

An Analysis of Linguistic Discrimination: Undergraduate Reactions to Nonnative Instructors

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Abstract

The following paper details a project begun with goals of eliciting and analyzing University of Michigan undergraduate opinions of nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructors (NNS GSIs) in relation to linguistic discrimination. The paper's original hypothesis proposes that though linguistic discrimination applies to all undergraduate judgments of instructors, increased age and experience with nonnative English-speaking instructors produces a lower degree of discrimination. Both the university program for prospective GSIs not educated in English as well as academic sources discussing international teaching assistants in the United States, supply context for the interviews with Michigan undergraduates. This Michigan case study does not support the original assumption that older students would be less discriminatory, but instead, it provides evidence of dichotomous ideologies factoring into undergraduate assessments of NNS GSIs. An unconscious belief that nonnative instructors are inherently inferior compared to native instructors because of the inferiority of nonnative speech exists among various philosophies in combination to shape the students' mainly negative opinions. Following the interview process, I formulated a new hypothesis, which assumes that all students are apt to be linguistically discriminatory based on the aforementioned socially constructed ideology. By holding multiple ideologies at once, they may avoid realization of their discriminatory behavior, which likely arises as a result of academic stress and a power structure favoring native residents. The final section of the paper discusses University of Michigan-specific proposals for improving student-instructor interactions and lessening linguistic discrimination. By integrating the undergraduate perspective with an account of institutional practice as well as scholarly discourse concerning international instructors, this paper presents a multi-faceted discussion of the linguistic discrimination of nonnative English-speaking instructors at the University of Michigan.

This project began with the hypothesis that linguistic discrimination affects all student assessments of nonnative English-speaking GSIs but that the intensity of discrimination diminishes as students' age and experience with these particular instructors increases. Interviews with twenty undergraduate participants (five individuals from each of the four undergraduate years) facilitated examination of these hypotheses by eliciting undergraduate opinions of NNS GSIs. Responses to interviews disproved the latter part of my original hypothesis concerning the effect of age, and an ideologically based theory for commonalities in answers emerged instead. Several, often conflicting, social and linguistic ideologies seemed to operate simultaneously within interviewees while they discussed opinions on NNS GSIs. Whether opinions were mainly negative or positive all seemed to feature at least traces of a bias for 'good' English, supporting the first part of the original hypothesis, but not the second. Subsequently, the hypothesis shifted from an explanation for discrimination focusing on undergraduate demographics, to an explanation reasoning that an unconscious, socially constructed ideology facilitates negative collocations of nonnative speech with GSIs' performances in the classroom.

Beginning in my first semester at the University of Michigan, various classroom experiences heightened my sensitivity to negative peer critiques of NNS GSIs. While a pattern of devaluation took root in my mind, I first assumed that the general condemnation of nonnative speakers issued from an inherent and enigmatic dislike of the instructors. However, sociolinguistic analysis suggests that 'linguistic discrimination' and not simple malice, explains the behavior. The American student's specific expectations for instructor speech and style in the classroom means that "a teacher's method of handling questions is as important as the content of the answers to the students asking the questions" (Smith, et. al, 1992, p. 91), and these expectations are governed by the standard language ideology, which promotes a single, 'correct'

version of English as preferable to any other variation (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). While no native speaker can achieve so-called linguistic ‘perfection’, standard language ideology encourages them to negatively assess those individuals with English as a second or foreign language, and this belief system works on undergraduate judgments of NNS GSIs at the University of Michigan.

During interviews, Michigan undergraduates expressed linguistically discriminatory ideas¹ without identifying them as such and at other times gave answers reflecting tolerance and understanding. The contradictory nature of responses may be explained by undergraduates’ multiple ideologies affecting perceptions of instructors. Of these ideologies, students seem particularly unaware of their societally embedded belief that nonnative speech implies poor instructional skills. They may be more cognizant of some of their other ideologies, but in any case, the cognitive dissonance in many interviews because of these multiple, conflicting ideologies becomes evident upon examination. Undergraduate expectations of instructors’ speech align with the power of nativeness to determine what language is acceptable. Author, Lippi-Green (1996), discusses the ways in which “we rely on language traits to judge others...Language is – among other things – a flexible and constantly flexing tool for the emblematic marking of social allegiances. We use variation in language to construct ourselves as social beings, to signal who we are, and who we are not – and cannot be” (p. 291). Given this social function of language, one may contextualize the negative reaction of students to unfamiliar language spoken by NNS GSIs. If social identity is at least partially established through language use and NNS GSIs disrupt undergraduate expectations of appropriate classroom language, students have an opportunity to construct a negative identity of their instructors by drawing on

¹ For example, students assumed that the problems encountered in a classroom with an NNS GSI were entirely the fault of the instructor based on their nonnative speech.

pre-existing negative stereotypes of nonnative speech. The stress of academic performance also often encourages undergraduate students to move to an exaggerated pessimistic response to an instructor's speech and what that particular speech may imply. Issues of power as well as academic pressures create the opportunity for linguistic discrimination, but more important than considerations of power or students' grades is the unconscious, socially constructed ideology supporting a negative stereotype of both NNS GSI speech and instructorial ability.

In universities across the United States, many college undergraduate students unconsciously base conclusions about instructors' skill upon a discriminatory understanding of linguistic features. In his research, Donald Rubin (1992) addresses the high proportion of negative student analyses of these types of instructors and discusses the possibility "that the NNSTA 'problem', an understanding of these instructors as inferior, may be explained at least partially as a problem of undergraduates' negative stereotyping" (p. 512).² Undergraduate 'stereotyping' issues from an unconscious socially constructed ideology based on deeply ingrained concepts of standardized language that position linguistic discrimination as natural. Standard language ideology suggests that there is one correct form of English better than all others, and when one evaluates speech in this manner, speakers of different varieties may also be evaluated based on their proximity or distance from the 'standard'.

Prepared by standard language ideology to formulate and perpetuate stereotypes regarding language and speakers, undergraduates enter classrooms equipped to critique their GSIs. For those graduate students with English as a foreign language, a University of Michigan classroom can therefore become an antagonistic environment. Discussions of 'linguistic discrimination' do not discount undergraduate concerns with the intelligibility of their

² The acronyms NNSTA, NNS GSI (nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructor), and NNS (nonnative speaker) are used interchangeably.

instructors, but rather suggest students' distress as being based upon preconceived and socially constructed biases. When accepting language barriers as the single root of classroom issues between undergraduates and NNS GSIs, the GSIs alone, as the party deviating from the 'standard', receive blame for difficulties and are expected to ameliorate the situation. Undergraduates on the other hand, do not often assume responsibility in addressing the matter. This unequal division of responsibility is illogical, given the fact that many students unknowingly identify problems as a result of their ingrained negative stereotype of the nonnative speaking instructors rather than actual issues. By speaking with undergraduates regarding their feelings about nonnative English-speaking GSIs, I tease apart the underlying factors contributing to their judgments because with better understanding one may begin devising mechanisms to address the true problem.

This paper next progresses to the Methods section with a discussion of research methods involved with undergraduate interviews and other aspects of the project. In the NNS GSI Training and Issues section, I briefly outline some of the ways in which others have approached these sociolinguistic issues, followed by a discussion in the next section, University of Michigan GSI Specifics, of the particular ways in which the University of Michigan currently addresses undergraduate-NNS relations. In the Discussion section, I investigate sociolinguistic theory as it relates to NNS GSIs and apply this to an examination of my data in the Interview section. The Recommendations section presents ideas for addressing linguistic discrimination at the University of Michigan. Finally, the Further Research section includes possible ideas for continuing research on this subject and a brief conclusion, and the paper finishes with an Appendix and Bibliography.

Methods

Research for this project began with a literature review on nonnative English speakers, followed by an investigation of university practice, a brief observation of an instructor course for NNS GSIs, and interviews with undergraduate students. Prior to conducting interviews, I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, which included submitting interview questions for an ethics review, and waiting for approval. Once approved, I procured participants, first by soliciting friends and acquaintances, and then asking for referrals to other potential interviewees. Twenty individuals, five from each year of undergraduate education, agreed to an interview with me without any compensation. To avoid missing or forgetting critical information, I recorded sessions using a small digital recorder and transcribed them at a later date instead of taking notes during the interviews. An example of the rough transcriptions appears in Appendix C. All interviews are anonymous, though in order to look for trends among interviews, I did ask participants to provide some demographic information including: age, year in school, major, ethnicity, and gender. Each session included the fifteen IRB-approved questions, which were designed to be non-biased and to elicit undergraduate opinions on nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructors. A copy of these questions may also be found in the Appendix. The interviews were meant to be informal, but in order to preserve the integrity of the IRB application and the neutrality of the interviews I consciously tried to limit my participation. I attempted to ask only the original questions and clarification questions, which resulted in more monologic interviewee explanations and less dialogic interactions, making sessions casual but not conversational.

Prior to the start of each interview, held in local coffee shops and residences, I described the project briefly, made note of the recording device, reiterated their anonymity as participants,

outlined the remainder of the session, and encouraged questions at any point. I also took pains to assure interviewees that this was meant to be a relaxed process, not meant to elicit any particular answer but rather to afford them the opportunity to express their honest opinions. I specifically highlighted my intention that interviews be relatively comfortable since the knowledge of having one's speech recorded and later analyzed for a research project seemed possibly intimidating. Most participants seemed fairly at ease though still cognizant of the digital recorder, which may have affected answers slightly.

In investigating the University of Michigan's particular system for international graduate student instructors, I looked in depth at the policies and practices of the Center for Research in Learning and Teaching (CRLT) and the English Language Institute (ELI), which eventually led to several observations of a summer ELI course for hopeful graduate student instructors whose undergraduate studies were not conducted in English. These steps provided vital background information on the specifics of University of Michigan practices and helped me to establish an effective list of interview questions. The next two sections include a discussion of the particular ways in which other American universities as well as the University of Michigan approach issues involving nonnative English-speaking instructors and the associated concerns of undergraduate students.

NNS GSI Issues and Training

In conjunction with a substantial increase in the number of international graduate students at American colleges and universities and subsequent increase in NNS GSIs, academics saw a rise in work published regarding International Teaching Assistant (ITA)³ programs. Rising from

³ This is also equivalent in this paper to *NNSTA* and other similar acronyms.

175,000 in 1970 to 387,000 in 1989/90 (Fox, 1991), the enlarged number of foreign students overall meant a greater proportion of international graduate level instructors. In the 1980s, growing numbers of undergraduate complaints about nonnative instructors likely factored into the shift among many American universities that had not previously offered any GSI preparatory courses to provide GSI training programs (Rubin, 1992). This section outlines both early and current prevailing ideas on NNS instructor training by examining examples of specific practices as well as general suggestions of effective approaches. Other relevant research and guidelines concerning these types of programs may be compared with the program in place at the University of Michigan, described in the following section.

Though a slightly older publication, the text, Teaching Assistant Training in the 1990s, outlines some of the basic considerations in ITA programs that remain relevant. Janet Constantinides (1989), for instance, discusses the specifics of four different types of courses: orientation, pre-session, concurrent, and pre-term, which an institution might implement. Orientation programs cost the institution the least amount of time and money but most likely only cover basic departmental requirements and a small amount of language instruction in a few days before the start of classes. Pre-session programs run slightly longer and focus more energy on “training in cross-cultural communication skills, instructional methods, and language skills within the culture of the specific institution...”(p. 72-3), which actually allows instructors to practice utilizing the new information rather than just memorizing a list of *do*'s and *don*'ts. Both orientation and pre-session programs invest fewer resources in GSI training than the latter two types of programs.

Concurrent programs last longer, running simultaneously with the instructor's placement in the classroom, and provide much more information than the previous two course styles. While

the length of the program presents an advantage over both of the aforementioned approaches, offering a longer period to acquire language skills and departmental knowledge, concurrent courses still include drawbacks. During the term the graduate students must divide their time amongst classes, research, theses, or other projects, limiting available time and effort to devote to the course. With the addition of a course full of new information to be incorporated in the classroom to their other commitments, GSIs may not effectively change their behavior in a concurrent program (Constantinides 1989). Continually upsetting expectations for appropriate linguistic behavior can indicate disrespect for undergraduates who have been conditioned to associate ‘appropriate’ language with standard language ideology. Not following standard guidelines could suggest that instructor does not care for the needs of his or her students or is not able to communicate in the correct manner and has not taken the time to learn to do so. Undergraduates view the offending speech as adding unnecessary toil to their lives and as possibly jeopardizing their success in the class. These assumptions and fears of the students may cause increased linguistic discrimination.

The preterm program, though most expensive for the university and most time consuming for the potential instructors, also probably functions the most effectively as a teaching method among the four choices. Instructors not yet teaching have the opportunity to review concepts and practice skills fully, and program administrators have the opportunity to include elements viewed as vital for success by Sequeira and Constantino (1989) such as “trained personnel in each of three content areas: ESL, instructional development, and cross-cultural communication” (p. 83). Preterm programs can offer the most diverse courses and place greater focus on relevant cultural differences and similarities than the other three courses that seem to address language, departmental information, and instructional style first and foremost.

Constantinides (1989) also emphasizes that staff of these programs should be knowledgeable of different educational systems, the particulars of their university's demographics, and the tone of campus discourse on undergraduate-nonnative instructor relations. She and many other researchers agree that staff should prepare instructors adequately for what they could encounter in the classroom, contrasting this with the instructors' previous educational background and experience. The Center for Teaching and Learning at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (1989) similarly encourages instructors to "be aware of possible reactions among the students to [features of] race, gender, age, ethnicity, physical attributes, and abilities" (p. 45). These suggestions focus on dissimilarities between NNS GSIs and undergraduates and situate the instructors as responsible for bridging the gap of differences.

