Factors Affecting Target Language Use in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Within the profession, the fact that there are two groups of foreign language instructors is often overlooked: native and non-native speaking teachers. The present study focuses on non-native speaking teachers with special emphasis on English language teachers. Teachers of the English language have been encouraged by curricular documents and inspectors' reports which show an increase in the amount of target language use in the classrooms since the advent of the communicative approach. Even though there is no pedagogical evidence to show that more target language input results in more effective acquisition, the stress on teachers' quantity of target language use remains. Also, while native and non-native teachers differ in terms of their language proficiency, there are few studies focusing on target language use by non-NESTs (non-Native English Speaking Teachers). Previous studies show that exclusive use of the target language in classroom practice tends to be more idealistic than realistic, and that there is much uncertainty among non-NESTs as to how their language use should be adapted to their teaching philosophy. It has been revealed that there is a general consensus concerning the reasons for low usage of the target language, such as lack of confidence in the target language, large class size, and pupils' misbehaviour. The study discussed here identifies problems with target language usage faced by 172 non-NESTs from 16 countries, and aims to discern the real reasons behind those problems.

Key words: Non-NESTs, Medium of instruction, Target language use

INTRODUCTION

Until quite recently, it has been believed that the more students come in touch with the target language, the better they will understand that language. The idea originally came from the study of first language acquisition in the 1960s. Children acquire their mother tongue by receiving an enormous amount of input from others. Some researchers in the second/foreign language acquisition field (e.g. Krashen, 1982; Rivers, 1983) tried to apply the same process to methods used in teaching second/foreign languages. In particular, Krashen (1982) strongly suggests providing plenty of comprehensible input, which has been widely supported by professions and practitioners. According to this view, both native and non-native speaking teachers have been encouraged to speak in the target language more often, with the expectation that the learners will then receive a good amount of input.

However, common sense tells us that when the teacher shares a mother tongue with her/his pupils, there is a strong temptation to break into that language in order to deal with the management of the classroom. Moreover, the mother tongue is acknowledged as a useful resource by non-NESTs. Atkinson (1987) and

Harbord (1992) describe the benefits of using the mother tongue. For example, it can be used to compare different linguistic features of the target language and the native language, to facilitate teacher-pupil relationships, to save time, to organise the whole class, or to check pupils' comprehension.

To this day, however, there is no cohesive theory or substantiated research on non-NESTs' language use. All we can say with confidence is, as Weschler (1997) notes, non-NESTs have to be encouraged to choose the most efficient way to use their very limited time in the real classroom by using the tools (s)he has most readily available rather than making excuses for not attempting something, which is evidently very difficult (Franklin, 1990: 20). It is unfair, just to encourage non-NESTs to increase their target language use without knowing the real impediments in the real classroom context. The following describes what previous studies in the last decade have revealed regarding problems and difficulties in target language use.

FINDINGS OF THE PREVIOUS STUDIES

Three studies, those of Franklin (1990), Macaro (1995), and Dickson (1996) are reviewed here to understand what can be learned about target language use by non-native speaking teachers in the classroom context.

Of the three studies, Dickson (1996) takes the most extreme position in support of target language use[1]. While the other two studies also ultimately support prevalent use of the target language, they do so with some reservations. For example, Macaro (1995) warns of the danger of accepting without any research-based evidence that more target language input results in more effective acquisition. Furthermore, the studies acknowledge the difficulties non-native speaking teachers will have in manipulating the target language to explain certain difficult concepts. All studies attempt to find the problems of target language use with the view that "it is unfair to pretend that these problems do not exist (Chambers, 1991: 27)."

Findings from the questionnaire in the previous studies

The three studies (Franklin, 1990; Macaro, 1995; Dickson, 1996) adopted the questionnaire method with the goal of revealing teachers' attitudes and the problems of using the target language in the classroom. Teachers' attitudes are broken down into two categories: what teachers considered advantageous regarding target language use and reasons for not using the target language. The respondents of those studies and results are summarised in Table 1.

