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Title: The study of foreign language teachers – teacher efficacy and native speakership

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The Study of Foreign Language Teachers – Teacher Efficacy and Native Speakership

Abstract

This study aims at examining the differences between native and nonnative foreign language teachers at a major northeast university. The primary areas of investigation are “teacher efficacy” and “teacher perceptions of language teaching.”

The results of this study suggested that both nativeness and wide repertoire of teaching experience and strategies play the significant role on efficacy in teaching higher-level classes. Beside, the results also revealed that teachers of less commonly taught languages seemed to be more conservative and cautious in evaluating their efficacy levels, while those of more commonly taught languages appeared to be more open in doing so.

Key words: Teacher Efficacy, native speakership. Foreign language teachers, teaching techniques, teachers' belief

INTRODUCTION

Language teaching possesses a unique characteristic that differentiates itself from teaching other subjects. Teaching a language involves transmitting knowledge that is culturally and socially intertwined. Teachers of other subjects claim their authority by what they know, that is, proficiency in the subject matter, but not by who they are. However, language teachers seem to face a different situation. People tend to mistakenly believe that being able to speak a language naturally corresponds to the ability to teach a language. The hiring policy of English teachers in Taiwan subtly echoes this assumption and clearly suggests, “nonnative speakers need not apply.” This birthright mentality projects a negative image of nonnative speakers as less qualified language teachers and perpetuates the superiority of native speakers for teaching a language (Walelign, 1986).

Native Speakership

The definition of native speakership is elusive. Some scholars argue that native speakers are defined by birth or infancy. People who are born in the community where the language is spoken are native speakers of that language. They have the intuition and communicative competence to vary their language according to different situations (Chomsky, 1965; Medgyes, 1992/1994). Other scholars approach the construct of native speakership from a different angle and define it as “competent users of the language.” The proponents of this definition argue that the intuition of native speakers comes from training and experience, not from birth or infancy (Davies, 1991; Paikeday, 1985). These scholars place native or nonnative speakers along a continuum that starts when the speakers begin learning the language and ends any time when they discontinue the learning process or are no longer exposed to the language. In this sense, the differentiation in the language acquisition process, that is inherent or learned, becomes the evaluation of language proficiency. That is to say, instead of the inherent characteristics, the capability of the speaker determines his/her location in the continuum and the right to claim the authority as a native speaker.

Regardless of the inconclusive definition of native and nonnative speakers in

the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), native-speaking teachers are preferred as “authentic” linguistic and cultural representatives (Nayar, 1997). Many nonnative English-speaking teachers, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, encounter discrimination in terms of hiring and promotion (Canagarajah, 1999). The inequality between native and nonnative teachers observed in different teaching contexts calls for awareness of language teachers, particularly nonnative speakers, to discover their pedagogical uniqueness. Arva and Medgyes (2000), for example, investigated the differences between native and nonnative English teachers regarding the aspects of “knowledge of grammar,” “language competence,” “competence in local language,” and “teaching behavior.” They discovered that native teachers have advantages in language proficiency and tend to create more relaxing, friendship-oriented relationships with students, whereas nonnative teachers have advantages in knowledge of grammar, local language and culture, and they are more likely to follow the content of textbooks.

While the advantages and disadvantages of native and nonnative teachers in the field of ELT were thoroughly analyzed and documented in several studies (e.g., Medgyes, 1992 ; Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999), similar attention had not been given to foreign language teaching in the United States. Among a few studies, Terashima (1996), for example, explored the differences between native and nonnative Japanese teachers in Taiwan. Her study examined the differences between these two groups of teachers in areas like “advantage and disadvantage,” “teacher training,” and “attitude towards various aspects of students’ guidance.” The results showed that nonnative teachers in her study were less confident in teaching pronunciation and reading/writing classes. However, as teachers became more experienced, there was no significant difference between native and nonnative teachers in teaching different aspects of a language.

