The Use of *I think* by Chinese EFL Learners: A Study Revisited

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Abstract

Based on London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC) and College Learners’ Spoken English Corpus (COLSEC), this research is a revisited study on the use of *I think* by English native speakers and Chinese EFL learners, regarding its overall frequencies, positions, collocations, and especially pragmatic functions. Statistics show that Chinese EFL learners have overused *I think*. Moreover, besides using *I think* like English native speakers to downgrade, mark deliberation, take and hold turn, and delay, Chinese EFL learners also use *I think* in some different ways such as signaling conclusion or listing by co-selecting with *so* or *firstly*. A follow-up survey showed that the Chinese EFL learners’ overuse of *I think* may be attributed to the need for delay, habit, inadequate language proficiency, and so on.

*Key words: discourse marker; I think; corpus; pragmatic function*

1. Introduction

So far, many researches on discourse markers used by different EFL learners, such as French EFL learners (De Cock, 1998), German EFL learners (Müller, 2004), Spanish EFL learners (Trillo, 2002), and Chinese EFL learners (He & Xu, 2003; Tan, 2003; Li, 2004; Wang & Zhu, 2005; Chen & Wu, 2006; Yang & Liu, 2006; Li & Chen, 2007, etc.) show that
“learners’ use of discourse markers are not native-like in terms of frequencies and types of discourse markers” (Wang, 2007: 10). As for the specific discourse marker I think, several studies were conducted and showed that Chinese learners tend to overuse I think (Wang & Zhu, 2005; Li, 2006; Wang, 2007; Li & Chen 2007, etc.). For example, Wang (2007) made a comparative study of I think used by Chinese EFL learners and English native speakers, regarding its overall frequencies, positions, collocations, and especially pragmatic functions. The present paper serves as a revisit of Wang’s study mainly in the following three respects: 1) With the support of 17 additional important references, especially in the enlightenment of studies by Aijmer (1997) and Preisler (1986), we are able to upgrade Wang’s study with sounder theoretical foundation, a wider and deeper scope of discussion and analysis, and finer results and findings. 2) We have also conducted a follow-up survey to facilitate the comparative study and explore the potential causes that may lead to the overuse of I think by Chinese EFL learners. 3) More importantly, this study aims to correct the statistical mistakes involved in Wang’s study: Wang (2007) used Wordsmith tools to count frequencies of I think and its collocates, unaware of the fact that Wordsmith tools had failed to count in many examples of I think in other forms such as I ^think and I !think in LLC, a corpus with various tags. Consequently, misleading statistics were produced. We therefore felt obliged to revisit the study by correcting the errors in counting and calculation. The rosy side is that Wang’s qualitative study of the pragmatic functions of I think still serves the purpose fairly well and in making this study consistent and convenient to read, we’ll retain this part with some of her original examples.

2. Literature Review

According to Aijmer (1997: 1), “spoken language is rich in recurrent phrases such as I think which are sensitive to speakers’ communicative needs. I argue that I think has ‘gone one step further’ and developed into a discourse marker or modal particle which is syntactically a speech-act adverbial”. She studied I think in terms of pragmatization and discussed their syntactic, semantic, prosodic, and functional properties based on the London Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC). She described I think as “a modal particle”, which permits extensions of meaning involving the speaker’s attitude to the hearer or to the message (ibid: 3), and an “epistemic qualifier” used to “avoid disagreement, to soften speech acts or to express involvement” (ibid: 20).

Besides Aijmer, there are other scholars who showed research interest in I think. For example, Preisler studied the different use of I think among women and men. He pointed out that I think expresses attitude or belief, thus referred to as the I find / I believe type (Preisler, 1986: 112). Brown & Levinson (1987: 164) called I think a “quality hedge” which suggests that “the speaker is not taking full responsibility for the truth of his utterance”. Holmes (1990: 199) recognized “two distinct and contrastive functions of I think”, expressing either uncertainty or certainty. Thompson & Mulac (1991) pointed out that I think changed from a main clause construction into an epistemic adverb through grammaticalization. Ifantidou (2001) termed I think “evidential parenthetical”, which in
complex utterances, may yield different interpretations when placed at different positions.

Given its significance as a discourse marker, *I think* has started to attract the attention of Chinese scholars. For example, Shen (2008) illustrated five functions of *I think* as a hedge with examples from English movies: expressing personal ideas, downtoning, lowering commitment in the proposition, expanding the scope in interpreting the proposition, and making topic-shift. Zhang (2009) studied the function of *I think* in legal context based on Verschueren’s linguistic adaptation theory. Wang & Zhu (2005), in studying the use of English discourse markers by Chinese EFL learners based on Spoken and Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners (SECCCL), and the British National Corpus (BNC), found that *I think* was the fourth most frequently used discourse marker among the 62 types of discourse markers, following *and, but, and very*. Compared with the native speakers, Chinese learners overuse *I think* ($\chi^2 = 229.4, P<0.001$) (Wang & Zhu, 2005: 43). According to them, the causes to the overuse may include communicative stress and low proficiency in spoken English. For example, when speaking English, due to time constraint, Chinese EFL learners may not have time to think of other fillers such as *I believe, in my opinion* for delay. Wang & Zhu (2005) did not go further but pointed out the necessity of a detailed study of the possible causes. Likewise, Li & Chen (2007), in studying the use of discourse marker *well* by Chinese EFL learners based on SECCCL and Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE) (Part I), found that English majors significantly overuse *I think* compared with the native English speakers. However, neither of the two researches was oriented at an exclusive study of *I think*. Li (2006) made a contrastive study of the use of *I think* by native English speakers and Chinese EFL learners based on College Learners’ Corpus (COLEC) and Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) and also found that Chinese EFL learners overuse *I think*. She mainly studied the semantic distinctions by analyzing the concordance features of *I think* in the two written English corpora. Unlike the above studies, our present study, with Wang’s study (2007) as the preliminary work, will be an attempt for a more devoted and in-depth study of the pragmatic functions of *I think* based on two spoken English corpora and the possible causes for overuse of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners based on a follow-up survey.

