LANGUAGE OF OTHERS: EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH

BAŞKALARININ DİLİ: YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRENEN ÖĞRENCİLERİN İNGİLİZCEYİ ALGILAYIŞLARI VE İNGİLİZCEYE KARŞI TUTUMLARI

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Uluslararası sahada ticaretten medyaya kadar pek çok alanda kullanılan İngilizce, dünyada ortak iletişim dili olarak görülmekte ve uluslar arası alanda iletişimin artmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Buna paralel olarak, İngilizce Türkiye de iletişim ve gelişme aracı olarak önemli bir yer edinmektedir. Bu çalışma üniversite hazırlık sınıfı öğrencilerinin bu etkili dili nasıl algıladıklarını ve bu dile karşı olan tutumlarını tasvir etmektedir. Çalışmanın verileri röportaj yöntemi ile toplanıp anlam- yoğunlaştırma yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar öğrencilerin İngilizceyi uluslar arası bir dil olarak algıladıklarını ve bu dile karşı tutumlarının çok katmanlı olduğunu işaret etmiştir. Öğrenciler bir yandan İngilizceyi güç sembolü olarak görmekte ve İngilizce öğrenerek bu güce erişmeyi istemekte, diğer yandan ise İngilizcenin egemenliğini sorgulamakta ve İngilizceye karşı olumsuz tutum sergilemektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Uluslar arası dil olarak İngilizce, İngilizceye karşı olan tutum, Yabancı dil eğitimi

ABSTRACT

English has emerged as a world language, which is used from international trade to international media, and contributed to the increase of communication among nations. Parallel to this situation, the English language has been acquiring an important role in Turkey as a tool for communication and a means of progress. This qualitative study describes language learners' perception of this influential language. The data were gathered form students in preparatory program through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through meaning-condensation method. Results indicated that language learners perceive English as an international language and have multilayered attitude towards English. On the one hand they value English as a language of power and want to have an access to this power by mastering it, but on the other hand they question its dominance and show negative attitude towards learning English.

Key Words: English as an International Language, attitude towards English, Foreign language education

Introduction

In this fast-shrinking world, English seems to be one of the major players of the global village. Today English is used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade, tourism, international media, air-traffic control, pop music industry, technology, and etc. There are 1.5 billion English users around the world. While 337 million of them are native speakers of English, 1.2 billion of them are nonnative speakers with reasonable competence (Crystal, 1997). However, English is considered as an international language not only because "nearly a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English" (Crystal, 1997, p.4), but also English has a special status in almost every country in the world. According to Crystal (1997) English has an official status in more than 70 countries, and is taught as a primary foreign language in more than 100 countries.

Although, English is defined as an international language which is used by native speakers and non-native speakers of it to communicate both within the nation and among nations (Alptekin, 2002; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Crystal,1997; Jenkins, 1998; Kachru, 1992; McKay, 2002; Pakir, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; Philipson 1992; Strevens. 1992; Widdowson, 1994), scholars approach the notion of English as an International Language (EIL) from various perspectives. For instance, while Crystal (1997) attempts "to tell the story of World English objectively" (p.viii), Philipson (1992), and Pennycook (1994) approach it from critical perspective. While Kachru (1992), Strevens (1992) and Smith (1992) discuss it from cross-cultural perspective, Brutt-Griffler (2002) approaches it from historical perspective.

Strevens (1992) explains the spread of English through "an element of historical luck" (p.29) which enables English speaking people to establish trading posts, and colonies, to have industrial revolution, and to dominate the most of the world. Crystal (1997) explains it as a result of the economic and military power of Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the maintenance of that power by the U.S.A. during the twentieth century. Crystal (1997) maintains that "British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, ...During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted, almost single-handedly through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower" (p.8)

Kachru (1992) explains the current status of English in the world in terms of three circles: Inner circle, Outer circle and Expanding circle. Inner circle refers to regions where English is the mother tongue of the speakers. It includes countries like the U.S.A., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Outer circle refers to the regions where English is used as an institutionalized second language as a result of colonialism. Some of the Outer circle countries are India, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore, and Zambia. Finally, the Expanding circle contains countries such as Turkey where English is taught as a foreign language. As Kachru (1992) indicated the expanding circle brings another dimension to English. The countries of the expanding circle are not the former colonies of the inner circle and English is not used as a second language within the country but as a foreign language for international communication.

