'BEYOND THE NATIVE SPEAKER FALLACY IN ESP COURSES'

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ABSTRACT: *With the rapid growth of English as an International language (EIL) due to globalization, and the emergence of the need for bridging the gap between what non-native English speakers(NNESs) perceived and what they need to know in their specific target environments (Basturkmen 2006:15) recent interest has been triggered to the status of native-speakerism in the realm of English for Specific Purposes and the pressing issue of comprehensibility of oral communication in ESP courses by examining the questions: 'How is intelligibility accommodated in ESP courses? Is non-native users' identity tightly linked to native users' with the former lacking the confidence to acquire the desirable specialist knowledge?'. Owing to the fact that there has been a lot of controversy to the subject of communicative competence and the linguistic awareness of ESP learners, this reflective article, focusses on drawing insight in the thorny issue of native-speakerism in the field of ESP courses and brings forth the stances towards the native speaker vs non-native speaker dichotomy in the working environments of Greece. The purpose was to explore the problematized fallacy of native-speakerism in ESP courses by questioning its perceived effects in the way students regard the English language. In doing so, it sheds light at what needs to be done to shake the foundations of specific discourse communities with specific communicative traits and distinct communicative practices. This article concludes that focusing on job-specific discourse features will enrich learners' linguistic resource commensurate with the demands of their working environments. Consequently, it reveals that the problematizing native-speakerism fallacy is a misconception and a stereotype.*

KEYWORDS*: native-speakerism, native-speakerism fallacy, ESP, dichotomy, job-specific discourse features, communicative competence.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-twentieth century, practising the English language has been a prestigious practice of non-native speakers and it has been considered one of the most widespread spoken language on a global scale. The fallacy propagated that native speakers speak the English language better than the non-natives. Thus, such attitude encouraged a large number of non-native language learners to perform with the discriminatory nature of the standard forms of the language which is in total contradiction of the rationality of language teaching. Practising speaking skills can be a daunting task for learners especially for those who are non-native speakers ESP learners with specific learning purposes and teaching instruction. Little interest in informing ESP learners' discipline-specific knowledge has been invested yet the growing number of corpus-based research

paper publications investigate the applicability of ESP theory at a practical level and raise awareness to the specific discourse patterns appropriate to communicative activities. This article gives an overview of the current research findings regarding ESP principles methodology as well as the conflicting views in the teaching practices to promote the speaking skills of ESP practitioners. Course design priorities in highly technical knowledge education settings is recommended. Based on the growing recognition of the challenges ESP practitioners face, the spartan environment of many ESP classrooms has been alienating from the successful comprehension and production of 'generative core' functional exponents of the target language in specific skills related disciplines. In many cases, it is still a daunting task for participants of specific discourse communities to acquire highly specialized and appropriate content knowledge. The primary goal of this article is to engage its readers in a respectful and fruitful discussion on the distinction between native-speakers and their 'generative-core' language skills and the non-native speakers in ESP courses. In these specific discipline courses, specific registers need to be mastered to equip themselves with cultural-awareness and native-like accuracy. It starts by defining the two concepts discussed here, native-speakerism and ESP and delineates the theoretical framework and common core language skills prevailing between those two concepts. Then, it elaborates on several concrete teaching practices and considerations relating to designing and implementing specific pragmatic tasks to correspond to normal communicative activities. Such activities are appropriate to focus on target events and language, focusing on fluency of the learners instead of accuracy, ranging from grammar to pronunciation.

This paper aims to shed light on culture-specific approaches develop both their common-core language and awareness of job-specific discourse patterns and underlines the importance of exploring this topic in depth and of helping learners to consolidate a range of lexis and functional language to enable them to engage in successful communicative speech acts. Additionally, my choice to focus on English for Specific Purposes is motivated by my experience over the past four years of teaching young Greek apprentices preparing for a career in the tourism industry.

Native speakerism and its relationship with the ESP courses

The prevailing and most cited conceptualised approach of native-speakerism remains that of Holliday (2005: 6) who defines the term as "an established belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology". Holliday (2006:386) introduces the term 'moral mission' to identify the hegemony of the native-speakers over the non-natives and the high-surrender value of the latter to achieve the homogeneity of the purpose. In the context of speaking, 'the educated native speaker model' is promoted by the institutions which standardise specific language requirements. As the learners' ultimate aim is to improve and integrate the functional components of the target language, there is growing recognition of the challenges they face, especially when entering professional life.

The ideology of native-speakerism relied upon constructing an English-language teaching model which perpetuates the emergence of the linguistic dominance of specific standardized language traits. These traits appeared within the domain of teaching

English for Specific Purposes. Since its onset in the 1960's the field of ESP has grown in significance and recognition. Over the past fifty years, the characteristics of the needs of the ESP learners were defined by reference to specialty, the materials devised changed significantly and a learner-centered approach, which is fluency-oriented rather than an accuracy-oriented approach. The latter is considered rather antiquated. Stern (1991) argued against its effectiveness as a teaching practice stressing the lurking possibility of students' boredom in class. and Dudley Evans & St John maintain that ESP methodology underlying and serving such disciplines, encompasses all ESP learners by including the utilization of subject-specific 'carrier-content' founded upon their pre-existing knowledge, their interests and the homogeneity of their learning purpose. 'Native-speakerism' is the widespread belief that 'native-speakers' form the key organizing principles of linguistic and socio-cultural power dynamics which are interwoven with a fairly homogeneous group of 'non-native speakers' which produces specific functional language quite proficiently and possess the 'generative core' needed for true communicative competence.

