

Effectiveness of Teaching English in a Foreign Country by a Non-native Speaker English Teacher (NNEST)

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Abstract: In the field of English language teaching (ELT), a growing number of teachers are not native speakers of English. According to current estimates, about eighty percent of English teachers worldwide are non-native speakers of the language. The term non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST) has created a division among professionals in the ELT profession. English is taught commonly in many countries where English is spoken as a second language or spoken widely. Therefore, being a non-native English speaking teacher in your own country, where English is the target language between you and your own local learners and inevitably your mother tongue is used partly during the classes, is different from in a foreign country where English is mutual language between you and your learners. In that case, English is the only way for you and your learners in order to communicate in every part of school life, in school activities or even in your daily life. Learners feel like talking just the target language before, during, and after the classes unavoidably. We can see the differences of learning English through a local non-native English speaking teacher, an English Teacher from the inner circle, and a foreign non-native English speaking teacher, an English Teacher from the outer circle, in terms of effectiveness of learning English among the language learners.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), nonnative-English-speaking teacher (NNEST), Target language, Outer Circle, Inner Circle

Introduction

Initially, we should mention the difference between Native Speaker and Non-Native Speaker in terms of Language Pedagogy. In an article on the differences between NTs and NNTs, Nayar (1994: 2) states that non native speakers are often regarded as language deprived, unreliable speakers in terms of language competence when compared to native speakers, who have phonological, linguistic, and communicative competence as well as linguistic identity. On the other hand, Medgyes considers that non-native speaking teachers have a 'bright' side (1994: 51). He points out that, even if non-native-speakers normally use bookish language and speak in a less confident way, they are more empathetic, attend to the students' real needs, show more commitment, have realistic expectations of the students and are more insightful (1994: 58-59).

According to Medgyes, we should analyze the different areas of difficulty.

Vocabulary: There are some problems with the English lexicon as well as with any other language: many words have different meanings according to the context, idioms, synonyms, etc. In short, vocabulary resists mastery.

Fluency: Oral fluency requires many qualities, such as readiness to speak, speech rate, etc, in which non-native-speakers are in a disadvantage. Non-native-speakers' speech tends to be redundant due to the difficulty in finding the right structures at the right time.

Pronunciation: It is obvious that non-native-speakers are marked by a foreign accent that in the worst cases interferes with other people's understanding.

Grammar: Grammar is the favorite field for non-native-speakers. It is said to be more concrete and more learnable than vocabulary.

The increasing demand for English all over the world and the ever-increasing number of NNTs in the field -about eighty percent of English teachers worldwide- (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. If you ask anyone whether s/he wants to be taught by a native teacher (NT) or non-native teachers (NNT), most of the learners would say that by native teacher (NT) due to the fact that NTs have the advantage of having the cultural, phonetic and lexical knowledge of the target language.

According to the one study aiming to present the attitudes of EFL learners towards NTs and NNTs, interview results were not surprising (Görsev, 2008). That is, the majority of the students (13/18) in the English prep school of a private university in İstanbul in 2007-08 academic year chose natives as better English teachers when asked whether they preferred to have NTs or NNTs. 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. We assume that that result would be nearly same in other countries in the same conditions.

There is no doubt that there is inevitable difference between native teacher (NT) and non-native teacher (NNT) as mentioned above. However, I will try to show the differences between the non-native English speaking teachers who are local teachers and foreign teachers. We will also try to mention foreign teachers' effectiveness as non-native teachers.

Status of the non-native English teachers

There is no doubt that native speakers of a language have a feel for its nuances, are comfortable using its idiomatic expressions, and speak it fluently. Unfortunately, native English speakers without teaching qualifications are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced NNESTs, especially outside the United States (Amin, 2000; Braine, 1999). But many in the profession argue that teaching qualifications should be required of all English teachers, regardless of their native language (Nayar, 1994; Phillipson, 1996). Phillipson also considers NNESTs to be potentially the ideal ESL teachers because they have gone through the process of acquiring English as an additional language. They have first-hand experience in learning and using a second language, and their personal experience has sensitized them to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students.

It might be true that non-native teacher can teach better English than the native speakers. That is because they have struggled themselves to learn that language. They know exactly where learners lack and where they make mistakes often. They are also aware of many more techniques of learning to speak which is not the case with the native speakers. Most non-native speakers have degrees in language teaching and many years of experience, whereas many native speakers either have little language teaching qualifications or little experience.

Effectiveness of non-native English teachers in foreign countries

I am a Turkish who was taught English as a foreign language by local Turkish teachers from middle to high school. Then, I graduated from one of the Turkish universities. Maybe I should confess something. While studying at university, we had no chance to use our target language out of the lessons. We were all Turkish students and we had mostly Turkish professors. Late 90s, we had no opportunity to access the Internet, as well.

Thanks to the technology, there are now a lot of opportunities to reach the sources of English in order to improve your language. You can keep in touch with your friends worldwide through the Internet.

I have been teaching English for ten years, and I have had the opportunity of living in a foreign country for three years. As a non-native speaking English teacher, I can clearly say that being in Bosnia as a Turkish man makes me happy in my classes and satisfies me that I am teaching English to my students. I have been working in a private school where the wealthier parents send their children to. It is similar to public schools, but since parents pay more for their child's education, classes are smaller, more teaching resources are available, and expectations are higher. However, as a foreign teacher you must meet higher requirements to land a job here. Furthermore, in the classes the only meeting point between you and your students is the target language - English. I am not going to compare here effectiveness of native and non-native English teachers. But I can assume that there is difference between me who is a foreigner and local teacher who is from the same country, as well.

As it can be seen in the study (Görsev,2008) that learners tend to use their mother language in order to communicate with the teacher during the lesson. It may seem unnatural to talk to a Turkish man in English. The local teachers respond them inevitably in native language. During the class there is no way for me to use only the target language, English. In recess time, lunch time or in after school activities and field trips students feel like talking or using English to communicate with me. Thanks to the Internet I can keep in touch with them through the chat rooms, msn or facebook.

There are also a lot of advantages being in the third country. Learning a new language, a new culture and new customs of people in this country makes me understand how the learners feel when they are learning English. For example, in Bosnian language *-učiti-* means both to teach and to learn. In order to understand what kind of difficulty a Bosnian learner has while learning those words it is good to experience Bosnian language.

Conclusion

As a foreigner, living in a third country may be considered advantageous and one can learn one more language, so that the difficulties learners may face while learning English are observed and experienced. Whenever a non-native language teacher tries to guess what a local foreign language learner feels, one can easily figure out that learning a language was not so easy. Long time ago I learned English and I had never considered that learners could have had problems. No matter the teacher is a native or non-native teacher, as long as he has interest, responsibility and willingness to help students he is a convenient teacher of a foreign language. Finally, it can be claimed that both native and non-native teachers should have gone through the process of learning at least one language.

However this study is only based on some personal observation of a non-native language teacher of English in a third country it may contain subjective conclusions, it may lead to starting point for further comparative research studies carried out by other researchers, such as, on effectiveness of learning foreign language through non-native and native language teachers in a country where the language is considered to be foreign language for both teachers and learners.

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