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Metathesis in Language Acquisition of Greek

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Abstract

This study investigates metathesis in children so that to see if it facilitates their language development and in which way. For this reason, thirteen Greek-speaking children are examined varying in age from 2;6.9 to 6;1.26. The data come from picture naming and spontaneous speech. Their examination reveals that its emergence lies to segmental, prosodic and phonotactic reasons. More specifically, metathesis helps children avoid specific sequences of consonants by switching them positions. It also assists them to avoid clusters located in unstressed syllables or illicit structures in the ambient language, as complex codas in loanwords. All metathesized segments are located in positions that can occupy according to the rules of Greek. For the data analysis, Optimality Theory is used (Prince & Smolensky, 1993), while we adopt the Multiple Parallel Grammars model (Revithiadou & Tzakosta, 2004) for the two different patterns attested in their speech.

Keywords: language acquisition, metathesis in Greek, phonology, Optimality Theory.

1. Introduction

During phonological development children employ many phonological processes in order to acquire their mother tongue. One among them is *metathesis*, which is the reversal of the expected linear order of segments (cf., Hume, 2004: 203), as illustrated in the example (1).

Adult's Form   Child's Form

1) [faneelah]   → [faleenah] (t-shirt)   (Arabic, Qasem, 2023: 224)

Metathesis has received little attention due to the fact that it is not very productive. In adult's speech, it arises under two specific conditions. First, the outcome of metathesis must be a sequence which is familiar and frequent in the speaker's ambient language. The second factor is related to indeterminacy of the signal, which is affected by the listener's experience of specific sounds or sequences of them or by the lack of sufficient phonetic cues for some segments in a given context (Hume, 2004). In child speech, it is equally ignored due to the lowest degree of appearance in comparison to other processes, such as *substitution* of segments (Qasem, 2023). One common feature in adults and children's metathesis lies to its systematic emergence when two non-default *distinctive features* participate (Gerlach, 2010).

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- The examination of metathesis from longitudinal data of children allows us to make generalizations for this peripheral process.

- Metathesis facilitates children in the acquisition of their mother tongue.

- It helps them avoid specific sequences of consonants, clusters in unstressed syllables and consonants located in codas.

- Its main advantage lies to the preservation of all segments traced in the aforementioned structures.

In the literature, three are the most common types of metathesis noted. In particular, it can contain the reversal of a consonant and a vowel, of two consonants or the movement of one consonant to another position. Representative examples of each case are given below (2-4).

Adult's Form   Child's Form   Child: Age

2) /klot'**ax**+ji/ → [klot.**xa**.ji] (to be burned) adult's language   (Nivaclé, Gutiérrez, 2010: 122)

3) [nezumi]   → [nemuzi] (mouse) Eugene: 2;5

4) [klink]   → [kinkl] (ice)   Loftur: 2;5-3;5 (Icelandic, Fukazawa & Miglio, 2008: 31)

These examples show additionally that the movement can be local (2, 3) or from distance (4). In adults, metathesis is usually traced in adjacent segments (Hume, 2004). On the other hand, in children the shift of only one segment constitutes rare case of metathesis (Bernhardt & Stemberger, 1998). However, it can occur together with other processes, such as *deletion* (Qasem, 2023). The present study investigates the purpose of metathesis in Greek-speaking children and how it facilitates them to acquire their mother tongue.

The structure of the paper is organized with the following way: in section 2 cross-linguistic findings of metathesis are presented. Section 3 includes the methodology conducted for this research. In section 4 the results of the study are presented, while in section 5 the data showing metathesis are analyzed. Section 6 concludes the paper and at the end of it, the *tokens* with metathesis of each child are cited in appendix.

2. Research on metathesis

Cross-linguistically, the appearance of metathesis is suggested to be due to articulatory, morphological, phonological, prosodic or phonotactic reasons depending on the language examined. We begin with the findings in adults. In several languages, metathesis leads to the avoidance of *complex* structures, such as *codas* (Gutiérrez, 2010, example 5).

5) /jijax+/-s/   → [jij.xas] (pumas)   (Nivaclé, Gutiérrez, 2010: 119)

In Nivaclé, complex codas are not allowed. So, in (5) the consonant [x] moves to the *onset* position before the vowel [a] in order for an illicit structure to be avoided ([*ji.jaxs]). Another reason for the emergence of this process constitutes the satisfaction of the *Syllable Contact Law*, according to which in any sequence of the form C1.C2, there is a preference for C1 to exceed in *sonority* C2 (Murray & Vennemann, 1983: 520). As far as sonority is concerned, every segment has its own value on a scale proposed by Kiparsky (1979, figure 1).