RESEARCH TOPICS

The respondents in the previous studies are Italian and English teachers teaching English and French. However, there are a number of non-native English speaking teachers in ESL/EFL[2] countries. It is not difficult to infer that they have problems in common with the teachers in the previous studies. The present study aims to place the research topic below in an international setting. To do so, it can reveal the problems, which non-native speaking teachers are facing to concerning their target language in general. The study also intends to invite discussion of target language use of non-NESTs and its role in relation to theories of language teaching.

SURVEY

Data collection

In May and June 2002, the questionnaires were sent by post and e-mail to 172 non-NESTs in sixteen countries where English is a second or foreign language. The destination of the questionnaire was intended to spread out geographically over states on five continents; however, no results from Africa could be obtained.

Table 1. Summary of the results of the studies

	Respondents	Attitudes of non-NESTs towards target language use
Franklin (1990)	201 teachers of French in Scotland. (*Mother tongue*: English)	• Most teachers (90%) recognised the inherent importance of teaching in the target language in theory.
Macaro (1995)	21 teachers of English in Italy. *Mother tongue*: Italian	• Seven out of 21 agreed that a good teacher uses the target language almost exclusively and the rest partly agreed. • Many teachers made the comment that the target language is useful in creating an atmosphere conducive to learning a foreign language. • One teacher commented that it is easier for younger pupils to use the target language because they are enthusiastic and regard the language as a means of communication.
Dickson (1996)	508 language teachers in England and Wales. *Mother tongue*: English, French, German, and Spanish.	• Teachers supporting the target language use made up a plurality. • Most teachers believe that it is essential to adapt target language use depending on individual pupil and the classroom situation. • Teachers of younger pupils (KS3) appear to be in favour of the target language use.
Main reasons for not using the target language (of frequency)		
Franklin (1990)	Behaviour of the pupils, lack of confidence of teachers in speaking target language, large class sizes, reaction of the pupils, presence of many low-ability pupils in the class. (Listed top 5 reasons.) • There is an interesting result showing those young teachers and older teachers identified the problems in different degrees.	
Macaro (1995)	Teacher's lack of confidence in target language proficiency and pupils' misbehaviour when teachers use target language.	
Dickson (1996)	Disorderly behaviour of the pupils, slow-learning pupils, large classes, mixed ability classes, teachers' fatigue and stress. (Listed top 5 reasons.)	
Difficult tasks conducting in the target language (in order)		
Franklin (1990)	Explaining grammar, discussing language objectives, teaching background of the target language, disciplining, running tests, correcting written work, explaining meanings of the word, organising the classroom, giving activity instructions, chatting informally with pupils.	
Macaro (1995)	Building up relationship with individual pupils, evaluating or commenting on pupils' performance, explaining grammar, giving activity instructions, organising language activities. • There was strong disagreement with the proposition that teacher cannot teach grammar in the target language.	
Dickson (1996)	Teaching grammar, explaining meanings, setting homework, disciplining pupils, organising activities, correcting mistakes, directing pupils, to comment on work, ask questions.	

Questionnaire and respondents

The questionnaire is composed of 41 discrete items, most of them rated on a four-point Likert scale. An open space was provided at the end of the questionnaire, where respondents were asked to provide any further opinions. A comparative analysis of the data related to each participating country was not feasible due to the

disproportionate number of responses received. 172 respondents participated in this study; 115 female teachers (66.9%) and 57 male teachers (33.1%). The countries and the distribution of the respondents by country are represented in the table below.

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents by countries (N=172)

Country	Number of respondents	Country	Number of respondents
Brazil	2	Indonesia	7
Chile	3	Japan	39
China	23	Korea	25
Colombia	14	Malaysia	2
Cyprus	2	Mexico	1
Denmark	5	Peru	3
Germany	2	Taiwan	9
Hungary	1	The Netherlands	32

Variables

The variables possibly relating to non-NESTs' target language use are pulled from previous studies and they are broken down into three categories:

i) Variables related to teachers.
   a) Confidence in the target language proficiency.
   • Experience studying abroad.
   • Frequency of contact with native speakers.
   b) Terms of service.
   c) Pedagogical concerns.

ii) Variables related to pupils.
   a) Age of pupils.
   b) Level of pupils.
   c) Behaviour of pupils.
iii) Variables related to external reasons.
   a) Class size.