Brutt-Griffler (2002) who examines the spread of English within historical perspective claims that English speaking countries did not promote the use of English during the colonization era and that "English owes its existence as a world language in large part to the struggle against imperialism, and not the imperialism alone" (p.ix). She argues that

British policy in colonies was primarily economically oriented and did not include spreading English to colonies. Brutt-Griffler (2002) rejects the political views, and explains the spread of English from linguistic perspective in terms of native speaker migration and "macroaquisition"

On the other hand scholars like Pennycook (1994, 2001) and Philipson (1992) approach the notion critically. Pennycook (1994, 2001) questions and discredits the assumptions that the spread of English is a natural and neutral process, and that the use of English for intercultural communications will be beneficial. He states that the discourse of English as an International Language (EIL) "has moved from a rhetoric of colonial expansion, through a rhetoric of development aid to a rhetoric of the international free market" (p.6) and therefore English carries the colonial past that teachers and language users need to be aware of. Furthermore, Phillipson (1992) argues that English language replaces local languages and cultures. Although English is not replacing Turkish language, Turkish borrowed enough English words to make many Turkish linguists worry about it (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998).

English language has an undeniable role in Turkey. It is considered the most significant and functional language for the technological and scientific development of the country. It is a compulsory school subject that students start learning from the 4th grade and continue to study even after they graduate from the university. English language proficiency seems to be a prerequisite to be able to take a position in competitive job market. In major newspapers, 22 percent of the job advertisements are printed in English (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998).

English began being taught in public schools in 1908. During the early days of Turkish Republic the primacy was given to the French language, followed by German and English. However, in the 1950s due to "closer ties with the United States... [and] the increasing impact of American economic and military power" (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998, p. 27), English began to gain primary foreign language status replacing French. In the 1980s, English became the dominant foreign language due to "increasing contact with the free market economies which brought into Turkey many new brands of products, new concepts and terminologies, and popular American culture and media" (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998, p. 29).

In Turkish context, there are limited number of studies related to Turkish students' attitude toward English (Çakıcı, 2007; Genc & Bilgin-Aksu, 2004; İnal,Evin, &Saracaloğlu, 2005; Kızıltepe, 2000; Saracaloğlu, 2005). Furthermore, these studies are all quantitative in nature and used structured questionnaires to described language learners' attitude. Since, English plays an important role in Turkey and Turkish students are expected to master English language and use it in their personal and professional lives, there is a need to obtain an in-depth look to describe their perception and attitude holistically. Therefore, this qualitative study was conducted to explore English language learners' perception of and attitude toward English.

Method

Research Site

The research site was the School of Foreign Languages at Dokuz Eylul University (DEU) in Izmir. Dokuz Eylul University was founded in 1982 and offers both

undergraduate and graduate degree programs in 10 faculties (Education, Arts and Sciences, Fine Arts, Law, Theology, Business, Architecture, Engineering, Medicine, Economics), five schools (Maritime Business, State Conservatory, Nursing, Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation, Foreign Languages), five vocational schools (Izmir vocational school, Torbalı vocational school, Vocational schools of religion, health services, and judical practices), and 10 institutes (Religious Studies, Marine sciences and technology, Fine arts, Hemodialysis, Oncology, Health science, Social science, Ataturk principles, Educational studies, Natural and applied sciences). The aim of the School of Foreign Languages is to teach English to students from various faculties and schools so that these students can follow instructions in English in their home departments.

Participants

The participants for this study were 15 freshmen who were taking one-year compulsory English preparatory courses at the School of Foreign Languages before starting to take their major-area courses. These students graduated from high school and were 18 years of age or older.

The sampling procedure for interviews was two-stage random sampling, which is the combination of cluster random sampling with individual random sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). At the first stage, the researcher randomly selected 20 classrooms out of 96 English preparatory classes and at the second stage, randomly selected 15 students from these classes. The researcher randomly selected the interview participants so that the researcher could interview with students with both negative and positive attitudes towards English. By following the criteria that Kvale (1996) set, the number of interviews was decided to be 15. Kvale (1996) states that "in current interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15 ± 10 " (p. 102).