3. The Present Study

3.1 Research questions

This paper aims to explore the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners based on two major corpora, namely LLC and COLSEC, and a small-scale follow-up survey. The research questions include: 1) Have Chinese EFL learners overused or underused *I think* compared with native speakers? 2) What specific pragmatic functions of *I think* are employed by Chinese EFL learners and native speakers? 3) What might be the possible causes to the overuse or underuse of the Chinese EFL learners, if any?

3.2 Research corpora

(1) College Learners’ Spoken English Corpus (COLSEC)

COLSEC contains 700,000 tokens, which are transcriptions from CET-SET (College English
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Test—Spoken English Test), administrated to college students who have achieved fairly good results in CET4 or CET6. CET-SET consists of three Sections: Section I is a warm-up section, in which the interlocutors ask the test takers some general questions such as future plans, hobbies, and favorite TV programs. In Section II, test takers are shown two pictures about which they are asked to make comparisons and contrasts. In Section III, test takers are asked to come to an agreement through a group discussion. So the corpus consists of teacher-student conversations, students’ monologues and student-student discussions.

(2) London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC)

LLC consists of 100 texts, each of 5,000 words, totaling 500,000 running words of spoken British English. The texts fall into 5 major groups, namely, Face-to-face conversation; Telephone conversation; Discussion, interview, debate; Public, unprepared commentary, demonstration, oration; Public, and prepared oration. They are all spoken English recorded or broadcast. All the telephone conversations and many of the face-to-face conversations were recorded surreptitiously, so they “represent spoken English at its most natural” (Greenbaum & Svartvik, 1990: 12).

In studying the specific features of learners’ English, many scholars tend to use a native English corpus for reference. For example, Wang & Zhu (2005) used BNC’s Spoken English Corpus while Li & Chen (2007) used SBCSAE as the reference corpus. Here LLC, taken world-widely as the native spoken English norm, is adopted as the reference corpus to study the similarities and differences in the use of *I think* between Chinese EFL learners and native speakers. Admittedly, given the fact that COLSEC consists of testing materials, it would be ideal if we could find a comparable native spoken English corpus with testing materials. A closer comparative study is expected to be carried out in the future once a corpus of this kind is established and available for use.

In addition, as Aijmer (1997: 9) figured out that the normalized frequency (here indicating number of frequency per 10,000 words) of *I think* is the highest in the group of Informal Face-to-face Conversation of LLC, we have also used this subcorpus (totaling 44,829 words) for further comparison to see if there is ever any statistical difference between the frequency of *I think* in COLSEC and the highest frequency in a LLC subgroup, i.e. LLC (Informal Face-to-face Conversation).

(3) Follow-up Survey Corpus

This corpus of 6,798 words was established through a follow-up survey, designed to furnish our analysis and discussion. In the follow-up survey, a group of 20 college students about to graduate (10 males and 10 females) in a major university in Shanghai were each given a 3-minute face-to-face interview, talking about their campus life and future career, mainly based on the following four questions (Question forms may vary, as shown in Appendix I ) :

1) *What would you do after graduation?*

2) *Why do you choose to do so?*

3) *What do you plan to do in the coming 3 years?*

4) *How do you like your 4-year life on campus?*

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed and a small corpus of 6,798 words was established.
3.3 Research tools and methods

In order to check whether Chinese EFL learners have a tendency to overuse or underuse *I think* in comparison with the native speakers, a concordancer called AntConc 3.2.1w was used to examine the absolute frequencies and normalized frequencies (i.e. the number of frequencies per 10,000 words) of *I think* and its collocates in the above-mentioned corpora. SPSS was then used to perform chi-square tests to check for statistical significance, i.e. if there is significant difference in using *I think* between Chinese EFL learners and native English speakers. In addition, File View Tool of AntConc 3.2.1w was also used to view the specific context to explore what specific pragmatic functions are performed with *I think*. Besides, in order not to leave out the many cases of *I think* of various tagged forms in the LLC tagged texts, we manually deleted the tags around *I think* before making the concordance search. The results turned out close to Aijmer’s (1997). Here it is worth noting that data concerning LLC are mainly adopted from Aijmer (1997) except those in Table 5, which are unavailable in Aijmer (1997).

In addition, a follow-up survey consisting of an interview and a questionnaire (See Appendix II) was conducted. A follow-up corpus was developed based on the interview, and the questionnaire, conducted immediately after the interview, aimed to check the awareness of Chinese EFL learners in using *I think* and the factors that affected their use of *I think*.

4. A Statistical Analysis of *I think*

4.1 Frequencies of *I think* in different corpora

Table 1 shows the absolute frequencies and normalized frequencies of *I think* in COLSEC, LLC, LLC (*Informal Face-to-face Conversation*), and the Follow-up Survey Corpus respectively. As we can see, the normalized frequency of *I think* in COLSEC (137) is almost 4 times of that in LLC (35), and almost 3 times of that in Informal Face-to-face Conversation of LLC (51), where the normalized frequency of *I think* is the highest among different groups in LLC. The chi-square test results demonstrated that there was significant difference between the frequencies of *I think* in COLSEC and LLC (\(\chi^2 = 60.49, P<0.001\)), and between those in COLSEC and LLC (*Informal Face-to-face Conversation*) (\(\chi^2 = 39.34, P<0.001\)). In other words, Chinese EFL learners have overused *I think*.

