

English Language Teacher Education Research Colloquium

Who Should Be Teachers of English?*

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Abstract

The problems related to native versus non-native teachers of English are discussed. The possible lack of knowledge of the cultural background of the language to be taught by non-native teachers is juxtaposed against the transmission of values related to cultural superiority by native English speaking teachers.

Keywords: Native English-speaking teachers, Non-native English-speaking teachers, Cultural superiority.

My International Colleagues,

I think Boğaziçi University is indeed an appropriate place to discuss issues related to English language teacher education research, on several accounts. First, teacher education has a history at this university starting in 1973, before the Faculties of Education were formed within the new structuring of universities in 1982. Secondly, research has been the ‘conditio sine qua non’ of teacher education in all fields of the Faculty of Education of Boğaziçi University, including the programs of the Department of Foreign Language Education. In addition, all of us here from Boğaziçi University have learned English as a foreign language at various ages, some earlier than others; and finally, our campus is gorgeous in spring and summer. I would like to express my thanks to the Department of Foreign Language Education of the Faculty of Education for the organization of this meaningful event, as well as to all of you participating in this colloquium.

Coming from the area of social sciences, and not linguistics, I would like to share with you what a social scientist might view as important and/or problematic, concerning English language teacher education and its related research. What may be some of the **research questions from the standpoint of a social scientist?** One would be interested in **who should teach English in the first place.** Although there are other criteria such as **language proficiency, language awareness, and pedagogical knowledge and skills,** still the most observable and **salient division in teaching English as a foreign language is native versus non-native speakers** of English as teachers. Research in the area shows that **both native speakers and those who themselves learned English as a foreign language can be effective teachers,** with different strengths and weaknesses vis à vis language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Non-native teachers of English might be more aware of the classification of errors due to the confounding with the native language. Thus, they might recognize error types more easily, **and address these errors more efficiently.** Furthermore, their **teaching of a foreign language may be easily instrumental rather than being related to issues of identity,** and therefore **less problematic and less value laden.** However, **their intuitive span of the use of the language they are teaching might be more limited in comparison to native speakers.** Moreover, the **cultural background of the language to be taught might be less accessible to the non-native teacher,** and thus **almost non-available to the student.** The question a social scientist might view as important is whether this state of affairs gives more **instrumental freedom to the learner** of English, or **whether the deficit in understanding the cultural background from which the language has evolved creates a limitation in its usage.**

Native speakers may have an intuitive and tacit knowledge of a wider spectrum in terms of the appropriate usage of their native language against its cultural background. Thus, their **production of the language might be richer, more flexible, and their pronunciation less erroneous.** But **what about the effects of cultural factors that the native teacher brings into the learning process?** What is the relationship between teaching English as a foreign language, and **the transmission of cultural values and styles of life operant in**

*The Opening Speech of the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Boğaziçi University

English speaking cultures, such as the United States and the United Kingdom? The acquaintance of the learners with the cultural background and norms of the target language gives meaning to the learning process. However, this is different from the **imposition of values and styles of life operant in cultures of the target language**.

The following questions become important. **What is the probability of the transmission of values and styles of life that leads to the cultural assimilation of the learner, and worst of all to the acceptance by the learner of the cultural superiority of the native teacher, and his/her life style?** Along similar concerns, **what is the role of native speaker teachers in promoting views of cultural superiority or even supremacy?** In other words, **what proportion of native speaker teachers tacitly adhere to or unconsciously facilitate views of cultural superiority or supremacy?** At this point, the social scientist would be very interested in other related issues; for example, **what is the difference between the teaching of any foreign language by a native speaker, and the teaching of English as a foreign language by its native speaker?** Is the probability of the native teacher of English to have the intention of helping foreigners learn the language in order to communicate through equilateral human relations, higher or lower than non-native teachers? Along the same line, what is **the role of the sensitivity of the native speaker teacher to the cultural background of the learners in opposing the phenomena of cultural superiority and homogenization of diversity?** These issues are especially important in the case of English, which is the most likely candidate for a lingua franca in a unipolar, not unified world.

Then, there are other questions. **Who benefits most from the enterprise of teaching and learning English as a foreign or international language? What are the economic gains for English speaking cultures concerning the promotion of English as an international language?** We know there are commercial enterprises built and transported to all corners of the globe, related to teaching English. What about the learner? **What is the accumulated economic and political value of learning English in comparison to the selling of the services of teaching it? Are these issues universal to the teaching of any other foreign language or are they unique to English because of its relation to present power structures?** To elaborate, at the end of the day, **will English ever be the property of the learner to be used instrumentally for whatever purpose, serving as a neutral language of world transaction?** Of course, as a social scientist I have my own hypotheses for these questions.

Finally, all of the above stated concerns would culminate in **the final, and from the standpoint of a social scientist, the most pertinent of all questions**. That is, **whether the teaching and learning of English would instrumentally serve world peace, with justice and equity for all parties using the language equilaterally, or will the transactions only protect the choices of the present power structure? This is indeed an important question, and to which the response is not readily available in an optimistic political framework**.

I cannot answer these questions. But **until English, necessary for communication and transaction across cultures stops being partial to its cultural origins, and strips itself from unilateral supremacies, it will not merit the value of a language which promotes and preserves human dignity across the wonderfully diverse and enriching cultural orientations and their historical heritage**.

As I leave you with these questions, let me welcome you once more to my university, and share my hopes for an enhancing exchange of knowledge and ideas during the conference.

References

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Kimler İngilizce Öğretmeni Olmalıdır?

Özet

Makalede anadili İngilizce olan veya olmayan İngilizce öğretmenleriyle ilgili sorunlar ele alınmıştır. Anadili İngilizce olmayan öğretmenlerin, öğretilecek dilin kültürel altyapısıyla ilgili olası bilgi eksikliği karşısında, anadili İngilizce olan öğretmenlerin kültürel üstünlük yaklaşımını aktarabilecekleri konusu üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Anadili İngilizce olan öğretmenler, Anadili İngilizce olmayan öğretmenler, Kültürel üstünlük.