Elements Influencing Students' Prejudice Towards Non-native English Teacher

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Abstract—**There have been instance of prejudice and discrimination against non-native teachers. This research is designed to test whether prejudice towards non-native English-speaking teachers still exist now. If so, which elements influence the students' attitude towards the non-native English-speaking teachers? Research methodology, data analysis, and potential results are demonstrated.**

Keywords- Non-native English-speaking teacher; prejudice.

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of learners of English as an international means of communication increases, so does the demand for the English as a second language (ESL) teachers. More and more non-native English-speaking teachers begin to make a figure for themselves in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field. However, it happens that the non-native English-speaking teachers receive prejudice and discrimination from the students and school administrators. The root of the discrimination is the perception that students benefit more from being taught by native teachers rather than non-native ones. Even though some researches exploring the qualification of non-native English-speaking teachers claimed that they do have advantage over native English speaker teachers in some aspects. For instance, Auerbach described that teachers and tutors who shared the background and at least some of the experiences of the learners are better able to reach and help those learners [1]. However, the prejudice and discrimination still existed recently. Moussu [2] figured out that feelings of students and school administrators toward non-native teachers were often negative.

A. Purpose of Research

The purpose of the research is to explore if the students' prejudice and discrimination that Non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) is not qualified English teacher still exist till now. The students are the basis of the institution. They have the final rights to judge the teacher. The potential consumers of this research will be the administrators, ESL teachers, and ESL students. I hope this research could help the NNESTs to clear the prejudice given by the students. Therefore, the administrators will offer more job opportunities for the qualified NNESTs. The NNESTs will be more confident while teaching and working together with the native English-speaking teachers. The students will be more sensible when they evaluate the NNESTs' qualification. In addition, I hope this research could study the variables which could influence the students' preference for the ESL teacher.

B. Research Question

The intent of the research is to explore whether prejudice and discrimination toward NNEST still exist. The previous researches which studied the students' attitude to generalize the differences between native and non-native English-speaking teachers and the preference of the students' for the ESL teacher did not take the students' discrimination against the non-native English-speaking teachers into consideration. We all know people could not make reasonable judgment if they have prejudice. The findings of these researches might be affected by the students' discrimination against the non-native English-speaking teacher. Therefore, the research questions will be:

1. Does the prejudice against non-native English-speaking teacher still exist?

2. Which qualifications of the ESL teacher are valuable in the students' eyes, without the influence of the prejudice against the ESL's first language background?

C. Literature Review

A lot of researches were conducted to explore the difference of the non-native English-speaking and native English-speaking teachers and the students' preference for the ESL teachers. Milambeling[1] investigated the "native speaker" (NS) and "non-native speaker" (NNS) in the field of TESOL. It concluded that attitudes in the TESOL field were shifting, and NNSs were seen in a more positive light as their contributions to the teaching of English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) were increasingly recognized and appreciated. This was especially true when NNS teachers taught students who shared their first language and culture.

Ma's [3] study discovered that non-native instructors were expected to improve their language proficiency and cultural understanding. Moussu's[2] dissertation for the master degree studied ESL students' reactions to nonnative English-speaking teachers. He sent a big amount of questionnaires to the ESL students who studied in a non-native English-speaking teacher's class. Also he investigated a lot of variables which could affect students' reflections like students' age, their prior education experiences, and etc. The findings of the research

showed that the majority of the students did not have negative attitudes towards the non-native English-speaking teachers and the changes of the attitudes were caused by many variables. All those researches explored students' attitude towards the non-native English-speaking teachers to some degree. However, all of the researches only focused on the students' attitudes towards non-native English-speaking teachers after the students had those teachers' classes for a while. No research has ever addressed the students' prejudice against the non-native English-speaking teachers before learning from the teachers. We could not tell if the prejudice still exists nowadays.

