

# *An Investigation of Oral English Classes Taught by Non-Native English-speaking Teacher (NNEST)*

—Take a Croatian Teacher in WEB International English in Cixi, China as an Example

Yang HE

Department of Finance and Trade  
Ningbo Dahongying University  
Ningbo, China  
247747921@qq.com

**Abstract**—This study investigates the oral English classes taught by Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (hereafter NNESTs) and takes a Croatian teacher who is teaching oral English in WEB International English in Cixi, China as an example. The study begins with a review of NNESTs and theoretical frameworks related to this study. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to make an analysis of how NNESTs conduct the oral English class. It is discussed that NNESTs also have the specialty in teaching oral English and offer some implications in local English language teaching in Cixi, China.

**Keywords**—*Non-Native English-speaking Teachers, Ethnography, Interactive Language Teaching, Cixi*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The project aims to investigate oral English classes taught by Non-Native English-speaking Teachers (NNESTs) in the Chinese context and take a Croatian teacher who is teaching in a local language training center in Cixi, China as an example. English has been taught as a second language (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL) all over the world. Research has shown that “the majority of English teachers in the world are not Native Speakers and almost eighty percent of the world’s English language teachers are Non-Native Speaker Teachers (NNEST)” [4]. According to the headmaster of WEB International English, a representative language training center in local context in Cixi, China, “Having recruited so many so-called Native English-speaking Teachers, I cannot say that their ‘title’ matches their teaching abilities. I prefer to hire Non-Native English Speakers with teaching qualifications. Now we have a Croatian teacher and the students speak highly of her oral English classes”. Therefore, the research is going to figure out how NNEST actually conduct oral English classes.

The development of sociolinguistics has led to “a revolution, a shifting from the traditional perspective on language teaching that training students to be grammarians to a new perspective that training students to be active language users, both on second language teaching and learning” [6]. In this study, sociolinguistic approach is applied to investigate oral English classes taught by NNESTs. According to Simpson [15], sociolinguistics has provided at least the following five concrete contributions to the field of language

teaching: (1) “sociolinguistics has contributed to a change of emphasis in the content of language teaching”, (2) “sociolinguistics has also contributed to innovations in materials and activities for the classroom”, (3) “sociolinguistics has contributed to a fresh look at the nature of language development and use”, (4) “sociolinguistics has contributed to a better framework in teacher training that the cognitive faculties of the learner can be more efficiently fostered”, (5) “sociolinguistics has contributed to a more fruitful research in this field”. These points guide the researcher to investigate the oral English classes taught by NNESTs in the perspectives of teaching method, classroom activities, and teaching contents.

By applying sociolinguistics approach, the researcher conducts a case study in a local language training center. This is also accomplished through ethnographic approach. This approach is “holistic, that is, the linguistic behavior are investigated in the context in which people produce them” [3]. In this regard, the previous perspectives mentioned have to be achieved by taking ethnographic observation in the oral English classes. Together, these two approaches are well-suited to investigate how NNESTs conduct oral English classes.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Review of NNEST

Medgyes (1994) first put forward two notions: “Native English-speaking Teacher (NEST) and Non-Native English-speaking Teacher (NNEST)”.

Many studies indicate that most of learners of the target language have positive attitudes towards NEST. They view NEST as the model of the target language and believe that NEST could provide a great example in learning spoken English. On the contrary, Harmer [16] claimed that “English is no longer owned by anybody in particular, least of all the native speakers of the world who are in minority which is becoming daily less significant—at least in numerical terms. In the end, the value of a teacher depends not just on their ability to use a language, but also on their knowledge about the language and their understanding of how to facilitate both the ability and their knowledge in the minds of their students”. This is also supported by Medgyes [16], “more than any

Native Speaker, he [a non-native-speaker teacher] is aware of the difficulties his students are likely to encounter and the possible errors they are likely to make". Meanwhile, Jusoh, Alias, Siraj and Darusalam [4] made a review and identified that "learners believe that their non-native teachers are compatible in teaching the language as they have experienced in being second language learners. As such, they are more empathic and are able to apply the suitable teaching approaches for the learners in learning the language". As Maum [12] concluded, "Qualified and trained Non-Native-speaking Teachers can contribute in meaningful ways to the English education field with their own experiences as English learners and their training and teaching experiences".