Teacher Efficacy

Despite the valuable insights Terashima (1996) contributed to the field of foreign language teaching, other differences between native and nonnative teachers, such as teacher efficacy or perception of language teaching, were not investigated in her study. Teacher efficacy has been addressed in relation to several fields such as math and science teaching, but it is scarce in the field of foreign language teaching.

Teacher efficacy, defined as “... the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 233), is a significant predictor of more effective teaching in many domains, such as elementary teaching or preservice teacher training. Studies show that teachers who have a stronger sense of efficacy have greater ability to accept and apply new approaches than do their less efficacious counterparts (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988). Efficacious teachers will set more challenging goals for themselves and their students, accept responsibility for the outcomes of instruction, and persist despite obstacles (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Ross, 1992).

Since the RAND corporation adapted Rotter’s social learning theory and conducted a study on the success of various reading programs, teacher efficacy has been the subject of a fair amount of research, which has established its popularity and importance in the field of teacher development. A teacher’s sense of confidence was initially explored in two dimensions: *General Teacher Efficacy (GTE)* and *Personal Teacher Efficacy (PTE)*. If teachers believe in the influence of external factors, such as gender or social value, on their students’ learning, the teachers’ belief will be

described as *GTE*, whereas, if teachers believe in the influence of internal factors, such as their experience or knowledge of students, on their students' learning, these teachers' beliefs will be described as *PTE*. Later, Bandura (1977) proposed two other dimensions to describe teacher efficacy: *Efficacy Beliefs* and *Outcome Expectancies*. Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory became the theoretical foundation for studying this construct, and different teacher efficacy scales were established and used in different domains, such as science teaching and special education (Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Riggs & Enoch, 1990).

Results from those scales show the connection between teacher efficacy and such factors as classroom management, perception of students' ability or students learning. Nevertheless, research focusing on teacher efficacy in language teaching is scant. No journal articles and only two doctoral dissertations (Chacon, 2002; Shin, 2001) directly address teacher efficacy in language teaching. Both studies reveal the effect of language proficiency on both teacher efficacy and teaching methodology. Language teachers who reported a higher level of language proficiency would choose to have more interactive and communication-orientated activities in the classrooms. However, participants in both studies were nonnative English teachers in EFL (English as Foreign Language) contexts and native-speaking teachers were not included in either study.

This study aims at examining the differences between native and nonnative foreign language teachers in German, French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese at a major northeast university at north America by employing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The primary areas of investigation are "teacher efficacy" and "teacher perceptions of language teaching." The area of teacher efficacy includes four factors: instructional strategic efficacy, language teaching efficacy, student engagement efficacy, and personal and environmental influence efficacy. "Teachers' perception of language teaching" will explore foreign language teachers' perceptions of (1) advantages and disadvantages of native and nonnative teachers, (2) importance in language teaching, regarding goal of teaching, methods of motivating and helping students, as well as foci in teacher training programs, and (3) teaching strategies.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of teacher efficacy of foreign language teachers? How does nativeness affect the level of teacher efficacy?
2. Do native- and non-native- language teachers perceive pedagogical differences between native- and nonnative-speaking language teachers differently?
3. Do native- and nonnative-speaking teachers perceive the important elements of language teaching differently?
4. Do native- and nonnative-speaking teachers use different teaching methods?
5. Do the demographic differences among language teachers relate to the differences in their level of efficacy?

METHODS

Foreign language teachers in the French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese department at a major northeast university in North America responded to the questionnaire. Of the 194 language teachers who taught in those language departments, 104 participated in this study. The return rate was 53 percent. Data from

both surveys and interviews were collected to answer the research inquiries of this study.

