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Examining Classroom Negotiation Strategies of International Teaching Assistants

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From a constructivist point of view teacher identity evolves as the teacher interacts and negotiates with others. However, before negotiation can occur, instructors must establish their own teacher identity as a starting position. This narrative study analyzes how international teaching assistants negotiated with their American undergraduate students. Twenty participants engaged in two individual interviews and a videotaped classroom observation where the negotiation strategies were discussed and observed. Findings revealed that although experience improved their negotiation skills, many international teaching assistants struggled with negotiating with students because they did not understand the students' background. Furthermore, cultural norms influenced how participants approached the negotiating process. The implications of cultural norms in cross-cultural teacher negotiation are discussed.

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Key Words: International teaching assistant, teacher/student negotiation, cross-cultural teaching, classroom interaction

Introduction

Mastering the ebb and flow of teacher-student interaction is a critical skill for all novice educators as they learn to practice within the prescribed discourses of a given educational context. Such a process requires awareness of hierarchical power structures and awareness of the students' positions in the classroom (Park, 2008). In addition to the various sides involved in a particular negotiation, instructors must understand the roles and expectations for the negotiating process in order to come to a successful conclusion (Donohue & Taylor, 2007). While teacher/student interaction in higher education classrooms has been studied in previous literature (Nguyen, 2007; McGowan & Graham, 2009; Nakamura, 2008), such research has focused on American teachers interacting with culturally diverse students and has not considered the implications of the instructor's race on interaction. Towards this end, a few studies have recently focused on the role of the racially diverse instructors in culturally homogenous classrooms in various settings (Rodriguez, 2009; Peeler & Jane, 2005). The current study seeks to build on this foundation of knowledge by examining how international teaching assistants (ITAs) negotiate with mainstream American students in the university classroom. While ITAs share some of the same characteristics of international instructors in other settings, the discourses and practices of American higher education distinguish ITAs from other international instructors.

Within the context of American higher education, incorporating international instructors into the faculties of US post-secondary institutions provides universities with the opportunity to preserve the academic quality of the professorate while fostering internationalism. The demographics of U.S. higher education continue to demonstrate growing numbers of internationals and non-native speakers of English in the teaching force. In 2007, twenty-

seven percent of all instructional and research assistants were non-resident aliens (Employees in Degree Granting Institutions, 2007). The United States Department of Education estimated that in the year 2008 46.3 percent of foreign students received a teaching assistantship compared to only 12.2 percent of American citizens (Total Assistantship, 2008). Even with the prevalence of ITAs in university classrooms, many undergraduates have had limited or no personal interactions with international individuals prior to their encounter in the university classroom. Accordingly, previous studies have shown that undergraduates have been quick to blame their ITAs' lack of English skills for poor grades (Fitch & Morgan, 2003). Therefore, this study examines how ITAs negotiate with their students for the purpose of training ITAs to interact effectively with undergraduates.

Literature Review

Participant structures serve as the foundation for examining negotiation in the classroom as teachers establish ways of interacting verbally with their students (Philips, 2005). These participation patterns are based on how teachers assume various roles in the classroom; the roles embraced in the classroom are often influenced by past experiences, family background, and interactions that they have with colleagues and students (Schultz, Jones-Walker, Chikkatur, 2008; Buehl & Fives, 2009). Given the diverse influences on teacher roles, the exact nature of a teacher role for a particular context must be clearly defined before determining how well the norms match the students' expectations (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Brown, 2008). Such a comparison of the differing views of the instructors and students serves as the starting point for the process of negotiation.