In addition to the framework of these four typified programs, authors, Sequeira and Constantino (1989), note two further possible classifications for NNS GSI training. Institutions may either choose to facilitate courses, which rely upon the assignation of a final grade, or else provision of an ongoing support system. Standardized oral and written proficiency tests may be more easily incorporated into a system that places heavy emphasis on grades as indicators of success. In contrast, the "client-consultant model" for GSI training (Sequeira & Constantino, 1989, p. 82) operates on an ongoing basis and allots time for interactive methods of teaching and learning like role-play, video simulation, interview, and other participatory techniques. For instance, at "the University of Missouri at Columbia, undergraduates are involved in an interactive approach, in which they function as trainers as well as learners" (Sequeira & Constantino, 1989, p. 83), meaning that students sit through mock classes and provide feedback on performance to potential GSIs. These interactive strategies encourage communicative competence, or the ability to contextualize language use, over simple linguistic competence. A

program focusing on linguistic competence correlates well with the use of standardized tests and minimum required course grades for the evaluation of potential instructors like in Sequeira and Constantino's (1989) first type of course. In the world of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, many agree that instructors should be "making communicative competence the goal of language teaching [...] acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 121), and many NNS GSI training programs, working with instructors who learned English as a foreign language, focus on producing communicatively competent instructors.

Julie Damron's (2000) work also contemplates undergraduate involvement in training programs, which perhaps indicates an attention to communicative competence. She discusses cases such as those of the University of New Mexico and University of Delaware in which students generally function as reviewers in some capacity providing constructive feedback on instructors' performance by either direct or indirect means to the prospective instructors. The feedback of these students assists instructors in learning to perform in a contextually appropriate manner, often the violation of which results in undergraduate frustration. As I discuss later in the paper, many University of Michigan undergraduates see an unfamiliar contextualization of language use as a problem.

Elsewhere, researchers have investigated student reactions similar to those of the Michigan students in this study. Donald L. Rubin, for example, sought to determine whether involving undergraduates in GSI training would affect discriminatory tendencies and conducted multiple experiments demonstrating that undergraduates do often operate under the influence of negative stereotypes when considering international instructors. Students were employed to review instructor skills, but despite exposure to the NNS GSIs and the training process, they

persisted in negative stereotyping (Rubin 1992). At Heartland University⁴, Wanda Sue Fox (1991) found that undergraduate complaints regarding international instructors had led to state legislation requiring the screening of ITAs. In contrast to some of the other researchers, she observed that the resulting program provided the chance for educational and cultural acclimation and supported language and cultural learning with the assistance of undergraduate reviewers as well as native teaching assistants, placing undergraduate involvement in ITA training in a slightly more positive light. Similarly, Sarkisian and Maurer (1998) mention, “research suggests that involving undergraduates in ITA training can have a positive effect on undergraduate-ITA relations (Plakans, 1997) [with] the added benefit of preparing undergraduates for cultural diversity. Many undergraduates who participate view ITAs with new respect and understanding, an attitude that they may pass on to their peers” (Sarkisian & Maurer, 1998, p. 172). While not guaranteed to be an effective attitude adjuster, some researchers have experienced or recorded successes in involving undergraduates in instructor training. Yet, even if some successes have been identified, cases like that at the University of Michigan demonstrate that issues still exist in NNS GSI-undergraduate relations, and will most likely improve when universities confront undergraduate stereotypes.

The University of Michigan training for international graduate students who hope to be graduate instructors appears fairly extensive and includes the support of both the English Language Institute and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. The combined efforts of these two bodies emphasize effective teaching methods, cultural understanding, and standard language use, placing greater focus on the first two points. With so many resources and the

⁴ Heartland University is a pseudonym for a Midwestern research university.

expertise of the staff involved with this Michigan program, it is startling to still see problems with discrimination in undergraduate-GSI interactions.

University of Michigan GSI Specifics

In addition to researching linguistic and educational literature on general approaches to nonnative speaking teaching assistant training, I researched two groups at the University of Michigan engaged with the linguistic issues highlighted in this paper. Resources and philosophies of the English Language Institute (ELI) and Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) affect lives of nonnative English-speaking graduate students at the University of Michigan hoping to be instructors. Those not educated at an English-medium undergraduate institution must take a course listed as ELI 994, a class jointly coordinated by the ELI and CRLT. Offered in both Summer and Winter terms, it addresses both linguistic performance⁵ skills as well as pedagogical points. For the practice teaching component of the course the ELI hires undergraduates to act as normal students attending a prospective GSI's discussion section. Student participants provide feedback aloud to the potential instructor directly following each mock lesson⁶. Per ELI instructions, they begin with positive comments and then shift to constructive ideas for improvement, all of which are supposed to be as specific as possible. This progression reflects the ELI's mission, which expresses a desire to "address the needs and rights of graduate students...while, at the same time, valuing the needs and rights of other graduate students, undergraduate students, the faculty, [etc.]...We believe that the entire University community is responsible for successful teaching and learning" (ELI, 2004). By incorporating

⁵ 'Performance' takes into account physical production, stylistic considerations, and culturally appropriate behavior.

⁶ One session is a mock-up of office hours rather than a practice lesson.

undergraduate opinions into the training and asking first for their positive comments, the ELI supports the graduate students, and constructive criticism allows undergraduates to express honest opinions. The mission statement suggests that all parties connected to the university have some responsibility in creating an effective teaching and learning environment. According to ELI principles of “Language and Communication”, “Pedagogy”, and “Communicative Language Ability”, an instructor’s language should convey information in a linguistically, pedagogically, and culturally appropriate manner, demands which entail a good deal work for international, nonnative English speakers. However, the ELI also recommends that the program focus on contextualized language use “co-constructed and negotiated by participants of an interaction” (ELI, 2004), a caveat which theoretically relieves some pressure for NNS GSIs by not expecting them to do all of the linguistic work for effective communication in the classroom. All of these considerations seem supportive of NNS GSIs and undergraduates alike, facilitating equal contributions from teachers and learners to create the best possible classroom environment, an approach that makes sense for all instructor-student relationships regardless of a person’s origins or native language. However, most undergraduates have not actually assumed the responsibility that the ELI suggests, which allows linguistic discrimination to continue.

At the conclusion of this preterm course, the graduate students take the GSI-OET (Oral English Test), a test developed by Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments to determine the linguistic readiness of a graduate student desiring to be an instructor. Importantly, the ELI emphasizes that the GSI-OET does not test whether individuals have the capacity to be ‘good’ teachers. Rather the test specifically examines the adequacy of a potential instructor’s language, but based on the interactive format, diversified rubric, and holistic grading method, test creators designed assessments, which take much more than simple linguistic competence into account.

Relatively short, the entire test lasts only twenty to thirty minutes and comprises a background interview, lesson presentation, office hours, and responses to recorded questions. During the separate portions of the examination, assessors look for demonstration of certain skills as set out by the rubric including: speech (fluency and intelligibility), listening comprehension, transactional competence, and interactional competence. A perfect test taker would be clear, fluent, able to understand other speakers, able to explain ideas effectively with appropriate cultural considerations, and capable of utilizing spoken and nonverbal communication in tandem to create the optimal classroom environment. Immediately after the conclusion of the test, the three evaluators⁷ use a rubric to with scores ranging from 3- to 5, decide on individual evaluations for the candidate. Those conducting the assessment bring their scores together to “discuss the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of the candidate to reach a consensus rating” (ELI, 2011). Upon a decision, evaluators call the graduate student back into the room to reveal the results of the test and discuss the next steps for him or her. Scores of 4 and above qualify a participant to become an instructor, and scores of 4 or 4+ may be improved to a 5 if the participant adequately explains away a mistake or two. Evaluators decide upon a final rating by consensus, utilizing a holistic grading method rather than a strict points system, which excludes the possibility that an imperfect performance on one part of the test necessitates failure. If the student does not pass this test, he or she must take one of the ten other courses that the ELI offers, most often specifically related to speaking or writing skills, before retaking the GSI-OET. Even with a passing grade a graduate student may be asked to take an additional course concurrently with a teaching placement (Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments, 2012).

⁷ Evaluators are two members of the ELI staff and one professor from the participant’s department.

The ELI's 994 course for NNS prospective GSIs incorporates much more than just language preparation into the curriculum, but is not advertised as direct preparation for the GSI-OET. Course administrators and instructors highlight its unique emphasis on pedagogical style, which goes beyond the skills tested in the GSI-OET. In my observation of the course, I noted that it includes an exploration of cultural expectations in the classroom and avoids describing a particular style as right or wrong. Instead, course objectives favor learning to teach for specific audiences; yet even if nonnative speakers concentrate on presenting material in a manner amenable to their students, their natural performance of self may still at times override these linguistic lessons. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) argue that the 'speaker design' explains stylistic variation "not merely as a means of responding to the attributes of audience members, but as a means of projecting one's own attributes" (p. 286). In this case, while potential instructors take courses to learn how to fulfill undergraduate expectations, undergraduates should also learn about different cultures' classroom expectations, which may reflect in the performance of instructors who speak English as a second language and come from non-American backgrounds. This point will resurface in the Recommendations section of the paper as a proposition to edify undergraduates in basic sociolinguistic theory and cultural variety.

Discussion

The effort required to be a GSI varies depending on whether an instructor is a native speaker or not; nonnative speakers in general needing to exert themselves to a greater extent to make up for their perceived inadequacies. Smith et al. (1992) remarks, "In addition to language and teaching skills, ITAs need a third set of skills not demanded of native English-speaking TAs...[they] need to develop cross-cultural communication skills based on an awareness of differences between their culture and U.S. culture" (p. vii). The University of Michigan has

materials to aid prospective graduate student instructors such as A Guidebook for University of Michigan Graduate Student Instructors: Strategies and Resources for New and Experienced GSIs (CRLT, 2003) for example, which includes works targeted for NNS specifically. One such article, “Suggestions for New Graduate Student Instructors Who Have Been Educated Abroad” (Axelson & Hofer, 2003), implicitly compares differences in student behavior towards the two groups. The division in expectations and treatment of NNS GSIs becomes crucial for understanding the problems detailed in Fox’s (1991) research: “Interviews revealed divergent viewpoints and concerns among stakeholders, particularly that undergraduates perceived more extensive difficulties related to ITAs than did ITAs and administrators” (p. xi). In the course of my Michigan education, I have noted a critical division in the prevalent undergraduate reaction to native English-speaking GSIs versus nonnative English-speaking GSIs that highlights students’ general concern about grades, the power of native students, and the socially constructed ideology connecting both of these considerations to facilitate linguistic discrimination.

Though it varies by cultural context, individuals and groups may derive social value from features such as gender, age, experience, occupation, ethnicity, etc. These factors could be inherited or acquired, and in some cases, value increases from the distinguishing nature of a particular attribute, while in other cases it is more socially powerful to be marked as part of the majority. With greater power, members of the majority have the opportunity to reaffirm their status or simply react to others’ supposedly disrespectful and detrimental behavior with discrimination.

A large portion of Michigan undergraduate students shares the inherent preferred trait of being native to the United States, but not the acquired collegiate academic distinction. In comparison, NNS GSIs are foreign-born and have acquired greater academic distinction, at least

by having completed one degree and being in the process of finishing a second. Professors, whether native or not, distinguish themselves through the acquisition of even more rare academic accomplishments, such as extensive research experience and related accolades. The social distance between students and professors could be said to be far greater than that existing between students and nonnative English-speaking GSIs so one might expect the student-GSI relationships to be more stable and positive than the student-professor relationship. However, inherent ethnic and linguistic minority traits of nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructors feature more prominently than academic distinction when considering social value, which means that comparably accomplished GSIs could be considered very differently by undergraduates depending on the instructors' native or nonnativeness. The social closeness of the undergraduates lacking the academic distinctions and the NNS GSIs lacking the native origins makes it easier for the students to linguistically discriminate against the instructors without being questioned. A student can assume the inferiority of an instructor based on the instructor's ethnic and linguistic dissimilarity without the student being labeled as racist or otherwise discriminatory because society inherently supports these stereotypes.

This concept of social closeness shares similarities with Walt Wolfram's (1998) argument explaining, "When language differences represent groups that are unequal in their power relations...the speech of a socially subordinate group will be interpreted as linguistically inadequate by comparison with that of the socially dominant group" (Wolfram, 1998, p. 59). In Wolfram's discourse on dialects and the analysis of linguistic discrimination, Michigan instructors would be considered the subordinate group between themselves and many undergraduates, based on nativeness. As the subordinate group, the instructors' speech would be subject to discrimination and Wolfram's discussion of subordination and linguistic

discrimination supports an idea of power considerations factoring into negative evaluations of NNS GSIs. The discriminatory faculty of social closeness, coupled with the socially constructed negative stereotype of nonnative speakers, allows linguistic discrimination, to become nearly invisible and to remain largely unchallenged. Undergraduates reacting to classroom concerns can leverage themselves with the social power of nativeness and unconscious stereotypes to discriminate against their instructors. Linguistic discrimination functions in this manner when University of Michigan undergraduates feel their academic record being threatened because of poor communication with NNS GSIs. As part of the more powerful native majority, the students can access standard language ideology to blame NNS GSIs for classroom issues and be supported in this discrimination.

Given a similarity in age and perhaps general life experience, one might have assumed a common solidarity between GSIs and undergraduate students, but language differences seem to strain the relationships between them more than age brings them together. Rusty Barrett (2006) describes the bond between NNS employees against the native English-speaking (and phenotypically white) employees in his study of language and racial issues in a Mexican restaurant. The ethnic and linguistic traits of the native Spanish speakers make them social subordinates to the other employees, and the greater power of the native speakers facilitates discrimination. Likewise, language acts as a significant factor affecting GSI-student relationships at the University of Michigan with social stereotypes of language bonding the undergraduates against the instructors.

In addition to differences of nativeness, academic assessment stresses the already strained relationship between NNS GSIs and undergraduates. One need only visit any library or coffee shop on campus, particularly around exam time, to view the tensed, worried faces of the

undergraduate population induced by social pressures to ‘do well’ in courses. While American curricula may appear less rigorous viewed side by side with other countries’ educational systems, the pressure for high grades still affects American students, and the University of Michigan represents an academically demanding institution. Even if a student were to design his or her studies to incorporate mainly ‘easy’ classes, the social and self-applied pressure for high marks remains significant. ‘Americanisms’⁸ reflect these substantial pressures, and sometimes when students feel dissatisfied with grades, they shift personal blame on to GSIs.

