

English teacher preference: the case of China's non-English-major students

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ABSTRACT: In an era when English has become the uncontested world language, this study explores who Chinese non-English majors prefer as their English teachers: English teachers from China (ETCs) or so-called native-speaking English teachers (NETs). This issue has been keenly debated in the Chinese press in recent years. However, it is not a debate in which the voices of the learners and teachers of English have been sufficiently reported through empirical studies. The study draws comprehensive data from 984 college students and their teachers at four universities in different parts of China. On the basis of three cross-validated research methods (questionnaire survey, matched-guise technique, and focused interview), it is argued that, where possible, college English classes should be taught by both ETCs and NETs, since students can benefit from the strengths of both types of teachers. In addition, ETCs should be given opportunities to train in English-speaking countries in order to improve their own English proficiency levels and that only qualified NETs should be recruited to teach college English in China.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly observed that modern technology has turned our world into a small village. The Internet is relied upon to help us with our daily lives: from food shopping to learning languages. However, even with the sophisticated advances in Internet technology, classroom teaching still remains the main way for people to learn English as a foreign language (Horwitz 2008). With the ever increasing number of students learning English, a debate has arisen over who can do a better job of teaching English in the classroom: local non-native-speaking English teachers or native-speaking English teachers (cf. Carless 2006a). This debate has surfaced in several East Asian countries where native-English speaking teachers are employed within the primary, secondary and tertiary school systems, for example in Japan (McConnell 2000), Hong Kong (Carless 2006b), and Korea (Joen 2009). The issue of teacher selection is of special significance in China as non-native speakers of English (NNSs) outnumber native speakers of English (NSs)¹ by a wide margin (Li 2007), and more importantly, the demand for learning English in China is huge – China is believed to have the largest English-learning and English-using population in the world (Jiang 2002; Bolton 2003; Crystal 2008; He and Li 2009). These learners mostly speak 'China English' with cross-linguistic influences from Chinese, their mother tongue (Jiang 1995; 2003; Du and Jiang 2001; Jiang and Du 2003; Hu 2004; He 2007; Li 2007).

The standard varieties of British and American English have for long been accepted and promoted as the only internationally acceptable pedagogical models for English language teaching (ELT) (Lam 2002; Bolton 2003; Zhang 2003; Adamson 2004). However, recently

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this concept has been challenged by world Englishes scholars (e.g. Kachru 1985, 1992; Braine 1999; Jenkins 2003, 2006; Kirkpatrick 2006). Within this framework, the question of a 'better' teacher for college English has become a hot issue in recent years (e.g. Jin 2005).

THE DEBATE ON ETCs AND NETs FOR COLLEGE ENGLISH

It has been argued that "language planning cannot be understood without reference to its social contexts" (Cooper 1989: 3). Given this, we would suggest that one cannot make a decision about who are better teachers (i.e. NETs or ETCs²) for college English in China without considering the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in China. Ever since China adopted the Open Door Policy in the late 1970s, there have been two main issues facing the education authorities: the need to hire non-native-speaking teachers to act as good linguistic models for the learners of English and the need to upgrade the English language proficiency of local English teachers.

There has been a growing interest in hiring NETs to teach college English classes in China. For example, there were 150,000 NETs working in China in 2006 (Joen and Lee 2006), a number which is sure to have risen given the huge demand nowadays. Nevertheless, China does not have a central government policy on employing NETs (Niu and Wolff 2003); instead, each province has its own ad hoc policy on hiring, with some employing highly trained NETs and others happy to employ NETs with only a US high school diploma (Niu and Wolff 2003). In other words, an ever increasing number of foreign teachers without any teaching experience, or qualifications in language teaching, are recruited just because they speak English as their mother tongue (Chen 2002). These unqualified foreign teachers are usually young fresh graduates in their own countries who travel to China for further study or as a base from which to explore China and Asia. Teaching mostly oral English classes at tertiary institutions within the local context,³ usually with high salary and reasonable workload, is seen as a way to support themselves during their study or travel. In addition to their lack of professional qualifications and experience, many of these NETs have little knowledge about Chinese culture and customs, and, more importantly, knowledge about the Chinese educational system, including Chinese ways of teaching and learning (Liu and Wu 2003).

