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Areti-Maria Sougari
Assistant professor
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
asougari@enl.auth.gr

Roxani Faltzi
PhD candidate
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
rfaltzi@enl.auth.gr

ABSTRACT

This paper describes some preliminary data from an on board research that concerns 86 Greek pre-service teachers’ beliefs and key issues involved in the teaching of English. The data were drawn with the administration of online questionnaires followed by 10 interviews. The findings indicate that native speaker oriented beliefs are entrenched only in relation to the participants’ accent. Nevertheless, they show open-mindedness towards their status as non-native teachers of English and feel rightfully entitled to teach a language that is not their mother tongue. The paper aims to contribute to the on-going research concerning pre-service teachers’ beliefs in expanding circle countries and discuss implications for pre-service teacher education programmes.

Keywords: Greek pre-service teachers, beliefs, self-beliefs, English as a lingua franca

1. INTRODUCTION

In this new era of globalization, human activities and relations are characterized by interconnectedness. The advance of technology and Internet and the global diffusion of English have transformed social relations enabling communication between different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This global spread of the English language has shaken the equilibrium and led to the massive increase of non-native English speakers who currently exceed native speakers (Crystal 2003). The exponential growth of English makes its role as today’s lingua franca. English as a lingua franca can be thought of as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidhlofer 2011: 7). Despite the strong positive and negative reactions that this evokes among scholars and decision makers, the global dissemination of English is a fact widely accepted by its supporters and detractors alike.

As English language competence is nowadays essential for participation in contemporary society, so is the need for English language teachers who are non-
native in their majority (Canagarajah 2005; Prodromou 2003). Pre--service teachers of English, who outnumber native ones (Llurda 2005; Medges 1999), are the future stakeholders in English language teaching (ELT). It becomes more than necessary to examine the way pre-service teachers perceive communication and the English language, its teaching, and the status of the non-native English language teacher.

In expanding circle countries\(^1\), teaching practices focus on structure and form, while teachers’ beliefs are in agreement with the traditional mono-lingua-cultural view of English (Sifakis & Sougari 2010). The aims and objectives of ELT need to be reassessed and sketched within new frameworks (Cogo et al. 2011; Dewey 2011; Seidlhofer 2011). To contribute to the ongoing research, this paper examines the perceptions of Greek pre-service teachers of English, focusing on exploring their self-beliefs and their self-perceived abilities to teach English in today’s globalized world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teachers’ beliefs

When looking into the literature of teachers’ beliefs there is a profusion of definitions. Teacher beliefs are often defined as “unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms and the academic material to be taught” (Kagan 1992: 65). Research supports the view that teacher beliefs play a key role as they can (a) act as a “filter through which new knowledge and experience are screened for meaning” (Zheng 2009: 74), and (b) be responsible for teachers’ adoption of new approaches in their teaching techniques and practices (Breen et al. 2001; Donaghue 2003; Sifakis 2009). As a means to keep abreast with developments in ELT, pre-service teacher education should consider teachers’ beliefs and help them be more aware of their own dispositions as well as the impact on their future teaching practices.

Previous studies on pre-service teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards English have addressed many issues. Some studies have induced perceptions about the status English holds and have shown an overwhelming acknowledgement that English is the world’s lingua franca (Coskun 2011; Ozturk et al. 2010). As far as English language teaching is concerned, native speaker (NS) norms are prevalent in pre-service teachers’ beliefs (Coskun 2011; Ozturk et al. 2010; Driljaca & Širola 2010; Shibata 2009; Shim 2002; Uygun 2013). For instance, in a study of 102 prospective teachers of English in Turkey, Uygun (2013) found that the overwhelming majority (90%) of her participants agreed on the importance of having a NS accent themselves, though a smaller percentage (70%) agreed on that in relation to their learners’ pronunciation.

