

國立臺東大學英美語文學系
碩士學位論文

指導教授：鄭偉成 博士

臺灣英語學習者使用 *I think* 的言談功能
之研究

**The Discourse Functions of *I think*
by Taiwanese EFL Learners**

研究生：邱奕曉 撰

中華民國一一二年七月



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臺灣英語學習者使用 *I think* 的言談功能之研究

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Chinese Abstract

先前探討英語學習者使用 *I think* 的文獻多指出英語能力程度與 *I think* 言談功能的使用有正相關，卻鮮少有實證研究呈現不同程度英語能力的學習者在不同 *I think* 言談功能的表現，因此，本論文旨在探討臺灣英語學習者使用 *I think* 的言談功能與其英語能力程度的攸關性。

Baumgarten 與 House (2010)及吳勇等(2010)皆指出英語學習者廣泛地使用多種 *I think* 的言談功能，例如以 *I think* 做結論、解釋、延遲等，而這些功能卻未在英語母語者的對話中發現。吳勇等(2010)進一步表示，當英語能力較不足的學習者在尋找辭彙有困難時，傾向用 *I think* 作為填充詞。然而，這些研究大多著重在 *I think* 使用的頻率和其言談功能，而英語學習者使用各種 *I think* 言談功能的情形與其英語能力程度的關係卻少有著墨。

有鑑於此，本論文從臺東縣的兩所高中招募高一、高二、高三的學生作為三個由低至高的英語能力組別，受試者以小組討論方式針對三種不同主題表達意見，將其談話內容作為真實語料，亦輔以統計及言談分析為佐證資料。研究發現以下四點：

- 一、文獻中所討論的八種 *I think* 的言談功能皆有使用，其中使用頻率最高的是「話語轉換」的功能，而最低的則是「深度闡述」。
- 二、英語學習者的英文能力程度高低與各個 *I think* 功能類型有正關聯，而使用「話語轉換」及「延遲」功能的次數與英語能力呈現負相關。
- 三、英語學習者在描述類型之任務中使用 *I think* 的數量最高，論說型的任務次之，最少的則是描述型任務。
- 四、中文「我覺得」的使用對英語學習者使用 *I think* 的影響並不明顯。

綜合以上結果，英語能力與 *I think* 的言談功能使用相互關聯，而語用

能力相關議題亦會在研究中一併探討。

關鍵字：英語學習者、英語能力、言談功能、語用能力、*I think*



The Discourse Functions of *I think* by Taiwanese EFL Learners

Yi-Hsiao Chiu

English Abstract

While there has been extensive research on functions of the marker *I think* in the field of pragmatics and discourse, little attention, if any, has been paid to EFL learners' acquisition of this marker by investigating whether its complex discourse functions (i) correlate with levels of English proficiency and (ii) are sensitive to genre differences in the context of EFL. To these ends, this thesis aims to examine the interplay of proficiency and genre types in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* in the utterance-initial position by designing three production tasks whereby thirty-six participants classified into three proficiency groups, Grade-10, -11 and -12 students from two senior high schools in Taitung, were required to initiate discussions on the assigned topics in three genres: argumentative, negotiative, and descriptive. Their production data were collected and transcribed for statistical and discourse analysis to calculate the tokens of *I think* and sort out different functions of *I think*.

The results have made four points. First, all of the eight discourse functions of *I think* are identified in the utterance-initial position. *Turn-taking* (T3) was used most frequently while *Marking deliberation* (T2) the least. Second, levels of proficiency correlate positively with different functions of *I think*. The token number of *Turn-taking* (T3) and *Delaying/Turn-holding* (T4) has a negative correlation with proficiency levels. *Downtoning* (T1) and *Reasoning/Illustrating* (T6) were performed exclusively by Grade-11 and -12 students. Moreover, the rarity of *Marking deliberation* (T2) was only observed with two tokens in the Grade-12 group. Third, genre types have a direct bearing on the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners. The participants used *I think* more frequently in the descriptive and the argumentative tasks than in the negotiative task. Fourth, the Mandarin EFL learners' acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge is not directly

influenced by their L1 pragmatic knowledge in their use of *I think*. Comparing the distributions of the functions of *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin, I suggest that the use of *wo juede* does not have a direct bearing on the use of *I think*. Thus, pragmatic transfer is not evident.

In sum, the present thesis has investigated the use of *I think* by the Mandarin EFL learners from the discourse perspective and broadened the understanding of the Mandarin EFL learners' acquisition of *I think*.

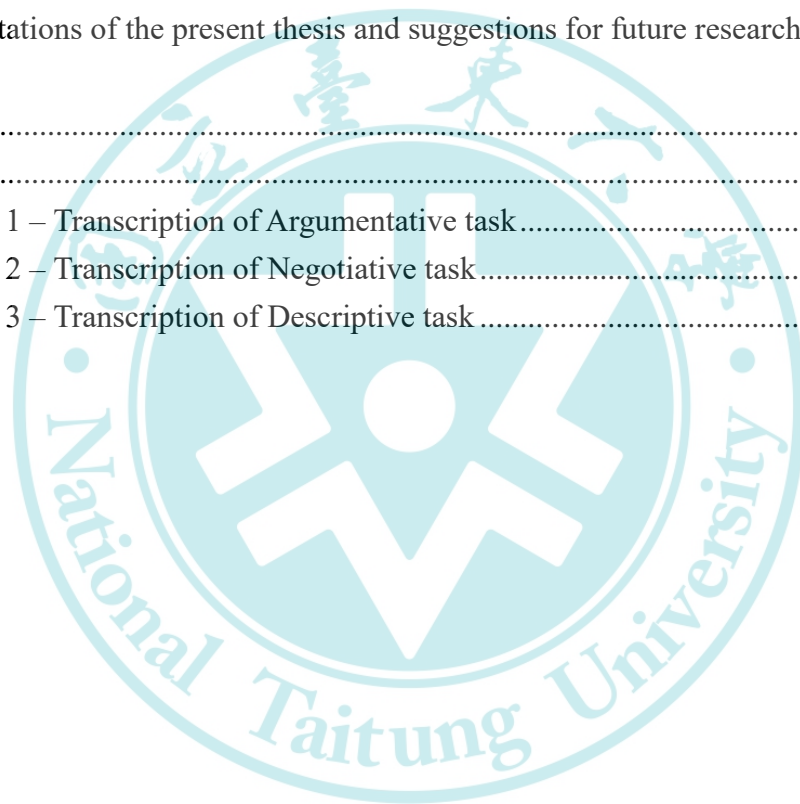
Keywords: EFL Learner, English Proficiency, Discourse Functions, Genre Types, I think



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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

To successfully communicate in a foreign language, a language learner has to not only acquire its syntactic rules to form well-formed sentences but also its functional rules underlying the proper use of the language, with the latter being referred to as pragmatic rules (Shu 2018). These two aspects of foreign language acquisition can be recast as syntactic competence and pragmatic competence. Promoting pragmatic competence, which has largely been ignored in traditional classroom teaching, is of great importance in foreign language acquisition. Pragmatic competence, defined by Fraser (2010:15), is ‘the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was.’

The expression *I think*, one of the most frequent common expressions (Aijmer 1997; Kaltenböck 2013) in daily conversation, has been investigated from different perspectives, such as discourse analysis in L1 context (Zhang 2014) and comparative analysis (Wu et al. 2010; Zhang and Sabet 2014). These studies pay careful attention to variation underlying the use of *I think* between EFL learners and native speakers of English in the context of language acquisition. Generally, the previous studies have pointed out that EFL learners tend to use *I think* more frequently than the native speakers of English (Nikula 1997; Zhang and Sabet 2014; Johansen 2020). As for the functions of *I think*, Baumgarten and House (2010) summarized four functions commonly used in both the L1 and the EFL discourse and eleven functions that are exclusively used in the ELF discourse. Similarly, Wu et al. (2010) identified four functions of *I think* common in both Chinese EFL learners’ and native speakers’ speech and six functions that are specifically performed by Chinese EFL learners. The results from both studies suggest

that EFL learners tend to use *I think* with a wider range of functions than the native speakers of English.

To account for the Chinese EFL learner's use of *I think*, possible factors such as proficiency, L1 transfer, and genres are considered. Neary-Sundquist's (2013) study on EFL learners' use of hedges shows that the frequency of *I think* has a negative correlation with proficiency levels. Wu et al. (2010) also indicate that speakers with inadequate English proficiency tend to use *I think* as a filler due to their difficulty searching for proper words. In addition to proficiency, L1 plays a role in Chinese EFL learners' use of functions of *I think*. The use of deliberative function in an utterance-medial or utterance-final position in English is possibly transferred from the use of its counterpart *wo juede* 'I think' in Mandarin (Liu 2013). As for the genre effect, Yu (2009) has found that the interview genre elicits more tokens of hedges than the debate genre.

Since there have been limited studies that closely examine the correlation between Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* and their English proficiency levels, this thesis intends to fill this gap by analyzing the frequency of different functions used by different English proficiency groups. Meanwhile, the interplay of L1 will be discussed to figure out whether pragmatic transfer is operative in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think*. Given that the use of hedges is sensitive to genre differences, an investigation of genre effect on the use of *I think* promotes a better understanding of their interaction.

1.2 Research questions

To investigate the possible factors influencing Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* with reference to its various discourse and pragmatic functions, this thesis addresses the following three questions:

- (1) Can proficiency be a factor that affects the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners?

- (2) Can genre effects be observed in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* in English?
- (3) Can the pragmatic and the discourse functions of *I think* influenced by those of *wo juede* in Mandarin?

The first research question explores the correlation between different levels of English proficiency and the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners with reference to eight types of discourse functions proposed in the previous studies. Next, the second research question concerns whether there will be any task effect from the three different tasks designed to explore the discourse function of *I think*. Finally, the third research question discusses whether L1 influences Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* with reference to its discourse functions. Two expressions, *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin, will be compared in terms of their discourse functions. Pragmatic transfer will also be addressed to provide insights into the effect of L1 on the L2 acquisition of *I think*.

1.3 Significance of the study

The present thesis attempts to investigate the interplay between levels of English proficiency and Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* with reference to its various discourse functions. Whether genre types play a role in their use of *I think* will also be examined by conducting three production tasks. The discourse functions of *wo juede* 'I think' in Mandarin are compared with our empirical results to explore the effect of L1.

1.4 Organization of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In Chapter 2, previous studies on the discourse and pragmatic functions of *I think* used in both L1 and L2 contexts are reviewed along with a brief comparison between *I think* and its Mandarin counterpart *wo juede*. Chapter 3 introduces the experimental design by justifying the procedure of three tasks and data analysis. Chapter 4

presents the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected data with examples and discussions and addresses related issues surrounding the L2 acquisition of *I think*. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the major findings and addresses the limitations.



Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter first reviews the pragmatic functions of *I think* in English and four empirical studies on *I think* in the context of EFL/ESL classrooms are discussed, followed by an overview of previous studies on pragmatic transfer. Specifically, Section 2.2.1 aims to provide a general classification of the pragmatic functions of *I think* as a basis for discussion. Next, Section 2.2.2 lays an empirical foundation on the use of *I think* by ESL/EFL learners, including a discussion about the effect of L1 and possible factors influencing ESL/EFL learners' use of *I think*. Issues of pragmatic transfer and its explanatory role in accounting for L2 acquisition are introduced in Section 2.2.3. Finally, a brief summary of the studies reviewed in this chapter is given in Section 2.3.

2.2 Previous studies on *I think* and *wo juede*

2.2.1 Pragmatic functions of *I think*

In this section, I will provide a survey of pragmatic functions of *I think* in English and its distribution that will serve as the basis of discussion in this thesis.

2.2.1.1 Zhang (2014)

Zhang (2014) summarizes pragmatic functions of *I think* proposed in the literature, including tentative, mitigating, emphatic, discursive and evaluative, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The pragmatic functions of *I think* (Adapted from Zhang (2004: 226-227))

Functions	Descriptions
Tentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To indicate uncertainty and approximation (Jucker 1986).➤ To express an afterthought in final position (Kaltenböck 2013).➤ To imply a lack of authority (Simon-Vandenberg 2000).
Mitigating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To tone down assertiveness and authority (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989).➤ To avoid bluntness and save face (Aijmer 1997).➤ To qualify commitment and be non-committal (Kärkkäinen 2010).➤ To be used for politeness as a mitigator (Tragott and Dasher 2002).
Emphatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To enhance the strength of a statement (Holmes 1984).➤ To add weight to the assertion or express reassurance (Aijmer 1997).➤ To convey certainty, authority, and reassurance (Macauley 1995).
Discursive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To be used as a structural device (Kaltenböck 2010).➤ To be a stalling or filling device to bridge communication gaps (Stenstöröm 1995).➤ To be used for hesitant speech, searching words, and self-repair (Kärkkäinen 2010).
Evaluative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To refer to a speaker's evaluation of what has been said (Zhang 2014).➤ To convey the core meaning of "I'm expressing my opinion" (Ifantidou 2001).➤ To carry a propositional attitude and simply assess or judge the truth and aptness of what is said (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Rather than focusing on discrete functions of *I think*, Zhang (2014) argues that the functions in Table 1 are interconnected and can be explained by the concept of elasticity which plays a crucial role in manifesting the pragmatic functions of *I think*. Elasticity is defined as 'language stretched purposefully to suit communicative needs (Zhang 2014: 228). In other words, the pragmatic functions of an expression are not discrete and can be interpreted differently depending on the context, and a speaker can combine any of the functions in order to achieve the communication purposes. To investigate how various functions of *I think* interact

with one another to form the multi-functional use of *I think* and how elasticity is manifested in monologues and dialogues, Zhang analyzes data from an institutional setting involving Australian officers and passengers. Both individual functions and combined functions of *I think* are analyzed in the discourse. The results show that *I think* is used in the monologues as frequently as in the dialogues. Of all the functions, the emphatic *I think* is the most frequently performed while the discursive one is the least frequently performed. Between these two was the evaluative *I think*, followed by the tentative and the mitigating *I think*. Zhang attributes the highly frequent use of the emphatic *I think* to the nature of the formal and institutional data, since the officers employed the emphatic *I think* to strengthen their statements and assert authority. In addition to individual functions of *I think*, the multi-functional use of *I think* accounts for approximately 18% of the examples from the data. The interlocutors tended to use *I think* for emphatic purposes while performing other functions. One extract, as shown in (1), exemplifies the multi-functional use of *I think* encoding both emphasis and tentativeness.

(1) Multi-functional functions (emphatic and tentative) (Zhang 2014: p.245):

Officer: *It is a borderline case. I mean they've...they've still stuck to mainly the same story. It's the fact (pause) that (pause) **I** really **think** that they are here to work, and the friend has **possibly** said to them, **you know**, come over see if there's work here.*

Supervisor: *They are coming here on visitor visa, you've got...*

The conversation in (1) was held between an officer and her supervisor in the context of two men suspected of having the intention to work illegally in Australia. The insertion of *really* between *I* and *think* enhances the strength of the officer's assertion, which is an indicator of the emphatic function. Meanwhile, *possibly* is used to show her uncertainty because it is an inference rather than a fact. The expression *you know* also implies that she is uncertain about

her assumption and wants to seek agreement from her supervisor. Notice that the two functions of *I think*, emphatic and tentative, seem contradictory but are encoded by *I think* to express the officer's assertion about the suspects' intention and indicate her uncertainty about the reasons behind the intention.

These findings add weight to the concept of elasticity underlying the functions of *I think*. Namely, the pragmatic functions of *I think* can stretch in any direction and can combine with other functions to form the multi-functional use for the satisfaction of communicative goals. As illustrated in Figure 1, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the pragmatic functions of *I think*. The five functions can be integrated and interconnected in any direction. The conversation in (1) exemplifies the integration of two functions of *I think*. The officer used the combined functions of *I think* to reach her communicative goal of persuading her supervisor to support her decision. Zhang concludes that the elasticity of *I think* enables the speaker to combine different functions of *I think*, with one being more dominant than the others, to meet communicative needs.

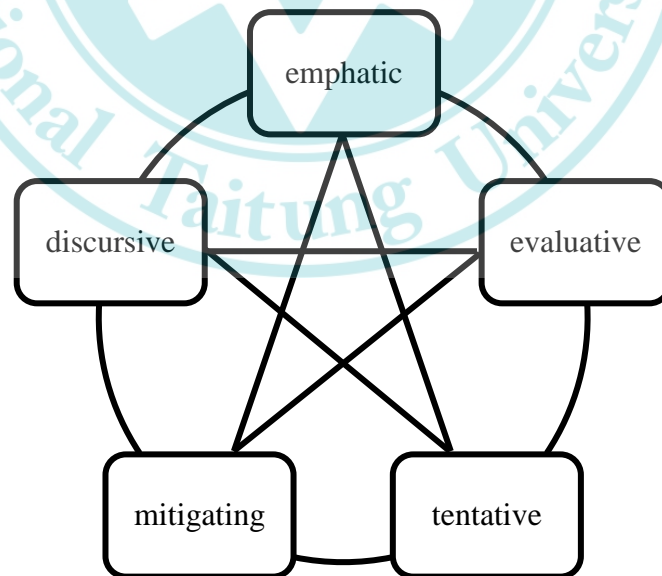


Figure 1. Overlapping functions of *I think* (adapted from Zhang (2014: 252))

2.2.2 *I think* in the context of EFL/ESL classrooms

In this section, I will review studies on the use of *I think* in English by EFL learners compared to native speakers of English. Possible factors for the EFL learners' use of *I think*, including English proficiency, task types, and L1 influence, will be discussed.

2.2.2.1 Wu et al. (2010)

To explore the use of *I think* by native speakers of English and Chinese EFL learners, Wu et al. (2010) analyze the use of *I think* from two corpora: London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC) and College Learners' Spoken English Corpus (COLSEC). While LLC is a native English corpus, COLSEC contains transcriptions from College English Test. The statistical results have shown that the use of *I think* by the Chinese EFL learners is significantly more frequent than that of the native speakers of English. In other words, the Chinese EFL learners tend to overuse *I think*. As for the different positions of *I think* in utterances, the Chinese EFL learners frequently use *I think* in the utterance-initial position, rather than the utterance-medial and the utterance-final position.

Based on Wang's (2007) study, Wu et al. (2010) refine Wang's work in an attempt to present an in-depth study of pragmatic functions of *I think*. Besides the functions of *I think* already proposed in Wang (2007), a new pragmatic function, 'marking deliberation', is added to the functions commonly used by both the native speakers and the Chinese EFL learners. The inclusion of 'marking deliberation' is to describe the function of *I think* in strengthening the force of the statement and the commitment to the proposition. However, according to the analysis, there are certain functions specifically performed by the Chinese EFL learners, including signaling self-repair, emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion', listing, reasoning/illustrating, comparing and contrasting, and summarizing/concluding. The overall pragmatic functions of *I think* are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The pragmatic functions of *I think* (adapted from Wu et al. (2010: 11-17))¹

Functions	Descriptions	Examples
Downtoning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To mitigate face threat and be employed as a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1983; Aijmer, 1997). To weaken the speaker's commitment (Ifantiduo 2001). 	Clusters containing <i>I think</i> : - well <i>I think</i> - maybe/personally <i>I think</i> - <i>I think</i> maybe/probably
Marking deliberation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To signal careful deliberation, objectivity and authority (Preisler 1986). To strengthen the speaker's commitment to the proposition (Ifantiduo 2001). 	<i>In my opinion, I think of course a healthy a healthy diet is very important.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:12)
Turn-taking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To signal one's turn to put forward one's opinions. To interrupt and gain floor. 	Speaker 2: <i>I have a classmate. She is in Japan. I communicate with him with her on Internet.</i> Speaker 3: <i>I think computer nowadays develop more and more quickly and more and more fast.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:12)
Delaying/turn-holding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To provide verbal planning time for speakers (Sabet & Holmes 1995). To help the speaker get prepared for what to say next (Wang 2007). To reflect the hesitation and confusion before the speaker comes to grip with message (Aijmer 1997). 	<i>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.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:13)
Signaling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To signal self-repair (Xu 2009). 	But low buil ² <i>I think</i> low

¹ Discourse symbols used to describe.... are removed, as they are not of direct concern to the current discussion.

² The fragment *buil* is not a typo and its complete form is *buildings*, as can be seen in the same utterance. This fragment can be taken to demonstrate the function of self-repair performed by the speaker who used *I think* to repair the incomplete form of *buil*.

self-repair		buildings will...(Wu et al. 2010:14)
Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'	1. To tell other people that this is my opinion" (Ifantiduo 2001).	<i>In my opinion I think that there are many factors to keep healthy.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:15)
Listing by co-selecting with listing connectives	1. To indicate sequence (Wu et al. 2010).	<i>I think there are several reasons. First I think fake and inferior products... with low price. ... Eh second I think eh sell fake ... consumers' healthy. ... And also I think people should ... buy something.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:16)
Reasoning/ Illustrating	1. To give reasons or illustrate the point (Wang 2007). 2. To signal cause-result relation or illustration (Wu et al. 2010).	<i>I think young people should live alone after graduation. ... And I think they often have different opinions about different things. And if ..., and I think they will ... they'll come?</i> (Wu et al. 2010:16)
Comparing and contrasting	1. To signal comparison and contrast (Wang 2007).	<i>Mm so ... I think it's a good way to mm to practice ... to decrease the pollution and ... and I think it brought a ... mn problem, because many bicycles takes much room ... very busy.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:17)
Summarizing/ concluding	1. To summarize the speakers' ideas or draw a conclusion (Wei 2007).	<i>So many western customers will come in our China ... I think there isn't any lovers' day. But now I see ... are celebrating the lovers' day. So</i>

	<p><i>I think the lovers' day will be most popular ... years later.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:17)</p>
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To account for the overuse of *I think* by the Chinese EFL learners, 20 college students were given a 3-minute interview about their campus life and future career, and a questionnaire was distributed to them in order to check their awareness and motivation to use *I think* in the previous interview. The questionnaire results show that ‘delay’ and ‘habit’ are the two major causes. 70% of the participants reported that they used *I think* to gain more time for organizing their ideas, which accounts for the common use of *I think* as conversation fillers, such as *eh, en, mm, oh, well* with *I think* in their utterance. Similarly, 70% of the participants noted that they used *I think* habitually rather than purposefully. Wu et al. (2010) ascribe this habit to the speakers’ restricted repertoires of expressing ideas. With a limited knowledge of discourse markers, EFL learners tend to use certain fixed phrases like *I think* with which they are more familiar and comfortable. Additionally, 45% of the participants indicated their difficulty in searching target words to carry on the conversation and therefore used *I think* repeatedly. The participants specifically attributed the difficulty to their low English proficiency levels. Pragmatic transfer was another account of the overuse of *I think*, which was reported by 15% of the participants. In Chinese, *wo juede* ‘I think, I feel’, defined by Liao (1986), is an expression to present opinions or beliefs. Due to the similar meaning shared by *I think* and *wo juede*, Chinese EFL learners may use *I think* as an equivalent expression of *wo juede*. However, the pragmatic functions encoded by the use of *I think* are not the same as those by the use of *wo juede* ‘I think’ (Wang 2007). Similar results can be drawn from a follow-up survey. Only three participants were aware of L1 (Mandarin) interference in their use of *I think* while half of the participants reported that they used *wo juede* frequently in Mandarin. Therefore, pragmatic transfer may not be a major cause for the overuse of *I think* by the Chinese EFL learners.