Undergraduates may treat NNS GSIs with an especially critical eye because of the instructors’ potentially large influence on student academic records, and “students may be concerned, fearing that a GSI’s different English will hinder their ability to succeed in the course” (Axelson & Hofer, 2003, p. 11) Instead of a professor-controlled grading system, GSIs at the University of Michigan often have the responsibility for grading assignments. An examination of discrepancies in attitude and behavior toward particular constituents reveals a significant difference in respect paid toward native English speakers and nonnative English speakers where NNS are often shown less respect than native speakers. Showing less respect might be collocated with an idea of unjust negative judgments and as Fox (1991) notes, “discourse flaws affect judgments by listeners concerning the personality, competence, and credibility of the speakers” (p. 37). My study looks specifically at the inconsistent conduct of undergraduates regarding native English-speaking GSIs and nonnative English-speaking GSIs assuming the structures and relations described above.

With the additional knowledge of standard language ideology, one can better understand the unexpectedly regular nature of negative undergraduate associations of NNS as instructors.

⁸ These are phrases common in American discourse that reflect dominant ideologies, often so repeated that they become clichés .

Undergraduate students in some instances may feel disrespected by an instructor's violation of expected language behaviors. Smith et al. (1992) note that instructors who neglect to use modals during lessons may inadvertently appear rude to U.S. students who expect to hear "these indirect expressions [that] show respect without lessening the effect of the request or suggestion", and without them a teacher could come across as "overly authoritarian and unnecessarily brusque" (p. 47). In such a situation undergraduates might respond with linguistic discrimination, which is available and more influential because of the greater power that many undergraduates have as native residents. An undergraduate may believe in the equality of all people while still fundamentally operating within a discriminatory context, by operating with an invisible framework of discrimination when forming judgments, suggesting that in many instances these students are able to hold several conflicting opinions based on varying ideologies. Often seen in conjunction with many types of discriminatory behavior, conflicting ideologies can also help explain the overarching negative judgments of nonnative GSIs by undergraduate students.

Despite the greater progress of GSIs than undergraduates in the academic world, the dispreferred characteristic of nonnativeness places NNS GSIs at a disadvantage with their students in terms of language evaluation. Nonnativeness separates NNS GSIs from other instructors of comparable academic achievement in the minds of students and factors into the linguistic discrimination of NNS instructors whereby their teaching abilities are called into question. In his research, Donald Rubin (1992) notes that complaints against ITAs has become especially significant: "The NNSTA 'crisis' is one of the relatively few instructional issues in higher education that has captured the attention of the popular press" (p. 511). The widespread discussion on this topic in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a worrisome subject illustrates the greater attention paid to ITAs rather than other instructors. Research published on this subject

begins to rise again in 2000, signaling its continued prevalence as an issue on American college campuses. Undergraduates persist in assessing NNS GSIs negatively, and schools must continue to try to address this problem. In one particular study, Rubin (1992) investigates discrimination against “ethnically Asian instructors who speak SAE⁹” and based on findings he predicted that in a “...particular sample of undergraduates even vigorous pronunciation training for NNSTAs will matter little” because the SAE speakers “confront similar dysfunctional attitudes as those who do speak with marked nonnative accents” (p. 519). Rubin’s research underscores the effect of ethnic appearance on assumptions of a language variety as nonstandard and dispreferred. An ethnicity potentially indicating an individual’s nonnativeness can lead to linguistic discrimination just as verified nonnativeness does.

Underlying power and grade considerations, negative student judgments of GSIs who are nonnative English speakers seem mainly attributable to the societal framework in which they occur; this concept becomes more understandable if one examines a similar argument: Jane Hill’s (2008) explanation of current racism in the United States. She argues that racism is not, as most people assume, an individual fault but rather, an evil inherent to the social constructs of our country. The hierarchical build of the US, Hill (2008) explains, favors those who are ‘white’, to the disadvantage of all other citizens. In particular, resources funnel to those seen as ‘white’, as in the case of the housing market, which lends itself to white citizens. Nicer suburban homes tend to be populated by those who are white, while lower-end housing in the city may be mainly be populated by those of other racial categories, and when a white person chooses to purchase a higher quality home in the suburbs instead of a lower-end home in the city, Hill (2008) says that they unintentionally reinforce this problematic system.

⁹ SAE represents Standard American English.

Similarly, undergraduates who linguistically discriminate against their NNS instructors unconsciously support the racist stereotypes forming the basis of the unconscious discrimination. Students believe they are simply pointing out a fact about an instructor's inferiority and do not generally question their personal evaluations of NNS instructors because the negative stereotypes that facilitate these judgments are so deeply ingrained in dominant U.S. ideology. For many American students: "the internationals [...] bear the onus for poor classroom communication and therefore it is the internationals who must undergo transformation in the North American mold" (Rubin, 1992, p. 512). Thus it is 'normal' for college students to feel pessimistic about their instructors who do not speak English natively.

Originally, I hypothesized that while all students exercise some level of linguistic discrimination, older students are less linguistically discriminatory than younger students due to a greater level of experience in interactions with nonnative speakers. However, interviews with undergraduates do not support an age-gradated scale of discrimination. In actuality, the interviews led me away from a single categorical (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) explanation of discrimination behavior and towards a more inclusive explanatory device. Similar student responses were not correlated with particular categorical information of participants but rather with power dynamics and fears about grades informed by an unconscious, socially constructed discrimination affecting all members of American society, not just individuals. Within the academic environment nonnative English-speaking GSIs disrupt undergraduate ideas of desirable language. Linguistic power operating on language exchanges of all kinds involves complicated interactions of respect issuing from expectations of behavior. Often, in the classroom this translates to the students' assumption that instructors will "make new information relevant (applicable)...[explain] why they should study the information and how it will be useful to

them...show how new information is related to familiar contexts, and...refer to practical examples or personal experiences when...illustrating, the information” (Smith et al., 1992, p. 53). In the event that an instructor disappoints these expectations, students may become worried for the effect that this ‘unusual’ behavior will have upon their grade in the class. Additionally, a student could use the unexpected language to justify his or her poor performance in the class. In either event, the power and academic worries of the undergraduates accompany their linguistic discrimination of NNS instructors, a move that remains prevalent due to the socially constructed nature of stereotypes surrounding these instructors. As I mentioned above, however, interviews revealed that students hold more than just this single negative ideology in relation to their NNS instructors; in fact, many students drew on multiple conflicting ideologies and appeared unaware of the resulting contradictions in their responses.

Interviews

With a goal to discover the average University of Michigan student’s feeling about nonnative English-speaking GSIs and to analyze the causes of those feelings, I interviewed twenty undergraduates in the Fall 2011 semester. My hypothesis assumed that all students would be linguistically discriminatory with younger students being more so; however, interviews disproved the second assumption.

To test these hypotheses I obtained five participants from each of the four undergraduate years to answer fifteen interview questions of my own design¹⁰. Though I did not restrict the sample to students of a particular major or school, nearly all of them were studying within the School of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LS&A) at the time of interview. One student attends

¹⁰ Interview questions may be found in Appendix A.

the Ross School of Business another is enrolled in the School of Kinesiology. Three of the five freshmen interviewed expressed interest in becoming business students but at the time of interview were as of yet LS&A students with undeclared majors. Some of the other widely arrayed majors include: English, Physics, Evolutionary Anthropology, and Financial Mathematics, though students did not necessarily take class with an NNS GSI in their major. The senior student enrolled in the School of Kinesiology, studying Sport Management for instance, spoke of her two Economics instructors.

Despite the fact that I asked participants to characterize their *ethnicity*, most students identified themselves in racial terms. In their self-description, only four students refrained from use of the terms: ‘white’, ‘Caucasian’, or ‘American’ (or a combination thereof), indicating a predominantly homogenous ethnic group. This seems to also reflect the general homogeneity of campus. Ages of interviewees spanned between a range of eighteen and twenty-two years old. Meanwhile, participants answered ‘male’, ‘female’, or ‘woman’ to the question of gender, with ‘male’ representing nine of the participants. No distinguishable patterns emerged correlating linguistically discriminatory behavior with age, year in school, or any of the other personal information, nullifying the latter part of the original hypothesis. With no patterned connection between answers and participants’ demographics, I examined the general similarity of content in the responses and hypothesized a collective ideology to explain negative associations with NNS GSIs instead.

The second student interviewed, distinctly disproved the latter part of my original hypothesis in describing one of the most negative experiences out of the entire group. She recalled her experiences with NNS GSIs: “They’re the four classes that I have the lowest grades in on my transcript...[and the] class where I had the Asian GSI is my lowest grade...I do think

that had something to do with it because I didn't understand the material and asking questions just made it more confusing for me" (Interview 2, Question 2a). Given that she is a senior, the original hypothesis would have predicted her greater understanding and tolerance of NNS GSIs. Instead, her interview and this memory in particular suggest the maintenance of her negative understanding of these instructors. However her general negativity, and that of other students, did not seem malicious but rather, informed by an American ideology constructing nonnative speakers as inferior.

Four of the twenty interviewees had not yet been in a course with a nonnative English-speaking GSI. These four freshmen all identified as 'white' and/or 'Caucasian' and 'male', traits shared by the majority that could potentially indicate greater social power for Americans. Greater social power can, as discussed above in relation to nativeness, offer greater opportunity for discrimination so one might have expected these four respondents to be particularly discriminatory. However, no clear correlation could be drawn between these traits and a greater degree of discrimination. Actually, one of the four students without experience with an NNS GSI held generally positive views at the prospect of class with such an instructor while the other three interviewees expressed more typical, negative assumptions. The optimistic individual assumed a course taught by an NNS GSI would "be basically like any other class...[They] obviously know the language pretty well. Well enough to be a gsi" (Interview 9, Question 2b). His opinions were important to this paper for several reasons. First, as a freshman that had not had class with a nonnative speaker, the hypothesis predicted that he should have been one of the most linguistically discriminatory; yet he presents one of the most open-minded opinions. Secondly, his answers contrast greatly with those of most of his peers, but some of his responses still suggest that a shared ideology, evoking the strongly negative assessments of other interviewees,

affects his opinions as well. Generally, students' descriptions of experiences with NNS GSIs were negative, but demographic information does not explain this, while a shared ideology may.

The shared ideology affecting interview responses of either positive or negative estimations of NNS GSIs, positions nonnative English speakers as inferior. Even in the optimistic ninth interview, can see the shadow of socially constructed stereotype. The student addresses the feelings of his peers saying, "I'd imagine that for the most part there's no problem I mean they might be somewhat annoyed by it especially if there's some kind of accent involved or some kind of understanding issue..."(Question 5). Though almost an afterthought, the student mentions the issue of accent, using the logic that nonnative speech inherently detracts from a student's classroom experience. His comment demonstrates the effect of the socially embedded stereotype that constructs nonnative speech as inferior while also highlighting the student retention of multiple ideologies, allowing them to incorporate linguistic discrimination into tolerant and open-minded speech, for instance.

When defining general student expectations of successful GSIs, many students replied in a sort of standardized way, emphasizing traits such as organization and communication. Communication in particular seemed popular and participants produced repetitive sounding replies, valuing: "being able to explain things in a clear cut way" (Interview 11, Question 3), "being able to explain things very well" (Interview 14, Question 3), "be[ing] able to answer questions effectively" (Interview 15, Question 3). This particular emphasis may have been the result of a hyper-awareness of topic created in participants. The interview format may have induced them to alter their answers to place a slightly greater focus on NNS GSIs than they might have otherwise.

However, if students were more conscious of their answers than usual, this peripheral awareness did not generally cause the undergraduates to recognize the multiple ideologies that inform their opinions. In one interview, a student mentioned her own semi-awareness: “as I’ve been going through this interview, I’ve kind of begun to realize that it really shouldn’t matter that much. It’s kind of difficult to think. Um I guess a benefit...” (Interview 20, Question 15). She goes on to answer the question given asking for her idea of the benefits and downsides of NNS GSIs highlighting the negative that “if you really can’t understand them that’s no good but I mean I don’t I don’t think that should usually be a reason that should hold you back from learning from them” (Interview 20, Question 15). It remains difficult to determine whether she points to her realization because the interview has begun to reveal her conflicting ideologies or she unconsciously uses this as a defense against this recognition and as a way to move through a difficult moment without exactly favoring one view over the other. Her latter statement also represents a sort of patchwork of contradicting ideas. She reaffirms the general opinion that the inferior language of the NNS GSI causes issues in the classroom but also, contrastingly refuses this explanation. The socially constructed concept of NNS inferiority based in standard language ideology comes into conflict with another of her personal ideologies, which constructs all people as equal.

Presumably in support of their collective ideology, most students were readily able to the answer the question regarding unsuccessful moments for NNS GSIs with likely or actual scenarios. Some respondents related specific stories to illustrate their points such as one who said, “once again to bring up an engineering friend he actually had kids in his class just stand up and say this is ridiculous and walk out on the gsi. Who uh, cuz they just couldn’t understand what he was saying” (Interview 13, Question 7). This student had not taken a course with a

nonnative English-speaking GSI, but had been introduced to the disparaging behavior of peers in conversations with friends. The speaker goes on to describe this behavior as ‘disrespectful’, a point resonant in many interviews. Here one sees a point of divergence within the minds of interviewees: how to emphasize the equality and acceptance of all people whilst also assuming the inherent superiority of native English speakers as instructors? The respondent winds his way through questions, sometimes favoring one ideology: “I mean we want the best and it doesn’t matter what language we speak first. This is America” (Interview 13, Question 8), sometimes another: “if you can’t understand the GSI it’s impossible to learn anything” (Interview 13, Question 11). He first supports the nonnative instructors given an idea of American equal opportunity, and then speaks to the potential poor results of instruction conducted by NNS GSIs. He masks his negative stereotype slightly, using the conditional ‘if’ instead of claiming that students never understand nonnative speakers. However, the implication underscoring the entire interview is that NNS GSIs will probably be hard to understand and thus make it more difficult to learn material. The effusion of many ideas may actually distract from the incongruences themselves, which I believe happens to some degree in all of the interviews. There are of course, many more ideologies operating in these interviews, undergraduates, and people in general; however, it is standard language ideology that grates against other ideologies of tolerance and creates most of the confusion in these interviews.