Table 1. Frequencies of *I think* in different corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
<th>Normalized frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COLSEC</td>
<td>9613</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>1757</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLC (<em>Informal Face-to-face Conversation</em>)</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up Survey Corpus</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, there is no difference between the results retrieved from COLSEC and those from the Follow-up Survey Corpus. This means that the college students in the follow-up survey have the same tendency of overusing *I think* as the test takers in COLSEC.
This also helps to clarify a question concerning the design of test questions in CET-SET and the follow-up survey. As Wang speculated, as the test takers in CET-SET are often asked to give their opinions, answering questions such as “do you think…” and “what do you think is…?”, the test takers, probably restrained under certain propositional framework, are inclined to use “I think…” when expressing their own opinions (Wang, 2007: 23). However, as shown in the follow-up survey, where the questions were so designed as to avoid “what do you think” questions, the subjects overused I think as significantly as the test takers of CET-SET. Therefore, the propositional framework of “giving opinions” is not necessarily the key factor for the overuse.

4.2 The positions of I think in the utterance
As a discourse marker, I think enjoys high structural flexibility, occurring in the front, medial, and end positions of an utterance. Aijmer (1997: 7) put forward the following model on the cline of pragmaticalization which accounts for the structural flexibility.

Table 2. The cline of pragmaticalization of I think (Aijmer, 1997: 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>I think that Bill is at home.</th>
<th>I think Bill is at home.</th>
<th>Bill is at home I think.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

We could see that I think has undergone a process of grammaticalization with that-deletion and the flexibility in position. Table 3 shows the distribution of that and zero after I think in LLC and COLSEC. In LLC, 1,635 (93%) examples were followed by zero; while in COLSEC 9,428 (98%) were followed by zero. Chi-square tests show a significant difference in the use of I think zero between Chinese EFL learners and English native speakers ($\chi^2 = 61.929$, $P<0.001$) but no significant difference in the use of I think that ($\chi^2 = .200$, $P>0.05$). The Crosstab statistics show that there is no significant difference in the distribution of that and zero between Chinese EFL learners and English native speakers ($\chi^2 = 1.247$, $P>0.05$). Since that-deletion could also be a sign of grammaticalization, we could tell that among Chinese EFL learners, the use of I think is quite grammaticalized.

Table 3. Distribution of that and zero after I think in LLC and COLSEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of complementiser</th>
<th>COLSEC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>COLSEC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>LLC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>LLC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$P$ value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think that</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think Φ</td>
<td>9428</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1635</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61.929</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(98%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(93%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9613</td>
<td>1757</td>
<td>(=100%)</td>
<td>(=100%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of that or zero may vary according to text types. Aijmer (1997: 10) found that zero dominated in informal conversation (94% of all the zero examples) and that was above all used in discussion (48% of the examples). Since COLSEC contains answers to warming-up
questions, descriptions of pictures and discussions among test takers, they vary from informal to relatively formal, but as we can see zero dominates the students’ production (98%).

Besides, with *that, I think* is “more likely to express an objective and informative statement about the speaker’s belief” (Aijmer, 1997: 10). This is true in the use of *I think* *that* among Chinese EFL learners:

(1) Mm, *I think* that [P2-t-e] hm reading is a good habit, mm, and [Pd-er] from reading we can acquire a lot of a lot of knowledge… (COLSEC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>COLSEC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>COLSEC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>LLC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>LLC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front</td>
<td>9117</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>65.848</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>354)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9613</td>
<td>1757</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the distribution of *I think* in different positions in the utterance. From the table, we can see that most cases of *I think* occur in the front position. But the Crosstab statistics show that there is a significant difference between native speakers and Chinese EFL learners in the use of *I think* in different positions ($\chi^2$=8.747, P<0.05). Specifically, Chinese EFL learners overuse *I think* in the front position ($\chi^2$=65.848, P<0.001), whereas there is no significant difference in the mid and end positions.

According to Aijmer (1997: 24), *I think* may express either uncertainty or certainty and position seems to be important for the function of *I think*. *I think*, when occurring at the front position with prosodic prominence, is considered to have deliberative function, signaling “deliberation, objectivity and so, perhaps authority” (Preisler, 1986: 107). *I think* in medial and final position is classified to be tentative, expressing uncertainty, as shown in (2). Since in COLSEC, prosodic prominence is not marked, it is impossible to deal with the use of *I think* in terms of prosody.

(2) *c* *no no* no it’s only about sort of - - three months
    *c I think*
    B cos she ^didn’t even ’know whether she was
    B pr\eignant or ’not# (LLC)

4.3 Collocation analysis of *I think* in COLSEC and LLC

By examining the collocations, we can find out more about the company *I think* keeps. As illustrated in Table 5, some collocations appear with high frequency both in COLSEC and LLC, such as *and I think, but I think*, and *eh/er/erm/em/en/mm I think* (transcribed as *m/h I think* in LLC). Chinese EFL learners overuse lexical clusters such as *em I think, so I think, and I think, yes/yeah I think, because I think, I think I think*. The 1,165 cases
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of *I think* preceded by *eh/er/erm/em/en/mm* in COLSEC reveal the learners’ hesitation or difficulty in expressing ideas. On the other hand, there is no significant difference in the use of *I think, oh I think, no I think, you know I think, and well I think*. Interestingly, Chinese EFL learners use *ok I think, in my opinion I think, firstly/secondly/thirdly/finally I think, as far as I am concerned I think*, which are not found in LLC, while *I mean I think*, used 17 times in LLC, is not found in COLSEC.

