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Non-native English language teachers' perspective on culture in English as a Foreign Language classrooms

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This article examines the importance of raising non-native English language teachers' awareness of different dimensions of culture in the teaching of English as an international language. The author believes that the more critical English language teachers become about the involvement of culture in their English language teaching, the more they equip their students with the necessary linguistic and cultural resources to be able to communicate with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The study comprises the development and implementation of a semi-structured interview. The participants are a small group of Turkish teachers of English working in public and private schools in Turkey. Drawing on the results of the interview study, the author shows that there is a general consensus among the participants of the study on the practice of referring to an 'international culture' with special emphasis on English-speaking Anglo-American cultures, as well as the learners' local culture in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. Moreover, the results also reveal the participant teachers' belief that being a non-native English-speaking teacher is an advantage as far as cultural and linguistic issues in the English language classroom are concerned.

Introduction

During the last two decades, it has been evident that the world is becoming more and more a 'global village' and English is becoming its lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2001; Alptekin, 2002). In other words, English is the language of technology, academia, art, financial and diplomatic interactions and many more activities in this global village. At present, the number of non-native speakers of English as a second and/or foreign language is growing fast, almost outnumbering the 'native speakers'[1] of English (Graddol, 1999). Thus, it has become essential to raise English language teachers' awareness and sensitivity with regard to the strategies they need to deploy in designing their activities and adjusting their teaching so as to take into consideration the

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current status of English as a world language. In an earlier work, Bentahila and Davies (1989) stated that learners should be equipped with a certain amount of knowledge about native speaker norms without giving them a feeling that 'this is the only way to use the target language'. They should be able to make a choice between their native language norms, target language norms and some sort of compromise according to the kinds of situations they find themselves in (pp. 110–111). As Alptekin (2002) points out, practitioners in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) need to define real communicative behaviour in ways that take account of the international status of the English language. The aim of English language teaching should be the development of the learners' 'intercultural communicative competence' in the English language to enable them to cope with issues that are related to the wider use of English in local and international contexts within the 'global village'.

Here, the concept of culture refers to the characteristics of the local culture (henceforth LC) of the learners, that of non-native English-speaking teachers, and includes English-speaking cultures as well as culture(s) of people speaking languages other than English. In this study, I investigate how a group of EFL teachers define culture in general and, specifically, in relation to their English language teaching (ELT) practices, I ask whether they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in presenting cultural information to their learners in their EFL classrooms as non-native English-speaking teachers. In this respect, I address the following research questions:

1. How do a group of Turkish teachers of English define the concept of 'culture' in the EFL context?
2. What do they think about the incorporation of culture into their EFL classes?
3. How do they position themselves within the profession of ELT?

What is culture?

Although it is difficult to define culture, the following definition that incorporates the Boasian postulates gives a working version of the concept from an anthropological perspective:

> Culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. (Bates & Plog, 1991, p. 7)

Although the above definition gives a static description of culture by stating that culture is constructed once and known to pass from one generation to the other, recently, social scientists have come to a consensus on a more dynamic view of the concept. That is, culture is not a static quintessence but something that is produced. It constantly shifts and changes (Corbett, 2003). In addition, culture cannot be the attribute of one nation state (e.g. Britain, the USA, Germany, New Zealand) as in those nation states there may be highly diverse populations and local groups engaging in different cultural practices. This encompasses ethnic groups (e.g. the Hispanic population in the USA), as well as people of different generations and age groups (e.g. New Age people in Britain) (Martin-Jones, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this study

to investigate the diverse nature of different cultures in a society. Loveday's (1981) and Adaskou *et al.*'s (1990) definitions of culture seem to cover a wider perspective of culture in relation to foreign language teaching practices. Loveday (1981, p. 34) describes culture as a concept that 'involves the implicit norms and conventions of a society, its methods of "going about doing things", its historically transmitted but also adaptive and creative ethos, its symbols and its organization of experience'. On the other hand, Adaskou *et al.* (1990, pp. 3–4) itemise the definition of 'culture' as a concept with four dimensions. These are: (i) the *aesthetic sense* (media, cinema, music and literature); (ii) the *sociological sense* (family, education, work and leisure, traditions); (iii) the *semantic sense* (conceptions and thought processes); (iv) the *pragmatic* (or *sociolinguistic*) *sense* ('appropriacy' in language use).