Other interviewees spoke more generally of recurring problematic situations like one student who remembered an instructor who would “write things on the board and say them. And they wouldn’t make sense when she said them or when she wrote them...it’s calculus and the language is very specific so if she says like ‘of’ instead of ‘in’...she wouldn’t say it properly and that would be bad [laughter]” (Interview 16, Question 4). This moment felt somewhat awkward

because of the laughter following her description, which may have been a signal of her increasing awareness and discomfort with the subject. Nevertheless she continued to detail her “miserable experience” and assumptions with certainty: “I think there’s a very negative view towards them just in general just because it makes it more difficult to learn subject matter that’s already difficult” (Interview 16, Questions 2 and 5). Her nervous laughter could indicate a conflicting ideology, challenging her negativity informed by the ideology constructing NNS GSIs as inherently inferior. Some of the harsher critiques of NNS GSIs should be accorded a certain level of understanding as they likely evolve from the overlap of a socially constructed stereotype and a difficult experience. Students have the opportunity to exercise discriminatory behavior because of an odd power dynamic between native undergraduates and nonnative graduate students, and take advantage of this when academic pressures morph a shared challenge into a problem for the undergraduates caused by the NNS GSIs.

In contrast with most interviewees, one student maintained that she was not aware of witnessing an unsuccessful moment. Several things about her interview led me to believe that one of her strongest ideological influences could be thought of as ‘forcefully equitable’ and still reflect a lack of understanding of socially constructed negative stereotyping. She seemed to recognize my expectations of discrimination and react with a distinctly divergent opinion. For instance, in answer to the final question regarding benefits and downsides of NNS GSIs, she readily responded with the benefit, but had to be asked a second time whether she identified any downsides. She replied, “I see that like um there’s a lot of bigger problems in society and our institutions that set it up to make communication hard and difficult and it’s something that needs dialogue to generate and break down these prejudices but it’s not necessarily a downside. I think it’s something that needs to be addressed across the board” (Interview 10, Question 15). The

language of her answer calls to mind an educational answer, perhaps suggesting some sort of background in these or similar discriminatory issues in her studies.

Regardless, another of her responses sounds similar to those given in other interviews. When answering the question as to the general undergraduate consensus on NNS GSIs at the University of Michigan, she remarked, “I think a lot of my peers attribute miscommunication to a lack of English speaking skills or feel that they’re inadequate teachers because they can’t even speak the native language and they don’t see that they have any role in working with the GSI. It’s more of like a taking relationship than a give and take relationship” (Interview 10, Question 5). Many of the interviews included similar answers reflecting upon the negative behavior of others, avoiding self reflection, and investing in the concept of individually based discrimination rather than a social construct affecting Americans in general. Despite her greater awareness of the problematic nature of the undergraduate discriminatory behavior, she does not contextualize this conduct in a socially ingrained framework. She, along with other undergraduates could profit from sociolinguistic education to better their understanding of linguistic issues in the classroom.

Unlike interviewee ten, two respondents, did not assume that most peers view these instructors with negativity, frustration, flippancy, or some combination thereof, but the other seventeen participants spoke with varying degrees of negativity. One participant harshly responded: “uh I’m pretty sure that they all hate them” (Interview 17, Question 5) whereas respondent number nine softens a similar perception to suggest: “they might be somewhat annoyed by it” (Interview 9, Question 5). Interviewee five stressed that opinions depend upon the subjects that the students study as to how prevalent this issue was for them, and the eleventh participant thought, “most people don’t have a problem with it as long as it doesn’t get in the

way...that they explain things” (Question 11). Clearly, undergraduate opinions on NNS GSIs vary but most seem to reside within a spectrum of negativity.

Students also mostly agreed that they would not drop a class because of an NNS GSI but might attempt to switch into another section. Discussion of this point highlighted resentment among students whose course choices are relatively stagnant and who feel forced into taking a course with an instructor whom they will not understand. Grades, fairness (for undergraduates), and workload were especially tense topics for these students: “if I knew that they wouldn’t be able to talk well or speak well I would drop it. I don’t feel like sacrificing my education or just trying to stick something out to give them a chance like I don’t think I do that...” (Interview 14, Question 6). She and many others spoke of NNS GSIs as an added challenge to their academic performance, which they would logically avoid if possible. In many ways this point of view makes perfect sense but falters in the assumption that a nonnative speaker will be a hindrance because of his or her ‘incorrect’ speech. Blame for difficult communication rests solely with the instructor without taking into account the stereotypes affecting the undergraduate’s reaction.

While blaming them for difficulties, participants also provided positive results of NNS GSI presence and listed off ‘diversity’, ‘multiculturalism’, ‘different perspectives’, etc. as some of the valuable effects, along with intelligence and research skills. These positive attributes were thrown out without a qualification of their actual effects; rather these terms seem to be another product of ingrained ideology that praises differences without explaining their appeal. Actual explanations might discourage the simultaneous occurrence of standard language ideology, while without explanation students may continue to layer contrasting beliefs.

Responses to many questions also often evoked ‘Americanisms’, a term I use to describe comments that seemed to reflect the speaker as particularly American by echoing socially

constructed ideologies, such as dictums concerning perseverance in spite of adversity. In the first interview the undergraduate expressed his belief that his GSI “could have done a better job and overcome her language skills...you still have to find a way to succeed even if you have a flaw that’s holding you back” (Interview 1, Question 4a). The participant applies this Americanism to a former GSI and the difficult situation that arose in his class with her. It may be a sort of justification for his logic, unconsciously masking the discrimination in calling her speech a ‘flaw’. By calling upon a socially familiar phrase, he emphasizes his native-centric ideology, which further distances him from his own discriminatory behavior and allows him to operate multiple ideologies simultaneously since he is not particularly aware of these embedded ideas.

Interestingly, even though many students displayed strong opinions related to NNS GSIS, knowledge of GSI training seemed scarce. In general, it seems that most Michigan students are completely unaware of any of these processes, which factor so heavily into the interactions of which they complain. Indeed, a mechanism for making the systems plain and memorable to all undergraduates would go a long way to alleviating some of the tension between the two groups. Responses identifying ways in which undergraduates might be involved in NNS GSI training were fairly redundant and often included a practice teaching requirement for undergraduates to participate in as students. As this is precisely what occurs at present, this answer reinforces students’ utter lack of knowledge on the subject, though suggestions of this type remain promising since they encourage classroom compromise. One of the few more creative answers to the question of undergraduate involvement in GSI training outlined several possibilities other than practice teaching: “if the student government were involved that could be helpful. Maybe pick older students who are in depth in their major...they’d probably be more open to thinking about it critically...maybe set up a group on campus...like a committee for people that are

passionate about learning about other cultures...you could talk to students who are here from other countries...” (Interview 6, Question 10). These suggestions would be most effective on a campus largely composed of students who understand the need for undergraduate awareness and involvement in NNS GSI-student interactions and the relevant sociolinguistic issues of this relationship. However, generally answers of ‘practice teaching’ demonstrate and support pre-existing ideological structures, in which nonnative speakers exist as a problem needing to be fixed. The vast majority of undergraduates remain uninformed of their linguistic discrimination.

Again, paradoxically many participants, in addition to expressing negative collocations with NNS GSIs as appropriate, also spoke of the student responsibility to be respectful, attend class, and actively participate. These expectations for themselves and their peers grate against other implications of discrimination since it seems inherently disrespectful to discriminate. Interviewees do not knowingly contradict themselves; rather discrimination based in stereotypes that issue forth from the social structure remains invisible to them, and they are able to overlap multiple ideologies that otherwise conflict. Some answers to the proposition that no NNS GSI be allowed to instruct at the University of Michigan reflected similar ideas of virtuous responsibility. There was a general consensus that this hypothetical situation was ridiculous and unfair such as one student who said, “that’s not fair at all because just because they don’t speak English doesn’t mean they aren’t qualified for the position. And they do speak English it’s not like we’re saying someone is a hundred percent speaking Japanese they just don’t speak English” (Interview 5, Question 14). “I’d say that’s ridiculous” (Interview 7, Question 14) and another who explained, “maybe their not really that good at teaching, but they bring a lot to the university that you wouldn’t get from having an English speaking person...their credentials...research funding...” (Interview 17, Question 14). These sample responses illustrate

that some students are able to defend the NNS GSIs while also calling on assumptions that construct these instructors as having poor language and teaching skills. However, at least one student suggested that he would understand the imaginary speaker's comment to "only let the people that grew up with English as a first language [as] that's the fastest way to remedy that situation [...] they need to be able to speak as though they had English as a first language" (Interview 14, Question 14). Students can also rationalize negative ideas of NNS GSIs with the logic of what would most easily fix the issue, not recognizing that confronting their own stereotypes would help to reduce negative associations and relieve most of the pressure to 'fix' the situation.

Complaints against NNS GSIs have received a lot of research attention in the United States, but the general approach to solutions simply involves ameliorating the "source" of the problem, or the "incorrect" usage of language by instructors. Given that issues persist despite a proliferation of thoughtfully designed training programs, such as the one at the University of Michigan, there must be something missing from the current solution. Current training programs may appeal to educational institutions because they are easily replicated and consistent with pre-existing resources, university infrastructure, and national ideological constructs. However, when trying to cure disease, one does not simply assuage the symptoms, but aims to eliminate the sickness altogether. Since the undergraduates represent a vocal, complaining party, it makes sense to directly address their analytical processing of this subject and the socially constructed discrimination affecting their opinions. It stands to reason that the first step of intervention must simply involve awareness. Teaching basic linguistic theory, as it is applicable to this issue, would at least bring the mechanisms functioning in linguistic discrimination to the

undergraduates' attention. Awareness should be the starting point predicating changes in behavior.

Recommendations

After observation, interviews, and analysis, which I believe confirm the original assumption of linguistic discrimination at the University of Michigan, we can and should move to a discussion of solutions. Mostly proposing ideas already at work, many interview participants suggested involving undergraduates and nonnative English speaking graduate students in practice teaching sessions, which is precisely the program that the English Language Institute and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching already facilitate twice a year. As problems persist with undergraduate concerns about nonnative speaking instructors, and the students themselves suggest implementing those programs that already exist, experimentation with additional interventions should be pursued.

With the ELI and CRLT already established as the institutional entities most involved with these NNS GSI-student issues, it seems logical to broaden their impacts rather than create any new university program. However, while the university should increase the intensity of focus on these issues through the pre-existing ELI and CRLT, student involvement should perhaps expand into new groups, including student organizations or clubs, in order to increase the visibility of these efforts on campus. The greatest successes though will undoubtedly come from the combined efforts of all relevant parties, marking the need for venues or events at which they could come together.

Ideally, the ELI and CRLT would both become more visible and familiar to the undergraduate population. However, as the group more concerned with cultural stereotypes and already directly in contact with undergraduates hired for practice teaching sessions, the ELI has a

greater opportunity to develop connections with students and improve student-instructor relations. Goals to become more vocal and visible on campus could be accomplished with the addition of an undergraduate component as a new department of the ELI or a student group functioning as an affiliate of the ELI. As an actual part of the ELI, the undergraduate group would likely have more access to those individuals already associated with the ELI and therefore more direct assistance and input on projects; however, as a club, the students could apply to the Michigan Student Assembly for funding. It might be possible to start the group as very small part of the ELI and later extend it into a club as the number of individuals involved grew.

Volunteer undergraduate students interested in relations between native and nonnative speakers, students and instructors, or native and international students could be gathered to act as a link between the ELI and the volunteers' peers. These student volunteers would form the core group assigned to increase student awareness of linguistic discrimination, and could achieve this through the combined efforts of multiple groups to educate and promote tolerance. By reaching out to other relevant groups and encouraging the formation of student groups well suited to address issues of linguistic discrimination, the student sector of the ELI could begin to subvert the unconscious socially constructed discrimination ideology.

The student ELI component could begin by associating itself with a whole host of groups already in existence such as the Chinese Student Association or multicultural fraternities, which might have similar goals, but no perfect pairing will present itself without patient experimentation. Among many possibilities, the ELI student volunteers could explore an association with GEO (Graduate Employees Organization), which should welcome discussion of GSI interests. Even if GEO did not wish to be directly involved with action taken on behalf of NNS GSIs, the union might still provide campus exposure with flyers, interviews, or other

passive measures. ELI student volunteers could also work with the Intergroup Relations program (IGR) that allows students to participate in what is called a dialogue as a class. On the program's website, a message from the directors describes the mission and goals of IGR: "We believe that knowledge about social diversity is essential to becoming responsible global citizens. The need for understanding between and across cultures is crucial to the development of students." (IGR, 2009) Participants in these dialogue groups focus on a single social issue for a semester such as gender, race, etc., and students may also be approved as peer facilitators of these groups. The premise of the groups is to confront issues directly in a group discussion where some members may disagree with one another based on divergent ideologies. One could propose a dialogue group to the program directors that focuses specifically on undergraduate-NNS relations, or at least integrates the relationship into discussions of language, ethnicity, and nativeness.

Beyond suggesting group topics for the IGR program, the student ELI sector should work to broaden the level of participation in this or other similar classes, which promote awareness and analysis of undergraduate-GSI relations on campus. Intergroup dialogues have a very low profile as of now with a small percentage of the total student body participating. Increasing numbers of undergraduates interested in this and similar courses that speak to sociolinguistic theories of linguistic discrimination and socially constructed ideologies could be achieved through attentive endorsement in areas where undergraduates congregate like coffee shops, university restrooms, gyms, restaurants, etc. Instead of relying upon the online course guide and university websites to promote ELI courses and events, the students could design 'advertisements' in the format of flyers. Posting these flyers in areas heavily frequented by undergraduates at the beginning and end of semesters when students have to think about signing up for classes could influence more of them to participate in the courses. These 'ads' could

emphasize courses that fulfill the Race and Ethnicity graduation requirement, but might also be effective with confrontational lines such as: “You discriminate, you just don’t know it” to draw student attention. Most importantly, students working on these promotional materials should consider ways to appeal both to students already interested in social justice issues as well as students less apt to choose a course concerned with discrimination.

