

Speaking the Same Language: Perceptions of NESTs and Non-NESTs within an Italian University

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Abstract

In light of multilingualism becoming ever more the aim of many L2 learners, one may question whether the learners' perceptions of both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (Non-NESTs) have undergone changes in recent years in accordance with the increasing growth in promotion of multilingualism. In previous studies, see [8], NESTs were perceived to be superior regardless of their qualifications. The study examines whether students have a preference for NESTs or Non-NESTs, and also if there are specific language skills where they would prefer to have a Non-NEST rather than a NEST thus refuting the NEST/Non-NEST dichotomy. The paper also seeks to examine how the students' own learning experiences with both NESTs and Non-NESTs may have influenced their perceptions and preferences. All the participants in the survey were taught by Non-NESTs during primary and secondary education and by NESTs during university English language courses. 50 participants (undergraduate engineering students) completed the survey on a voluntary basis. Participants were asked to state their level of agreement with a series of statements regarding their preference to be taught by NESTs or Non-NESTs depending on the specific skill being taught. They were also requested to express their preference according to education level, being asked to state their preference for primary, secondary and tertiary education. Data from the survey was collected and analysed through the use of quantitative-qualitative research methodologies. The results demonstrated that students clearly viewed NESTs more favourably than Non-NESTs on the whole, stating that NESTs can provide their students with a depth of knowledge of the language that Non-NESTs cannot rival. Contrary to other studies [2] Non-NESTs were not found to be viewed more positively for the learning of grammar. For communicative competence and vocabulary the general preference was for NESTs confirming the findings of [2]. All participants stated that learning with NESTs was more likely to improve their motivation and attitude towards learning the language than learning with Non-NESTs.

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