In China, since foreign teachers have played an important role in foreign language teaching, there are many studies on the differences between NESTs and NNESTs who are teaching in Chinese universities and schools. However, there are few systematic studies on NNESTs who are teaching in China. This essay tries to identify how NNESTs, on earth, conduct oral English classes in the context of China.

## B. Theoretical Frameworks

### 1) The Perspective of Sociolinguistics

As for the application of sociolinguistic approach, according to Liu [6], it was discussed from three aspects: "textbooks, educators and students". In terms of the role of educators, Liu [6] described the image of teachers as follows: "a relationship specialist, an effective communicator, and also a helper". In this respect, it is necessary to discover the role of the Croatian teacher in her oral English classes.

Besides, as is mentioned by Yuan [15], "In relation to language teaching, what Halliday suggests is in fact a sociolinguistic understanding of why we should include social and cultural things in our language teaching and how language could be more efficiently learned and taught by adopting a sociolinguistic approach". Based on sociolinguistic perspective, the social cultural factors also have a great impact on language teaching and learning. Therefore, language teaching should also involve "schematic knowledge for social and cultural input of a certain culture" [15]. In oral English classes, teachers should not only focus on the correct use of language forms, but also cultivate students' ability to use authentic language in the real situations. As Liu [6] mentioned, "If learners from a given cultural background are not fully aware of the relevant constraints socially and functionally institutionalized in another society, they may easily get themselves troubled when involved in some socially interactive activities".

To sum up, from the perspective of sociolinguistics, the oral English classes taught by NNEST will be further investigated from different aspects.

### 2) The Perspective of Ethnography

#### a) Definitions of Ethnography

"Ethnography has a goal, of which an ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" [8]. According to Dufon [3], the thick description of an

ethnographic account is accomplished through a number of means: "first, through an ethnographic approach, the behaviors are investigated in the context; second, it involves prolonged or intensive fieldwork in the community under study; third, it involves triangulation inquiry; gathering naturalistic data using a variety of techniques, such as participant observation, field notes, audio or video recordings, interviews and so forth in order to get multiple perspectives or points of view on a particular behavior, event, or phenomenon".

#### b) Data Collection Method

As Madison [7] pointed out, "In the practice of ethnography, the methods rely heavily on direct observation, open-ended interviewing, and textual analysis of human products". He also mentioned that "the degree and extent of utilization of each of these methods depend on the researcher's purpose, the guiding questions" [7]. As is concluded by Walsh [13], "ethnography, through participant observation of the social and cultural words, opens out the possibility of an understanding of reality which no other method can realize". In this study, taking ethnographic approach, the researcher also participated as an observer in the oral English classes.

Through the literature review, the sociolinguistic approach offers the research orientation of investigating oral English classes taught by NNEST, while ethnographic approach hints the methodology of the study.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Questions

In this study, it tries to answer the following questions:

1. How do NNESTs conduct oral English classes, including the teaching method, classroom activities, the teaching content, etc.?
2. Are there any implications in the local English Language Teaching (ELT)? What are they?

### B. Subject

#### 1) Participants

The Croatian teacher is the target objective of the research as well as the students who attend the oral English class. The teacher is 25 years old with TESOL teaching qualification. She has been in China for a year, and has taught in WEB International English for 8 months. There are totally 15 students involved in the class. Only two of them are teenage students and the rest are adults.

#### 2) WEB International English

WEB International English is one of the most popular language training centers in Cixi, China. It was founded in 1998 and offers English training for 12-year-old above students. It hires a Croatian teacher as full-time and the other teachers are local Chinese who are English majors.

### C. Instrument

Classroom observation is taken as a tool in this research project. The researcher attended the oral English class for two months. And the class is held on Friday night once a week.

The researcher also applies an audio recording pen to record the class with consent form signed by the participants and take notes during the class. Each class lasts one hour.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Through a two-month classroom observation in accordance with audio recordings and notes taken in class, the oral English classes taught by NNEST can be analyzed in the following perspectives.

##### A. Overall of the Oral English Class

The oral English class taught by the Croatian teacher is called "Social Club". The teacher chose different topics each week.

TABLE I. THE TOPICS FROM WEEK ONE TO WEEK EIGHT

Week	Topic
1	Learning English
2	Superstitions
3	Health and Food
4	Fortune Telling
5	Wedding
6	Weather and Natural Disaster
7	Beauty
8	Croatia

As is shown in TABLE 1, the topics are discussed by the teacher and the students through abundant of related questions shown in the screen. In that sense, there are no textbooks for this oral English class.

