Non-Native English Teachers' Perspectives on Teaching, Accents, and Varieties

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The present study contributes to the ongoing systematic inquiry about non-native English-speaking teachers' (NNESTs) issues and concerns, specifically the native teacher fallacy regarding the unfair treatment of qualified NNESTs and the false perceptions of the native speaker as an ideal teacher. The research on NNESTs issues has dealt with teachers' self-perceptions and personal histories, administrative concerns, and student opinions (Braine, 2004; Flynn & Gulikers, 2001; Mahboob, 2004; Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, & Hartford, 2004). Within this body of research, NNESTs are found to experience an inferior status due to administrator and student preference for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) (Achimbe, 2006; Braine, 2004; Ellis, 2002; Kamhi-Stein, 1999; Liu, 1999; Mahboob et.al., 2004; Medgyes, 2001; Oda, 1999) and this has led to NNESTs having a poorer self-image and perceiving themselves as incompetent and deficient teachers (Reves & Medgyes, 1994).Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate NNESTs' teaching behavior and their perceptions of their own language proficiency, accent, and awareness of different English varieties.

Native Versus Non-Native Teachers

The existence of the native/nonnative dichotomy has been questioned in the literature because the "native-speaker" construct has not been successfully defined and nativeness is not the major criterion for the description of language competence (Achimbe, 2006; Canagarajah, 1999; Cook, 1999; Davies, 1991; Rampton, 1990). It has been argued that instead of dwelling on the nativeness issue, teachers should be viewed on the basis of their professionalism and NNESTs' language competence should not be considered inferior but different than that of NESTs'.

In terms of NNESTs' teaching behavior, previous research suggests that NNESTs tend to have a lower pragmatic competence and bookish language because most of them have not lived in an English-speaking country for a long period of time (Liu, 2004). They focus on accuracy, form, grammar rules, texts, and formal registers. They schedule more homework and tests, and they correct errors more frequently (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1999).

Because of NNESTs' use of L1 and translation, there is some level of code-switching in the classroom communication between the instructor and the students and among

students themselves. According to Chen and Hird (2006), in EFL contexts, code-switching during student group work is inevitable because they share the same L1. They tend to reserve the use of the target language for specific tasks, while L1 is the medium for all off-task, off-record communication. Hancock (1997) argues that the use of L1 should not be necessarily deemed as bad. He believes that "on the one hand, L1 interjections are a natural by-product of charge in the interaction, and that charge could not be too easily defused by an inflexible insistence on the L2" (p. 233).

As for teacher-student interaction, Macaro (2001) points out that the prominent reasons for L1 use are giving procedural instructions, keeping control of students, and reprimanding them. He goes on to say that research should focus on developing a code-switching optimality theory which will provide teacher trainers with guidelines on what can be considered good practices of switching to L1 as compared to using it as an easy option.

In terms of teachers' perceptions of English accents and varieties, previous research suggests that inner-circle models (those coming from countries in which English is used as a first language) dominate EFL classes (Matsuda, 2002). Matsuda (2003) found that Japanese EFL classes are based on inner-circle models because of the widespread use of American and British textbooks. Sifakis and Sougari (2005), on the other hand, argue that EFL teachers in Greece view English teaching as norm-bound because they identify the language with its native speakers. NNESTs' norm dependence has been challenged by the argument that students, especially in EFL contexts, learn English not to communicate primarily with native speakers, but to become intercultural speakers by acquiring competence in intercultural communication and English as an international language (EIL) (Seidlhofer, 2004). In other words, EIL does not have a direct connection with Inner Circle countries. Thus, instead of native competence, students need to develop linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical competence for multicultural and transnational communication (McKay, 2002). The establishment of intercultural speaker identity (i.e. speakers who position themselves between the target and their own culture) would help eradicate the binary notion of native versus nonnative speakers (Sifakis, 2007; Velasco-Martin, 2004).

The Macedonian Context

Macedonia is one area of the world where English has become the dominant foreign language studied. Over the years, there has been an increasing number of private elementary and high schools as well as private language schools which use English as the medium of instruction for all courses they offer. And recently, English study has become compulsory in Macedonia even though in the past ten years almost all elementary and high school students have studied it voluntarily at some point (Dimova, 2003, 2005). Yet there are still students who attend English classes in private language schools because they believe that their English instruction at school is inappropriate or insufficient. Even though there is currently a strong demand for English in Macedonia, it is expected to

further increase due to the latest socio-political developments of visa liberalization and prospective European Union membership. Macedonians desire English for the purposes of international communication and access to educational, economic, and cultural information. Nevertheless, most English instructors in the country, and in the Balkan region, are NNESTs.