The poor professional quality of many NETs is just one side of the main issue about teacher selection for college English in China. The other, and equally important, side of the debate is whether or not the ETCs are able to do the job of teaching English up to advanced levels. There is a perception that ETCs are unable to match the NETs linguistic proficiencies (Quirk 1990; Medgyes 1994). Good linguistic role models are considered essential when learning a foreign language as teachers with high proficiency levels are able to set standards for their learners to aim at, and are also able to identify and correct linguistic errors which may prevent comprehension. In a survey on non-native English speaking teachers in Europe, Medgyes (1992) found that 'fluency', 'vocabulary' and 'pronunciation' were the top three areas of concern among those surveyed. Similar anxieties are voiced in the Chinese press about ETCs (e.g. Lin 2005; Zhang 2009). Therefore, ETCs not only need to have an understanding of the local context they are teaching in, but good proficiency in English so that they will be perceived as good role models.

As part of the ETC versus NET debate, it is often noted that NETs can bring a number of valuable features to the language class: authenticity of language use; role model for pronunciation and other linguistic features of spoken texts; an informant on language use,

especially idioms and slang; motivation for the learners to interact with a native-speaker of the language; variety of teaching activities; an informant on cultural aspects, among others. This wide range of features can be found even in non-language trained NETs. However, it also has to be pointed out that EFL teaching emphasizes what makes the language foreign and how as a foreign language it might be taught most effectively. In other words, teaching English as a foreign language is different from teaching it as a native or a second language. In this context, Widdowson (1994) argues that the focus of attention on the language shifts from 'nativeness' to 'foreignness' because NETs are not able to imagine themselves learning English as a foreign language although they have the rich experience of using it as a native language. Seidlhofer (1999: 235) also supports ETCs when she noted that they share the same mother tongue and culture with their learners while also having the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target language, which makes ETCs "uniquely suited to be agents facilitating learning by mediating between the different languages and cultures through appropriate pedagogy". Similarly, Phillipson (1992a) and Canagarajah (1999) see the educated local teachers as the ideal teachers of English, since they have gone through the complex process of EFL/ESL acquisition and they have first-hand insights into the linguistic and cultural needs of their students. Therefore, while appreciating NETs' speaking skills, pronunciation, intonation, and knowledge of English-speaking cultures, it should not be overlooked that ETCs have their own advantages in terms of their understanding of local students' language learning problems, their knowledge of what language learning strategies might work and their ability to explain grammatical rules explicitly for instance (cf. Barrett 2009; Oxford and Jain 2010). As a matter of fact, several empirical studies in the USA and in Hong Kong (e.g. Moussu and Braine 2006; Ling and Braine 2007), have proved that proficient ETCs can also make successful EFL/ESL teachers.

He's (2007) study on 'China English' has also found that university students in China, in spite of their fondness of NETs, placed high value on ETCs' knowledge of local testing systems and Chinese students' learning habits and preferences, and on ETCs' awareness of well-accepted linguistic features associated with 'China English'. What is more, it is suggested that well-trained ETCs who speak Chinese will be more intelligible to learners who speak the same mother tongue compared with NETs (Kirkpatrick 2006). This is because learners whose native tongue is syllable-timed, such as Chinese, Malay and French, are likely to find speakers of stress-timed languages, such as English, less intelligible than speakers of syllable-timed varieties on account of the massive reduction and neutralization of unstressed syllables (Hung 2002).

Based on the above review of the literature, it might be assumed that well-educated local teachers of English are able to serve as more successful instructors and coordinators for EFL learners in China than unqualified NETs. Although this assumption has been somewhat supported by Jin's (2005) research, it needs further empirical evidence from the major stakeholders,⁴ college English learners and their teachers, concerning the question of teacher preference. Using both questionnaire survey and interview, Jin (2005)⁵ concludes that, in spite of their preference and aspiration for NETs, Chinese EFL students might choose to be taught by ETCs, taking their level of English into consideration; and that education concerning world Englishes is a necessity for both learners and teachers in China so as to enhance learners' awareness of the existence of different varieties of English as well as to improve teachers' awareness of their own value. In addition to Jin's (2005) work, Kirkpatrick (2002) discusses the implications of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and Asian cultures and models for the English language teaching

curriculum and for teacher selection. Despite his recognition of the need for the qualified multilingual NETs in Asian countries, Kirkpatrick (2002) believes that trained ETCs with proficient English level can be more appropriate as English teachers than monolingual NETs in the context of ASEAN. The present study extends the limited amount of research that has been carried out into the question of ETCs versus NETs in China.

METHODOLOGY⁶

In order to find out who learners and teachers believe are the better teachers (ETCs or NETs) in English teaching in China's classrooms, this empirical study draws on data from non-English majors and teachers of college English in China. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach using three instruments: questionnaire survey, matched-guise technique (MGT), and focused interview.

