Bridges ESL
2021-22
STUDENT
ANTHOLOGY

FEATURING WORKS BY OUR STUDENTS
It was a year ago, in March 2021, when my wife, my two children and I found out that she had been accepted to do a postdoc here at Yale University. We did not think twice and decided to leave everything behind to enjoy this experience as a family. Although it was something that my wife had been looking forward to for months, the pandemic forced us to rethink our plans; but well, this came to us out of the blue and everything changed from one day to the next. We left our family and friends, left our house, and quit our jobs, just to take this opportunity.

We are from Mexico, and although the distance is not huge and there is a lot of history in common, cultural differences can play an important role. Facing a new way of life, a new language, with two small children, at a higher cost of living (here all services cost an arm and a leg) and in the midst of a global pandemic, it is not an easy matter; however, I must confess that everything has gone well so far and has been a highly enriching experience. It would also be absurd of me to complain about our situation knowing that there are many people who have had a really bad time in these last two years.

I could fill pages and pages describing everything we have experienced during this short stay, despite the confinement, starting with the good things: the wonderful autumn landscapes, the impressive constructions of the university city, the experience of seeing a snowfall for the first time, the cultural atmosphere that is breathed in the air, diversity, multiculturalism, etc.

However, and I think it’s important to say, not everything shines, or not for everyone. By deciding to live this experience fully, we have been able to see closely the marked social and economic differences that exist in New Haven; it is not difficult, if you immerse yourself in the outskirts of the city, you can observe the marginalization, poverty and inequality of opportunities and living conditions of a large sector of the population, mainly for the Afro-American and Latino community.

As in many parts of the world since the 1970s, this city has undergone a long and deep process of gentrification, of "beautification" of the environment that surrounds university campuses. and That has consequences, such as the increase in the cost of living, which directly or indirectly marginalizes those who can no longer afford it. Of course, I think this social phenomenon is not completely Yale’s fault, as different social movements point out, but it has not been part of the solution either, not to the best of its abilities. Anyway, society, government and other actors involved have much to think about and do about it.
Well, in a world convulsed by pandemics and wars, here we are, trying to make our way. The American dream is a multicolored and multi-flavored mosaic, very far from what is usually believed, but without a doubt, it is an adventure that is worth living for.

Finally, I want to thank the Bridges ESL program, and especially my tutors Nawal and Amelia and each of my classmates, for the opportunity and tools provided for the development of my language skills, which is extremely valuable at this stage of adaptation in my life.

Daniel Castillo.
Hello there! My name is Mayumi, and I am from Brazil. I lived in New Haven with my husband for two years during the pandemic. It was tough. We arrived a few weeks before the lockdown, so our first year was in our small apartment without the sensation of living abroad. At least we brought our cat with us and that was crucial for maintaining our sanity during that time.

Luckily, during our second year there, I found out about the Bridges ESL program and could finally study and practice my English as I had planned. It was a great opportunity not just to improve my English, but also to learn about other cultures with my classmates and meet amazing people.

Last but not least, I want to thank my tutor, Nawal, for being patient and comprehensive with us. Bringing interesting and important topics to discuss in class and setting a comfortable environment for us to speak without fear (especially for me, since I struggle to express myself even in my native language). I really appreciate this chance that Bridges provides me to improve my abilities.

Now, me, my husband and our cat are moving to Canada. We are excited and anxious at the same time. Moving is already a big change, and to another country for the second time is in another level. However, I’ll use the knowledge I got while I was taking classes with Nawal and my classmates. It will help me a lot in this new adventure. Thank you so much everyone!
By Cecilia Herrera
Tutor: Selin Nalbantoglu

My favorite part of learning English is expanding my knowledge and knowing that I have the ability to learn a new language. My favorite part of working with BRIGES ESL has been the challenge of learning at a higher level than I should be and having such a kind and friendly teacher. My favorite activities are reading comprehension and grammar. I think learning English is important because it’s the way to communicate with other people not only in the USA but around the world.
“Future Goals”
By Shengming Yang
Tutor: Derek Song

Hello. My name is Shengming Yang. I am from Xi’an, China. I live here, in New Haven, to take care of my granddaughter. Here, people are friendly, but I do not understand English too well, so I cannot speak with them easily.