**Table 5. Collocates of *I think* in COLSEC and LLC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collocates</th>
<th>COLSEC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>LLC Absolute frequency</th>
<th>COLSEC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>LLC Normalized frequency</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>m/h I think</em></td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>128.35</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>so I think</em></td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>112.988</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>and I think</em></td>
<td>1032</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>77.339</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>but I think</em></td>
<td>683</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>146.288</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>yes/yeah I think</em></td>
<td>380</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.213</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>because I think</em></td>
<td>254</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.439</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I think I think</em></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I I think</em></td>
<td>167</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.632</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>oh I think</em></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>no I think</em></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.286</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>you know I think</em></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>well I think</em></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ok I think</em></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>First/secondly/thirdly/finally</em></td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in <em>my opinion</em></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in/from my point of view, I think</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>As far as I am concerned, I think</em></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I mean I think</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In this table, unlike in the rest of the paper, the normalized frequency indicates number of frequency per 100,000 words, simply for the convenience of calculation.

According to Wei (2007: 285), by the principle of co-selection, connectives (e.g. *so, and, but*) and discourse markers (e.g. *I think*) co-select to perform some pragmatic functions. For example, *so* and *I think* co-select to indicate the cause-result relation, and *but* and *I think*, the adversative relation. The study of the collocates of *I think* shows that while Chinese EFL learners use *I think* for some similar functions as natives speakers do, they tend to overuse them (e.g. *so I think*); moreover, they use *I think* for some functions that
native speakers would not do, say, signal listing by the co-selection of *firstly I think*. A
detailed discussion will be done in Section 5 based on a close examination of the specific
context in which *I think* is employed.

5. Pragmatic Functions of *I think*: Natives vs. Non-natives

According to the data retrieved from COLSEC and LLC, it is found that on the one hand,
Chinese EFL learners use *I think* in the same ways as English native speakers do, such as
for downtoning, marking deliberation, turn-taking, and for delaying/turn-holding, but
on the other hand, they use *I think* in some different ways, such as for signaling self-repair,
emphasizing “I’m expressing my opinion”, listing, reasoning/illustrating, comparing
and contrasting, and summarizing/concluding. As mentioned earlier, this part of study
in Wang (2007) works quite well, so for the integrity of this paper, we shall retain much
of her work and the relevant examples. A major change in our categorization is that we
have added “marking deliberation” in the category for common functions, which is to be
explained in the following section. Moreover, we have also refined this part by providing
some additional supporting evidence based on other studies, including Aijmer (1997), Wei
(2007) and so on.

5.1 Pragmatic functions of *I think* common in LLC and COLSEC

1) Downtoning

As pointed out by scholars such as Brown & Levinson (1983) and Aijmer (1997), *I
think* has the function of mitigating face threat and is thus employed as a politeness
strategy. According to Ifantidou (2001: 155), *I think* is used to “indicate that the views
being interpreted are the speaker’s own”, so “depending on the context”, it has two
functions, either “generally weakening the speaker’s commitment” to the proposition or
“strengthening the speaker’s commitment”. Here “downtoning” will be used to refer to the
former and “marking deliberation”, the latter. As for downtoning, for example, in both
COLSEC and LLC, *I think, Er, well* are used before *I think*, sometimes for delaying and
sometimes for softening the tone. Moreover, *I think* may also be accompanied by some
other mitigators such as *probably* and *maybe*, making stronger its downtoning function,
especially when they are placed in turn-initial position. Table 6 is a list of some frequent
clusters of this kind. The data from COLSEC show that Chinese EFL learners use these
clusters as hedges, but with fewer varieties. Interestingly, they also use clusters such as *I
think maybe* (18 in turn-initial position out of 78 cases), *maybe I think* (9 in turn-initial
position out of 34 cases), and *personally I think* (3 in turn-initial position out of 7 cases).
In contrast, these clusters are not found in LLC.

| Table 6. Clusters containing *I think* in turn-initial position |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| **Type of cluster**      | **LLC** | **COLSEC** | **Type of cluster**      | **LLC** | **COLSEC** |
| well I think             | 23      | 58         | I think really           | 4       | 0          |
| I mean I think           | 17      | 0          | I think you see          | 3       | 0          |
| you know I think         | 13      | 1          | well I think probably    | 3       | 0          |
2) Marking deliberation

While *I think* is used to weaken the speaker’s commitment to the proposition by expressing uncertainty and thus mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance, it is also used to signal “careful deliberation, objectivity and so, perhaps authority” (Preisler, 1986: 107) and express certainty. “Marking deliberation” is thus used by the writers to describe the function of *I think* in strengthening the speaker’s commitment to the proposition and enhancing the illocutionary force.

(3) c yes no  
A [@:m] . ^I think 'that - a :lot of the 'drastic 
A 'things will be :starting 'to be 'happening - - 
c maybe * . well - - * (LLC)

Chinese EFL learners use *I think* to show deliberation too; what’s more, they would use *actually I think* and *I think of course* to mark the deliberative function, as shown in (4).

(4) <sp1> In my opinion, **I think of course** a healthy a healthy diet [Wie-e] is very important.  
</sp1> <interrupted> (COLSEC)

Actually, Wang (2007: 44) mentioned that Chinese EFL learners used *I think* to upgrade, but she took this as a function unique in Chinese FEL learners, neglecting the fact that this is a function common in native speakers too.

3) Turn-taking

Besides the downtoning function and the deliberative function, *I think* can also perform the function of turn-taking.

(5 ) c what is it Miele -  
 a **I think** it is—anyway we haven’t got one and  
 a we’re unlikely to have one (LLC)

With *I think* in turn-initial position, the speaker in (5) accomplishes turn-taking in a less disturbing way. Example (6) is extracted from a group discussion among three students concerning the use of internet. After Speaker 2 gives his opinion, speaker 3 takes the turn with *I think*, signaling his turn to put forward his own opinions.