The perception of a teaching role is closely related to the teacher's frame of reference (Haworth, 2008); teaching practices reflect the cultural beliefs and values of the prevailing dominant culture in which they are implemented (Givvin, Herbert, Jacobs, Hollingsworth & Gallimore, 2005). Since the conception of the role of the teacher and the purposes of education vary from culture to culture (Dhindsa, 2005), it is critical to understand how the international instructor views the role of teaching before analyzing the negotiation strategies that he or she uses. Cultural values, such as individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), paint very different views of the role of the teacher. For example, in a study that compared Japanese student teachers with American student teachers, the Japanese teachers wrote more about understanding their students' cultural background as a means of creating classroom harmony, whereas the American teachers were interested in solving individual student problems (Morey, Nakazawa & Colvin, 1997). Research has shown that international instructors are more likely to view their role in the classroom as a dispenser of information rather than a facilitator, which is prevalent within American educational systems (Kim, 2006; Robertson, 2005). Therefore, for some instructors whose native culture socialized students to be silent absorbers of knowledge teaching to the model of active student participation within a class lecture may be an extremely difficult adjustment (Sarkisian, 2006). Additionally, instructors are appointed managers of the classroom so that they control the pace and flexibility of the learning environment (Biber, 2006). Such a view is contrasted with another study which found that Chinese instructors viewed daydreaming as the most important obstacle to maintaining classroom management (Ding, Li, Li & Kulm, 2008). Another common expectation in U.S. higher education is that the instructor serves as a mentor to students (Langer, 2010), while such a role would not be expected in cultures where there is a great power distance that discourages personal interactions between teachers and students (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Cultural differences can exude a pervasive influence of the roles of teachers.

Beyond the cultural differences in education, understanding the common teaching practices for a given context enables the instructors to work within the existing discourse patterns to promote their own individual persona while still meeting the students' expectations for the role of teacher (Donohue & Taylor, 2007; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). Awareness of systemic practices in education in a particular locale is a fundamental starting point for the process of negotiation so that the instructor is cognizant of the acceptable options available from the educational institution and its community (Peeler & Jane, 2005). Therefore, studying the issues that are involved in cross-cultural negotiations between international instructors and their domestic undergraduate students could help administrators train international instructors to negotiate with their students.

Method

Purpose of Study
This study examined how the ITAs negotiated their roles as instructors with their students while adjusting to teaching in the context of an American university. The overall purpose of this research was to provide insight for ITA trainers so that they could provide meaningful and relevant professional development for ITAs.

Theoretical Framework/ Perspective
This study utilized symbolic interactionism as the theoretical basis, building on the premise that identities evolve through the process of creating meaning as people interact with one another and their environment (Crotty, 1998). Specifically, social structures control when and how these interactions occur as society sets the protocol of interactions between various groups of people (Stryker, 2008). In the field of education symbolic interactionism defines how relationships between teachers and students are affected by the processes of education within a given culture. These interactions that occur between instructors and students have a significant impact on teacher beliefs, which in turn influence the decisions and negotiations that the teacher makes with his or her students. From this context negotiation is understood as the process of interpreting and prioritizing different beliefs for the purpose of making decisions within a given context (Schultz et al, 2008). Accordingly, this study's research question was what is the role of negotiation as the ITA interacts with students in the context of U.S. university classrooms?

This study, which was conducted at a large Research I university in the southeastern United States, used the construct of teacher identity to provide a framework for studying the interaction between the international instructors and their students. Teacher identity reflects how teachers perceive their role in the classroom and what processes they undertake to sustain the projected identity to students (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). The present focus on teacher-student negotiation is one subset of this larger study.

Participants
The participants for this study were recruited through the use of snowball sampling (Merriam, 1998), as participants were recruited through personal and professional contacts across campus. Recruitment was also directed towards departments that had high concentrations of ITAs, such as mathematics and the Romance languages department. Specifically, this study, targeting ITAs who were teaching undergraduate classes, included twenty different participants (ten males and ten females), who represented thirteen different disciplines and fourteen different nationalities. These people had been ITAs for an average of three years and had resided in the United States for an average of five years. All but four of the participants had taught in other countries in various contexts before coming to the United States. At the time of the study, three of the ITAs were in the first semester

of teaching. Generally, the ITAs who were teaching languages were responsible for two sections of the same course, while the math and science students were responsible for one section of a classroom course or a science lab. Half of the participants taught language classes, while the others lectured in the sciences and non-language humanities. All of the participants are identified by pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Modes of Inquiry

Narrative analysis was used to study how the ITAs portrayed their role in the negotiation process in their stories of teacher growth (Pavlenko, 2007). The teacher narratives were analyzed to see how the ITAs represented their negotiation in these areas as part of their own conscious involvement in their own professional growth (Beijaard et al, 2004). As the participants represented themselves through storytelling, the resulting narratives provided the researcher with valuable insight into the ITAs' thoughts and attitudes.