I thank Bridges ESL for giving me the opportunity to learn English. Every teacher of Bridges ESL is very good-willed, attentive, and teaches English to me well. I have studied with Bridges ESL for 5 years. Now, I can read basic things. I can also use the dictionary to help myself. I want to improve my level in English, like speaking.

I will keep studying hard and hopefully will be able to have simple conversations in English soon. I sincerely thank all the teachers who have done so much for me, and I thank the organizers of Yale Bridges ESL.
By Estael Araújo de Faria  
Tutor: Charlie Mayock-Bradley

It was very good for me to take the course. Through it I could improve my English, meet other people from other countries as well as other cultures. The fact that it’s free and on the internet was also essential for me as I don’t have a job at the moment and I live on a farm in Brazil where getting around is not easy. I am currently thinking of living in another country where I am looking for a new job opportunity where one of the languages spoken is English, so taking the course could mean a better opportunity for me in the future. Thanks.
Xinjiang is my hometown. Its name, however, is in the news, not for its stunning scenery or multiculturalism but because of so-called “racial tensions.” As a Xinjiang native, I am sad to watch news that makes accusations against Xinjiang. So I would like to share my own story about growing up in this multi-ethnic region.

Like my father, I was born and raised in Xinjiang, which is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and is inhabited by more than 40 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Uyghurs and the Han. Other minority groups include Hui, Mongolians, Khalkha, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tibets, Tajiks, Tatars, Russians, and Tibetans.

I am Han Chinese, but a significant number of my classmates and friends were minorities, mostly Muslims. Like kids all over the world, we studied, played, laughed together, and celebrated special days like birthdays and holidays. It was our tradition to visit their homes, and celebrate Corban Festival with them. We met their families, wished them “Eid Mubarak,” and enjoyed their traditional cuisine. We looked forward to the Muslim holidays as much as they did. I noticed the differences between me and my minority friends when I was a child. We looked different, spoke different language at home, and celebrated different holidays.

But these differences didn’t affect our friendship at all in daily life. We met every day, ate in the same Halal restaurants, and danced together to the same popular Uyghur and Kazakh music. Speaking of music, on my own wedding day, the dance music included folk songs from the Uyghur, Kazakh, Tajik, and Russian ethnic minority groups. People in our region firmly believe folk songs and Xinjiang folk dance are vital parts of a wedding, even though they are Han Chinese. It’s a tradition like using Mendelssohn’s Wedding March at a wedding ceremony in the United States.

Now I am in the US, reading claims that minorities are being persecuted in China, which is opposite of my experience; for this reason, I feel the importance of sharing my story.

PS: Thanks to the Bridge and my tutor for giving me this opportunity to share my hometown’s culture and personal story, I feel much empowered because I know the divide between people who speak different languages seems wide but is simple (hopefully) to solve by using a bridge language.
By Mingming Chen
Tutor: Annabel Lee

I deeply appreciate my tutor Annabel Lee and the Bridges ESL program to provide such a great ‘English journey’ for me during the pandemic. Even though I have been studying English for many years, it is still quite difficult for me to communicate smoothly with others, especially in the lab.

Thanks to Annabel’s great efforts on choosing so many great practice materials, I have made a great progress in the listening and speaking English. Moreover, these materials also provide me a better understanding of the American culture, and the discussion during the class always inspiring me to think more with a different aspect.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Bridges ESL, especially my tutor Annabel Lee. Hope to see you in person soon.
By Pablo Bravo
Tutor: Selin Nalbantoglu

My favorite part of learning English is when I can speak more fluently, and understand more about what people are speaking. The whole program was my favorite. Humility and affection were in the air. My favorite activities were expressing and talking about myself in English, and talking with my teacher about everything; that generated in me that I can speak without shame. I think learning English is important because it opens doors to different things in every part of the world. It helps –literally– to connect the hispanic world with the english world too.
“Reflections on Bridges Term Spring 2022”
By Isabela Kerber Ribeiro
Tutor: Janic Aguirre

My name is Isabela, I am Brazilian and I am currently doing the Au Pair program in Westchester, New York. I have a major in Letras which means that I am graduated in Portuguese and English language and Brazilian, Portuguese and English Literature, and I also have a Master in Practice of Bilingual Education.