Principles of ESP Methodology and Materials
Dudley- Evans & St. John (1998) suggest that the utilization of authentic materials which correspond to target events and language is likely to involve ESP learners in the learning process and provide discipline-specific knowledge and subject-specific 'carrier-content'. Such specialism in the authentic materials, with a focus on common core language skills with a Present-Practice-Produce approach may be preferred for intermediate learners while for advanced learners, a Task-Based Learning approach using 'genuine texts' may be more appropriate. (Widdowson, 1978). Such graded and tailored authentic materials provide high face validity and ensure the homogeneity of the purpose and familiarity of the ESP learners with the target language and target situations.

Assessment of the ESP Methodology
Evaluating the performance of the students has a great role in ESP methodology and it is considered of vital importance to accommodate the learners' needs. Formative assessment for the students' evaluation needs provide 'rich and useful feedback' (Wiggins, 1998:12). The assessment process should include communicative tasks and formative assessment components.

Class Profile
My chosen group is comprised of 18 mixed ability vocational training students who are trained to be occupied in the tourism industry. When I asked my current group of ESP users about their objective needs, they expressed a strong interest to meet their job requirements. While it might be challenging for some of them because they may not be exposed to the grammar and lexis of the target language forms in their everyday lives, I consider such exposure to the specific discourse patterns, motivating to them and an excellent opportunity for learners for practice in a wide range of authentic texts and communicative tasks. In my experience, ESP practitioners who are motivated tend to familiarise more easily with the target language patterns and become proficient users.

Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has been classified by Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) in five types of needs:

1.   Objective
2.   Subjective
3.   Lacks
4.   Learning
5.   Means

The needs analysis conveyed via the use of personal interviews, questionnaires, peer observation evaluation sheets and qualitative data collection and revealed that the ESP practitioners felt that their needs through the ESP courses were not met.

Findings

The objective needs analysis indicated that the ESP learners are highly-motivated to be exposed to authentic texts and the target language norms. Additionally, they are primarily motivated to achieve cross-cultural intelligibility and authentic interactional competence with spoken discourse through authentic performance tasks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current section explores the phenomenon of native-speakerism in the working environments of Greece and explores the dichotomy of native speakers versus non-natives. These contrastive elements are fundamental to understand the purpose of this article. In the literature that dichotomy is identified as *fallacy* and *ideology*. These terms are intertwined and interconnected to discuss the dimensions of such phenomenon Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999) account it as a fallacy, which predicates that native speakers are superior and ideal language models compared to those whose native language is not the target one. Native speakerism practices are considered a part of linguistic imperialism. In Canagarajah and Ben Said (2011) the authors argue that such attitude towards non-native speakers, disregards the nature of language learning as a creative cognitive and social process. Evidence of such consequences are the unequal employability conditions in the working environments of Greece. Unfair employment discrimination (Selvi 2010) leads non-native speakers to their exclusion of certain workplaces which promote the unprofessional favouritism of native-speakerism. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) place an *awareness* of needs at the heart of English for Specific Purposes, elegantly defining it as 'an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning' Significant confusion has been noticed among students on how to employ discourse conventions to interact successfully in English in certain sociocultural contexts. The level of control to master the 'proper' pronunciation with the accurate morphological and phonological units of the target language is designed on a behavior-oriented pattern, without a genuine communicative purpose. The question that arises is whether interactional patterns between native speakers and non-native speakers, will be gravely affected and the 'discourse value of World Englishes will be either ignored or diminished by native speakers. Consequently, practising speaking skills can be a daunting task for learners,

especially those who are non-native speakers of English. Effective speaking skills are necessary for admission to English-speaking tertiary education institutions.

The 'discourse value' assigned to the native-speaker's utterances is neither received nor ignored by the non-native speakers. In conversational terms, Mckay's (2002) principles of cross-cultural intelligibility are not satisfied. Byram (1997) argues that this rote-learning emphasises a form-oriented 'emulation' of the native speaker's speech characteristics which is underpinned by the belief that a native speaker's linguistic skills are the only ones deemed acceptable by the native speaker community. Any deviations are considered erroneous and unacceptable. Fukushima (2000, cited in Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010) adds a further characteristic and explains that one participant, in an exchange may hold power over the other due to factors such as social status, class, institutional role, physical strength or age.

Basturkmen (2006) defines ESP by reference to Swales' framework of academic, professional and workplace discourse communities (Swales, 1990). ESP learners can be seen as would-be participants in specific discourse communities with distinct communicative practices.