Instrument

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews to collect the data. A semi-structured interview "has a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions. Yet at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequences and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). The themes that were covered in the interviews included the following: (1) students' perception of English language; (2) their attitude toward English-speaking countries; (3) their attitude toward native and nonnative varieties of English; (4) their motivation to learn English; (5) their experiences with English (learning and communication experiences), (6) Background information

In addition to the main mean of data collection - semi-structured interviews- the researcher conducted Document Analysis and informal interviews with teachers. For Document Analysis, the researcher examined the text books and other teaching materials such as short stories. In addition, the researcher conducted informal interviews with English teachers at the School of Foreign Languages to understand their perception of English and their understanding of students' perception and attitude. The researcher used the information that she gained through these document analysis and informal interviews to interpret the main results.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data were gathered during the spring semester of the academic year through semistructured interview questions. Considering the language proficiency level of students, interviews were conducted in Turkish. Before starting each interview, the researcher briefly discussed the purpose of the interview and the use of the audio-recorder. In order to protect their identities, each respondent was asked to choose a pseudonym that the researcher could use to refer to him/her. Each interview took approximately 40 minutes and was conducted in a quiet room at the university. Each interview was recorded by using audiotape, and the researcher took notes during the interview. At the end, the researcher signaled the end of the interview and allowed each interviewee to ask questions or to raise issues.

The data were analyzed following the general qualitative analysis techniques (Merriam, 1998, Erickson, 1986, Miles, & Huberman, 1994) and specific interview analysis technique (Kvale, 1996). First, the data that came from interviews were prepared by structuring and clarifying. Structuring of complex interview data was done by transcription. Microsoft Word program was utilized to transcribe interviews. Then, the transcript was clarified by eliminating repetitions and digressions. Finally, the meaning condensation method, which involves the condensation of interviewees' statements and meaning into shorter formulations, was conducted. Thus, the lengthy interview transcript was reduced into briefer and more concise formulations that were used to formulate assertions for each theme. Then, the data were identified by dividing the transcripts into "analytically meaningful" segments (Merriam, 1998). These segments were formed for each respondent and the data were manipulated by sorting and rearranging these segments for each respondent. By reading the transcripts and comparing the respondents' comments with each other, the researcher formed the assertions (Erickson, 1986). In order to establish evidentiary warrant for these assertions, the researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times and searched for confirming and disconfirming evidence. Direct quotes from the interviews were used to warrant the assertions. The results were organized in relation to these themes and presented in a descriptive narrative style.

Results

Characteristics of the participants

Research participants of the study consisted of 15 college students. While eight of the participants were female, seven of them were male. Only one of the interview participants was at the high intermediate level, while seven of the remaining students were at intermediate level, and the other seven were at the low intermediate level. They majored in business (eight), engineering (five), teaching English (one), and mathematics (one). All of the students had studied English at either middle school and/or high school before they entered the university. In addition to English, nine of them studied German, one of them French, and one of them Arabic at middle school and/or high school. Only three of the 15 had been abroad (Russia, Italy, and Saudi Arabia). One of them went to Russia for a summer vacation while another one went to Italy for the same purpose. The third one lived in Saudi Arabia and had attended an international school; however, none of them had been to an English-speaking country.

A majority of the students wanted to go to a European country such as Germany, and France (ten), or an English-speaking country such as the USA, Canada, or England (ten). If they had not had to learn English, most of the students indicated that they would have learned one of the European languages. Five of them said they would learn Italian, three of them would learn French, and one would learn Spanish. Furthermore, five of the students said that even if they did not have to learn English, they would study it

So far, 13 of the interview participants have had a chance to communicate in English either face to face or through the Internet. Most of the face-to-face communication took place during the summer, when the students talked to tourists. On the other hand, two of the participants had never used English outside the classroom to communicate with either a native or a nonnative speaker of English.

English in Learners' Life

Although the language learners had been studying English as a school subject throughout their middle and high school years, they had limited communication experiences in English in their daily lives. They did not have much of a chance to communicate orally with foreigners in or out of their school context. During secondary school years none of the participants had a foreign instructor. Although there were four foreign English instructors (two American and two British) at the Foreign Language School, these instructors offered conversation classes only to a small number of advanced proficiency-level students and therefore are not accessible to all students. Moreover, language learners did not have an access to foreigners outside the school context. They had limited face-to-face communication experiences in English during the summer time with tourists who were both native (mostly British) and nonnative (Dutch, Slovak, Czech, Russian, German, French, Israeli, Danish, etc.) speakers of English. Some representative comments include:

"I did not have a chance to talk to a foreigner, if I had had a chance I would have talked. I did not have any friends to chat. I could not reach them" (Ali).