To be able to participate in the Bridges ESL program is a great experience that allows us to talk to people from all over the world. In my class I had the opportunity to talk to someone from Spain, China, and from the US and this is an incredible way of not only improving the language, but also doing a cultural exchange.

I decided to do the Au Pair program in order to improve my English, so having the opportunity to participate in the Bridges ESL classes is really significant to me and I am truly glad that I got the chance to do it.
My name is Riyang, and I am a visiting student from China.

It’s not high-flown to say that learning English is something I have been doing for more than 20 years. When I was on grade 3 in the elementary school, I began to remember 26 English letters, and on grade 6, I learnt to sing English songs. Now I am a Ph.D. candidate, I read papers in English, writing e-mails and essays in English but when I met some people from other countries, I find it still hard for me to express myself naturally and fluently. Many of the cases were due to vocabulary, I learnt many academic vocabularies, but know so little about others. In other words, sometimes I know the exact word in Chinese, but I don’t know how to say it in English. For example, I am a big movie fan, but I cannot remember the original names of some American movies, which makes me impossible to talk about these movies with others in English.

Many people say that people need an environment to practice language skills. I could not agree more. Since using English is necessary in the United States, I could push myself to reach out to use English for contacting agents of a cellphone carrier, applying for Mychart account, or getting COVID-19 booster shoot, etc.

However, those circumstances are so specific that people can understand you even with contextual information instead of words and there are no real communications of ideas. If I want to exchange ideas with others, I need to learn not only about the vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar, but also about culture and traditions of people who are using it. For example, sometimes, I didn’t laugh when someone told a joke in English.

Thanks to Bridges and my tutor Annabel, I learnt much more about American daily English and culture like food, holidays, education and super bowl, etc. And during this class, I realize that there are tons of treasures of learning materials on the websites like YouTube, but sometimes I need some native speaker to guide me to dig them out and then practice by myself as much as possible.

Thanks again for your time and help, Annabel!
Reflection
By Santiago Sosa Vercellone
Tutor: Lizbeth Lozano

This was my second semester at Bridges and I can't be more grateful.

My tutor was younger than me so I guess this is where the 'feeling old' part of my life starts.

She is amazing. She gave us videos to watch and articles to read and we shared our thoughts on every subject we dove into.

It was a great experience listening to a U.S citizen explain how things are there and compare them with Argentina and Brazil.

I hope she has a great end of the year and high scores on her tests because she works hard and she deserves it.

I wish the best for Lizbeth and Thais, thank you for sharing Saturday mornings with me and I also want to thank the program for this opportunity.
By Tianyi Zeng
Tutor: Denise Peng

This is my first time in Bridges ESL. I’m happy that I learned a lot from my trainer Denise. She is a kind and helpful advisor. During class time, we discussed the Plague and other news, and also listened to some radios. The best part for this course is the debate between me and Xinyi, where we talked about Oscar and Will Smith. If there is a chance, I would join more classes in Bridges ESL. I feel grateful about this experience and thanks again to Denise.

Tianyi Zeng
“One Sentence Story”
By Iris H. Guerra de Castillo, Agnes (Kyung A) Shin, and Carlene Duarte
Tutor: Charlie Mayock-Bradley

Once upon a time, there was a house - a really old house.
Somebody wanted to use the house for a Halloween party.
I decorated with all of the Halloween things: a ghost, a vampire, etc.
Finally my guests began to arrive wearing crazy costumes.
We all were drinking and playing around, but suddenly someone heard a really loud sound of a car crashing.
Everybody went outside to watch what happened, but nobody was dead.
And also, there was not any car that was broken.
We all started running around and screaming, “What is going on?!?”
We all went back to the house, and somebody said, “It’s okay, just come back to the party! Relax! Enjoy the party!” And then everybody went to dance.
Then, everybody heard another big scream from outside.
Everybody ran back outside again, but when I followed them everybody had disappeared.

The end.