

Identity Problems of Non-native Teachers of English in Teacher Education

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Some non-native English teachers intentionally carry a strong foreign accent in their speech to assert their national identity. The purpose of this article is to determine if non-native speaking foreign/second language teachers have identity problems and have the right to keep a foreign accented pronunciation and intonation when teaching.

Introduction

The issue of ethnic identity in the field of foreign language teaching and learning is a nagging problem in terms of using certain traits of L1 as an international language right. That's why the link between language use and ethnicity has been subject to considerable dispute. Some researchers claim that L1 is not an essential component of identity. As opposed to this view, some other scholars state that L1 is an indispensable determinant of identity in teaching foreign languages by nonnative speaking teachers. In this article, the dispute on the L1 identity of the non-native teachers of English will be taken up in relation to foreign or second language teaching.

Teacher Training and Identity Issue

In the field of teacher education, 'identity problem' has always occupied a serious position as a part of the foreign language teaching profession. Foreign language teaching as a job poses the need for identity adjustments in different environments of the teaching profession for the non-native foreign language teachers. The foreign language teaching profession in some respects involves the acquisition of a second identity alongside with other identity types. All foreign language teachers besides their native, national, ethnic, and cultural identities develop another identity. This fact is a specific case of foreign language identity that may force the teachers to develop an identity crisis.

Language and Ethnicity Trends

In the issue of L1 and identity relation, the point of departure is one's ethnic language. But the topic of language and ethnicity is a controversial one. Two fundamental trends in scholarship exist. The first trend denies any direct or necessary link between language and ethnic identity. It also emphasizes that the relation between language and ethnic identity is accidental. Apple and Muysken (1987: 15) state that race, political class affiliation and social class are more important factors in the determination of ethnicity. The second trend stresses that language is a true marker and vehicle of ethnic identity as an essential criterion along with cultural heritage, history, assumptions, values, religion institutions, and beliefs.

Types of Language Identity

Language or a sublanguage is an instrument of ethnic identity. Much socio-psychological research has indicated that language and identity are complementary to each other, and therefore are reciprocally related. They cannot be separated from each other.

Personal Identity

Within the social psychology of identity, a person's self-image is seen to have two components: namely, personal identity and

social identity (Liebkind 1999:141). One's native dialect or language permeates one's personal identity; therefore, it is essential in every individual's advancement, further shaped by the national education process. It is in the development of a personal sense of language that we shape our personality and learn to explore ourselves. So nothing must be done to diminish our regard for this local and most intimately known language or our self-respect goes with it (Quirk and Stein 1990:29).

Ethnic Identity

This is a sense of belonging to a group. The relationship between language and identity is bi-directional. By living in a group and sharing the collective consciousness of common ancestry features of the same dialect, each person in the social group develops an ethnic speech style. For example, the children of Israel maintained their identity during the period of slavery in Egypt by not giving up their language (Spolsky 1999:181). The way we use language to symbolize our view of ourselves and ascribe ethnicity to ourselves as distinct from others is known as ethnic speech style (Eastman 1990:154). The ethnic speech style serves the speakers of that group in home, peer groups situations, and interethnic relations. This way, the ethnic speech style becomes an ethnic speech marker. This ethnic identity sense, apart from its sub-language basis, is further manifested by physical appearance in forms of dress, folklore, religious rites, manifestations of customs and traditions.

The sense of ethnic identity is intrinsically connected with the use of a dialect of a language. Therefore, as a serious issue, it is materialized into some theories, namely, the ethnolinguistic identity theory, accommodation theory, and Sapir-Whorf theory. Ethno linguistic identity theory was developed by Giles and Johnson in 1987. It is the ethnolinguistic theory which helps us comprehend that language is one of the most conditioning powers over our foreign language teaching and learning habits. Apparently, in most cases it may be the major factor that moulds our ethnic, social, and cultural ego. This theory suggests that when ethnic group identity becomes important for individuals they may attempt to distinguish themselves favorably in dimensions such as language (Liebkind 1999: 143). Similarly, Italian immigrants in the USA still use their mother tongue while speaking English as an indicator, an index of their ethnic identity. This way members of the ethnolinguistic groups work on their identities to enhance their self-esteem. They highly value their own language in communicating with members from other groups. They tend to stress their distinctiveness from others, such as accentuating their ethnic speech styles even when speaking and teaching a foreign language. Thus, many of the non-native English teachers insistently keep an audible 'foreign accent' in their speech. Do they have this right in the teaching profession? Think of Arab, Spanish, or French-originated English language teachers? Can they use their native language pronunciation and intonation patterns while teaching English in teacher training?

National Identity

The sense of national identity is strongly attached to the use of a standard national language, which functions as a common ground for national unity. Standard language is the most widely encountered symbol of nationhood functioning as the nation's identity. This is well-evidenced in Europe with the use of the Finnish identity within Czarist Russia, the use of Hungarian to establish Hungarian identity within the Austrian Empire (Quirk and Stein 1990:33). While language can play a vital role in creating a national identity, it can also operate (as in Belgium to militate against national unity) in favor of a sub-identity within the nation state. This case is seen in Canada where French speaking people want to split from Canada and become a new independent state under a new name like Quebec. Countries which house multi-national states may also suffer from the outcomes of the ethnolinguistic identity. Thus, it is almost impossible not to use L1 as a political as well as a social index.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity does not depend only on language. Cultural identity is a collective identity case consisting of a couple identity types, as members of a group, a nation or a community acquiring its cultural specific vocabulary, race, context sensitive topics, shared belief(s), attitudes, superstitions, customs, structural forms of related language, alongside with idioms and proverbs, as well as the features of paralinguage and mannerisms of the entire community. There may be bicultural identity cases, as seen in Canada, or trilingual identity cases, as seen in Switzerland, or multi-cultural identity cases, as seen in the USA.