This paper extends the discussion on the issues related to NNESTS' by exploring the following research questions:

1. What are Macedonian NNESTs' beliefs about their English teaching practices?
2. What are Macedonian NNESTs' perceptions of their own English language proficiency and accent?
3. What are Macedonian NNESTs' attitudes towards different English varieties?

Method

To achieve data comparability, the study draws on prior research dealing with non-native English speaking teachers' (NNESTs) teaching behavior and self-perceptions in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Braine, 2004; Flynn & Gulikers, 2001; Mahboob, 2004; Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, & Hartford, 2004). Data collection consisted of structured interviews of NNESTs and classroom observations. Classroom observations were included to validate NNESTs' statements obtained through the interviews. The qualitative design of the present study allowed for a more in-depth exploratory analysis of Macedonian NNESTs' opinions, beliefs, and behavior.

Participants

Participants in the study were 15 NNESTs working in six private language schools in two cities, Veles and Piliep, both of which have about 70,000 inhabitants and are typical mid-size cities in Macedonia and the Balkan region. All private language schools from Veles (n=4) and half of the private language schools from Prilep (n=2) participated in the study. The teachers selected for the study were representative of the Macedonian NNESTs because most of them had the standard pre-service teacher training in Macedonia or the neighboring countries of Bulgaria and Serbia, and many of them taught in both public and private schools. The study followed the research protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board, and school administrators and teachers signed consent forms before their participation in the study.

Schools

The number of participating English teachers from each of the schools ranged from two to six, with a mean of four. In terms of student enrollment, the schools ranged from 140 to 350, but most of them had around 300 students. All participating schools offered English classes for students of all ages and proficiency levels. The English classes in all schools were primarily based on general English although some offered specialized courses like Business English or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation courses.

Teachers

After locating the private language schools in Veles and Prilep, meetings with the school directors were arranged to inform them about the study and to request their participation. The purpose of these initial meetings with school directors was to learn about the number of English teachers in the school, their teaching schedules, and the type of classes they taught. At least two teachers per school were selected to participate in the study. In most cases, the school directors notified the teachers about the times the researcher would visit to observe their classes. However, the researcher scheduled the interviews with the teachers. It was made clear to all participants that participation was voluntary and that they were free to opt out of the study.

All teachers participating in the study were female (the percentage of male English teachers in Macedonia is low), and ranged in age from 20 to 33. When asked about their L1, they all stated it was Macedonian, except for one teacher whose L1 was Serbian. Their teaching experience ranged between two months and 10 years (mean=4 years, median=4 years). The educational background of the teachers varied. While one of the participants was a college senior, eight had a four-year degree in English language and literature, six of whom majored in English education and two majored in translation studies. Two had a four-year degree with English studies as a minor. Two teachers had four-year teaching degrees (one in German language and literature and one in elementary education), and two had non-teaching degrees (hospitality management and engineering).

In terms of their career, six teachers had worked only in the participating language schools. The other teachers had other work experience. Six had taught English in an elementary school and one in a secondary school. One was a bank administrator, and one was a library administrator. None of the teachers had taught other subjects except for one who had taught German. The participants' teaching loads ranged from a total of 15 to 45 hours a week (mean=29.6, median=35), which included all the classes they taught both in the private language schools and elsewhere. Seven teachers had not participated in in-service training programs and activities while eight stated that they attended different seminars organized by textbook publishers, workshops organized by the Ministry of Education, and seminars organized by the United States Agency for International Development and the British Council in Macedonia.

While in college, six of the participating teachers visited for less than a year English-speaking countries, namely Great Britain (N=4) and the United States (N=2). Some of them went on student worker exchange programs working as au pairs or in restaurants while others visited relatives or attended intensive English programs.

Instruments

A structured interview was designed for teachers. Some interview questions were original and, in order to obtain comparable data, some were adapted from the studies

conducted by Llurda and Huguet (2003) and Arva and Medgyes (2000). The interviews were designed to take between 30 minutes and one hour, but the actual interview length varied depending on participants' responses to questions. The interview included 47 questions divided into five sections: introduction, instructor background, English proficiency, teaching, and opinions about ownership and varieties used in the classroom.