Methods

The subjects are asked to judge to what extent each variable has influence on their command of English. The responses to each question are scored according to a 4-point Likert-type scale. The respondents are placed in two groups, A and B, based on these results. The respondents in group A have employed target language more than group B as the natural means of communication in the classroom[3].

It is important to bear in mind the limitations of this study. First, this study does not consider all the variables but looks at the main ones identified in previous studies. Second, there is not a large enough number of respondents to make it representative of non-NESTs in all ESL/EFL countries.

RESULTS

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to estimate, on average, what proportion of their speech is in the target language. Four categories were specified (*over 75%*, *between 50-75%*, *between 25-50%*, and *under 25%*). Frequency values of the number of respondents represented *over 75%*, *between 50-75%*, *between 25-50%*, and *under 25%* for the full sample are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages by proportion of target language use (N=166)

Proportion	over 75%	50-75%	25-50%	under 25%
	37 (22.3%)	43 (25.9%)	47 (28.3%)	39 (23.5%)

The respondents, who estimated the portion of their target language use as *over 50%* (*n*=80, 51.8%) are grouped as A, and the rest, who use the target language *less than 50%* (*n*=86, 48.2%) are grouped as B.

Tasks conducted in the target language

The respondents were asked how often they carry out particular aspects of classroom teaching in the target language. The tasks for each aspect and the results are shown in Table 4 along with the proportions of teachers responding (*always* to *never*).

Table 4. Quantity of target language used in the classroom (Valid percent)

	Always			Never
Organisational aspect				
Giving activity instructions. (*N*=168)	56 (33.3%)	72 (42.9%)	29 (17.3%)	11 (6.5%)
Organising the classroom. (*N*=168)	50 (29.8%)	52 (31.0%)	51 (30.4%)	15 (8.9%)
Instructional aspect				
Explaining grammar. (*N*=168)	27 (16.1%)	36 (21.4%)	47 (28.0%)	18 (34.5%)
Explaining meaning of vocabulary. (*N*=168)	35 (20.8%)	68 (40.5%)	52 (31.0%)	13 (7.7%)
Teaching background of the target language. (*N*=169)	44 (26.0%)	52 (30.8%)	46 (27.2%)	27 (16.0%)
Giving feedback. (*N*=169)	57 (33.7%)	67 (39.6%)	36 (21.3%)	9 (5.3%)
Interpersonal aspect				
Chatting informally with pupils. (*N*=170)	48 (28.2%)	54 (31.8%)	46 (27.1%)	22 (12.9%)
Disciplining. (*N*=165)	23 (13.9%)	50 (30.3%)	55 (33.3%)	37 (22.4%)

Group A in particular uses more target language in *organising the classroom* (*r*=0.56**) and *giving feedback* (*r*=0.55**). The most difficult tasks to be conducted (or the tasks, for which respondents do not use English) are in order; *explaining grammar, teaching background of the target language, disciplining, and chatting informally with pupils*. The evidence confirms that group A uses more target language than group B in action.

Variables related to the teachers

In order to examine the variables related to the teachers, the respondents were asked to answer the questions in the following categories:

a) Confidence in the target language proficiency

Half of the subjects commented that their lack of confidence prevents them from using the target language. (The question asked was; *Lack of confidence in speaking English affects your use of English: extremely* 24.3%, *a little bit* 26.6%, *not really* 15.4%, *not at all* 33.2%) The result showed that group A possesses more confidence than group B, which indicates that the confidence significantly influences their target language use. The target language proficiency of the respondents was not asked directly; instead, *experience of studying abroad and frequency of contact with native speakers* were asked.