Participants

A total of 1,030 participants (820 students and 210 teachers) completed a questionnaire survey and took part in a matched-guise experiment, and 984 valid questionnaires were collected (795 students and 189 teachers). One-tenth of the participants ($N = 103$) were interviewed (82 students and 21 teachers). In order to ensure that the participants represent their respective groups, varying academic levels and geographic regions were taken into consideration when selecting the participants. In addition to these factors, the interviewees were also chosen in line with their responses to some related questionnaire items. Such variation is acknowledged as an advantage that increases the validity of qualitative research (Maxwell 2005).

The participants came from four universities (one key university and three second-tier universities) located in eastern, western, northern, and central China. China's primary and secondary education is college-oriented, which means that the curriculum at lower levels match any changes to the curriculum of English at tertiary level. Therefore there is a continuity of learning experiences for students which is mostly examination oriented and which prepares them for entering college. The focus of the study was limited to teachers and students of non-English majors. There are two main reasons for excluding English majors in our study. First, English majors in China are expected to graduate with near-native proficiency in English and are a minority group of learners within the Chinese educational system. Second, perhaps more importantly, since non-English majors constitute the majority⁷ of the potential English-speaking and English-using population in China, we believe that the teacher selection of college English should be geared towards the needs of this group.

With regard to the three research instruments used, various factors were taken into consideration when selecting participants: age, gender distribution, disciplines and school years of student participants; and academic qualifications and ranks of teacher participants. Although some of the participants speak Chinese dialects as their first language, all of them reported to speak Putonghua (the national language) as their everyday language.

All the 795 student participants in the study were Chinese, aged from 17 to 25 ($\bar{x} = 20.6$). Among them, 51.7 per cent (411) were male and 48.3 per cent (384) female. They came from four discipline areas: Arts (196); Law (194); Business (174); and Engineering

(231). In terms of the year of study, 344 (43.3 per cent) were freshmen, 251 (31.6 per cent) sophomores, 77 (9.7 per cent) juniors, and 123 (15.5 per cent) seniors. With such a large group spread over a number of disciplines it is believed that the student participants were representative of non-English majors studying in China's universities.

There were 189 teacher participants in the study, 77 (40.7 per cent) male and 112 (59.3 per cent) female. Their ages ranged from 22 to 65 ($\bar{x} = 34.4$), and they had between five months to 42 years of English teaching experience ($\bar{x} = 10.6$). All the teacher participants had majored in English as students, with the highest academic qualification attained being three (1.6 per cent) doctorate degrees, 150 (79.4 per cent) master's degrees, and 36 (19 per cent) bachelor's degrees. Their academic ranking also varied considerably, with two (1.1 per cent) being professors, 69 (36.5 per cent) associate professors, 73 (38.6 per cent) lecturers, and 45 (23.8 per cent) teaching assistants. The majority of the teacher participants, 113 (59.8 per cent), taught non-English majors only, while 76 (40.2 per cent) taught both English majors and non-English majors (for additional details about the participants in this study, please see He and Li 2009; He and Zhang 2010).

Methods

In order to increase the validity and reliability of the data in this study, three different instruments were employed in accordance with the general observation that "interpretations which are built upon triangulation are certain to be stronger than those which rest on the more constricted framework of a single method" (Denzin 1997: 319). Specifically, questionnaire survey data are triangulated with data obtained from interviews and the experiment using the matched-guise technique (MGT).

Using a 5-point scale, a total of 10 items was included in the survey questionnaire (see Table 1 in the next section for details). Before administering the questionnaires (including the one for the MGT), we gave a simple explanation to the participants (in Putonghua) based on He and Li's (2009: 83) definition that China English is "a performance variety of English which has the standard Englishes as its core but is colored with characteristic features of Chinese phonology, lexis, syntax and discourse pragmatics, and which is particularly suited for expressing content ideas specific to Chinese culture through such means as transliteration and loan translation". To ensure comprehensibility of the questionnaire, it was translated into Chinese. Then, prior to the pilot test with the questionnaire, back-translation, a technique regularly used for assessing translation quality, was used to check the item-compatibility between the Chinese and English versions of the questionnaire. The primary objective of the questionnaire is to tap into participants' preferred type of teacher for college level English classes. Therefore, the questionnaire data was simply tabulated and the frequencies and means were reported and discussed.