The results of Wu et al.'s (2010) study show that the frequency of the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners is significantly higher than that of the English native speakers, which is further corroborated by other studies on EFL learners' use of *I think* (see Neary-Sundquist 2013; Zhang and Sabet 2014). In addition, the pragmatic functions of *I think* summarized by Wu et al. (2010) are also reviewed by Zhang (2014). For example, they both indicate that *I think* can be used to soften the tone of the speakers, mark deliberation, perform turn-taking, and fill communication gaps. Moreover, Wu et al. (2010) argue that Chinese EFL learners' high frequent use of *I think* for self-repairing and delaying may result from their low level of English proficiency and limited knowledge of discourse markers. This view is supported by Zhang and Sabet's (2014) study on the use of *I think* by Chinese and Persian EFL learners. Another explanation for the overuse of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners is the L1 influence. As in Wu et al.'s (2010), the resemblance of the two expressions *wo juede* 'I think, I feel' in Chinese and *I think* in English may give rise to the common use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners. A similar statement is made by Johansen (2020) as well. In the investigation of Norwegian EFL learners' use of *I think*, the similar pragmatic functions shared by *jeg tror* 'I think' in Norwegian and *I think* in English seem to lead to the frequent use of *I think* by Norwegian learners.

Drawing on the research findings in an EFL classroom, Wang (2007) suggests that teachers should expose learners to contexts in which the use of discourse markers, such as *I think*, is felicitous. Meanwhile, learners' awareness of pragmatic functions of discourse markers should be enhanced to avoid the excessive or inappropriate use of those markers in their production.

2.2.2.2 Liu (2013)

Liu (2013) investigates the effect of L1 on the use of English discourse markers by L1 Chinese speakers by analyzing the spoken data gathered from sociolinguistic interviews with the Chinese speakers and English native speakers. To explore the factors that may influence the

use of English discourse markers by L1 Chinese speakers, ten Chinese graduate students and five native speakers of English were recruited in the study. While all the fifteen participants were recruited for the individual English interviews in order to compare the use of discourse markers of the Chinese speakers to that of the native speakers, Chinese individual interviews only included the Chinese speakers to compare their use of English discourse markers with their use of Chinese discourse markers. The topics in both interviews were about school life and personal experience in order to elicit the oral narrative register.

The analysis of the spoken data indicates that eighteen English and nineteen Chinese discourse markers were identified. Based on the previous studies (Schiffrin 1987; Erman 1992; Brinton 1996; Müller 2005) on the definitions of discourse markers, Liu (2013) adopts the definition of discourse markers as a criterion in her study: discourse markers are (i) grammatically optional or syntactically independent, (ii) have little or no propositional meaning, and (iii) have textual or interpersonal functions. The results show that the overall rate of the use of English discourse markers by the native speakers is higher than that of the Chinese speakers. Significant differences in frequency were found in nine markers, *just*, *sort of/kind of*, *referent-final tags*, *but*, *well*, *then*, *I think*, *yeah/yes*, and *ah*. Of the nine discourse markers, *I think*, *yeah/yes*, and *ah* were used more frequently by the Chinese speakers than by the native speakers.

As one of the most frequently used discourse markers by the Chinese speakers, *I think* was further analyzed in terms of pragmatic functions and distribution in utterances. *I think* serves the deliberative function when used to express certainty and the tentative function to indicate uncertainty (Aijmer 1997; Baumgarten and House 2010). Both groups used *I think* for deliberation and tentativeness. However, only the L1 Chinese speakers used *I think* as a pause filler to collect thoughts and this textual function was not exploited by any of the native speakers. The frequency of the functions of *I think* used by the two groups is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The frequency of the functions of *I think* used by the L1 Chinese speakers and the English native speakers (adapted from Liu (2013: 159-160))

	L1 Chinese speakers	Native English speakers
Deliberative function	25.8%	38.1%
Tentative function	46.2%	61.9%
Filler	28.0%	0%

Additionally, they exhibited distributional differences in the use of the certain function of *I think*. Table 4 shows the frequency of the functions and the distributions of *I think* used by the two groups.

Table 4. The frequency of the functions and distributions of *I think* used by the L1 Chinese speakers and the English native speakers (adapted from Liu (2013: 159-160))

		Initial position	Medial or final position
Deliberative function	L1 Chinese speakers	93.7%	6.3%
	English native speakers	100%	0%
Tentative function	L1 Chinese speakers	86.0%	14.0%
	English native speakers	46.2%	53.8%

The Chinese speakers used *I think* mostly in the utterance-initial position (86%) for the tentative function, as can be seen in (2), while the English native speakers used it mostly in the utterance-medial or final position (53.8%), as in (3).

(2) Sherry: How long have you been here?

Bing: Here I just for ... maybe ... four months, ***I think*** four months.

- (3) Davy: ...also the issue of financial aid. Because I was accepted to, accepted to one of the universities in Texas ***I think***. I can't remember if it is Arlington or Austin.

As for the deliberative function, the Chinese speakers used *I think* in the utterance-initial, medial, and final position but the native speakers only used it in the utterance-initial position as shown in (4). The conversation in (5) and (6) shows the Chinese speakers' use of the deliberative function in the utterance-initial and final position, respectively.

- (4) Ann: ... uh the original 'Simpsons' the first several reasons were were potent social commentaries, just great, um not any more. Actually, ***I think*** television is a waste of time.

- (5) Sherry: Why do you come here, instead of doing it in China or somewhere else?

Lian: ***I think*** in here is the best one.

- (6) Sherry: OK, do you have a favorite American movie?

Bing: Yeah, I have uh a couple favorite movie. I like uh 'Shawn Redemption' and 'Forest Gump.'

Sherry: OK.

Bing: Yeah, I like 'Forest Gump' movie. It's really kind of life style different. But it really encouraging people to achieve their own goal ***I think***.

By comparing the use of *I think* in English with that of *wo juede* 'I think' in Mandarin, Liu (2013) proposes that L1 transfer and lack of confidence are the factors that account for the L1 Chinese speakers' tendency to use *I think* in a certain position within an utterance to express the deliberative or the tentative function. *Wo juede*, defined by Feng (2008), is an epistemic marker that indicates 'the speaker's commitment to the degree of certitude'. It has similar

pragmatic functions of *I think* in English, namely, the deliberative function to express certain opinions and the tentative function to weaken the strength of a commitment. However, in Mandarin, *wo juede* can occur initially, medially, or finally in an utterance to signal deliberation while *I think* in English is used only in the utterance-initial position for the deliberative function. Therefore, the use of *I think* by the Mandarin speakers is less distributionally constrained. The use of *I think* in the utterance-medial and -final position for the deliberative function by the Chinese speakers may be attributed to the L1 transfer from the deliberative use of *wo juede* in Mandarin to the use of *I think* in English. Similarly, that both *wo juede* and *I think* are used at a high rate in the utterance-initial position for the tentative function seems to imply that the Chinese speakers transfer the tentative function of *I think* from their L1 corresponding expression *wo juede*. Furthermore, Liu (2013) suggests that L1 Chinese speakers' frequent use of *I think* may be due to their lack of confidence and the intention to mitigate face threat when they use *I think* for the tentative function in the utterance-initial position. Baumgarten and House (2010) state that the high frequency of the use of *I think* by EFL learners indicates their insecurity about expressing subjectivity, perhaps influenced by their L1 communicative norms.

Based on the data from individual interviews with the Chinese speakers and English native speakers, Liu (2013) examines the effect of Mandarin on the use of English discourse markers. The results show that the Chinese speakers overused *I think*, which corresponds to other studies exploring the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners (Wu et al. 2010; Neary-Sundquist 2013). As Wu et al. (2010) and Johansen's (2020) indicate, L1 transfer influences the use of *I think* in English since the counterpart expressions from L1 (e.g. *wo juede* in Chinese, *jeg tror* in Norwegian) and L2 (*I think*) share similar meanings. Liu (2013) also highlights the effect of L1 on the use of *I think* by analyzing the position of these two expressions in utterances. In addition, both Wu et al. (2010) and Liu (2013) report that *I think* is used as a pause filler by Chinese EFL learners for hesitation or collecting thoughts, which is possibly due to their lack of confidence and anxiety about speaking a foreign language. However, Liu's (2013) study is

limited to L1 transfer as the major cause and may overlook other possible factors affecting the use of *I think* by EFL learners. For instance, Neary-Sundquist (2013) points out that the use of *I think* is sensitive to task types, discourse mode (monologue or dialogue), and English proficiency level. Zhang (2014) also indicates that discourse modes have an effect on the use of the functions of *I think*.

2.2.2.3 Neary-Sundquist (2013)

Neary-Sundquist(2013) examines the use of hedges by ESL learners at different proficiency levels by implementing different task types to investigate whether proficiency and task types are crucial in affecting the use of hedges. 47 examinees (37 as non-native speakers of English) were placed into four English proficiency levels (Level 3 to 6), based on their test results from a semi-direct test (the Test of Oral Proficiency), which includes four speaking tasks: News, Personal, Passing Information, and Telephone. In the News task, the examinees had to give their opinions about the news they had read. In the Personal task, the examinees responded to an open-ended question related to their personal experience. In the Passing Information task, the examinees needed to pass on the information to someone who had no knowledge of it. In the Telephone task, the examinees relayed a message through voicemail. Based on the exam results, there were five ESL learners of L1 Chinese and five of L1 Korean in each group of Level 3, 4, and 5, while three ESL learners of L1 Chinese and four of L1 Korean were placed in Level 6.

The results show that the ESL learners use hedges at a lower rate than the native speakers of English, except the ESL learners from Level 6, the highest proficiency level. Specifically, the use of hedges increases as the proficiency level increases. Of all the hedges identified in the data, *I think* is used the most frequently by the ESL learners at Level 3, 4, and 5, while *just* is the most frequent hedge used by the ESL learners at Level 6. The native speakers use *I think* with a lower proportion than the ESL learners at Level 3, 4, and 5 but higher than those at Level

6. Table 5 illustrates the use of *I think* by the native speakers and the ESL learners at each level.

Table 5. The use of *I think* by native speakers and ESL learners at proficiency levels (adapted from Neary-Sundquist (2013:162-165))

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Native Speakers
<i>I think</i> used per 1000 words	71	59	55	48	75
The rate of <i>I think</i> used among all the hedges	81%	74%	76%	31%	56%

Though proficiency levels play a crucial role in the use of hedges by the ESL learners, it is found that the use is sensitive to task types. The News task elicited the most hedges from the ESL learners at Level 3, 4, 5, and the native speakers. The frequent use of hedges in the News task may be attributed to the argumentative nature of the task since the subjects were asked to provide their opinions on a news item. On the contrary, the Personal and the Telephone tasks showed a relatively low rate of hedges. Neary-Sundquist (2013:168) states that relaying a message by voicemail only concerns message delivery instead of expressing one's opinions. Therefore, fewer hedges are expected to be used. However, Sundquist (2013:168) indicates that it is difficult to account for the few uses of hedges in the Personal task because the responses involve various personal experience in different types, such as description or narration.

Neary-Sundquist (2013) demonstrates that both proficiency and task types play an important role in determining the use of hedges by ESL learners. The subjects tend to use more hedges as their proficiency levels increases, but the use of *I think*, the most frequently used hedge, reveals the opposite case. In other words, the frequency of the use of *I think* decreases with proficiency levels. Furthermore, it is found that task types appear to affect the use of hedges in language production due to the distinct characteristics of each task. For example, the

task that requires the examinees' opinions, such as the News task, elicits a higher rate of the use of hedges, and the task that concerns information delivery has a lower rate of use. The effect of task type is supported by Wu's (2022) investigation on the use of *wo juede* 'I think' in L1 oral production in the context of Taiwanese Mandarin. It is found that both the child and the adult groups use *wo juede* more frequently in argumentative genre than in negotiative genre. Wu (2022) suggests that argumentative discourse often involves choosing a stance and defending one's position. Therefore, *wo juede*, the expression used to make comments and show agreement or disagreement, is expected to occur frequently in argumentative genre.

The results of Neary-Sundquist's (2013) study underline the importance of proficiency levels and task types as two determining factors in the investigation of the use of hedges by ESL learners. However, the distinction in the use of hedges between Chinese and Korean ESL learners is not fully recognized. Every group in the experiment is consisted of an even number of Chinese and Korean ESL learners. It is suggested that the results should have been distinguished by the learners' L1 background since L1 may have an effect on their use of hedges. What is more, there is no further study on how L1 (i.e., Mandarin and Korean) influences the ESL learners' use of *I think* in English.

2.2.2.4 Johansen (2020)

Johansen (2020) retrieved data from two spoken corpora to compare the use of 10 hedging expressions by advanced Norwegian EFL learners and native speakers of English. Norwegian Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI-no) is a corpus consisting of spoken English by university undergraduates and advanced EFL learners. In contrast, Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation (LOCNEC) stores data from native speakers of English. In previous studies (Johansen 2020; Love et al. 2017), 10 hedges, *a bit, I mean, I think, just, kind of/kinda, like, might, probably, thing(s), and you know*, are found to be the most frequently used forms of all the 715 hedges retrieved from the Spoken British National

Corpus 2014. Thus, the 10 commonly used hedges are adopted as the target hedges in Johansen (2020).

The results show that the overall rate of the use of hedges by the native English speakers is significantly higher than that of the Norwegian advanced EFL learners. However, when each hedge is separately analyzed, the rate of the use of each hedge from the two corpora has a different pattern. Of all the ten hedges, five hedges (*a bit*, *I mean*, *like*, *thing(s)*, and *you know*) are underused by the Norwegian advanced EFL learners but there is no significant difference in the other four hedges (*I think*, *just*, *might*, and *probably*), and one (*kind of*) shows the overuse by the Norwegian advanced EFL learners.

Johansen (2020) attributes the Norwegian learners' underuse of the hedges to the L1 influence, Norwegian. Although several pragmatic functions of the English *like* overlap with those of the Norwegian *liksom* ('like') (Hasund 2003), which is also frequently used by Norwegians, there is no one-to-one correspondence between *like* and *liksom*. In addition, the Norwegian learners may not fully understand the varieties of the functions of the English *like*, and are unaware of the pragmatic difference between *like* and *liksom*. As for *I mean* and *you know*, the direct translations of these two expressions in Norwegian are *du vet/ vet du* 'you know'/'know you' and *jeg mener* 'I mean', which can be used as hedges as well, but *du vet/ vet du* and *jeg mener* do not undergo the same process of pragmaticalization as *you know* and *I mean* in English. Therefore, the diverse rates of the use of *you know* and *I mean* by the Norwegian EFL learners and the native English speakers can be expected. In addition, the frequency of the use of *I think* by the Norwegian EFL learners is similar to that of the native English speakers, which may also result from the influence of their L1. In Norwegian, *jeg tror* 'I think' is frequently used to (i) express uncertainty and (ii) decrease the strength of one's commitment to the proposition, resembling the pragmatic functions performed by *I think* in English. Due to the similar functions shared by the two expressions *jeg tror* 'I think' in Norwegian and *I think* in English, the Norwegian EFL learners have a relatively strong

tendency to use *I think* in their English production as they do in their first language.

Generally, the Norwegian advanced EFL learners use fewer hedges and fewer types of hedges than the English native speakers, but when individual variations are taken into consideration, some overlaps between the two groups can be observed. The results show that the native English speakers' use of the hedges outnumbers those of the Norwegians. However, some native English speakers use a similar number of hedges as the Norwegian advanced EFL learners do. The similarities between the two groups can also be found in the types of hedges. On average, each native speaker used approximately eight of the ten hedges while the Norwegian EFL learners used approximately five. Similarly, when the types of hedges used by each individual are examined, there are some overlaps between the Norwegian advanced EFL learners and the native English speakers. As shown in Figure 2, the types of hedges used by a Norwegian learner resemble those of a native speaker.

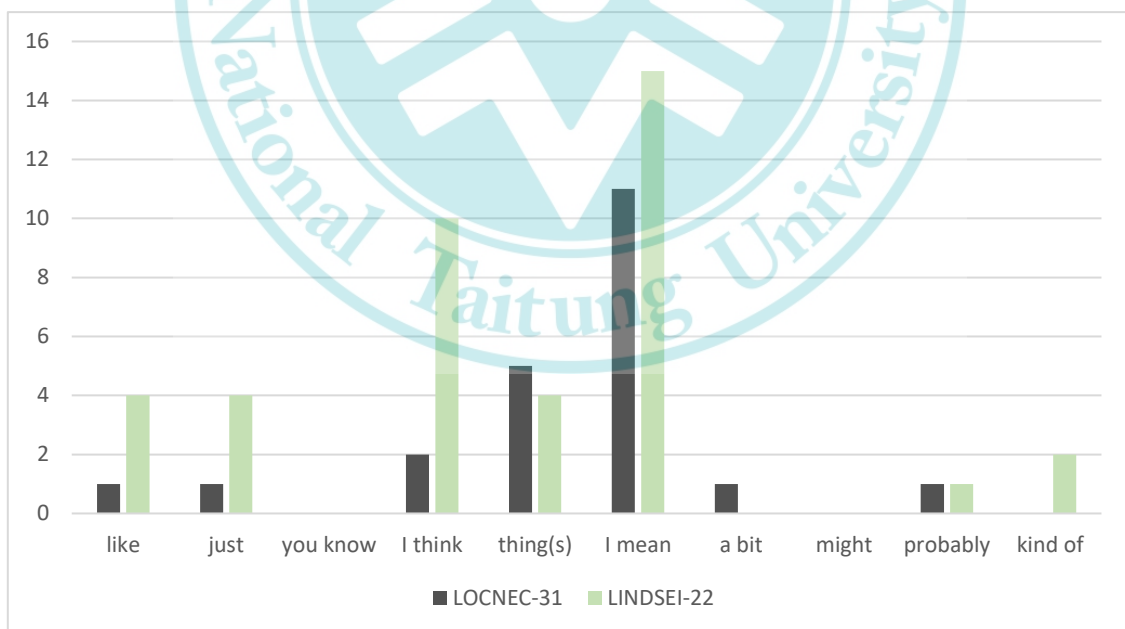


Figure 2. The pattern of types of hedges used by a learner and a native speaker (adapted from Johansen (2020:43))

Johansen (2020) compares the use of ten hedges by Norwegian advanced EFL learners

and native English speakers from two corpora to explore whether the number of hedges and types of hedges used by the two groups differ from each other. The results indicate that the Norwegian learners use the hedges less frequently than the native speakers, and the range of types of hedges is limited. However, when each hedge and individual variation is considered, some of the Norwegian EFL learners' use of hedges partially overlap with those of the native speakers in both frequency and types of hedges. The results highlight the importance of taking individual variation into account in a study investigating the data at a group-level. Since both groups are not homogeneously formed, a close examination of individual differences deepens the understanding of the use of hedges by native speakers of English and EFL learners.

Based on the results, it is suggested that L1 influences the use of hedges in English, and the frequency of the use of hedges in L2 is affected by whether the pragmatic functions of the hedges of L1 resemble those of L2. For example, since the Norwegian hedges *du vet/ vet du* 'you know' / 'know you' and *jeg mener* 'I mean' do not share the same pragmatic functions of *you know* and *I mean* in English, a lower rate of using these two hedges in English by the Norwegian is observed. On the contrary, *jeg tror* 'I think' in Norwegian and *I think* in English serve similar pragmatic functions. In Norwegian, *jeg tror* 'I think' is a hedge used to signal uncertainty and lack of commitment, which is also the functions encoded by *I think* in English. As pointed out by Zhang (2014), *I think* performs a tentative function used to express uncertainty and to weaken the speaker's commitment. Likewise, Wu et al. (2010) states that *I think* has the pragmatic function of downtoning which the speaker uses to soften the tone and to imply lack of commitment. Due to the similar pragmatic functions shared by *jeg tror* in Norwegian and *I think* in English, the Norwegian EFL learners use *I think* more frequently.

2.2.2.5 Summary

Previous studies have discussed possible factors that influence the use of *I think* by EFL learners, such as English proficiency, task types, and L1 influence. Wu et al. (2010) indicate

that EFL learners at lower levels of English proficiency use *I think* repeatedly since they have difficulty searching for proper words and thus resort to the use of *I think* to gain more time for verbal planning, similar to the filler function observed by Liu (2013). Neary-Sundquist's (2013) study observes the effect of English proficiency on the frequency of the use of *I think* by EFL learners and has found that the EFL learners' use of *I think* increases as their proficiency level decreases. Task types and genre types also affect the frequency of the use of *I think* used by EFL learners and *wo juede* 'I think' by L1 Mandarin speakers, respectively, the reason being that argumentative genre that elicits the participants' opinions and several types of hedges like *I think* (Neary-Sundquist 2013) and *wo juede* are used more frequently in argumentative genre than in negotiative genre (Wu 2022).

What is more, it has been observed that L1 plays a crucial role in affecting the use of *I think* by EFL learners. Johansen (2020) states that Norwegian EFL learners' frequent use of *I think* is attributed to the similar pragmatic functions shared by *jeg tror* 'I think' in Norwegian and *I think* in English since both expressions are used to express uncertainty and to decrease the strength of one's commitment to the proposition. Similarly, L1 can also influence Chinese EFL learners' use of *I think* in English.