The teachers' stories also served several important functions for the participants in this study. Storytelling offered the ITAs a way to conceptualize abstract thoughts through concrete representation (Dewhurst & Lamb, 2005). Furthermore, narratives told how the participants understood themselves and their relationships with other people in their lives. The act of narrative construction is in itself a meaning-making endeavor as the narrator seeks to organize events in a logical manner to fulfill the needs of a particular audience and context (Goffman, 1959). This co-construction of narratives often triggered self-reflection in teaching, leading to a more personalized view of teaching, (Cohen, 2010).

Data Collection Sources

In this study each ITA participated in two individual interviews that focused on cultural beliefs and professional development of their identity as teachers. The interview questions elicited personal stories about their educational experiences and philosophies. One interview occurred prior to the observation to gain information about the cultural and educational background of the ITAs, while the second interview focused on clarifying information from the earlier interview and events from the observations (Kvale, 1996). After the initial interview each participant was observed and videotaped teaching in the classroom for one complete class period, ranging from fifty minutes to three hours. The procedure for videotaping was explained beforehand so that the ITAs knew what to expect, and their students were not surprised to see the video camera recording during class. The videotape was subsequently used to help participants to recall the segment of the lesson that the researcher wanted to discuss (Hoekstra, Beijaard, Brekelmans & Korthagen, 2007) as well as to study how the opinions in the interviews translated into classroom practice. This study found that although negotiation was a critical teaching skill, the efforts at negotiation were often hampered by lack of cultural knowledge on the part of the ITA.

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Results

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Generally, the participants in this study all experimented with various levels of negotiations with their students. Negotiations sought to reach common understanding as the two sides worked from different expectations of classroom norms (Dhindsa, 2005). Overall, the participants in this study were willing to participate, but their lack of cultural knowledge prevented them from understanding the various permissible roles for teachers and students in that specific context (Peeler & Jane, 2005). The findings tended to fall into three major categories: the role of negotiation in the classroom, the influence of the role of the students' zone of proximal development on the negotiation process, and the negotiation due to linguistic and cultural differences between the students and their ITAs.

The Role of Negotiation in the Classroom
Previous research has shown that negotiating with students requires a lot of thought and effort as the instructors must anticipate the results of such actions. Battling against the American philosophy that "the consumer is always right," the findings indicate that these teachers found that negotiation was essential to their teaching (Snare, 1997). For instance, Ibrahim, a French ITA from Burkina Faso, recognized the importance of negotiation as an ongoing process.

> American culture, this a melting pot. It's complex. You know the student body, the setting is different. What may work with the group I have here may not work with the next group, because it gonna have, we're gonna have another student body, different cultural background and so on. And so, always it's like a thermostat. You have to choo-, you know turn it, adjust it.

This ongoing dialogue between the students and teachers became a balancing act between teacher authority and student empowerment as the teachers sought to engage their students in autonomous learning while still maintaining content and pedagogical authority in the classroom (VanderStaay, Faxon, Meischen, Koleskinov & Ruppel, 2009). Therefore, the teacher had to make daily decisions about the role of the students in the learning process. Despite the difference in roles between the teacher and student, the two had to work together or negotiate to achieve the goals of teaching and learning. This collaboration yielded positive or negative results depending on the amount of effort provided by both parties. The role of negotiation between the instructors and their students was significant for ITAs who were not all familiar with American culture, as student perceptions seemed to be a pressing concern on most participants' minds.