Culture in ELT

In ELT, there are two major views that envisage the inclusion of culture in foreign language classrooms. The first view supports the implementation of a culture-free curriculum for foreign language teaching, protecting the cultural integrity of the 'non-native speaker' (Kachru, 1986; Canagarajah, 1999). The 'supporters' of this view are against the idea of taking a monolingual/monocultural view of ELT as a norm spreading from the 'centre' to the 'periphery'.

The second major view instead supports the idea that culture and language cannot be separated from one another. Therefore, the presentation of the target language culture (henceforth TLC) should be an essential part of the foreign language teaching curriculum. However, the supporters of this view differ with respect to their perspective on the issue of which culture to involve in the foreign language classrooms. The first group claims that the culture of the foreign language—i.e. TLC—should be involved in language teaching practice for a full understanding of the language forms that are presented to learners. Thus, the presentation of the foreign language together with its culture provides learners with a holistic view about how and when to use the language (Byram & Fleming, 1998). The second group emphasises the involvement of the learners' LC in EFL classrooms. McKay (2003) emphasises the importance of the involvement of the learners' LC in English as an International Language (henceforth EIL) classrooms. She maintains that each country where English is taught as an international language should take the responsibility to select and develop language materials together with appropriate language teaching methods within the context of the learners' LC. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) also state that the successful teaching of EIL is in the hands of the local ELT professionals who have a global perspective within a local context. Thus, the teaching of English in a global perspective should be the basis of the current ELT methodology.

The non-native speaker as an English language teacher

Canagarajah (1999) points out that there are not enough 'Centre' teachers (native English-speaking teachers) to teach English all over the world, so 'Periphery' teachers

(non-native English-speaking teachers) are needed. Further, he elucidates that 80% of the English teachers in the world are non-native speakers of English, and these teachers are as competent to teach English as native speakers. As he states:

> At a time when learner strategy training and self-directed language learning are fashionable concepts, it should not be difficult to understand the extreme case of a Periphery teacher with 'poor' grammar and 'bad' pronunciation functioning as a good teacher. Paradoxically, such a teacher may lead the students to acquire (if need be) even Centre versions of English. (p. 91)

There are different views on the language teaching skills of non-native English-speaking teachers. In a study, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999, pp. 141–142) found that non-native speakers of English could be as competent to teach English to speakers of other languages as native English-speaking teachers. However, non-native English-speaking teachers who took part in Reves and Medgyes's (1994) study thought they were not as skilful as native-speaking English teachers. Although there are differing views on non-native-speaking English teachers' expertise, Thomas (1999, p. 12) indicates that learners can identify themselves more with a non-native English language teacher and take him/her as their model in their language learning process. Thus, the non-native English language teacher represents the ideal language learner who accomplished learning English and became a professional to teach it to other non-native speakers of English.

The Turkish education system and the place of foreign language teaching

The Turkish education system went through a major change in 1997. Until that time compulsory education lasted five years, and there was no place for foreign language teaching in public primary schools. In 1997, the Turkish Ministry of National Education passed Act 4306, which specified that the structure of the Turkish primary education system change in the following way:[2] primary education comprises eight years of schooling. The graduates of these schools are given primary school diplomas. The students start learning a foreign language (primarily English) in fourth grade (fourth and fifth grades, two hours a week; sixth, seventh and eighth grades, four hours a week). Secondary education follows eight years of primary education and includes general, vocational and technical schools. General high schools aim at preparing students for higher education rather than for a particular vocation. As in sixth, seventh and eighth grades, the students learn a foreign language (primarily English) for four hours a week with an option of extending their exposure to a foreign language by two hours by choosing English as an elective course, in addition to their regular study time.