Liu (2013) suggests that L1 Chinese speakers transfer the use of *wo juede* 'I think' in Mandarin to *I think* in English. Both *wo juede* and *I think* have the deliberative and tentative functions but the two expressions have distributional differences in utterances for certain functions. Therefore, L1 transfer may occur when Chinese speakers use *I think* to exploit the deliberative and tentative functions. For example, they use the deliberative function of *I think* in the utterance-medial and final position because the same position of *wo juede* in an utterance also marks the deliberation in Mandarin. However, this use of *I think* is not found in English native speakers' oral production. Unlike Liu (2013) and Johansen (2020) accounts for the EFL learners' use of *I think* by motivating the language transfer analysis, Wu et al. (2010) notice the effect of L1 transfer but do not consider it to be a major cause for the use of *I think* by the

Chinese EFL learners. The uncommon functions of *I think* used by the Chinese learners are not found in their use of *wo juede* in Mandarin, implying that L1 may not play a decisive role in their use of *I think* in English.

Task types and genre types also exert effects on the use of *I think* by Chinese ESL learners and *wo juede* 'I think' by L1 Mandarin speakers. Neary-Sundquist (2013) shows that the Chinese ESL learners use hedges like *I think* more frequently in the News task than in other tasks (Personal task, Passing Information task, and Telephone task), due to the argumentative nature of the News task that requires the subjects' opinions. On the contrary, the Personal and the Telephone tasks that concern only information delivery elicit the fewer use of the hedges. Similar to L1 Mandarin speakers' use of *wo juede*, Liu (2022) indicates that *wo juede* is more frequently exploited in argumentative genre than in negotiative genre. Both the Chinese adults and children use more *wo juede* in the argumentation of school rules or regulations than in the negotiation of school activities. The subjects are asked to take a stance and lend support to it in the argumentative topics, leading to the frequent use of *wo juede* by the subjects to express their attitudes toward the topics.

The Chinese EFL learners use *I think* for certain functions that are frequently used by the English native speakers, but there are also functions common in the Chinese learners' use of *I think*. Wu et al. (2010) and Liu (2013) suggest that both Chinese EFL learners and English native speakers use *I think* for the deliberative function to express a certain opinion and strengthen the speaker's commitment, and for the tentative function to express uncertainty. In addition, *I think* is used as a mitigator to soften one's tone and as a signal for turn-taking, which is also observed in the production of native speakers and Chinese learners (Wu et al. 2010). On the contrary, only Chinese EFL learners are found to use *I think* frequently to signal self-repair, provide reasons, make comparisons, and summarize ideas (Wu et al. 2010). Furthermore, both Wu et al. (2010) and Liu (2013) indicate that *I think* can serve as a pause filler or a conversation filler for hesitation, thought collection and word-search. However, while the function of pause

fillers is commonly used by both the Chinese learners and the native speakers in Wu et al. (2010), it is not used by the native speakers in Liu (2013). The EFL learners' frequent use of *I think* as a pause filler seem to imply their limited repertoires of hedges or discourse markers (Wu et al. 2010; Johensan 2020) and low level of oral fluency (Wu et al. 2010; Liu 2013).

The above studies have explored the effects of English proficiency and genre types on the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners. The functions of *I think* and *wo juede* are investigated cross-linguistically in different distributions to understand the potential L1 influence on Chinese EFL learners' use of *I think*. Table 6 summarizes the functions and distributions of *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin reviewed in the above studies.

Table 6. The functions and distributions of *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin.

Distribution \ Function	Utterance-initial	Utterance-medial	Utterance-final
<i>I think</i> (English)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To signal deliberation, objectivity, and authority (Wu et al. 2010). 2. To soften the speaker's tone (Wu et al. 2010). 3. To signal turn-taking (Wu et al. 2010). 4. To express certain opinions toward something (deliberative function) (Liu 2013). 5. To indicate uncertainty (tentative 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To indicate uncertainty (tentative function) (Wu et al. 2010; Liu 2013). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To indicate uncertainty (tentative function) (Wu et al. 2010; Liu 2013).

	function) (Liu 2013).		
<i>wo juede</i> (Mandarin)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To express certain opinions toward something (deliberative function) (Liu 2013). 2. To indicate uncertainty (tentative function) (Liu 2013). 3. To agree or disagree to what is being expressed (Wu 2022). 4. To comment on or give reasons for certain ideas (Wu 2022). 5. To offer suggestions (Wu 2022). 6. To make a summary or a conclusion (Wu 2022). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To express certain opinions toward something (deliberative function) (Liu 2013). 2. To indicate uncertainty (tentative function) (Liu 2013). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To express certain opinions toward something (deliberative function) (Liu 2013). 2. To indicate uncertainty (tentative function) (Liu 2013). 3. To express afterthoughts (Wu 2022).

Table 7 summarizes the distributional and functional similarities and differences of *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin. Three points are made as follows. First, the utterance-initial *I think* is endowed with more functions than those of *wo juede* in the other two utterance positions. Second, *wo juede* is not found to have a discursive function in Mandarin. Third, in terms of deliberative function, *I think* is more distributionally constrained. While *I think* only occurs initially in the utterances, *wo juede* can occur initially, medially, or finally in an utterance

to signal deliberation.

Table 7. Distributions and functions of *I think* in Mandarin and English³

	Utterance-initial		Utterance-medial		Utterance-final	
	English	Mandarin	English	Mandarin	English	Mandarin
Deliberative	✓	✓		✓		✓
Tentative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mitigating	✓				✓	
Discursive ⁴	✓		✓			
Evaluative	✓	✓	✓			

Given the similarities and differences mentioned in Table 7, three questions that guide the current thesis are listed as follows.

1. Can proficiency be a factor that affects the use of functions of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners?
2. Can genre effects be observed in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* in English?
3. Can the pragmatic and the discourse functions of *I think* influenced by those of *wo juede* in Mandarin?

2.2.3 Pragmatic transfer

The notion of language transfer evolved from Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which concerns the similarities and differences between two languages, with the aim of predicting

³ The classification of the functions of *I think* is adopted from Zhang (2014) since it provides a comprehensive review of previous studies on the functions and distributions of *I think*.

⁴ The function of *Discursive* is described as *delaying* in Wu et al. (2010), and as a *pause filler* in Liu (2013).

learning difficulty caused by L1. CAH suggests that negative transfer occurs where certain aspects in two languages are different since the habitual use of L1 tends to result in errors in the production of L2, while positive transfer takes place when some aspects in the two languages are similar since the native language can facilitate L2 learning. However, it was found that errors predicted by CAH do not always exist in actual learner performance, posing a challenge to the empirical validity and theoretical foundation of CAH. Therefore, a different way to account for the role of L1 was needed, leading to a process-oriented approach to the L1 influence. In this new light, 'transfer' was so expanded as to incorporate the study of errors, facilitation, avoidance of L2, and their overuse (Ellis 1994: 341).

Language transfer occurs not only in the form of the language but also on the functions of the language, meaning that the acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge is also influenced by learners' L1 pragmatic knowledge. Pragmatic transfer is referred to as transfer of conversational features (Odlin 1989), sociocultural transfer (Wolfson 1989), and sociolinguistic transfer (Beebe et al. 1990), reflecting different aspects of pragmatics and transfer. Kasper (1992) defines pragmatic transfer as 'the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information' (1992:207). Additionally, Kasper's process-oriented approach to pragmatic transfer suggests that identifying what is transferred and what triggers transfer plays an explanatory role in accounting for L1 influence (Franch 1998). Adopting this approach, previous studies have found that pragmatic transfer is evident in L2 speech performance (e.g., Huth 2006; Wannaruk 2008) and both negative/positive transfer (e.g., Abed 2011) and under/over-use (e.g., Dalmau & Gotor 2007) were identified.

To explore the pragmatic transfer from Thai to English in spoken English, Wannaruk (2008) investigates the refusal strategies employed by Thai and American native speakers and Thai EFL learners by implementing a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT was designed to elicit participants' refusals through the interviews designed on real-life situations in which the

refusals may occur. 120 graduate students were recruited in the study, including 40 native speakers of English (NEs), 40 Thai native speakers (NTs), and 40 Thai EFL learners. Based on the university's Graduate English Test, the EFL learners were categorized into three proficiency groups: lower intermediate, intermediate, and higher intermediate. Retrospective interviews were also conducted to offer insights into the participants' perception of the situations.

The data gained from the DCT were analyzed based on the classification adapted from Beebe et al. (1990). For instance, when an EFL learner responded with 'Sorry. Now I don't have enough time. Maybe next time' to refuse a junior member's request for an interview, this response was coded as three refusal strategies, as shown in the brackets:

<i>Sorry.</i>	<i>Now I don't have enough time.</i>	<i>Maybe next time.</i>
[Gratitude]	[Explanation]	[Future acceptance]

Following the above classification, all of the responses made by the three groups were compared in terms of frequency of the refusal strategies used by the interlocutors on three status levels (higher, equal, and lower) in four types of situations (refusals to invitations, refusals to suggestions, refusals of offers, and refusals to requests).

The results indicate that pragmatic transfer occurs in their implementation of the refusal strategies, and that culture and English proficiency are the crucial factors for triggering the Thai EFL learners' use of the strategies.

Four patterns of pragmatic transfer are observed. First, pragmatic transfer is observed in the case of refusing a junior member's request for an interview. Both the NTs and the EFL learners used the strategy of 'future acceptance', while few NEs used it in their refusals. Wannaruk (2008) indicates that in Thai society, senior members are expected to provide support for juniors. However, with reasonable excuses, seniors can refuse a request from a junior but

also have to make a promise to offer help in the future in order to maintain a good relationship. Therefore, ‘future acceptance’ is used to make refusals but concurrently promise to provide support in the future. The second pattern of pragmatic transfer is observed in the EFL learners’ use of ‘negative ability’, a direct strategy used to express the speaker’s inability to do what is being asked, such as ‘I can’t’ or ‘I won’t’. Both the native Thai speakers and the Thai EFL learners use ‘negative ability’ in a wider range of situations than the NEs do. What’s more, it is found that the two Thai groups tend to use the expressions like *kong* ‘probably’ and *kit wah* ‘I think’ before the statement of ‘negative ability’ to soften the force of their refusals, as shown in (7).

(7) (Wannaruk 2008:330)

NT7: **kong** mai dai raw tong pim ngarn hai set muan kan

Probably not. I have to finish typing my work, too.

EFL34: *I think I couldn’t this time. I still have much to do.*

Third, pragmatic transfer is observed in refusing an advisor’s invitation to a party. While most of the NEs state a positive feeling followed by ‘negative ability’ or ‘explanation’, the NTs used ‘regret’ as one of the three most frequently used strategies. Adopting the NTs’ norm, some of the Thai EFL learners used ‘regret’ in their refusals in the same situation. Wannaruk (2008) attributes the use of ‘regret’ by the Thai EFL learners to their awareness of social status in the Thai culture. Declining an invitation from a person with a higher social status is considered to be a face-threatening act and thus ‘regret’ can serve the function of mitigating the force of making a refusal. Fourth, pragmatic transfer is evident in the EFL learners’ use of ‘explanation’ strategy and is affected by the learners’ English proficiency levels. Unlike the NEs’ explanations that are more specific and straightforward, NTs tend to give modest explanations by downgrading their ability, such as ‘I don’t think I’m capable enough’. Similarly, the Thai

EFL learners with lower English proficiency levels use the same strategies in their refusals, for example, 'I have no confidence in public speech' and 'I'm afraid I couldn't teach'. The modest explanations given by the L1 Thai speakers reflect their cultural value of being humble and respectful. Nevertheless, this transfer phenomenon is not observed in the refusals made by the learners with higher English proficiency levels. This finding adds weight to Robinson's (1992 as cited in Takahashi 1996) study in that learners with lower L2 proficiency levels are more prone to be influenced by their L1 than learners with higher L2 proficiency.

Wannaruk (2008) compares the refusal strategies used by the Thai EFL learners with native speakers of English and Thai to explore how cross-cultural and linguistic differences affect the learners' adoption of the refusal strategies in English. The results show that the three groups implement similar refusal strategies in the four situations but prioritize the strategies differently. The awareness of social status and the importance of being respectful and modest in Thai culture seem to have an effect on the Thai EFL learners' use of the refusal strategies and thus tend to trigger pragmatic transfer. Proficiency also plays a role in triggering pragmatic transfer. In certain situations, the EFL learners with lower English proficiency levels share similar refusal strategies with the native Thai while those with higher proficiency do not.

Wannaruk's (2008) study identifies different patterns of pragmatic transfer from Thai to English by considering L1 cultural and English proficiency. However, the effect of proficiency is only revealed in certain conditions, such as in the use of 'explanation' to refuse an offer of a teaching assistantship. Similarly, the awareness of social status is not observed in most of the communication involving interlocutors with different social status. What's more, under certain circumstances, the native Thai speakers share similar patterns of refusal strategies with the native English speakers, while the Thai EFL learners have a different pattern not shared by the two groups. Therefore, more explanations are needed to account for the interplay of pragmatic transfer.

Given that the influence of pragmatic knowledge of L1 has been observed in L2 learners'

performance in speech acts, the role of pragmatic transfer cannot be overemphasized. To better understand the factors attributed to pragmatic transfer, Kasper (1992) suggests a process-oriented approach that identifies what is transferred and under what conditions transfer is triggered. From Kasper's perspective, the factors that interact with pragmatic transfer are underscored and the influence of both L1 and L2 is taken into consideration. Previous studies on the use of *I think* by ESL/EFL learners are found to adopt Kasper's notion on pragmatic transfer in that they not only investigate the influence of the corresponding expression in L1 but also discuss other possible accounts of transfer. The pragmatic functions of the similar expression in L1 tend to be transferred to the use of *I think* in English and factors other than L1 such as English proficiency are also discussed. The findings from the studies on pragmatic transfer not only facilitate our understanding of the development of learners' pragmatic competence but provide pedagogical implications for teaching L2 pragmatics.

2.3. Summary

Based on Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), language transfer is known as the L1 effect on L2 acquisition, with the main idea being that the interference with learning L2 is caused by linguistic differences between L1 and L2. However, CAH is untenable to account for certain phenomena, such as avoidance and overuse. The implausibility of CAH shifts the notion of language transfer from the view of behaviorism to the developmental nature of language acquisition. Thus, language transfer is discussed in a broader scope such that error analysis, facilitation, avoidance of L2 forms, and overuse are more emphasized than L1 interference (Ellis 1994). As to pragmatic transfer, it has received different treatments which are however confined to the cultural, social, and linguistic influence of L1. Kasper (1992) also considers sociolinguistic factors and adopts a process-oriented approach that underscores the conditions and constrains affecting the occurrence of pragmatic transfer.

Previous studies have shown that pragmatic transfer is evident in L2 speech performance

and have explored the factors for the transfer. Given the available studies that examine pragmatic transfer in the use of expressions in communication, *I think* has received much attention. Liu (2013) investigates the effect of Mandarin on the use of English discourse markers by L1 Chinese speakers by analyzing the data gathered from interviews. Pragmatic transfer is identified in Chinese speakers' use of *I think* for deliberative and tentative functions. Chinese speakers are found to transfer the distributions of *wo juede* in Mandarin to that in English when using *I think* to signal deliberation. Additionally, Wu et al. (2010) compare the use of *I think* from two corpora (native English and Chinese learner English) and have shown that the Chinese EFL learners overuse *I think* and tend to put it in the utterance-initial position. It is suggested that pragmatic transfer is one of the possible causes for their frequent use of *I think*, due to its similar meanings and functions shared with *wo juede* in Mandarin.

Other factors for the use of *I think* by EFL learners have been investigated, including English proficiency and genre types. Neary-Sundquist's (2013) study shows that Chinese ESL learners use *I think* more frequently in the News Task than in other tasks due to the argumentative nature of the News Task, which requires the subjects' opinions and thus elicits more stance-taking markers, such as *I think*. Wu et al. (2010) suggest that EFL learners with lower English proficiency frequently use *I think*, because of their difficulty in searching for target words in the immediate context, and thus resort to the use of *I think* to gain more time, similar to the filler function observed by Liu (2013).

The studies reviewed in this chapter have shown that the use of *I think* by Chinese EFL learners is influenced by different levels of English proficiency, task genre, and the use of *wo juede* in Mandarin. Pragmatic transfer also plays an explanatory role in accounting for Chinese EFL learners' non-canonical use of *I think*. Given the functional similarities and differences between *I think* in English and *wo juede* in Mandarin, further studies are needed to investigate the effect of L1 on the use of *I think* with reference to task types and frequency of the functions.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes three tasks designed to elicit participants' production of *I think* in three genres. General information of the participants is provided in Section 3.2, followed by methods with experimental materials being presented in Section 3.3 and 3.4. Last, Section 3.5 illustrates the procedure of the experiment and data analysis.

3.2 Participants

A total of 36 participants, which were tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-graders recruited from two senior high schools in Taitung City, were classified into three groups in terms of school years, namely, Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12, with each group being comprised of 12 participants. It should be noted that English is an academic subject and regarded as an EFL in senior high school. Their background information, including gender, age, proficiency levels of English, school year and any English proficiency test being taken prior to the experiment, was collected through a background survey. Furthermore, all of the participants have neither listening and speaking disabilities nor developmental delays.

The three groups are considered as representing three proficiency groups⁵, as proficiency has been argued to be a crucial factor which influences the use of *I think* by EFL/ESL learners. Both Wu et al. (2010) and Neary-Sundquist (2013) have found that English proficiency is a key factor affecting the use of *I think* by EFL learners, indicating that the learners with lower proficiency levels tend to use *I think* more frequently. Wannaruk (2008) also suggests that EFL

⁵ The experiment is based on a minimal assumption that the three groups of participants represent three proficiency groups, as they were already placed in different grades from Grade 10 to 12 in term in the high schools. As would be shown in Chapter 4, the participants in the three groups showed diversity in the functions of *I think*.

learners with low L2 proficiency levels are more prone to be influenced by their L1 than learners with higher L2 proficiency levels. Therefore, English proficiency and L1 influence are taken into account to investigate their interplay in the use of *I think* by EFL learners.

3.3 Method

Main methods of data collection for discourse analysis includes corpora, interviews, and group discussion. As reviewed in Chapter 2, Wu et al. (2010) and Johenson (2020) have recognized the benefit of using the corpora to obtain linguistic data. Spoken corpora offer immediate access to authentic evidence for language with an extensive amount and variations of spoken data. However, there are limitations on the use of spoken corpora. First, the corpora present language without contextual information, which may result in difficulty identifying the pragmatic functions of certain markers since discourse analysis depends heavily on contextual information for close examination. Second, without access to the interlocutors in the conversation, it is hard to reach appropriate judgements when further clarification and confirmation is needed for discourse analysis. Interviews, the other viable alternative to data collection, are adopted in Liu (2013). The interview method employed in Liu (2013) is used to elicit discourse markers through an oral narrative register and mainly three functions of *I think* are identified in the collected data. The interaction in the interview is restricted to asking and answering questions rather than exchanging opinions, decreasing the opportunities to use other pragmatic functions of *I think*, such as signaling agreement or disagreement and turn-taking. In addition to corpora and interviews, group discussion is also commonly used to elicit oral production. Group discussion involves opinion exchange which allows conversational turn-taking and thus yields a greater chance of eliciting target expressions and facilitating more use of pragmatic functions. Employing the method of group discussion to collect data, Baumgarten and House (2010) obtained an adequate number of tokens of *I think*. Accordingly, in an attempt to collect tokens of *I think* and to reveal various functions of *I think* used by the speakers, this

thesis adopts group discussion as a primary method for data collection.

As for group size, Fay et al. (2000) have found that in a small group of five, the communication pattern is more like an interactive dialogue, while in large, 10-person groups for example, the communication is like a serial monologue. Additionally, it is suggested that small groups perform better if the goal is to take into account a wider variety of opinions among group members instead of disseminating a particular opinion (Fay et al. 2010). Therefore, in our experiment, the twelve participants in each group are subcategorized evenly into three discussion groups, with each consisting of 4 participants.

Task type plays a role in affecting the use of *I think* in English by the EFL learners (Neary-Sundquist 2013) and *wo juede* 'I think' in Mandarin by the native speakers of Mandarin (Wu 2022). The results have shown that the task which requires the participants' opinions, such as the News Task in Neary-Sundquist (2013), elicits a higher frequency of the use of *I think*. Similarly, the discussion about school regulations in the Argumentative Task in Wu (2022) elicits multiple occurrences of *wo juede*, compared to the Negotiative Task. Wu (2022) states that the argumentative discourse involves taking a stance and defending one's position and thus leads to the frequent use of *wo juede*. As a result, the stance-taking markers like *I think* and *wo juede* are expected to be used frequently to make comments and express agreement or disagreement. To further explore the effect of task type on the use of *I think*, this thesis adopts but modifies Wu's (2022) structure of the production tasks by adding a descriptive genre while retaining the argumentative and the negotiative genre designed in Wu (2022). Table 7 illustrates the descriptions of the tasks conducted in this thesis.

Table 8. The descriptions of the tasks (adapted from Wu (2020:42))

Task	Genre	Scenario	Topic
1	Argumentative	School rules	Smartphones in school: Banned or allowed?
2	Negotiative	Trip plan	Plan a graduation trip
3	Descriptive	Picture description	Describe a given picture

In the argumentative task, each participant in a discussion group was asked to respond to the question ‘should smartphones be allowed in school?’ by providing their opinions and reasons for their stance. To conclude the task, the group leader should make a brief summary of the advantages and disadvantages addressed in the discussion. In the negotiative task, the participants needed to agree on a place for their graduation trip from two available options by negotiating with other group members. In the descriptive task, the participants were required to describe a picture they were assigned. Meanwhile, *wh*-questions, as guiding questions aimed to stimulate discussion and opinion exchange, were listed in each task. An example of each production task is presented in Table 9, Table 10, and Table 11. The amount of time allocated to each task was fifteen minutes but it was subject to flexible changes in order to allow proper conclusions to be reached and to alleviate time pressure.

Table 9. An example of the Argumentative Task (adapted from Wu (2020:43))


Genre	Argumentative
Discussion topic	Should smartphones be allowed in schools?
Instruction	
Should students be allowed to use smartphones in school? Why or why not? Please express your opinions with reasons. You can also show your agreement or disagreement with other speakers’ statements. The guiding questions are for your reference to the discussion. In this task, you will have fifteen minutes for the discussion.	
Guiding questions / Prompts	

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages in using smartphones in school?
2. Can smartphones be used for learning purposes? If yes, how?
3. How do you prevent distractions with smartphones in class?