In the following example one of the participants described how the failure to negotiate something as rudimentary as morning greetings with her students produced negative results. Rosa, an ITA from Spain, described an experience where she told her students to treat her like a peer and not show outward signs of respect, such as rising when the teacher entered the room. She reflected:

> The thing is when the teacher arrive in the classroom all students have to get up. (She demonstrates by standing up.) Like the whole system. So I never want my student like that, because it's like honoring me for my education, but for them now, and I had a lot of students in my classes like this, but I said, "No, no, no, it's OK." But there is some places that they don't respect me because I don't do so hot, you know, I don't put my level so high; I put…sometimes I have…you know, it's these teenagers. It's like "aaah" It's cultural thing, I think; some of these will be speaking… speaking it through, because some of these don't follow the roles. I didn't want to follow their roles, and now I think it's a mistake, because you have rules, something the people is accustomed to**.**

Accordingly, she recognized that her attempt to create a more collegial atmosphere in the classroom actually had the exact opposite effect that she had intended because there was a mismatch between the perceptions of the teacher and the students (den Brok, Levy, Rodriguez & Wubbels, 2002). This example highlights the importance of understanding student expectations as part of a negotiation process (Brown, 2009); failure to do so had deleterious consequences since the students no longer viewed her as having a position of authority. Singh and Doherty (2004) argue that the cross-cultural negotiation of respect is very difficult for a Western teacher because the teacher has to balance the local cultural norms with Western academic values. Rosa explained that violating a cultural norm created more issues between her and her students because her students lost their respect for her.

Because she did not act as her students expected her students did not want to follow directions or stay on task. However, other participants stated that making mistakes was part of the process of learning to teach. For instance, Hashim, a Swahili ITA from Tanzania, commented, "I've realized that students, they are willing to take or accept mistakes as long as they know that it's not intentional, and I think you make honest mistakes. I think no problem." Accordingly, instructors must consider the norms of both the teacher and students when they negotiate with their students and accept the possibility that mistakes may occur. Many other ITAs described similar situations about negotiating simple classroom procedures, such as passing in papers, in which the two sides had to deliberately discuss the classroom procedure in order to develop a common set of classroom norms. All of the participants found that the ITA and the students must work together to achieve the goals of teaching and learning.

Research has shown that negotiating student roles in the classroom is important because the concept of student is culturally constructed and the patterns for student participation fluctuate from culture to culture as models of student learning are a result of the teaching and learning environment and not necessarily attributable to the individuals themselves (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Accordingly, since the possibility for participant structures or student involvement varies across cultures (Philips, 2005), teacher-student negotiations have to specify and communicate the options that are available to students. Furthermore, Schultz et al (2008) found that while listening to students' opinions as part of the negotiation process is essential to a successful compromise, allowing students too much power in the negotiation process can lead to negative outcomes because students may not use the power in a way that the instructor expects. Although Houser and Frymier (2009) posit that traditionally student empowerment is viewed as positive because the student is portrayed as a competent individual who can make meaningful contributions to a situation, sometimes students make decisions that do not live up to the instructor's expectations. Therefore, negotiations must establish clear ground rules for engaging in and completing the interaction. The following example shows that failure to clarify expectations can lead to disappointment. Isabel, a Spanish TA from Peru, created a classroom activity that was a simulation of the Latin Grammy awards show. While she was passing out roles, she allowed one group to substitute la bamba for the salsa dance. Therefore, she was willing to negotiate with her students in order to get them more interested in the content area. However, she later described the event as follows: "I was disappointed because they didn't do it by heart. They bring the lyrics, or something like this. I was completely disappointed about that; I supposed they will learn it by heart, but they didn't." In this story, Isabel represented her students' cavalier attitudes toward the project as a rejection of her ideals for this lesson. Therefore, this example shows that negotiation in teacher/ student interactions can build trust or lead to disappointment when the students do not meet the teacher's expectations. Other participants commented that it took experience to determine how much autonomy to grant to their students for particular tasks. The participants seemed to become firmer in their rules over time. Once they began to set their parameters, the ITAs found that clear definitions of student expectations signaled the realm of options that are available to the students as part of the negotiation process. In all, these findings show that a lack of clear understanding of the possible roles of the instructors and students can lead to an unsuccessful negotiation with unanticipated consequences.