44.2% of the respondents (*n*=76) have experience studying in English speaking countries. Among the respondents with experience studying in English speaking countries, 71.1% (*n*=54) have had less than one year, 18.4% (*n*=14) have had 2-5 years, and 10.5 % (*n*=8) have more than 6 years of experience. There were weak correlations relating to their experience in studying abroad (*r*=0.26*). Figure 1 shows that group A has more experience studying in English speaking countries. On the other hand, there was no correlation to the frequency of contact with native speakers as Table 5 shows.
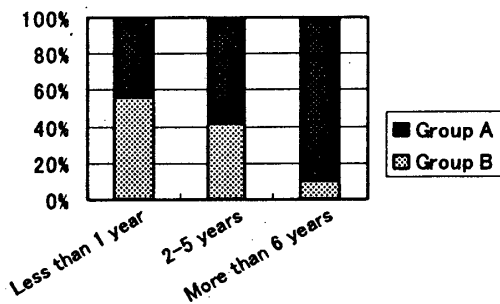
Figure.1 Experience of studying abroad

Table 5. Frequency of the contact with naive speakers ($N=170$)

everyday	once/week	once/month	less than that
57 (33.5%)	20 (11.8%)	43 (25.3%)	50 (29.4%)

d) Terms of service

The average length of service of each individual was 12.3 years, ranging from six months to 45 years. The respondents were divided into three groups based on their years of service: 1-5 years experience ($n=66$, 38.6%), 6-15 years experience ($n=49$, 28.7%), and more than 16 years' experience ($n=56$, 32.7%). There was no correlation found between the terms of service and the amount of target language use.

e) Pedagogical concerns

Non-NESTs' attitude towards target language use was sought by asking the following questions: *Teacher should use English as much as possible to show pupils language use, and pupils learn more effectively if teacher uses English as a medium of instruction*. Different attitudes towards the target language use were found between group A and B. The result revealed that group A has a more positive attitude towards the target use.

Table 6. Pedagogical concerns of the respondents

	Strongly agree			Strongly disagree
Teacher should use English as much as possible to show pupils language use. (N=165)				
Group A (*n=79*)	62 (78.5%)	17 (21.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Group B (*n=86*)	39 (45.3%)	39 (45.3%)	7 (8.4%)	1 (1.2%)
Pupils learn more effectively if teacher uses English as a medium of instruction. (N=166)				
Group A (*n=80*)	38 (47.5%)	31 (38.8%)	9 (11.3%)	2 (2.5%)
Group B (*n=86*)	15 (17.4%)	34 (39.5%)	31 (36.0%)	6 (7.1%)

Variables related to the pupils

(a) Age of the pupils

The pupils they taught were aged between 5 and 60 years old. This section is divided into four age groups: under 12 years old ($n=1$, 0.6 %), 12 to 15 years old ($n=47$, 27.3%), 15 to 18 years old ($n=96$, 55.8%), and over 18 years old ($n=28$, 16.3%). Concerning the age of pupils, group A teaches elder pupils than group B. The facts outlined here indicate that the teachers teaching older pupils may use more target language.

(b) Level of the pupils

The respondents were asked to judge the average level of their pupils' language proficiency on a four-point scale (between *excellent* to *poor*). Only 10 teachers (5.9%) claimed that their pupils are *below average*, 46 teachers (27.1%) identified them as *average*, 88 (51.8%) marked *above average*, and 26 teachers (15.3%) indicated *excellent*. While 21 teachers of group A marked *excellent*, only 5 teachers of group B indicated the same. Indeed, group A judges their pupils as having higher ability than their counterparts. However, it does not provide the answer to whether group A can use English more because they are actually teaching higher level pupils.

(c) Behaviour of the pupils

In the previous studies, students' misbehaviour is listed as one of the most common reasons for not using the target language. Almost half of the respondents (48.2%) commented that pupils behave differently when the teacher uses English. However, there was no evidence found to determine whether the pupils' misbehaviour really affects the respondents' target language use.

