to choose not being disturbed by smokers. If there are no limits for smokers in public place, the non-smokers have no choice other than taking in the “second hand smoke”, which is unfair. We should make certain that non-smoker are not coerced to smoke.

Thirdly, it is a good idea to ban smoking in public places because it can reduce conflicts. Non-smokers tend to get annoyed when feel uncomfortable with the somke around. The most significant conflict is over whether smokers have a right to smoke in public. People quarreled about that very much, it even influenced people’s relationship in some degree.

It seems clear that banning smoking in public is a good idea. It benefit health of both smokers and non-smokers, protect people’s rights of not being influenced by the harmful somke, and even improves people’s relationship.
“Grace”

1. In terms of grammar the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 2]
2. In terms of vocabulary the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
3. In terms of syntax the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
4. In terms of paragraph structure the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 3]
5. In terms of overall organization the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
6. In terms of comprehensibility the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
7. Overall, both essays are about the same level of ULAW. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
8. N/A (Both essays are of similar academic writing level.) [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]

Raters’ comments:

**Grammar:** Grace’s final essay is improved in grammar, but only modestly; fewer errors and they are minor.

Better verb usage and word choice in final essay.

**Paragraph structure:** Her final essay contains slightly better topic sentences.

**Overall quality:** In her essays, the student seems to have started out with many of the usual mistakes absent. The change is not as dramatic as with some other students.

**General comments:** Both of Grace’s essays are quite close in terms of ULAW. It is notable that Grace, like Alice, is relatively proficient when compared with the other tutees and (again like Alice) one sees less change in Grace’s academic writing proficiency when compared with her peers.
“Grace” (initial essay)

There is a danger in becoming too dependent on technology

I think that it is true that people depend too much on technology. Technology is everywhere in our daily life. We get up on time by using a alarm clock. We cook breakfast in the kitchen which is full of electrical appliances. Computers and mobile phones are the most common tools for us to work with others or just spent a whole day. What’s more, the traffic tools, such a trains and planes, are necessary for us to travel around. It is difficult to image that what will left in our world if all of the technology are disappeared. With the rapid development of the science and technology, more and more advanced devices are invented to make our lives easier and more convenient. They saves us so much time and we are able to do something difficult with the help from these automatic technology.

But things are not always going well. What will you feel if your mobile phone is out of power? Most of us may have the feeling that it is uncomfortable when our mobile phone can not connect to the Internet. This phenomenon tells us that we depend too much on technology. Actually, I feel anxious when I am aware of the problem. Then I pay more attention on how many hours I use the technology a day. The result is disappointed, as expected. Even when I am sleeping, the fan is working to make me comfortable.

Is it dangerous to depend too much on technology? I am not sure. I feel sad when my friends sit beside me and look at their own phones without any words. But it is exciting to get a phone call from my friends far away from me. So I think that we should make a proper use of the technology and be grateful to those people who spent their life times on the development of the technology. What’s more, it is interesting to do something only by ourselves without any help from the technology. I am sure that if you have a try, you will be surprised at that you did a good job.
“Grace” (final essay)

[If you had to be a salesperson, what would you choose to sell? Explain why.]

There are many shops around us and we buy what we need from these shops. What kind of goods do we need most? Of course, foods. We need them everyday to obtain enough nutrition. Foods can be divided into many types, such as vegetables, meat or dessert. Dessert is my favorite. If I had to be a salesperson, I’d like to open a dessert shop.

Foods are necessary for our daily lives, but not all of us are good at cooking foods, and most of us even have no time to learn cooking. However, cooking is one of my hobbies. It is interesting to cook dishes for family members and friends. I feel very happy if they enjoy the food which was cooked by myself.

Among a variety of foods, dessert is the special one. It has a kind of magic that people feel happy when they are tasting it. Almost no one can resist the temptation of sweets, especially girls. What’s more, there are countless kinds of sweets and we may have different choices according to our mood at that time. So I think it is a good idea to sell dessert.

