

Perceptions of EFL Instructors on Negotiation of Meaning Strategies from an ELF Perspective

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been a major shift in perspectives of English Language Teaching (ELT), and a pivotal role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has gained a lot of attention. As the needs of English language learners have changed in a globalized world, there is a demand for raising awareness on ELF-oriented teaching in ELT curricula. As one of the widely used strategies among ELF speakers, negotiation of meaning (NoM) strategies is a central concern in this study. In this sense, this study aims to explore English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors' awareness of NoM strategies and also aims to shed light on EFL instructors' teaching practices and perceptions of prescribed coursebooks. This descriptive case study, based on the preliminary findings of a Master's thesis, was conducted by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data through an open-ended questionnaire administered to 45 EFL instructors at a foundation university in Turkey. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings of the study revealed that the majority of the instructors had concerns about the application of NoM strategies despite being aware of them. The participants also disagreed with how NoM strategies were integrated into the prescribed coursebooks. Moreover, many participants regarded Turkish students' resorting to their mother tongue as negative behaviour when negotiating the meaning. These findings will be presented and discussed further in this paper against the backdrop of a global perspective.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, English as a lingua franca, Negotiation of Meaning Strategies

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Introduction

With the widespread use of English around the world, ELF is an emerging field which attracts so much attention from both the field of Applied Linguistics and ELT. British Council (2013) reveals that the total number of English speakers around the world is now over 1.75 billion, and they forecast that the number will have reached two billion by 2020. Among the speakers, roughly one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Crystal, 2003), which shows that non-native English speakers outnumbered the native speakers (Kachru, 2005). Therefore, it can be stated that English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011).

The dynamism of acknowledged model proposed by Kachru (1985) which categorizes English speakers into three circles as *Inner*, *Outer* and *Expanding* was rearranged based on speakers' language proficiencies such as high and low proficiency (Graddol, 2006). In this new model, the *Inner Circle* is conceived as proficient English speakers who achieve "functional nativeness" as opposed to "genetic nativeness" (Kachru, 2005, p. 12). According to Graddol (2006), English is considered as not only belong to *Inner Circle* countries where English functions mostly as a first language, but also to any individual who is a proficient user in this language regardless of his/her bilingual status.

The aforementioned reality of globalization has helped the English language become enriched through the proficient ELF speakers around the world. The proficient ELF speakers are highly skilled communicators who can use their multilingual resources to achieve successful communication. They project their own cultural identity by building their idioms and using chunks creatively (Jenkins, Cogo & Dewey, 2011). However, even though scholars in Applied Linguistics are satisfied with spreading of English language, they tend to ignore the transformation in language forms. This transformation, namely, flexibility and variability in English should be seen as an inevitable part of a language evolution which dates back to pre-history. Thus, a better understanding of this phenomenon is crucial to be able to explore its effects on the nature of the language (Cogo & Dewey, 2006).

The NoM strategies are deemed as appropriate for the base of this study as it is one of the widely used interactional strategies among ELF users to achieve successful communication. So far, NoM strategies has mostly been examined in the field of Second Language Acquisition. However, the studies which examine NoM strategies from a global perspective are rather small in number, therefore, much research is called for in this domain. There is also a need for raising awareness of such ELF strategies in the ELT curricula. In this regard, this study was conducted to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Are the EFL instructors aware of the negotiation of meaning strategies?
2. If so, what are the practices and perceptions of the EFL instructors on the negotiation of meaning strategies?
3. What are the perceptions of the EFL instructors on the negotiation of meaning strategies in the prescribed ELT coursebooks?

Methodology

Research Design

In this research, a descriptive case study was utilized by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data of this study were analyzed through descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were examined via thematic analysis. For the analysis of the qualitative data, Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework is considered as suitable one and the steps indicated below were followed.

Step 1: Familiarising yourself with your data

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step 3: Searching for themes

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Step 6: Producing the report (pp. 16-23)

Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell's (1995) model of "Suggested components of Strategic Competence" serves as a theoretical framework for the study since the model is pedagogically based.



