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Short Report

Experiences of International Language Teachers at a Turkish University

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ABSTRACT

Using a multiple case study approach, this short research article describes the experiences of three teachers (of German, French, and Korean) in a Turkish university where English is also mandatorily taught. Three themes common to the participants' experiences emerged: use of the Turkish language, integrative adaptability, and international self-awareness. We suggest that understanding these themes may help teachers, students, and administrators better understand the rich and potentially unique fonts of knowledge that international teachers could bring into Turkish language classrooms in a university context.

INTRODUCTION

Sending students abroad for linguistic and cultural enrichment has been extensively praised and dissected, but other means of providing international language learning experiences for students also merit examination. As King and Bigelow (this volume) argue, meaningful international exposure can also occur domestically through activities such as collaborating with local immigrant communities. Similarly, many institutions of higher education in countries with social, financial, or other constraints attempt to provide their students with international exposure through efforts such as diversifying student population, using a second language (L2; e.g., English, French) as the medium of instruction, or inclusion of more international faculty in the institutions. Among these efforts, of particular importance to language learning in contexts where study abroad opportunities are limited is the diversity of experience that international language teachers can bring *into* a classroom.

The experiment in this article earned an Open Materials badge for transparent practices. The materials are available at https://www.iris-database.org/iris/app/home/detail?id=york%3a935338&ref=search and https://www.iris-database.org/iris/app/home/detail?id=york%3a935337&ref=search

This short report presents the results of three case studies of instructors teaching their native languages (i.e., German, French, and Korean) in a large Turkish university where English is the medium of instruction. It describes the ways in which varied educational, professional, and life experiences influenced the instructional approaches of these teachers.

BACKGROUND

The idea of bringing instructors who are native speakers of the language they are teaching into classrooms is not new, and it has been the focus of a long-standing debate in applied linguistics (Martínez Agudo, 2017). Despite cogent arguments surrounding the historical native speaker and nonnative speaker dichotomy and appropriate terminology to discuss it (Cook, 1999; Davies, 2003, 2004; Murahata, Murahata, & Cook, 2016), these concepts are still alive, and the fixed dichotomy of the two categories is widely used. It is not the intent of the current study to research the dichotomy between native and nonnative English teachers that is extensively debated in the literature (see Dewaele, 2018; Martínez Agudo, 2017), but given that the participants in these case studies are all native speakers of the languages they were teaching and frequently used these terms in describing themselves, some of the issues previously addressed do apply to the current investigation. We refer to the participants in this study as "international language teachers" to avoid bias and to emphasize the fact that even though they were all originally from countries other than Turkey, being native speakers of the languages they teach is only one part of what makes up their experiences. However, when used by the participants in this article or referenced in literature, a "native speaker" refers to someone who meets the same criteria most recently applied by Dewaele (2018) to the term "L1 user:" someone who acquired a particular language as a first language (L1), usually before age 3.

As Duff (2015) pointed out, native speakers are believed to bring certain advantageous qualities to the language classroom and are often privileged by administrators in hiring and promotion practices: "The practice of hiring native speakers of the target language, with or without appropriate training, is another means by which an authentic transnational and intercultural experience may be promoted by educational programs; study abroad is another" (p. 75). Many studies have confirmed benefits for native speakers over their nonnative peers (e.g., Holliday, 2005; Kontra, 1993; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Luk & Lin, 2007; Pacek, 2005; Tsou & Chen, 2017). Others, however, have revealed frequent shortcomings in pedagogic training for native speakers in teaching roles (England & Roberts, 1989; Phillipson, 1992; Polio, 1994; Polio & Wilson-Duffy, 1998).

Some studies have pointed out the discrepancies and inconsistencies in pedagogical styles between home and host country contexts (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1990; Kramsch, 1993; Lantolf & Genung, 2002; LoCastro, 1996; Valdes, 1998). In a similar fashion, Kramsch (2014) posited that teachers of languages other than English tend to adopt a pedagogical style appropriate to the culture where

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a language is being learned, not the one that is prevalent in the target language's culture. She also stressed the fact that teachers are under pressure to adopt the same pedagogical approaches as used in the teaching of English in their overseas teaching of other languages. As Dewey, Belnap, and Steffen point out (this volume), these international differences in teaching approaches could be a factor contributing to anxiety in study abroad contexts.

