

Title of Project:

The Relationship between Teachers' English Proficiency and Curriculum Delivery in EFL Settings and Settings where English is an Institutionalized Language

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Project Summary:

Over the last few years, increased attention has been paid to nonnative English-speaking (NNES) professionals. Work in this area has looked at the labels “native speaker” and “nonnative speaker,” perceptions about NNES professionals, including the perceptions they hold of themselves and the perceptions others hold of them as English language teaching (ELT) professionals, issues of teacher identity, and, more recently, students' perceptions of NNES professionals (for complete reviews of the literature on these topics, see Kamhi-Stein, 2005; Moussu & Llorca, 2008).

However, missing from the literature is research that would help to understand the answers to the following questions: What is relationship between teacher beliefs about the language that should be used in the classroom and the language that teachers actually use in the classroom? To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between higher English language proficiency and the more (or less) frequent use of the English language in the instructional process? What is the relationship among English language proficiency, teacher beliefs about the language that should be used in the classroom, and the language that teachers actually use in the instructional process?

Given that Ministries of Education around the world are encouraging teachers to maximize the use of English in the English language classroom, it is important to address the above questions.

The above questions addressed, in part, one of the topics suggested in the TIRF Call for Research Proposals:

- The assessment of teachers' English proficiency and determination of levels of competence required for effective curriculum delivery in English.

The project addressed the topic by investigating selected English classrooms in three countries, Pakistan, South Korea, and Argentina. The countries fall on different ends of the continuum of English language use and recognition. Pakistan is an ex-British colony with a long history of English language use and where English is recognized as one of two official languages. South Korea and Argentina represent two different geographical areas (Asia and Latin America) with large numbers of EFL learners. In contrast to Pakistan, English is not an official language in these countries and has had a shorter history. South Korea and Argentina present an interesting situation in that both of these countries have recently changed their language-in-education policies and English is now introduced in primary schools.

Review of the Literature

The last few years have seen substantial growth in research and publications focusing on issues related to NNES educators. Research on NNES teachers has shown how self-image can affect teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning (e.g., Amin, 2004; Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). It has also shown that the visible status of minority NNES educators' negatively affects their students' perceptions of their "authenticity" as ELT educators (e.g., Amin, 2004; Braine, 1999; Thomas, 1999). Furthermore, research on the "NNES label" (e.g., Hansen, 2004; Liu, 1999) has supported the notion that the label is problematic in that it does not capture the range of language learning experiences of visible and invisible minority NNES educators (Hansen, 2004; Liu, 1999; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004).

Work on NNES professionals has also dealt with students' perceptions of teacher pedagogical skills (e.g., Cheung, 2002; Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu, 2002) and accentedness (e.g., Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Kim, 2008; Liang, 2002). In general, both NES and NNES professionals are perceived to have unique strengths, regardless of the setting in which they function, and students feel they can learn just as well from either group. However, ESL and EFL learners perceive NNES teacher to be more knowledgeable of grammar teaching (though as shown by Kamhi-Stein et al (2004) long-term US residents were shown to be more similar to NES teachers in their lack of awareness about grammar), and NES teachers more knowledgeable of culture. The investigations on teacher accentedness have shown that ESL learners can't identify NNES teachers with "a high degree of accuracy" (Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002, p. 62) and that students' attitudes toward teachers are more positive when the teacher is perceived to be a NES. In another comprehensive study focusing on the ESL context, Kim (2008) found that ESL students perceived teachers to be difficult to understand when they were *perceived* to have a foreign accent. The same study found that while the students were able to transcribe stimuli received with over 80% of accuracy, if they perceived the teachers to be difficult to understand, they had more negative attitudes toward the teacher. As explained by Kim, the results of this study show that perceived accent does not necessarily reduce NNES teacher intelligibility or interpretability; instead, it negatively affects students attitudes toward NNES teachers.

While there is a substantial body of literature focusing on NNES professionals, research focusing on teacher language proficiency is very limited. To our knowledge,

there are two studies that investigated these issues (e.g., Butler, 2004; Li, 1998) by looking at teachers' perceptions of their proficiency in English. Li's study, focusing on Korean EFL teachers, concluded that the teachers' negative perceptions about their proficiency in English was one of the reasons why they did not implement communicative language teaching (CLT) in the EFL classroom. The second reason why they did not implement it was their lack of training in CLT. The study by Butler focused on elementary school teachers from South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. These teachers reported that there were substantial gaps between their level of proficiency and "the minimum level needed to teach" (p. 245).