Figure 1. Sonority Scale (drawn from Kiparsky, 1979: 432)

stops>fricatives>nasals>liquids>glides>vowels

less sonorous   more sonorous

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Based on the sonority scale, Selkirk (1984) suggests the *Sonority Sequence Principle*, which states that the sonority of segments decreases steadily from the *nucleus* to the edges of a syllable. There are several researches (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2010; Alqahtani, 2018), in which metathesis serves as a repair strategy for the satisfaction of the Syllable Contact Law (examples 6-7).

6) /fi.nak/(tobacco) → [fin.ka.meʧ] (to have power over tobacco) (Nivaclé, Gutiérrez, 2010: 120)

7) /mad.re.se/ → [mar.de.se] (school)   (Persian, Alqahtani, 2018: 93)

In (6), the consonant [n] is syllabified in coda position of the first syllable, while the vowel [a] moves after the consonant [k]. This way the form [fi.nak.meʧ] is avoided, which violates the Syllable Contact Law. The same holds for (7) with the difference that two consonants must reorder their position in order for the initial syllable to have a more sonorous consonant than that of the second syllable. In other surveys (e.g., Hock, 1985; Alqahtani, 2018, among others), metathesis arises in cases where the Sonority Sequence Principle is violated in complex onsets or codas (examples 8-9).

8) /suxr(a)/ → [surx] (red)   (Persian, Hock, 1985: 534)

9) /pudr/ → [purd] (powder)   (Persian, Alqahtani, 2018: 93)

The explanation of the movements in (8-9) is the same. They change the position of the consonants in the clusters so that the more sonorous to be closer to the nucleus. This way, two well-formed clusters are created.

Now, we move on to metathesis in child speech. It is observed to occur in specific sequences, such as [DORSAL]-[LABIAL] (Gerlach, 2010, example 10).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age

10) [kʌp] → [pʌk] (cup) Grace: 1;8 (English, Gerlach, 2010: 14)

In this case, the switching between distinctive features and not whole segments is proposed to take place, that is, the consonants [k] and [p] shift their *place* as the child cannot utter [DORSAL] consonants in initial syllables. When the child produces [DORSAL] consonants with higher frequency, metathesis begins steadily to fade away (Gerlach, 2010). In addition, the advantage of metathesis lies to the preservation of both segments together with the distinctive features they bear. A similar conclusion is drawn in another study (Leonard & McGregor, 1991), where a child is unable to utter fricatives in initial position of words (example 11).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age

11) [su] → [us] (shoe) W: 2;0 (English, Leonard & McGregor, 1991: 262)

This type of metathesis is related to the order of acquisition of fricatives, which are usually acquired earlier in coda position than in onset (e.g., Edwards, 1996). In Arabic, the frequency of metathesis is higher when a sibilant consonant participates (examples 12-13).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age

12) [nafesi] → [nasefi] (myself) Maryam

13) [manshafah] → [masnafah] (towel) Salama   (Arabic, Qasem, 2023: 225)

This is attributed to the children's preference to move acquired consonants, since in Arabic sibilants emerge frequently and as a result they are easier to be produced by them in comparison to others. Furthermore, metathesis is mostly triggered when two side by side consonants located word medially share some distinctive features, such as place or *manner* (Qasem, 2023). One more environment where this process is observed is in clusters (examples 14-15).

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Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
14) [nudnɔ]	→ [jun.dɔ] (boring)	Ola: 4;0-4;4 (Polish, Łukaszewicz, 2007: 65)
15) [i.po.ˈ**vr**i.çi.o]	→ [i.po**l**.ˈ**vi**.çi.o] (submarine)	S.1: 4;9 (Greek, Gatsou, 2022: 54)

In (14), the consonants [d] and [n] have switched positions satisfying the Syllable Contact Law, as the consonant [n] is more sonorous than the consonant [d] and all the segments are retained (Łukaszewicz, 2007). In (15), the same strategy is employed in order for both members of the cluster to be preserved and for the Syllable Contact Law to not be violated, as the consonant [l] bears higher sonority in regard to the consonant [v]. Metathesis is additionally traced in syllables containing consonants in coda position (examples 16-17).