Table 10. An example of the Negotiative Task (adapted from Wu (2020:43))

Genre	Negotiative		
Discussion topic	Graduation trip		
Instruction			
Your graduation trip will be held next semester. One of the destinations in the travel plan is an amusement park. There are two available options for you to choose, which are Leofoo Village and Janfusun Fancyworld. The guiding questions and information about these two parks are provided for your reference. You will have about fifteen minutes to talk to your group members and decide where to go. You are encouraged to share your thoughts and suggestions with others. Once you four have reached a consensus, please let me know.			
Guiding questions / Prompts			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the two amusement parks 			
	Park	Location	Ticket Price
	Park Features		
	Leofoo Village	Hsinchu	NT\$ 899
	The Condor Roller Coaster, Big Ranging God, Volcano Adventure, Grand Canyon Rapid Rafting, City of Tomb Maze-3D Movie, Ferocious Beast Area Bus		
	Janfusun Fancyworld	Yunlin	NT\$ 699
	Diving Machine G5, Ferris Wheels, Crazy Coaster, Great Poseidon, Horror Train, Super Swing, Jungle Slide, Frisbee, Sky Jet, Air Shower		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about these two parks? 2. Have you ever been to these two parks? How was it? 3. Where do you want to go? Why? 			


Table 11. An example of the Descriptive Task

Genre	Descriptive
Discussion topic	Picture description
Instruction	
In this task, you are going to describe this picture. Each of you is required to share your opinion and thoughts about the picture. The guiding questions are provided. You will have about fifteen minutes for this task.	
Guiding questions / Prompts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Picture prompt  <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guiding questions<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What do you see?2. What are they doing?3. How do they feel? Why?4. What is the picture trying to say?5. What comes to your mind when you see this image?	

3.4 Materials

Discussion topics and guiding questions to initiate intensive discussions for the three tasks are illustrated in Table 12, including the picture used as a speaking prompt to elicit personal thoughts and interpretation of the image.

Table 12. Questions and prompts in each task.

Task	Genre	Scenario	Guiding questions and prompts
1	Argumentative	Smartphone	Should smartphones be allowed in schools?
2	Negotiative	Graduation trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the two amusement parks. • Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about these two parks? 2. Have you ever been to these two parks? How was it? 3. Where do you want to go? Why?
3	Descriptive	Picture description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you see? 2. What are they doing? 3. How do they feel? Why? 4. What is the picture trying to say? 5. What comes to your mind when you see this picture? • Picture 

3.5 Procedures

This section illustrates the protocol for data collection and analysis. Section 3.5.1 first summarizes the procedure, main findings, and limitations of the pilot study, aiming to assess the feasibility of the research design. In Section 3.5.3 the coding system and analytical tools for data analysis and interpretation are presented.

3.5.1 Instruments

The participants' responses to the three tasks were audio-recorded through three mobile devices (two iPads and an iPhone), with each device located in the center of the table surrounded by the four participants. A group leader from each group was assigned to be in charge of operating the recording App (Voice Memos) on the mobile device. For each task, once all the members of the group agreed to begin a discussion, the group leader pressed the recording button to start the recording and pressed it again when the discussion ended.

3.5.2 Formal Study

A total of thirty-six participants from two senior high schools were recruited through an online questionnaire collecting the students' willingness to participate in a formal study in this thesis. The questionnaire was distributed online with the assistance of two senior high school teachers. For those who were willing to participate in the study, a consent form was sent to them to reach a formal agreement with their legal custodians and a background survey to include their background information. All of the participants were fully informed of the purpose of this thesis. The experiment sessions with the participants were arranged according to their school year and the available time scheduled by the two teachers.

The experiment was conducted in two different senior high schools, with 12 participants of Grade 10 from one and 24 participants from the other. Each group arrived at the appointed time and was led to a quiet classroom for the trial. Before the discussion, the participants received detailed instructions on the three tasks and browsed through a piece of paper on which questions and prompts were listed, which was intended to ensure that the procedure was made known to the participants. In each task, fifteen minutes were allocated to discussion but the time limit was flexible in order for the participants to successfully wrap up the assigned task. To wrap up each task, the participants were required to present a brief summary of the pros and cons of the issue in the argumentative task, reached their consensus on the place for the graduation trip in the negotiative task, and provided a complete description of the picture in the

descriptive task. The whole experiment consisted of three tasks and two five-minute breaks between each task, which took approximately an hour to complete the experimental sessions. Generally, the duration of the data collection lasted for about two weeks, including thirty-six discussion sessions from twelve groups. Figure 3 illustrates the procedure of the experiment.

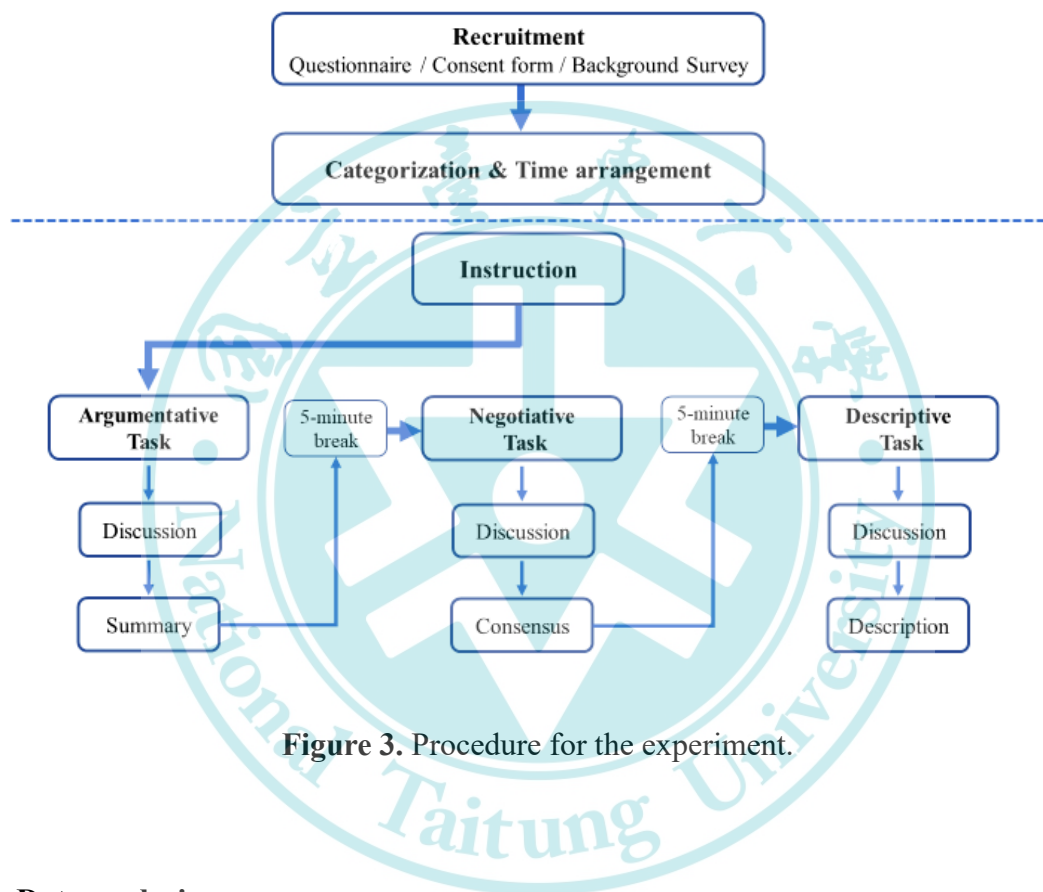


Figure 3. Procedure for the experiment.

3.5.3 Data analysis

The responses in every discussion were audio-recorded on a mobile device. The spoken data was transcribed and further coded for discourse analysis. As noted in Chapter 2, Wu et al. (2010) compared the use of *I think* between English native speakers and Chinese EFL learners through a classification system modified from Wang (2007) by adding a new category, ‘marking deliberation’. The classification system in Wu et al. (2010) receives direct support from the current thesis since all the functions of *I think* in their classification are found to be used by Mandarin EFL learners and each function of *I think* is clearly defined and exemplified.

Moreover, the clusters of *I think* used to exploit a certain function are also provided. Therefore, the current thesis adopts Wu et al.'s (2010) system of classification for data analysis, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. The pragmatic functions of *I think* (adapted from Wu et al. (2010: 11-17))⁶

Type / Functions	Descriptions	Examples
Type 1 Downtoning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To mitigate face threat and be employed as a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1983; Aijmer, 1997). To weaken the speaker's commitment (Ifantiduo 2001). 	Clusters containing <i>I think</i> : - well <i>I think</i> - maybe/personally <i>I think</i> - <i>I think</i> maybe/probably
Type 2 Marking deliberation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To signal careful deliberation, objectivity and authority (Preisler 1986). To strengthen the speaker's commitment to the proposition (Ifantiduo 2001). 	<i>In my opinion, I think of course a healthy a healthy diet is very important.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:12)
Type 3 Turn-taking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To signal one's turn to put forward one's opinions. To interrupt and gain floor. 	Speaker 2: <i>I have a classmate. She is in Japan. I communicate with him with her on Internet.</i> Speaker 3: <i>I think computer nowadays develop more and more quickly and more and more fast.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:12)
Type 4 Delaying/ turn-holding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To provide verbal planning time for speakers (Sabet & Holmes 1995). To help the speaker get prepared for what to say next (Wang 2007). To reflect the hesitation and 	<i>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.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:13)

⁶ Discourse symbols used to describe ... are removed, as they are not of direct concern to the current discussion.

	confusion before the speaker comes to grip with message (Aijmer 1997).	
Type 5 Signaling self-repair	1. To signal self-repair (Xu 2009).	But low buil ⁷ I think low buildings will...(Wu et al. 2010:14)
Type 6 Emphasizing “I’m expressing my opinion”	1. To tell other people that this is my opinion” (Ifantiduo 2001).	<i>In my opinion I think that there are many factors to keep healthy.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:15)
Type 7 Listing by co- selecting with listing connectives	1. To indicate sequence (Wu et al. 2010).	<i>I think there are several reasons. First I think fake and inferior products... with low price. ... Eh second I think eh sell fake ... consumers’ healthy. ... And also I think people should ... buy something.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:16)
Type 8 Reasoning/ Illustrating	1. To give reasons or illustrate the point (Wang 2007). 2. To signal cause-result relation or illustration (Wu et al. 2010).	<i>I think young people should live alone after graduation. ... And I think they often have different opinions about different things. And if ..., and I think they will ... they’ll come?</i> (Wu et al. 2010:16)
Type 9 Comparing and contrasting	1. To signal comparison and contrast (Wang 2007).	<i>Mm so ... I think it’s a good way to mm to practice ... to decrease the pollution and ... and I think it brought a ... mn problem, because many bicycles takes much room ... very busy.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:17)
Type 10	4.1 To summarize the speakers’ ideas or	<i>So many western customers will come in our China ... I</i>

⁷ The fragment *buil* is not a typo and its complete form is *buildings*, as can be seen in the same utterance. This fragment can be taken to demonstrate the function of self-repair performed by the speaker who used *I think* to repair the incomplete form of *buil*.

Summarizing/ concluding	draw a conclusion (Wei 2007).	<i>think there isn't any lovers' day. But now I see ... are celebrating the lovers' day. So I think the lovers' day will be most popular ... years later.</i> (Wu et al. 2010:17)
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For the reliability of coding, two raters were invited to consolidate the classification to be proposed in this thesis. When there was a disagreement on multiple functions of *I think*, the two raters first discussed whether the functions were accessible and further reached a consensus on one dominant function out of the other functions. Meanwhile, the third rater was consulted to consolidate the coding.



Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the current thesis with the attempt to answer the three research questions raised in Chapter 1. In Section 4.2, the overall frequency of every function of *I think* is presented with each function being illustrated by examples from the collected data. Section 4.3 delineates the distribution of each function used by the three proficiency groups, followed by a discussion about the role of proficiency. The effect of genre type is examined in Section 4.4. Whether L1 influences the use of *I think* is discussed in Section 4.5

4.2 Discourse functions of *I think*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, all the instances of *I think* were classified in terms of functions on the basis of an analytical framework established by Wu et al. (2010) (see Table 12). However, based on the collected data, refinement was needed to improve the applicability of the classification. First, the two functions, *Listing by Co-selection with Listing Connectives* and *Comparing and Contrasting*, are removed from the following discussion since these two functions were not identified in the collected data. Second, *Self-Repair* is merged with *Delaying/Turn-Holding*, due to the fundamental similarity between these two functions. *Delaying/Turn-Holding* (Type 4) of *I think*, as stated by Wu et al. (2010), is used for hesitation, word-search, repetition, and self-correction, which also incorporates *Self-Repair*. Moreover, both of the functions reflect the speaker's difficulty in finding the right word and used *I think* as a conversation filler during hesitation. Forth, *Agreeing/Disagreeing* (Type 8) is added as a new category to accommodate instances of *I think* that signify agreement and disagreement with the previous statement. The revised classification system used in this thesis is illustrated

in Table 13. In the following sub-sections, I will categorize tokens of *I think* following Table 14 with examples provided. I will discuss the interplay between proficiency and the discourse functions later.

Table 14. The classification of the functions of *I think* (adapted from Wu et al. (2010: 11-17))

Type	Functions	Descriptions
T1	Downtoning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To mitigate face threat and be employed as a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1983; Aijmer, 1997). 2. To weaken the speaker's commitment (Ifantiduo 2001).
T2	Marking deliberation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To signal careful deliberation, objectivity and authority (Preisler 1986). 2. To strengthen the speaker's commitment to the proposition (Ifantiduo 2001).
T3	Turn-taking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To signal one's turn to put forward one's opinions. 2. To interrupt and gain floor.
T4	Delaying/ Turn-holding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide verbal planning time for speakers (Sabet & Holmes 1995). 2. To help the speaker get prepared for what to say next (Wang 2007). 3. To reflect the hesitation and confusion before the speaker comes to grip with message (Aijmer 1997). 4. To signal self-repair.
T5	Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To tell other people that 'this is my opinion' (Ifantiduo 2001).
T6	Reasoning/ Illustrating	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To give reasons or illustrate the point (Wang 2007). 2. To signal cause-result relation or illustration (Wu et al. 2010).
T7	Summarizing/ concluding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To summarize the speakers' ideas or draw a conclusion (Wei 2007).
T8	Agreeing/	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To express the speaker's agreement or disagreement to

	Disagreeing	what has been stated.
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4.2.1. Findings

In total, 113 tokens of *I think* in the utterance-initial position were identified from the speech data produced by the three groups of the participants. Figure 4 and Table 15 illustrate the distribution of the functions of *I think* used in the three tasks. Generally, *Turn-taking* (T3) was used the most frequently (30.1%) and *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'* (T5) was the second most frequently (26.5%) used function. While the percent of *Delaying/Turn-holding* (T4), *Reasoning/Illustrating* (T6) and *Summarizing/Concluding* (T7) are close (T4, 8.8%; T6, 9.7%; T7, 10.6%), the other three functions were used with a relatively low percent (T1, 6.2%; T2, 1.8%; T8, 5.3%).

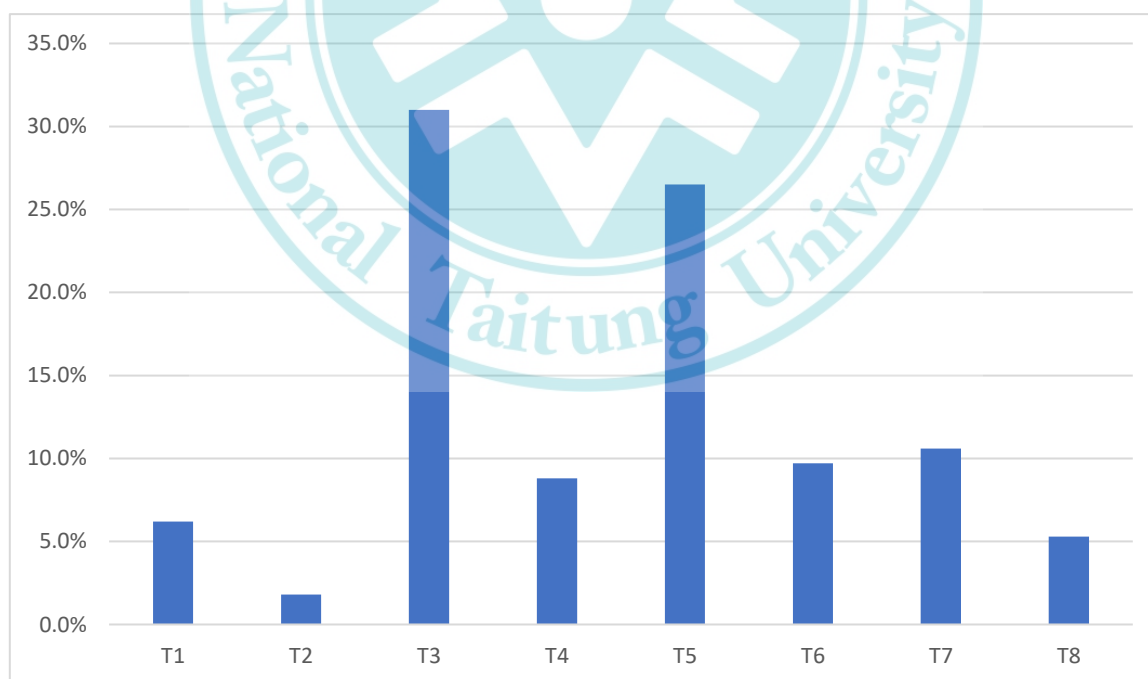


Figure 4. Percent of the functions of *I think* used by all the participants.

Table 15. Distribution of the functions of *I think*.

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	Total
Numbers of token	7	2	34	10	30	12	12	5	113
Percent	6.2%	1.8%	31.0%	8.8%	26.5%	9.7%	10.6%	5.3%	100%

What followed here are the eight functions of *I think* discussed and analyzed with excerpts from the collected data.

4.2.1.1 Type 1: Downtoning

I think has two functions, either weakening the speaker's commitment to a proposition or strengthening the speaker's commitment (Ifantidou 2001) and downtonig is used similarly as the weakening function. As shown in (1), the speaker preferred *Leofoo Village* for their graduation trip but he did not have convincing reasons to persuade other group members because he had not been there before. Therefore, he assumed that young people might enjoy *Leofoo Village* by using *I think* to indicate that he was not sure about it. His uncertainty can be signaled by the adverb *maybe*. Likewise, in (2), the speaker was unsure about the boy's identity so he used *I think* to suggest that it was just his conjecture.

(1) Grade 11-Task 2

G11-S2: *I don't have any experience in Leofoo Village, so ***I think maybe*** it's good for young people to play there.*

(2) Grade 12-Task 3

G12-S9: *So, if it were just an imagination, ***I think maybe*** it's from a student who is going to graduate from school and going to contact with social.*

As exemplified in these two extracts, *I think* is accompanied by the mitigator *maybe* to express the speaker's uncertainty. This is in line with Zhang's (2014) finding that the cluster *I think maybe* or *I think perhaps* are typically used as hedges in the utterance-initial position to express a moderate degree of certainty.

4.2.1.2 Type 2: Marking deliberation

In contrast to *Downtoning*, *I think* also has the function of marking deliberation, which is used by the speaker to enhance the strength of his/her statement and to intensify the illocutionary force (Wu et al. 2010). Of all the eight functions, *Marking Deliberation* was used the least frequently with only two instances identified in G12's speech data, as shown in (3) and (4).

(3) Grade 12-Task 2

G12-S10: *So, after listen to your choice, I heard that all of you is going to choose where you have been before like Janfusun and Leofoo and you are not prefer to go a new place you haven't been before. So, it maybe have many reasons but most play a role **I think** is memories you have with your families and your classmates. So, I think this is the main reason to lead to this consequence, right?*

In (3), before S10's speech, two of the group members chose *Janfusun Fancyworld* because both of them had nice memories there with their family and friends. Knowing that his classmates made the decision for the same reason, the speaker tried to draw an inference by saying that it was 'memory', not other factors, that influenced their choice. Here, *I think*, preceded by a superlative expression *most play a role*, was used to emphasize the main reason that the speaker intended to stress and meanwhile to increase the strength of his statement.

(4) Grade 12-Task 3

G12-S12: *As you can see, this object is the our necessary in our normal life, so the black man look at the money. He wants money.*

G12-S09: *Yes. I agree.*

G12-S12: *The woman look at the black person.*

G12-S09: *So, the woman wants a husband not the money and cellphone.*

G12-S12: ***I think that** every people have their own want... what they want. Whatever. This is their dream.*

G12-S09: *Their dreams to have such a object.*

Similarly, S12 in (4) used *I think* to highlight his view on the interpretation of the image. The two speakers first talked about what the man and the woman wanted and S12 drew a conclusion that every person had a desired object. Although *I think* could also serve a concluding function here, the only instance of *that* with *I think* by the speaker might suggest his deliberate intention of emphasizing a common situation among people. Furthermore, the deliberative use of *I think* is signaled by the complementizer *that* to add weight to the speaker's assertion (Aijmer 1997).

4.2.1.3 Type 3: Turn-taking

Turn-taking is mostly used in the turn-initial position to signal the initiation of a speaking turn. Kärkkäinen (2003) identifies the starting point function of *I think* that serves as a boundary marker to routinely bring in the speaker's perspective or to indicate a topic shift. This function was fully realized in (5), where all the speakers began their statement with *I think*.

(5) Grade 11-Task 1

G11-S05: ***I think** I can use cellphone in the school is a good choice because I can use*

cellphone found information on the Internet. Maybe my teacher doesn't know information. I can find on the Internet.

G11-S06: ***I think*** *smartphone shouldn't...not allowed used in school because smartphone maybe attract student attention in class. So, I don't agree use smartphone in school.*

G11-S07: ***I think*** *cellphone can use in school because cellphone... and cellphone can play many game. I very love play game can make me relax. So, very good.*

G11-S08: ***I think*** *didn't use smartphone in the school because is ... my attention. So, this is not good.*

All of the four speakers used *I think* in the turn-initial position to put forward their opinions on the issue of using smartphones in school. In other words, each speaker accomplished turn-taking by beginning with *I think* after the former speaker finished his/her speaking turn. As shown in the results, *Turn-taking* was used the most frequently by the participants, especially by the students of Grade 10. Baumgarten and House (2010) also found this function exclusively in the ELF discourse where '*I think* marks an additional, overt expression of the subjective perspective and explicate the speaker's stance-taking.'

4.2.1.4 Type 4: Delaying/Turn-holding

I think also functions as a structural device or a pause filler, often co-occurring with hesitation particles (*uhm, uh*), word repetitions, pauses, backtracking (Kärkkäinen 2003), and self-repair (Wu et al. 2010). The speakers tended to use *Delaying/Turn-holding* when more time was needed to collect thoughts or searching for proper words. This function is manifested in the three following extracts, (6), (7), and (8).