An ELI affiliated student group could also reach out to the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). It seems that many students involved with research on campus work in the ‘hard sciences’ like chemistry, biology, and biochemistry so there is likely opportunity for more involvement in social science and humanities. Encouraging more students to do research in subjects related to social networks, ideologies, discrimination and other social research might promote understanding on campus if research sparks informal discussions with peers and formal UROP presentations expose findings in some sort of visible format. In fact, the UROP website currently features a document for recruiting students to do social science and humanities research (UROP, 2012), which ELI volunteers could ask to distribute at their events or the like, suggesting research as an option for concerned students wanting to contribute to solutions for NNS GSI-student relations or other discriminatory relationships. All UROP students have to create a professional poster and showcase their work at a final colloquium; however, it might be more beneficial for the sake of spreading social knowledge and for the benefit of the program as a whole, to also suggest a more far-reaching platform for the display and consequent discussion of the UROP projects. Realistically, few peers will attend a poster presentation and interview those involved in the research but perhaps key quotes, theses, or small excerpts of the discussion section, could be featured somehow in dorm cafeterias, in university

assignment notebooks (already containing notes of advice), on the school or relevant department's website, in the school newspaper, or other venues.

Undergraduates involved in assisting the ELI could also become involved in larger scale events on or off campus that concern these issues. They could organize different cultural events or encourage an undergraduate presence at pre-existing happenings. For instance, student volunteers could coordinate a gathering focused on a holiday either shared by students and GSIs or mostly familiar to GSIs. This event could involve food, presentations, dance, music, theater, or any other number of components and could possibly act as a fundraiser for other future plans. The group could also identify other events to promote and attend such as the Chinese Student Association's 'Taste of Taiwan', the Indian-American Student Association dance show, one of the volunteering opportunities through the Trotter Multicultural Center, or a multicultural acapella show. By forming connections with various student and university groups, other relevant organizations might begin to approach the ELI student volunteers for joint projects. In order to encourage learning rather than just passive participation, promotional materials for these events might include a few leading questions to generate thought and discussion. Flyers and other documents would direct readers to the group's website to learn more about the core issues and ideas of the ELI student group. After solidifying a presence and discourse on campus, ELI specific events could be preceded by a short Q&A or discussion, designed for audience participation.

While shows and events have the appeal of mixing entertainment or food with issue awareness, it would also behoove the ELI student volunteers to organize more scholarly events to explore issues in depth. Assembling a panel of GSIs, university administrators involved in student affairs, ELI and CRLT representatives, and undergraduates to discuss differing points of

view and answer audience questions would allow the participation of all groups involved with the negative stereotypes surrounding NNS GSIs. A panel would appeal to undergraduates particularly if framed as an investigation of issues related to their education. In the current context of Occupy movements and frustration with tuition, many undergraduates as well as other university figures are likely primed to speak out in a public format. This sort of panel could focus solely on student-instructor relations or could range across a whole host of topics needing scrutiny, making sure to include the issue of linguistic discrimination.

The ELI affiliate could cooperate with other entities such as politically related student organizations, student government, and other groups in support of ending campus discrimination to organize this panel. The student ELI contingent could also work on organizing a conference open to those interested in or involved with cross-discipline research on undergraduate-instructor relations and discrimination. Volunteers could invite other Midwestern universities with relevant issues, programs, or ideas to send presenters or anyone interested in attending. Such a conference would constitute a major undertaking and would likely require significant planning, fundraising, and cooperative involvement of many student groups as well as the University of Michigan, itself.

Beyond university connections, the ELI could reach out to the ESL community at large. Student volunteers could contact local or nearby ESL tutoring groups and invite representatives to a summit for the students' edification as to approaches which worked for those groups in teaching and awareness. This information might be reformatted and distributed in ways mentioned above or other methods to the undergraduate population. After establishing contact and a reputation with university officials, ELI volunteers could also become involved with the design of ideas for incorporating this linguistic subject into Orientation. Some statistics and

points related to NNS GSIs are mentioned in new student orientation at present; however, having gone through that process myself, I can attest to the fact that most students retain approximately none of the information provided during those three days. The orientation skit designed to broach difficult subjects for students represents the only counter-example in my case. The pre-existing skit could integrate a piece on NNS instructors, student reactions, and discriminatory behavior. Alternatively, the subject could be introduced in a small group setting at some point. The orientation program provides so much information that much of it becomes lost in the shuffle, but by targeting the NNS GSI topic in a more original format, new students might begin to think about the coming interactions and hopefully be more open to a class with a NNS.

I conclude by proposing an undergraduate-GSI mentor program. Participating undergraduates would assist nonnative English-speaking instructors in class, perhaps by directly addressing the idea of an NNS instructor with the students in the first meeting and facilitating a short discussion. He or she would also be available for mediation between students and the instructor, allow at least an hour per week to meet with the GSI for work on conversational English and any other specific issues the instructor had, and attend to an assortment of other duties. The student should receive course credit for this position perhaps through the ELI or an Independent study and might do further work with the ELI for class 'assignments'. The core focus of the course and any related academic work would focus on the undergraduates' understanding of discrimination and other linguistic ideology rather than on changing the language or teaching style of the instructor. While not exactly unprecedented, given programs like Michigan State University's buddy program and University of Michigan's Conversation Circles that pair undergraduates with nonnative speakers, this program could still represent a large shift in the predominant approach to the socialization of NNS instructors as well as the relations between undergraduates and

instructors and might take significantly longer than my other suggestions to implement successfully.

Clearly, experimental ideas for solutions to the negative reactions of many undergraduates at their nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructors abound. The University of Michigan must begin a period of trial and error along with further research to determine whether any of these ideas can successfully supersede the socially constructed ideologies fueling linguistic discrimination on campus.

Further Research:

Further research at the University of Michigan and elsewhere should hone in on the impetus behind undergraduate complaints about nonnative English-speaking graduate student instructors, correlate findings more soundly with those of other specific universities, and expand the discussion of this national issue in comparisons of these approaches as to efficacy and resolution. Eventually, a pilot training program should be implemented at the University of Michigan in response to the analysis brought forward in this and future papers. Given a much longer period of time than available for this project, interviews or surveys of University of Michigan undergraduates could be conducted at many points (i.e. at each semester break for four years, following a single group of students throughout their college careers) after the implementation of the suggested pilot program, in order to compare it with these initial findings and to track its progress.

Though this study suggests that identifying categorical information such as gender, ethnicity, and age is not as important to an understanding of the tone and content of undergraduate evaluations of NNS GSIs as the broader, nationally embedded linguistic stereotypes integrated within the institutional hierarchy, future researchers may want to elicit

further evidence to support or refute this idea. To this end, future studies could focus on comparisons between undergraduate interviews conducted amongst groups of differing ethnicities, genders, ages, or other social categories. Additionally, Though the majors of interviewees happened to represent a fairly wide variety, students were almost entirely housed in the College for Literature, Science, and the Arts (LS&A), and there were no representatives from the school of Engineering, Music/Theater/Dance, Public Health, Nursing, or other significant areas of study. In future research, it would be profitable to consistently target students from a single college and/or school in separate studies so that opinions of LS&A students could be compared with opinions of Business School students, for instance, to determine whether my hypothesis of a collective ideology affecting negative opinions of NNS GSIs remains supported. At the University of Michigan, LS&A along with the School of Engineering would be the most interesting to target and compare as the majority of nonnative GSIs teach in the School of Engineering and the second largest number of these instructors is found in LS&A. Sociolinguistics, however, has moved away from using these categories in explanations of behavior and has shifted focus instead to linguistic ideologies, which are socially and unconsciously constructed so any effort as described above should be considered secondary to the research goal.

Additional studies should include a larger number of participants, and should be sure to fine tune the interview questions to best focus the answers on the relevant issues while avoiding bias. Devising questions to avoid too much overlap in answers would improve upon this study's methods. It could also be fruitful to do as I had imagined initially, before realizing the constraints of time, and interview native and nonnative GSIs, staff of the ELI and CRLT, and university administration officials for a more holistic understanding of the campus attitude toward NNS

GSI at the University of Michigan. For an even richer analysis, one could also interview parents or guardians of undergraduate participants to investigate the effect of the common discourse at home on undergraduate opinions.

With numbers of NNS GSIs remaining stable or even possibly growing, further research following this study is imperative to solidify the understandings of this project and to examine the impacts of experimental programs.

Conclusion:

General research on nonnative English-speaking instructors underscored that there has been and still remains a difficult relationship between these instructors and their undergraduate students, placing most responsibility upon the instructors. A more in-depth investigation of the ELI and the CRLT, observations of several ELI 994 sessions, solidified my understanding of the University of Michigan as an institution greatly invested in the personal and professional development of NNS instructors as well as the relations between the instructors and their undergraduate students but also assumes that the instructors must ‘fix’ the problem they create.

Undergraduate interviews suggested that despite efforts to improve student-instructor relations, many students still become dissatisfied in classes taught by NNS GSIs. They may feel disrespected by an instructor’s unfamiliar language use, believing that language issues make it unfairly difficult for them to succeed in the class. In this case, context-specific social power resulting from native origins, allows undergraduates to apply an unconscious socially constructed linguistic discrimination to NNS GSIs. Standard language ideology assumes that nonnative speech is a substandard variety, and linguistically discriminatory ideology incorporates this belief to suggest that nonnative speakers make poor instructors. Interviews with University of

Michigan undergraduates illustrated the use of these belief systems while also showing that students may operate several ideologies at once and create contradictory opinions of nonnative instructors. Having existed in American universities for decades despite the advent of GSI training programs and extensive research to better understand the subject, undergraduate linguistic discrimination of NNS GSIs still persists on campuses like the University of Michigan. Staff and students informed on discriminatory ideology should work to eradicate linguistic discrimination by promoting awareness and education among undergraduates as well as further research on how best to accomplish this.

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Appendix A

Interview Document:

Anonymous Categorical Data

Please qualify your gender, ethnicity, age, year in school, and major (college if no major).

QUESTIONS: (prompts should only be used given the interviewee's apparent difficulty with the question)

1. Have you personally had class with a foreign Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) whose first language was not English, and if so, approximately how many classes have you had with such a person?

2a. What were these experiences like for you? (prompts: positive/negative)

OR

2b. What would you expect from a class with such a GSI? (prompts: same/different from class with another GSI)

3. What sort of skills/behavior makes a GSI successful?

4a. Can you describe a time when a non-native English speaking GSI was not successful?

AND/OR (for those who answered No to #1)

4b. Can you describe a specific situation that would be more difficult for a GSI whose first language is not English in which to remain successful?

5. How do you think most of your fellow undergraduates feel about non-native English speaking GSIs?

6. In what context would you drop/have you dropped a class because of a non-native English speaking GSI? (prompt: can you give your reasoning for this literal or hypothetical situation)

7. What sort of differences in the behavior of undergraduates have you witnessed, if any, with regard to native English speaking GSI's versus those whose first language is not language?

8. For what reasons do you believe the university accepts graduate students from other countries?

9. What do you know about the process for a non-native English speaking graduate student to become a GSI?

10. Do you think undergraduate students should be involved in this process and if so, in what ways/to what extent?

11. What (potential) problems do non-native English speaking GSIs create for undergraduates?

12. How do you think these problems should be addressed?
13. What responsibilities do undergraduate students have concerning their GSIs?
14. If another undergraduate student told you that he or she did not believe that any non-native English speaking graduate student should be allowed to become an instructor, how would you respond?
15. What are the benefits and downsides to having a non-native English speaking GSI?

Appendix B

Table of Interviewee Categorical Information

#	Age	Year	Major	Gender	Ethnicity
1	21	Senior	Economics	Male	Caucasian
2	21	Senior	Sport Management	Female	Caucasian
3	22	Senior	Physics	Male	Caucasian
4	20	Junior	English	Female	White/Caucasian
5	21	Senior	Evolutionary Anthropology	Female	Afro-Caribbean
6	21	Senior	Business/Economics	Male	White/Caucasian
7	20	Junior	History	Female	American/Caucasian
8	19	Sophomore	Undecided	Female	Korean
9	18	Freshman	Undecided	Male	White/Caucasian
10	20	Junior	Women's Studies/Psychology	Woman	Multiracial
11	19	Sophomore	Undeclared (prehealth)	Female	White/Hispanic
12	20	Junior	Social Psychology	Woman	American
13	19	Freshman	Economics	Male	Caucasian
14	19	Sophomore	Biochemistry	Female	Caucasian
15	19	Freshman	Prospective Business/Economics	Male	White
16	19	Sophomore	Chemistry	Female	White
17	20	Junior	Financial Mathematics/Economics	Male	Indian/Asian American
18	18	Freshman	Undecided (History/Political Science)	Male	Caucasian
19	19	Freshman	Undeclared (pre-business)	Male	Caucasian/white
20	19	Sophomore	Sociology	Woman	Greek/American

Appendix C

Example of Interview Transcriptions

Interview 1:

-Ok this is the first interview and um if you would can you just qualify for me your gender, ethnicity, age, year in school, and major for me?

- So I am senior 21 years old Caucasian, you also wanted school major? So I go to the University of Michigan and I'm an Economics major

-and what do you qualify your gender as?

-male

-ok and um just so you know if you get confused...blah blah

-“Question 1”

-um so I'll have to think quickly, my freshman year I had a psych class with a gsi whose first language was not English. (pause) it's ok if I take some time and run through each of my classes right?

-mhm

-and you only want gsis not professors?

-right

-ok

-LONG PAUSE while thinking

-I think it may have only been that one, psychology my freshman year. But if I think of any others I'll mention it

-ok

-“Question 2”

-so I also had a statistics class second semester freshman year with a gsi whose native language was not English, I had an anthropology class freshman year where I'm not sure if the gsi was a native speaker or not, her English was very good but she I know for a fact she spoke another language, I'm not sure what country she was from

-ok um so the situation where you are sure the person wasn't a native speaker, um, what were these experiences like for you as a student in that class?