Differences were also found in their perceptions of their own accent in informal

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\(^1\) According to Kachru’s (1985: 12-17) three-concentric circle model of English, the Inner circle countries (i.e. the U.S.A., the U.K.) are countries where English is spoken as the first language, the outer circle countries (i.e. India, Hong Kong) are countries where English is spoken as a second language and finally in the expanding circle countries (i.e. Brazil, Greece) English is spoken as a foreign language.
communicative situations juxtaposed with teaching situations (Uygun 2013). Furthermore, with regard to the incorporation of cultural-related issues in teaching practices, in Asian contexts there is fondness for teaching the western culture in general, focusing mainly on the American culture (Shibata 2009; Shim 2002).

When it comes to their self-beliefs, non-native pre-service teachers still consider NSTs\textsuperscript{2} as better-qualified in relation to them (Medgyes 1994; Tang 1997). Particularly, “NNSTs opt for a NS identity, as expressed in a native-like accent” (Jenkins 2005: 541). Pre-service teachers often feel like ‘impostors’ (Bernat 2008) as the ELT market values more native speakers of English as experts of a language that is their mother tongue. On the other hand, the findings of certain studies (e.g. Samimy & Brutt-Griffler 1999) demonstrate a sense of confidence and self-esteem on behalf of NNSTs. Overall, it appears that despite acknowledging the lingua franca status of English, pre-service teachers remain attached to the native speaker ideology “in which British or American norms have to be followed and native speakers are considered the ideal teachers” (Llurda 2004: 319).

Studies on in-service primary and secondary teachers’ beliefs in Greece (Sifakis & Sougari 2005, 2010; Sougari & Sifakis 2007, 2010) have shown that teaching abides to native speaker norms (McKay 2003) and display a consequential influence from their own teachers’ methods and teaching practices (Lortie 1975). More recently, though, Greek in-service teachers are more open to finding ways of using the language “as a means of understanding native and non-native cultures alike” (Sifakis 2011: 396). In the same study (Sifakis 2011), 76.5\% of the participants endorse the notion of English as a language used for communication with both native and non-native speakers. In a different study (Karavas & Drossou 2010) on how Greek EFL student teachers’ beliefs are amenable to change after their teaching practice, the majority (61\%) believed that it was important for their learners to develop native-like pronunciation. However, the percentage dropped to 40\% at the end of their teaching practice. The researchers attributed this change in the student teachers’ beliefs in their school mentors’ non-native pronunciation, which revealed how unrealistic would be to set a native-like pronunciation as a goal for their future learners.

### 2.2. The role of English in Greece

Greece is a predominantly (99\%) monolingual country. English does not hold an official status in Greece. It is taught as a foreign language from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade at primary level, though in a small number of primary schools, it has been introduced from the 1\textsuperscript{st} grade onwards on an experimental basis since 2010. It is the first foreign language taught in schools and in many cases the \textit{de jure} lingua franca of the country (Sifakis 2012). In fact, the majority of the population acknowledges the utilitarian nature of the language. According to the Special Eurobarometer (386) survey on Europeans and their languages, which was carried out in spring 2012, 92\%

\textsuperscript{2} The terms ‘native speaker teachers’ and ‘non-native speaker teachers’ will henceforth be used as NSTs and NNSTs respectively.
of Greek people think that English is one of the two most useful languages for children to learn for their future (Special Eurobarometer (386) 2012: 80).

3. THE STUDY

This paper will (i) look into Greek pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the English language, (ii) explore pre-service teachers’ self-beliefs as NNSTs in an expanding circle country, and (iii) detect their beliefs about teaching the language in question. To be more specific, the concept of self-beliefs refers to the pre-service teachers’ own estimate of their capabilities to teach the English language.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 86 undergraduate students in their final year of studies, pursuing an undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Studies at the School of English provide undergraduate students with advanced knowledge in a variety of core and specialized-elective courses taught in different areas (i.e. theoretical and applied linguistics, English and American Literature and translation and intercultural studies). Graduates become fully-fledged teachers of English in both the private and state sector.