We believe that given the "push" to maximize English language use in English classrooms around the world, there is a need to understand the relationship between teacher language proficiency and curriculum delivery. At the same time, we believe that language proficiency may not necessarily be the only factor that may affect a teacher's use or non-use of English in the classroom: teachers' beliefs of the role that English has to play in the classroom may also affect the degree to which a teacher uses English in the classroom. Given that these issues have not been the focus of research, in this study, we set out to investigate the relationship between actual language proficiency, teacher beliefs about English and the local language, and language used in the classroom through a variety of instruments that allowed the triangulation of the data collected.

Method

Research questions

1. What is the relationship between teacher beliefs about the language that should be used in the classroom and the language that is actually used in the classroom?
2. What is the relationship among English language proficiency, self-perceived proficiency in English, teacher beliefs about language use in the classroom and the actual language that teachers use in the English classroom?

Definition of Terms

Native and nonnative English-speaking professionals: While we acknowledge the fact that these dichotomies are extremely problematic, for the purposes of this study, nonnative English-speaking were those born in households where a language other than English was the primary language. Additionally, in the case of Argentina and South Korea, the teachers' use of the English language was limited to the classroom setting.

English language proficiency: In this study, language proficiency was defined and assessed in two manners. First, language proficiency was defined as language knowledge in the four skill areas (as measured by the Quick Placement Test), which as noted by Butler (2004), are "relevant to their English teaching" (p. 252). Second, language proficiency was defined within an integrative perspective (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) and, as such, was measured by looking at the teachers' language knowledge and strategic performance in a reading-to-write task.

Data Collected and Analysis

As noted above, data for this study were collected in selected classrooms in three countries: Argentina, Pakistan, and South Korea. Kamhi-Stein collected the data in Argentina and Mahboob collected the data in Pakistan.

Participants

The teachers in this study taught in selected middle schools or high schools in the cities of Buenos Aires (Argentina), Pusan (South Korea), and Karachi (Pakistan). Following is a table with general information on the participants.

Table 1: General Demographic Information on the Participating Teachers

Country & N of Teachers	Gender M F	Teaching Experience		Professional Preparation Number of Teachers	SES & Number of Schools (total = 3 schools/country)
		Min	Max		
Argentina (7)	6 1	10 years	36 years	Certified English Translator = 1 Professional EFL Teaching Degrees = 6	Low to med = 2 Medium only = 0 Low to med high = 1
South Korea (7)	7 0	1 year	21 years	Professional EFL Teaching Degrees = 7	Low to med = 1 Med = 2 Low to med = 0
Pakistan (6)	2 4	1 year	29 years	Teaching Degrees = 3 Degrees in Other Areas = 4	Low to med = 1 Med = 1 Med to high = 1

Instruments

Several instruments were used to collect data. These instruments can roughly be placed into four categories: teachers' background, language proficiency, teachers' beliefs, and instructional practices.

Teacher Background

Information about the teachers' background was collected through an English Language Teacher Questionnaire, designed to provide information on the teachers' professional background, their self-perceptions about their English language skills, and their English language use.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency in this study was measured by a battery of tests. In addition to the tests described in this section, information on the teachers' self-evaluation of their English language skills was collected in the English Language Teacher Questionnaire described earlier.

Declarative Knowledge Test (DKT). This instrument, developed for this study, included two sections designed to test teachers' explicit understanding of English grammar (DKT-L), and their explicit understanding of English language teaching theories and methods (DKT-P).

Essay Writing Task. This task, adapted from Liang (2002), required participants to write a timed-essay about "the ideal language teacher" and had the dual objective of assessing the teachers' proficiency in English and providing information on their beliefs about language use in the classroom.

Summary-Writing Task. This task, more cognitively and linguistically demanding than the essay writing task or the other multiple-choice language tests, required participants to read and summarize an excerpt from an article focusing on issues related to NNES professionals. Therefore, it evaluated the teachers' knowledge of academic English.

The Quick Placement Test (QPT). This commercially available test of English language proficiency (University of Cambridge), designed to assess reading, vocabulary, and grammar, was used because its results can be easily interpreted in terms of a variety of organizations (e.g., Association of Language Testers in Europe—ALTE, the Council of Europe) and tests (TOEFL's paper test, and the Test of English for International Communication—TOEIC). Another reason for selecting the test is that it is based on British English, a variety of English that was considered to be the variety with which the participants in the three countries were familiar.