In order to investigate if the participants perceived any differences between qualities of accents used when listening to English, a matched-guise test was performed. In the matched-guise experiment, the respondents listened to one voice reading a paragraph out loud using two different accents: one in a typical 'China English' accent, and the other in a near-native-like accent. However, the participants were not informed that it was the same person reading the texts. The MGT procedure is built on the assumption that speech style can trigger social categorizations that lead to group-related traits (Giles and Coupland 1991). In this way, the responses elicited are considered stereotyped reactions towards the

Table 1. Frequencies and means for questionnaire items

| Items | 1 ^a (%) | 2 (%) | 3 (%) | 4 (%) | 5 (%) | Means |
|---|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in our textbooks. | 3.7 ^b | 6.1 | 14.6 | 29.2 | 46.2 | 4.08 ^c |
| 2. College English should be taught by English teachers from China. | 26.9 | 25.6 | 28.5 | 12.6 | 6.3 | 2.46 |
| 3. College English should be taught by native speakers. | 18.2 | 17.3 | 28.2 | 20.5 | 15.8 | 2.98 |
| 4. College English should be taught by both English teachers from China and native speakers. | 5.4 | 4.3 | 11.4 | 19.3 | 59.7 | 4.24 |
| 5. When I speak English, I want to sound like a native speaker. | 3.5 | 3.2 | 11.5 | 20.9 | 61.0 | 4.33 |
| 6. When I speak English, I want to be identified clearly as Chinese. | 30.2 | 23.0 | 21.4 | 13.8 | 11.5 | 2.53 |
| 7. The non-native speakers can also speak Standard English. | 2.6 | 4.0 | 13.6 | 31.1 | 48.5 | 4.19 |
| 8. Most Chinese need English to communicate mainly with native English speakers. | 12.0 | 19.8 | 22.1 | 27.0 | 19.0 | 3.21 |
| 9. Most Chinese need English to communicate mainly with other non-native English speakers. | 8.3 | 13.0 | 24.5 | 33.1 | 20.8 | 3.45 |
| 10. There are many standard Englishes. | 7.3 | 12.1 | 25.3 | 32.9 | 21.8 | 3.50 |

Notes:

^a1: strongly disagree; 2: disagree; 3: no opinion or don't know; 4: agree; 5: strongly agree.

^bThe percentage has been rounded off to one decimal place.

^cThe mean has been rounded off to two decimal places.

language (or the different dialects/varieties of a language) and its related group, rather than towards the voices (Edwards 1994; Lai 2007).

While collecting data with the MGT, the respondents were instructed to give their ratings of 'the two speakers' on a response sheet with regard to the 16 traits as shown in Table 2 in the next section. The rating was based on a 5-point Likert scale.⁸ Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted in order to explore the potential significant differences in the perceptions towards the two accents. Prior to implementation, for quality assurance, the 'near-native-like' accent was played to seven English teaching professors (four NETs and three ETCs), of whom five were convinced that the accent sounded sufficiently native-like, with the other two commenting on the high proficiency of the accent.

It should be noted that the taped speaker simply read out a paragraph in two different accents. The participants were informed that they would listen to two examples of spoken text: Speaker 1 and Speaker 2. They were not informed who the speaker was and whether there was more than one speaker (cf. Butler 2007). In no way was the speaker intending to deceive the listeners that he was a native-speaker – with all the social, cultural and linguistic assumptions that are usually associated with native-speakers of a language (Cook 1999).

Table 2. Means and differences of 'China English' and Standard English on the 16 traits

| Traits | Means | | |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | | 'China English'/Standard English | Difference |
| Positive | 1. Friendly | 2.94/ 3.31 | -0.37** |
| | 2. Intelligent | 2.83/ 3.17 | -0.34** |
| | 3. Educated | 2.88/ 3.18 | -0.30** |
| | 5. Competent | 2.80/ 3.39 | -0.59** |
| | 6. Industrious | 2.93/ 3.08 | -0.15* |
| | 7. Sincere | 2.99/ 3.15 | -0.16* |
| | 9. Approachable | 2.78/ 3.16 | -0.38** |
| | 10. Considerate | 2.85/ 3.00 | -0.15* |
| | 11. Trustworthy | 2.92/ 3.11 | -0.19* |
| | 12. Wealthy | 2.77/ 3.06 | -0.29** |
| | 13. Trendy | 2.72/ 3.20 | -0.48** |
| | 15. Powerful | 2.75/ 3.34 | -0.59** |
| | 16. Confident | 2.79/ 3.64 | -0.85** |
| | | 14. Patient | 3.13 /3.04 |
| Negative | 4. Arrogant | 3.01 /2.61 | 0.40** |
| | 8. Aggressive | 3.04 /2.66 | 0.38** |

Note: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

The purpose of using the same voice was to attempt to standardize the voice quality and have the listeners focus simply on the phonological features of the spoken text. Research shows that L2 users of English can reproduce native-speaker-like syntax (Birdsong 1992), and phonology (Bongaerts, Planken, and Schils 1995).