The participants of this study were registered in the Practice in Teaching English as a Foreign Language course and as such were required to complete an 8-week internship in primary and secondary schools. Of these, 93% were female (N=80), while the rest 7% were male (N=6). They were all of Greek origin. As learners the vast majority (76%) had attended a private language school, whereas 8% had private tutorials in English and 13% had both.

3.2. Data collection and instruments

The participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire, written in English, once they had completed their eight-week internship. They indicated their answers on a five-point Likert scale (from 1: strongly agree to 5: strongly disagree) and additionally selected the most suitable answer in other items. For the purposes of the present study the sets of items that were investigated are as follows:

1. beliefs about the role of English
2. self-beliefs concerning the status of the Greek NNSTs and ELT training
3. beliefs about the teaching of English

A particular section also looked into the participants’ profile, where students provided demographic information. The questionnaire was pilot tested and the feedback received was incorporated in the final version. Only the items that relate to the purposes of the present study are presented and discussed. Upon completion of the questionnaire survey ten informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with some of the respondents to clarify or explain some parts that need clarification.

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3 German comes second mentioned by 34% of Greek people
needed particular attention. The interviews were held in any language they felt most comfortable (i.e. English or Greek) and were tape-recorded.

3.3. Data analysis

The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data pertained to the calculation of those features that were necessary for the identification of the overall pattern of the participants’ beliefs. The first set of items (i.e. beliefs about the role of English) rendered a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .732, whereas .627 was offered in the case of the second set (i.e. self-beliefs concerning the status of the Greek NNSTs and ELT training). As for the third set of items, the five items received a Cronbach’s alpha reliability of .603.

Regarding the interview data, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Some basic themes arose within those interviews and served as an additional source of information to supplement the questionnaire survey and clarify some points further. After careful examination of the data gathered, some areas of commonality or recurring patterns were traced.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about English

When asked to assert their level of agreement to statements concerning their beliefs about English, the bulk of participants (97%) agreed to the fact that English is an important language and also that it is the most useful foreign language (93%). This finding is in accordance with the Eurobarometer survey mentioned earlier in this paper according to which the majority of Greek people had attested the importance of knowing English for their children. 73 participants (87%) believe that it is necessary to have a global language and that English serves that function. At the same time the respondents endorse the promotion of English tuition in Greece, because English is a global language spoken all over the world (88%) (see Table 1). Greek pre-service teachers of English embrace the changing role of English as the world’s lingua franca. These findings are in agreement with similar studies (Coskun 2011; Ozturk et al. 2010). Moreover, the utilitarian nature of English is supported by a 75% of the participants according to whom English language competence promotes employability and career opportunities.

Table 1: Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</th>
<th>SA/A ¹</th>
<th>NAND</th>
<th>D/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is an important language to know</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English is the most useful foreign language to know</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary to have a global language</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary to have a global language and</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ SA: Strongly Agree; A: Agree
NAND: Neither Agree nor Disagree
D: Disagree; SD: Strongly Disagree
English serves that function
In Greece, tuition in English should be promoted, because English is a global language spoken all over the world
In Greece, tuition in English should be promoted in order to ensure better job opportunities

4.2. Pre-service teachers’ self-beliefs

In Table 2 we see that more than half of the respondents believed that they were offered the necessary background methodological and pedagogical knowledge so as to cope with the classroom reality in the primary sector. Regarding the secondary context responses were quite ambivalent. Nearly half of them agreed that they had been adequately prepared to teach English in secondary schools, while 29 respondents (34%) were not certain about that.

The majority (79%) of the pre-service teachers were confident about their competence in English. Our results indicate that Greek pre-service teachers consider themselves able to cater for their learners’ needs, a finding that contradicts previous findings (Bernat 2008). This is significant in the sense that Greek pre-service teachers of English feel empowered by their self-perceived competence and possibly more eager to adopt another perspective in their language teaching. Moreover, 67% declared their satisfaction with their pronunciation. That is in contrast with other studies (Uygun 2013) in which though the majority (68%) accepted their accent for teaching English, only 29% were found to be completely satisfied with their pronunciation.