Procedures

One lesson per instructor was observed before the interviews were conducted individually at the instructor's convenience. The observations and the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed and coded by two raters. The inter-rater reliability was calculated to ensure rating consistency ($r = .915$). The coding scheme the raters used was shaped by the three main research questions that guided the study. Seven coding categories were used in relation to the research question dealing with NNESTs' teaching practices (see Table 1). Three coding categories were developed based on the research questions related to teacher's self-perceptions and attitudes towards different English varieties (see Table 2).

Table 1

Coding Categories for NNESTs' Teaching Practices

Category	Description
pedagogy	specific teaching and learning methods, description of general teaching approaches, techniques, and class structure, and the type of textbooks used in the classroom
listening	teacher's understanding of the listening skill, types of teaching and learning listening activities and frequency of their use
reading	teacher's understanding of the reading skill, types of teaching and learning reading activities, and frequency of their use
speaking	teacher's understanding of the speaking skill, types of teaching and learning speaking activities, and frequency of their use
writing	teacher's understanding of the writing skill, types of teaching and learning writing activities, and frequency of their use
L1 use	teacher's opinion about the purpose, the positive and negative aspects of L1 use, as well as the frequency of L1 use in class
culture	teacher's levels of understanding and knowledge of the target culture(s), frequency and type of cultural references in class, as well as teacher's confidence speaking about it

Table 2
Coding Categories for Teachers' Perceptions of Language Proficiency, Accent, and English Varieties

Category	Description
self-evaluation	how comfortable the teacher is when self-evaluating her English and teaching skills
accents	teacher's awareness of her own accent and the accents of her students, as well as her preferred English accents
English varieties	teacher's opinion about the English variety she teaches, the benefits of that variety, as well as the importance of achieving native-like accents

Findings

The findings from the teacher interviews and the observed classes are divided into two sections below. The first section discusses NNESTs' teaching opinions and practices. The second section presents their perceptions of their own language proficiency, accent, and English varieties.

Teaching Opinions and Practices

First, NNESTs' teaching opinions and practices resembled the descriptions presented in previous research. As is the case with many NNESTs in South America, Africa, and Eastern and Western Europe (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; Reves & Medgyes, 1994), Macedonian NNESTs claimed to address all language skills even though, in most classes, vocabulary and grammar were the focal skills.

Pedagogy

When asked about their main language teaching principles and practices, only one teacher named the method she used: "I try to combine grammar and communication methods so the students can learn grammar and then use it in communication." All of the other teachers described the types of activities they liked to use or a typical lesson plan. For example, several teachers pointed out that they liked teaching English through different games. They believed that games made their classes more interesting and motivated students to learn. Some teachers valued interactive and task-based activities. According to the teachers' responses, and supported by class observation findings, their

classes usually consist of listening to an audio recorded text, reading the text, identifying new vocabulary, translating the text, and doing the activities following the text, such as grammar, reading comprehension or listening comprehension. The following is an example of a typical lesson described by one of the teachers:

> If we have a text, and in the text there are some grammar rules that are following, I read the text first or I play it on a cassette. Then I try to find if there are unfamiliar words, I write them on the blackboard, and I write the definition, the pronunciation, and the translation. If I can describe the meaning of them in English, I do that, but if I can't, I always use the Macedonian translation. And after that, when I finish reading and translating the whole text, I make the students read the text, and translate the text, of course, and then we talk about it. And after that, I tell them to pay attention to grammar. So, first we have reading, pronunciation, and translation, and after that grammar. (Teacher# 10)

The textbook choices in the observed classes followed the traditional pattern of an inner-circle linguistic selection and a restricted representation of the wide range of English users and uses (Matsuda, 2002; 2003). Most textbooks were norm-oriented providing British, and more rarely American, written and spoken samples and cultural elements. The textbook selection was partly influenced by several British publishing companies (e.g. Oxford University Press, Longman, and Cambridge University Press), who attract clientele from the private school sector via organizing various workshops. In their textbook promotion, the main emphasis rests on material "authenticity" as the selling point. Even though most Macedonians would probably use English for international communication, no samples of other English varieties or nonnative speakers were used in the textbooks.