As stated on the web page of the Turkish Ministry of National Education,[3] the aim of foreign language teaching in Turkey is to train students for basic literacy skills (reading and writing), as well as listening and speaking, according to their level of proficiency in the foreign language they are learning. It is stated that the acquisition and learning of a foreign language will enable the students to read academic and literary texts in a foreign language, follow closely the technological

advances in the world and communicate with people from different cultures. This is the general aim of foreign language education in Turkey. The foreign language teaching books that are used in these schools are prepared and designed by language teaching professionals working for the Turkish Ministry of National Education.

In addition to general, vocational and technical schools, there is another group of schools which fall under the category of general secondary education with intensive foreign language teaching, such as Anatolian high schools, private high schools—with or without a preparatory year where a foreign language such as English, French or German is taught. These high schools aim to prepare students for higher education while teaching them a foreign language intensively to enable them to follow scientific and technological advances in the world.[4] The materials that are used in these schools are different from those in the schools where foreign language teaching materials designed by the Turkish Ministry of National Education are used. However, they are approved by the Turkish Ministry of National Education in terms of their suitability for the curricular needs of foreign language teaching in Turkey.

The foreign language that is widely taught and preferred in Turkish schools is English (Genç, 2004). One of the reasons for this is the special status of English as an international language of communication, science and technology.

A case study in Turkey: research approach

Participants

Twelve non-native English-speaking teachers who were chosen for their ability to contribute to different perspectives on the place of culture in foreign language teaching participated in the study. The convenience sampling method was used in choosing the participants (Gall *et al*., 1996, p. 228). The teachers' consent was taken before they were interviewed. Teacher trainees who were studying in the researcher's department helped the researcher to establish contact between the school teachers and the researcher by first obtaining the participants' consent and then conducting the interviews on behalf of the researcher. Teachers who did not want to participate in the study were not interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the schools where the participant teachers were working. The interviewers were given training before they interviewed the participant teachers.

The demographic features of the teachers were as follows: there were 10 female and 2 male teachers; their age range was between 21 and 38. Seven teachers were from Anatolian high schools, and five teachers were from private schools (see the section on the Turkish education system for the description of Anatolian high schools and private high schools). The proficiency level of their students ranged from beginners to upper-intermediate. Their teaching experience varied from 5 to 12 years. All of the teachers were Turkish citizens. Nine teachers were graduates of ELT programmes and three teachers were graduates of English/American Language and Literature programmes of various universities in Turkey.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview was designed to elicit the views of the teachers on the following issues: (i) the concept of 'culture' (questions 1 to 3); (ii) the content and context of cultural information in the EFL classrooms (questions 4 to 7); and (iii) the strengths and weaknesses of non-native English-speaking teachers (questions 8 to 10) (see Appendix 1). A thematic analysis based on the research questions was done by generating categories and then themes from the answers given by the respondents (Lemke, 1998). The interview was intended to be exploratory and descriptive to follow up on similar studies of teachers' and learners' views on the role of culture in EFL (Prodromou, 1992; Lessard-Clouston, 1996; McKay, 2003). Therefore, independent variables such as teachers' age, gender, nationality and years of experience, although indicated, were not taken into consideration in the analysis.

The following themes and sub-themes were identified in the data analysis:

1. the teachers' concept of culture;
2. cultural information in the EFL classroom:
   a. content of cultural information,
   b. reasons for presenting cultural information,
   c. reasons for omitting cultural information;
3. the role of non-native educators in presenting cultural information.

Data analysis

The teachers' concept of culture

The first research question aimed to investigate how non-native English-speaking teachers defined the concept of culture in the EFL context. Therefore, the first three questions of the interview were designed to explore how the participants defined the concept of culture in general and in relation to ELT (see Appendix 1).