(6) I have a classmate. She is in Japan. I communicate with him with her on Internet. </sp2>
I think computer nowadays develop more and more quickly and more and more fast. (COLSEC)

Sometimes *I think* is used to interrupt and gain floor, thus realizing turn-taking. As shown in (7), the use of *I think* by Speaker C in a way helps to mitigate the face threat of interrupting Speaker B.

(7) B that ^we should !try and get 'something *"n\ow# -
   B [s]*
   C *^s/omething ^((oh[?])).* y\es#
   B ^something **that 'we can**
   C **(II) . think** it ^\ought to b/e#
   C ^pr\obably# -
   C ^[ei] . !fl\at#
   C *^which* is !ch\eap#
   B *^y/eah## (LLC)

4) Delaying/ turn-holding
Generally speaking, discourse markers undoubtedly do provide verbal planning time for speakers (Stubbe & Holmes, 1995) and this is true with *I think*. According to Aijmer (1997: 27), in planning the message, the speaker may use “modal and interpersonal elements” together with “hesitation noises, word-search, repetition, and self-corrections”. In both (8) and (9), the repetition of *I think* reflects the speaker’s difficulties in finding the right word. As pointed out in Wang (2007: 40), this “helps the speaker get prepared for what to say next, and at this point, it bears an analogy with conversation fillers such as *mm, er, eh,* and *erm*”. Indeed, sometimes *I think* is used with these conversation fillers to “reflect the hesitation and confusion before the speaker comes to grips with the message” (Aijmer, 1997: 27). In this sense, *I think* has the function of delaying and holding the turn.

(8) a ((I think he I think he wanted a)) a +bit more+
   a blood he **wants**   (LLC)
(9) They don’t want to make friends with each others. I think I think that’s not a good attitudes. And sometimes I want to make friends (COLSEC)

5.2 Pragmatic functions of *I think* specifically common in COLSEC
The data from COLSEC show that while Chinese EFL learners use *I think* as the native speakers do, there are some other ways which are specifically common in COLSEC, including signaling self-repair, emphasizing “I’m expressing my opinion”, listing, reasoning/illustrating, comparing and contrasting, and summarizing/concluding. Lacking introspection from Chinese EFL learners, it is difficult to tell the exact purposes for which they misuse *I think*. Therefore, when we say they use *I think* in a different way, we mean they either overuse *I think* or use *I think* in the slot where another kind of discourse marker, if used instead, will be more appropriate. Though the cases of deviant uses under
discussion are by no means exhaustive, they serve as a significant clue for the proper
teaching and learning of *I think*.

According to the taxonomy of discourse markers by Wang & Zhu (2005: 41) (Table 7),
different English discourse markers are used to perform different pragmatic functions. To
some extent, Table 7 can also serve as a reference for identifying in what way *I think* is used in a
deviant way and what other discourse markers can be used instead of the misused *I think*.

Table 7. An abridged taxonomy of discourse markers by Wang & Zhu (2005: 41)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connectives</th>
<th>Fillers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Addition: Also, furthermore, moreover, besides, still, and, too, in addition</td>
<td>Well, oh, yah, you know, you see, I mean, I think, yes, no, of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Illustration: For instance, for example, such as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Comparison and contrast: But, on the contrary, however, on the other hand, nevertheless, yet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reformulation: In other words, namely, that is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cause and result: Since, because, so, thus, hence, therefore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Listing: Firstly, secondly, thirdly, next, in the first place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Summary: In summary, to sum up, in sum, in total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) **Signaling self-repair**

Chinese EFL learners are found to use *I think* much more frequently than English native
speakers to signal self-repair, where other fillers such as *well, I mean, and you know* are
more preferable, as shown in (10).

(10) A ^I think it’s !better than !Gi\uinness mys/elf#  
A it ^hasn’t ’got that [? sh] you ^know [?] ’Guinness  
A ’has a :slightly !sh\arp ’taste#  
A [@:b] a ^little ’bit - ((well)) it’s ^m\ore than  
A ’sharp#  
A it’s ^quite b\itter#  
A ^Gi\uinness *I* ’think#        (LLC)

Indeed, according to Xu (2009: 31), in SECCL, although Chinese EFL do use *I mean* to
signal self-repair, they also frequently use *I think* and maybe and they do not use *you
know* to signal self-repair. This is true in COLSEC. While there do exist several cases of
*I think* used in self-repair in LLC, as shown in (11), there are much more in COLSEC.
For example, there are 14 cases out of the first 500 cases of *I think* in COLSEC, with 7
for partial correction (e.g. *because every world I think there is one day when every world is
connected by the whole Internet*), 6 for restart (e.g. *it’s it’s very; mm I think one day I can
do it*), and 1 for repeat (e.g. but low buil *I think low buildings will...*). A close look at the
examples show that Chinese EFL learners tend to use *I think* for self-repair most probably
because they find it difficult to retrieve a proper expression to complete the sentence
they have just started. (12) is a case in point. Again, lacking introspection from Chinese EFL learners, what we can say is that they lack other means of self-repair devices. Indeed, as shown in Table 5, there are 17 cases of I mean I think, with I mean as the self-repair marker, while in COLSEC there is none.