(6) Grade 10-Task 1

G10-S02: *I never use cellphone in the class. It's a big problem. Uhm...**I think** students students shouldn't use smartphones in the class in the school because they will use them in the class and teacher always very angry. And I usually put...put my cellphone in my bag and ...and then I usually put it in my bag and I can't use it in the class. OK.*

As shown in (6), *I think* was preceded by a hesitation particle (*uhm*) and followed by the repetition of the same word *students*, indicating that the speaker was not able to fully verbalize his thoughts and thus used *I think* to gain more time to search for target words.

(7) Grade 11-Task 1

G11-S04: ***I think** cellphone can... **I think** questions two is yes because teacher can use cellphone to help we learned or study because he or she can send the question to us.*

While the first *I think* in (7) served the function of expressing the speaker's opinion, the second *I think* was used as a structural device to initiate self-repair. To respond to the question about whether cellphones could be used for learning purposes, the speaker first intended to make a full statement but then shifted to a brief answer *yes*, by using *I think* to initiate this repair move. Evidence for a structural or the filler function of *I think* has also been identified in Liu (2013), which reported that Chinese EFL learners used *I think* as a pause filler to collect thoughts at a rate of 28% of all the three functions of *I think*.

4.2.1.5 Type 5: Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'

According to Ifantidou (2001), *I think* is used to suggest that the statement after *I think* is 'my opinion.' Generally, the 'opinion' can be referred to the speaker's subjective belief, intention,

or comment by inferencing. *I think* in *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'* also signals subjectivity and occurs in utterance-initial position as it does in *Marking Deliberation*. However, these two functions are different in that *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'* suggests neither authority nor certainty but adopts a rather moderate tone (Zhang 2014). The examples are shown in (8) and (9).

(8) Grade 12-Task 3

G12-S03: *In the middle of the picture, we can see there is money and cellphones on the three people's head and the little child stretch their hands to get the phone and money and **I think in my opinion**, that mean cellphone is more related and child wants money less than cellphones and [...] and **I think** this image want to tell us that be careful because one day this will gone away. Just like they come very fast and they will go very fast either.*

The speaker in (8) first stated the fact about what he saw in the picture and then provided his own interpretation of the image. The first *I think* occurring with the expression *in my opinion* explicitly pointed out that what followed was 'my personal opinion' about the picture. The second *I think* served a similar function of implying that 'this was my own interpretation of the picture'.

(9) Grade 11-Task 2

G11-S11: *I would like to go to Leofoo Village because I have gone there before and although their ticket price are expensive **but I think** their roller coaster, Volcano Adventure, Grand Canyon, and the City of Tomb is are pretty good and but also the Janfusun Fancyworld their ticket price is not expensive than Leofoo Village **but I think** their facilities are not interesting for me.*

The two tokens of *I think* in (9) performed the same function of underscoring the speaker's personal opinions on the two amusement parks. He first stated the fact about the ticket price with reference to his evaluation (whether it is expensive or not) and showed his inclination for certain facilities. The use of *I think* with *but* indicated that his decision was made not based on the ticket price but on his subjective opinions. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there were eight instances of *but I think* in our data, which confirmed Zhang and Sabet's (2014) finding that *but I think* is one of the common clusters used by the Chinese EFL learners.

4.2.1.6 Type 6: Reasoning/Illustrating

When *I think* is used to provide a detailed account or rationale of the speaker's ideas, it serves *Reasoning/Illustrating*. In such a case, *I think* is occasionally preceded or followed by the conjunction *because*, as shown in (10) and (11).

(10) Grade 11- Task 1

G11-S12: *I think I agree the rule of the using smartphone because I think it is useful to me and for me and for example, when I in the foreign class, I just only can use the English to talk with him with my teacher; and my teacher can't understand other language such as Chinese. So, when I don't know some vocabulary, I can use my cellphone to search the vocabulary to say it to teacher. So, smartphone is very important.*

As shown in (10), the speaker not only took a stance on the use of smartphones in school but further explained his position on the issue by using *I think* with *because*. To provide supporting evidence for the claim, the speaker gave an example drawn from his personal experience in an English class.

(11) Grade 12- Task 2

G12-S09: *So, what is your reason why you not to choose to Leofoo Village?*

G12-S10: *I think that is because I first is I have ever have haven't I have ever to go to there in my life so I don't have any chance about that. It is I personally don't want to go to play so if today you tell me have these two opportunity and can let me to choose, I want to choose the first one yeah. It's Janfusun it's because that have good memory for myself.*

Being asked the reasons for his choice, the speaker began with *I think* to express his main concern about the decision on the destination in (11). The conjunction *because* is used together with *I think* to introduce an explanatory statement.

Although Wu et al. (2010) have identified certain tokens of *I think* with *Reasoning/Illustrating*, there is a slight difference from what is found in the current thesis in the use of conjunctions (*because, since*) and phrases (*for example, for instance*). In their data, *Reasoning/Illustrating* of *I think* is mostly used in the absence of those conjunctions and phrases. However, as can be seen in the above extracts, both *because* and *for example* were used to provide reasons and illustrations.

4.2.1.7 Type 7: Summarizing/Concluding

I think can be used to sum up discussions, draw conclusions, and present a summary. *So*, as an indicator for a conclusion, often precede *I think* to perform *Summarizing/Concluding* (Zhang 2014). The two examples are shown in (12) and (13), where *I think* was used with *so* and without *so* respectively.

(12) Grade 11-Task 3

G11-S11: *In this picture, I saw a woman, a kid, and a man and I see the credit card and the money fly away. Maybe lots of people think this is a very peace scene but but I think this is very horrible. I think they are doing the human trafficking and the man wants to buy the boy. Although the boy is looks happy but I think in their heart he is very very scared. So, the money means the man use money and credit card to buy some woman, yeah this is very bad. **So, I think** the picture is talking about don't don't don't have the human trafficking. It is illegal and it is very serious problem in the world.*

The speaker in (12) first gave a general description of the picture, followed by his own interpretation of the image, and finally issued a warning of human trafficking. The statements before *So I think* were the references to support the speaker's conclusion. The last two sentences were introduced by the cluster *So I think* to wrap up the discussion.

(13) Grade 10- Task 2

G10-S01: *I think Leofoo Village is more attract me because there have many games to play and although it is more expensive than Janfusun Fancyworld but I still want to go to Leofoo Village because I have been there twice and that was fun. **But I think** if we have to go we will choose Janfusun Fancyworld.*

In this Negotaitive task, the participants were asked to reach a consensus about the destination. Therefore, S01 in (13), who took the last speaking turn, reported the result to end the discussion. Recognizing that all of the group members except herself chose *Janfusun Fancyworld*, the speaker used *but I think* to draw the conclusion. *But* was used to signal the opposite result of her choice and *I think* to indicate the result of their negotiation.

4.2.1.8 Type 8: Agreeing/Disagreeing

The use of *I think* to express one's congruent stance on what has been stated is regarded as Agreeing. On the contrary, *Disagreeing* expresses the opposite position to the previous statement. While the speaker in (14) used *I think* to express agreement, the speaker in (15) expressed disagreement.

(14) Grade 11- Task 2

G11-S01: *I think I like the I like the Leofoo Village much because the Leofoo Village have the water world and animal world and and youle sheshi [amusement facilities] play.*

G11-S04: ***I think*** *this haishi [or] that the classmates says very good. In Leofoo Village, we have much much change can can can change. OK.*

In (14), S01 chose Leofoo Village as their destination because of the various facilities in the park. S04 then responded to S01 with a positive evaluation but in fact he intended to express a similar opinion to S01's. S04's congruent stance towards S01 could be inferred from his following statement showing his preference for the multiple facilities in Leofoo Village. Here, the speaker used *I think* to express his agreement with the former speaker's opinion.

(15) Grade 10- Task 3

G10-S02: *I think the man unhappy because this children is going...*

G10-S04: *Are asking money.*

G10-S02: *Yeah, is asking money to him for him.*

G10-S01: *Is he his children?*

G10-S04: *Children?*

G10-S01: *Meiyou la shi [No, it's] child. Zhiyou yige [Only one].*

G10-S03: ***I think*** he is want to a hug. His father. Not money and cellphone.

The two speakers, S02 and S04, both thought that the boy in the picture was asking for money from his father. Holding a different opinion, S03 argued that what the boy wanted was a hug rather than money. Therefore, *I think* was used by the speaker to indicate disagreement.

4.2.2. Combined functions

Different functions of *I think* can interact with one another to derive combined functions. In the coding process, each token of *I think* is categorized in general into a type of function based on the criteria. While most tokens of *I think* demonstrate one function, there are also cases in which tokens of *I think* seem to encode more than one function. For example, (16) shows a possible combination of *Turn-taking* and *Agreeing*.

(16) Grade 12- Task 1

G12-S06: *I think the advantage is we can use the we can use smartphone to search the question we don't know. So, it is can reach the learning purpose.*

G12-S07: *I think we can we use cellphone in class is my it's our right. And it is a correct correct ... to do this.*

G12-S08: ***I think*** *they are correct because maybe we can use the cellphone to obtain more class material and if so we can reach higher objective.*

In (16), S08 used *I think* to initiate his speaking turn and further expressed his agreement with the previous statement. The word 'correct' shows his agreement with the stance of the other two speakers. Thus, *I think* here performs the combined functions of *Turn-taking* and *Agreeing*. Another example of combined functions is shown in (17), where *I think* encodes both *Marking deliberation* and *Reasoning/Illustrating*.

(17) Grade 12- Task 1

G12-S09: *And what's your reason? Why you are going to choose?*

G12-S12: *It is cheaper than Leofu Village.*

G12-S10: *So budget is your first come to your mind?*

G12-S11: *The lower budget.*

G12-S12: *Yeah. The lower.*

G12-S11: *For you may feel more comfortable than Leofu Village.*

G12-S12: *Yeah.*

G12-S11: *Just for its two hundred dollars.*

G12-S12: *No. No. No. Also have another reason. **I think** that the important one is there are many memories with my friends.*

To justify the reason to choose *Janfusun Fancyworld*, S12 first addressed his concern about budget. However, when S11 further checked whether the lower price was the main concern, S12 stated another reason by using *I think* to mention his explanation. Meanwhile, 'that' and 'important one' were used to emphasize that 'memories with friends' was the primary concern. In this case, *I think* was assumed to perform the combined functions of *Marking deliberation* and *Reasoning/Illustrating*.

Of all the functions, *Turn-taking* was found to be the most flexible function in a sense that it is commonly performed in combination with other functions. In the collected data, *Turn-taking* was used concurrently with the other four functions, namely, *Marking deliberation*, *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'*, *Reasoning/Illustrating* and *Agreeing/Disagreeing*. Given that *Turn-taking* is used to put forward one's opinion, what is further stated after *I think* may simultaneously trigger another function, which makes *Turn-taking* highly compatible with other functions. In fact, of all the functions combined with *Turn-taking*, *Agreeing/Disagreeing* was the most frequently used. The participants tended to initiate their communication turn with

I think, followed by their agreement or disagreement with the previous statement, as has been shown in (16).

It is worth mentioning that there was no token of *I think* encoding the combined functions of *Turn-taking* and *Delaying/Turn-holding*, *Turn-taking* and *Downtoning*, as well as *Turn-taking* and *Summarizing/Concluding*. The lack of these combined functions does not come as a surprise, however. When the speaker takes a speech turn, it is assumed that he/she is ready to speak and is prepared to respond. This way, taking the initiative to speak but at the same time, stalling or hesitating to speak seems to be in conflict. Most functions of delaying or self-repair performed by *I think* were found in the utterance-medial position where the speaking flow was interrupted due to the speaker's difficulty retrieving proper words. Therefore, rarely is *Turn-taking* combined with *Delaying/Turn-holding*. Similarly, *Turn-taking* were not found to be used with *Downtoning*. When the participants stated their conjectures, they first restated the questions or declared that it was only a personal guess and then used *I think* to present their conjectures. In this case, *I think* was not used utterance-initially to take the speaking turn and thus did not perform *Turn-taking*. As for the absence of the combination of *Turn-taking* with *Summarizing/Concluding*, how the speakers organized their summary/conclusion might be the factor. In most of the cases, the speakers usually provided details or explanations before presenting a summary/conclusion. Therefore, *Summarizing/Concluding* of *I think* commonly occurred in the middle or toward the end of the speech, making the combination of *Turn-taking* and *Summarizing/Concluding* only occur once in our data. The observed combined functions in the collected data are listed in Table 16.

Table 16. Distribution of the combined functions of *I think*.

Combined Functions		Number of tokens	Examples
Turn-taking	Marking deliberation	2	(18)
	Emphasizing ‘I’m expressing my opinion’	1	(19)
	Reasoning/Illustrating	1	(20)
	Agreeing/Disagreeing	6	(16)
Summarizing/ Concluding	Downtoning	1	(21)
Marking deliberation	Reasoning/Illustrating	1	(17)
Total		12	N./A.

In the following subsections, I discuss the observed combined functions of *I think* with examples.

4.2.2.1 Turn-taking and Marking deliberation

In (18), after hearing that the other group members discussed what the man, the woman, and the child wanted in the picture, S09 used *I think* to take the speech turn and interpret the previous statements by emphasizing that every person had their own material desires. The complementizer *that* was also used to add weight to the speaker’s assertion (Aijmer 1997). Thus, *I think* may perform two functions, *Turn-taking* and *Marking deliberation*.

(18) Grade 12- Task 3

G12-S10: *So, the woman wants a husband not the money and the cellphone.*

G12-S09: ***I think*** *that every people have their own want their... what they want, whatever.*

This is their dream.

G12-S10: *Their dreams to have such a object.*

4.2.2.2 Turn-taking and Emphasizing ‘I’m expressing my opinion’

Although S10 used *agree* to express his argument, *I think* here was not used for *Agreeing/Disagreeing* since his statement was his stance on the issue of using smartphones in school instead of showing his agreement with the other speakers. *I think* in the utterance-initial position signaled the initiation of a speech turn. Meanwhile, *I think* was immediately followed by *I’m very agree about*, implying that the speaker intended to emphasize his stance on the issue. The subsequent recurrence of the personal pronoun *I* was triggered to foreground the speaker’s subjectivity as well.

(19) Grade 12- Task1

G12-S10: *I think* *I’m very agree about to take a smartphone to school because I think nowadays very international...so we are prone to use smartphones to search a lot of information. For example, if you are...it’s a English subject or Chinese or another yeah if you if you...we don’t understand about the knowledge about the teacher say and we can use the smartphone to make my mind be clear.*

4.2.2.3 Turn-taking and Reasoning/Illustrating

When being asked the reason for choosing *Janfusun Fancyworld*, S10 used *I think* to begin his speech turn and further justified his reason through *Illustrating* with reference to his good memories.

(20) Grade 12- Task 2

G12-S09: *So, what is your reason? Why you not to choose to Leofoo Village?*

G12-S10: ***I think*** that is because I first is I have ever have haven't I have ever to go to there in my life so I don't have any chance about that. It is I personally don't want to go to play so if today you tell me have these two opportunity and can let me to choose, I want to choose the first one yeah. It's Janfusun it's because that have good memory for myself.

4.2.2.4 Turn-taking and Agreeing/Disagreeing

The example of this combined function has been shown in (16).

4.2.2.5 Summarizing/Concluding and Downtoning

Since S02 had not been to *Leofoo Village*, he made a choice based on what the previous speakers said. So, *I think* here was used to draw a conclusion that the variety of the facilities might be attractive to young people. The word *maybe*, at the same time, showed that the speaker was unsure about whether *Leofoo Village* was a right choice because the conclusion was based on the limited information provided by the others. Thus, *I think* also performed *Downtoning* to indicate the speaker's uncertainty.

(21) Grade 11- Task 2

G11-S01: *I think I like the I like the Leofoo Village much because the Leofoo Village have the water world and animal world and and youle sheshi play.*

G11-S04: *I think this haishi that the classmates says very good. In Leofoo Village, we have much much change can can can change. OK.*

G11-S02: *I don't have any experience in Leofoo Village, so ***I think*** maybe it's good for young people to play there.*

4.2.2.6 Marking deliberation and Reasoning/Illustrating

The example of this combined function has been shown in (17).

The encoding of combined functions in *I think* does not, however, come as a surprise. Zhang (2014) has proposed the concept of elasticity underlying the functions of *I think*, indicating that all the functions can be integrated and combined to reach a certain communicative goal. In other words, a speaker may use two or more functions of *I think* concurrently to achieve his/her communicative purposes. The combined use of different functions of *I think*, defined as elasticity by Zhang (2014), is also manifested in our data where two functions, such as *Turn-taking* and *Agreeing/Disagreeing*, and *Marking deliberation* and *Reasoning/Illustrating*, are performed concomitantly by *I think* to express the speakers' intention.

4.2.3. General discussion

In total, 113 tokens of *I think* in the utterance-initial position and 2 tokens in the utterance-final position were identified in the collected data. All of the eight functions of *I think* were observed in the utterance-initial position, but with a disparity in the numbers of tokens among three groups.

Generally, the results are consistent with the previous studies (Baumgarten & House 2010; Liu 2013; Wu et al. 2013; Zhang & Sabet 2014) examining the use of *I think* by EFL learners. First, Chinese EFL learners tend to use *I think* in the utterance-initial position. The results from the current thesis have shown that 98.3% of the total tokens of *I think* occurred in the utterance-initial position. The dominant use of *I think* in the utterance-initial position by EFL learners was also verified by Liu (2013) and Zhang and Sabet (2014). According to Kärkkäinen (2010), *I think* is a common phrase that has a wide range of interactional functions when it occurs initially in an utterance. Given that *I think* in the utterance-initial position has multiple functions (Kärkkäinen 2010) and that ELF learners use *I think* with extensive functions (Baumgarten and House 2010), the frequent use of *I think* in the utterance-initial

position could therefore be expected.

Second, Wu et al. (2010) found that *Turn-taking* is commonly used by Chinese EFL learners, which is consistent with our findings. Of all the eight functions of *I think*, *Turn-Taking* constitutes the largest percentage (31.0%). From the collected data, 19 out of the 27 total discussion sessions were found to proceed with a fixed pattern whereby the four speakers talked one after another like four consecutive monologues.⁸ Most of the time, they only took turns expressing their opinions on the target issue with rare interruptions or immediate feedback. In this form of communication, *I think* was used by almost every speaker to signal the beginning of their statements, resulting in the largest percentage of *Turn-taking*. In other words, this one-by-one speaking pattern facilitated the frequent use of *Turn-Taking*. Possibly, their preference for *I think* for turn-taking is due to inadequate communication strategies and limited repertoire of turn-taking expressions. In other words, if the interlocutors cannot adopt communication strategies properly, such as inviting opinions, asking questions, and providing feedback, an interactive discussion is hard to facilitate and thus becomes a one-by-one routine procedure. Limited knowledge of turn-taking expressions may also lead to the frequent use of a single phrase, such as *I think* in their speech.

Third, Chinese EFL learners tend to extend the functions of *I think* to a wider range of uses, compared to its original use in the L1 context. Eight functions of *I think* listed in the classification were all identified in the discussion produced by the participants. The findings are mostly congruent with Wu et al. (2010), except that one of the functions outlined in his study, *Listing by co-selecting with listing connectives*, was not observed in our collected data. Furthermore, Baumgarten & House (2010) distinguishes the functions of *I think* between those common in both L1 and ELF discourse and those exclusively used in the ELF discourse. Of the functions exclusively used in the ELF discourse, *Drawing conclusions*, *Giving*

⁸ In the experiment, there were 9 groups in total with each group having three discussion sessions (3 tasks), so there is a total of 27 discussion sessions.

explanations/ Elaborating previous utterance, Expressing agreement and contrasting views, correspond to the *Summarizing/Concluding, Reasoning/Illustrating,* and *Agreeing/Disagreeing* in our classification. The similar results verify that EFL learners exploit *I think* with versatile functions, and certain functions typically characterize EFL learners' use of *I think*.

Nevertheless, there were findings inconsistent with the previous study. Liu (2013) investigates the Chinese EFL learners' use of *I think* in terms of three functions, *Deliberative, Tentative,* and *Filler,* which correspond respectively to *Marking deliberation, Downtoning,* and *Delaying/Turn-holding* in our classification system. Her result showed that *Tentative* is used with the highest percentage and *Deliberation* the lowest one, with *Filler* in-between. Unlike Liu (2013), our results showed a rarity of *Marking deliberation* (1.8%) and *Downtoning* (6.8%) but a slightly higher use of *Delaying/Turn-holding* (8.8%). The difference from Liu (2013) may be attributed to the definition of the functions and the proficiency levels of the participants. Liu (2013) defines *Deliberative* as 'the speaker expresses certain opinions toward something' while *Marking deliberation,* by our definition, is used to 'enhance the strength of one's commitment' and usually identified with markers such as superlatives or the complementizer *that*. Obviously, Liu's definition for *Deliberative* is much broader than the one in the present thesis. The definitional difference is likely to cause differences in the interpretation of the results. As for proficiency, while the participants in Liu (2013) are graduate students who have reached the C1 level on the CEFR scale, most of our participants are approximately placed on the A2 and B1 levels. Kobayashi & Rinnert (2003) has shown that EFL learners at higher proficiency levels tend to use more mitigators and upgraders than those at lower proficiency levels. Functionally, *I think* in *Downtoning* serves as a mitigator and in *Marking deliberation* as an upgrader. Therefore, it could be assumed that the less proficient participants in our experiment might not use these two functions as capably as the participants in Liu's study did.

Moreover, although the concept of combined functions has been empirically verified in the current thesis, not every function of *I think* is found to be combined with another. While

Zhang (2014) has proposed the notion of elasticity, arguing that all the five functions of *I think*, namely emphatic, evaluative, tentative, mitigating, and discursive, are allowed to be combined with one another, not all the possible combinations are observed in her collected data. Therefore, the current thesis tries to reinterpret elasticity with reference to the use of *I think* by EFL learners. Based on the results, I proposed that elasticity can apply to the interaction of the discourse functions of *I think*, as shown in Figure 5, which demonstrates how functions of *I think* are combined in terms of elasticity. As the most flexible function, *Turn-taking* can be combined with other four functions. When *I think* is used to initiate a speaking turn, it is highly compatible with other functions since the statement after *I think* may co-occur with other functions. Furthermore, *Downtoning* and *Summarizing/Concluding* are found to be combined only with each other. This combination is used when the conclusion is made based on limited information or personal guesses. Additionally, it is worthwhile to note that *Downtoning* and *Summarizing/Concluding* are not combined with *Turn-taking* like the other four functions. *I think* for *Downtoning* is used after a repeat of the question or between the statements of the speakers' conjectures and thus does not occur at the beginning of a speaking turn to perform *Turn-taking*. Similarly, *I think* for *Summarizing/Concluding* occur after descriptions of details or supporting ideas and thus are not used at the beginning to take the speaking turn. While all the functions of *I think* are interconnected in the elasticity model proposed by Zhang (2014), the current thesis attempt to reinterpret elasticity by demonstrating that several functions of *I think* are exclusively combined with certain functions.