- so I'll take them one by one, the psych gsi that I had my freshman year, first semester, she had a lot of difficulty communicating with people. I could tell and that made her seem like very disorganized and I think she had a very hard time like motivating students to pay attention and

come to class. Because I just don't think she was assertive enough to keep like some coherence to the class. So I mean I personally went to every discussion section and tried to pay attention but other students did not. and I found it a little bit annoying that people [garbled] like they wouldn't even show any respect like there was this one somewhat funny instance where this one student, she couldn't figure out the uh she couldn't figure out how to get the presentation to work on the computer so she called IT and uh I'm sure this wasn't her fault but just the fact that she had a hard time running class[] the students didn't really respect her, so one student gets up and goes to walk out and the IT person looks at her and says you know if you wanna stick around here for a few extra minutes you can stay here and get educated and she just didn't even pay attention and just kept walking forward and left. so I mean I felt that throughout the year people didn't really respect her and I felt kind of bad for her and I felt that she could have done a better job but I felt her language held her back because she couldn't speak like she didn't really speak fluently.

-ok

-my second gsi, she spoke fluently but had an accent so I didn't think that she was hard to understand, she just had an accent. And I felt that she was able to keep class organized, and it never really held her back ever so people would pay attention and respected her throughout the semester. And uh I think she she was also a very helpful person, I spoke to her many times after class and she was always willing to spend extra time making sure students understood so I think my experience with her was was great, she was a very good gsi.

- ok um so the next question, if you're done?

-mhm

-is "Question 3"

-so I think there, I mean I this applies to both professors and gsis but I think the most important thing that you need to do as a teacher is you need to be organized and make sure that everyone is on the same page and you need to have like you need to instill an attitude in students from the very beginning that people are going to work together and try to learn throughout the semester so there are some some professors that just don't engage the students at all and they don't spend time, I think it's crucial at the beginning of the semester to make sure that like students get to know each other and that everyone feels comfortable talking during class and that the gsi needs to be very engaging as the leader to make sure that everyone is being heard and everyone feels comfortable speaking and if you don't instill that attitude from day 1, it's very hard to motivate your students in the future. So when I was talking about my first gsi, I felt there was no coherence to the class she couldn't move quickly enough to make sure that discussion was interesting and useful for everybody. No one had any motivation to speak up because they didn't feel invested in the class whatsoever. It was just like one gsi whose very disorganized at the front of the class and then a bunch of students who didn't really understand why they were there because they were {} but I think its important to let everyone get to know each other from day one so that there can be some engaging discussion throughout the semester.

-and so can you explain what you mean by get to know each other?

- so people need to be comfortable speaking with each other. And I think if you make them comfortable speaking with each other on a social level with on the first within the first few

classes then they're going to be willing to engage the material at hand with each other later in the semester. So if you asked me the same question before the semester started, my answer would probably be similar, that there needs to be a culture where everyone is willing to speak with each other and um everyone needs to have an attitude that they're going to talk with each other and the gsi is going to be organized so everybody's on the same page, that's probably what I'd say, but now going into my senior year, I think that, letting people get to know each other better from the very beginning is the most effective way in order to have that attitude in the classroom.

-ok I understand, so you kinda already elaborated on the next question, which is "Question 4" so that's, is that what you were describing just now?

-yeah I think she was very disorganized, she couldn't really keep up with the pace of the students because of her language kept her back a little bit, and once again I think she could've done a better job, I think she could have done a better job and overcome her language skills a little bit, I mean we all have little flaws and it's not an excuse to... I mean I think you still have to find a way to succeed even if you have a flaw that's holding you back and in this case, it was her language skills so I think she could've done a better job and found a way. And I think if she had had the students get to know each other a little more it could have helped, compensate for the fact that her language skills were not as good. So um sorry the original question was, can you give an example of how language skills held her back?

-right

-ok so I still think she could have done a better job by being more organized, by making sure the students knew what they were supposed to do before each class and during each class, and having the students get to know each other a little bit more so maybe she could have used written communication and um just explained to everybody beforehand what the schedule for the class was going to be and what we were going to talk about so that she wouldn't necessarily have to explain that in front of the class, it would've been one less thing. But I just felt that each time we came to class, we would never really know what we were supposed to do, we didn't know the other people and then we would be switching back and forth from videos back to her speaking to like powerpoint slides and stuff like that. And I feel that if you don't make very effective transitions between the material you're trying to present, you lose students and they get distracted. And I felt like that was a constant problem, students would get distracted and not pay attention, they wouldn't speak up during class and I mean nobody really respected her or paid attention to her really. And I mean oftentimes I felt bad for her to be honest. Because I tried to, I tried pay attention and listen but a lot of students didn't. and ultimately I mean I think students, even students that seem disrespectful at times I think they're willing to pay attention if they're interested in it. So if there were a different professor there or a gsi that was engaging, I think those same students that seem disrespectful would have been willing to participate so I do think some of the responsibility falls to the gsi. You can't just blame students for being disrespectful.

- ok well that relates really well to the next question which is um "Question 5"

-I think a lot of them are frustrated by it. And they use it as an excuse to not go to class or not pay attention in class or they use it as an excuse for their exam grades or um people definitely use that as an excuse and um and you can follow up with me, if this doesn't make sense to you, but I was talking about before how I felt bad for this gsi but at the same time I do consider it her

responsibility to make sure that there is an environment in class where people are comfortable speaking and feel like they're engaging the material. I also think as a student, I would never place responsibility on my gsi for not like teaching me material or for doing bad on an exam or anything like that. I would never blame a gsi, no matter how bad she is or he. And cuz I just think that's kind of a detrimental attitude for yourself if you go around blaming other people for times that you don't succeed. Like I said before, I said that gsis that don't speak perfect English, they need to find a way to, they still need to find a way to succeed and have a good classroom environment. And I think the same applies to students. Just because you have a bad professor or gsi, you cannot blame these people. And I think you have to have a better attitude and take personal responsibility for it. I mean there are times when people aren't going to be able to teach you effectively. And you just need to learn how to [cope??] so I think a lot of the frustration that students express for gsis [garbled] is kind of misguided and I think they would be much better off if they placed more personal responsibility on themselves to find a way to succeed as opposed to letting, expecting other people to teach them the material. Um and I mean that's really part of life so in some ways I feel bad for the students that think it's the gsi's responsibility for them to do well on exams.

- I think that makes sense to me

-ok

- I followed so if I were to sort of paraphrase it, I think that what you're saying is that um the gsis hold the responsibility for conducting class in a meaningful and productive way. Uh at the same time undergraduates have their own responsibility for themselves and their what they get out of the class in the end.

-yes I completely agree

-ok. So I understand. So next question "Question6" so first tell me if you have done that.

- I have never done that.

-ok so in what context would you do that?

- I think I would only drop the class if I believed both the professor and the gsi would be... were such poor communicators that the class as a whole would be unproductive throughout the whole semester. So if I felt I could not have a positive experience because of the way the professor because of the way both the gsi and the professor communicated with the class and therefore the class wouldn't be motivated to do well, like if I thought let's take my psychology gsi as an example if I felt that I was attending a class that was going to be like that and also the professor's class was going to be like that as well at that point I would probably drop the course.

-ok

-so only if I felt that communication was going to make the classroom environment unproductive
[]

-ok I understand. So "Question 7"

- so difference in behavior in the classroom?

- right. I mean you could also extend that question to overhearing speech of undergraduates about gsis

- so what they think about gsis?

-mhm

- so I think that I mean I've had great gsis and I've had bad gsis and I think the worst gsi that I've had was the psychology one that we talked about before. And I mean I'm under the belief and I think a lot of undergraduates would agree that we've had I've had some fantastic gsis that I've learned a lot from and I think that there are even sometimes it's even good to break into section to have a different person teaching you as opposed to having a professor teaching you all the time. So I think that undergrads can have a very good opinion of gsis. And I mean I think it gets back to what I was saying before if I think about some of the best gsis I've had and some of the best classroom experiences that I've had with gsis, it's when the gsi is capable of getting the majority of the class to participate consistently. So I mean when when that doesn't happen, the classroom just seems stale and boring so when when a gsis capable of making everyone feel comfortable from the very beginning they'll talk about, they're going to be willing to engage the material and have discussions between other students and between gsis and the students so I think there can be I've seen like a huge difference in behavior between good gsis and bad gsis and in this uh in this psychology class I'm talking about nobody every really participated and when there was like a break or our gsi was transitioning between like one part of the presentation to another and there may have been like a 15 second delay between her actually presenting people, their attention span vanished like into thin air and they would start talking to each other and once people get distracted and talking to each other, it's impossible to get them to engage again in the material. Whereas in other classes I think people and I mean I think one of my best gsis was probably my first semester great books gsi, Eileen was in that class, he was great and people were willing to talk about the material constantly every single class and they wouldn't get distracted. They would just come and they would pay attention for the full hour they would do that every single time. Really the opposite of the case. And people in terms of how they would think about these gsis people had a very positive opinion of him. I've gone around and talked to other students about how good certain other gsis were and I've heard people express very positive things about certain gsis this gsi had as a psychology...the psychology gsi that I had, I think people would consistently talk about how she wasn't very good and they were not learning much in class. People would skip class and people would also make fun of her consistently.
[overlap]

- and can you give an example?

- of how they would make fun of her? I mean I there was one instance where she got somebody's name wrong, and I don't really remember the specifics but after class people were making fun of her for it and making fun of her for the awkward moment she caused and imitating her with her accent and stuff like that. So but I mean for the better gsis I've had, people have left class and spoken very highly of that gsi and they don't feel cheated at all that a gsi is teaching the course instead of a professor. I mean I think people are capable of having a very good opinion of their gsis and a very bad opinion of their gsis.

-alright well um so obviously this is just in your own personal opinion: "Question 8"

-it probably gets back to the fact that we would consider ourselves a research university and these graduate students are generally brought in to learn how to do research and then go on to have productive research careers so at other universities generally so it would be especially in the sciences I think people who don't speak English that well but can be very productive in terms of learning material and conducting research in that field so I think it's probably based on their capability of doing research which is the primary reason they're here, to do research and to do research with faculty members.

-so for this 9th question ""

-well I would imagine that they, that before they even apply for to get into a PhD program they have to take an English language test which is toefl (spelled), is that correct?

- TOEFL (pronounced)? Yeah

-so they would have to take that test to demonstrate that their written and verbal language skills are at least at some level in order to get into an American university where English is spoken in the classroom. Once they get to once they get into a PhD program I would imagine that they have to apply for that they'd have to apply for different gsi positions with different professors for courses that they're interested in. and this probably correlates more so with professors who have similar research interests or that they do research with so that's probably some sort of relationship between the professor and the gsi beforehand but that's not always the case. And if I had to guess I'd probably say that at that point when you're already [] in that program, you probably wouldn't have to take any other English language test or anything like that. But that's just a guess. But I'm not really sure. But I would be interested to here the process if you can tell me.

-um well we can talk about it after the interview. Um

-that's fine

-so in like this process that you're like imagining "question 10"

-well I would say that ultimately the decision of who is a gsi for a specific course should depend on the professor of that course. So I think that decision should be based on the faculty member teaching the course because she should have the authority and the responsibility of designing the course the way they want to and therefore the authority to choose [who teaches the course?] so I do think that it's the faculty members decision. However I think that the faculty members should consider what the audience members want which is the undergraduates in the course. so I think if I were a professor I would want the students feedback at the end of every single semester for myself as a teacher about my gsi as a teacher and so I would make sure I would get good feedback from them and I'd probably even provide some incentive for them to give me the feedback. So I've had two professors one this semester and one in the past who made sure that who gave an incentive for people to fill out their those evaluations at the end. So like one of my professors in the past who was didn't actually have a gsi but she was a nonnative English speaking professor and it was her first semester here so she really wanted feedback so she said I'll give you an extra point on your exam if you give me the confirmation if you print out the confirmation that you filled out your evaluation and you give it to me before the exam. And I have one professor now who makes it two percent of your grade to write an evaluation of the

course and how the course can be better which is distinct from the ctools evaluation. So he wants to know how the course can be better whether it's in lecture or discussion or whatever. So and I personally think that's a great idea because and I mean I think that the professor I was just describing that makes you write an evaluation, that's actually a great idea because you're being graded on the quality of the advice that you provide. So it's not necessarily and once again this isn't specifically the gsis but I think this type of form can apply to gsis. So I don't think he's looking for anything in particular but he wants to see that people have put an honest effort and they've thought about how the course can be better and if you show if you demonstrate that you are providing real feedback where you actually want the course to be better he'll just give you []. And I think that can be I think a system like that is great because you make the student responsible for giving good feedback and I've always thought that those ctools evaluations were probably not that effective because the professor at the end of the semester gets 50 evaluations each with 30 questions and I bet a lot of them don't even compile and look at the data at the end of the semester but even if even if they do, questions like how how good was this aspect of the course from 1-10 probably doesn't provide that information that a 2 page written evaluation of the whole course that's graded based on the quality of the feedback you provide can provide you with some um very good ways to change the course in the future. So I think a system like that I think a system like that would be very good and I think that faculty members should it would be nice if more faculty members used the system like that and got real feedback from undergraduates and could make more decisions about gsis in the future. And honestly I think that like in most courses well I don't want to say most, in a lot of courses you get a lecture you get a grade based on an assignment you do and also you get a grade based on discussion which would count participation and stuff like that, if I were a gsi and getting a PhD and planning on a career as a professor I would want to be a better teacher and I bet if I went to my professor and I said that ok I'm gonna make people write a two page evaluation based on how I can do better and I'm gonna make it 5% of my discussion grade will you allow me to do that so we can make this course better and I can become a better teacher I bet every faculty member would [approve?] a system like that. So I think gsis or professors put in a system like that they could do a much better job of improving gsis []. That's a very long answer []

-ok, yeah but very interesting and thorough. Um so so what "question 11"

-well I think one of the problems is that they give students an excuse for not placing personal responsibility on themselves and we talked about that before

-right

-so that's a very detrimental effect that I don't like. I also think it makes it harder to keep the it makes it a lot harder to keep class organized and engaging and we've talked about this before. I think its imperative for instructors or leaders or whoever to make sure that people in the class are engaged from the beginning to make sure they're comfortable speaking, and if you can't keep up with the pace of students or if you are hard to understand or if you can't use the right words at the right time it makes it very hard to create an engaging environment in the classroom. So I think those are two problems with nonnative speaking gsis. That may be all I can think of right now but I think I elaborated on both of those a lot in prior questions.