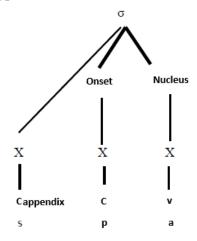| Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
16) [fo**r**.ti.ˈɣo]	→ [**fr**o.ti.ˈɣo] (truck)	S.28: 4;9
17) [a**r**.ˈvi.la]	→ [a.ˈ**vr**i.la] (combat boot)	S.4: 5;11 (Greek, Gatsou, 2022: 41, 43)

As illustrated in (16), the reorder of [r] creates a well-formed cluster and leads to the highest possible sonority distance between the first and the second syllable, as vowels bear the highest sonority. Further, the type of *markedness* changes instead of its level and quantity, since CVC and CCV syllables are equally marked as they both come from the *unmarked* CV syllable with the addition of one consonant in different though position. In addition, the movement of [r] turns the initial syllable from open to closed (Gatsou, 2022). This conforms to the view that in Greek open syllables are more frequent than closed ones (see Setatos, 1974, among others). The reasons of [r] movement in (17) are the same but its characteristics differ, as the shift is accomplished from initial to medial syllable. Children seem to be sensitive to segments located at the beginning of words which disallow the presence of other segments in front of them for their faithful utterance (Gatsou, 2022). The faithfulness of initial segments is attributed to their position, as it is considered perceptually salient (see Beckman, 1998, among others). Metathesis in (17) changes the type of markedness between the participating syllables, as the initial becomes less marked, while the second is more marked. In the next example (18), an alternative way for the avoidance of cluster is represented.

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
18) [**p**sa.ˈli.ði]	→ [**s**pa.ˈli.ði] (scissor)	S.1: 4;9	(Greek, Gatsou, 2022: 68)

The consonant [s] goes to a position, in which it is licensed as *appendix* in the node of syllable (see Kappa, 1995, among others), as shown from figure (2).

Figure 2. Appendix [s] (drawn from Gatsou, 2022: 14)

This way the onset of the initial syllable is not complex. Regarding the properties of metathesis in examples (16-18), it is ascertained that the direction of the metathesized segment can be leftwards or rightwards, while the movement usually takes place to the next or previous syllable or even in the same syllable.

Finally, in a survey examined metathesis both in adult and child speech (Fukazawa & Miglio, 2008), it is proposed that in the former it is applied at the level of the syllable (example 19), while in the latter at the level of the segment (example 20).

Adult's Form   Child's Form   Child: Age

19) [taburakasu]   → [tarabukasu] (deceive) adult's language

20) [nemaki]   → [menaki] (pajama) Eugene: 2;5 (Fukazawa & Miglio, 2008: 31)

3. Methodology

Before the research an ethnical approval to conduct it was obtained by the departmental research ethnics committee and consent forms were signed by the parents of the participating children as well as by themselves. Children's consent form was simpler in order for them to be clear what they were going to do. In addition, children who selected to participate in the survey met the researcher in order for both sides to be familiarized with each other before the recordings. In total, 13 monolingual Greek-speaking children with typical linguistic development and without suffering from any hearing problem were recorded. The meetings took place in a nursery and a kindergarten. For the data collection, the professional tape recorder Marantz PMD661MKII was used. All tokens gathered come from picture naming via a book, which includes laminated images showing animals, foods, plants, vehicles, professions, household utensils, buildings, characters from cartoons and generally every day words, which give the children the possibility to utter all consonants and vowels in every position within a word. Their spontaneous speech was also recorded which resulted from activities, such as playing with puzzles, balls, dolls, cars, bricks, painting with markers, reading fairy tales and so on. The process was always done between the researcher and one child each time in a room granted for this purpose so that their productions do not come from hesitation or to get distracted from other activities happening in the nursery or kindergarten during the recordings.

Children's age varies from 2;6.9 to 6;1.26 years old. Their speech was recorded on a weekly basis for those that were younger than 4;5 years old and every 14 days for those older than 4;5 years old. The duration lasted about 7 months, while each recording ranges from 8 to 20 minutes for every child. We rely our assumptions on 32 tokens presenting metathesis. All children are observed to be in the intermediate phase of acquisition but at a different substage. Thus, complex structures such as consonantal clusters, consonants in coda position, trisyllabic and longer words, consonants specified as liquid appear in all the children. These features are proposed to indicate the transition of the initial to the intermediate stage of language acquisition (see for Greek, Tzakosta & Kappa, 2008; Kappa, 2009). For the reproduction and conversion of audio material into phonetic tokens the Audacity software was used. The processing and analysis were done in Microsoft Excel Worksheets. Due to the transcription done perceptually, only data with high certainty of children's outputs are included. The adult's and child's outputs are written according to the *International Phonetic Alphabet*.