Determining Students' Zones of Proximal Development

In addition to discussing student roles in the classroom, the teacher also must negotiate with the student to determine the students' level of content area knowledge. Given that many of the ITAs in this study taught introductory courses in their disciplines, they quite often had to negotiate in order to determine the students' zone of proximal development, which is the level of student learning that the student would be able to complete a new

task given the appropriate scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly, Van Huizen, Van Oers and Wubbels (2005) suggest that finding the level of student understanding is critical so that the instructors can aim the instruction at a level that is challenging but understandable to the students at their existing level. The present results indicated that this negotiation was especially challenging for the ITAs. International instructors describe finding a common threshold for learning as a collaborative process when the international instructors tried different levels of instructions and monitored their students' reactions. Many ITAs recognized that interest in their discipline might not be shared by students who were pursuing different fields so they provided basic explanations to move the class forward within the prescribed curriculum without trying to negotiate the level of instruction. For instance, Dikembe, an ITA from Cameroon described his understanding of negotiating with students as follows:

> When I came here, to adjust was not easy for me because there are certain thing that you assume student normally must do by himself…but here as a teacher you have to give it to the student and for me it was difficult because I know he can do it by himself...but it took me a long time and a lot of bad experiences before I've learned that no, it's my job to give all the students…. and it was not their fault; it's because of the system.

This ITA recognized that students' behavior reflected American cultural norms. Therefore, Dikembe adjusted his idea of what kind of instruction that the students needed after he had several experiences instructing the students based on his earlier assumptions. Later he explained that "when you try to make that switch in your mind, you find yourself happy and they also be happy." Accordingly, this example shows that some instructors in this study found that providing instruction at a rudimentary level without necessarily challenging students at their zone of proximal development was the best way to provide meaningful instruction. Many other ITAs voiced similar stories about simplifying the level of instruction in order to help non-major students meet course requirements, as many undergraduate introductory courses were heterogeneous and included many students from majors outside of the course being studied.

Other participants chose to negotiate with students to find out where the students' zone of proximal development was in order to provide instruction that was meaningful to the students. Although ascertaining the students' level of comprehension was difficult, finding this threshold enabled the teacher to stimulate the students' thinking and change activities to make them more meaningful to the students (Margolinas, Coulange, & Bessot, 2005). One participant, Hai, a TA from China in the physics department, offered his strategy for learning the students' level of understanding. He said he had to "to think about your students, thinking from the point of view of your student." Instead of guiding the student through the steps needed to calculate the answer, Hai allowed the student to solve the problem on his own and encounter the results of his mistake and then work backwards to correct the error with directed questions from the instructor. This negotiation of power allowed the student to assume autonomy over his own learning while getting support in the zone of proximal development. Accordingly, the willingness to assume the identity of the other party in the negotiation process facilitated the learning process since the ITA was able to address directly the instruction to the student's level.

Although some participants tried to assume the student identity, their efforts met with varying degrees of success as cultural backgrounds colored the perceptions of the role of the students.. Such a sentiment was voiced by Ivan, a math ITA from Bulgaria:

> I have many problems because I don't have any idea what my students know I expect much more than they know and actually nobody makes any efforts to explain to us foreign teaching assistants what we should expect from American students from their high school education and what we should not, and so, at the beginning it is very painful.

As this example illustrates, trying to see the students' perspective was extremely difficult for many participants because they were not conversant with the American K-12 system to understand what knowledge was to be expected. However, this process became easier as the ITAs gained more experience. One such example was Ravi, a statistics ITA from India, who commented "one of the things I learned over time…. I'll do give them some kind of example on some thing that they have the idea on some, suppose football game or something like that." Accordingly, Ravi recognized the heterogeneous background of his students and tried to use pop culture examples that would be familiar to all to students.