In addition to the quantitative data collected, 103 informants were interviewed either individually (18 of 21 teachers) or in small groups (82 student participants and three teachers; group size ranged from 3 to 9). To ensure that all interviewees would voice their opinions, they were interviewed in Putonghua. The interview data were transcribed verbatim into Chinese before being translated into English. Both the transcriptions and translations were proofread and checked independently by the first author and a separate rater (a Chinese PhD majoring in 'English Education'). In the process, stylistic inconsistencies were minimized and discrepancies thoroughly discussed and resolved by agreement. This proved to be an extremely time-consuming process, but in the interest of assuring high-quality data, the resultant gain in reliability and validity made it a worthwhile procedure to follow (cf. Kvale 1996). The qualitative data was then read several times to discover supportive evidence for the quantitative data.

RESULTS

Questionnaire survey

As shown in Table 1, 75.4 per cent⁹ of the questionnaire respondents perceived that British English and American English are the major varieties of English used in the textbooks they had used. Although 79 per cent (777) of the participants thought that college English should be taught by both ETCs and NETs (see Item 4), only 36 per cent

(357) believed that college English should be taught completely by NETs (Item 3) and an even smaller percentage – 18.9 per cent (186) considered that English should be taught exclusively by Chinese teachers of English (Item 2). Consequently, when speaking English, the majority of participants, 82 per cent, preferred trying to sound like a NS (Item 5) whereas 25.3 per cent wanted to be clearly identified as Chinese (Item 6). Conforming to their perceptions that they may be able to achieve native like proficiency, most of the participants (79.6 per cent) believed that the non-native English speakers (NNSs) can also speak 'Standard English' (biāozhǔn yīngyǔ) (Item 7). Less than half of the respondents, 46 per cent (453) agreed that Chinese people need English to communicate mainly with native English speakers (Item 8), while a slightly greater number of them, 53 per cent (531) thought that English is more useful for communicating with speakers of other languages (Item 9). More than half of the participants (54.7 per cent, 539) agreed that there are many standard Englishes (Item 10). The above suggests three things to us: (1) Chinese teachers and learners of college English alike realize that although English is the global language there are more models to imitate than only British or American standards; (2) Participants have high expectations of the level of English speaking they wish to achieve; and (3) the participants believe that college English should be taught by both ETCs and NETs in China.

Matched-guise experiment

On the whole, the findings of the MGT as displayed in Table 2 are found to be consistent with the findings of the questionnaire survey reported above. It can be seen from Table 2 that MANOVA revealed significant differences between 'China English' and Standard English in the means on 15 out of the 16 traits. Standard English was given significantly higher ratings than 'China English' on nearly all the positive traits except one (i.e. patient) which showed no significant difference. It may seem surprising that the speakers of 'China English' were reported to be more "arrogant" and "aggressive" than those of Standard English in our study, seeing as it was Chinese speakers doing the rating. Nevertheless, this might be somewhat expected as the MGT was intended to identify participants' attitudes towards different languages (or different varieties/dialects of a language). Since the respondents had formed more positive attitudes towards Standard English, they might consequently rate these two negative traits higher for 'China English' than for Standard English. Such results indicate that the participants are far more in favor of Standard English than of 'China English'. However, in spite of their preference for Standard English, it should also be noted that the MGT participants are far from being negative towards 'China English', since their means on all of the 14 positive traits of 'China English' are above 2 and close to the median 3, and the mean on the trait 'patient' (3.13) is even higher than the median and that of Standard English (3.04; see Table 2 for details). These results suggest that the participants' attitudes towards 'China English' are not so negative. This is compatible with the questionnaire survey results that college English should be taught by both NETs and ETCs.

Interview

Similar to the results obtained by the quantitative instruments in this study, about three-fifths (49) of the students (N = 82) and all of the teachers (N = 21) in the interviews were in favor of a combination of both ETCs and NETs for the teaching of college English.

The reasons behind their choice are that students can benefit from the teaching strengths of both types of teachers. Based on comments made during the interviews, the advantages possessed by each type of teacher include the following (arranged in decreasing order of statistical significance, with the percentages in brackets at the end of each statement indicating the interviewees' supporting rates):

Strengths of ETCs

- They are more familiar with the Chinese way of teaching and learning, especially the Chinese testing system (100 per cent);
- they have the experience of learning English as a foreign language (92 per cent);
- they are good at teaching reading, writing, and translation skills (78 per cent);
- they know Chinese students well (e.g. their learning difficulties) (73 per cent);
- they can explain some complicated language points and grammatical rules in Chinese to students if necessary (59 per cent); and
- they can function as a bridge between Chinese students and NETs if the cooperation between them (i.e. Chinese students and NETs) encounters difficulties or even breaks down (54 per cent).