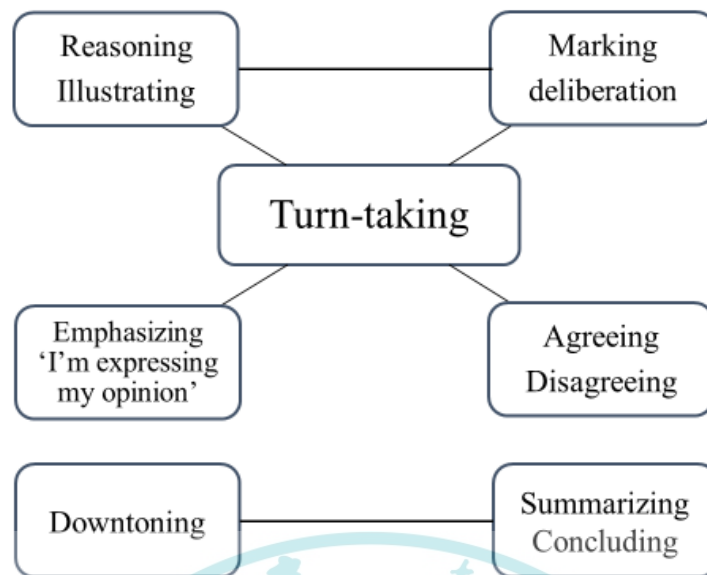


Figure 5. Combined functions of *I think*

4.3 Proficiency effect

As discussed in Chapter 2, Wu et al. (2010) and Neary-Sundquist (2013) have suggested that proficiency is closely related to the EFL learners' use of *I think* in terms of frequency and functions. However, their studies only provided a general discussion without closely examining the interplay between proficiency and the use of different functions of *I think*. To fill this gap, the current work aims to explore whether proficiency is a factor which determines the use of functions of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners and how it affects their use. In the following, I report the results of the functions of *I think* used by the three proficiency groups and provide a discussion about the effect of proficiency on their use of *I think*.

4.3.1 Findings

In addition to analyzing the aggregated data, each function was also investigated one after another to better understand how the eight functions work in the discussions led by the three proficiency groups. Figure 6 and Table 17 display the percent of the eight functions of *I think* used by the three groups, namely, Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12.

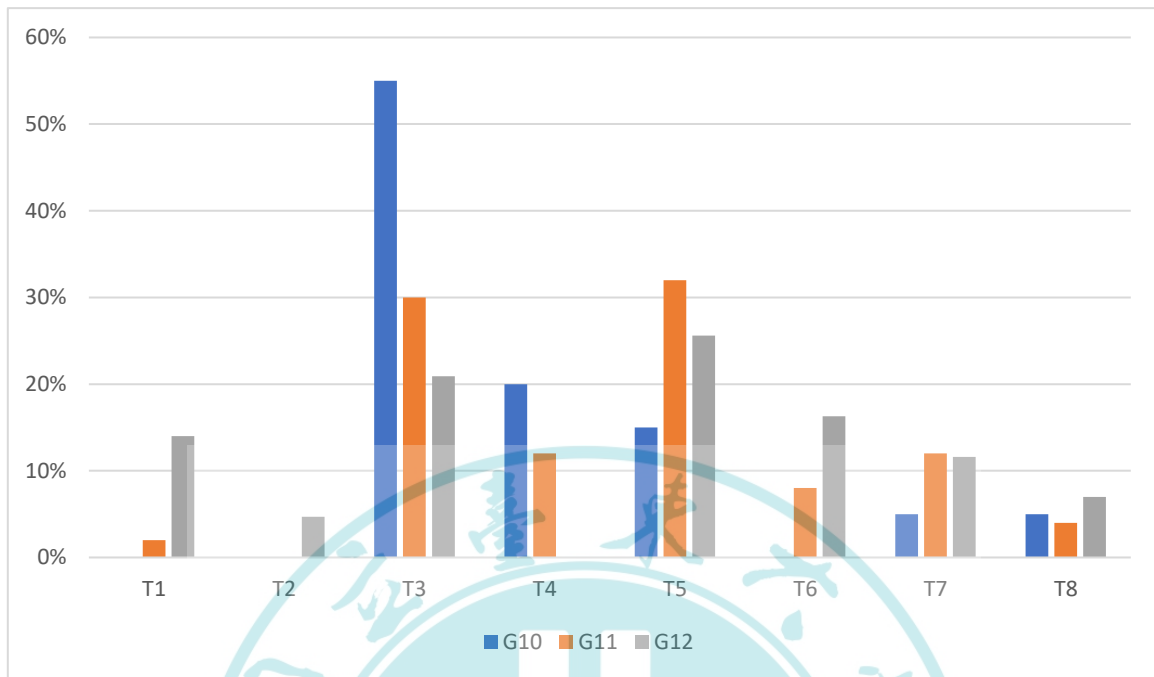


Figure 6. Percent of the functions of *I think* used the three groups.

Table 17. Distribution of the functions of *I think* among the three groups.

	Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Number of tokens	Percent	Number of tokens	Percent	Number of tokens	Percent
T1 (Downtoning)	0	0.0%	1	2.0%	6	14.0%
T2 (Marking deliberation)	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	4.7%
T3 (Turn-taking)	11	55.0%	15	30.0%	9	20.9%
T4 (Delaying/Turn-holding)	4	20.0%	6	12.0%	0	0.0%
T5 (Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion')	3	15.0%	16	32.0%	11	25.6%
T6 (Reasoning/Illustrating)	0	0.0%	4	8.0%	7	16.3%
T7 (Summarizing/Concluding)	1	5.0%	6	12.0%	5	11.6%
T8 (Agreeing/Disagreeing)	1	5.0%	2	4.0%	3	7.0%

Total	20	100%	50	100%	43	100%
Number of tokens per 100 words	1.5%		2.8%		1.1%	

As can be seen, the two functions, *Turn-taking* (T3) and *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'*, were frequently used by all the three groups. On the contrary, all the participants seldom used *I think* to express their agreement or disagreement. It is noteworthy that while the two functions, *Downtoning* (T1) and *Reasoning/Illustrating* (T6), were only carried out by Grade 11 and Grade 12, *Delaying/Turn-holding* was only used by Grade 10 and Grade 11. As for the numbers of the types used by each group, G11 and G12 used 7 types of functions, whereas G10 used only 5. What's more, the tokens of *Marking deliberation* (T2) were identified only in the speech data from Grade 12.

4.3.2 General discussion

According to the current findings, the correlation between proficiency and the different functions of *I think* is observed. First, the participants at higher proficiency levels performed a wider range of functions. Second, the participants at the highest proficiency level used *I think* with the lowest percentage. Third, *Downtoning* (T1) and *Reasoning/Illustrating* (T6) were exclusively used by G11 and G12 and *Marking deliberation* (T2) was only found in G12. Fourth, the frequency of *Turn-taking* (T3) and *Delaying/Turn-holding* (T4) had a negative correlation with proficiency levels.

First of all, as shown in the above results, the function types of *I think* used by G11 and G12 outnumbered the types used by G10, implying that the participants at higher proficiency levels used *I think* with more direct access to diverse functional patterns of *I think* than those at lower proficiency levels. The study of the acquisition of Mandarin *wo juede* 'I think' in the L1 context can provide insights into the interpretation of our results. Wu (2020) found that as

the participants' grade levels increase, a more diversified pattern of the use of *wo juede* develops. Although in different contexts, Wu's and our finding are similar in a sense that learners at the later stages of language acquisition perform more functions of *I think* than those at the earlier stages. Furthermore, as pragmatic competence in production refers to the ability to effectively express the intended message in a social context, being able to perform different functions of *I think* in communication can be regarded as the hallmark of increase in pragmatic competence. Provided that proficiency has a positive effect on pragmatic competence (Ifantidou 2011; Taguchi 2011; Xiao 2015), the speakers at higher proficiency levels may thus be more capable of using *I think* with different functions.

The second observation was that the group at the highest proficiency level used *I think* the least frequently, which is similar to the results of Neary-Sundquist (2013). However, while a strong negative correlation between the frequency of *I think* and the proficiency levels is observed in Neary-Sundquist (2013), it is not shown in our data. The lowest proficiency group (G10) in our experiment did not use *I think* with the highest percentage. The different results may be attributed to the underlying difference in the participants' proficiency levels. All of the participants in Neary-Sundquist (2013) are university students and even those at the lowest proficiency level may have acquired the various functions of *I think*. On the contrary, our participants in G10 may have not yet fully acquired different functions of *I think* and thus use it with a lower frequency.

Third, it was found that *Downtoning*, *Marking deliberation* and *Reasoning/Illustrating* were exclusively used by particular groups. It seemed that these three functions were hard for the participants at lower proficiency levels to use. According to Kaltenböck (2010), *I think* has two opposite functions: as a shield to decrease the speaker's commitment and as a booster to strengthen the speaker's proposition. Two contrastive functions being manifested by a single phrase may pay a challenge to EFL learners who have not acquired the usages and thus are unable to appropriately use them. In another respect, high EFL achievers use more mitigators

and upgraders than low EFL achievers (Kobayashi & Rinnert 2003). Accordingly, as *I think* in *Downtoning* is referred to as a mitigator and in *Marking deliberation* as an upgrader, the limited use of these two functions by the participants at lower proficiency levels is expected. As for *Reasoning/Illustrating*, this function involves cause-effect relations and the use of conjunctions to connect clauses. On the contrary, *I think* is often used as a filler in *Delaying/Turn-holding* and followed by a single clause in other functions. To a certain degree, the sentence structure of *I think* for *Reasoning/Illustrating* is more complex. Therefore, to perform *Reasoning/Illustrating* in communication, higher linguistic competence may be required.

Fourth, the frequency of *Turn-taking* decreases as proficiency levels increase. Although there were more turns produced by the participants at higher proficiency levels, fewer tokens of *Turn-taking* were identified in their speeches. This suggests that speakers at higher proficiency levels manipulate more types of discourse devices and strategies to take turns. In fact, in the speech of G12, *Turn-taking* was activated by various means such as raising questions, asking for clarification, or interrupting. What's more, the findings are in line with Kang and Wang's (2014) study on the effect of proficiency on the features of spoken responses. Their results indicate that speakers at higher proficiency levels tend to have more speaking turns in the production tasks and exchange the turns more promptly with more discourse markers.

Conversely, the frequency of *Delaying/Turn-holding* decreased with the participants' proficiency levels. Specifically, it was used with the highest percentage by the participants in G10 and was not found in the speech of G12. According to Kaltenböck (2010), *I think* has a strong tendency to occur with disfluency features such as fillers, hesitation markers, word repetitions, pauses, and restarts. This tendency was also observed in our data especially in the speech of G10 in which disfluency features occurred frequently and were often accompanied by *I think* for *Delaying/Turn-holding*. Although previous studies (Wu et al. 2010; Liu 2013) have pointed out that low proficiency facilitates the use of *I think* for delaying, pausing, and

self-repair, the role of proficiency is not verified with empirical evidence in their studies. This thesis, therefore, empirically validates the importance of proficiency as a factor for the use of *Delaying/Turn-holding*.

All in all, the different patterns of the use of *I think* shown by the three groups are closely related to proficiency. First, higher EFL achievers perform more functions of *I think*, which may due to their higher pragmatic competence. Second, the participants at the highest proficiency level use *I think* the least frequently. Third, *Downtoning* and *Marking deliberation* feature the use of *I think* by speakers at higher proficiency levels since these two functions require more advanced linguistic and pragmatic competence. Fourth, learners at lower-proficiency levels use a smaller variety of markers for *Turn-taking*, leading to the use of a single phrase to take up the speaking turn. Last, the use of *Delaying/Turn-holding* is obviously related to proficiency. Given that proficiency determines the speaker's fluency, the less fluent speech produced by speakers at lower proficiency levels may facilitate more tokens of *I think* for *Delaying/Turn-holding*. Although the previous studies have highlighted proficiency as a factor affecting EFL learners' use of functions of *I think*, the present thesis presents a close investigation on the effect of proficiency on the use of each discourse function.

As has been discussed above, limited repertoires for expressing opinions may be a main reason for the frequent use of *I think* by the participants at the lower proficiency level. In addition, the formulaic nature of *I think* may can be a driving force for the frequent use. As a single most frequent *I + verb* collocation in spoken English (Baumgarten and House 2010), *I think* may be one of the fixed expressions that EFL learners are more familiar with and thus are more confident in using it. Therefore, they tend to use it intuitively and habitually without giving careful deliberation when other expressions, except *I think*, can be more appropriate in the context. This habitual use of *I think* was also manifested in their use of fillers. The filler function of *I think* was frequently used by the participants at the lower proficiency level to bridge gaps in conversation or to initiate repair moves while other fillers, such as *and* and

dengyixia ‘wait’, were rarely used.

4.4 Genre effect

As mentioned in Chapter 2, genre may influence the use of *I think* by EFL/ESL learners. Neary-Sundquist (2013) suggests that the use of hedges is sensitive to task types and any task that requires the participants’ opinions elicits a higher rate of the use of *I think*. Wu’s (2022) investigation on the use of *wo juede* ‘I think’ has also found that *wo juede* is used more frequently in argumentative genre than in negotiative genre. The results of these studies underline the importance of genre as a determining factor in the use of *I think*. To further explore the effect of genre on the use of *I think*, the second research question aims to explore whether genre plays a role in the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners by designing three production tasks, namely, argumentative, negotiative, and descriptive.

4.4.1 Findings

In total, 113 tokens of *I think* in the utterance initial-position were identified in the production data collected from the three tasks. While Figure 7 and Table 18 illustrate the overall distribution of *I think* in three different kinds of genre, Figure 8 and Table 19 display the percent of *I think* used by the three proficiency groups in the three genres.

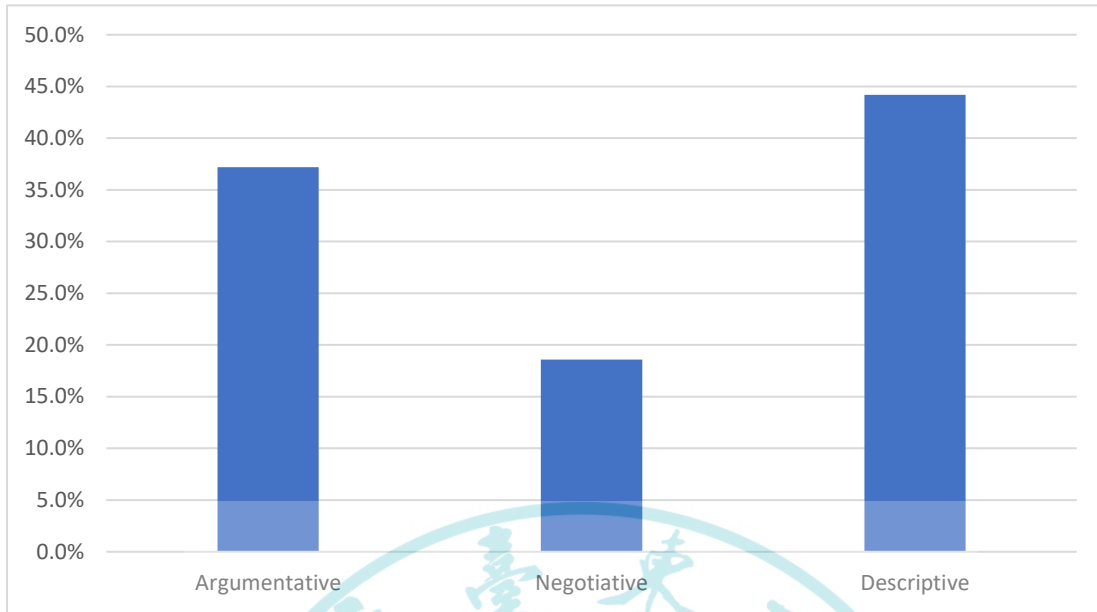


Figure 7. Percent of *I think* used in the three genres.

Table 18. Distribution of *I think* used in the three genres.

	Argumentative	Negotiative	Descriptive
Numbers of token	42	21	50
Percent	37.2%	15.6%	44.2%

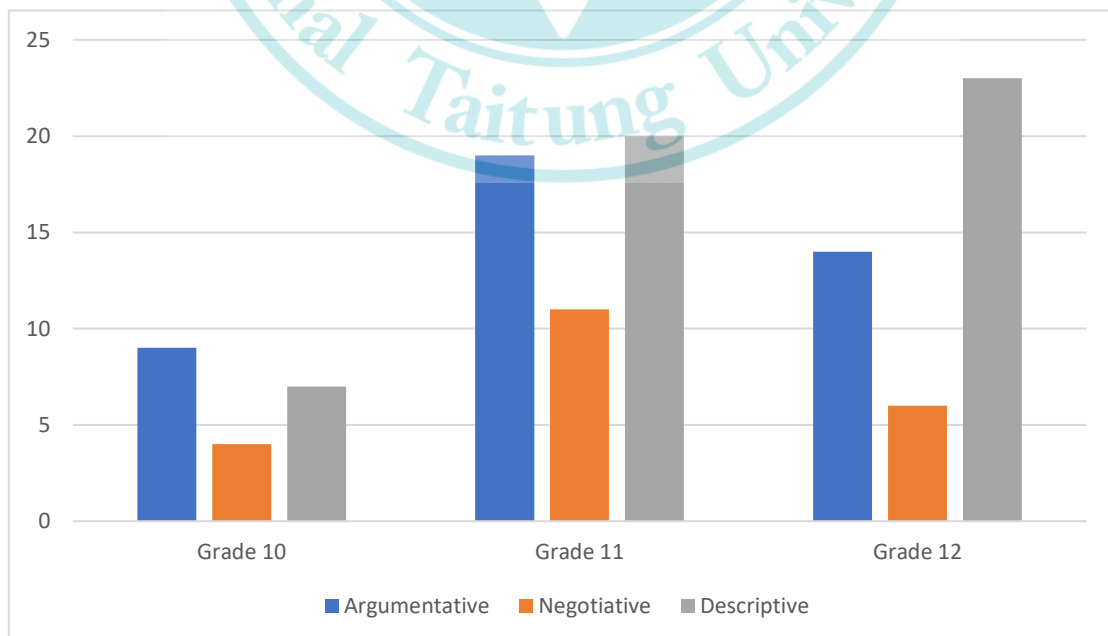


Figure 8. Percent of *I think* used in the three genres by the three proficiency groups.

Table 19. Distribution of *I think* used in the three genres by the three proficiency groups.

	Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Numbers of token	Percent	Numbers of token	Percent	Numbers of token	Percent
Argumentative	9	45.0%	19	38.0%	14	32.5%
Negotiative	4	20.0%	11	22.0%	6	14.0%
Descriptive	7	35.0%	20	40.0%	23	53.5%
Total	20	100%	50	100%	43	100%

Generally, the total number of *I think* elicited in the descriptive task was the highest, followed by a slightly lower number of *I think* in the argumentative task and a lower number in the negotiative task. When proficiency is considered, all the three groups produced the least number of *I think* in the negotiative task. While more tokens of *I think* were elicited from both Grade 11 and Grade 12 in the descriptive task than in the argumentative task, the token of *I think* in the argumentative outnumbered than that of the descriptive task by Grade 10.

4.4.2 General discussion

As shown in Figure 6, the participants used *I think* more frequently in the descriptive and the argumentative tasks than in the negotiative task. The relatively large number of tokens of *I think* in the argumentative task may be attributed to the semantic and pragmatic features of *I think* that characterize argumentative discourse. Semantically, *I think* is endowed with at least four meanings, namely ‘cogitation’, ‘belief’, ‘opinion’, and ‘subjective evaluation’ (Aijmer 1998). The diverse meanings of *I think* enable the speaker to use it to express his/her viewpoints and attitudes, and provide reasons when they have to choose a stance and justify their positions, just as the participants did in the argumentative task. Pragmatically, *I think* can be used to show agreement or disagreement with the discussion from the interlocuter, which was commonly

used by the participants in the argumentative task.

Although the descriptive task does not require stance-taking and justification, it has elicited the majority of tokens of *I think*. Possibly, the design of the guiding questions and the nature of the descriptive task bring about the majority. On the one hand, the guiding questions led the participants to make conjectures about the characters' activities and feelings. To tone down their assertiveness, the participants used *I think* to show uncertainty about their guesses and thus facilitated the use of *Downtoning*. On the other hand, to answer the question about the message conveyed by the picture, the participants tended to illustrate the details of the picture first as the clues and draw a conclusion based on the clues. *I think* was used for *Reasoning/Illustrating* when the descriptions of the picture were made, and for *Summarizing/Concluding* when the messages of the picture were stated. Nevertheless, the tokens of *Turn-taking* used in the argumentative task outnumbered those in the descriptive task. This suggests that although the total number of *I think* elicited in the descriptive task is higher than that of the descriptive task, the participants tended to use *I think* for *Turn-taking* in the argumentative discourse. It is likely that more exchanges of opinions are required in the argumentative context and thus expressions for the initiation of turn-taking, such *I think*, are used.

The negotiative task also required the participants to express their opinions, but did not elicit as many tokens of *I think* as the other two tasks did. In the descriptive task, most of the participants simply presented their choices without much interaction with other, so *Agreeing/Disagreeing* was only used once in this task. In addition, it was found that instead of using *I think* for turn-taking, the participants tended to start their speech with expressions like 'I want/prefer to go ...' or 'To/For me, I will go...'. After expressing where they preferred to go, the participants provided reasons for their choices. Therefore, *I think* in the negotiative discourse were mainly used for *Reasoning/Illustrating*, while the other functions of *I think* were seldom performed. The fewer types of the functions of *I think* required in the negotiative task

possibly led to a lower number of tokens of *I think*.