The common features of the participants' definition of culture were as follows: culture is the lifestyle, gastronomy, traditions, etiquette, history, belief and value systems, and language of a group of people living in a city, country; in other words, in a particular geographic region. Some of the teachers said the following:

> Culture is people's way of living, eating, and so on, as well as their shared values, history, geographical region, and so on. (Informant 1)
>
> [Culture is] anything … human made part of the environment which gives specific information about a society. (Informant 5)
>
> Culture is … all the things related to the lives of people, such as their way of living, beliefs, values, norms, and daily cultural activities (cinema, music, etc). (Informant 6)

When they were asked to comment on whether there was a relationship between language and culture or not, most of the participants said that culture and language were interrelated. Some participants said:

> I believe that there is a reciprocal relationship between language and culture, they influence one another. Language is important for a culture to develop, and in return culture shapes the 'language' that is used in a society. (Informant 2)

> There is a relationship between language and culture. You cannot teach language independent of culture … Despite their claim that they are free of cultural influence, all of the printed materials include information on the experiences of people living in that culture. (Informant 3)

The views of the participants with respect to the involvement of culture in EFL classrooms varied from giving no information about the target language culture to giving information about target language culture as well as information about all English-speaking (e.g. Australian and Indian cultures) cultures equally and cultures of other countries—i.e. international culture (IC). They said:

> I should either give information about all English-speaking cultures equally or skip culture-specific parts in my language teaching as much as possible. Since I do not have time to give such extensive information about English-speaking cultures in class I choose not to present it at all. (Informant 11)

> EFL [author's clarification: EFL refers to English language] culture should be taught to the extent that learners are interested in it. (Informant 12)

They further stated that while teaching a foreign language, the culture of that language was automatically involved in the language teaching process. They agreed on the importance of increasing their language learners' knowledge about the differences between different English-speaking cultures, as well as other cultures.

Cultural information in the EFL classroom

The second research question examined how the informants regarded the involvement of cultural information in EFL classrooms (See Appendix 1, questions 4 to 7). The teachers' responses to these questions were categorised and analysed as follows: content of cultural information, reasons for presenting cultural information and reasons for omitting cultural information.

Content of cultural information. According to most of the teachers, the content of cultural information consisted of everything that was related to the everyday lives of people who spoke the TL as a native language and were living in a TLC setting. They indicated that culture as a concept encompasses 'works of art and literature, eating and drinking habits of people, family relations, festivals, traditions, rituals, lifestyle, differences in educational systems, perspectives of life that are produced by that culture', 'when, where and how to use the language(s) that is(are) spoken in that culture'. In their responses, they mostly highlighted subjects that were related to the aesthetic and sociological aspects of TLC. One of the teachers said:

> [Cultural information presented in a foreign language classroom] should cover special days, festivals, and so on. In addition, cultural information can be presented in the context

> of meetings, everyday conversations, openings and closures of formal/informal conversations in that particular culture, and so on. (Informant 2)

Another teacher underlined the importance of the connection between the semantic and pragmatic/sociolinguistic aspects of TLC and content of cultural information in the EFL classroom by saying:

> From time to time, my students ask about what the speakers might have meant when they used certain abbreviations, acronyms, words and so on in a film or a TV programme they have recently seen, or a magazine interview they have recently read. When they do that, I think my students show their interest in understanding the thought processes and language use of the people in TLC. (Informant 3)

Some of the teachers suggested that cultural content should be presented to the students in such a way that they should not feel threatened by the features of TLC. They said that there is a positive correlation between the involvement of students' LC in the EFL classroom and their linguistic development. They stated that ELT materials should relate to the LC of the students.

> When we have a look at the students' needs [in language teaching/learning] we can see that most of them do not have any intention of going abroad and living in a foreign culture. Their aim is learning a foreign language in order to develop themselves professionally and to earn a better salary … Therefore, from time to time, they might not be interested in learning the ways of a foreign culture at all, depending on their aim for learning a foreign language. Then the materials can be adapted according to the LC of the students, if their aim is purely learning a foreign language for business or other local purposes. (Informant 1)

Reasons for presenting cultural information. The teachers who supported the presentation of TLC/LC/IC in their EFL classrooms differed from each other with respect to the presentation of TLC, LC and IC on their own or in combination with one another.