Questionnaire Development

The researcher developed the 56-item questionnaire to examine language teachers' sense of teaching efficacy and their beliefs about pedagogical issues relating to language teaching such as nativeness or teacher training. Items reflecting language teachers' sense of efficacy in instructional strategies, engaging students, and environmental and personal influence on language teaching were adopted and modified from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Woolfolk, 2001) and the Science Teaching Efficacy Beliefs Instrument (Riggs & Enoch, 1990). Items identifying teachers' sense of language teaching efficacy and their perception of issues relating to nativeness and language teacher preparation were constructed based on the literature review, interviews with three experienced foreign language teachers, and the researcher's personal language teaching experience.

Each item in the questionnaire was rated on a 6-point Likert-scale where 1= strongly agree, 2= moderately agree, 3= agree slightly more than disagree, 4=disagree slightly more than agree, 5= moderately disagree, and 6= strongly disagree. The reliability of the questionnaire used was tested by the use of Cronbach's alpha, resulting in .874 for the overall questionnaire, .704 for instructional strategies efficacy, .887 for language teaching efficacy, .789 for students' engagement efficacy, .614 for the environmental and personal influence efficacy, .571 for issues of nativeness, and .635 for perception of teacher training.

Follow-up Individual Interviews

After the questionnaire was administered, the follow-up interviews were conducted. At the end of the questionnaire, the language teachers were invited to participate in a semi-structured and open-ended interview. Of those who volunteered, 12 (two from each foreign language department) were selected based on the TAs' teaching experience and status of nativeness. The follow-up interviews attempted to explore the opinions of both native-/nonnative-speaking and experienced/novice teachers of different foreign languages. In the process of the interview, no particular but several general questions grouped in each of the following categories were asked to understand the participants' experience of (a) classroom teaching, (b) multicultural environment, (c) professional training program, and (d) working with other native- and nonnative-speaking teachers.

RESULTS

Forty-nine per cent of the participants were native speakers of the target language, mainly international graduate students from various foreign countries. Fifty-one per cent were nonnative speakers, primarily American graduate students. Seventy-one percent were female participants, and this percentage was similar to that of the gender distribution of each language department. Of these participants, 28% had taught for more than six years and about 38% had taught for less than two years. The majority of the participants (68%) was under 30 years old and 12% was over 40 years old (Appendix A). Twelve interviewees were chosen with teaching experiences ranging from elementary to intermediate and above language courses. Most interviewees were female and pursuing a Master's degree at the time of the interview.

Only two were Ph.D. students majoring in Foreign Language Education and French Literature respectively (Appendix B). Results from both survey and interviews will be presented after each research question in the following section.

Question 1: What is the level of teacher efficacy of foreign language teachers? How does nativenesship affect the level of teacher efficacy?

Most of the participants were efficacious in using different instructional strategies, such as implementing communicative instruction or providing different explanations, to fit the students' needs (Table 1). They also had a high level of efficacy in engaging students with low learning interests in various classroom activities. However, compared with the high level of efficacy in using instructional strategies, most of the participants seemed to feel less capable in engaging students in classroom activities, especially when the students had low interest in learning the language. Several participants, later in interviews, shared their concerns with how motivating the students with low interests might hinder the students' autonomy. Some of them believed that students would learn only when they were self-motivated instead of being manipulated by external influences. In terms of teaching the language in different levels and modalities, the participants felt more competent in analyzing structures of texts, and not in teaching high-level classes, especially writing classes. In addition, most of the participants believed that teachers' effectiveness in teaching could be the crucial elements in enhancing students' achievement. However, they believed that teachers' effectiveness should not be blamed when students failed. Other factors, such as parental involvement or learning goals desired by the department, could also affect students' performance.

Table 1
Language Teachers' Average Level of Teacher Efficacy

Teacher Efficacy	Mean (SD)
Instructional Strategies	1.50 (2.9)
Engaging Students	1.68 (4.0)
Language Teaching	1.93 (10.3)
EPI	2.76 (4.5)

Note: EPI = environmental and personal influence in teaching

- 1= strongly agree
- 2= moderately agree
- 3= agree slightly more than disagree
- 4=disagree slightly more than agree
- 5= moderately disagree
- 6= strongly disagree

Native and nonnative language teachers were found to be different in their language teaching efficacy. Native language teachers were more efficacious in teaching high-level reading, speaking and listening classes. At the same time, they were more capable in teaching more colloquial language or knowledge relating to the cultural background of the target language. The interview data revealed similar conclusions. Several native-speaking language teachers mentioned their willingness to teach higher-level language classes with some training and observations. However, language teachers with more teaching experience also had similar confidence.