-yeah um a lot of the questions tend to intermingle but that's the idea

-that's fine

-so how do "question 12"

-well I think that system of providing of getting honest written feedback from people so that you can use that to improve would be one way to resolve this issue. I mean I think that I mean I really I think it all gets back to placing personal responsibility on gsis if certain gsis really care about the quality of their classroom experience that it's going to be their future to make sure they do a good job in this respect so they care a lot about making the classroom experience productive for everybody and I don't know if they started out slow and developed over time or whether they're just naturally talented in this respect it's hard for me to say exactly but I think there are a lot of gsis who do take personal responsibility for that and they make sure that they improve over time. However I think the real problem comes when certain gsis don't care about their classroom experience because they're being evaluated based on the quality of their research. So I think that's that's the real problem.

-mhmm

- where certain gsis just don't see the importance of making sure that they have a good classroom experience even while they're a graduate student because they're not being evaluated based on it. So that's a real problem. And I mean it's tough to resolve right because if the gsi never sees the importance of having a good classroom experience then there's not really a it's going to be hard to get them to improve right?

-yeah

- because even if this gsi is doing a terrible job and the faculty member realizes it and just says you know what you can't be my gsi. Like that doesn't really solve any problems. That just makes the faculty member replace this gsi. That gsi will probably go apply for another course and do the same thing. So it's a difficult problem. Um I don't know if I have a solution for it off the top of my head.

-that's fine

-like I don't really think it's appropriate to evaluate a PhD like I don't think that there should be like one could argue that ok them being awarded a PhD should be part based on the evaluations they received in the classroom. You could make that argument and force every gsi to become better. Or at least they would have to []. But I just don't know if that's appropriate to be honest. I think that adding that component to the normal process which is due to research over the course of 5 or 6 years and writing a dissertation [] I don't think that making sure the evaluations are good really fits into that process. And I don't really think that's an appropriate change. So I mean it's a difficult problem; I don't really know.

- I mean that's a fair answer, that's valid.

-but I mean I do, I feel the real problem is when a gsi does not feel the classroom experience is important. And because they're not being evaluated and therefore they don't place any personal responsibility on themselves. I mean I think that's a real problem. I would say that's not a problem that's not the problem for most gsis. Most gsis really do care about teaching well as a

graduate student learning to teach well because they understand it's part of their career. But I think there are some gsis that don't really care that much about placing personal responsibility about making their classroom experience is good. But I'm not really sure how to fix that.

-um so I guess you touched on this some but what "question 13"

- well I think it's ultimately you're responsibility as a student to make every experience you have not just in the classroom to be as productive and as um beneficial to yourself as possible. So even if you are involved in a discussion where you realize that the leader of your discussion your gsi is just not that capable of teaching of creating and making a strong classroom environment I still think it's your responsibility to make sure you learn the material do well on exams, find some way to make it productive. Recently I've been, I've been thinking about this more. I think that usually the most challenging experiences that students are involved in where you're working with very difficult people are opportunities where there's the most to learn. So I mean I think that like let me give you an example. Like let's say that so you're a I don't know, you're a junior in a class, you have a terrible gsi, the classroom environment is terrible. No one pays attention, half the people show up and leave but as a junior you're also the leader of some student organization where you need to go you need to motivate 10 other people to work and make sure that make sure that you accomplish your goals for that []. I think there would be a lot to learn from that classroom environment. So that you can go and apply that to your student organization, make sure that make sure you are um doing a good job. Like if you you should try to learn like for what reasons is this gsis not succeeding. Is it the fact that she's not organized? Is it that the students don't know each others' names whatever. And I mean I think that even though this junior probably isn't off teaching in a classroom setting you can apply those challenging situations that you've learned from to other contexts. So I mean I think teaching and leading a classroom requires similar skills to leading a group of other people and accomplish some goals and I think there's a lot to learn. And that's just really one example but my point is that I think when you're involved in these challenging situations and you probably even have no control over whether this classroom experience is going to improve throughout the semester you can still learn a lot from that experience and apply that to other aspects of your life. And so I think that it's the students' responsibility to learn as much as they can in every environment. Especially the challenging ones where they may have no control of what the outcome is. So I mean I think you can learn a lot about teamwork and leadership by having a gsi that doesn't speak English well and therefore cannot have cannot create a good classroom experience.

-ok so sort of as, still thinking about that "question 14"

-another student comes up to me and says no nonnative English speaker should be allowed?

-right

- I would disagree completely. I think that once again, there are some very bad gsis that don't speak English and there are also some that don't didn't originally speak English and there are also some very good gsis who didn't speak English originally. So I don't think that's fair and so I I don't think that's fair because you're basically excluding a whole class of people who could be very good for students right off the get-go so I would disagree for that reason. Secondly, once again I don't like the attitude because I think that places the responsibility more so on the instruction as opposed to you as a student. So what that attitude suggests to me like from that

student's perspective, is I can't learn if this person doesn't teach me I can't learn if I can't understand this person, etc etc. so and I just think that's a terrible attitude. You need to you're going to be dealing with difficult people in life that don't communicate well. I mean I have relationships with people that don't communicate well and honestly I've learned a lot from them over the years. And I make sure that because of these people that I know that don't communicate well, I make sure that I try to stay organized and stay prepared and go the extra mile to make sure that we're communicating well in emails and in person and stuff like that. So I don't think that it's I just don't like that attitude of placing the responsibility on somebody else for you to learn. That what you learn should always be your responsibility and when you're dealing with difficult people and gsis that don't communicate well, that's just another situation where you can learn a lot about how to lead your life in other contexts. So I would just strongly disagree to be honest.

-ok um so this is the final question um "question 15"

- well I mean I think the benefit is I think honestly overall I would say that allowing nonnative English speakers to speak during allowing nonnative speakers to be gsis is good for students because I mean there are a lot of students from around the world that come to American universities to receive PhD's and are very talented at what they do. And as a student I would not be I would not want to be excluded from that body of people. I think that there's a lot to learn about about culture and about teaching and about leadership from being involved in these classroom settings. I think it's good to have diversity among gsis. So I think there are a lot of benefits to it. And I mean most of these gsis that pretty much every gsi that gets accepted at this university or other universities that are you know have competitive um hard PhD programs these people are well qualified and know a lot about their field so I think it's good for students to have the opportunity to learn from them. And if they come from different cultures and different countries that just allows students to learn that much more in their classroom experience about the material at hand and also just about the uh whatever else the gsi has to offer. Negatives- I mean I would really I mean I've already said this but I think it just gives students an excuse to not place personal responsibility on themselves when they have a bad gsi who doesn't communicate well. So overall I think it's very beneficial for the undergraduates, the community, and the university as a whole. I mean really I just feel bad for the students who use it as an excuse. I mean I think it's their loss more than anything if they believe it's the teacher's responsibility to [].

-well thank you for your time and that concludes my first interview

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INTERVIEW II:

-gender: Female

-ethnicity: Caucasian

-age: 21

-year in school: senior

-major: sport management

-question 1: “just the gsi, not the professor?...[my affirmative answer] I had four classes.

-question 2: “overall it’s hard to differentiate. They’re the four classes that I have the lowest grades in on my transcript. Um I think, three of them, three were European and one was Asian. The class where I had the Asian GSI is my lowest grade, Economics 101. I do think that had something to do with it because I didn’t understand the material and asking questions just made it more confusing for me. Thankfully, I do not do well in Calculus, and in Calculus I had an English speaking GSI, I could just like tell the difference. In Calculus I was just lost and it wouldn’t have mattered who I had, it wouldn’t have helped. I think in Econ, if I had been able to ask, been more comfortable asking questions, I could have done better. And I understand, she was a smart girl, it wasn’t her fault but I think it was just her whole background of economics and her thought process was just so far different than mine, it wasn’t just the language. It was just the whole thing. I think it was her first time teaching the class. So I had her for Econ 101 then I had 102 next semester. They brought her up to 102 and I freaked out. I was like oh my gosh I am not going through this again.” [2:55] and I had friends who were in that discussion which I wasn’t in it and I had a girl from Germany and econ isn’t my best thing, I just felt better in that class. She just explained things to me in a way I understood.”

-question 3: “I definitely think that they need to be on the same page with the professor. Sometimes I feel like that wasn’t always the case, that they knew, that they thought they knew the material. And then I’d ask a question in class and they explained it differently and that’s where econ 101 failed was that I was getting two different explanations...whereas 102 they were always on the same page, exactly the same page. Her name was Laura, I loved Laura. And I think it’s just really important to know that we are college students but I don’t know, like we want to be treated as equals but I think that in my case I was treated as such an equal that I felt stupid a lot of the time. Like they’re still our teacher, grad students, they are students too they equate with you more, they relate to you more. But I always had an issue feeling like comfortable asking questions I always felt like dumb to be asking questions. I felt like sometimes it was it seemed like I should know these things, like we’re very close in age so it’s just weird not to understand. And I think gsi’s need to take into consideration that they are our teachers, and when I was in chemistry, chem. 130, a lecture with a hundred people, like I had no contact with that professor. My gsi was my teacher. I think at Michigan sometimes that gets lost. Like we see them more than we see our professor.

-and was the professor for 102 the same as 101?

-“no, the professor was [2 names]...

-question 4: “I can just elaborate more on 101. I mean I took econ because it was required for my major. So I didn’t want to be there really in the first place. so I didn’t go into it with the best attitude. But the lectures I understood, I could grasp, I took an honors class with that professor at the same time that was a theory class to try and help me understand econ. Cuz I really didn’t get it. And I understood it in class with her and then I’d go to discussion and it would fall apart. It

was 8:30s on Tuesday and Thursdays, I'll never forget it. And I just like, going there was the worst thing. Because it was like a joke to everyone in the class. It was like a joke about being there. She couldn't really, she wouldn't really say anything to us besides the answers because people wouldn't ask questions after the first three weeks there was like an overall mantra that we weren't going to understand from her. I remember my friend Jamie had a different gsi, and I actually sought out his help. And not my own gsi's because I tried several times to go to her office hours and it just wasn't there. I don't know what it was. I didn't know if she didn't know what I was asking or I didn't know what she was saying. But I mean I understood physically what words she was saying to me, the concepts were just lost in translation. I just didn't understand at all. And I wasn't doing well on the quizzes in class and I'd go ask her about the quizzes and she was just, that's when I felt stupid. She was like well this is all you had to do. And I was like just showing me the answers isn't teaching me and I think what was happening was that she just thought that she just had to show us the answers and not the processes. And I didn't understand the processes so when I asked for a verbal explanation instead of just numerical it was not happening."

-and that's the same way she was behaving in class?

-“yeah like if we had a quiz and she went over the quiz. She would just go to the board and write all of the problems with the correct answers and then like that was it. She wouldn't go step by step through them. You had to go to her office hours to do that and it just doesn't make sense to me to have to outside of class to be taught.”

-ok I understand, question 5: “to be frank and unfortunately I think its' an overarching, it's almost funny. it's almost we just people don't take it seriously. It's also like an excuse, you know I was just, I feel like I'm doing bad in econ because my gsi's Asian or whatever. I think it's something that people say a lot that they're not understanding or doing well in this class because they can't understand their professor. I mean it's sad, I think our generation as a whole doesn't know how to communicate. But I mean I definitely think here like because you have so many instances of having gsis who aren't native English speakers, you're, sometimes you luck out and you understand anyway. But I mean the majority of the student population is white, American English speaking and I think it's always a difficult thing. I hope not everyone's as cynical as I'm making it out to be. I hope but I just, that one experience has just tainted my view on the whole thing. Maybe if I had never, like with Laura or Eric, they were European, German and Swedish and I just the accent, the accent was not hard to overlook. The Chinese accent, I just couldn't get over it. Maybe we need to be exposed to it earlier...but my first class freshman year I had chem. And a Japanese gsi. And that was my first class at Michigan and you know I don't, I think your first experience first time around makes or breaks it for the rest of your time here.”

-so can you give a few words that describe undergraduate feelings?

-“ I guess it is a joke. Its just people don't want to deal with it. They're just kind of ignorant about the whole thing. I mean also probably there's some disrespect there.”

-question 6: STOPPED at 11,48 “I didn't drop it because it was required. I probably would have if it wasn't required for me to graduate. I also would probably drop it if I couldn't switch out. Like if I was that far off base, like if they wouldn't let me switch to another gsi. I mean personally, I mean I just handle the cards I'm dealt but I think from knowing other people, they

usually would just switch out and use other people and try to find another teacher and just use the excuse that they needed another time or something like that.” So just switch to another section? “yeah I think dropping a class is like, unless it’s not required. If it was something you’re taking for enjoyment and you’re no longer enjoying it because you can’t understand then that’s easily droppable but I had to take this class anyway before I could graduate so I wasn’t going to drop it just because of that.”

-ok um so question 7: “I think, let me know if I’m not answering the question...there is that sense that it’s funny or people get so frustrated or people put the blame on a gsi when they’re not a na, when they don’t natively speak English. I don’t think that’s there when it’s an English speaking gsi. You can’t really blame someone for teaching you the way you’ve always been taught and they understand what you’re saying so. I mean that’s never an issue. I also, like I think our experiences, like I went to a big public high school, all my teachers were from where we grew up. And I’ve never been out of the United States so I’ve never come across not being the native speaker. For international students which I know Michigan has a lot of, or for students like [] who went to school in another country and had the experience of listening to other people’s accents, maybe not as big of a deal. But for me and for a lot of people her you never really keep in contact with anyone who didn’t grow up speaking English and so I guess it became such a challenge in itself that you had to work to understand your work in those classes that I would seek out gsis that I knew were English speaking just because I knew it would be easier to me. Whether or not it did is another story because you know I still had to do well in calc where I had an English speaking teacher.”