Variables related to the external reason
(a) Class size

Class size showed considerable variation, ranging between less than 10 to more than 70. Twenty-four teachers (14.0%) are teaching more than 40 pupils, 27.9% ($n=48$) teach 30-40 pupils, 61% ($n=35.5$%) teach 20-30, 19 % ($n=11.0$%) is 10-20, and 11.6% ($n=20$) are teaching less than 10 pupils. Teachers of group B teach larger classes (more than 40 pupils) than group A. However, there was no significant difference for the other classroom sizes.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

While exclusive use of the target language is widely supported by non-NESTs, the evidence of the present study showed that exclusive use of it in classroom practice tends to be idealistic. Even the teachers, who relatively use more English, adopt target language mainly for *organising the classroom or giving feedback*. It is not difficult to presume that these are easier to give in the target language because they are used "frequently, often daily, possibly several times per lesson so that there is constant reinforcement" (Chambers, 1991: 21). With this target language use in the classroom, however, learners do not find room to speak as themselves, to use language in communicative encounters, to create text, to stimulate responses from fellow learners, or to find solutions to relevant problems, which are regarded as ideal features of classroom talk for learning (Thornbury, 1996). In other words, efforts of teachers to extend target language use appear to fail in relation to theories of language acquisition. There is, as avowed by the respondents in the questionnaire, much difficulties as to how their practice should be adapted to their beliefs.

This article examined the factors as true impediments of target language use in the classroom. The data obtained from non-native speaking teachers teaching in 16 countries was presented. Table 7 summarises the factors found in the previous studies and the present study.

Confidence in the language proficiency is ranked first among the reasons for not using the target language in all the studies. *Lack of confidence* here does not indicate 'lack of knowledge' because the survey found that only being able to speak English would not help the teachers to increase their target language use. Rather, it indicates that there is a 'lack of explicit justification for the adoption of the target language'.

Even though all the studies identified the *age of the pupils* as an impediment, which influence teachers' target language use, the conclusions suggested by each study appear to be different. Franklin (1990) and Macaro (1995) believe that some teachers can adopt the target language more easily because younger pupils regard the foreign language as means of communication. On the other hand, the findings in the present study showed the opposite. Teachers estimated that they use English with the elder pupils (15-18 year-old) more than with the younger ones (12-15 year-old).

Level of the pupils and class size is also one of the most popular reasons for not using the target language in the previous studies. 75.1% of the respondents ($n=127$) expressed being disturbed by such reasons in the study as well. The pupils' limited proficiency could be an obstacle, a theory which is supported by the evidence shown in this survey. The class size could be an excuse in some more dramatic cases, as it was found that the class size decreases teachers' target language use when the class has more than 40 pupils.

The discussion concerning target language use has focused on reasons relating to the pupils or the nature of the classroom, such as pupils' misbehaviour, large class size or classes of mixed ability. However, what the

Table 7. Comparison of the findings

Variables	**Franklin**	**Macaro**	**Dickson**	**The present study**
Related to teachers				
Confidence in the language proficiency.	++	++	+	++
Experience studying abroad.	---	---	---	+
Frequency of contact with native speakers.	---	---	---	no
Terms of service.	*	---	---	no
Pedagogical concerns.	---	---	*	++
Related to pupils				
Age of pupils.	+	++	++	+
Level of pupils.	++	---	++	+
Behavior of pupils.	++	---	++	??
Related to external reasons				
Class size	++	---	++	+
Final/exit exams	---	---	no	no

++: It could be a strong impediment. +: It could be an impediment. no: It cannot be an impediment.
---: It was not examined in the study. *: It was mentioned but just to describe the background of the subjects. ??: It is not clear in the study.

survey of this study revealed is that those reasons are not necessarily the real impediments.   In point of fact, the real impediments lie in the teachers themselves.   Just getting teachers to increase the amount of their conversation in the target language would not necessarily be in the best interests of the learners.   However, as non-NESTs feel 'guilty and inadequate' (Chambers, 1991: 27) due to the gap between their beliefs and practice, further studies would be needed to support them to gain their confidence as a profession.

NOTES

1) One must know that his study was initiated by NFER (National Foundation of Educational Research), which promotes the idea of exclusive target language use in modern foreign language education (Dickson, 1996: 1), so that target language use is on the premise.

2) ESL: English as a Second Language country, EFL: English as a Foreign Language country.

3) All questionnaire items were entered in Excel 97, and SPSS 10.0 package was used for analysis. Only significant results, marked with * and **, were considered.

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