(11) A ^w/ell we [d] I ^think we 'have a 'sense of
A h/istory#
A I mean one ^only has to do !O-level h/istory
A 'to# -
A [@:] ^get all this 'stuff *about [@] . :N\elson
A and#
A ^g\enerals and#
A ^all th\at* (LLC)

(12) <sp1> … So I think TV is the most [Pt-e]...er the great invention of this century, so I really prefer it. … And third, and [Pd-e] I think in China, TV is er most I think [Pk-e] a lot of people would prefer the TV for their entertainment, and [Pd-e] it's er to some degree it's an [Mn] electronic er er it's a very economic way … </sp1> (COLSEC)

2) Emphasizing “I’m expressing my opinion”
According to Ifantidou (2001: 137), “parenthetical utterances perform two separate speech acts, one commenting on the other…the parenthetical comment has a ‘fine-tuning’ function, narrowing down the interpretation of the speech act to which it is appended”. I think is then primarily telling other people that “this is my opinion”. Aijmer (1997: 12) suggested that “think is organized as a prototype with cogitation as a focus. This is a general concept which can easily be extended to belief, opinion and intention by inferencing”. While I think can primarily mean “this is my idea”, native speakers do not often use them to emphasize this point, but rather use them to perform the function expressing certainty and uncertainty. In contrast, Chinese EFL learners use I think to emphasize that “I’m expressing my opinion”. Sometimes they even co-select it with in my opinion, from my point of view, and as far as I am concerned, as in example (13). As shown in Table 5, in COLSEC, there are 64 co-selection cases of in my opinion with I think, 13 co-selection cases of as far as I am concerned with I think (including its misused forms such as “as long as I am concerned”), and 17 cases of in/from my point of view with I think”, etc. But in LLC, there is no occurrence of any of these clusters.

(13) <sp2> Well, I can’t agree with you. In my opinion I think that there are many factors to keep healthy. But I think the most factor is er have a healthy diet [Pe-r]. </sp2> (COLSEC)

3) Listing by co-selection with listing connectives
As shown in Table 5, about 182 cases of I think co-occur with listing connectives such as firstly and secondly. For example, in (14) the speaker uses “first(ly)…I think..., second(ly)...I think..., and (thirdly)...I think...” when listing reasons. Although connectives and discourse marker may co-select to perform some pragmatic functions
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(Wei 2007: 285), the co-selection of listing connectives and I think to indicate sequence, as found in COLSEC, is something uncommon among native speakers, as unseen in LLC.

(14) <sp1> Ok. Eh my question is why should the sale of fake and inferior products [S2] be baned. I think there are several reasons. First I think fake and inferior products [S2] interference with the good products because I think fake and inferior products [S2] eh the the prices is ?? low [Wl-n] [Wow-ο;], and most people will choose to buy something with low price. Eh so I think it will interference the good products [S2]. Eh second I think eh sell fake and inferior products [S2] en will would be harmful to consumers’ consumers’ healthy [Wl-r]. Eh so I think eh the [We-er] inferior and fake products [S2] should be banned. And also [Wl-r] I think people [Wl-r] should be en hould be careful [Wl-r] when they should be careful when they choose to buy something. Eh they should not be eh believe ·····</sp1> (COLSEC)

4) Reasoning/Illustrating
When we say I think is used to give reasons or illustrate the point (Wang, 2007:49), we mean that it is used where a connective signaling cause-result relation (e.g. because) or illustration (e.g. for instance) will be more appropriate. In example (15), the speaker holds the idea that an ideal family should have only one child; but instead of using because or since, he uses I think to preface his reason that “parents don’t need to work very hard to support the family”. Similarly, in example (16), the speaker tries to illustrate what kinds of gap exist between parents and children, and what might be resulted if they live together. However, he uses I think instead of using illustration makers such as for example.

(15) <sp3> Yes. I think the ideal size of a family is only … have only one child: father, mother and baby. It’s three people in family. Just ok. And I think the…they…the the child parents will … don’t need to … will not need to work very hard to support the family. They can be … much better. </sp3> (COLSEC)

(16) <sp3> No. I don’t think so. I think young people should live alone after their graduation. And there are … have be a generation gap between the parents and the child. And I think they often [Wf-v] have different opinions about different things. And if … if they live together, and I think they will sometimes they’ll come? Quarrel. But …. </sp3> (COLSEC)

5) Comparing and contrasting
Similarly, by “comparing and contrasting”, we mean that I think is used where a connective signaling comparison or contrast (e.g. on the other hand) will be more appropriate. Here “comparing and contrasting” is used to replace Wang’s label “disjunctive” (Wang, 2007: 50) for consistency in labeling. In example (17), the speaker comments on whether riding bicycles should be encouraged. After expressing his agreement with two supporting reasons, he introduces a problem. But the speaker uses I think (it brought…) where markers of comparison and contrast such as however or on the other hand would have been more appropriate (see Table 7). A close look at all the three occurrences of I think in
this example, together with the unusually frequent use of *mm* reveals that the speaker has some difficulty in expressing himself, unable to think of the appropriate discourse markers to make his talk more explicitly logical and coherent.

(17) *<sp1>I think* mm it should be encouraged. …it is a good it is a good way to er exercise and er also it it mm it decrease er it decrease the pollution. Mm so… *I think* it is a good way to mm to practise and to mm to mm mm to decrease the pollution and what’s… and *I think* it brought a…mm problem, because many bicycles takes much room, and the way will be very busy. … Yes. *</sp1>* (COLSEC)

6) Summarizing/concluding
As pointed out by Wei (2007: 285), Chinese EFL learners frequently co-select *so* with *I think* to summarize their ideas or draw a conclusion. This can be illustrated in (14) (*so I think* as underlined) and in (18). In comparison, the native speakers, though use *so I think* as well, they use them far less frequently with a normalized frequency of 3 in LLC versus 155 in COLSEC (*χ²*=112.988, *P*<0.001, See Table 5). What’s more, native speakers use *so I think* mainly for signaling cause-result relation, and as shown in Table 7, instead of using *I think*, native English speakers normally use markers such as *in summary*, and *to sum up* to signal summary or conclusion. All in all, the above examples show that one possible cause for the Chinese EFL learners’ deviant uses of *I think* may be a lack of a variety of discourse markers for use.