"I am extremely willing, I wish there were somebody to talk [in English]. We don't have any opportunity to speak in English here. We may create an opportunity during summer by going to tourist destinations" (Denizci).

"I go to Marmaris in summers. I work there. We sell carpet. There are a lot of tourists who want to buy carpet. I talk to them in English" (Mika).

In this setting, the Internet seemed to be the key tool that allows students to have reallife communication in English. Students who had access to the Internet indicated that they chat with their peers (Brazilian, Korean, Spanish, Australian, Canadian, Ethiopian, American, etc.) either through computer game sites or through chat programs like ICQ. "We start chatting, [we ask questions like] where are you from? Where do you live? Have you been to Turkey? If they'd been to Turkey, they wrote Cesme, Bodrum, Antalya. But after a short while it ends. I don't talk to the same person again because neither he nor I enjoy it, because after a while the conversation ends, you know" (Murat).

However, as can be understood from Murat's comment, their conversations did not seem to extend beyond the brief exchange of information during these online chats. They merely exchanged a small conversation through which they learned each other's

names and nationality before starting to play computer games. Besides, all these conversations on the Internet were not oral but written. Both parties typed their responses instead of speaking.

Their other communication experiences in English include reading computer game instructions during installation and set up of the game, reading on-line materials, books, magazines (like *Newsweek, Reader's Digest, National Geographic*), and newspapers.

"I worked at an Internet Café...computer games were in English. When we had a problem, I [read the instructions] looked up the words in the dictionary and tried to solve the problem" (Phoenix).

"I read *Newsweek*. Sometimes I read books like a book of E. A. Poe. But I don't read them all the time" (Atron).

"I listen to foreign music [in English]. I memorize the lyrics of the songs...I watch MTV and try to understand. I sometimes watch BBC" (Fatma).

Other than reading in English, the participants indicated that they listened to news in English, watch BBC, and CNBC, MTV, and listened to music in English. Only a few of them (two) indicated that they wrote in English and kept a journal.

They had been studying English for six or seven years before coming to the Foreign Language School and were going through an intense English language program at the Foreign Language School. However, their experiences with English were limited to studying English (mostly grammar and vocabulary) as a school subject, a limited number of face-to-face conversations with tourists during summer, a few online chat experiences, and some reading and listening activities. It appears that English does not play a significant role in their life. These learners do not use English regularly either to communicate with people through written and/or oral modes, or interact with materials through reading, and listening. English seems to be not taking part in their life outside the school.

English as an International Language

Language learners considered English as an international language that is spoken all around the world. They defined English as an important common language through which they can connect to the rest of the world. Moreover, they acknowledged that English is the most valued foreign language in Turkey

"English is a common language; it is like a common sign language. It is everywhere from Britain to Saudi Arabia from China to Alaska" (Denizci).

"In a few years, English will be the language spoken by everybody" (Mika).

"English is a common language and in our country it is also the most important one" (Ayse).

Although language learners considered English as an international language, most of them were not informed on the current status of English or how it spread around the world. They were not aware of the consequences of this widespread use of English; namely, that English is the second (official) language of some countries like Kenya and Malaysia due to their colonial past. A majority of them only knew the British and American native varieties of English and seemed to be unaware of other native varieties of English like Canadian or Australian English. Furthermore, they were totally unaware of the nonnative varieties of English such as Indian English which is considered as a legitimate variety by linguists. These language learners implicitly assumed that all

around the world people speak either British or American English. Furthermore, they thought British English was better than American English and preferred British accent. "British English and American English are different. I prefer British English. I think British pronunciation is better." (Fatma).

"I would like to have British accent, I want to go to Britain to study and correct my accent. I want to speak like British people" (Deniz).

For these English language learners English-speaking countries mean technologically developed, powerful countries such as the USA, Japan, and the European countries. They did not consider countries such as India, Singapore, etc. as English speaking even though English is the official language of these countries and is used as a second language. They considered Japan and European countries like France and Germany as English-speaking countries even though the learners were well aware of these countries' first languages. This suggests that English language learners associate English with power and technological development. They want to learn English to gain access to this power. They perceive English as a language of power, which could allow them to have a better life. They believe that English would enable them to find a better, well-paid job by putting them into advantageous position in comparison to their monolingual counterparts. In a way, being proficient in English makes them special.