Living in another country and becoming a teacher—possibly without much pedagogical background or training—can be a major life shift for many people. Thus, native and nonnative speaker issues have been further questioned and redefined through identity research (e.g., Aneja, 2016; Duff, 2015; Ellis, 2013, 2016; Norton, 2010; Pavlenko, 2003). These studies increasingly lend considerable and significant support for interplay between native language and identity, denying "a linguistic caste system and a monocultural and monolingual point of reference" (Kachru & Nelson, 1996, p. 79). Most recently, Norton and De Costa (2018) noted the growing interest and diversity in language teacher identity research and specifically called for the continuation of investigation into teacher identity and practices in relation to educational policy, as well as study abroad learner identities.

All in all, it is evident from the literature that while there are an abundant number of studies that have been conducted on the potential strengths and weaknesses of native and nonnative English teachers, the vying pedagogical styles between home and host countries, and the growing interest in teacher identity, there is less research on native speakers teaching languages other than English, their preferences and classroom practices, or the ways they may view themselves or be viewed as sources of international language learning. The aim of the current research is to describe how international teachers bring language learning into classrooms by addressing the question: What affects the pedagogical approaches of international language teachers in Turkey?

To this end, this study uses a multiple case study approach within the social constructivist lens of Wenger's (1998) social theory of identity formation, which assumes that participants and researchers jointly create realities based on their own experiences in their communities of practice (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it is important to note that although both of the authors of this article have experience teaching university-level English as a foreign language in Turkey and studying foreign languages as students, neither has taught a language other than English. Despite their similar teaching experiences, the primary difference in their perspectives is that Ashleigh Pipes is a native speaker of English, whereas Hasibe Kahraman is a native speaker of Turkish.

METHODS

Context, Participants, and Researchers

This research took place in the foreign language department of a large Turkish university. The university offers classes in multiple languages for students interested

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TABLE 1. *Participant and Researcher Backgrounds*

Name	L1	Teaches or Taught	Role
Klaus	German	German, English, Russian	Participant
Camilla	French	French, English	Participant
Myung	Korean	Korean	Participant
Hasibe	Turkish	English	Researcher
Ashleigh	English	English	Researcher

in pursuing study of a third language (L3) in addition to their native language (typically L1 Turkish) and English, which is a mandatory L2 in Turkey. Of the instructors in the department who teach languages other than English, 20% are native speakers of the languages they teach, and the rest are native speakers of Turkish. The three case study participants were full-time university language instructors who were teaching their native languages: German, French, and Korean (see Table 1).

The first participant, Klaus, is a native speaker of German, who also speaks English, Russian, and Turkish. At the time of the study, he had been teaching German in Turkey for more than 7 years; he had previously taught English and Russian in other countries. The second participant, Camilla, is a native speaker of French and also speaks English and Turkish. She had been teaching French to Turkish students for 15 years; she previously taught both English and French in other countries. The third participant, Myung, is a native speaker of Korean and also speaks English and Turkish. He had been a Korean teacher in Turkey for almost 20 years. All of the participants held master's or doctoral degrees in their relevant fields, and all names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

A combination of interviews, observations, electronic communication, and documents were used to construct our understanding of the experiences of the participants. Documents such as sample homework assignments, classroom activity worksheets, and course syllabi were particularly useful in establishing the reality of what participants do along with their own perceptions of their teaching practices. Each researcher descriptively coded the data based on the interview transcripts. Through axial coding, data were deductively recoded to establish the categories and emerging themes. Data were rescrutinized using the analytic memos and classroom observation notes to finalize emergent themes. Through triangulation, member checking, careful sampling, and an audit by a scholar in the field, the study underwent rigorous procedures in accordance with Yin's (1994) criteria to ensure validity of the findings of a qualitative study to the greatest extent possible. Reliability was addressed by keeping careful records of data collection and analysis procedures and by testing for intercoder agreement on a portion of the interview

FIGURE 1. (Color online) The themes of the study can be represented as a basket.

transcript data. The 81.82% agreement met the 80% minimum level suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013).

FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from analysis of the data: use of Turkish language, integrative adaptability, and international self-awareness. Using an analogy inspired by a comment by participant Camilla, these themes can be visualized as a basket that collects experiences and knowledge that come and go through a native lens, but is held together by Turkish language skills (see Figure 1). The basket handle represents the theme of their use of Turkish language skills. The experiences and education inside the basket are manifested in the theme of integrative adaptability, which demonstrates their ability to merge and adjust a variety of tools. The international self-awareness, which is the basket opening through which their experiences and education come and go, is manifested through the theme of their cognizance of international status. While these themes do answer this study's research question, the participants' identities and experiences merged and emerged as a more holistic influence on their day-to-day interactions and decisions rather than a simple list of discrete influences. The themes unveiled by the data fit also within Wenger's (1998) three modes that precede identity construction (i.e., engagement, imagination, and alignment), in connection with broader modes of the social theory of identity formation.

Use of Turkish Language

While there is clear support for the use of students' native language in foreign language instruction for linguistic (e.g., McManus & Marsden, 2017) as well as academic, managerial, or social/cultural purposes (Sali, 2014), the use of Turkish in this context is noteworthy because of the university's English-only instruction policy, in which instructors can be penalized on end-of-semester evaluations for use of Turkish in the classroom. For one instructor, Turkish was primarily a tool

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to mediate by building better relationships with students in the classroom and by setting a personal tone. As noted by one of the researchers in a memo based on a classroom observation of Camilla,

> Turkish was primarily a tool for building rapport and a fun atmosphere...the instructor told a few short, humorous stories in Turkish that resulted in … a "good class chuckle." For example, at the beginning of class … she was laughing about her own very busy day and something she had confused (I think she had gone to the wrong classroom or something). This generally lightened the mood and got the students' attention.

Camilla agreed with this assessment, elaborating that

> The advantages of speaking the students' language are enormous. If I compare my first years in [the university] and today's situation, I can see how much my relationship with students has improved both in academic and human terms. Thanks to my Turkish language ability, I can communicate more straightforward [sic] and obtain better results.

Through stories and jokes, Camilla carefully used the language in a way that she hoped would improve relationships and ultimately overall educational outcomes.

Other linguistic benefits of Turkish proficiency include being able to communicate with students during the early phases of their foreign language learning, as well as being able to offer vocabulary or grammatical explanations more efficiently. This is especially true in the case of Korean, which Myung reported is more closely related to Turkish than to English. Myung was mildly hesitant about the use of Turkish in the classroom because of the university's English instruction policy. However, he pointed out that he had received special permission to use Turkish when it is more sensible, because

> Turkish and Korean are so similar in grammatical structure and if you can say, "This is something of Turkish, just the difference is this." If you teach that, then they understand it the moment, everything.… That's how we do it.

So, while the reasons and results of using Turkish to communicate with students vary, all three participants used it as a powerful and fundamental source, because it entailed investment in their activities and interactions with other community members.

Integrative Adaptability

The foreign language teachers in this context did not use any one specific or unified approach to teaching. While their past educational and professional experiences influenced the actions they took in the classroom, they constantly adapted to the current situation, drawing on and integrating their knowledge and skills as needed. This ability to adapt and integrate myriad influences and approaches allows

students to critically examine different teaching methods in those teachers' countries of origin and become aware of what strategies one needs to take for adapting to a new environment. For example, although the European language teachers take a generally communicative approach, Klaus provided additional worksheets for students who preferred extra practice from a grammar-based perspective, similar to the way they probably learned English. As noted earlier, Camilla described her approach as a container:

> As far as my current teaching method, I can honestly say that I am a communicative teacher. I see the communicative approach, like a bucket [basket] which collects all the past experience and put them all together for me to feel free to use the most convenient one. It is its eclecticism and its degree of freedom which make this approach the most compelling one.

Likewise, Klaus noted how his teaching has evolved along with his accumulated experiences:

> I didn't teach in the same way I am teaching in [this university] now in anywhere else. Because I have more experience, the amounts of materials I have is much more. I cannot compare my experience in Turkey with another country because this is much higher the level of experience, the dedication, the years.

Myung focused on reading and writing because he believed it would be more useful to his students who were pursuing academic endeavors abroad, even though he focused on conversation when he taught in a different context. The interview data reported here, along with observations and document review, clearly indicate that the teachers adapted to their current context by integrating a variety of knowledge, skills, and abilities, rather than strictly adopting the prevalent teaching practices of either their home countries or Turkey.

International Self-awareness

The data suggest two subthemes related to the participants' awareness of their status as international teachers who are native speakers of the languages they are teaching: linguistic benefits and cultural knowledge.