Figure 1. "Suggested Components of Strategic Competence" adapted from Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995, p.28)

Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted with 45 EFL instructors from a school of foreign languages in one of the foundation universities in Turkey in the fall term of 2018-2019 Academic Year. For the study, the convenience sampling method was adopted due to the availability and willingness of the participants (Creswell, 2012). There are 31 female and 13 male participants between the ages of 23 and 69. While 32 Turkish instructors teach more grammar-based coursebooks, five foreign EFL instructors from England, the USA, Ireland, and two Turkish EFL instructors teach listening and speaking based coursebooks. On the other hand, three foreign EFL instructors from Holland, Slovakia, Algeria and three Turkish EFL instructors teach reading and writing based coursebooks from the same publishing house. Before commencing this study, all necessary permissions from the authorities were secured. This study was voluntary based, therefore a consent form was also given to the participants, and all

other ethical issues were considered such as confidentiality of identity and participation, and choice of quitting the study any time desired.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the study, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to 45 EFL instructors. The open-ended questionnaire consists of three major parts. The first part aims to obtain the necessary background information of the participants whereas the second part aims to build foresight on the instructors' awareness and knowledge on the NoM strategies. Finally, the aim of the third part is to shed light on the instructors' teaching practices and perceptions on NoM strategies in the prescribed coursebooks. The open-ended questionnaire was favoured as it allows participants to express themselves in a more flexible way than a structured one (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Before the questionnaire was administered, the piloting was conducted with five instructors, and necessary amendments were made accordingly. On the first draft of the questionnaire, minor mistakes such as spelling and word order were detected. Moreover, some vagueness in understanding the strategies was mentioned by several instructors. Therefore, the table of Mariani (2010), adapted for our context, was included into the questionnaire since it presents examples of how these strategies are used in a conversation. As a further step, expert opinion was taken and the final version of the questionnaire was formed.

As a first step, data from both first and second part of the questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS descriptive statistics as well as the third part where the participants were asked to select the suitable option(s). The participants were then asked to explain and clarify the reasons behind their choice(s). As a second step, the participants' opinions were examined through thematic analysis, an inductive approach was adopted which means there were not any pre-set codes but the codes were rather developed and modified through the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the collected data was manageable, coding was made by hand after developing preliminary ideas on Microsoft Excel.

Findings

RQ1: Are the EFL instructors aware of the NoM strategies?

The first research question aims to find out whether the instructors are aware of NoM strategies. It can be stated that even though a majority of the instructors (80%) have heard these strategies before, a third of them (33%) have knowledge about the strategies.

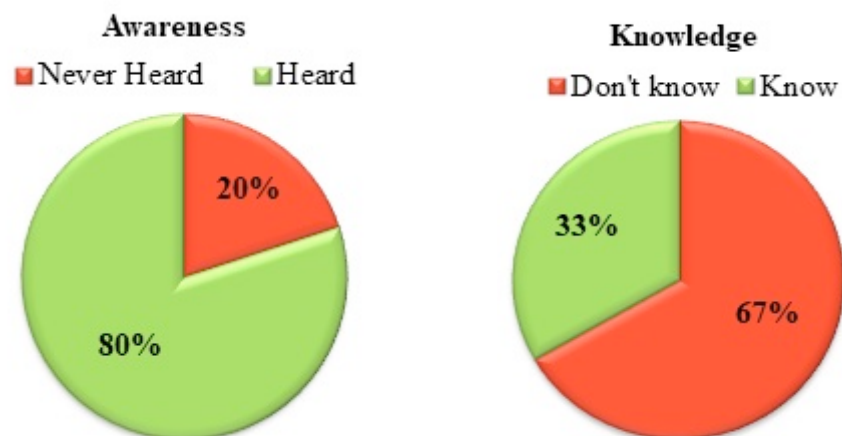


Figure 2. Awareness and knowledge of EFL instructors on NoM strategies

RQ2: What are the practices and perceptions of the EFL instructors on NoM strategies?

The second question aims at finding out the instructors' perceptions and practices on NoM strategies. *Item 1*, *Item 2* and *Item 3* in the open-ended section of the questionnaire seek answers for this research question. Perceptions of the EFL instructors about the aforementioned items are presented below.

Item 1. It is necessary to teach NoM strategies in English language classes.