The informants who supported the view that presentation of the cultural aspects of TLC should be an essential part of the foreign language teaching curriculum said that TLC is necessary for a fuller understanding of the true meanings of a language (Byram & Fleming, 1998). As one of the teachers said:

> It is important for the students to explore TLC via language teaching/learning materials, in other words, we, as English language teachers, should teach the students ways of communicating with people in TLC via videotapes, textbooks, Internet and the like. (Informant 9)

Another group of teachers indicated that in foreign language classrooms, cultural issues should be presented only in relation to students' LC, as it is easily available and more meaningful for the learners. One teacher said this:

> The students' knowledge of their own culture should be part of the EFL curriculum, as this would ease the learners' problems in handling the newly presented language. This would also activate their knowledge in relation to familiar issues that they have already learned in their L1 [native language]. (Informant 1)

The teachers who supported this view believed that the aim of English language teaching in a country where English is spoken as a foreign language should be instrumental rather than integrative. They further said that presenting new language materials via TLC is rather demotivating and meaningless for the learners if the LC is different from the TLC (Adaskou *et al*., 1990; Prodromou, 1992).

Other teachers stated that learners' LC should be used as a basis to explain IC in EFL classrooms. They said that since English is an international language, then its 'culture' cannot be attributed to only English-speaking cultures. They were in favour of the presentation and explanation of language learning/teaching materials within the context of IC on its own or together with TLC. As one of the teachers said:

> It is necessary for my learners to acquire a taste of world cultures, such as they should be able to talk about the aspects of their own culture, as well as the paintings of Van Gogh, the culinary traditions of different counries and, so on, in English. (Informant 4)

> Culture can be included in the ELT materials but it shouldn't be only the culture of the target language. ELT materials should also include cultural examples from other parts of the world. (Informant 5)

> instead of the culture of one particular English-speaking country, we can present information about other cultures and countries, as well, since our students are being exposed to an international culture more and more through the Internet, satellite TV, etc. (Informant 7)

Alptekin (2002) affirms that 'English has become the language of international communication; therefore, real communicative behaviour that includes the use of English in native speaker–native speaker interactions, as well as native speaker–nonnative speaker and nonnative speaker–nonnative speaker interactions, should be defined' (p. 60). He indicates that only then can autonomous language learning take place involving the meaningful background encompassing the L1 and LC of the learner. He suggests that the learners should be equipped with the necessary linguistic and cultural behaviour that will enable them to communicate effectively in an international community. Therefore, as the third group of informants suggests, the teaching of an international culture, with or without TLC, should be the aim of future English language teachers. This enables the language learners to become competent and successful communicators in a global world.

Omitting cultural information in the EFL classroom. Some of the participants indicated that at times their students were not keen on learning about the TLC; for that reason, they did not have any motivation to include cultural information in their language teaching. They said this:

> our students are learning English to enter a good university and get a better job in the future; most of the time they do not have any intention of going and living abroad. Therefore, they might not be interested in learning culture at all. (Informant 1)

> When a cultural issue comes up during the class hour in relation to the materials that we are using, I simply explain what it is and go on with my teaching. I do not give detailed information. (Informant 10)

> As non-native speakers of English, we should present cultural information only if it has a contribution to the teaching of English in our language classrooms. Our major aim should be to teach English, not its culture. (Informant 11)

These informants appeared to be giving voice to the idea of 'culture-free' language teaching to protect the cultural integrity of language learners (Kachru, 1986; Canagarajah, 1999). Although they seemed to be against including cultural information in their language teaching, they came to a consensus that teaching a foreign language via LC can be acceptable in the EFL classrooms (see the discussion above on LC).

The role of non-native educators in presenting cultural information

The final section of the interviews examined how the participant teachers positioned themselves within the profession of ELT with a view to shedding light on the perception of their strengths and weaknesses as non-native English language teachers (see Appendix 1, questions 8–10). The participants indicated that their familiarity with the L1 and LC of the learners was one of their strongest points as EFL teachers. They believed they could sympathise with the kinds of difficulties their students were experiencing while learning the newly presented language structurally, lexically, phonologically and so on, with or without its cultural context.