Strengths of NETs

- They know their native language and culture well (100 per cent);
- they can teach good oral English (100 per cent);
- they can help create a conducive communicative environment and atmosphere for students (85 per cent);
- they are generally more active in class than Chinese teachers (81 per cent);
- they are often more open-minded than their Chinese peers (65 per cent); and
- they are usually adept at arousing students' interest in English learning (52 per cent).

During the interviews many of those interviewed pointed out that students' English level is an important factor in determining their preference of teachers. NETs might be a better choice if students already have a solid foundation of English, and are more confident in terms of their spoken-English; whereas ETCs or a combination of ETCs and NETs would be preferred by beginners. Those interviewed also argued that NETs should know how to teach English as a foreign language and have a strong sense of responsibility towards Chinese students (a common trait that most ETCs already possess). Two of the teacher interviewees voiced a concern regarding the 'threat' NETs may be to their job security, and hence this was a reason for preferring a dual system of teaching – so that ETCs would not lose their jobs completely (as shown in Example 3 below). Below are some typical comments on the preference of the combination of the two types of teachers:

Interviewer: Should college English be taught by ETCs or by NETs or by both of these two types of teachers in China? Why?

SME4:¹⁰ Both of them. Local teachers are good at teaching reading, writing, and translation, and they know more about Chinese approaches to English teaching and learning and the characteristics of Chinese students, for example, they know what my learning difficulties are. NETs have an edge over Chinese

teachers in teaching speaking, listening, and the cultures of English-speaking countries. They can foster a better environment for students to improve communicative competence in English. (Example 1)

SFL2: I prefer the teaching by both of them, but mainly by local teachers since they have the experience of learning English as a foreign language and know how to teach and help us effectively in English learning. They also know the Chinese testing system better, you know, we must pass CET-4 [College English Test Band-4] in order to find a good job. NETs might help us with our oral English and keep our interest in English learning, but they are not so helpful with the test (Example 2)

TMMA: A combination is better. At the beginning of college English learning, specifically, in the first three semesters, students should be taught by Chinese teachers. Then if their English is good enough and have no big problems in following NETs' teaching, they should be taught by NETs. If students are taught by NETs but cannot understand their teaching, they might lose interest and confidence in English study. NETs would be more capable of teaching oral English, but to develop students' other language skills like reading, writing, translation, and the mastery of grammar and vocabulary, local teachers might be more experienced. Also, I wonder if college English were taught completely by NETs, what would we Chinese teachers do? (Example 3)

About 30 per cent (24) of the student interviewees (N = 82) preferred to be taught exclusively by NETs. The reasons underlying their preference are somewhat the same as the perceived strengths of NETs mentioned above. However, the overriding concern was their disappointment at their ETCs' standard of spoken English, especially in terms of pronunciation. Once again, NETs were preferred if they had professional experience of teaching English as a foreign language, and also if they knew some Chinese. We asked some of the student interviewees who wished to be taught completely by NETs whether it would be a problem for them to prepare for the tests like CET-4/6 without ETCs' guidance. Their response was that they did not think that they would have any problems with such tests. This, however, may indicate that these students were already comparatively good at English. Some typical responses from students who supported the above opinions are as follows:

SFA4: I prefer NETs, they can speak very good English since it is their native language, and they can arouse our interest in English learning. We are a little disappointed at most of the ETCs' pronunciation. (Example 4)

SFE2: NETs, since they can provide us with a better English learning environment. It will be better if they can speak Chinese. For example, we can employ English teachers from Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, they can speak both English and Chinese well. (Example 5)

SFL2K: I will choose NETs. If so, we can learn Standard English to communicate more effectively with others. Besides, I don't think I have any difficulties in preparing for and passing CET-4/6; or else, I might need help from ETCs. (Example 6)

Approximately 10 per cent (8) of the students (N = 82) preferred to be taught completely by local English teachers. Apart from their wish to benefit from the advantages of Chinese teachers as stated earlier, their main concerns were that they might not be able to follow the NETs' teaching due to their poor level of English proficiency and they already felt that

they had difficulties preparing for CET-4/6, they felt more comfortable being taught by a ETC who knew the examination format:

SFE1: Local teachers, since we need to pass CET-4 and CET-6, and local teachers are better at helping us in this aspect. (Example 7)

CONCLUSION

In terms of the methodological design, the scope of investigation, the targeted participants, and the quality of results obtained, the present study offers a more comprehensive survey of Chinese learners' and teachers' views than Jin (2005). One of the limitations of Jin's (2005: 45) research is that "the small number of participants (makes it hard to) obtain more accurate and richer empirical findings".