Therefore, not only nativeness but also teaching experience appeared to affect language teachers' capability in teaching the language.

Question 2: Do native- and non-native- language teachers perceive pedagogical differences between native- and nonnative-speaking language teachers differently?

The results indicated that the differences among language teachers were not due to their status of nativeness. Consistent with previous studies (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Auerbach, 1993; Phillipson, 1992A), language teachers in the present study believed that the linguistic knowledge of native speakers was more important than teaching strategies in motivating students. However, the advantage of native linguistic knowledge did not lead to conclusion that native speakers could better motivate students in this study. Native-speaking language teachers reported to have more difficulties to answer students' questions in a simple and understandable language. Meanwhile, they seemed to lack sympathy and were less capable of anticipating students' learning problems. Nonnative-speaking language teachers' experience as a learner of the target language, on the other hand, may strengthen them in the areas where native-speaking teachers were perceived as less capable of, such as anticipating students' problems and expressing empathy. They were regarded as better role models for students and were seen to be more understanding because of their bonds with students culturally and linguistically.

Question 3: Do native- and nonnative-speaking teachers perceive the important elements of language teaching differently?

Both survey findings and the interview data revealed the importance of staying in the target language community as the key to learning the language successfully. Language learning requires opportunities and motivation to use this language in a meaningful and purposeful context. Many of the participants also regarded this concept as a goal in teaching. The beliefs of important elements of language teaching did not vary among the participants due to their status of nativeness. Most of participants perceived teaching communicative language as more important than increasing students' grammatical competence. It seemed that linguistic knowledge was not believed to be the soul of language teaching. Teachers' ability to understand students and provide access to improve the learning environment seemed to be more important.

Question 4: Do native- and nonnative-speaking teachers use different teaching methods?

Chacon (2002) examined the routine pedagogical strategies EFL teachers in Venezuela used and claimed that grammar-oriented strategies predominated other types of strategies. In contrast to Chacon's study, most teachers in the present study used communication-oriented activities, such as simulated social activities or pair/group work, in the classroom. The survey findings indicated that native- and nonnative-speaking language teachers in this study reacted to this question differently. Most native-speaking language teachers chose to use traditional methods more frequently than nonnative teachers did. They preferred to have students memorize and practice dialogues in the classroom. In contrast, nonnative-speaking language teachers chose to have students share information through interviews or polls to express their opinion on different topics. On the other hand, the interview data showed that there seemed to be differences in nationality but not in nativeness. American foreign

language teachers seemed to prefer more activity-oriented methods, such as games, whereas teachers from other countries preferred more structure in their instruction. The differences in choosing teaching methods seemed to be cultural. Most nonnative-speaking language teachers were American and native-speaking language teachers were from different foreign countries. This finding could be a result of the influence from the cultures behind these languages. For example, East Asian culture appreciates modesty in each individual and values harmony more than difference in a group. Western culture, in contrast, encourages self-expression and emphasizes individual differences. While cultural differences might explain some of the results of this study, future studies are needed to further explore the impact from other factors such as teachers' cultural background, atmosphere in the language department, or the interaction among teachers.

Question 5: Do the demographic differences among language teachers relate to the differences in their level of efficacy?