It can be highlighted that all of the instructors in the study agree on the necessity of teaching NoM strategies. Some benefits of teaching the strategies are mentioned by the participants such as helping communication skills improve, making meaning comprehensible, and achieving mutual understanding. Moreover, different benefits are also indicated, all of which may be fundamental for successful communication such as avoiding misunderstandings and communication breakdowns as well as having confidence in conversations in multicultural environments.

Item 2. I explicitly and purposefully teach NoM strategies and expect my students to use these strategies in class activities.

For *Item 2*, as it is presented in the pie chart below (See Figure 3), the majority of the instructors (80%) expressed that they prefer to teach these strategies explicitly and purposefully. They also expect their students to utilize these strategies by encouraging and guiding the students. Several instructors indicated that they usually correct their students' language due to their tendency in resorting to mother tongue when the students negotiate the meaning. For some EFL instructors, students' resorting to their mother tongue is regarded as a behaviour to be avoided.

However, a small number of the instructors (20%) mentioned that they do not frequently emphasize these strategies in their classes. Some EFL instructors explained that they are obliged to follow a certain coursebook, thus, they teach NoM strategies unavoidably without the need of incorporating any extra materials. Some, however,

believe in implicit teaching and described this process as “*learner’s own discovery*” (P-14).

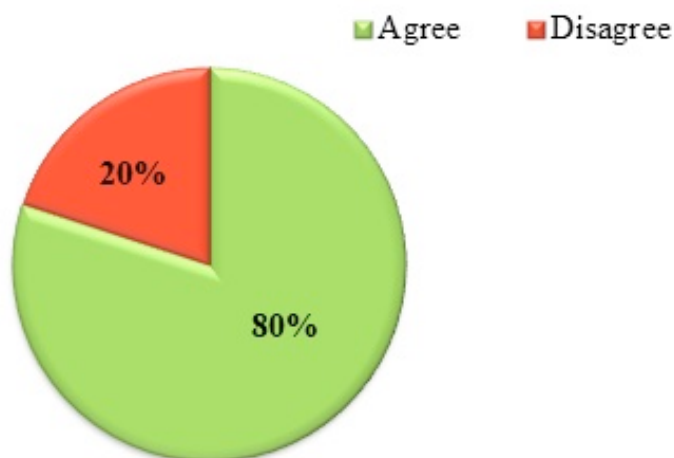


Figure 3: Explicit teaching and expectation of usage of NoM strategies

Item 3. My students can readily apply NoM strategies in English in-class activities and discussions.

A good number of the instructors (60%) agree with the idea that their students can readily apply these strategies in the class as a part of the lesson through class discussions or some activities that a coursebook has. Some of the instructors (20%) highlighted that students are not motivated to utilize the strategies in English. Some of the instructors also believed that students feel an obligation to use NoM strategies in English only with a foreign EFL instructor who does not share the same first language with them. On the other hand, a small number of instructors (20%) preferred being neutral on this statement (See Figure 4). They are convinced that productivity requires time. They also observed that the students tend to use NoM strategies in English not at the beginning but later in their lives as their proficiency gets higher. It can be inferred that guidance, encouragement as well as students’ own motivation towards learning English play a crucial role in acquiring NoM strategies.

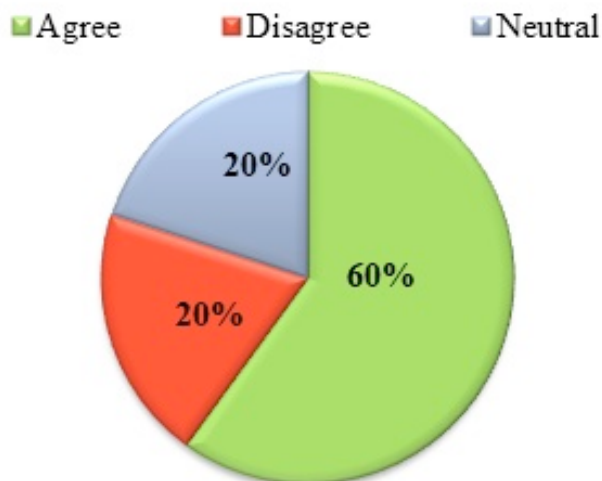


Figure 4. The students' practices of NoM strategies

RQ3: What are the perceptions of the EFL instructors on NoM strategies in the prescribed ELT coursebooks?