There are, of course, many reasons for or against using ETCs or NETs to teach college English in China. Kirkpatrick (2002: 222) argues that the "trained, multilingual local non-native speakers with high proficiency in English" are the ideal English language teachers in the context of ASEAN because they provide an appropriate and attainable model of the language; provide a motivating example for their students; have empathy for their students; are linguistically sophisticated; understand local cultural and educational traditions; and represent an excellent educational investment (see also Hayes 2009).

In addition, Kirkpatrick (2002: 221) also points out the disadvantages of the monolingual native-speaking English teachers: "they do not speak the language of the students or the staff; are not be able to contribute to the life of the school in any way; are unfamiliar with the cultural and educational role expected of the teacher and the student in the local context; and after a relatively short period of time, many will leave" (see also Hayes 2009). Therefore, Kirkpatrick sees them as a poor investment for the schools.

However, what the present study reveals is somewhat different from Kirkpatrick (2002), specifically, we support Jin's (2005) conclusion that a combination of both ETCs and NETs (even if they are monolingual) is preferable for teaching college English in the context of world Englishes. Cook (1999) maintains that "SLA research has often fallen into the *comparative fallacy* . . . of relating the L2 learner to the native speaker". We need to distance ourselves from such a comparative approach when discussing the most appropriate type of English teachers for Chinese learners and come to an understanding that we are looking at differences, not deficiencies between native-speakers and non-native speakers of English. The two types of teachers complement each other, and one cannot replace the other. There are many ways in which the NS and NNS English teacher can be used in the classroom, as demonstrated by some of the comments made by the participants in this research. This echoes the comments from several other authors on the benefits Chinese students of English have when taught by both NSs and NNSs of English (e.g. Cortazzi and Jin 1996; Boyle 2000).

A second point to note is that this study reinforces Jin's (2005) suggestion that it is fairly important to provide more Chinese teachers with better opportunities to be trained and educated (preferably in English-speaking countries), so that they can supply their students with teaching of higher quality. It is believed that ETCs in China often lack enough English language competence and teacher education (Yu 2001; Nunan 2003; Hu 2005). This is especially the case in an era when the modern syllabus development trends in the English language curriculum in China advocate a communicative language teaching approach

and when accommodating and cultivating a positive attitude towards world Englishes is believed to be necessary in light of the conclusions of the present study as well as other research findings (e.g. Shibata 2010). The ETCs' not-so-competent communicative capability is one of the reasons for them to avoid the communicative approach and focus on examination related skill development with a strong tendency to develop reading skills (e.g. Wang 1999; Pavlenko 2003). If ETCs are given opportunities to improve their English proficiency and teacher education skills, or at least to enhance their awareness of coping strategies that would aid their professionalism (cf. Barratt 2010), then one of the biggest tasks in convincing students that they can benefit as much from having NNS English teachers as having NS English teachers may be achieved. NNS teachers can then be seen not as "failed native speakers" but as "successful multicompetent speakers" (Cook 1999), and they can get the credit that they deserve as EFL/ESL teachers in the era of world Englishes (cf. Liu 1999; Thomas 1999).

The third main point this research suggests is that more NETs should be employed to teach non-English majors rather than mainly English majors in China's universities. Only in this way will college students learn English in a more conducive environment. By suggesting that it is necessary to recruit more NETs to teach college English, we mean that there are very few universities in China employing NETs to teach non-English majors nowadays. Nevertheless, many non-English majors, especially those with comparatively proficient English, do want to have some English courses taught by NETs. In order to avoid the problem of poor professional quality of NETs as discussed in the second section, the Ministry of Education in China can promote the well practiced procedures concerning NET recruitment and management in Hong Kong. From late 1980s and especially from 1997, the NET scheme was introduced to all secondary schools in Hong Kong. After a shaky start (Boyle 1997), the NET scheme in Hong Kong is now considered a success. The scheme is constantly monitored by Melbourne University and schools are required to provide evidence of how the NETs are used and the impact on students' learning (EB 2010a). Under this scheme, each middle school in the territory was provided with at least one NET, and schools adopting Chinese as the medium of instruction were encouraged to employ two (Miller and Li 2008). From 2000, this scheme was extended to primary schools in Hong Kong. By 2008, there were over 800 NETs working in Hong Kong schools (Miller and Li 2008). They are recruited from North America, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and other English-speaking countries by the Education Bureau (EB) according to the following order of priority (EB 2010b):

- A bachelor's degree in English Language or English Literature or English Studies or Linguistics or a Modern Language OR a Bachelor in Education degree (major in English or a Modern Language, but not primary education specialist) obtained after 3 years' full-time study from a Hong Kong university or equivalent;
- a Post-graduate Diploma in Education majoring in English or equivalent;
- a Teaching of English as Foreign or Second Language (TEFL/TESL) qualification at least at the diploma level; and
- at least 1 year's post-graduate experience of teaching English (preferably as a second or foreign language) at secondary level or above.