II. METHODS AND SUBJECTS

A. Research Subjects

The site of this research is Saint Mary's university of Minnesota. The participants are the International students studying in the De La Salle language institute in that university. Currently, there are 80 international students taking the ESL English class in the De La Salle language institute in Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. The language institute offers an intensive program for students from non-English speaking countries to master the English language and to participate in the life of a North American university. The major coursework is in English as a Second Language. In addition, students study the history, traditions, culture, and customs of the United States. The students enrolled in the program have diverse culture backgrounds. Following the sampling rule "the bigger, the better", I will choose all of these 80 to be my research participants [4].

The professors whose ESL class will be recorded and used in my research include native speaker who speaks standard English, native speaker who speak accented English (still highly proficient in English), Asian English teacher (who has near-native English speaking proficiency), and European English teacher (who has near-native English speaking proficiency). The native speaker who speaks accented English is used to disturb the students' judgment. The first two types of native speaker are easier to find. As far as I know, there are three ESL teachers with the Asian background. Two females, one comes from China, and one comes from Japan. The third one is a Chinese male professor. I will choose the Chinese female professor as she has stayed in America for more than 20 years and married an American. Also the Chinese male professor will be selected as the students' attitude towards the gender of the ESL teacher could be tested. The only European English teacher I could find is a Danish male professor. All the professors are middle-aged. Also there are two Chinese graduate student teaching assistant (TA) teaching in the ESL class. I plan to include the young Chinese TA in my research to investigate the age's influence to the students' attitude. However, I am afraid I could not get the reliable result as the TAs' English proficiency is far behind the other professors. To solve the problem, I will take the video of the TA's in-class instruction and show it to the students in my polite study. If the result shows that the TA's in-class instruction is not preferred because of the English proficiency and teaching skill. I will stop using the TA's video in my research to guarantee the credibility of my research. If the result shows that the TA's in-class instruction could be used in the video, I will use one of the TA's to prove how the ESL's age influences the students' attitude.

After getting the permission, I will sit in those professors' class to take the video. The professor's instruction will be the focus of the video. For each professor, I will video a whole class instruction and condense it into an 8-10 minutes long video. Then I will have an around 50 minute's video disc which contains 5 professors' in-class instruction to be shown to my participants.

B. Research Methods

The research is composed of two parts: study A and study B. Mixed method approach will be used in this research. In study A, the participants will listen to the professors' in-class instruction video. Only the sound of the professors will be showed to the participants. Not showing the images of the professor will diminish the participants' negative attitudes toward non-native English-speaking teacher. The participants will evaluate the professors' in-class instruction without the interference of the discrimination. There is not a perfect variety of the English language. In the early 1980s, a lot of researchers have made a conclusion that "English will never be one unique and immovable language but is rather a 'living' language, able to evolve and change every minute" [2]. There is no fixed standard for native speaker. The truth is a lot of ESL students judging whether the professor is native or non-native by his/her appearance. If the professor is Asian, they will subconsciously have the prejudice that the professor is not qualified to be the English teacher. The previous researches always asked the students to fill up questionnaires when they were being taught by the ESL teacher in class. Those researches failed to filter the students' prejudice to the non-native looking ESL teachers. To eliminate the face appearance's influence on the students' answer, participants are only allowed to listen to the professors' in-class instruction video first. Questionnaires are given to the participants after they finish listening to the video. The questions include demographic questions about the participants, quantitative and qualitative questions about the teachers.

The data are analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The statistic data gained from the scale and descriptive data gained from the open-ended questions are processed. Some outliers emerge. Further interviews are given to these outliers and some participants with general responses. According to Perry [4], comparing the outliers with the general samples is an excellent way to check credibility. Interviews are conducted for better triangulation and better observation of the students' opinion. To analyze the descriptive data gained from the open-ended questions and the interviews, a coding process will be utilized. Those data will be categorized into "chunks" and then the "chunks" will be labeled with a term [5]. After that, themes will be generalized from those chunks and the themes will be interconnected into a general description.