Actually a dessert shop is one of my dreams. I’d like to creat new and delicious sweets by my imagination. Also it is wonderful to share them with my friends and customs. I’ll meet many people who are interested in eating or cooking food and we will get along well with each other due to the same hobby. In my mind, there is an idea that I wish to make unique birthday cakes by myself for my family members and my friends.

In my opinion, dessert is not only a kind of foods, but also a symbol of sweet lives. People who are willing to take few minutes to taste a piece of cake, may well understand the meanings of lives. That’s why I’d like to choose to sell dessert. Enjoy dessert and enjoy sweet lives!
“Kate”

1. In terms of grammar the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Rater 3]
2. In terms of vocabulary the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
3. In terms of syntax the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 2]
4. In terms of paragraph structure the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Rater 3]
5. In terms of overall organization the final essay is superior. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
6. In terms of comprehensibility the final essay is comparable. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
7. Overall, the final essay comes closest to ULAW. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]
8. “Moderate, with several noteworthy improvements” best describes the degree of improvement in the final essay. [Concurrence: Raters 2, 3]

Raters’ comments:

Grammar: While both essays are comparable in grammar, Kate’s final essay is more complex and requires a better handle on English grammar.

Vocabulary: Kate’s final essay contains a broader use of vocabulary.

Syntax: Comparable, but again her final essay is more complex.

Paragraph structure: Her final essay, especially the central paragraph, is closer to ULAW paragraph structure.

Neither essay is up to speed, but the final essay has firmer grasp on where to place thesis, supporting arguments, etc.

Overall organization: Kate’s final essay is much better organized, staying on message and drawing a conclusion.

The initial essay is much shorter, so less to work through.

Overall quality: Quality of content and focus on organization (especially argumentative structure) improved in the final essay.

General comments: Kate’s initial essay wanders quite aimlessly, ending on a particularly weak note. This is not the case with her final essay, which carries its message and provides a logic in its argumentation; clearly closer to ULAW.

Kate’s final essay is more obviously reflective of an awareness of argumentative structure, has more appropriately placed thesis statement, and a more robust conclusion.
[Is romantic love the best reason for choosing a husband or wife?]

I think romantic love is the best reason for choosing a husband or wife. When I was a little girl, I liked to read fairy tales such as Cinderella, The Frog Prince and Snow White. The stories are really romantic and all have a happy ending. And even now I have grown up and I still love these fairy tales.

I hope I could own a romantic love. A romantic husband can make life full of surprises. I would never feel boring. Not all men are romantic, and a man who is romantic is always considerate, attentive and dependable. Romantic love makes marriage life happier. Only in the romantic love, we may think of marriage. I am looking forward to meeting my Mr. Right and starting a romantic love.

That’s all I could think about romantic love is the best reason for choosing a husband or wife, now.
[Would the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects be a good or bad thing for the nation? Explain why.]

Perhaps for most Chinese citizens, the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects is a bad thing for the nation. Because these dialects have distinctive national and local characteristics and they are significantly important parts of Chinese culture heritage. However, I still hold the positive view on the disappearance of all of China’s language dialects.

With a vast territory and huge population, China is home to thousands of dialects and several minority languages. As is known to all, dialects are languages spoken only by the local people and they vary greatly from places to places. There is no doubt that no one can speak or understand every dialects. Therefore it is fairly difficult for people from different parts of China to correctly understand each other and easily communicate with each other. Consequently dialects make communication even harder. Since the purpose of language is to make communication possible, we need to avoid using dialects and to build a popular and easy-to-understand communication. Besides, dialects also have many bad words and they may have side effects on building a civilized society. On the contrary, if we all speak mandarin, the standard language, people all over the country are able to interact with each other more easily and the whole country will be united increasingly tightly. Then how convenient our life will become.

In a word, I do not think it is a bad thing for the nation if all of China’s language dialects disappear.