Negotiating Language Differences in the Classroom
Verbal communication between an ITA and students has become a defining hallmark of the undergraduate's experiences with ITAs because many undergraduates express negative opinions about ITAs when they cannot understand their ITA (Fitch & Morgan, 2003). Alberts (2008) argues that although foreign born instructors are often falsely blamed for communication difficulties in the classroom, undergraduate attitudes towards foreign instructors influence how successful negotiations will be. However, current research indicates that most of the onus for improving classroom communication is placed on the international instructor, as evidenced by the many university ITA training courses that focus on oral communication skills (Chiang, 2009).

Being a non-native speaker of American English presented the instructors with the challenge of negotiating language differences with their students in order to achieve mutual understanding. Many of the ITAs were convinced that if students wanted to create an issue, the accented English was usually the prime target. Since reactions to accent often come from a larger socio-historic background of the listener, negotiation in this area is imperative to the successful teaching experience of the ITA. The stances of the participants seemed to fall into two major categories. First, some of the ITAs were teaching foreign languages, so they generally used the target language in the classroom instead of using English. Another group of participants were the ITAs who were comfortable assuming a non-expert identity in English where they strove to meet the standard of being understandable.

Many of the ITAs who taught languages to their students did not have to use very much English in their interaction with students. The romance languages department structured the teaching assignments so that the new TAs started with introductory classes which required more English usage while the more experienced TAs taught the upper level courses with less English. Given that the quality of foreign language instruction is often measured by the percentage of instruction that is conducted in the target language (Kim & Elder, 2005), for these participants it was a pedagogical decision to model the language of instruction as much as possible in order to increase the proficiency of their students. Many of the participants remarked that this choice had nothing to do with their English proficiency. For example, Carlos, a TA from Spain who taught Spanish, stated,

> It's not that I'm uncomfortable with speaking English. I don't have a problem with that actually, but the, the…what I mean, I guess, it's not a good thing because the more you are in contact with the language…I mean, I don't know, but I guess it's…. I mean, I've read studies on it and everything I've done classes on linguistics and stuff like that. So, yeah, I mean….I…the theory, theoretically speaking, the more

you are in contact with the language the more chances you have to learn it.

In this example, Carlos stated that his choice to speak Spanish in the classroom was based on his own personal research as well as the research from departmental courses that he had taken. Given the knowledge that he had gained about the use of the target language in the world language classroom, he was not willing to negotiate with his students on this issue. However, during the observation, Carlos did occasionally codeswitch into English to tell a joke to his students indicating that he was willing to use English to communicate on certain occasions. Since native speakers tend to be more tolerant of a foreign accent in a friend than in a teaching assistant (Bresnahan, Osashi, Nebashi, Liu & Shearman, 2002), using humor to create rapport can alleviate some of the tensions that may be felt between students and the non-native speaker teacher. Therefore, although his use of the Spanish language may be initially perceived as lack of negotiation, his inclusion of English humor shows a flexibility to meet a given situation. Similarly, Hans, an ITA from Austria, emphasized student needs when negotiating language usage:

> I think I speak a lot of English because I want to make the conversation interesting. I'd like to speak as much German as I can but I must keep it interesting, if I speak too much German, I realize they cannot follow it anymore. Then it gets boring for a student. Then I switch to English.