##### B. Interactive Language Teaching

Since sociolinguistics has contributed to language teaching in several aspects, evidences have been shown in the teaching method and classroom activities during classroom observation. Murray and Christison (2011) recognized that "interaction in the classroom is both a linguistic and a social phenomenon". It is found that the NNEST implemented Interactive Language Teaching in the oral English classes.

###### 1) Interactive Atmosphere

Having attended the oral English classes for eight times, the researcher found that each class had relaxed atmosphere harmonious interactions between the teacher and students. Unlike traditional Chinese classes with disciplines that kept teachers superior over the students, the oral English classes taught by the NNEST was student-centred and placed students and teacher equally. Based on the observation, the researcher found that despite the fluency and accuracy of English, the students were encouraged to open their mouths and take active part in negotiating the topic questions. Once the question was shown in the screen, the students answered them simultaneously. Under the supervision of the teacher, the students made cooperation, communicated freely with each other and exchange information and opinions to achieve goals.

During the class, there was no hands-up before answering or asking questions. If they have questions, they could interrupt at any time or require the teacher to repeat. In the process of interaction, it is found that the students' talk exceeded the teacher's talk. The teacher acted as an observer and a guide to some topics. In this relaxed and interactive atmosphere, the teacher can much more easily guide students to an automatic process in using the target language to communicate with each other.

###### 2) Classroom Activities

In the oral English classes, the research found that various classroom activities were held to enable the students in communication and interaction. The classroom activities were designed to focus on completing tasks that were accomplished through interactions. In the process of interactive activities in target language, the students were usually divided in two groups. And these group activities were usually inserted in the delivery of vocabularies. The examples of group activities are:

In Week One, the students were required to make a mental map. And the teacher offered three words: "Weather, Food, and China". Take "weather" as an example, the students should draw a map with "weather" in the central position and wrote the related words as much as possible, such as snow, sun, cloud, etc.

In Week Two, the teacher organized a game. She wrote a letter in the blackboard. The students were given a sheet(See Appendix A). The groups were required to write the words started with the given letter in each item of the sheet. They should not repeat the words with other groups. The group which wrote more words could win.

The teacher organized classroom activities almost every week. And the students actively participated in the activities, through which their interactive and communicative ability, to great extent, were enhanced.

##### C. Cultivation of Cultural Awareness

Language is an indispensable part of culture. In the perspective of sociolinguistics, it has been discussed that the input of cultural things in a given language is significant in the process of second language teaching and learning. Littlewood (2000, cited in Xu, 2004) analyzed "the cause for differences among the learners of second language, such as motivations, opportunities and abilities of the individuals in language learning process. Learner's cultural awareness and attitudes toward the target language formed the crucial parts of all the three elements". In the process of ethnographic observation, it is found that the teacher combined culture input with oral English teaching.

In Week Two, the topic was "Superstitions". They shared different cultures concerning the words "Friday", "black cat" and the number "13". The teacher claimed that in western culture, "Friday" is not a lucky day.

In Week Five, since the topic was "Wedding", they exchanged ideas of weddings. The teacher introduced that "the majority of weddings in western countries are held in the church". And they also talked about gifts and pre-nup. Sample transcription of the conversation is shown below:

T: What do you think about signing a prenup before getting married?

S1: What's prenup?

T: This is popular in western countries when they are rich. They sign in case of divorce.

S2: I don't think it's necessary.

T: In which situations is it necessary?

S3: Rich people need it.

S4: We should trust each other.

S5: I have never heard someone around me did that.

In Week Eight, the teacher introduced her home country "Croatia" in terms of history, population, customs, festivals, education, etc. And the students have a better understanding of the culture of East Europe.

It is found that, in each topic, the teacher would naturally input cultural elements when communicating with the students. In this respect, the students can communicate appropriately in cross-culture communication.

In conclusion, from the observation of oral English classes taught by the NNEST, it can be found that the teacher basically applied interactive teaching in the classes to motivate students to participate in discussing the topics and offer them enough opportunities to communicate in the target language. Meanwhile, plenty of input of the target language provides an authentic language environment for students, which also guarantees the efficient output of the target language with student-centred teaching mode. In addition, various classroom activities are adopted and culture knowledge is inserted in the language acquisition process, which cultivate students' interactive abilities and cross-cultural competence. All these facts can be regarded as the advantages of NNEST.