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4. Results

We classify our data in three different categories based on the reasons of metathesis emergence. More specifically, it is used in order for specific sequences to be avoided and in order for the consonants of clusters located in unstressed syllable or consonants traced in coda position to be maintained. In addition, we observe two types of metathesis to appear. The first involves the switching between two consonants and the second the movement of a consonant.

We begin with the shift between two consonants. Representative examples are given below (21-24).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
21) [ˈka.ti]	→ [ˈta.ci] (something)	#076B-A[1]: 4;9.10
22) [ˈci.ta]	→ [ˈti.ka] (look)	#077G-A: 5;1.13
23) [ˈnu.me.ɾo]	→ [ˈɾu.me.no] (number)	#094B-A: 5;11.22
24) [a.ne.mi.ˈsti.ɾas]	→ [a.me.ni.ˈsti.ɾas] (fan)	#094B-A: 6;1.26

Metathesis in tokens (21-24) helps the children to avoid sequences containing specific consonants regarding their distinctive features. In (21-22), a [DORSAL] consonant in initial syllable shifts position with a [CORONAL] consonant located in the next syllable. This is attributed to two reasons. The first lies to *input* frequency. In both children, tokens starting with [CORONAL] consonant are more systematic (#076B-A: 1.431 tokens, #077G-A: 849 tokens) than those beginning with [DORSAL] consonant (#076B-A: 185 tokens, #077G-A: 162 tokens). The second lies to faithfulness. Children utter faithfully in higher degree tokens that begin with [CORONAL] consonant (#076B-A: 1.428/1.431 (99.8%), #077G-A: 849/852 (99.7%) in comparison to those beginning with [DORSAL] consonant (#076B-A: 166/185 (89.7%), #077G-A: 161/162 (99.4%)[2]. In (23-24), metathesis applies for the same reasons but with different consonants involving, as in (23) the consonants [ɾ] and [n] change position, while in (24) the [n] and [m]. This child seems to struggles more with sequences of [n] followed by [m]. Words including both nasals show that the sequence [m] followed by [n] appears to be more frequent (36 tokens) than the reversed (15 tokens). In addition, words in which [m] precedes [n] have been acquired (35/36, 97.2%), while words in which [n] precedes [m] have not (9/15, 60%). Examples (21-24) show that metathesis is triggered by consonants presenting *similarity*, as [k] and [t] differ only in place, [r] and [n] differ only in *manner* and [n] and [m] differ only in place. Also, it can be accomplished to consecutive syllables (21-22, 24) or from distance (23). Next, a similar pattern is observed (examples 25-26).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
25) [ˈfra.u.la]	→ [ˈfla.u.ɾa] (strawberry)	#060B-A: 4;7.15
26) [o.ˈbre.la]	→ [o.ˈble.ɾa] (umbrella)	#060B-A: 4;7.22

This child cannot produce faithfully sequences of [r] and [l] with one of them traced in cluster. The reason lies to the faithfulness observed in sequences [l] and [r] when [l] is located in cluster, which are always preserved (100%) despite their low frequency of emergence (2 tokens, one includes [stop + l] cluster and the other [fricative + l]). On the other hand, when [r] is observed in cluster and is followed by [l], then it is not always produced (6/8 tokens (75%) in [stop + r]

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[1] The children's names are coded to keep anonymity. The higher the number the higher the age of the child. B: boy, G: girl, A: Athens.

[2] There are several views regarding the percentages a segment or structure must have in order for it to be considered as acquired by the children (see, Papadopoulou, 2000). In the present study we follow the strictest, namely, a segment or structure has been acquired if it presents ≥ 90% faithfulness.

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cluster and 1/2 tokens (50%) in [fricative + r]). Once again, the features of metathesis regarding the domain and similarity of participating segments remain the same. In addition, the cluster is maintained due to its position since the stressed syllable is considered as psycholinguistically prominent position (see Smith, 2002, among others).