Listening

According to interview statements, and confirmed by classroom observations, teachers employed various activities depending on the focal language skill. To teach listening, the teachers played tapes, CDs, and DVDs that accompanied the textbooks, or DVDs with songs, cartoons, or movies. Most audio-recordings represented English varieties from the UK and the US. While one teacher reported that she started with pre-listening activities that established the context for the listening, the rest of the teachers discussed only post-listening activities, such as comprehension questions, true or false statements, fill-in the gaps, and put the information in the correct order. Several teachers described the listening activities as mere listening and reading of the text in the book.

Findings from the classroom observations supported teachers' statements that listening comprehension activities were used most frequently because they were incorporated in the textbook learning units. None of the teachers mentioned discussions and questions and answer sessions as activities for listening development although these

activities were observed in the classes. Finally, none of the teachers stated that sometimes their own speech could provide input for the listening activity while such instances were clearly noted during observation.

Reading

The teachers' understanding of the reading skill was an ability to read out loud and then translate different texts. The observations provided corroborating evidence for this because teachers frequently asked students to read texts out loud with correct pronunciation of the words and appropriate intonation. Most teachers used read aloud activities to practice pronunciation, so they infallibly corrected students each time they mispronounced a word.

Even though numerous reading comprehension activities were noted during observation, only three teachers mentioned pre-reading and post-reading activities, such as discussions or reading comprehension questions. The following is a list of reading activities that one of the teachers offered:

> There are many activities. I give them a text and they write questions related to the text, and then they answer the questions. I give them a statement, one or two sentences, and the students write questions about the statement. The statement has to be provocative and I want to lead them to the text. Then they read the text. Before reading the text, I ask the students to write what they know and what they want to know about the topic. Then, I give them the text and ask them to write what they've learned. (Teacher#15)

Speaking

Even though some teachers listed different activities for oral language development, the most frequently observed activities were class discussions and conversations or dialogs. The topics for these discussions were usually related to a text or suggested by students. The dialogs, however, were not spontaneous because students would first write them and then read them out loud. It seemed that most teachers focused on practicing pronunciation, which, as mentioned earlier, was part of the reading activities. Some teachers related speaking to writing or listening, stating that they used discussion as a pre-writing activity (for example, to brainstorm ideas for the writing activity) or as a post-listening activity, that is, to discuss what they learned from the listening activity. One teacher mentioned using several speaking activities:

> I want them to be able to ask questions and answer questions. I want them to be able to re-tell a text based on what they remember, not based on actual sentences and just learning them by heart. I want them to be able to describe something. I want them to be able to, if they don't know a word, to explain it in different words so I can come to the word they are asking for, stuff like that. (Teacher#4)

Writing

When asked about teaching writing, many teachers stated that most writing activities were assigned for homework because they took too much time or because students were not fond of doing them in class. The most frequently mentioned writing activities were dictation and writing the new vocabulary words. Free writing and writing on specific topics were two more writing activities employed in the classrooms. In addition to spelling and new word entries, other writing activities used in the observed classrooms were fill-in-the-gap or complete-the-sentence activities. None of the observed teachers spent time discussing English writing conventions, discourse, or genres because traditionally, with the exception of spelling and grammar, writing has not been explicitly taught in the Macedonian public school system.

Even though teachers believed that all language skills were important and tried to spend time on each during their lessons, grammar seemed to be the most and writing seemed to be the least favorite skill. Listening and speaking were two other skills that teachers agreed to be valuable for their students to acquire because they were necessary for effective communication.

Use of L1

Most teachers felt that the use of L1 was beneficial and they used it to establish rapport with their students or to explain grammar points and difficult concepts. Teachers thought the L1 was most beneficial for younger children and beginning level students because it would be hard to establish any communication in English. However, many teachers warned that L1 in the EFL classes should be present only in moderation because English exposure was essential for learning.

In the observed classes, the amount of L1 use differed among classes ranging from predominantly L1 to predominantly English. What seemed to be common for all classes, though, was the fact that the L1 was used in all off-record communication (including comments, asides, chats, and jokes) among students or teacher and students. Another commonality was that even if teachers used English to address their students, unless it was an English activity, students replied or addressed teachers in the L1. The findings from the classroom observations regarding code-switching corroborated previous research. As Macaro (2001) suggested, L1 in teacher-student interactions was used to establish classroom discipline and to provide procedural concepts. Both teachers and students used English when assuming a different role or for task specific purposes, so it seemed that L1 related to "self" while English related to "other" (Chen &Hird, 2006; Hancock, 1997).

