

EFL LEARNERS' INTERACTION WITH NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE EFL TEACHERS

Görsev İNCEÇAY, Yeditepe University, Turkey

Derin ATAY, Marmara University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to present the attitudes of Turkish EFL learners towards native (NT) and non-native teachers (NNT) and find out the differences in the classroom interactions. Two EFL teachers and eighteen students participated in the study. Data were collected by means of video-recordings and interviews. Turkish students were observed to have a preference for native ELT teachers, which seem to affect their classroom interactions with the teachers at a great deal.

INTRODUCTION

The number of people worldwide learning English is steadily increasing, and according to Kachru's (1996) estimates there are four non-native English speakers for each native English speaker, which is a proportion similar to that of teachers of English. The increasing demand for English all over the world and the ever-increasing number of NNTs in the field (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999) has led to debates regarding to whether English should be taught by native (NT) or by non-native teachers (NNT) and whether NTs or NNTs are better in terms of teaching the language.

According to Kramsch (1997) and Phillipson (1992) the fact that NTs have a high command of the target language does not automatically prepare them to teach it. NTs have the advantage of having the cultural, phonetic and lexical knowledge of the target language, and can identify something that is wrong when they hear or read it, but might have no idea why this is so and fail to explain it to the learners. On the other hand, sharing the same L1 with their students, NNTs can foresee language structures that could be problematic for their students to understand (Arva & Medgyes, 2000).

According to Kramsch (1997) one of the reasons NT speech has become so esteemed is because of the high importance placed on students' communicative competence in the FL classroom. Canagarajah (1999:79) argues that "the native speaker fallacy is linguistically anachronistic", especially at a time when the globalisation of English and the existence of English are widely recognized (Liu, 1999). NTs may be "potentially more accomplished users of English than non-native speakers" (Medgyes, 1994: 12), however, because of the nature and the demands of pedagogic discourse, specific aims of classroom language imply modifications in teachers' speech. In particular at the level of discourse, features of NT and NNTs' teacher talk may be more similar to one another than every day speech produced by native and non-native speakers of English.

In a number of studies NTs and NNTs were differentiated in terms of their teaching behaviours such as by their attitudes towards error correction, with NTs seen less strict (Medgyes, 1994). Moreover, NTs were found to use more 'real' language, use English more confidently, provide more cultural information and have more awareness of students' needs (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999) Arva and Medgyes (2000) in a small scale study video recorded language lessons of British and 10 Hungarian teachers, in Hungary and had follow up interviews with them. Not surprisingly the primary advantage attributed to NTs lied in their superior English language competence, yet, grammar occupied the pride of plea on the NNTs list. Generally speaking, NNTs were claimed to be stricter teachers possibly because they had an enhanced feeling of responsibility as well as of being more restrained by school regulations and administrative task like giving

marks. NTs were also told to have motivational effects on their students, as they used English as a genuine vehicle of communication.

In a study with 76 undergraduates Lasagaster and Sierra (2002) similarly found that there was a preference for NTs at all levels. The participants showed preferences for NTs in the areas of pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary and culture and civilization, and particularly in the areas of listening and reading. Yet, a slightly negative view of NTs emerged when it came to the assessment of grammar; that is there was a swing towards NNTs when it came to the teaching of grammar.

Due to the power of English as the international language and due to the fact that Turkey is facing European integration, English language teaching has expanded in Turkey in the last years. Similar to many other EFL contexts, the majority of Turkish people, including administrators and educators seem to view English language teaching as domain of native speakers and assume that the ideal of EFL teacher is necessarily a native speaker (Atay, in press; Çelik, 2006).

The present study aims to present the attitudes of EFL learners towards NTs and NNTs and find out whether differences in learners' attitudes affected their classroom interactions with their teachers in an EFL context, namely Turkey, which has not been explored in terms of the relevant issue so far.

METHOD

Participants and setting

The study took place in the English prep school of a private university in İstanbul in 2007-8 academic year. For the purposes of the study we decided to do our study in an intermediate class. At the time of the study there were ten intermediate classes, each being taught by one N and one NNT. Only one pair accepted to take part in the study and allowed us to videotape their classes on the dates suggested by them for three months.

Thus, one NT and one NNT, and eighteen students in their class participated in this study. The native teacher, John (pseudonym) had a fifteen year of experience in TEFL.