"If you don't want to live an average life in this country, you have to learn English. If you want to go abroad, you have to learn English. And in this country in order to earn more money and live like a human, you have to learn English. The only way to reject this is to live in a certain way with less money. But not many people accept to live like that" (Atron).

"When you apply to a job in Turkey, they ask you right away whether you know a foreign language, whether you know English. English comes first, even the computer terms are in English" (Ali).

"English is necessary to get a job but it is not sufficient. You have to learn another foreign language" (Fatma).

"I need to learn English for my future, for my career. Knowing English is not an exception any more. In order to be at a better position in life, English is a must. If a person who works for government knows a foreign language he earns more. In addition, English is necessary for social status" (Denizci).

On the other hand the students seemed to have resistance toward learning English. They questioned the status and power of English and resisted the imposed necessity of learning this foreign language. While Phoenix considered English to be the "language of others," Iliksüt questioned the reasons for learning "another language" in her "own country." These students seemed to perceive that they had to learn English whether they liked it or not. It was a process that they could not avoid. For them, learning English was not a choice that they freely made but an imposed necessity that they could not escape.

"I don't like English very much. As I said I wish Turkish were a universal language instead of English, I wish everybody spoke Turkish. But even though I don't like it I want to learn it very much because I have to" (Murat).

"It bothers me that English is required. I have to learn another language in my own country. It bothers me that I have to spend a year for that... It is good to have a mutual language in the world...but why English, why not another language?" (Iliksut).

"If it were not required, nobody would speak [English]. Nobody wants to speak the language of others" (Phoenix).

Conclusion

These learners perceive English as an international language which is used all around the world. Yet, their understanding is limited in the sense that they are only aware of British and American native varieties of the language and assume that everybody uses one of these two varieties. Moreover, they value British English more than American variety and take native British English speaker as a role model. It appears that although they perceive English as an international language, they are not aware of the current status of English in many countries around the world (as a mother tongue, official second language, and foreign language) and its native (Australian, Canadian English in addition to British and American English) and nonnative varieties (Indian English, SingEnglish, etc.).

In spite of their limited awareness of and experiences in English, these learners seem to have formed strong attitude towards the language. Their attitude towards English seems to be multilayered. On the one hand they value English as an international language and admire its British variety, but on the other hand they show dislike towards the same language. They associate English with power, and economic and technological development. While, they want to have an access to this power through mastering English; at the same time, they question its dominance and show negative attitude towards learning English.

In conclusion, these learners perceive English as an international language but do not have knowledge on its spread and current status in many different countries. Moreover, they do not utilize English as an international language, namely use it to communicate with people and materials created in English. Despite this limited exposure and understanding, these learners seemed to have formed multilayered attitude towards English. On the one hand they have a positive attitude towards English which they perceive as a means to success; on the other hand they have a negative attitude towards this imposed language of power.

Suggestions

Turkish students start to learn English at fourth grade and continue through middle and high school, however, they do not use English outside the classroom. For majority of the students English remains to be another school subject rather than a global language which they can use to communicate with the rest of the world. The Ministry of National Education identified the aim of teaching English in Turkey as to enable students to read, write, speak and comprehend spoken language in English so that they can follow technological developments and communicate with people from various countries. In order to achieve these goals and enrich language learners' experiences, language teachers can utilize internet. These teachers can contact with English teachers from various countries and establish e-mail exchange program between their students and foreign students. Via exchanging e-mails language learners can have real-life, meaningful communications in English. At university preparatory programs, English teachers can establish conversation club and/or reading club and invite foreign students who came to the different departments of the university as part of ERASMUS program

so that language learners can gain experience using English as an international language.

Results indicated that these language learners are not aware of the spread and the current status of English. One or two class hour may be allocated to give information on this topic. Students can be asked to read certain book chapters or articles on the topic and may discuss the issue in conversation classes. First, they may share the information in their small groups then discuss it as a whole class. Chapters from David Crystal's book "English as a Global Language" may be used for this purpose. Moreover, language learners' awareness on different varieties of English need to be raised so that they will be able to communicate with various people from different cultures who use different varieties of this international language. In order for English teachers to be able to do all these, these teachers need be aware of the issues themselves. Therefore, in teacher training programs, sociolinguistic issues need to be addressed.

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