Culture

Limited cultural information was offered during the observed classes, which supports the findings from several earlier studies (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Mahboob, 2004; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). Even though teachers tried to deal with cultural issues more or less effectively, their teacher-as-an-informant perspective prevented them from admitting if they were not sure or did not know (Lazaraton, 2003). It is important to note that the classroom resources (e.g. textbooks, audio-visuals, etc.) for adolescent (10-14) and adult learners contained more inner-circle cultural references than those for young learners (5-9). Even though references to the local culture were included, especially for comparison with the target culture, no instances of multicultural and transnational situations and contexts were observed, which suggests that teachers do not associate these contexts with English culture.

Teachers' endeavors to describe some of the target culture elements in the teaching materials were not always successful. For example, teachers did not provide accurate descriptions of certain behaviors, institutions, and foods mentioned in the texts because they had never experienced the target culture themselves.

Teachers' Self-perceptions of their Language Proficiency, Accent, and English Varieties

Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation of their English proficiency was difficult for teachers because they struggled between modesty and acceptability of their proficiency. They were asked to rate different aspects of their English proficiency (grammar in use, knowledge of grammar rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, oral fluency, listening, writing, reading, and overall) on a five-point scale (1-very weak, 2-weak, 3-acceptable, 4-good, and 5-very good). However, many teachers rated their skills in increments of .5 or between two points of the scale. Some teachers believed they should measure their English proficiency against inner-circle norms. They suggested that the researcher should measure their proficiency because their self-evaluation may be incorrect, or that they felt they had to justify the scores they gave themselves for different language skills.

Results suggest that most Macedonian NNESTs are confident with their overall language skills with self-ratings between good or very good (see Table 3). Findings partially supported previous research (Llurda & Huguet, 2003) in that even though reading was rated highest, listening and writing were rated higher than knowledge of grammar rules, which is generally considered the best teaching and language skill of NNESTs (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Butler, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Mahboob et. al., 2004; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). Oral language skills and vocabulary range were rated lowest, which was consistent with previous studies (Butler, 2007; Llurda & Huguet, 2003).

Table 3
Teachers' Self-evaluation by Language Skill

Skill	Average self-rating
Reading	4.9
Writing	4.6
Listening	4.5
Grammar rules	4.4
Oral fluency	4.1
Grammar use	4
Pronunciation	4
Vocabulary	3.86

According to their own ratings, teachers believed that reading (mean=4.9) and writing (mean=4.6) were their best skills. However, the majority thought that writing meant spelling of English words or writing grammatically correct sentences, so they related writing to their knowledge of grammar rules (mean=4.4) and their grammar use (mean=4), which they rated lower than writing. Listening comprehension closely followed writing and rated fairly high (mean=4.5)

The weaker language skills, according to the teachers' ratings, were oral fluency (mean=4.1), pronunciation (mean=4) and vocabulary (mean=3.9). The teachers rated their vocabulary lowest because they used a restricted range of words in their classes, and they did not have a chance to use English in other contexts. Table 3 summarizes teachers' self-evaluations.

Overall, the average self-rated proficiency among teachers was reasonably high (mean=4.3). Most teachers believed that their English had improved since their graduation from university because they were exposed to different English media such as television, magazines, and books, and because they prepared their classes on daily basis. These opinions support the belief that NNESTs constantly work on their linguistic and professional development in order to retain high teaching quality by using many English resources at their disposal (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Miranda, 2003).

Although their self-rating of English proficiency was high, teachers expressed some feelings of uncertainty and inferiority. They listed their lack of confidence, lower range of vocabulary, accented speech, occasional use of incorrect grammar, and exaggerated use of L1 in the classroom as problematic areas. "Maybe we don't have a good accent. Maybe we are weaker in grammar. We're not so fluent in speaking," one of the teachers said. In addition, they believed they had to use the dictionary or other resources much more often than if they were native speakers. A teacher claimed, "Well, if you are a native speaker, you know everything. Sometimes you [NNEST] can't remember a word or something. That's the main disadvantage" (Teacher#2).

More teachers added that they thought they were not as knowledgeable as native teachers because they had a restricted vocabulary range and problems with grammar. The teachers expressed their fear of not being able to answer students' questions or remember a word because some students may still expect an all-knowing teacher figure.