Accordingly, consideration of the students enables the ITAs to maintain the attention of their students. These examples indicated that there are multiple ways to negotiate language use in the classroom in order to address the needs of a specific class effectively

Some instructors were quite comfortable in assuming the position as the non-native speaker of English in the classroom with their students. These ITAs viewed their status as a non-native speaker to be an advantage in the classroom so that the students could also feel comfortable as being non-experts in the language that they were learning (Ilieva, 2010). By illustrating this vulnerability to their students, they also demonstrated ways to negotiate word meaning with other speakers in order to establish understanding when the communication had broken down. Some of the participants described how they chose to enlist the aid of their students when they needed a language translation or cultural context as concepts that are based on underlying cultural norms and beliefs are often subject to negotiation and reconsideration (Dalton-Puffer, 2005). Accordingly, the ITAs used the cultural capital that was available through their students in order to gain greater understanding. One such participant was Daniela, a Portuguese ITA from Brazil. During the observation, the class was reading a story about a character named Fabio. The class got all excited and started teasing her about Fabio and made references to I Can't Believe It's Not Butter. Daniela was totally unaware of the pop culture reference to Fabio, so she tried to ask the students about it during class. Later, she asked about Fabio in the follow-up interview. When she was asked about how she deals with language or cultural references that she did not understand, Daniela explained her experience as follows:

> I have no trouble asking them [students] something. Sometimes I don't know what to say…a word in English and then I ask them. Sometimes….The other day it happened, like they asked me, a student asked me something that I didn't know, what was it in English and so I don't know what it is in English, I can tell you what it is in Portuguese. And then I say, you know, "Explain to me what is that in a way that I can understand" and then he did explain and I understood, and okay, I know what you're talking about, so that is this in Portuguese.

Although her lack of sociocultural knowledge about the topic limited her options for negotiation in this setting (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007), Daniela's choice to ask students for knowledge resulted in a bidirectional exchange where the ITA gained information from the students. She believed that allowing students to see her vulnerability in the L2 would encourage them to try Spanish and to be comfortable making mistakes in the process. The back and forth exchange of information enabled both parties to gain knowledge from the negotiation. Even though the teacher and students could find points of similarity, this equality of being non-native speakers of two different languages did not lessen the teacher's authority in the classroom (Ilieva, 2010). Such an opinion was voiced by Eva, an ITA from Romania who was teaching German, which was actually her third language. She explained,

> I also very much have this non-native speakers' perspective, which I think is an advantage because I can explain the language…. Well, sometimes of course there are things that, you know, students would ask so how is this done in Germany and I mean, I just don't know, because I…I haven't lived there long enough. I mean, I don't know, and I wish I knew. But then again, I don't think that…you know, every German has the answers to everything, you know.

This negotiation led to the creation of a community of learners that could learn from each other. Language negotiation was an issue to some degree for all participants, but their confidence in their English proficiency seemed to have an impact on their students' attitudes towards them (Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2006). Many participants had adopted the non-native identity that was comfortable learning from others, which generally seemed to be well-received by their students.

Discussion

This study shows that adjusting educational norms might help cross-cultural instructors to meet the expectations of their students. Such a finding supports Carnoy and Rhoten's study (2002) which found that superimposing culturally constructed pedagogical beliefs unto a different culture is likely to meet with resistance. This research contributes to such work by illustrating that negotiation is necessary in order to create a beneficial learning environment where students and their teacher feel free to move out of their comfort zone by trying different approaches to learning without being penalized. Furthermore, this process of give and take enables the teacher and students to form a community of learners where they can learn from each other. Although such negotiation occurs in monocultural classrooms, these findings emphasize that the need for trust is heightened in a cross-cultural setting when one party is not familiar with the accepted norms, relying on the other to provide cultural information. Accordingly, negotiation skills are crucial part of teacher identity as teachers continually negotiate their professional growth and development. This study has emphasized the necessity for negotiation on various levels between the ITA and the student.