Table 2: Pre-service teachers’ self-beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</th>
<th>SA/A</th>
<th>NAND</th>
<th>D/SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think that the courses taught at the university had adequately prepared me to teach English in the primary classroom</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that the courses taught at the university had adequately prepared me to teach English in the secondary classroom</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident about my competence in English</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my English pronunciation</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to describe their pronunciation in English in a subsequent open-ended question, 50% of the respondents said it sounds American, while only 12% said it is British and 22% characterized it “intelligible”. They feel content with their accent probably because they perceive it as American, which reflects an attachment to the native speaker accent as the one and only acceptable for an English teacher. The tendency towards the American accent possibly mirrors their previous tuition.
and the pronunciation models they had as English language learners.

The context where these future teachers reside in should be considered as well. Obviously they are more exposed to the American culture as well as accent via the American movies that are so popular in Greece. As foreign movies are not dubbed in Greece, people are acquainted with the American accent and therefore more likely to adopt it rather than any other native English accent.

### 4.3. Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching English

Table 3 shows that pre-service teachers’ beliefs towards the development of a native-like accent by English learners are diversified. This contrasts a clearer consensus for the development of learners’ native-like pronunciation found in a different study in Greece (Karavas & Drossou 2010). With regard to the teachers’ accent they support that it is important to have a perfect accent in English (54%) and imitate a native speakers’ accent (47%), though they did not expect the same from their English learners. Presumably, native speaker norms are fundamental for the teachers’ pronunciation, as shown previously, though not so crucial for their learners. That finding is in accordance with previous research (Sifakis & Sougari 2005; Uygun 2013), though in Uygun’s study the emphasis on native speaker norms is accepted by a greater number of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</th>
<th>SA/A N</th>
<th>NAND N</th>
<th>D/SD N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important for learners of English to develop a native-like accent</td>
<td>32 38</td>
<td>30 35</td>
<td>23 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching focus should be on standard English grammar</td>
<td>18 21</td>
<td>27 32</td>
<td>40 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching English, learners’ awareness of aspects of other cultures should be raised</td>
<td>55 65</td>
<td>27 32</td>
<td>3 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers of English should have a perfect accent in English</td>
<td>46 54</td>
<td>26 30</td>
<td>14 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is necessary for Greek teachers of English to imitate native speakers’ accent</td>
<td>40 47</td>
<td>24 28</td>
<td>22 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of them (65%) agreed to the incorporation of other cultures in the English subject. It probably suggests that future Greek teachers of English are aware of the changing role of English as well as the repercussions that entails for the teaching of the language in question. In other words, they seem to reject the previously held belief that English teaching should be targeted for communication with NSs only. Learners should be aware of the possibilities of involving themselves in NNS-NNS interactions and as such they should be prepared for successful communication.

With regard to the teaching of Standard English grammar as the main teaching focus, the respondents were not strongly in favour of implementing such practices. It seems that the once pivotal role of grammar seems to be losing ground to an
intelligible use of language. Maybe that echoes an influence of the methodological courses offered during their undergraduate studies. However, the extent to which they put their beliefs into practice could be the scope of future research.

4.4. Interviews

As a means to illuminate the unresolved dilemma regarding pronunciation, ten interviews were conducted. While pre-service teachers were more tolerant of their learners’ non-native accent, despite the diversification of the results, they desired to maintain a standard of correctness for their own accent. Therefore, participants were asked whether and why it was important for them to speak English with a native speaker accent. The majority (49%) agreed on the importance of sounding like a NS in their own pronunciation. The reasons behind this were not clearly explained by the participants. In fact, they just stated that they “like it” and that it is “better” and “more beautiful” or smiled and said they could not explain why. However, participants elaborated more on that when asked about their previous language learning experience.