Study B is given to the participants 4 weeks after the study A. The aim of waiting for 4 weeks is to give the participants a period of time to forget the accent of the professors in the video. In study B, the video is shown to the participants. Finally, the images of the professors are revealed to the participants to

check if the students' attitude will change. As it has been 4 weeks since study A, the video is new to the participants. Also the order of the five professors' in-class instruction video has been changed. The same questionnaires and interviews are given to the participants. The data gained from study B is analyzed and compared with the data gained from study A. Research result could be obtained from the comparison.

III. RESULTS

If the data gained from study A is similar to the data gained from study B, it could prove that the ethical background does not influence the students' attitudes towards the ESL teacher. In another word, it means the discrimination against the non-native English-speaking teacher does not exist. If there is difference between these two groups of data, it means the teachers' the ESL professor's non-native appearance could influence the students' attitude towards the professor. This answers the first research question. Furthermore, the types of professors basically represent the diversity of the ESL professors. The questionnaires ask the students to mark the most qualified professor and the reasons why they choose this professor. Also whether there is change of the ESL teacher's qualification valued by the students before and after they know the ethical background of the teacher is revealed.

There are also open-ended questions about students' attitude towards the professors' body language which could provide the information about the ESL preference for the in-class instruction style. Because of different culture background, some ESL students prefer an active professor while some prefer a quiet one.

If the teacher with the Standard English accent turns out to be the best choice of the student, it means ESL students highly value the teacher's English pronunciation. If not, it means, in the students' mind, being a good teacher is not a matter of having a good accent.

IV. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

A. Conclusion

"Many students, teachers, and administrators are looking for practical information that will help them in their studies, teaching, or program development, respectively. They want immediate and practical information that they can use" [4].

This research will provide the practical information for those three research consumers. If the research finds out the discrimination against non-native English-speaking teacher does not exist now, the non-native teacher will strengthen their confidence and self-respect when teaching in an English-speaking country. The administrators will not make the same mistake to exclude the non-native speakers out of the list of the faculty while hiring. Also the students' preferred-ESL qualifications will be provided to the ESL teachers. Both the non-native and native English-speaking teachers will get to know their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve themselves to cater to the ESL students' needs.

B. Limitation

The author acts as an observer and data collector. As it is not an interview, so there will be no "going native" effect which occurs "when researcher gets so close to the respondents that s/he is co-opted into their perceptions and explanations"[4]. However, when I video the professor's in-class instruction, I am the director of the video. During the period I sit in one professor's class, I have to decide which part of his/her instruction I should video or not. Therefore, in this way, I have clipped the professor's teaching in advance by my own judgment in my own standard. The content of the video is labeled by my own taste. To eliminate the bias of my choice, I ask my colleagues or the professors who are in my study to help me to clip the video. By generalizing the suggestions from different aspects, I am sure the video could reflect the real teaching skill and English proficiency of the professors.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaires Used for the Pilot Study

Demographic Information:
1. Country of origin:
2. First language(s):
3. Gender:
4. Age:

Please evaluate each professor according to a scale from 1-6:

1. worst 2. worse 3. bad   4. average 5. better   6. best

1. The first professor's English pronunciation	1 2 3 4 5 6
2. The first professor's way of teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6
3. The second professor's English pronunciation	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. The second professor's way of teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6
5. The third professor's English pronunciation	1 2 3 4 5 6
6. The third professor's way of teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6
7. The fourth professor's English pronunciation	1 2 3 4 5 6
8. The fourth professor's way of teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6
9. The fifth professor's English pronunciation	1 2 3 4 5 6
10.The fifth professor's way of teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6

Please answer the following questions with as many details as possible.

1.   Which professor you would like to choose to be your own ESL professor? List the reasons in details.
2.   Which professor is the last one you would like to choose to be your own ESL professor? List the reasons in details.

Thank you very much for your time and your help!