The survey findings reveal that the experience of teaching intermediate level or above, type of language taught (i.e. commonly vs. less commonly) and nativenesship were found to affect language teachers' capability in teaching (Table 2). Teachers with more years of teaching experience reported a higher level of efficacy than those who did not have. Meanwhile, levels of students' language proficiency were found to determine teachers' levels of efficacy. Language teachers who had taught intermediate levels or above demonstrated higher efficacy than those who did not have such teaching experience. Those who did not teach such levels had lower levels of efficacy. It seemed that this group of language teachers developed a higher level of efficacy when they accumulated more years of teaching experience or acquired experience in teaching the intermediate or higher levels. Meanwhile, nativenesship also contributed to the different levels of efficacy in language teaching only, but not in other aspects of efficacy, such as motivating students or modifying different teaching strategies in classrooms.

Table 2
Correlation between Demographic Information and Levels of Teacher Efficacy

	Correlation			
	Instructional strategy	Engaging students	Language teaching	Environmental and personal influence
Native and nonnative	-.003	.127	.277 ^d	.161
Training experience	.005	.052	-.074	.001
Levels of teaching	.271	.355 ^b	.540 ^e	.125
Years of teaching	-.327	-.293	-.439	-.086
Commonly and Less Commonly Taught Language	-.252 ^a	-.315 ^c	-.293 ^f	-.035

Note: ^a Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1,102) = 4.63$, $p < .05$

^b Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1,102) = 6.50$, $p < .05$

^c Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1, 102) = 10.10$, $p < .05$

^d Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1, 102) = 12.34$, $p < .05$

^e Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1, 102) = 19.63$, $p < .05$

^f Indicate significant different between groups, $f(1, 102) = 8.73$, $p < .05$

The data retrieved from language teachers of less commonly taught languages, i.e. Chinese and Japanese, were compared with those from commonly taught languages, i.e. Spanish, German, Italian and French, to examine if there were any differences. The findings suggested that these two groups of teachers had different efficacy levels in applying different instructional strategies, engaging students and teaching the language. Teachers of commonly taught languages seemed to be more efficacious in their ability to modify their teaching and create an environment where students felt comfortable to practice the target language. When encountering students with low learning interest, they believed that they were capable of helping students by encouraging them to access activities outside of classrooms. Furthermore, opinions on issues of nativenesship also varied in accordance with language departments. Teachers of commonly taught languages tended to attribute students' failure to knowledge of teaching strategies as opposed to other factors believed by Chinese and Japanese language teachers. Most teachers of commonly taught languages did not agree that language teachers should be native speakers, in contrast to the mutual stand taken by most Chinese and Japanese language teachers.

DISSCUION

The results of this study suggested that nativeness was not the only factor for a higher level of teacher efficacy. The importance of teaching experience indicates the significant role of pedagogical knowledge in teaching higher-level classes. Experience in teaching different levels of students in different contexts can possibly help the teachers develop knowledge by facing different problems and conflicts. At the same time, a wide repertoire of teaching strategies, classroom activities and understanding of environmental influence might also contribute to efficacy in teaching higher-level classes. Nonnative language teachers with various years and levels of teaching experience may have a chance to expand their pedagogical knowledge. They could also develop a level of efficacy equal or even higher than that of native-speaking teachers who teach different levels, especially higher levels, of courses.

The results of the current study did not show any differences between native and non-native speaking language teachers that were as significant as those of previous studies. The discrepancy between the present and previous studies shows the contextual contingency characteristics of studies on language teacher preparation. Teachers' levels of efficacy, like their perceptions, do not cross different contexts and language domains (Bandura, 1977). Teacher efficacy is subject to such factors as teachers' educational background, their experience abroad and students' language proficiency. Most participants, both native- and non-native speaking teachers, had lived in a language community where they were foreigners for various lengths of time. The experience of traveling to different countries and the advantage of using a language other than their native one helped them to see language learning from both perspectives, as a native speaker and a learner of a language.

Both the survey and the interview data revealed the importance of staying in the target language community as the key to successful language learning. Language learning requires opportunities and motivation to use the new language in a meaningful and purposeful context. Most participants regarded teaching communicative language as more important than improving students' grammatical competence. Teachers' knowledge of students and their ability to provide a learning environment where students could use the language as if they were in the target

language community seemed to be important.