> As a non-native English teacher … I am familiar with the LC. Therefore, I can easily understand students' language learning problems, clarify some unclear cultural points related to the English culture that come up in the language teaching materials more easily. (Informant 6)

Some teachers thought that they had access to both the LC and the TLC; hence, they did not think that it was a disadvantage to be a non-native English-speaking teacher. One of the teachers said: 'I believe that there should be both native and non-native English-speaking EFL teachers in the profession of English language teaching. They both have different functions in the lives of the language learners' (Informant 2). In general, they stated that in the earlier phases of their students' language learning process, it was an advantage for the students to have a non-native-speaking English language teacher as they needed someone who was familiar with their L1 and LC. That way the students had a chance to consult their teachers in terms of linguistic as well as cultural issues involving either TLC, IC or LC whenever they needed help. However, when probed further into the motivation for their answers, two of the teachers stated that they needed to do extra preparation before going into the classroom in terms of bringing explanations on the details of the topic that was taught. These topics ranged from the significance of 'Thanksgiving' for Americans in the United States to a particular type of clothing in Scotland. One of the teachers said

> Since I am barely familiar with the concept of 'Thanksgiving', I need to check whether my knowledge of 'Thanksgiving' is correct and enough to explain the concept to my students. To do that I search what 'Thanksgiving' refers to on the Internet and/or other sources. Only then I feel confident to go ahead with the subject and introduce the concept to my students in class. (Informant 4)

She emphasised that it was necessary to give her students reliable information about the topic. Another teacher who said that it was necessary to do extra preparation before class indicated that his students were always coming up with very interesting ideas about the topics covered in class:

> During the class, depending on the subject of the day, my students can come up with questions like 'What is a kilt?' after seeing the film *Braveheart* or 'What is the difference between high school and college?' after reading an article on the educational system in the United States. (Informant 1)

They further stated that they represented a model language learner who went through similar stages that their learners were going through while learning English. This supported the view that, in general, foreign language learners identify themselves more with non-native English-speaking teachers than native English-speaking teachers (Thomas, 1999). One of the teachers said:

> One day, one of my students thanked me for teaching him English the way I was doing. He said he was feeling more and more confident in using English. He was hopeful for the future. He thought he could one day speak English as well as I did, if he kept doing his homework and listening to my lessons carefully. This was really rewarding and encouraging after a hard day's work! (Informant 4)

However, during the interviews, the participants stated that native English-speaking EFL teachers were also needed as they

> are helpful in drawing an ideal model of L2 speaker and improving students' communication skills, for example, they can correct our students' pronunciation and teach them how to be a fluent speaker of English as well as explaining English culture to the students without further preparation like us. But, in my opinion, they should enter into the lives of our learners when our learners become more advanced language learners. (Informant 2)

Since it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the issues related to the advantages and disadvantages of being a native or non-native teacher in the ELT profession, I will conclude this section by stating that both native and non-native teachers are needed in the ELT profession provided that they are trained in an appropriate way to be competent English language teachers to address the needs of language learners of all age groups and levels.

Discussion and conclusion

One of the main purposes of this study was to explore different ideas and perspectives on which culture to involve in English language classrooms that would extend English language teachers' views of the concept of culture and assist them to shape it in relation to their teaching practices. The analysis of the interviews demonstrated ways in which the context of teaching and the background of individual teachers influenced their attitude towards the incorporation of culture into their language teaching. Although this interview study was carried out on a small scale and did not reflect the views of all non-native English language teachers in Turkey, it still demonstrated a variety of perspectives held by the participant teachers.