The NNT, Deniz (pseudonym), was a twenty nine year old Turkish EFL teacher with an eight year of teaching experience. Both were graduates of ELT programs. Students, four female and fourteen male, were all native speakers of Turkish with an average age of 19.

Data collection

Data for this study were collected by means of video-recording and interviews. During the video recordings, one of us sat in the back of the class and took field notes. Finally, interviews were carried out with each student in order to collect information on their ideas related to NT and NNTs, and to triangulate the data collected via video recordings.

Data Analysis

The recorded videos were transcribed and analyzed by means of Conversation Analysis Methodology as it helps researchers to focus on the interaction patterns emerging from the data (Walsh, 2002). Pattern coding was used to analyze the interview data as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). From the total of 26 hours of recorded lessons, two whole lessons were selected for transcription and analysis. Lessons on approximately the same content were selected for comparison.

RESULT

Interview results: When asked whether they preferred to have NTs or NNTs, the majority of the students (13/18) chose natives as better English teachers. The rest thought it would be more “suitable to have NNTs during the early stages of L2 learning process” as they “benefit from Turkish explanations a lot” or “the grammar explanations given in Turkish are much easier for them to understand

and remember”. On the other hand, when giving reasons for their preference for a native ELT teacher, students focused on the following: a) relationship b) freedom and c) authenticity of topics and language use.

Relationship: Interestingly many students indicated that they felt free when studying with a NT because of having the freedom to call the NT by name as well as the NT’s flexibility with grammar mistakes while talking, as illustrated in the following statements:

He is like a friend to us, we call him by his name. Our Turkish teacher claims to be “friend” – a friend whom we call “Mrs”.

Moreover, NTs’ spending time with their students out of class time was also highly appreciated by Turkish students. NNTs, however, were rather reluctant because of cultural reasons and administrative restraints. For many students meeting their teachers outside was like an icebreaker:

Spending time out of the class and doing anything but coursework with a teacher means so much for us. If we spent some time with our NNTs, like going to a cafe or going on a picnic, we could be more willing in the lessons.

Freedom: Many students also mentioned the freedom provided by the NTs during class time. NTs were not taking attendance or decreasing the participation grades of the students when being inattentive or when speaking in Turkish. Comparing those practices with those of the NNTs one student comment as follows:

Mrs. D. has lots of rules, for example we mustn’t enter class after her, talk in Turkish. Funny but, the more she tries, the more we want to talk

in Turkish. Or when she does not accept us to the class, I do not want to enter her class any more. But it is the opposite with NNTs.

Many students also claimed that while the NNTs equated classroom disciplines with being silent and not going out without taking permission, for NTs it was maximum talk of students in groups or individually. One of the students makes the following comment on this:

The more we talk and work in the groups, the more credits we get in the lessons with the NTs. But we are always working individually and can't find anybody to communicate in the lessons with our NNTs who give too much importance to control and organization during the lessons.

Authenticity of topics and language use: Many students think that using L2 with a NT is not authentic as they share the same language. Yet, it is totally different with the NNTs as illustrated in the following statement:

We don't need to have a book to deal with during the lesson. When John enters we understand that it is time to practice English. I mean, having a native teacher in the classroom is enough to understand that it is time for English although we are not dealing with tenses.

Analysis of the transcripts: The transcripts were analyzed in terms of the topics presented

Table 1.

Number of acts in teacher and student talk

Acts	NT		NNT	
	Teacher talk	Student talk	Teacher talk	Student talk
Conversation initiation	32	14	45	6
Length of answers (more than three words)	—	40	—	24
Use of native language	—	3	1	16
Self correction	—	3	—	10
Humour	3	4	—	—

The analysis of the transcriptions revealed the total number of the utterances in NT's lessons was 233. 131 (56 %) of these utterances belonged to NT whereas 103 (44 %) of them belong to the students. In the NNT's lessons the number of total utterances is 195. 121 (62 %) of these utterances belonged to the teacher while 74 (38 %) belonged to the students.

Conversation initiation: When the data were analysed it clearly appeared that the students felt more confident in initiating a conversation in the NT's lesson. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

Ex. 1

St1: John, can you help me? (initiation)

NT: Yes, sure.

St1: What is the difference between foreigner and stranger? (initiation)

NT: I am a foreigner because I am not Turkish but someone from another class is a stranger. Is it clear?

St1: Very clear. Thank you.

However, in the NNT's classroom the ratio of teacher-student in terms of conversation initiation was much lower. As it is the case in most of the Turkish classes, it is the teacher who always starts the conversations and the conversations

usually involve display questions. Culturally in Turkey students cannot feel very confident to ask questions to their teachers.