(18) *<sp2>And I think. Thank you. I think with the er ... the lover’s day, I think, are become more and more popular in China, because our China have opened our doors to the world. So many western customers will come into our China, er many years ago I I think there isn’t any lovers’ day. But now I I see many and many young girls and young boys are celebrating yeah the lovers’ day. So *I think* the lovers’ day will be most popular for several years later. */<sp2>*(COLSEC)

6. Possible Causes for the Overuse of *I think*
As Wang (2007: 52-57) suggested, the possible causes for the overuse of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners might include pragmatic transfer, pragmatic overgeneralization, and situational anxiety. To verify her suggestions and further explore the potential causes, a questionnaire was used in the follow-up survey conducted by Wu Yong and Cai Zhou. As shown in Appendix II, the questionnaire consists of 6 questions, with Questions 1-3 focused on awareness in using *I think*, Question 4 and 5 on the possible causes for using *I think*, and Question 6 specifically on the issue of pragmatic transfer.

The subjects were first asked for their awareness of having used *I think* in their previous speech production. Among the 20 subjects, 85% said they realized they had used *I think* during the interview, and 60% of the subjects said they had used it unconsciously, 10% purposefully, and 25% alternating between purposefully and unconsciously. In other words, it is somehow difficult to avoid using *I think*. 
Then the subjects were asked to recall for what purpose they used *I think*. This question is an open-end question. But for the convenience of the subjects, some possible causes are provided in case they cannot think of a proper expression, including, delay, turn-taking, downgrading, inadequate English proficiency, situational anxiety, Chinese interference (pragmatic transfer), habit, and a few others (See Appendix II). The results show that Delay and Habit are the two major causes for the overuse (See Table 8).

**Table 8. Possible causes for the overuse of *I think***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Causes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delay</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habit</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate English proficiency</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic Transfer</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational Anxiety</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) **Delay**

Delay is one of the major causes for the overuse of *I think* among the subjects along with Habit. 14 out of 20 subjects (70%) said that they used *I think* for delaying, as they wanted to obtain more time to formulate ideas or sentences. It was therefore not uncommon for them to use conversation fillers such as *eh, ah, en, mm, oh, well* before and after *I think*.

2) **Habit**

Habit is another major cause for the overuse of *I think* among the subjects. 14 subjects (70%) believed that they had used *I think* habitually instead of purposefully, and 7 of them listed Habit as their primary cause for using *I think* because using *I think* has to some extent become part of their spoken English behavior. For example, both Subject No.2 (with the highest normalized frequency of *I think*) and Subject No. 13 (with the second highest normalized frequency) admitted that they used *I think* out of habit. The former tend to use *I think* at the beginning of the utterance while the latter habitually puts *I think* either at the beginning or at the end of the utterance.

However, although many subjects admitted that they used *I think* out of habit, few of them had any idea how they formed the habit. Besides, few subjects in the survey realized that they had used *I think* for functions that are performed by other discourse markers such as *because, for instance, and in summary*. Wang (2007) introduced “pragmatic overgeneralization” as one of the causes for the overuse of *I think*. “Pragmatic errors arise when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language. It generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures” (Wang, 2007: 55). Indeed, as Granger (1998: 156) pointed out, the use of *I think* among learners could be viewed as “prefabricated formulaic stretches of verbal behavior whose linguistic and paralinguistic form and function need not be ‘worked upon’”. In other words, learners’ repertoires for introducing arguments and points of view are very restricted and they therefore “cling on to certain fixed phrases and expressions
which they feel confident in using”. This could be true of the Chinese EFL learners: the analysis in 5.2 shows that Chinese EFL learners have not yet acquired the proper use of various discourse markers for illustrating, summarizing, listing, and so on. “The failure of acquisition of these discourse markers makes Chinese EFL learners resort to those they are familiar with, such as *I think*, when they need to fulfill the above mentioned pragmatic functions” (Wang, 2007: 56).

3) Inadequate English proficiency
In addition to Delay in the broader sense (i.e. delay due to various causes), some subjects specifically mentioned delay due to inadequate English proficiency. Indeed, 45% of the subjects (9 subjects) said that they had expression difficulty during the interview because of inadequate English proficiency, so they used the discourse marker *I think*. They usually used *I think* repeatedly, with the hope of bringing out some new words to keep the conversation going, allowing no period of silence. Sometimes they would use “what shall I say”, and “how to say” before *I think*, betraying their inadequate English proficiency.

4) Pragmatic Transfer
According to Kasper (1992: 207), “Pragmatic transfer...shall refer to the influence exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than second language on their comprehension, production and learning of second language pragmatic information”. As Wang (2007: 54) pointed out, Chinese expressions such as 我想/我觉得/我认为 (*I know*), defined by Liao Qiuzhong (1986) as predicative markers employed to present the opinions or beliefs, have many functions and meanings similar to *I think* in English. However, “these Chinese expressions are not actually employed for the pragmatic functions which are misused by Chinese EFL learners in using *I think*. In this sense, the presence of an equivalent expression in Chinese may not have the decisive effect on their use of *I think* in English” (Wang, 2007: 55).

The follow-up survey yielded similar results. When asked if they used 我想/我认为/我觉得 a lot in Chinese, 50% of the subjects said NO and the other half said YES. But only 3 subjects admitted that they had used *I think* because of Chinese interference. Therefore, Pragmatic Transfer does not seem to play a major role in the overuse of *I think* among Chinese EFL learners.

5) Situational anxiety
In the study of second language acquisition, learners’ situational anxiety is thought to impose great influence on the development of learner language (Bailey, 1983), and it will sometimes lead to the learner’s production of pragmatically inappropriate utterances (Wang, 2007: 56).

In COLSEC, there are 1,165 cases of *I think* occurring with filled pauses *eh/em/en/er/erm/mm* before it, and 281 cases of *I think* preceded by a repetition of *I or I think*. As Wang (2007: 56) suggested, “as speakers are taking the spoken English test, they may become much more nervous and use many filled pauses to ‘play out time’”.