First, the present research has illustrated that the negotiation of classroom practices is essential in order to create a classroom environment that is comfortable for students and international instructors alike. Since previous research indicates that teaching practices cannot be automatically transferred to other cultural settings (Givvin et al, 2005), this study elaborates on that finding by demonstrating that negotiations are essential to determine which practices can be accepted by each party. Beyond the recognition of different cultural models of education (Dhindsa, 2005), the present study advocates that cross-cultural teachers should ascertain the goals of education within that particular setting so that their practices can negotiate with the students' cultural norms. Accordingly, cross-cultural teachers need to pay special attention to the systemic practices in order to gain greater

insight into the structure and organization of that institution. This research has found that knowledge of the existing norms of the American university system is an essential basis for the process of negotiation so that the ITA can offer choices to the undergraduate that are not culturally incompatible. Such an action will lead towards long-term effectual compromise with which both the instructor and students can feel comfortable.

Findings also emphasize that interacting to ascertain the zone of proximal development enables the international instructor to prepare lessons that are intellectually stimulating to the students. Furthermore, this research indicates that ITAs would benefit from learning about the American K-12 system so that they would have a firmer idea of what the students' level of previous knowledge should be. Most participants seemed to be unaware of the American system, basing their level of knowledge on what students from their respective cultures would be expected to know at that level in college. Such a supposition does not always accurately reflect the level of American students, leading to frustration on the part of the ITA and the students (Bresnahan & Cai, 2000). This study shows that this difficulty seems to be more apparent in the math and science fields. Accordingly, departmental mentoring should provide ITAs with an overview of the level of knowledge that freshmen bring with them from their classes in high school as well as from their prerequisite college-level courses. This information would make less guesswork involved in negotiating the zone of proximal development with the students.

Results indicate that negotiating language differences between ITAs and their undergraduate students is a critical step in creating cross-cultural understanding between these two groups. Recent research (e.g. Damron, 2003) increasingly portrays the language issue as a two-sided negotiation where the onus for establishing understanding is shared between the two parties and is not solely relegated as the responsibility of the non-native speaker. However, the current findings suggest that before any negotiation can occur, the non-native speakers must determine their starting position, identifying personal goals of English proficiency and the role of English in the classroom. These values will be transmitted to students through everyday interactions; this study found that ITAs have great power in contextualizing the language debate. Although the ITA can use visuals or discourse markers to reinforce the oral language use in the classroom, the negotiation of language attitudes is essential to the ITAs' success because language attitudes may be non-linguistic in nature. Therefore, ITAs should conduct an open discussion about their linguistic and cultural background. Another approach is to encourage student questions during classroom lecture and performing frequent comprehension checks to make sure the students understand the content and the language of instruction.

The current findings demonstrate that negotiation is an important skill that should be integrated into teacher education programs. Schultz et al (2008) recommended this practice for urban teacher preparation; however, this study finds that negotiation is even more imperative for training teachers who are teaching cross-culturally, given the diversity in national educational practices. By teaching international instructors about the expected educational norms and student knowledge levels, these instructors will be able to negotiate from a position of knowledge and to alleviate some of the painful experiences of trial and error as they negotiate with their students. Therefore, faculty members should mentor ITAs in the skills of negation. By doing so, these cross-cultural teachers will become more confident instructors as they listen and learn along with their students.

Conclusions

This study offers several important contributions to the field of education. First, the narratives in this study offer an inside view of the ITAs' view of negotiations in various contexts. Although previous research has considered the students' role in the negotiation process (Fitch & Morgan, 2003), this study provides a new perspective by addressing how ITAs perceive and respond to classroom issues of teacher/student negotiation. This research is important to the field of international teacher training because it provides an examination of the strategies that the ITAs have used to negotiate situations with their students. Such knowledge would be beneficial in training ITAs in negotiation strategies, equipping them to interact cross-culturally with students in the classroom.

The present research has found that as the TAs gain more experience and confidence, they are more willing to negotiate with their students because this negotiation will not threaten their identity. Furthermore, this negotiation has illustrated ITAs' willingness to stretch their teaching self-image in order to better meet their students' needs. While all participants recognized the need for negotiation with their students, this research found that more experienced ITAs were more accomplished in establishing and enforcing firm parameters for the students to follow. Accordingly, negotiation is a teaching skill that is honed through practice as ITAs interact with undergraduates in the classroom.

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