Bilingual Identity

Second language learning in many respects involves the acquisition of a second language identity. The essence of bilingual identity is embedded in the Czech proverb, which states “Learn a new language and get a new soul”. Similarly, a Turkish proverb states “Bir dil bir insan, iki dil iki insan” (If you speak one language you are one person, but if you speak two languages, you are two people).

Professional Identity

Professional identity refers to teachers’ subject matter knowledge of their field. Professional identity formation and development are individual maturation processes which begin during one’s vocational training for the profession. They develop by the entry into the profession, and continue in a lifelong process. Thus, molding a professional identity is a developmental process of socialization, vocational behavior, and maturation.

As Lado states, to perform professional duties one must be professionally qualified (1960: 8). Therefore, professional identity calls for a specific career role which requires the acquisition of specific foreign language knowledge and teaching skills alongside critical thinking, interpersonal skills, conflict solving skills, as well as an ability to use computer technology and alternative assessment techniques. Then, a foreign or second language teacher’s self-conceptualization associated with the teaching career role can be viewed as their professional teaching identity. It is this professional identity that requires professional socialization and advancement, person-environment fit, and a developmental process of vocational maturation.

Collective Identity

Collective identity is an identity bundle in which more than one identity coincides peacefully. The first identity type that collective identity includes is the mother tongue identity or ethnic identity. Thus, by definition, collective identity is a combination of certain identities. People generally have a so-called integrative attitude toward their tongue - that is, they identify with the speakers of that language and want to maintain that identification (Liebkind 1999:144).

Do the Bilingual Language Teachers Have One or Two, or Multiple Personalities?

One of the most interesting questions about the bilingual attitudes of language teachers is whether the bilingual teachers have one or two personalities. Some bilingual teachers may feel that they change their personalities when they change from their mother tongue to the target language: this is a socio-psychological situation. What is seen as a change in personality is simply a shift in attitudes and behaviors corresponding to a shift in the situation or context (Roberts and Penfield 1964: 306). Then, at this point, a shift from one language to another is not actually a shift in personality but just a code shift in social roles and emotional attitudes. The topic of the speech act, interlocutors, and purpose of conversation trigger the use of different impressions, attitudes, and speech behaviors. The teachers make these code shifts in a conversation setting. In addition, environment and culture in this setting as a whole cause the bilingual teachers to shift from the mother tongue to the target language during the communication processes.

Neurolinguistic investigations have tried to answer the question of how bilingual teachers manage to keep the two languages separate. According to Adler (1977: 38), a bilingual is neither here, nor there; he is a marginal man. He goes back and forth from one language to another. According to Roberts and Penfield (1964:306), bilinguals have a switch that allows the speaker to turn from one language to the other.

Identity Crisis of Non-native English Teachers

Foreign or second language learning also involves acquiring a second identity. Learning a second language involves taking on a new identity; some contexts of foreign language learning involve an identity crisis (Brown 1994: 155). One of these contexts can be teacher’s ethnic identity, or national identity, or cultural identity, or bicultural identity.

When the articulation habits involved in mother tongue are inevitably transferred into the pronunciation and intonation of the

target language, the inescapable result is the development of a 'foreign accent'. The term 'foreign accent', in fact, points to the inefficiencies of a speaker in the articulation, pronunciation, and intonation of a foreign language in a native-like habit. There are many non-native teachers of English who are unaware of the fact that they carry over obvious traits of a foreign accent in speech just because they speak it with a non-native flow. The foreign accent determined by their mother tongues is quite audible in the articulation and intonation of the Arabic, Indian, Pakistani, Italian, Spanish, French, and German- originated teachers. Their accent serves as a distinctive marker of social identity (Avery and Ehrlich 1987: 9).

Some foreign language teachers intentionally carry a strong foreign accent in their speech and teaching manners to assert their national identity. For this reason, their English is not accurate, not fluent, and not intelligible, sounding unnatural to the students. How can such a teacher teach efficiently if he himself cannot handle standard English appropriately and sufficiently? In addition, some other non-native English teachers wish to maintain a slight mother tongue accent as an assertion of their personal or ethnic identity. This feeling should, surely, be respected (Ur 1996:52). It must be noted that developing a native-like accent or at least near-native like accent does not necessarily come to mean losing a part or all of foreign language teacher's identity. This is true because a foreign language teacher's attitude towards the second language is a case of instrumental motivation. A motivation like this does not lead them to lose their national or ethnic or cultural identities. Neither does the integrative motivation do any harm to the foreign language teaching profession in this respect.

It is a fact that identity crisis is detrimental to second language learning and its motivations. To minimize this crisis and unblock the way of assimilation to the target culture, a combination of instrumental-integrative motivation can be proposed. As Brown states, the findings also suggest that the two types of motivation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Second language learning is rarely motivated by attitudes that are exclusively instrumental or exclusively integrative. Most foreign language teaching situations involve a mixture of each type of motivation (Brown 1994: 154).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that non-native speaking teachers should not retain a foreign accent in their foreign language teaching profession as a foreign language right. A high degree of 'foreign accent' happens to be harmful to the students' learning because the teachers may not be understood by their students. As Rivers (1981: 33) has indicated, there are great problems for students if the teachers themselves do not have near-native like fluency with the language. In teacher training institutions, having a strong foreign accent works contrary to the values of the profession because it absolutely diminishes the efficacy of professional identity. As Baxter adds (1991: 54), such non-native English teachers have great frustration or inferiority complexes and may therefore become severely demoralized. Such a case may come to an embarrassing stage when a teacher's pronunciation and intonation are corrected by attentive

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