Accents

As far as the accents and varieties were concerned, most teachers described their accents and their teaching practices as norm-oriented, which follows Sifakis and Sougari's (2005) findings regarding teachers' opinions on pronunciation in Greece. The preferred English varieties were inner-circle Englishes, in other words Englishes from the countries in which English is learned and used as a first language (Kachru, 1985). Teachers chose British and American English, the latter being much more popular due to its greater presence in the media. Six teachers characterized their English accent as American, four thought it was British, while two stated it was a mix. As can be seen from the example below, some teachers argued that their accents would change if they were exposed to a different variety of English:

> Well, I have so many. I think I'm changing my accents very easily. I'm very adjustable or adaptable, because now you're talking with American accent and I think I'm doing the same. Sometimes it's more British...But, I think I'm changing the accents because it's a kind of communication or something, I just adjust. Once I talked to a guy who was Italian. We talked in English and, I found myself talking in English with an Italian accent, so..., unfortunately I don't have my own. (Teacher#2)

This teacher raises an important issue as to whether there is a homogenous, local, and recognizable English variety with which Macedonian English speakers can identify. She seems to be reshaping and negotiating her identity by testing and adjusting her intelligibility in different contexts. This adjustment seems to follow the argument that, "NNES accents are to some degree influenced by those of NESs, but they still are negotiated products between an idealized target and their identities" (Kubota, 2006, p. 606).

While this teacher regretted that she did not have her own accent, another teacher identified her English as being "Macedonian with American and European influence," because people had described it as such. She did not mind her accent, and she did not think that having a Macedonian English accent was unacceptable.

Most teachers did not provide specific description of the features that made them characterize their English accent as British, American, or a mix. Their opinions were based primarily on their preference or attitudes towards the variety. A few teachers believed that their pronunciation or spelling determined their accent. As examples of British English the teachers provided the "the mute /r/, at the end of the word" in British, and the pronunciation of *can't* as /kant/ in British and /kænt/ in American English. One teacher made the comment that Macedonians tend to "sound more like the American people, and they don't have that British accent."

English Varieties

The English varieties teachers taught in the classroom did not always coincide with the English variety they used. When asked about the choice of English standards, teachers compared and chose between American and British English. Some teachers claimed that they taught British English in their classes because they used British textbooks and audio and visual materials. Some believed the media imposed American English in their classes, and some believed that they used a mix of British and American.

Teachers' and students' preferences and attitudes towards the two main inner-circle varieties, American and British, influenced their choice. "I try to use British English," one teacher said, "because that is the correct variety." While one teacher used American English because her students did not like British, which "sounds so neat, sounds fake," another teacher argued that the American variety was "closer" and "easier" for students.

Even though their views were norm-bound, teachers rejected the idea that their students should strive towards acquiring a native-like accent. The teachers argued that if their students had good communicational skills in English, the accent would not matter, which seems to relate to Velasco-Martin's (2004) concept of an intercultural, inter-communicational speaker, even though the teachers did not seem fully aware of the English as an international language perspective.

One teacher thought that students were "interested in acquiring the knowledge of the language not the accents." Even though the teachers deemed correct, norm-referenced pronunciation very important, they stressed that the ability to communicate, not the accent, was important for students to acquire:

> If I can understand them, what they are talking about, for me, it's not a problem. I try to correct them or bring to attention the need to pronounce correctly. It's good [if they can acquire a native-like accent], but it's not top priority for me. (Teacher#4)

Even though some students would like to sound like native speakers of English, some teachers believed that obtaining a native-like accent was not feasible in EFL contexts. "I think that no matter how hard they try, not only the students but also the teachers, they can't speak the same for sure...They can't speak like somebody for whom it is a native language" (Teacher#7). This teacher raises the concern about whether teachers should even try to teach the inner-circle norms or whether they should make their students aware of the existence of World Englishes.

Those teachers who thought that students should acquire a native-like accent did not provide specific reasons to support their opinion. "It's not so good when we hear somebody speaking with some, I don't know, hard accent," one teacher said, but she didn't describe what "hard accent" meant.