-question 8: 15,07 I mean, US Report, Michigan’s the number 14 school in the world, with things like that and with resources like that you can’t deny the opportunity to be a grad student at this school to people from other countries just...for us to be students at other countries is very difficult so for them to get the opportunity to come here I would never stop them from doing so um I guess Michigan is a research university and I have my issues with professors who get hired here with tenure who...English isn’t there first language. I think that’s the direction this country’s in that we’re headed. Melting pot the United States, there’s a lot of people in this country that speak Spanish as their first language and I don’t speak Spanish you know. And if it comes to the point you know that I come in contact with a lot of people then I’m gonna have to learn and that’s where our student body...we are ignorant, it’s not like, including myself here, I’ve never given these people a chance and they come here with that opportunity and if part of their program is that they have to teach us, I guess they’re not looking to be teachers maybe I don’t really know their end of the story, I’m sure it’s not easy for them to be teaching in another language but um I don’t know, it’s hard because we have such an arrogance about this university like our student population knows that they’re smart and wants to do well and kinda doesn’t want to have to work sometimes to you know, I worked so hard to get here and now I still have to work so hard to understand my teachers it just seems like the stupidest thing sometimes but um yeah but, looking at it that way you can’t deny people the opportunity to get an education here. Um I couldn’t imagine going across the world to go to school and teach kids who spoke a different language so.

-question 9: 17:30 I really don’t know how it works, I remember talking to Laura once and I knew she was a research assistant and it was docking her tuition to teach but that’s all I really know. I don’t know if she was asked to do it. I’m not sure.

-question 10: um I think that may help if maybe...the semester before they start being a gsi they...does a mock class or goes in and teaches a class for the subject they're going to teach and maybe even the students could give a reaction. It could be a part of that ctools thing at the end of the semester. I mean I don't really know how many...'what ctools thing?' uh the teacher evaluation thing that are on ctools at the end of the semester, I don't know what the response rate is for that if it's really low or anything but um yeah exposing them to maybe...them to the students and seeing how the classroom is before they are just thrown in to the classroom...that way even a current gsi could give their opinion um I don't know. That's tough...in a perfect world obviously I would want to know that this person is qualified but with the I mean we don't, the lack of time that people are willing to put into things, the only way they could do it is if students are already in class because asking students unless it's part of a paid \$10 study for you to go sit in class then volunteer your time to see how that teacher does something I don't really think students would put their time and effort into it even how valuable it might be.

-question 11: 20:01, a lack of communication...the issue with what questions are being asked and what answers are being given. I think that a lot of times again to use the phrase lost in translation, I think a lot of times undergrad students have a tough time conveying already what they're confused about to somebody who speaks English natively let alone to try and explain it in like laymen's terms to somebody and to repeat it back to you in an answer I think that people sometimes just don't want to try and do that...indirectly that makes students feel like they can't ask questions because they are already assuming that their teacher won't understand what they're saying...I think it also it creates an inequality amongst a section. In econ 101 my friend Jamie loved her gsi and he spoke English and she understood everything and I was so pissed off about that that like she was getting a's in everything that I used the fact that I didn't understand my gsi as my excuse let alone...I don't know if it was the reason...I think that it just creates an unbalanced opinion of a class so at the end of a semester when you go to rate a class or something you look back on how you feel about a class, it really can make or break an experience if you had a poor relationship with your gsi for something like that, um I mean I hate economics but I would take 102 a hundred times over, I got the same grade in both classes, c's in both classes but I would take 102 a hundred times over because my gsi spoke English and I actually knew what was going on in the class and in discussion as opposed to 101.

-so most of the problems that you're talking about are about academic understanding?'

-yeah because I think that you always have other students to go if you need help or whatever if that's an issue...being in that room, people just don't go to class...people don't go to discussion, they don't understand because they think it's dumb, they're not willing to put in the time and effort to try and understand. I don't know.

-question 12 23min: I mean I don't know if it's like a really tough thing to say rotate gsis halfway through the semester but to like expose students to different people so that if all of a sudden you do see that kids scores are like deviated and dependent on their speaker maybe that was the issue but you know if I consistently didn't understand economics and even with that gsi was still not doing that well I'm still not able to have that excuse, oh it's not because I didn't understand 'x' it's because I just didn't get economics or I wasn't studying or whatever it's not an entire semester of just feeling lost if I don't know...I know there's like two 8:30 sections at once, if you just flipped gsis halfway through that you know, cuz there's definitely in certain departments more not non native English speakers, I am not a science major, after chem. I didn't

take a science class, I know that that and math department is a lot more than other sections like political science and other classes are I've always had English speaking gsis. Um but that's just an idea...

-'if that had happened for you and you had maintained the same grade how would you have felt?'

-then I wouldn't have felt like this is all 'x's' fault, oh this is all because of my gsi, ok I'm really just not studying I'm really just not understanding it would've given me a reality check you know just to say I just, me and economics just don't work out, not like now when I'm saying I hated economics 101 because I was lost because I didn't understand discussion. I couldn't use that excuse because um it would show me later on that I couldn't use that excuse it wouldn't just sit poorly me like it always has since I took that class. It would force me to understand that it wasn't her, it was me and I don't have that feeling now because I had her that entire semester and I couldn't tell ya.

-question 13: I think that students have the responsibility to speak up if there is miscommunication in a respectful manner of course but just to kinda you know if which I didn't do, but just email or saying I'm having a really tough time understanding your description of this can we go over it again? Or if that's really that much of a problem to go seek other help to go seek out your professor. I don't think your professor is going to shoot you down if you're like I'm having trouble understanding my gsi like I'm kind of lost. I don't think they're going to throw you to the wolves and just say deal with it. But at the same time it's what gsi you were given. It's who's teaching your class and you have to be willing to give em some slack and um you know they're trying just as hard as you are and on the students end I'm sure they're trying more than you are um when you skip their class or laugh in class or like whatever behind their back you're not giving them full respect I mean it's kind of your own problem too. So I mean being respectful is a huge thing and then just making sure to try and communicate. Sitting back and doing nothing which is what I did from experience was stupid and I think it's, it sets you up for life. The more we're looking into post-collegiate stuff or jobs the more you're coming into contact with people that don't necessarily have perfect English or don't speak just English and that's you know you don't want to go study abroad or go get a job in another country and get mocked and disrespected because you don't speak that language you know that's something that students don't realize because we've just been brought up in an environment where we haven't really been exposed myself included so.

-question 14: you know what that's just like, I've probably had people say comments like that to me like they shouldn't be gsis and this is so dumb. I underlyingly want to say I know this sucks but you can't take that right away from anyone. If they wanna teach a class if it helps them take their you know work study tuition down, that's part of going to this school, you know they got into this school because of their academia, they know what they're talking about. They're not going to let someone who doesn't know the subject teach you but I understand that there are problems. So I mean I don't think that's true but as I said before there's plenty of people I've had who English wasn't their first language who spoke very good English so that within itself cannot be a stigma against somebody that grew up speaking Swedish or German because the languages are so close it's when you have languages that aren't similar that the problems start to come out. You can't just be like, if you're from Asia you can't be a teacher. That's why they come here to get more opportunity or to you know experience something different. I don't know that's gonna

solve any problems, students would just make something else up that they were having issues with their gsis after that happened. So I don't really think that, I would react poorly to that.

-question 15: um just address the downsides first, not to be extremely repetitive but its' it's harder just harder to try and understand things that you might not already understand. I honestly wish that I had taken a class with a nonnative speaking gsi in a class that I did well in um so I wouldn't be so judgmental about it all the time. Unfortunately I took it in big lectures and math class, which were my hardest classes here. So I think when it comes to that having students that have to take classes to graduate and they weren't good at is hard for those students. When you're working hard already trying to understand material and you're having issues understanding or communicating or there's a culture clash in how you're being taught it's very very hard. The upside is that they are very very smart. Um these people to me I mean having know economic policy of at least two different countries probably more, know exactly what they're talking about. They've been exposed to so many different things the research that they do and what they bring is very very interesting. And if you got the time to understand that about them I think it would be really cool. Unfortunately the way those classes work is that you have discussions twice a week and you have five discussions before an exam so you really don't have time to like (31;21) analyze anything but like being taught that material and I think that's unfortunate for them um because that pretty much, the way undergrads here work is that they wanna get good grades and they will bitch and moan until they get that good grade. I mean I did the same thing and I think the benefit to having one of those instructors is that it teaches you in the long run for sure at the time you don't see it as a benefit even just sitting here I like understand that I need to be more aware of those around me and what they're trying to do but um I definitely think that it's a two way street. I mean for every time that you're gsi is messing up to you you're really not doing anything back unless you go seek out help and it's really that big of an issue at that point they would understand that you need to go in another direction. I feel like they would really try. It just sucks that they do take classes or they are doing research at the same time so their availability isn't amazing but 9 out of ten times the professor is doing the same thing and their availability is just as strict. So it's a tough call.

Interview 3:

-male, Caucasian, 22 years old, senior, physics

-question 1: I have and I have had, is it just gsi's or also professors?...I have had two such classes

-question 2: they were pretty typical actually of most of my other classes that had gsis in the sense that like they were ok classes and the problem mostly was that they were inexperienced and they didn't necessarily have good classroom management or um good control of where discussions were going or what was going on in the class but otherwise I they were fine in the same way that any inexperienced gsi was fine like I thought they were pretty typical. 'do you remember which classes they were?' one of them was English 313, it was a rhetoric course [can't remember other], 'do you remember what the native language was?' the individual in the English course was Indian and in the other course it was some kind of Asian nationality

-question 3: successful gsi has competence, is prepared for the class and is fairly flexible in the sense that if someone fields questions they are able to answer them and if they have a class that's more discussion based and the discussion goes in an unexpected direction they are able to flow with it.

-question 4: in my rhetoric course, we had a discussion section that basically could be described as watch a movie and talk about it. It was much more in line with we watched the movie and then they had nothing to talk about. And all they really had were so what'd you guys think about this? And that was pretty awful actually.

-question 5: they think almost, the typical stereotype is that a nonnative gsi would be in the hard sciences and math, especially in math. And they're usually in the introductory courses where students don't really know what's going on and so they get these, they tend to think of them pretty negatively because the material's hard and there's a language barrier that's not helped by the material itself which can kinda be arcane to explain so I think that students that have nonnative gsis have they form fairly negative perspectives about them

-question 6: if I had a class where the sections where the gsi taught were very important like in great books essentially your grade was decided by your discussion section and in that sort of situation if I had a nonnative gsi who I couldn't understand or I couldn't make them understand me I would drop the course whereas in contrast in calculus class or physics class, the gsi doesn't have a lot of influence over your grade so in a lot of senses you can just kinda not go to those discussion sections if it doesn't work with your gsi so I would drop a course if a gsi had a lot of power over my grade and we weren't connecting for some reason.

-question 7: they're quicker to form judgments on nonnative speaking gsis and they're less likely to give them a second chance if they mess up or something's not working because it's a lot easier, it just makes a very convenient scapegoat to blame the foreigners or the nonnative speakers. 'blame them for?' for anything that doesn't work out, so for instance I think if you took two classes and you have the gsis teach and in one of them the gsi was a nonnative speaker and the other was a native speaker, and they both taught the same lesson and they both made the same crucial mistake where I don't know they forgot to bring in some handout for the class to work, I think more students would form negative opinions of the nonnative speaker because they come to some conclusion that the nonnative speaker was not good or adept to teach the class.

-question 8 (7;18): um I think they accept nonnative students for pretty much the same reason they accept native students which is that they think they'd make good graduate students

-question 9: I don't know very much, I assume somewhere in there is some kind of English speaking proficiency test although that's probably in the graduate student application um but beyond that I don't really know

-question 10: beyond having willing undergraduates test some class situation in the process of training gsis, beyond that I don't really see much need to have undergraduates involved in the selection process of gsis

-question 11: I mean its mostly either problems with language or accent or being understood or making it easy to be understood but also problems with terminology that can vary across countries. I don't really see what else could be a problem. 'so in that situation in the terminology

situation how does that affect students in the classroom?' I mean so the two products of any at least in my mind the two main products of like language confusion or misapprehension or misunderstandings are either that the student doesn't understand the material or...the gsi and the student don't connect in communication. And then as part of that it engenders frustration in the student and also probably the gsi about like you know they're trying to make each other understood and they can't do it and that can be annoying...you're in an environment that's maybe a little more hostile and intense

-question 12(10;21): I think there are three avenues, ok so the first one is to have higher standards in English proficiency which may or may not include just like raising your test scores on some type of exam but also maybe some kind of softer evaluation of gsi's ability to speak in front of the class. 'softer meaning?' meaning like it isn't like you take some exam that's like in this sentence you find where the comma's supposed to go. Or like you give a presentation in front of professors and they say you should work on these things in that sense. So that's avenue one. Avenue two is and in similar lines just to increase the level of preparation of presentations to the class. Because that's one of the issues with nonnative speakers is that a slip-up makes it easier for students to form negative opinions of the gsi then just like one solution is to make them slip up less. Which is something that all gsis benefit from then because they all receive that training and it enhances the classroom experience. And then the third is some kind of way I don't know to reach the students and kind of remind them that gsis are people too and they are trying at least are supposed to be trying and uh. 'and do you have any thoughts on how that could be accomplished?' really no um, I mean it could always be kind of a subtle thing, like when you're doing your orientations there's some line about how the gsis are working really hard to give you a good education or something like that.

-question 13: (12;26) it's the same responsibilities really as when they come to any class which is to essentially be prepared with the material and be willing to push yourselves with the material and to be not only misunderstood but also attempt to rectify that misunderstanding. Those are the sorts of, like just general preparedness for the class.

-question 14: that's a pretty silly idea. Um I don't know it just doesn't really just hold up to any kind of inspection. 'why?' I mean there are plenty of native English speakers who cannot be understood in class anyways. So I don't see how you can make that judgment on like one subsection of the entire population. Because the issue is not so much that they're nonnative speakers it would more be that they're hard to understand or there's some sort of connection communication that's not being made between student and teacher. 'so you would disagree with that...' yes I would disagree with them.

-question 15: (note the tone) benefits- interactions with other cultures and multicultural experiences. Also you're more likely to get perhaps more unorthodox or perhaps alternative perspectives on different issues. So for example if you're taking an English class or some kind of anthropology class with a nonnative gsi they probably have they're more likely to have a different perspective on some issue in the humanities course than like your native one who grew up in the Midwest and has the same sort of values as you know the general student population. Um but that all generally falls under the [?] of multicultural experiences. And of course the downsides are if the gsi is not well versed in English and there are essential communication issues. And those communication issues may extend just beyond their accents or whatever

linguistics or communication issues about what words stand for or what concepts stand for or like where that that sort of thing.