#### V. DISCUSSION

According to Medgyes (2005, p.195, cited in Zou, 2015), "the issue of native-speaker English teacher and non-native English speaker teacher has become the focus of professional attention and has been extensively discussed in recent years". It is also prevalent in China. On the one hand, NESTs are popular with Chinese students and parents. "Every university in China now has native English teachers teaching various English courses to students of different levels" (Rao, 2010). From the case study of the oral English classes "Social Club" taught by NNEST, it can be seen that NNESTs also have the specialty in teaching oral English and offer some implications in local English language teaching in Cixi, China.

First, they create an interactive atmosphere in class. The interaction happens easily between the teacher and students, and among students. The students are guided to an automatic in using the target language to communicate with each other in class.

Second, the teacher values the significance of interactive activities. Various classroom activities are adopted in each session of oral English class, such as group competition,

games. The students actively take part in those activities. Especially when it comes to vocabulary delivery, the combination of activity and vocabulary acquisition make it less boring and difficult.

Third, the teacher insists on cultural input in the process of language teaching. On the one hand, the students have the chance to introduce Chinese culture in English. On the other hand, the teacher adopts different ways to transfer cultural knowledge to students. In this respect, the students can practice the target language in the authentic situations successfully.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

This project has examined the oral English classes taught by NNESTs through ethnography approach by doing ethnographic observation in a Croatian teacher's oral English class in a local language training school in Cixi, China. The significant findings were submitted to an analysis of oral English classes with regard to sociolinguistic perspectives, since sociolinguistics has taken great effect on language teaching. These two methodologies were used in conjunction to reveal how NNESTs conduct oral English teaching in the local context of Cixi. And some implications on local English language teaching were also briefly discussed. However, there are also some limitations of the study. Due to the time limit, the researcher didn't apply ethnographic interview and survey toward the students who attended the class, which would offer some feedback toward the NNEST and thus have a deeper understanding of the oral English class taught by NNESTs.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Arva, V. and Medgyes, P. (2000) 'Native and Non-native Teachers in the classroom', *Elsevier Journal*, 28 (3): 355-372.
- [2] Doan, N. B. (2016). 'To Employ or not to Employ Expatriate Non-native Speaker Teachers: Views from within', *Asian Englishes*, 18 (1): 67-79.
- [3] Dufon, M. A. (2002). 'Video Recording in Ethnographic SLA Research: Some Issues of Validity in Data Collection', *Language Learning and Technology*, 6 (1): 40-59.
- [4] Jusoh, F. S.; Alias, N.; Siraj, S.; Darusalam, G. (2012) 'Research and trends in the studies of native & non-native speaker teachers of languages: a review on selected researches and theses', *The Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science*, 1 (1). pp. 815-826.
- [5] Liu, M. X. and Zhang L. M. (2007). 'Student Perceptions of Native and Non-native English Teachers' Attitudes, Teaching Skills Assessment and Performance', *Asian EFL Journal*, 9 (4): 157.
- [6] Liu, Z. W. (2014). 'The Application of Sociolinguistics Theory in Language learning and teaching', *Overseas English*, 15 (1): 15-16.
- [7] Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. US: Sage.
- [8] Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
- [9] Medgyes, P. (1994). *The Non-native Teacher*. London: Macmillan.
- [10] Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Rao, Z. H. (2010) 'Chinese Students' Perceptions of Native English-speaking Teachers in EFL Teaching', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. 12 (2):52-53.



- [12] Wang, J. L. (2004). 'Comparative Study on Teacher Talk of Australian and Chinese English Teachers in English as Foreign Language Classroom', *Overseas English*, 25 (4): 250-253.
- [13] Walsh, D. (2000). *Doing Ethnography*. Seale: Clive.
- [14] Classroom Observation and Case Study', *CELEA Journal*, 27 (3): 65-66.
- [15] Yuan, J. (2010). 'On Integrating Culture in Foreign Language Teaching from Sociolinguistic perspective', *Read and Write Periodical*, 7 (6): 32-33.
- [16] Zou, X. (2015). 'Overview of Native-speaker English Teacher Versus Non-native Speaker English Teacher', *Overseas English*, 6 (2): 103-104.