Teachers' opinions on which accent was more beneficial for the students were divided. Although most teachers discussed inner-circle norms, their attitudes and their descriptions of the models differed, which suggests that the concept of native speaker is obscure and fluid. Seven teachers thought that American English was best for their students because "it sounds softly," "it's closer to the students," and "it's easier to pronounce." These teachers also said that students "are under the influence of the American accent, because of the films, music, and other media," while "British is not so popular." Three teachers believed that British English was best because it "has more rules that students have to learn so that they can learn other dialects more easily later on." The teachers mentioned that "British English is the standard [variety] in all European countries," while they characterized American English as "some kind of a dialect."

Even though most teachers opted either for the British or the American variety, five teachers commented that students should choose the English variety depending on what they find more important or easier to learn. However, when observed, these teachers did not employ any pedagogy that fosters exposure to and awareness of World Englishes.

Conclusions

Findings suggest that Macedonian NNESTs are influenced by the normative varieties through the media, textbooks, and inner-circle organizations such as the British Council and Peace Corps. Many Macedonian NNESTs express English linguistic and cultural inferiority because they believe their ownership belongs to the inner-circle countries. Although most teachers are aware that their students' English differs from the inner-circle varieties, they still maintain that English instruction and assessment have to be norm-oriented. These beliefs affect teachers' pedagogical choices and decisions. NNESTs seem to underplay the language input they provide in the classroom to the advantage of the authentic textbooks and materials, which expose students to native English varieties. Hence, the dominant models in the Macedonian EFL classes depend mostly on the textbook choice.

The findings from this study lead to certain implications about NNESTs in the expanding circle, which has been defined as countries in which English is learned and used for international communication (Kachru, 1985). Even though scholars have tried to demystify the superiority of native speakers and document the expanding role of English as an international language (Achimbe, 2006; Jenkins, 2002; Seidelhofer, 2004), NNESTs are yet to overcome their feelings of deficiency, as well as their lack of English identity awareness. Even though Macedonian NNESTs' rated their English proficiency high, they expressed their uncertainties and feelings of inferiority, comparing themselves to native speakers. In addition, most teachers did not show awareness about their English identity, be it related to the English variety and accent or their pedagogical and methodological practices.

Nevertheless, the results from this study suggest unity among Macedonian NNEST beliefs and practices, which may separate them from other NNESTs. Unlike previous findings suggesting that NNESTs were most comfortable with their knowledge of grammar rules, Macedonian NNESTs rated their reading and listening skills higher than their grammar rule knowledge. Two assumptions that need further investigation arise from this finding. First, Macedonian NNESTs are frequently exposed to English media (TV, movies, music, magazines) that are not dubbed or translated, which helps solidify their so-called receptive language skills, reading and listening. The other assumption is teachers cannot separate the dynamic connection between grammar knowledge and grammar use, so they think their knowledge about the application of grammar rules is not always right.

The homogeneity of Macedonian NNESTs' beliefs and teaching practices provides additional evidence about the specific traits of Macedonian NNESTs. Most teachers' classes were driven by the texts and activities in the course textbooks, and they valued reading and translation. This observation, however, does not necessarily mean that teachers would fall back on the grammar-translation method if it weren't for the textbooks because they explicitly stated that games, interaction, and task-based activities are effective teaching approaches and techniques.

These findings suggest that teacher-trainers and educators may need to pay greater attention to the particular language proficiency and teaching skills with which NNESTs struggle. Raising awareness about English as an international language and the different varieties existing outside the inner circle may also help NNESTs to improve their self-perceptions and re-validate the relationship between the language and its native speakers. Even though teachers may continue to use inner-circle varieties as language models, they may find it useful to expose their students to other varieties, and to reflect on issues and concerns with regard to English as a global language. Moreover, instead of focusing on stereotypical cultural aspects associated with England, Scotland, or the U.S. or avoiding unfamiliar cultural elements, NNESTs may build their identity and gain more confidence if they embed English in more familiar contexts such as international education and communication.

NNESTs may benefit from different pre-service and in-service teacher training opportunities created to address these issues, be they part of the pre-service training programs or through ongoing seminars and workshops. According to Sifakis and Sougari (2005), such training can address the role of English as a language for intercultural communication in the country's current geopolitical environment and beyond.

Finally, due to the descriptive nature of the study and its scope limitation, further research should investigate the possible differences in teachers' perceived proficiency levels and the expected proficiency for successful teaching (Butler, 2004). Last, a careful description of NNES teacher talk, focusing on cultural elements, code-switching, and interaction should be provided to analyze the types of input and the functions of L1 and L2 use in the EFL context.

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