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PERCEPTIONS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF BEING A NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER TEACHER (NNEST) AS A FOREIGNER IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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1 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.

Key words: English language teaching, NNEST

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To my lovely wife, Mine BAŞTUĞ

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5   Chapter 1

6   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) 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, it is considered that non-native speaking teachers have a 'bright' side. It could be also pointed 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.

According to Medgyes (1994), 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 to be taught by whether 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 (Gorsev, 2008). That is, the majority of the students (13/18) in the English prep school of a private university in Istanbul in 2007-08 academic years 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.

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10   Chapter 2

11   Status of the non-native English teachers

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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.

The native speaker fallacy has created a number of challenges with which NNTs must contend in the workplace and in their daily lives. Although the majority of English teachers in the world are not native speakers of English (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2001), NNTs struggle for equal treatment in the ELT profession. They face a number of challenges, including those related to accent and credibility in the workplace.

According to one research, it is shown that considering NS teachers ideal teachers and trying to prove themselves all the time affect the self-confidence of NNS teachers negatively as well. For example, in a study with 78 NS and 18 NNS teachers working at different universities in the United States, Moussu (2006) found that NS teachers were more confident than NNS

teachers about the strengths of their teaching and language skills. NNS teachers, on the other hand, were found to have low self esteem because of their limited knowledge of American culture and foreign accents. Although NNS teachers constitute 80% of the total ELT workforce worldwide, they are "typically treated as second class citizens in the world of language teaching". Rajagopalan (2006) believes this is due to the fact that native speakers are usually regarded as the only reliable source of "authentic " language and that the target language is considered to be "whatever the native speakers speak". In the meantime NS teachers are often hired with little or no teacher education because of an "automatic extrapolation from competent speaker to competent teacher-based on linguist grounds alone" (Seidlhofer, 1999). Studies carried out in the US (Mahboob et al., 2004), UK (Clark and Paran, 2007), and Turkey (Celik, 2006) have all shown that being a native speaker is important for employers of English teachers, especially in private language schools and universities.

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.

According to Ulku and Derin (2010), the analyses in general revealed a similar picture regarding Turkish teachers' opinions on NS/NNS dichotomy when they start teaching. At first they feel hostile towards the system of admission, but they accept the superiority of NS teachers. They also realize that as English language teachers they can be as successful as NS teachers and this awareness seems to increase their self-esteem. They feel annoyed by the situation they are in, while accepting is as it is and even feel "lucky" as they are given a chance to work with NS teachers in the same institution.

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17   **Chapter 3**

18   **Perceptions of being a Non-native Teacher (NNT)**

Language acquisition is influenced by the complex interactions of a number of variables including materials, activities, and evaluative feedback. That is why all language teachers believe that a central characteristic of good language teaching and good language teachers is the fact that they place a great importance on students' needs, interests, likes and dislikes. Teachers' knowledge about the subject matter and pedagogy plays an important role in responding those needs, and is one of the sources of motivation for further development. Willingness and a desire for continuous improvement have been considered as some of the characteristics of autonomous teachers (McGrath, 2000). Language teachers should have a desire to learn more about their profession. They may look for ways to further develop professionally, and will be open to new ideas on how to do so on their own or with colleagues.

Teacher may feel that they have to stick to the curriculum and follow the syllabus more closely. But they should find extra activities that are appropriate for students. It is better to keep in mind the aims while trying to motivate the students. Supplementing the course book by looking for materials and activities may help to respond students' problems and needs. Activities that activate students' previous knowledge enhance their learning and motivate them, and that foster the real use of the language through communication.

19   3.1 NNS Teachers' Self-perceptions

It can be claimed that due to their lower language proficiency and different teaching behavior in comparison with their NS counterparts; research on students' perceptions indicates that they tend to be more supportive of NNS teachers the longer they are taught by them (Enric, 2005).

According to one the study done by Ulku and Atay (2010), it was mentioned that "I'm-not-a-native speaker" syndrome is common among NNS teachers and this has negative consequences on their confidence as they feel inferior and inadequate when they compare themselves to their L1 colleagues

Institutions offering English language programs often promote themselves as employing NS teachers and advertisements for teaching positions often require that applicants are native speakers implying that NS teachers are preferable in some way. The reason for the commercial preference for NS teachers appears to be that despite the academic arguments and evidence there is still a broad social acceptance of the native speaker model (Pacek, 2005; Thornburry, 2006). Such institutions advertise that all of their teachers are native speakers in order to attract attention from students and parents, and increase their enrollment rates. Native speaker teachers are generally paid much more than their non-native speaker counterparts and get extra benefits, like lodging.

20   3.2 NNS Teachers in The Classroom

Having the knowledge of two or more languages in one mind and using another language for any purpose have implications for language teaching. There might be pros and cons of native and NNS teachers from the students' perspective. NNs teachers may have some problems in lexical and phonological way. But at the first steps, learners may prefer their local teachers. Thus they should explain some grammar structures and some words may be translated into native language.

The role of the mother tongue in the second language classroom is very important. Ernesto Macaro (2005) provides answers to questions related to the reasons that make code-switching (by definition only available to the bilingual teacher) a contentious issue in the L2 classroom and the purposes and frequency of code switching. He finally advances a pedagogical proposal based on an interaction between functionally based code switching (the use of the L1 is beneficial because it facilitates classroom interaction or improves the learning of the L2 or both.

21   3.3 Students' Perceptions of NNS Teachers

Most schools do not have good facilities for second language learning. In many cases, teachers use the most convenient textbooks available on the market, without a prior and proper assessment of their suitability in terms of the very specific needs of the learners. In addition, the learners themselves are not often aware of the fact that many professions require particular linguistic skills that they must learn. In terms of language acquisition, students must be competent in order to learn second language.

Because of the syllabi students have two or three English classes a week. It is not easy for both NS and NNS teachers to make students be interested in second language. As a foreigner NNS teacher may lead them use the target language before, during and after the classes. That is why Bosnian students feel themselves have to talk in English as if they were talking to NS teachers.

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23   Chapter 4

24   Effectiveness of being a Non-native Teacher (NNT)

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 in 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 your friends in 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 (Gorsev, 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, inevitably, response them 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 this 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 of learning Bosnian language.

As I am foreigner, the challenges that an English teacher may face may not be so important for me, especially pronunciation and vocabulary. Somehow I figured out that cultural differences are very important to teach American or English culture to Bosnian students. For instance, the word *uncle* means brother of your mother or your father. On the other hand, both in Bosnian and Turkish there two different words to address them each *amica* and *dayica*, *amca* and *dayı*, respectively.

Conclusion

As a foreigner, I should consider the advantages of being in this country and I should learn one more language, so that I can see the difficulties that learners may face to while learning English. When I started learning Bosnian, I figured out that learning a language wasn't easy. Long time ago I learned English and I had never considered that learners could have had problems. No matter I am native or non-native teacher, as long as I have interest, responsibility and willingness to help students I am a suitable teacher of a foreign language. Finally, it can be claimed that both native and non-native teachers should go through the process of learning at least one more language.

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Curriculum Vitae

Harun BAŞTUĞ was born on 21 December 1977, in Kirikkale. He received his BA degree in English Language Teaching in 2000 from Marmara University. He worked as an English teacher in Language Schools from 2000 to 2006, in International School from 2007 to 2008, and in a Private School from 2008 to 2010. Since September 2010, he has been a research assistant at a private university.