When asked about their experience as learners of English, concerning the teacher’s accent, they claimed that they had tried to imitate their NS teacher’s accent. The reasons behind this varied. For some participants it was important to sound as “more native-like as I could” because “I fancied it”. They also described the NS accent as “correct”, “natural”, “perfect” and “proper”. One participant (P24) stated “I knew that imitating my teacher’s accent...the...native speaker’s accent that would make me more comprehensible and perhaps better accepted in a conversation with native speakers. Plus, I always enjoyed the sound of the British accent”. Perhaps that reflects a prejudice that they still hold about the teachers’ non-native accent in English and the importance of being accepted by native speakers.

Another (P5) asserted that she always wanted to sound like a native speaker and added, “If you learn English, you should also try to sound like an English”. Apart from placing a particularly high value to the native speaker accent characterizing it as “perfect” and claiming that they liked how words sound, they saw this competence as necessary for another reason. To be more specific a participant’s (P7) account for that was “because foreign language acquisition involves such an imitation as well as our native language acquisition does”. That brings to the fore, Medgyes’s (1992) claim about non-native speakers’ implicit aim to sound like and be native speakers in linguistic terms and the characterization of their own English as “an imitation of some form of native use” (Medgyes 1992: 343). This assertion seems to be in line with Cook in that “it is the L2 users themselves who want to be native speakers” (Cook 1999: 196).

What emerged from the participants’ comments is a belief that a pronunciation, which is not native, stands little chance of being adopted or equally validated. While they may be tolerant of their learners’ non-native accent, as shown previously, they
desire to retain a standard of correctness for their own accent. Greek pre-service teachers of English regard themselves as the custodians of English (Sifakis 2008) and as such they are expected to obey the NS norms and be the right “native-like” role models for their future students.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have presented the findings from an on-going investigation concerning Greek pre-service teachers’ self-beliefs and beliefs about English and their teaching practices. The importance of the present study lies in that it gives voice to future Greek teachers of English thus assisting them to become more aware of their own perceptions. Our participants manifest their confidence about their linguistic competence and exhibit no feelings of inferiority to NSTs as they accept that they are well-equipped and qualified to teach English at all levels. Nevertheless, pronunciation remains a thorny issue as they feel obliged to espouse a native speaker accent and act as role models for their future learners.

Greek pre-service teachers are acquainted with the lingua franca role of English today and the consequences that entails for ELT. Hence, they consider the importance of implementing aspects of other cultures in their future teaching practices and focus on intelligibility rather than on accuracy and form. This finding is significant in that it shows that future English language teachers in Greece are ready for a change that would entail a shift from a traditional norm-bound teaching of English to a more-ELF aware teaching.

The challenge for teacher education programmes is to become au courant with current research on issues in question in both overseas and local contexts. Future Greek teachers of English, though aware of those issues, need to be prepared to meet the requirements of a globalized world. As a means to educate language teachers, the university curriculum ought to revise and incorporate ELF-aware courses. Those could possibly include readings about ELF-related issues (i.e. norms, intelligibility, accuracy, etc.) with particular emphasis on pronunciation issues as that seems to be a very important aspect for Greek pre-service teachers. Discussions and viewpoints exchange on specific topics could follow. Greek pre-service teachers may benefit from additional training on how to put into practice those matters in question and therefore lead the way to better outcomes for EFL learners in Greece.

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**BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES**

**Areti-Maria Sougari** is an assistant professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Some of her work appears in TESOL Quarterly, Language and Education, the Journal of Applied Linguistics as well as in several edited volumes. Her research interests include teacher education and development, teaching English as an International Language, and teaching English to young learners.

**Roxani Faltzi** is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at the School of English of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. She holds an MSc in Applied Linguistics from the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests are in the broad areas of language attitudes, intercultural communication and English as a lingua franca, and bilingualism.