The participant teachers were able to see the connection between language teaching and culture, and to state their views with respect to their own experience in English language teaching (Byram & Fleming, 1998; McKay, 2003). There was no consensus among the teachers' views on whether culture should be a part of the English language teaching curriculum or not. However, they all mentioned that they dealt with issues related to culture in their English language classrooms varying from using elements of the LC to using elements of the IC and/or the TLC. As one of the teachers stated:

> In my opinion, it is difficult to separate 'language' and 'culture'. If we are teaching English then our students should either be aware of the elements of English or American culture or be informed about these elements via teaching materials in the EFL classrooms … I believe that the students' motivation increases if they learn more about the elements of the English language culture in the English language classrooms. (Informant 3)

As discussed in the section on non-native speakers as English teachers, non-native-speaking English teachers constituted a *model language learner* for their students (Thomas, 1999). In other words, learners seemed to be more motivated to learn a foreign language when they had a successful non-native speaker model, i.e. the non-native English teacher, as guidance. Hence, it can be said that a 'successful non-native speaker model' of a foreign language—i.e. English in our case—might help learners to overcome linguistic as well as cultural barriers in their language learning process.

In this study, the participant teachers showed an awareness of their importance as non-native English teachers in the field; and further indicated that native English-speaking teachers were also needed to help foreign language learners with pronunciation and communication skills, i.e. using appropriate target language forms in appropriate contexts. Although the use of appropriate forms in appropriate contexts is important for any language, when the foreign language to be learned is English this can be questioned, e.g. 'What do we mean by appropriate contexts and appropriate forms when two non-native speakers of English are conversing in English?'; 'Which communication norms should we take into consideration when people from non-native English-speaking countries are using English to communicate—i.e. a Japanese and a Turkish engineer talking about the construction of suspension bridges in Istanbul in English?' Besides, native English-speaking teachers should not be hired for the sole reason of teaching English language learners correct pronunciation and communication skills. Inevitably, native English-speaking teachers make a great contribution to the teaching of English as a foreign/international language in terms of linguistic and cultural development of language learners. However, English has now become an international language (or lingua franca) (Seidlhofer, 2001; McKay, 2003), therefore important questions to answer are: 'Who is the native speaker of English?' and 'Should we give English language learners native speaker models from English-speaking countries such as England, Australia and USA, or non-native speaker models from all over the world just like the learners themselves or non-native speaker models from the students' local culture?'. Additionally, further investigation is needed to highlight the

value of the contribution of non-native English language teachers in promoting understanding and use of English as an international language all over the world.

As a final remark, I want to indicate that it is necessary to train qualified non-native English-speaking teachers with an understanding that they can be as successful as native English-speaking teachers in teaching English as an international/foreign language and/or lingua franca in their local context.

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Notes

1. When so many different English-speaking countries are taken into consideration, 'native speaker' as a concept becomes a problematic term to define—i.e. who to consider as a 'native speaker', 'who are native speakers of English' and so on. Since it is not the main focus of this article I will not discuss it here and will use the term in general referring to all English-speaking countries (India, New Zealand, Australia, etc.). For more information on this issue, see Canagarajah (1999) and Graddol (1999).
2. See the Turkish Ministry of National Education (2005a).
3. The URL of the Turkish Ministry of National Education web site is: www.meb.gov.tr
4. The duration of secondary education has been recently changed to four years (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2005b).

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

Interview questions

Part I (demographic features of the participants):

How old are you?
When and where did you learn English?
Could you tell me about your educational background?
Can you also give me some information about how long you have been teaching English? Where, when and to whom?

Part 2 (the concept of 'culture'):

1. How can you define culture as a general concept?
2. Is there a relationship between language and culture?
3. What is the place of culture in the EFL context?

Part 3 (the content of cultural information):

4. What should cultural information consist of in the English language classrooms?
5. What is the aim of presenting cultural information in English language classrooms?
6. Do you include cultural information in your language teaching?
7. What are your reasons for including or omitting cultural information in your EFL classrooms?

Part 4 (the place of non-native English speaking EFL teachers in ELT practices):

8. What is the role of EFL teachers in learners' perception of the foreign language culture in the EFL classroom?
9. In terms of giving cultural information in the foreign language classrooms, what are the advantages of being a non-native speaker who teaches English language?
10. In terms of giving cultural information in the foreign language classrooms, what are the disadvantages of being a non-native speaker who teaches English language?