Directions for future modern teaching approaches for ESP
The above evaluation of the native-speakerism highlights the need for a targeted, learner-centred, autonomous pedagogy that will enable ESP-learners to initiate and show authentic interactional competence with minimal teacher-intervention. Therefore, a new teaching approach that develops learners' pragmatic awareness of the target's language's discourse patterns and conversational skills that develop learners' autonomy in speaking the target language is required. Whereby, the teacher focuses on creating motivational learning-to-speak tasks. Such meaning-focused tasks reflect Johnson's (1982) principles; they are more interesting for learners and involve more speaking. Therefore, in combination with communicative teaching, task-based learning provides ESP learners with the opportunity to process the target language at the level of meaning and develop their working memory capacity (Ellis, 2005). Another valuable task-related teaching tool is Nunan's task typology (1989), which classifies three types of tasks: information gap tasks, reasoning gap tasks and opinion gap tasks. Task-dependent tasks and guided cues elicit free talk, are the main focus of the lesson. while Mckay (2002, p.81) notes the importance of cross-cultural communication for establishing *intelligibility*, *comprehensibility* and *interpretability*. The teacher's role in ESP speaking lessons should be to identify the learning style preferences of their learners and devise authentic lessons with genuine speech characteristics.

These conceptual strategies can be used to develop simulations of real-life situations in class to offer ESP students an overview of such interactional discourse patterns. In such simulations, learners would be required to employ both explicit and implicit learning strategies, congruent with current successful classroom practices. Learners themselves are an invaluable source of insights on these strategies. Therefore, the clustered learning strategies employed in the speaking lesson should be customised based on their individualised learning preferences and subjective needs to promote authentic communicative speaking. Ehrman and Oxford (1990) provide a lucid and descriptive

analysis of such strategies. Using these strategies, non-native speakers can functionally practice and develop their *memory*, *cognitive* and *compensation* strategies Such communication strategies, convey a real message (Porter & Roberts, 1984) and promote their target language acquisition and the willingness of the test-takers to be like valued members of the language community' (Gardner, 2010). Using such approaches to deliver and practice their productive skills, would offer non-native speakers, a productive cognitive challenge, and may appeal greatly to learners, especially younger ones. These extendable examples of real-world conditions would enable ESP learners to demonstrate their grasp of the speech conventions of the target language through beneficial, synchronous, virtual speech acts.

Regarding non-native norms, Jenkins (2000) shows how a pronunciation syllabus for the classroom might improve ESP learners' intelligibility, while Seidlhofer and Dalton-Puffer (1995) note that learners should be discouraged from fixating on the smaller details of speech utterances and adopt an effective holistic approach. This approach would focus on pragmatic competence and would be superior to an unproductive approach that merely focused on pre-fabricated formulaic segments of language.

Learning-to-speak and sequence-oriented tasks are necessary to elicit communication. Becoming proficient in such tasks might enable learners to 'buy' valuable processing time during their oral examination and maintain their interpretive communication skills while taking ownership of their speech utterances (Thornbury, 2005, pp.29-30). Therefore, tasks to promote both their cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies (Oxford, 1998) and encourage learner autonomy (Benson, 2011) and effective future self-study. To meet learners' emerging needs, peer-feedback is of crucial importance. Furthermore, since learners may have been learning functional exponents by rote and may, therefore, lack the 'generative core' needed for true communicative competence, authentic speaking material tailored to the learners' already existing knowledge, such as videos and other technological resources, site visits and word-processed task sheets.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the ESP practitioners will be benefited significantly by equipping them with the needed specified linguistic components to be admitted in the target community of their preference. Exposure to specific job-specific discourse features and authentic communicative tasks will facilitate their communicative skills to be able to convey meaning with intelligibility and lucidity. The current findings concerning the future modern teaching methodologies in shaping learning strategy training ESP courses will complement the work of McKay's (2002)and Gardner's (2010). Furthermore, specific learner-centered tasks aligned with their learning needs will be met. As for the field of ESP courses, research moves to skills-based components integrating cognitive, metacognitive and learning strategies to ensure intelligibility, reliability and self-study. The needs for the developing of wide-angled curriculum, focusing on the learners' competencies is of crucial importance to be determined. Although, the identification of the learners' needs is a critical step towards the development of a successful course to accommodate their essential competencies, much additional work needs to be done. Time-constraints on the specific ESP courses may be

depriving from students of certain disciplines the lexical range and skills to cope with specific target situations of their working-lives. However, I trust that the therapeutic role of focusing on common ground language skills, tailored to accommodate real-life communicative tasks and shared discourse patterns will address any weaknesses of the ESP courses which may arise.

CONCLUSION

An authentic speaking lesson aims to prepare non-native ESP learners to achieve their goals and communicate efficiently in the target language, employing the appropriate socio-cultural norms with the proper pronunciation. With this goal in mind, at the heart of the lesson was a consideration of the ESP learners' needs. A learner-centred lesson with authentic communicative tasks should be the main focus for each educator. The aim is to create a task-based communicative lesson driven by the individualised learners' goals. Based on these goals, authentic assessment tasks are derived.

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