Furthermore, the results indicate that teachers of commonly taught foreign languages were found to differ from those of less commonly taught languages. Teachers of less commonly taught languages seemed to be more conservative and cautious in evaluating their efficacy levels, while those of more commonly taught languages appeared to be more open in doing so. This finding could be a result of the influence from the cultures behind these languages. For example, East Asian culture appreciates modesty in each individual and values harmony more than difference in a group. Western culture, in contrast, encourages self-expression and emphasizes individual differences. While cultural differences might explain some of the results of this study, future studies are needed to further explore the impact from other factors such as teachers' cultural background, atmosphere in the language department, or the interaction among teachers.

CONCLUSION

The difference between native and non-native speaking teachers have been recognized and studied in several English teaching contexts. However, few studies have addressed such issues concerning English teachers in Taiwan. Since the influx of English native speaking teachers from various countries has been increasing in recent years, the issue of nativeness has become more and more important in English teaching in Taiwan. It is hoped that this study will serve as a starting point for other such studies, will help improve understanding and serve teachers from different linguistic backgrounds. A longitudinal study is recommended as a follow-up to examine the shift in language teachers' sense of teacher efficacy and their perceptions of the same issues after changes in teaching experiences and environment. Moreover, the effect of different language teaching contexts, levels of students' language proficiency, age of students, status of language teachers (e.g., full-time language teachers, part-time language assistants or novice teachers), or language teachers' cultural background could have a significant impact on language teachers' sense of efficacy or their perception of different issues.

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APPENDIX A

Participants' Demographic Information

Foreign Language	Frequency	Percent (%)
Chinese	18	17.3
Japanese	12	11.5
French	18	17.3
Italian	8	7.7
German	14	13.5
Spanish	34	32.7
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nativeness		
Native Speaker	51	49.0
Nonnative Speaker	53	51.0
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Gender		
Male	30	28.8
Female	74	71.2
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Age		
Under 25 yrs	23	22.1
26-30 yrs	48	46.2
31-35 yrs	13	12.5
36-40 yrs	7	6.7
Above 40yrs	13	12.5
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Years of Teaching		
Less than 2 years	40	38.5
3-5 years	35	33.7
6-8 yrs	9	8.7
More than 9 years	20	19.2
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Appendix A: Continued		
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Professional Training		
YES	85	81.7
NO	19	18.3
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Years of Visiting the target language community		
NO	2	3.8
Less than 1 year	24	45.3
1-3 years	18	34.0
More than 3 years	9	17.0
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APPENDIX B

Demographic Information of Interviewees

	Language Taught	Nativeness	Years of Teaching	Age	Degree	Level of Teaching
Ms. A	Japanese	NNA	<2yrs	26-30 yrs	MA	Elementary and intermediate conversation
Ms. B	French	NNA	<2yrs	26-30 yrs	MA	Elementary conversation
Ms. C	Italian	NNA	< 2yrs	26-30 yrs	MA	Elementary level
Ms. D	Spanish	NNA	< 2yrs	26-30yrs	MA	Elementary level
Ms. E	Japanese	NA	> 9yrs	> 41yrs		All levels
Ms. F	Chinese	NNA	< 2yrs	26-30 yrs	MA	Elementary conversation
Ms. G	Spanish	NNA	> 9yrs	36-40 yrs	Ph.D.	All levels
Mr. H	Italian	NNA	> 9yrs	> 41 yrs	MA	All levels at high school
Ms. I	Chinese	NA	< 2yrs	< 25yrs	MA	Elementary conversation
Mr. J	German	NNA	> 9yrs	31-35 yrs	MA	All levels & others
Ms. K	German	NA	< 2yrs	26-30 yrs	MA	Elementary conversation
Mr. L	French	NA	> 9yrs	31-35 yrs	Ph.D.	All levels, and others

Note: NA = Native-speaking language