Generally, the observation that the more frequent use of *I think* in the argumentative task than in the negotiative task is consistent with what has been reported in Wu (2022), which compares the use of Mandarin *wo juede* ‘I think’ by Mandarin speakers between the argumentative genre and the negotiative genre. Our results have shown that the argumentative task elicits multiple occurrences of *wo juede* and *I think*, compared to the negotiative Task. Likewise, Neary-Sundquist (2013) indicates that the task (News task) which requires the participants’ personal opinions elicits a higher frequency of the use of *I think*. The argumentative task in our study is similar to the News task in Neary-Sundquist’s (2013) study in that both tasks involve stance-taking and personal opinions, which facilitate a higher rate of the use of *I think* to express thoughts and opinions.

4.5 Pragmatic transfer

According to Kasper (1992), pragmatic transfer refers to the influence of learners’ L1 pragmatic knowledge of languages and culture on their use of L2 pragmatic knowledge. Previous studies that investigate pragmatic transfer with reference to the use of expressions in communication, like *I think*, have received much attention. Liu (2013) has reported that pragmatic transfer is evident in Chinese speakers’ use of *I think* for deliberative and tentative functions. Chinese speakers tend to transfer the distributions of *wo juede* in Mandarin to that in English when using *I think* to mark deliberation. Wu et al. (2010) have shown that the Chinese EFL learners overuse *I think* and tend to use it in the utterance-initial position. Pragmatic transfer is suggested to be one of the possible causes for their frequent use of *I think* because of the similar meanings and functions shared with *wo juede* in Mandarin.

Wu (2020) has investigated the first language acquisition of the Chinese discourse marker *wo juede* with reference to its pragmatic functions by comparing the use of *wo juede* between adults and elementary school students in Taiwan. A total of seven pragmatic functions

of *wo juede* are identified: *Agreeing* (T1), *Disagreeing* (T2), *Commenting/Reasoning* (T3), *Speculating* (T4), *Suggesting* (T5), *Concluding* (T6), and *Expressing afterthoughts* (T7). The results show that both the Child and Adult groups prefer to use *wo juede* for *Commenting/Reasoning*. *Expressing afterthoughts* is used once and twice by the Child groups and Adult group respectively. While *Concluding* accounts for around 10% of the total tokens by the Adult group, it is not used by any of the participants from the Child group. Table 20 outlines the functions of *wo juede* in order of frequency between the Adult and Child group.

Table 20. Patterns of *wo juede* functions between the Child and Adult groups. (adapted from Wu (2020: 65))

Child groups	T3 > T2 = T5 > T1 = T4 > T7 > T6
Adult group	T3 > T4 > T6 > T5 > T2 > T1 > T7

In the present thesis, the coding system of *I think* is slightly different from that of *wo juede* designed by Wu (2020) in both number and types of functions. As has been shown in Section 4.4.2, the tokens of *I think* were classified into eight categories, namely, *Downtoning* (T1), *Marking deliberation* (T2), *Turn-taking* (T3), *Delaying/Turn-holding* (T4), *Emphasizing I'm expressing my opinions* (T5), *Reasoning/Illustrating* (T6), *Summarizing/Concluding* (T7), and *Agreeing/Disagreeing* (T8). The results show that *Turn-taking* was most frequently used (30.1%) and *Emphasizing 'I'm expressing my opinion'* was the second most frequently used function. The functions that were used with a relatively low percent were *Downtoning*, *Marking deliberation*, and *Agreeing/Disagreeing*. Table 21 illustrates the functions of *I think* used by all the participants in order of frequency.

Table 21. Patterns of *I think* functions used by all the participants.

All the three groups	T3 > T5 > T7 > T6 > T4 > T1 > T8 > T2
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Table 22 aims to align the functions of *I think* with those of *wo juede* between English and Mandarin. However, there are two functions of *wo juede* that cannot align with the functions of *I think*. First, *Suggesting* was not listed in our classification, nor did it have a function that can directly correspond to the functions of *I think*. Second, *Afterthoughts*, defined by Wu (2020), is the token of *wo juede* used in the utterance-final position. As the present thesis concerns the tokens of *I think* in the utterance-initial position, the functions of *I think* in the utterance-final position are not taken into consideration.

Table 22. The functions of *I think* corresponded to the functions of *wo juede*.

	Functions of <i>I think</i> (the present thesis)	Functions of <i>wo juede</i> (Wu 2020)	Descriptions
F1	Downtoning	Speculating	To indicate the speaker's uncertainty
F2	Reasoning/Illustrating	Commenting/Reasoning	To give reasons or rationale for certain ideas.
F3	Summarizing/Concluding	Concluding	To summarize the speakers' ideas or draw a conclusion
F4	Agreeing/Disagreeing	Agreeing Disagreeing	To express the speaker's agreement or disagreement to what has been stated.

To compare the use of the functions of *wo juede* and *I think*, their corresponding functions are relabeled from F1 to F4 and are ordered in terms of frequency based on the results in Wu (2020) and the present thesis, as presented in Table 23.

Table 23. The functions of *I think* and *wo jude* in order of frequency.

Functions of <i>I think</i> (the present thesis)	F3 > F2 > F1 > F4
Functions of <i>wo jude</i> (Wu 2020)	F2 > F4 > F1 > F3

In terms of frequency, the four functions of *I think* show a distributional pattern not shared by *wo jude*. While *Summarizing/Concluding* (F3) was used the most frequently among the four functions of *I think*, it was ranked the least frequently used functions of *wo jude*. Only *Downtoning/Speculating* (F1) was ranked in the same position in the order of the four functions of *I think* and *wo jude*.

When the distributions of the functions of *I think* and *wo jude* are compared, it seems that the use of *wo jude* does not play a determining role in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think*. In other words, the Mandarin EFL learners' acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge is not directly influenced by their L1 pragmatic knowledge in their use of *I think*, and thus pragmatic transfer is not evident. Moreover, there are functions of *I think* that were not identified in the use of *wo jude*, such as *Marking deliberation*, *Turn-taking*, and *Delaying/Turn-holding*, which suggests that Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* is possibly not affected by their use of the similar expression in their L1.

4.6 Summary

This chapter reports the results of the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners to investigate the influence of proficiency and genre with reference to various discourse functions of *I think*. The results made five points. First, eight discourse functions of *I think* are identified. Second, *Turn-taking* was used most frequently while *Marking deliberation* the least. Third, the combined functions of *I think* were identified as well. *Turn-taking* was found to be the most flexible function that is commonly performed in combination with other functions. Fourth,

levels of proficiency correlate with different functions of *I think*. The token number of *Turn-taking* and *Delaying/Turn-holding* has a negative correlation with English proficiency levels. Specifically, *Downtoning* and *Reasoning/Illustrating* were performed exclusively by the Grade-11 and -12 students. Fifth, the descriptive task elicited the highest token number of *I think*, with the argumentative task eliciting the second highest and the negotiative task the least. Given the above results, proficiency and genre have been proved to have correlations with the discourse functions of *I think*.

It is worth noting that the results from the current thesis support Zhang's (2014) elasticity of *I think* because the use of the combined functions were identified, but there are differences in the combinations of the functions. The elasticity proposed by Zhang (2014) indicates that all the functions of *I think* can be combined with each other. However, among all the eight functions in our study, only six types of the combinations were identified. Accordingly, the elasticity model needs to be revised in order to accommodate the combined functions of *I think* based on our results. As has been shown in Figure 5, it is suggested that not all the possible combinations of the functions can be used and while there is a function that can be flexibly combined with the other functions, which is *Turn-taking*, there are also functions that are exclusively combined with a certain function.

Although the current thesis adopts the framework in Wu et al. (2010), several new findings from the current thesis are reported. First, while Wu et al. (2010) collect the data based on two corpora, the current thesis analyzes the spoken data produced by the EFL learners in the production tasks. Second, this thesis investigates not only the functions of *I think* by the EFL learners, but also demonstrates the frequency of functions of *I think* in the three genres, which is absent in Wu et al. (2010). Most importantly, as Wu et al. (2010) only mention that proficiency may be a possible factor influencing EFL learners' use of *I think*, the current thesis adds weight to the crucial role of proficiency in the use of *I think* by designing three production tasks whereby thirty-six participants were classified into three proficiency groups.

In addition to proficiency and genre, habit and L1 communicative norms may influence EFL learner's use of *I think*. Wu et al. (2010) has reported that habit is one of the major reasons for the EFL learners' frequent use of *I think*. Their limited repertoires needed for presenting arguments and opinions possibly make them cling on to a fixed expression that they are more familiar with, such as *I think*. The habitual use of *I think* is also observed in our participants' use of fillers. They tended to use *I think* more frequently than other fillers when initiating repair moves and bridging gaps in conversations. Moreover, communicative norms in an ELF discourse is another possible factor accounting for EFL learners' frequent use of *I think*. Baumgarten and House (2010) argue that an ELF discourse is assumed to be comparatively fragile and susceptible to expressions of subjectivity by L2 speakers, which possibly results from their L1 communicative norm. Given that the expression of subjectivity may be a potential trouble spot in an ELF conversation, L2 speakers may resort to a more mutually understandable and acceptable expression, such as *I think*, to express opinions.

With the aim of exploring the interplay of proficiency and genre types in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think*, both qualitative and quantitative analysis have been conducted to examine how the two factors determine their use of *I think* in terms of frequency and functions. Previous studies have discussed the possible influence of EFL learners' habitual use of expressions and communicative norms. As these two factors are not the major concern of the present thesis, further studies may be needed to investigate the effect of habit and L1 communicative norm on EFL learners' use of *I think*.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The conclusion of this thesis is presented as follows. Section 5.2 provides a summary of the major findings. In Section 5.3 discusses the limitations of the current thesis and provides suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of the major findings

The present thesis investigates the interplay of proficiency and genre types in Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* in the utterance-initial position by designing three production tasks whereby the thirty-six participants classified into three proficiency groups were required to initiate discussions on the topics in three genres, namely, argumentative, negotiative, and descriptive. Four major findings are made as follows.

First, of all the eight functions of *I think*, *Turn-taking* is used most frequently and *Marking deliberation* the least. The participants' preference for *Turn-taking* is possibly due to inadequate communication strategies and limited repertoire of turn-taking markers. Similarly, the few tokens of *I think* for *Marking deliberation* may be attributed to their insufficient knowledge of expressions used to emphasis.

Second, levels of proficiency correlate positively with different functions of *I think*. Specifically, the token number of *Turn-taking* and *Delaying/Turn-holding* has a negative correlation with English proficiency levels. The participants at the higher proficiency levels manipulate more types of discourse devices and strategies to take turns. On the contrary, the participants at the low proficient level use *I think* for delaying, pausing, and self-repair. Moreover, *Downtoning* and *Marking deliberation* are performed exclusively by Grade-11 and -12 students. It is suggested that high EFL achievers use more mitigators and upgraders than

low EFL achievers. Given the above results, proficiency has been proved to have correlations with the discourse functions of *I think*.

Third, genre types play a role in affecting the use of *I think* by Mandarin EFL learners. The participants used *I think* more frequently in the descriptive and the argumentative tasks than in the negotiative task. In the descriptive task, the participants commonly used *I think* to illustrate their interpretation of the picture. The ease of the task also leads to more exchange turns in communication and thus elicits more tokens of *I think* for *Turn-taking*. As for the argumentative tasks, the discussion involves stance-taking and personal opinions, which facilitate a higher rate of the use of *I think* to express thoughts and opinions.

5.3 Limitations of the present thesis and suggestions for future research

The present thesis is subject to the following limitations, however. First, a larger sample size is needed to provide more data that can characterize EFL learners' use of *I think* more precisely. The spoken data produced by Grade 10 was only 1337 words in total. To compare the use of *I think* at different proficiency levels, a large number of tokens of *I think* are required to ensure that the results can actually represent the distribution of the functions by each proficiency group.

Second, the participants from three different grades may not typically represent three proficiency levels. Although they were already placed in different grades from Grade 10 to 12 in term of their school performance, rather than English levels of proficiency, in the high schools, there can be proficiency difference among the participants even in the same grade. More background information about the participants' English proficiency levels and descriptions of each proficiency level are needed. Measures to ensure that people in the same grade have the same proficiency are necessary. Future research can adopt a method to ensure that all the participants are grouped based on their English proficiency levels.

Third, a group of English native speakers and a group of Mandarin native speakers should be needed to constitute control groups. English native speakers' use of *I think* can be compared

in order to investigate differences in the use of *I think* between native speakers and EFL learners. However, the present thesis focuses in Taiwanese EFL learners' use of *I think* at different levels of proficiency. Moreover, it is necessary to observe discourse functions of *wo juede* used by Mandarin speakers, serving as the data basis to which Mandarin EFL learners' use of *I think* can be compared.



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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Transcription of Argumentative task

Grade 10- Group 1

S01: **I think** that use smartphone is good in school because students can search... search for what...search something they can't understand.

S02: I never use cellphone in the class. It's a big problem. Er...**I think** students shouldn't use smartphones in the class in the school because they will use them in the class and teacher always very angry. And I usually put...put my cellphone in my bag and ...and then...I usually put it in my bag and I can't use it in the class. OK.

S03: **I think** smartphone can't use...can't use it... *dengyixia* ...**I think** smartphone can't use in elementary school and junior high school because the student in there can't control themselves and **I think** high school student can control themselves and **I think** smartphone can use for learning because Internet have many information and...ok.

S04: **I think** students can use smartphones at school but teacher should limit their using time Because student can't control themselves at the classes during the class so if the class need to search something, students can use their phone.

Grade 10- Group 2

S05: **I think** using smartphone in school is our right and we can free to use that.

S06: And **I think** smartphone it shouldn't be own in school because some teacher will ask we to search something on Internet.

S07: If we can't see the word on the blackboard or the screen, we can use smartphone to zoom in and or take picture.

S08: If we have no enough time to take notes in the class, we can use our smartphone to take picture and we can write in later.

Grade 10- Group 3

S09: The advantage is we can use cellphone to seduce men through *Tantan* and Instagram.

S10: But the disadvantage is we can't concentrate during the class. We can't focus on what the teacher said.

S09: Question two. No, because we only use cellphone to seduce.

S11: Question 3. Turn off your cellphone and...

S12: And give it to someone you can trust.

Grade 11- Group 1

S01: What are the advantages and disadvantages in using smartphones in school?

S02: **I think** the advantage is we can use smartphone to search some words we don't know.
OK.

S01: And **I think** the smartphone can make the information to me and I help I hope the teacher don't don't catch me.

S02: Kick you

S01: Kick me to use the cellphone. OK.

S03: The disadvantage is easy to see... It is possible that student may be use cellphone to play games.

S02: Can smartphones be used for learning purpose? If yes, how?

S04: May be can.

S02: How?

S04: Because it's easy to search you learned.

S02: **I think** yes because if you have smartphone in your hand, you can search information to help you study and and and what?

S04: *Jiushi* the teacher not time to help you when teacher not have time to help you.

S02: You don't need to wait teacher teach you can learn and...

S04: By yourself.

S02: By yourself, yes.

S01: **I think** you can ...commit.

S02: Communicate

S01: Communicate in forging

S02: Foreign.

S01: Foreign.

S02: Foreign countries

S01: Countries. We *dengy xia* ... **I think** you can...communicate in foreign countries with a mobile phone.

S03: **I think** smartphone can be used for learning purpose. When I saw some see some word that I didn't know, I can use cellphone to search.

S04: **I think** cellphone can... **I think** questions two is yes because teacher can use cellphone to help we learned or study because he or she can send the question to us.

S03: How do you prevent distractions with smartphones in class?

S02: Before the class, you need to put your cellphone in...

S01: Cellphone box.

S02: Cellphone box. In class, when teacher teach us some information and we can take notebook and and OK.

S03: **I think** it is... **I think** the question is insolvable because the teacher is hard to limit the

student to searching instead of playing video games. Students may... maybe easily distract by video game.

S02: I use the App to lock my phone to prevent distraction.

S04: Like the classmate say can put the in the cellphone box.

Grade 11- Group 2

S05: **I think** I can use cellphone in the school is a good choice because I can use cellphone found information on the Internet. Maybe my teacher doesn't know information. I can find on the Internet.

S06: **I think** smartphone shouldn't...not allowed used in school because smartphone maybe attract student attention in class. So, I don't agree use smartphone in school.

S07: **I think** cellphone can use in school because cellphone can find the... and cellphone can play many game. I very love play game can make me relax. So, very good.

S08: **I think** didn't use smartphone in the school because is...my attention. So, this is not good.

Grade 11- Group 3

S09: **I think** smartphones should be allowed in schools because it can help student more convenient to learn more things, only control himself.

S10: **I think** smartphone be allowed in school because when we to meet we don't know knowledge, we can search the knowledge answer.

S11: **I think** smartphones can be allowed in schools because we have some information that we don't know and we can use smartphone to search this information or in math class or some other class maybe you need the calculator, so the smartphone is important.

S12: **I think** I agree the rule of the using smartphone because **I think** it is useful to me and for me and for example, when I in the foreign class, I just only can use the English to talk with him with my teacher and my teacher can't understand other language such as Chinese, so when I don't know some vocabulary, I can use my cellphone to search the vocabulary to say it to teacher so smartphone is very important.

Grade 12- Group 1

S01: **I think** that cellphones should be allowed in school because sometimes students will need some situations which will need to search information on Internet.

S02: And you can use smartphones to watch instructive videos to help you learn new things. The disadvantages is that using smartphone in schools is that you may get distracted by

the smartphone.

S03: There's plenty of ways to prevent students from distraction with cellphones in class. In our school. Our teachers use the... like a basket and you can put smartphone inside only for the class teacher need for lunch can you take it back and that is for lots of students but if some of them are very good at control themselves maybe they can just put their smartphone over there in the desk and they can still be learning very well.

S04: To sum up, smartphones should be allowed in school. They can ban smartphone in school because some students use it to play video games.

Grade 12- Group 2

S05: **I think** we can check the website that the school offer to us through using cellphones. So, what do you think guys?

S06: **I think** the advantage is we can use the we can use smartphone to search the question we don't know. So, it is can reach the learning purpose.

S07: **I think** we can use cellphone in class is my it's our right. And it is a correct correct ...to do this.

S08: **I think** they are correct because maybe we can use the cellphone to obtain more class material and if so we can reach higher objective.

Grade 12- Group 3

S09: Today we are going to make a discussion about should smartphones be allowed in schools. What's you guys' opinions?

S10: Good.

S11: Very good.

S10: I agree.

S09: About guiding questions, it's about to ask you guys and first question is what are the advantages and disadvantages in using smartphones in school? It's just like pros and cons and as you saw you just say it.

S10: Yes.

S12: Yes.

S09: It's not about choose yes or no it's may be a reason and a thing that using cellphones is may maybe is more convenient in learning or what. You can take...

S10: **I think** I'm very agree about to take a smartphone to school because **I think** nowadays very international...so we are prone to use smartphones to search a lot of information. For example, if you are...it's a English subject or Chinese or another yeah if you if you...we don't understand about the knowledge about the teacher say and we can use

the smartphone to make my mind be clear.

S09: I agree to you just from my perspective because **I think** it's not just about cellphones but it might be all the electronic equipments that could help our learning to be more convenient and easy because **I think** the advantages with the technology is such so fast in our generations so **I think** smartphones should be allowed in schools and but it should be some rules to students and teachers that just like maybe it should be scheduled and make a timeline that you can use cellphones in several minutes and just for information research yeah so it can be avoid from playing games or just lose attraction.

S10: **I think** there are two kinds of the situation. It is because if today you use the smartphone is in order to search for some information and **I think** that is good but if today you use the smartphone to play the games, that's bad and...

S09: It's not for our.. It's a issue that should be discussed. And what's your opinion? You agree or disagree?

S11: I agree. We should take smartphone to school because smartphone is student's property so yes. It's based on the law.

S09: And what's your opinion? You agree or disagree?

S12: I agree the opinion. Yes.

S09: What's the reason about your agreement?

S12: Should cellphone?

S09: Yeah. Should smartphone.

S12: No. No. No. I disagree. I disagree.

S09: You disagree?

S12: I'm just kidding. I disagree should the cellphone and the cellphone cage.

S09: You disagree our school rule us to put the cellphones in our cage.

S12: Yes. Because **I think** there is our freedom. If we are we will grow up so we should learn how to control ourselves on the playing cellphone.

S09: Yeah.

S12: Yeah. Because **I think** the learning is our...

S09: Our permission.

S12: Yeah.

S09: And next question.

Appendix 2 – Transcription of Negotiative task

Grade 10- Group 1

- S4: **I think** Leofoo Village is...is more expensive than Fancyworld and...but their park feature is more than Fancyworld so I want to go to Janfusun Fancyworld. I want to play G5 and I haven't been to these two parks.
- S3: I live in Taitung so for me Leofoo Village is farther than Fancyworld and I have been to Leofoo Village in...in elementary school. I want to go to Leofoo Village because I want to play the Condor Roller Coaster and the Big Raging God. **I think** Fancyworld game is not my interesting.
- S2: To me, I want to go to Fancyworld because the ticket is cheaper than the other one and I haven't...I haven't go I haven't been there before and I went I went to Leofoo Village when I when I was in six six grade and **I think** Leofoo Village is interesting, too like there have many animal in there and have so many and it's scaryful.
- S1: **I think** Leofoo Village is more attract me because there have many games to play and although it is more expensive than Janfusun Fancyworld but I still want to go to Leofoo Village because I have been there twice and that was fun. But **I think** if we have to go we will choose Janfusun Fancyworld.

Grade 10- Group 2

- S6: I want to go to Fancyworld because Fancyworld is cheaper. And Yunlin have many food can eat.
- S5: I want to go to fancyworld, too because Hsinchu is a desert of delicious food. and I don't know what can I eat. And I really wanna know what Diving Machine G5 is.
- S7: I want to go Fancyworld because last time I went there and I really like G5 and play many times. And it is closer.
- S8: I'm prefer to go to Janfusun Fancyworld because is not that expensive like Leofoo Village. And I have heart disease so I want to play Diving Machine G5. I want to die in the sky.

Grade 10- Group 3

- S4: I will prefer Janfusun Fancyworld because its ticket is more cheap and the Leofoo Village ... and security is lower than Janfusun Fancyworld.
- S1: I have been to Leofoo Village. It's funny and wet.
- S3: Janfusun Fancyworld. Because we have no money.

Grade 11- Group 1

S01: **I think** I like the I like the Leofoo Village much because the Leofoo Village have the water world and animal world and and *youle sheshi* play.

S04: **I think** this *haishi* that the classmates says very good. In Leofoo Village, we have much much change can can can change. OK.

S02: I don't have any experience in Leofoo Village, so **I think** maybe it's good for young people to play there.

S03: I will go to Leofoo Village because my teammates go want to go there.

S01: So, everybody...

S03: We decide to go to Leofoo Village. OK.