Teacher Beliefs

The instruments placed in this category served the primary purpose of exploring teachers' beliefs about the role and status of the English language as well their beliefs about practices and theories of English language teaching and learning.

Teachers' Beliefs Inventory. This instrument, developed by Lightbown and Spada (1999), consisted of 12 Likert-scale items designed to provide information on the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning.

Oral Interview. An open-ended interview was designed to provide further information on the teachers' background and their beliefs about teaching and learning and language use in the classroom. It also helped the researchers evaluate the participants' language proficiency in unplanned tasks. The teachers were encouraged to use English, but were allowed to use another language if they felt more comfortable in it.

Instructional Practices

All the teachers were observed for a minimum of three and a maximum of six contact hours. These observations were videotaped and, when available, lesson plans were collected.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was done as follows: First, the teachers were asked to participate in the oral interview, complete the QPT and the DKT, and fulfill the essay-writing task. Then, teachers were instructed to complete the English Language Teacher Questionnaire and the Teachers' Beliefs Inventory. After this step, the teachers' classes were videotaped. Finally, the teachers were asked to complete the summary-writing task. This sequence was followed in order to ensure that the article selected for the purposes of the summary-writing task, focusing on the value of NNES teachers, would not affect the teachers' perceptions about nonnative English-speaking professionals.

Data analysis involved several steps. Pearson correlations were run to test the reliability of the four instruments used to measure teachers' language proficiency: QPT, DKT-L, essay, and summary. The instruments correlated significantly with each other ($p < .01$).

Second, the oral interview data and the video transcripts for the teachers in each country were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns of beliefs about which language

should be used in the classroom and the actual language that the teachers used in the classroom. To do this, the researchers compared what the teachers had to say about the role of the L1 in the classroom in the oral interview and the extent to which they used the English language in the classroom (practically L1 only, mostly L1, L1 and English, mostly English, only English).

Third, Pearson correlations were run to understand the relationship among several variables, including English language use in the classroom, teacher beliefs about language used in the classroom, English language proficiency, and teacher perceptions about their proficiency in English. The final step in the analysis involved investigating the extent to which English language proficiency and beliefs about language use in the classroom affected the language that teachers used in the classroom. To this end, we calculated a linear regression in which the dependent variable was language used in the classroom and the independent variables were English language proficiency, and teachers' beliefs about language use in the classroom.

Results

The main results of the study are presented below.

Different patterns of beliefs about which language should be used in the classroom were identified for each of the three countries. In general, the results of the study showed that while Argentine teachers expressed stronger beliefs about the role that English should play in the classroom, both Pakistani and Korean teachers revealed that both a local language and English have a role in the language classroom.

Four of the Argentine teachers reported believing that English only should be used in the classroom, two believed that both Spanish and English have a place in the EFL classroom, and one believed that Spanish should be used only if there is an absolute need for it. The results of the classroom observations were consistent with the results of the oral interviews in that the Argentine teachers mostly used English in their classes. Specifically, of the seven teachers who participated in the study, 4 used only English, two used mostly English, and only one used mostly Spanish.

Five of the 6 Pakistani teachers revealed that both a local language and English should be used in an English language classroom, and only one teacher believed that English should be used exclusively. The classroom observations were also consistent with the results of the interviews in that they showed that one used only English in the classroom, one used mostly English, one used both English and Urdu, and three used mostly Urdu.

The interviews of the 7 South Korean teachers showed that all of them believed that both Korean and English should be used in language classroom. The classroom observations showed that while 4 of the South Korean teachers code-switched from Korean to English, the other 3 mostly used Korean.

In order to understand the above relationships, quantitative values were assigned to two variables: teachers' beliefs about language use in the classroom (L1 should be used only when there is a need, both languages should be used, only English should be used) and the language actually used in the classroom (practically L1 only, mostly L1, L1

and English, mostly English, only English). After coding the interview and observation data, Pearson correlations were calculated.

The highest and statistically significant correlations were observed for English language proficiency and language used in the classroom (.728) and teacher beliefs about language use in the classroom and language used in the classroom (.644). This means that the higher the teachers' proficiency in English, the more English they used in the classroom. At the same time, the stronger the teachers' beliefs about the use of English in the classroom, the more they used it in the classroom.