The third question aims to find out the instructors' perceptions of NoM strategies in the prescribed ELT coursebooks. *Items 4, Item 5* and *Item 6* in the questionnaire seek answers for this research question. Perceptions of the EFL instructors about the aforementioned items are presented below (See Figure 5).

Item 4. The coursebook I use includes a sufficient number of activities and tasks to teach negotiation of meaning strategies.

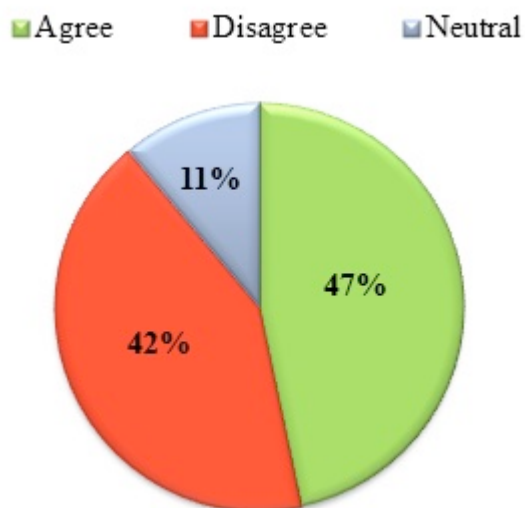


Figure 5. Number activities and tasks that stimulate NoM strategies in coursebooks

Almost half of the instructors (47%) indicated that coursebooks include sufficient dialogues, variety of activities and tasks supported by videos. Other instructors (42%), however, mentioned that the emphasis given on these strategies in the book is not sufficient. To exemplify, one of the EFL instructors explained: "*Activities are not sufficient as they don't provide clear examples on how to use them*"(P-32).

Item 5. NoM phrases and expressions in the coursebook match up with the ones that my students use when communicating in English.

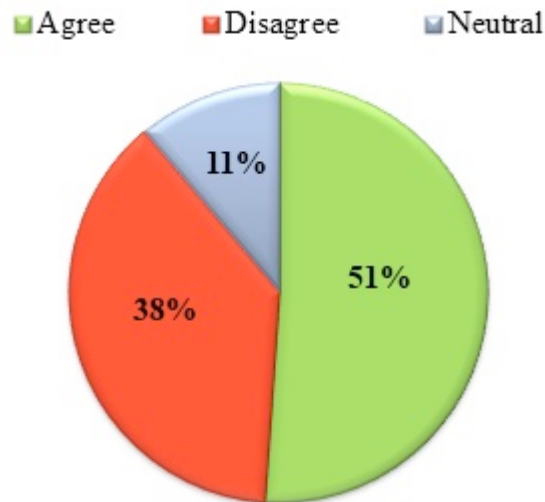


Figure 6. Consistency between the phrases and expressions in the prescribed coursebooks and the students' use of English

In terms of consistency between phrases and expressions used in the prescribed coursebooks and the students' use of English, the instructors' perceptions vary (See Figure 6). Although half of the instructors (51%) highlighted that phrases and expressions match, they also mentioned that they have some concerns as phrases and expressions in the coursebook set bounds to the students' creative use of language and lead the students to one direction. They also complained about the students' tendency to think in their mother tongue.

While some instructors prefer to focus on accurate usage of these phrases and expressions which the students memorize, others do not prefer to restrict their students only with the phrases and expressions in the coursebook as long as the students can communicate and have an ability to express themselves in English. One instructor mentioned: *"The phrases and expressions in the coursebooks only cover the basic needs of students in real-life communication and do not allow diversity to get into the class"* (P-7). Another instructor also highlighted the importance of the context by indicating *"Not all phrases and expressions in the coursebooks used in real-life communication, in some cases, they may even sound weird in that particular context. So, students should be aware of in which situations and contexts these strategies are used."* (P-25).

Item 6. The number and variety of NoM strategies in the coursebook are sufficient for my students to establish effective communication with other users of English in a multicultural environment.