Ex 2.

NNT: Arif, Where were you last night at nine o'clock? (initiation)

St17: home.

NNT: Can you tell me a long answer?(initiation)

St17: I was home. At home.

NNT: Which program did you watch?(initiation)

Length of answers: The analyses of the transcripts also showed that students tried to give longer answers (more than three words) in the NTs' lessons and make longer sentences since they believed that the teacher didn't know any Turkish. In addition, in the NTs' lessons they felt more comfortable to speak since the purpose was to 'speak' the target language not to learn any grammatical rules. However, in the NNTs' lessons students generally gave short answers with one or two words.

Ex 3.

NT:.... Is anyone adopted in this classroom?

St3: Yes teacher. Arda is adopted. (making a joke and the students laugh). He has step mum.

NT: It is not something bad. You can tell it honestly.

St4: No, John. They are lying. I am not adopted.

Ex 4.

NNT: Now let's talk about you. When were you born?

St6: 1989.

NNT: Where were you born?

St6: Ordu

NNT: How is life in Ordu? Can you tell us about it a bit?

St6: Nice

Use of native language and translation: Another major difference was the use of native language and code switching. As can be seen in the following extracts, students in the NNTs' class tend to utter in their native language when they have difficulty in target language, particularly when they cannot remember the words in English. On the other hand, in the NTs' class they do their best to go on with communication.

Ex5.

NT: Who is a step mother?

St6: Original mother.

NT: You should think more. Anybody else?

St7: Not real mother.

Ex6.

NNT: Beatles was a very famous pop band in 70s. What is a band?

St1: şarkıcı.[singer]

NNT: No it is not a singer. It is a pop group. And Lennon was the leading member of the band. Leading member for example in Yeni Türkü Derya Köroğlu is the leading member.

St2: Solist.

NNT: No, he is in front of the other members.

Self correction and peer feedback: Moreover, when the students were in the lessons of their NT, they rarely corrected their own mistakes since the teacher also did not interrupt them when they were trying to talk.

Ex9.

NT: When did she abandon her child?

St5: when she *is* thirty-five.

NT: Yes your friend is true. She abandoned her child when she was thirty five.

St6: But teacher my friend not true. Thirty seven. Look , here, thirty seven.

On the contrary, since the students were corrected any minute they made a mistake when speaking in the lesson with the NNT, they also tended to self correct while talking or answering a question which can be related to NNT's focus on grammar as can be seen in the following extract.

Ex10.

NNT: The first one?

St11: John Lennon dies in 1980. No no, teacher died died.

NNT: Okay John Lennon died in 1980. The second one. Seda?

St3: The group gaved a lot of concerts all around the world

NNT: The group gave, it is not gaved. You should memorize the past forms of the verbs.

The students in NT's lesson ask for feedback from their peers themselves whereas in NNT's lesson the teacher asks the peers for feedback since the students prefer using native language when they are not able to express themselves in target language.

Ex11.

NT: What is agency?

St1: Travel agency for example.

NT: Okay but what is agency? 'agency'.

St2: It is a place where you..... (thinks, tries to complete, looks around)

St3: where you buy tickets. (this learner helps L1 and completes the sentence)

Humour: During the lesson taught by the NT it is seen that the students can make jokes to their teacher since the teacher also makes some jokes to them.

Ex15.

NT: Okay guys, enjoy the film. Have some chips and coke. Call some other friends.

St9: Thank you John.

NT: And. I want you to tell the film to your friends next week. Okay.

St10: John, no. We are champions. We don't want homework. Please.

St9: I don't want the film.

NT: Okay okay, I'm joking. Enjoy the film. Now, let's check the answers altogether.

On the contrary, in the NNT's lessons, no humour was observed. The NNT explains the reason for this as follows:

Students in my classroom have a great tendency to spoil the lesson, when I want to talk about something daily, or make a joke, they can easily go beyond. That's why after a few trials, I gave up making jokes or chatting with them in the end of the lessons.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to find out the attitudes of EFL learners towards NTs and NNTs and the effect of the NTs' and NNTs' input on EFL learners' talk. The results of the study have shown that the EFL learners have different attitudes towards NTs and NNTs. This result is the consequence of the different cultural backgrounds of the teachers, the relationship they form with their students and the teaching principles they apply throughout their lessons.

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