However, in the follow-up survey, only 3 subjects mentioned that they had used *I
think due to situational anxiety and they did not rank it as the most important of the causes for the use of *I think*. One of them listed it as the second most important cause while the other two subjects ranked Situational Anxiety as the least important factor. This is understandable as the interviews were conducted in a situation much less stressful than the CET-SET.

7. Conclusion

This paper, as a revisit of Wang’s (2007) study, has analyzed features of *I think* used by Chinese EFL learners and by native speakers in terms of frequency, collocations, and functions, and explored the factors for overuse by Chinese EFL learners based on a follow-up survey. The major findings are similar to those of Wang (2007):

1. Chinese EFL learners significantly overuse *I think* compared with native speakers;
2. There is no significant difference in the distribution of *I think that* and *I think* between Chinese EFL learners and English native speakers. Chinese EFL learners overuse *I think* in the front position, whereas there is no significant difference in the mid and end positions.
3. Some collocates of *I think* appear with high frequency both in COLSEC and LLC, such as *and, but, yes,* and *because,* while some only appear specifically in COLSEC or LLC. The co-selection patterns show that while Chinese EFL learners use *I think* for some similar functions, they tend to overuse them (e.g. *so* *I think*); and they use *I think* for some different functions uncommon among native speakers (e.g. signal listing by the co-selection of *firstly I think*).
4. Like native English speakers, Chinese EFL learners use *I think* for downtoning, marking deliberation, taking/holding the turn, and delaying.
5. Chinese EFL learners are found to use *I think* in a context where another kind of discourse marker, if used instead, would be more appropriate. Examples show that *I think* seems to be used for signaling self-repair, emphasizing “I’m expressing my opinion”, listing, reasoning/illustrating, comparing and contrasting, and summarizing/concluding. More evidence is to be required, though, for a sounder conclusion.
6. Chinese EFL learners’ overuse of *I think* may be attributed to the need for delay, habit, inadequate language proficiency, pragmatic overgeneralization, and probably situational anxiety.

The research findings may have some implications for current EFL teaching and learning. As Wei (2007: 291) stated, learners tend to focus more on semantic meaning than pragmatic functions, and the pragmatic studies in recent years provide us with a new language teaching perspective: the interactiveness, politeness, cooperativeness, and appropriateness in language use should be given more consideration in English teaching. As Wang (2007: 59) suggested, in teaching discourse markers such as *I think*, we should enhance the awareness of grasping proper pragmatic functions by increasing learners’ exposure to discourse makers and teaching discourse markers in context. Meanwhile,
the learners should also be made aware that they should avoid using discourse markers excessively without a full consideration of appropriateness and accuracy.

Finally, it is noteworthy that like Li & Chen (2007: 25), we are concerned that some statistics might still have been affected by the tags in the copora, though we have tried our best to make our statistics as accurate as possible. We sincerely hope that more precise work could be done in the future with the development of more scientific research tools.

References


陈新仁、吴钰，2006，中国英语学习者对因果类话语标记语的使用情况，《国外外语教
Appendix I

A Sample Interview

T: What will you do after your graduation?
J: Eh….continue my study on master degree.

T: Why do you choose to do that?
J: Because originally I planned to study abroad, but the….the work of preparation is not so smooth, so at last I choose to study at Jiaotong University.

T: Does your choice match your interest?
J: It’s nothing about my interest, just Eh…..partially my parents told me that maybe a degree of master can make me more competitive for the future career and partially since I originally…planned to continue my study, and now the SOFL offered me the opportunity to continue my study without any exam so I think it’s a good opportunity and I take it.

T: Then do you really love study?
J: I do not want to say whether I love it or not, because if I say I love it, it’s not true; if I say I enjoy it, it’s also not true. Neither will I say that I was forced to continue my study. It’s just that my parents suggest me that eh…study the… to continue study maybe good for me and there comes the opportunity, and then that happened. I choose to the…I choose to study the master degree so it’s so natural.
During your three years for master degree, what will you do besides study?

I do want to give you an answer but sorry even myself I do not have a clear idea of it. Because what I’m going to do in the coming three years depends on what I’m going to do after the 3 years, I mean after the graduation. If I still want to study overseas, so I think I should….concentrate on the study or if I decide to work at company after the graduation, then I will try to find some related jobs or part-time jobs to do.

Then how do you like your four years' life on campus?

It was fantastic to me. Because here I’ve experienced so many first things, the first things to me, the first time to live with four girls together and here I learned a lot, so I think life here was colorful and fulfilled.

Appendix II

Questionnaire

Please answer the questions based on the interview that you did just now. Thank you for your cooperation!

Name _____________ Gender _____________

1. Have you realized whether you used “I think” during the interview?
   A. Yes   B. No (go to Q3)   C. Not sure

2. If yes, how many times have you used? ___________________________

3. Do you use “I think” purposefully or unconsciously?
   A. Purposefully
   B. Unconsciously
   C. Sometimes purposefully, sometimes unconsciously
   D. Not sure

4. Why did you use “I think” during the interview? ___________________________
   If you cannot think of a proper expression, please read the following for reference:
   A. Situational anxiety   B. Politeness
   C. Delay   D. Turn-taking
   E. Downgrade   F. Habit
   G. Emphasis of my own opinion   H. Summary
   I. Inadequate English proficiency
   J. Chinese interference (always use 我想, 我认为 in Chinese)
   K. Others___________________________

5. Please rank the reasons for your use of “I think” by labeling the most important as 1, the next important as 2, and so on so forth.

6. Do you often use 我想，我认为，我觉得 in speaking Chinese?
   A. Yes   B. No   C. Not sure