For the issue of applicability of tasks stimulating NoM strategies in the coursebooks to multicultural platforms, the instructors' perceptions also differ from each other (See Figure 7). One participant expressed that the coursebooks include a variety of cultures which may enable the students to make connections later in their lives in multicultural platforms. The instructors assumed that it is easier for their students to use NoM

strategies when they have familiarity with different cultures. It was also highlighted that informal situations and dialogues are mostly ignored in the coursebooks, which might be necessary for the students in multicultural environments. An instructor noted that “*The coursebooks are mostly standard British-English oriented but they should have more varieties of Englishes including various activities and tasks that stimulate NoM strategies.*” (P-41). Another instructor also mentioned: “*The strategies in coursebooks are of course effective to maintain good communication. However, some strategies are more cultural and can only be learned in that society.*” (P-18).

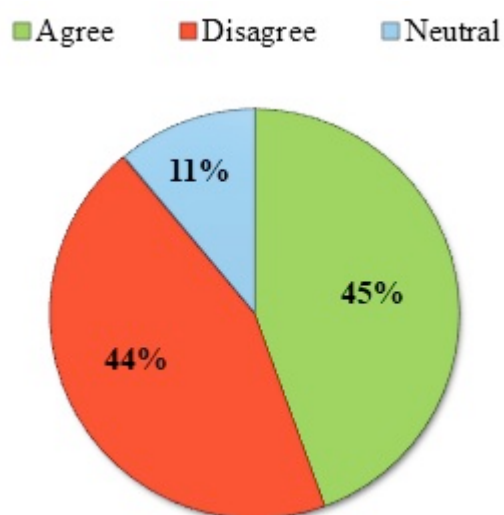


Figure 7. Applicability of tasks and activities in the coursebooks to multicultural environments

Discussion and Conclusions

From an overall perspective, it can be concluded that the perceptions of the instructors are not always parallel with each other. This may tell us that the EFL instructors are in disagreement, and their practices of teaching NoM strategies vary. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of the instructors are aware of the NoM strategies, yet they have some concerns regarding the application of such strategies. Additionally, it might be commented that the integration of NoM strategies into coursebooks is not satisfying for a great number of instructors. Based on the EFL instructors' perceptions, with a wide range of activities stimulating NoM strategies may be integrated into the coursebooks. These tasks and activities, recommended by Hartono (2017), are shown in the table below (See Table 1).

Table 1. Various tasks and activities that stimulate NoM strategies

- ❖ Information gap
- ❖ Jigsaw
- ❖ Decision-making
- ❖ Problem-solving
- ❖ Opinion exchange
- ❖ Role play
- ❖ Picture comparison
- ❖ Picture drawing
- ❖ Storytelling
- ❖ Free discussion activities

These tasks and activities may be adapted and modified by the instructors taking into account of the needs of today's learners in a highly globalized world. In other words, flexibility and creativity in language use by using multilingual repertoire may be encouraged by educators as well as coursebook writers. The findings also reveal the fact about students' tendency to think in their mother tongue is regarded as a negative behaviour when students negotiate the meaning. However, the features of ELF speakers in Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey's (2011) study, as mentioned previously, might be well-considered. Namely, ELF speakers are multilingual speakers who are capable of accommodating their multilinguality by resorting to their mother tongue creatively in appropriate contexts (House, 2015). Moreover, according to Cogo and Dewey (2006), flexibility and variability in English should be seen as an inevitable part of language evolution.

Students may also be encouraged to use all the linguistic resources, even their mother tongue, to achieve successful communication. In this way, language students may be prepared for real-life communication where English functions as a global language. It is also worth remembering that successful communication is achieved when communicative practices are applied in a situation rather than depending on a static and rigid code as there is not only one way of communicating in English (Cooper, 1968; Galloway, 2018).

Limitations

This study was conducted within the scope of only one institution. Since there was no possibility to conduct this study with all English language instructors using the prescribed coursebooks around the world, the number of participants was limited. Moreover, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all English language instructors across the globe.

Implications for Further Research

For further research, the prescribed ELT coursebooks, which all EFL instructors gave various opinions on, may be examined thoroughly in terms of presence or absence of NoM strategies by taking into consideration of the global role of English today. The issue of students' resorting to their L1, which is mentioned frequently and conceived as a disadvantage by EFL instructors, may be evaluated within the ELF context.

Acknowledgment

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