The results of the linear regression, in which the dependent variable was language use in the classroom and the independent variables were English language proficiency, teachers' beliefs about language use in the classroom, and the teachers' country of origin, confirmed that both English language proficiency and beliefs about language use in the classroom were significant variables in the model. However, the standardized beta coefficients show that the contribution of English language proficiency is higher than that of beliefs about language use in the classroom (β for English language proficiency = .662, β for beliefs about language use in the classroom = .436). Additionally, the value R^2 was .718. This number shows that nearly 72% of the variation in the English language use in the classroom is explained by the linear regression. Therefore, the linear regression model was quite effective in explaining how the independent variables affect English language use in the classroom. Table 2 below shows the results of the statistical analysis.

Table 2. Linear regression analysis

Variable	B	SE B	B	t	Sig
English language proficiency	.067	.021	.662	3.209	.005
Beliefs about language use in the classroom	1.015	.338	.436	3.006	.008
Country of Origin	.181	.292	.123	.620	.544

Note = $R = .848$, $R^2 = .718$.

In summary, the findings of the study reveal that, for the teachers in this study, their English language proficiency was a major contributor to their use of the English language in the class. The second important factor that affects the language used in the classroom is the teacher's beliefs about the use of the L1.

Conclusion

The present study confirmed the strong relationship between English language proficiency and the language use in the classroom. In contrast to other studies, rather than looking at teachers' *perceived* level of proficiency in English (e.g., Butler, 2004; Kamhi-Stein, Aagard, Ching, Paik, & Sasser, 2004; Li, 1998), this study focused on *actual* proficiency. What these results showed is that the higher the teachers' English language proficiency and the stronger the teachers' beliefs about the importance of the use of English in the classroom, the more the teachers in this study used English in their classes. While it could be argued that the teachers may have used more English because of the

researchers' presence in their classrooms, the analysis of the data collected was designed to allow the triangulation of findings; therefore, we are confident that the results of this study are reliable.

The results of this study also confirm the notion that teachers' beliefs affect their instructional practices (e.g., Butler, 2004; Liu et. al, 2004; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). In this study, the teachers who believed that English should be used in the classroom used it more than those who believed that there is a role for two languages (English and the local language). It can be argued that the teachers' beliefs about the role that English should play in the classroom reflect the beliefs of the educational system in which the teachers function. For example, in Argentina, language teacher education emphasizes CLT and, as such, gives importance to the use of the English in the classroom. In the South Korean and Pakistani educational system, school and college examinations require that students translate from English into Korean/Urdu and from Korean/Urdu into English. Therefore, it was not surprising that to see that South Korean and the Pakistani teachers reported believing that both languages should be used in the classroom. However, in the case of South Korea, given the Ministry of Education's mandate to implement communicative methodologies and use more English in the language classroom, the implications of these policies for classroom instruction remains to be seen.

At the same time, this investigation showed that the relationship between teachers' self-perceptions of English language proficiency and language used in the classroom, although significant, was weaker than the relationship between the teachers' actual English language proficiency and language use in the classroom. These findings suggest that self-reported data on teacher language proficiency are not necessarily reliable. Therefore, it can be argued that future research focusing on teacher language proficiency may need to reconsider the use of self-reported data as the sole measure of teacher language proficiency.

Finally, the results of the quantitative measures showed differences in performance between the Pakistani teachers and the teachers in South Korea and Argentina and raised questions about language testing, EFL, and World Englishes. Specifically, the Pakistani teachers' scores on the QPT, essays, summaries, and DKT-L were lower than those of the Argentine and the South Korean teachers. These lower language scores for Pakistan can be explained in the context of Pakistani English, which has a number of marked features that differentiate it from British English (e.g. see Baumgardner, 1993; Hartford & Mahboob, 2004; Kachru, 1992; Mahboob, 2004; Mahboob & Ahmar, 2004). The language measures used in this study were based on British English. Thus, the low scores for Pakistani teachers may be the result of the mismatch between the teachers' dialect and the dialects used in the tests in this investigation. If this is true, then the low scores for the Pakistani teachers do not necessarily mean that they use incorrect English (in reference to Pakistani English) and instead they may be proficient users of Pakistani English. This understanding suggests that while tests that measure the use of a variety of English like British or American English may be appropriate for Expanding Circle countries, they are not necessarily suitable to Outer Circle countries. This issue needs further investigation as there is limited research on teaching and learning of English within a World Englishes context.

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