In addition to the strict requirements about NETs recruitment, the appointed NETs in Hong Kong are expected to enhance the English language proficiency of individual students, to demonstrate contemporary approaches to the teaching and learning of English

in their work with students, and to share professional ideas with their fellow English teachers (Miller and Li 2008: 85).

Following the literature and the findings of this study we would like to map out a few guidelines which if adhered to may help to develop the teaching and learning of English in China. On the one hand, the recruitment of NETs in China may take the following three guidelines into account. First, a minimum standard of professional qualification should be set, for example, a bachelor's degree plus a qualification of teaching English as a second or foreign language. Second, a minimum standard of work experience should be set, for instance, one year as an English teacher. Third, the host college should arrange a basic course in Putonghua for the newly arrived teachers, and a course to sensitize the NETs to the Chinese educational system. On the other hand, guidelines for staff development of ETCs may involve at least the following three. First of all, all NNS English teachers should have access to some form of teacher development (preferably attending programs in English-speaking countries). This should be an on-going process and help the teachers with areas they may have difficulty in, for example, pronunciation, cultural issues, idioms and expressions. Second, if a NS teacher is working in the college, efforts should be made to have sharing sessions between the NS and NNS teachers so that they benefit from each others' experiences. Last but not least, if resources allow it, then team-teaching of classes with NS and NNS teachers should be encouraged.

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NOTES

1. The terms 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' have been greatly problematized in the literature in recent years (e.g. ; Phillipson 1992b; Canagarajah 1999; Paikeday 2003). Despite this we have chosen to retain these terms in this paper as earlier research has been based on the dichotomy (e.g. Canagarajah 1999; Hayes 2009). Nevertheless, we realize such terms are ideologically loaded, and are often the source of skewed discussions and debate.
2. Again it may be pointed out that the term 'native-speaking English teacher' might be misleading, as there are significant numbers of overseas English teachers in China from a range of European societies, where English is not regarded as a 'native' language, for instance, Germany, Scandinavia, and Switzerland.
3. The workload for NETs and ETCs are about the same (16–20 teaching hours per week); but the salary for the former ranges from RMB 2,917 to 5,029 (US\$ 365 to 629) per month, which is much higher than that for the latter, from RMB 813 to 2,342 (US\$ 101 to 284) (Joen and Lee 2006).
4. Other stakeholders pertaining to this question may include the education policy makers and implementers (in other words, the politicians and educational bureaucrats) at different governmental levels, experts of EFL teaching, parents of the language learners, textbook publishers, examination providers, and even some leaders of the enterprises which might need their employees to be proficient in English.
5. It should be noted that only small number of participants (no specific number) were involved in Jin (2005), and not enough demographic information was reported except that they were EFL learners in a university in China.
6. The methodology used in this paper is similar to two other papers, He and Li (2009) and He and Zhang (2010). These three papers form a series of research papers.
7. Although no official numbers of the total non-English majors and English majors in China can be obtained, we can take one comprehensive key university in central China – Wuhan University – as an example. It is reported on this university's official webpage that there were 32,010 undergraduates in November 2009, among them, only 483 were English majors (WU 2009). There are over 1,000 universities in China.
8. 1 = the voice does *not* match with the given trait *at all*; 2 = the voice does *not* match with the given trait *so well*; 3 = *I do not know* whether the voice matches with the given trait or not; 4 = the voice matches with the given trait *well*; and 5 = the voice matches with the given trait *very well*.

9. For the ease of interpretation, the choices “agree” and “strongly agree” are counted together as “agree”, so 75.4 per cent is the sum of the percentages of choices “agree” (29.2 per cent) and “strongly agree” (46.2 per cent) for Item 1. The other percentages in this paragraph are obtained in the same way.
10. The codes of the interviewees contain the following information in turn: Identity (S – student, T – teacher); Gender (F – female, M – male); Discipline for students (B – business, L – law, E – engineering, A – arts) or academic qualification for teachers (B – bachelor, M – master, D – doctor); Years for students (1 – Year 1; 2 – Year 2; 3 – Year 3; 4 – Year 4) or academic rank for teachers (T – teaching assistant, L – lecturer, A – associate professor, P – professor); and University: if the interviewee comes from the key university, the letter “K” will be added to the end of the code, for example, “SME4” refers to a male Year 4 engineering major from a second-tier university, and “TMMA” refers to a male associate professor whose highest academic qualification was the master’s degree when interviewed.

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