Linguistic Benefits. Although they were not asked specifically to distinguish between teaching to beginner and advanced levels, all three participants brought up the difference in being a native speaker of the language they were teaching at progressive levels of instruction. The linguistic benefits that participants mentioned, however, were focused on more advanced levels of language instruction. Klaus pointed out, "Even if our [Turkish L1] instructors' level is very high, is very good, but sometimes I find there is a native level needed," for example, with "sophisticated idioms." Camilla echoed these sentiments, saying, "Maybe advanced courses it might be better to have a native speaker." When asked to elaborate on the statement, "Actually I am not a strong advocate of … learning foreign

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language from native speaker except for the advanced stage," Myung responded, "I cannot say it [several seconds pause]. Hmmm … what I mean is … elementary class native speaker had not much advantage compared to very effective foreign speakers." These comments reflect the perspectives of the instructors. Klaus also acknowledged the perspective of his students, which was not consistent with that of the instructors: "I think students feel lucky to have a native speaker especially for the beginner levels," suggesting a distinction between the attitudes toward native speaker instructors at beginner and advanced levels and a generally positive attitude toward the native teacher, although, of course, the current study did not ask students this question directly, so the data are secondhand reports.

Cultural Knowledge. Deeper cultural knowledge emerged as another facet of the differences in being an international language teacher. Again without prompting, two of three participants suggested that cultural knowledge was a unique asset. Myung stated his view quite directly: "Of course, at least the cultural things, the native speaker would know better." Klaus saw his role as "a bit of ambassador of my country," "to raise awareness of cultural differences and the positive ... cultural difference, the richness of cultural difference." Although Camilla did not directly discuss culture, based on additional data sources, it was an important part of her approach. Observation revealed that her classes included a great deal of information about her home country, and the syllabi descriptions for her classes named cultural knowledge as a goal: "They will be exposed to French culture, history, geography and contemporary literature." While any teacher of a language can certainly teach about culture, the participants perceived themselves as having greater expertise in this area.

Klaus, Camilla, and Myung discussed the strong capabilities and potential advantages of nonnative teachers as well. Camilla described a nonnative teacher's advantage "because they studied that language, so they went through that process. So they might understand better little things that I might, just you know, overlook." She went on to emphasize that to her, despite the differentiations discussed, the native/nonnative distinction is not the dominant quality that makes the teacher effective:

> To teach, you must be an expert, a passionate person, a theatre player, a psychologist, a tutor, a writer, a commentator. You should also be sensitive, funny, patient, dedicated, strong. In one world you must be [neither] a native speaker teacher [nor] a nonnative speaker teacher but a "teacher."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The participants in this study used Turkish to their advantage despite it being banned from their language classrooms. They skillfully adapted and integrated their experiences, education, and abilities. They were cognizant of the strengths they brought to the classroom as native speakers of the languages they were teaching and of the strengths their nonnative-speaking colleagues brought. Their use of the

Turkish language in particular fostered their investment "in the form of belonging and ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (Wenger, 1998, p. 188).

The fusion experience that results from the teachers' integrative adaptability could serve as a preparatory bridge for unfamiliar situations that students may encounter if they work or study abroad in the future, allowing them a chance to observe and practice skills necessary for their own adaptations. The teachers' beliefs about their own native linguistic and cultural benefits helped them to capitalize on these perceived strengths, which is of significant use to students. Finally, for administrators making hiring decisions—which Duff (2015) pointed out typically privilege native speakers—these findings demonstrate that international language teachers provide unique types of learning opportunities for students, but they are not perceived to be superior. Overall, the three themes show the influences that affect the pedagogical approach of these international teachers and add to the understanding of the complex mix of factors relevant in this Turkish university context.

LIMITATIONS

The authors' lack of knowledge of the participants' languages of instruction somewhat restricted the amount of information they could glean from classroom observation. Additional interviews and/or focus groups with other stakeholders such as students, administrators, and other teachers could help to develop a more thorough understanding of the case. Extending the sample to multiple universities would also enhance the study. Further research might also investigate the case of international teachers in L3 contexts in light of Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of language learning investment, which situates identity alongside ideology and capital. While geared toward learners, these three facets of language learning investment could potentially be applied to language *teaching* investment, as well. Despite the limitations, examining this research provides instructors, students, and administrators with a better understanding of the complexities of teaching an in an environment comprising multiple influences, and insights on how bringing international exposure into a university third language classroom may offer linguistic and cultural dividends for students.

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