Grade 11- Group 2

S05: **I think** Fancyworld is my choose...

S06: My first choice.

S05: My first choose to two parks because because Fancyworld's ticket is more cheaper is cheaper than Leofoo village. So, I will choose the Fancyworld and I have been to Leofoo village few years ago. I went to there with my family. **I think** it is a beautiful place and there are a lot of a lot of beautiful sites. I want to go Fancyworld because there are a lot of playgrounds.

S06: I prefer go to Leofoo Village on graduation trip because its ticket is expensive. Maybe expensive ticket can bring more fun and interesting in this Leofoo Village. So, I prefer go to there.

S07: I want to go to Janfu fancyworld in graduation trip because Janfu fancyworld have G5 and its ticket cheap than Leogoo Village.

S08: **I think** Janfusun Fancyworld is very good than Leofoo Village because Leofoo Village is very expensive. I don't go to the two two park. Never, I don't never go to the... I want to go Janfusun Fancyworld because very interesting than Leofoo Village.

Grade 11- Group 3

S12: I want to go the the Leofoo Village because **I think** it is it is interesting and I don't have been go there before so I want to see it or play yeah play some some some ...game but but two of but both of the park are very expensive because **I think** the price can lower. But it is...

S11: I would like to go to Leofoo Village because I have gone there before and although there

ticket price are expensive but **I think** their roller coaster, Volcano Adventure, Grand Canyon, and the City of Tomb is are pretty good and but also the Janfusun Fancyworld their ticket price is not expensive than Leofoo Village but **I think** their facilities are not interesting for me.

S10: I want to go to the Janfusun because this ticket price is is cheap so I want I want to go to the Janfusun.

S09: I want to go to the Janfusun because it is cheaper and and more exciting and Leofoo Village is too far to Taitung so **I think** Janfusun is the best.

Grade 12- Group 1

S03: For me, I prefer Leofoo Village. Although its price is much higher than the other Janfusun Fancyworld but I love it because it has a roller coaster and lots of adventure and also the Maze-3D Movies and because I want to my trip is full of exciting part and is there of lots of prince or princess stories...like that, so I would choose the Leofoo Village.

S02: To me, I will choose the Leofoo Village amusement park because I have never been the this amusement park and I will maybe I will I can take some advantage in this park and find something new.

S04: I would choose Janfusun Fancyworld because the price the ticket price is much cheaper than Leofu Village and me personally I don't enjoy riding those exciting rides so Janfusun Fancyworld is my choice.

S01: For me, I will prefer to choose go to the Leofu Village because I like to play the exciting facilities in there such as the Condor Roller Coaster, Big Raging God, and the Volcano Adventure and on the other hand, there are beautiful place in my childhood because my parent have take me there in my when I was eight years old.

Grade 12- Group 2

S08: Because I've been to the two parks so I prefer to shopping shopping in the department store. So, maybe we can change the change the schedule on the maybe we can change the schedule above so maybe **I think** school can listening to our schools. Maybe we can change we can go to the go to the *Libao* amusement so *wo buhuile, jiexialai yao zenme jiang?*

S06: Because they have a ...

S08: Because they have outdoor water water water equipment *haishi* facility

S06: Facility, water facility.

S08: Water facility to make us to have a fun day.

S06: **I think** I will choose a cheaper one, so I will choose Janfusun because they also have a G5.

S08: *G shenme?*

S06: G5.

S08: Oh, G5.

S06: Yeah. Very exciting. So, I will choose Janfusun.

S07: I don't want to choose Janfusun because it's too too old to pay the equipment. Leofoo Village is very interesting park.

S05: I want to Leofoo Village because because it is very very...

Grade 12- Group 3

S09: Second question is about a trip that we just finished a few years ago a few months ago.

It's about our graduation trip and we all know that we have a four-day trip and going out our living Taitung. And the place we have been the park the first one is Taichung and Fengjia and Kaohsiung and some university. Now, we have to discuss about two amusement park we could choose if we have a chance to have another graduation trip and the two option one of the option is Leofoo Village and it's in Hsinchu. It's ticket price for cost eight hundred and ninety-nine dollars for each person and our second option is Janfusun Fancyworld. It's in Yunlin and its ticket price is a little bit lower than the former one. It's cost six hundred ninety-nine dollars for each person. And the park features is about Leofoo Village. All I can see is like Big Raging God and Volcano Adventure. It's maybe the famous the most famous feature in the park. And Janfusun Fancyworld have Diving machine G5. It's a exciting entertainment. Another will be Super Swing. It just like a boat and you sit down it will swing up and down and make you want to throw your stomach out. So the first guiding question, what do you think about this two parks?

S12: Seriously, I have never been to Janfusun so I prefer Leofoo Village because... how to say that you know their features more than Janfusun Fancyworld so you know what you like to play.

S11: Yeah. I know I know Leofoo Village feature so I know that so I want to go there.

S09: And how about you?

S10: I'm more tend to the Janfusun because it is my favorite like the park in Taiwan. It is because when I was a little children and my my family had take me and my sister to there so I'm very I have very good experience about that. So, if I can and if I have this chance, I want to go to there again.

S09: So, what is your reason why you not to choose to Leofoo Village.

S10: **I think** that is because I first is I have ever have haven't I have ever to go to there in my

life so I don't have any chance about that. It is I personally don't want to go to play so if today you tell me have these two opportunity and can let me to choose, I want to choose the first one yeah. It's Janfusun it's because that have good memory for myself.

S09: I see. And what about you?

S1?: Janfusun Fancyworld. You choose Janfusun.

S12: Yeah. That is my choice.

S09: And what's your reason? Why you are going to choose?

S12: It is cheaper than Leofu Village.

S10: So budget is your first come to your mind?

S1?: The lower budget.

S12: Yeah. The lower.

S1?: For you may feel more comfortable than Leofu Village.

S12: Yeah.

S1?: Just for its two hundred dollars.

S12: No. No. No. Also have another reason. **I think** that the important one is there are many memories with my friends.

S1?: Some memories with girlfriends?

S12: Not girlfriend. Yeah. With my classmate and family.

S1?: So you guys both have some good memories no matter in Leofu or Janfusun. So all of you are prefer to go where you have been before not to choose a new place you haven't been, right?

S12: Huh? Again.

S1?: So after listen to your choice, I heard that all of you is going to choose where you have been before like Janfusun and Leofu and you are not prefer to go a new place you haven't been before. So, it maybe have many reasons but most play a role **I think** is memories you have with your families and your classmates. So, **I think** this is the main reason to lead to this consequence, right?

S1?: Yeah.

Appendix 3 – Transcription of Descriptive task

Grade 10- Group 1

S01: I see three people in this picture and a smartphone and some money have wings and they fly away.

S04: **I think** this is a family and the kid is...is *yaoqiu yao zenme jiang?*

S02: Require...acquire.

S04: Acquire his father to give him some money to buy cellphone because he is old phone is broken...is fly away.

S02: But his dad his dad is a black people he wants the children and the mom...people.

S04: His dream.

S02: What?

S01: So, maybe he is a chocolate?

S04: Chocolate?

S01: Sorry.

S03: **I think** she is the widow

S04: The *shenme?*

S03: Widow.

S04: Window? What? *Shenme?* Widow?

S03: Yeah.

S04: Oh, widow. So mean. Wow. So mean.

S02: And **I think** it is in the winter because they all wear coats and gloves and...

S01: Sweater.

S02: And sweater and the hats.

S01: And shoes.

S03: **I think** the woman look his... her husband and she buy a...

S04: Buy a money in the heaven.

S03: She pay the cellphone and the money to father to buy husband.

S01: What comes to your mind when you see this image?

S02: Huh?

S03: What comes to your mind when you see this image?

S04: Whenever. Whatever. This money and cellphones and maybe the man is her father. She is asking... How do they feel? They feel happy because they all smiling.

S02: You sure?

S04: But I don't know why they are smiling because their mother's cellphone is gone.

S01: Because they burn the cellphone and the money to give the husband in the heaven.

S02: **I think** the man unhappy because this children is going...

S04: Are asking money.

S02: Yeah, is asking money to him for him.
 S01: Is he his children?
 S04: Children?
 S01: *Meiyou la shi* child. *Zhiyou yige*.
 S03: **I think** he is want to a hug. His father not money and cellphone.
 S02: It's a warm family.
 S01: Yeah.
 S04: It's warm picture. Yeah. They are happy and he is giving money.
 S01: But their money flew fly away.

Grade 10- Group 2

S05: And I see there is a woman. And maybe is her child with a black man, yeah. I am not
 races is just a black man, yeah.
 S06: And the money...
 S05: And the money flying in the sky, and the eraser flying in the sky, too.
 S06: Or the smartphone.
 S05: Maybe the money and that eraser is an angel or something.
 S06: And the black man...
 S05: Is a *shenfu*.
 S06: Have a wallet on her hand on his hand.
 S04: His hand is black.
 S05: So they are so they give black man money and the black man gave her give they eraser.
 So they are making a deal.
 S06: Yes.
 S05: Yes.
 S06: And the money face the the the the
 S05: White.
 S06: The woman.
 S05: What?
 S06: So the money fly
 S05: Away.
 S06: To the woman not the black man.
 S05: Ok Good. Ok so maybe he..
 S06: The child want that eraser.
 S05: The child want that eraser?
 S06: Maybe her mom want money, and the child will go to *jian pu zhai*.
 S05: No no. not good. If I was this kids, I don't want eraser, yeah. I want the smartphone and
 using that in the class just like task one.
 S06: And use the money to go to the Leofoo Village.
 S05: Maybe maybe is the woman
 S07: But the child the boy has rise his hand. Maybe maybe...

S05: Maybe is making...I don't know how to say that *mobai*.
S07: Maybe is pray. Maybe the child has...
S05: What are you talking about? And maybe is the woman give the eraser to the black man, and the black man gave them money. It's like *dangpu*.
S06: The child ...
S05: What? The child?
S06: Sell to the black man. His mother his mother didn't want the boy.
S05: The mother the mother
S06: Gave the man
S05: Gave the man child, and the man gave her eraser and money.
S06: Yes.
S05: So like *renshe jituan*.
S06: People snake company.

Grade 10- Group 3

S11: I see three people one cellphone and some money. The money and cellphone to the sky. They feel happy because their face has smiled.
S09: This picture try to say lending money to people in need is great.
S11: **I think** they are funny.
S12: Ridiculous.

Grade 11- Group 1

S04: I see the money in the sky and phone in the sky. There are some people wear wear the heavy coat. Maybe it's very cold.
S01: I see a man and a woman and a kid and maybe they they feel happy because the have the smile on their face.
S03: I see a mother and a child giving them money and phone cellphone.
S01: The picture is tell me giving is important and can make everybody happy.

Grade 11- Group 2

S08: A black man and tall girl and little boy and a money can fly.
S07: Credit card.
S08: And one credit card. They can fly, too. **I think** a black man use money buy the two people. The woman is very happy looks his her smile. The little boy is happy, too. The black man is happy. **I think** the picture tell me money can buy everything around the world. Girl right and something, you can use money.
S07: I see a kid and a woman. And a man in this picture. And the money and the credit card. **I**

think they are doing trade. They feel very happy from their smile.

S06: Big smile.

S05: Big smile.

S07: The money and the credit card is flying. So, we can see the woman is trading his kids for the man. So this picture is tell me money can buy everything.

S05: I see a woman, a man, and a children. And I see they are talking face to face and they feel so happy because this conversation can make them money. And **I think** this picture trying to say if you if you can talk to everyone, maybe you can earn much money.

S06: I see a woman, a man, a child. I see the man give the woman and child money and credit card. I feel they are family in previous, but now they are the divorce so **I think** the man give money is the woman and child *shenghuofei*.

Grade 11- Group 3

S09: I see a man and a woman and a children in the picture. I see a cellphone and money with wings. **I think** the picture wants to tell us when you put your cellphone down, you will get more money.

S10: In this picture, I see the three people and and a woman, a children, a black man and **I think** the picture want to tell us... want to tell us... I see the money fly into the woman and children and the credit card fly with the black man so **I think** this is a a a...

S11: In this picture, I saw a woman, a kid, and a man and I see the credit card and the money fly away. Maybe lots of people think this is a very peace scene but but **I think** this is very horrible. **I think** they are doing the human trafficking and the man wants to buy the boy. Although the boy is looks happy but **I think** in their heart he is very very scared. So, the money means the man use money and credit card to buy some woman, yeah this is very bad. So, **I think** the picture is talking about don't don't don't have the human trafficking. It is illegal and it is very serious problem in the world.

S12: When I look the picture, I see a woman and a little boy and a black man and a flying money and cellphone. Then, **I think** they are they are trade because I see the money and something and **I think** the black man and **I think** the black man is a is a customer because I see the wallet and the woman is is selling the little boy because the because the woman's hand put the push the little boy, so **I think** it is the woman sell the little boy to change for some money and the black man can can have a little boy to use he. But the little boy is very happy because I see her his face, so **I think** and man and the little boy is a happy family. Then, so **I think** the picture is want to talk me that money can can exchange a little boy but **I think I think** the little boy is bad. I want a little girl. And I see when I see the image, I immediately think the woman is is married with the black man because the black man is is is using the money to *baoyang zenme nian* to to

purchase them.

Grade 12- Group 1

S02: After throwing the money and cellphone away, they feel much happier because they now have time to interact with their family.

S03: In the middle of the picture, we can see there is money and cellphones on the three people's head and the little child stretch their hands to get the phone and money and **I think** in my opinion, that mean cellphone is more related and child wants money less than cellphones and **I think** although these two things is essential for our life and lots of our life but it's not the most important things and **I think** this image want to tell us that be careful because one day this will gone away. Just like they come very fast and they will go very fast either.

S04: **I think** this picture tell me that the most part of our life is not money and cellphone. We should accompany with our family and abandon the materialistic life but search for spiritual life.

S01: **I think** the picture is want to convey that winter is coming and we need is the family's warmth instead of materialistic bringing to us so we need to care more about our family because there are a lot of people who can support you.

S02: **I think** this picture is trying to convey that family is more important the cellphone and money and we should spend more time with our families instead of playing cellphone or going to work.

Grade 12- Group 2

S08: From...judging from the picture, I saw a couple. They have a child. Because and the money because they have child so their money was gone. Because to to nurture a child is is spend so is spend too many too much money to nurture them. And the the the next expression was was so...

S07: Very good.

S08: Very very bad because the man is a needy and they don't like child because he's not he's not like child because because because a child would took many a lot of money from her yes away.

S07: So, I see this picture shows the the man and a the man lose a lot of money because of their because of his wife and his child. So, this story tells us family family spend lots of money.

S08: The money have wings, and it can fly, fly away.

S07: But they are they are happy because the child... this story tells us we need to choose a

richer family.

S08: If we don't have money, we can't birth a child. All of our leisure time because we can't we can't nurture a child because it will lead to our leisure time will be taken over by the by the child.

S07: And also make our make our cash and credit card have wings so they can fly.

S08: Yes. They can fly. Fly, fly, fly.

S08: And this story tell told us the money is is the angle angel. So, we should earn more money in our life.

S07: **I think** this story tell us although he's like doesn't have a lot of money. What do you think?

S08: *Wo mei tingdao ye.* I I I consider that the story bring the grieving feeling for us because the money is flying the money have a wings and it will fly away. And our wallet will be empty. So sad.

S07: **I think** if we have the power to can help people, we should do it.

S08: **I think** the family is harmony but strictly because they limit the child the kids not to use cellphone and don't give give give him give him allowance.

S08: Where's the cellphone in this picture?

S07: That.

S08: That one is credit card.

S07: Oh, credit card. The kids was so *kelian zenme jiang?*

S08: Poor.

S07: So poor because he don't have any allowance in my eye.

S08: His allowance is flying.

S07: Yeah yeah yeah. Because his allowance have wings so it can fly.

S06: According to the picture, we can know they are live in live in a cold cold nation, maybe maybe Canada or Norway, Iceland. So, they don't have money.

S08: Because they take their money to buy their sweater.

S06: Sweater, yeah. They take money to buy sweater. So, they don't have money. The kids rise her hand and catch the flake of ice flake of snow, I guess. I guess. And the snow in her eyes is such as is like money and credit card. *Youmeiyou daoli?* It's reasonable. *Tuice zenme jiang?*

S08: Preditation.

S06: The preditation is reasonable. Yes.

S07: Maybe maybe the credit card and the money were were dead, they become a spirit and the family were the angels to welcome to them to come to the heaven. Yes.

S08: So, the money and credit card are going to heaven now.

S07: Heaven now.

S08: Heaven. People in the heaven.

S07: Yes. Going to heaven now. They are very good things to help people gain the better quality of life.

S08: So, they are angel.

S07: They are angel.

S08: To help people.

S06: To make people happy.

S07: To make people better.

Grade 12- Group 3

S09: The third question. Final question. Picture description. So, we are going to look at this picture with a black man and a short woman and a unknown sexual little kid with money and three C electronics with feather and fly in the sky. So, how's your feeling with this picture?

S10: I don't know. I have to have to take a look first.

S09: And I'm going to talk about my thoughts after look at the picture. So, first thing I'm looking at will be the money and cellphone which is fly in the sky. So, because I'm not the author to this picture, but after my guessing, **I think** maybe it's a imagination that related to our new generation about rapid rise of technology and our maybe our money is become much more than before maybe than 1960s, 1970s. Yeah, so **I think** their emotions that showed on their face everyone seems to be happy. **I think** maybe money and electronics technology are the reason leads them to have this emotion. Maybe my guess isn't right but **I think** it's a funny discussion that you can just take it. And how about you?

S11: I didn't get the question.

S09: Just describe the picture or you can follow the guiding questions.

S11: Just some money some money and electronic products are flying, yeah.

S09: And how's the person?

S11: Their facial...their looking... I don't know. They look...they are happy, **I think**. Yeah.

S09: And what do you think they will be smile?

S11: I don't know. Serious I don't know. I just say what I what I what I see.

S09: You think is weird that money and products flying in the sky and people see it with a smile.

S11: Yeah. I don't know why. Maybe it can be a mystery.

S10: How about you?

S09: OK. You go first. Look at the picture and talk about what you see.

S12: I see the black man two black men. No, just one black man and one woman and a children. They see the money have a flight.

S09: Have a fight.

S12: Flight. And I don't know what is this.

S09: It seems to be a cellphone.

S12: **I think** that is a eraser.

S09: You think is a eraser.

S12: As you can see, this object is the our necessary in our normal life, so the black man look at the money. He want money

S09: Yes. I agree.

S12: The woman look at the black person.

S09: So the woman wants a husband not the money and cellphone.

S12: **I think** that every people have their own want their.. what they want. Whatever. This is their dream

S09: Their dreams to have such a object.

S12: The children want a...

S09: Eraser?

S12: Yeah. Eraser or cellphone. Whatever. The black people want make more money in his in his dream.

The woman... and he want...

S09: But **I think**, my different angle to see this picture. Maybe the children wants the black man to be his father because he just put their his hand out and maybe trying to hug the person.

S12: Yeah. As you can see, put on the coat. You can see they are cold.

S09: They are cold, yeah.

S12: So they put on a coat.

S09: Because they are cold so they put on the coat. With their coat, we can know they are cold.

S12: So they look so heavy because they are fight against the cold weather.

S09: The weather make them look heavy.

S1?: Because there are monsters in our hearts. They make us to be cold like snakes. So, they need a passion

on their life so that through this money and cellphone.

S1?: Really good.

S09: Very good. Thank you.

S12: Welcome. Welcome.

S09: And the next one. Just look at the picture and say what you see

S10: OK. I see three kinds of people and have one man is black and two kind of people is maybe white or yellow like us. So, there are they are watching the money and the smartphone. It's smartphone or not?

S1?: NO, chocolate.

S1?: Eraser, right?

S1?: Just kidding.

S1?: It is eraser.

S1?: Oh. Eraser. OK. OK. OK.

S1?: Is that look like a...

S1?: Maybe the children's dream is about drawing and maybe the eraser is just..

S1?: And why you don't need... it is not a pen?

S10: Yeah yeah yeah I know, I know. So, they select these two kind of objects and maybe they can feel equal each other, **I think**. It's because in the past, the black people and the white people have a lot of discrimination for each other, so this picture they can to see the same the same objects at the same time. It's equal to these three kind of people.

S09: So the racist is disappear between each other.

S10: Yeah. Yeah.

S09: So they could see same thing equally through their eyes.

S10: OK.

S09: What's more?

S10: How do they feel? Maybe they can feel...

S09: Just look at their weird smile.

S1?: Yeah. They are very happy and harmony, maybe. **I think** they maybe they are discussing discussion something or not. **I think** this picture is very is very positive for myself. So maybe they are discussion about money or how to use eraser to do something, maybe.

S??: But have you ever think about this kid and his movement to the black man. Maybe he's putting out his hands and just want a hug not for the object flying in the sky.

S1?: OK.

S??: Because I see his eye is contact with the black man but the black man's eyes is for the money. Yeah. So **I think** this is another angle to see the picture.

S??: I agree. Yeah. And **I think** the little children want a big huge about the... he is in his eyes he only to see the money. So...

S??: With another angle to see, maybe this woman she wants neither the money nor the cellphone. It's the male who standing in her how to say in her eyes.

S??: Maybe he wants she wants to marry him or make a family to let her kid have a dad and it also can say to make the children's childhood to be more happiness.

S??: Have you thought about why they want to wear a coat? Just because the weather or another simile?

S??: Maybe this is not a real scene would be happen in our life. **I think** maybe it's a like a drama in our heart so it just like an imagination about maybe it will be happen in our future because we are a senior high student and we are going to graduate from schools

and after graduated from college, out first thing to face it's going to find a work to earn the money to feed ourselves maybe at that time we will have a girlfriend or maybe faster...

S??: Have a family.

S??: Yeah, have a family. So, money will be the first thing we have to consider about and **I think** cellphone is just for kids because just like us, we have cellphones maybe like when we are thirteen, fourteen, we are in junior high school so, cellphone is a thing that kids must have to meet the trend.

S??: It's trend in our generation.

S??: So, if it were just an imagination, **I think** maybe it's from a student who is going to graduate from school and going to contact with social.

S1?: Social with somebody.

S1?: Yeah.

S??: So, this picture has lots of different situations for us can think.

S09: Because this picture would be different just be different statements everyone would say after they saw. So, it can say it's be funny but more you can say is mystery and maybe it's like a little mentally to everyone and with your mentally different, your your answer your looking at will be a lot of differences.

S1?: OK.

S1?: I agree.