All the remaining tokens include the movement of one consonant. The second environment of metathesis concerns the avoidance of clusters in unstressed syllable. Three different strategies are employed by the children for this reason. Examples of the first are cited next (27-28).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
27) [ˈci.tri.no]	→ [ˈkli.ti.no] (yellow)	#052G-A: 2;7.4
28) [ˈva.tra.xos]	→ [ˈvla.ta.xos] (frog)	#055G-A: 3;3.2

As shown from (27-28), the second member of the cluster moves to a strong position, namely, in the initial stressed syllable in order to be retained. In this position it increases its chances of being produced, since both children have not yet acquired this kind of clusters (tokens preserved in [stop + liquid] cluster: #052G-A: 244/273 (89.4%), #055G-A: 17/21 (81%)[3]. This change does not violate the Syllable Contact Law between the participating syllables and it creates a well-formed cluster as that in the unstressed syllable. Further, the type of markedness change but not its quantity, as in adult's outputs the stressed syllable is unmarked CV and the syllable with the cluster is marked. The opposite happens in children's outputs where the stressed syllable becomes marked, while the syllable with the cluster becomes unmarked. The second strategy is shown in examples (29-30).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
29) [ksi.ˈno]	→ [sçi.ˈno] (sour)	#052G-A: 2;11.9
30) [ˈfu.ksi.o]	→ [ˈfu.sci.o] (magenta)	#052G-A: 3;0

Clusters with [stop + fricative] consonants have not yet been acquired by this child (120/187 tokens preserved (64.2%). So, the consonant [s] moves before the first member of the cluster and is licensed as appendix. This way it does not constitute part of the onset which is not considered complex anymore. In the following example (31) two strategies are applied in order for all the consonants of the cluster to be uttered.

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
31) [struɲ.ˈfa.ca]	→ [stu.ˈfra.ca] (smurfs)	#078G-A: 4;10.10

In (31), the consonant [s] is licensed as appendix, while the consonant [r] moves to the stressed syllable creating a well-formed cluster. These two changes alter the type of markedness between the first and second syllable, as the former is less marked and the second more marked than the corresponding of the adult's output. Below the final strategy is represented (examples 32-33).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
32) [kra.ˈsi]	→ [kar.ˈsi] (wine)	#056G-A: 3;10.4
33) [ˈci.knos]	→ [ˈcin.kos] (swan)	#080G-A: 4;11.22

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[3] The substitution of [r] to [l] is beyond the scope of the paper and is not discussed. However, it reveals that metathesis can emerge together with other processes, as has been suggested in other surveys (Qasem, 2023). Generally, other processes that appear and do not affect the application of metathesis are not discussed.

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In (32), the second member of the cluster moves to a position which can be licensed and, more specifically, in the coda of the initial syllable. In Greek, the consonants [n], [l] and [r] are allowed in initial or medial syllable (see Kappa, 1995, among others). However, tokens as (32) constitute exemptions, as this child have acquired clusters with [stop + liquid] consonants (44/46 tokens preserved (95.7%)). In (33) respectively, the consonant [n] moves to coda position of the initial syllable so that to not be deleted, as clusters with [stop + nasal] have not been acquired (2/3 tokens preserved (66.7%)). In (32) the quantity of markedness does not change, as CCV and CVC syllables are equally marked, while in (33) the first syllable turns into more marked and the second into less marked. In both examples though the Syllable Contact Law is still satisfied after the accomplishment of metathesis, but the sonority distance between the two syllables is not the highest possible, since in the adult's outputs the first syllable ends with a vowel. The next token is more complex as two strategies need to take place for the avoidance of cluster in unstressed syllable (example 34).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
34) [sfra.ˈji.ðes]	→ [sfar.ˈji.ðes] (stamps)	#094B-A: 6;1.26

First, this is the only token containing a cluster with three members in this child's speech. In order for its consonants to be maintained, the consonant [s] is licensed as appendix and the consonant [r] is metathesized in coda position of the initial syllable. Additionally, the markedness is altered as the consonant [s] has been removed from the onset's node resulting in a simpler structure.

The third environment of metathesis is related to consonants traced in codas. Indicative tokens are provided next (35-36).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
35) [ˈpir.ɣo]	→ [ˈpri.ɣo] (tower)	#056G-A: 3;8.15
36) [ˈtin.cer.bel]	→ [ˈtri.ce.bel] (Tinker Bell)	#078G-A: 4;9.26

In (35), the consonant [r] moves before the vowel [i] creating a well-formed cluster in a strong position, such as the stressed syllable (see Smith, 2002, among others). It additionally satisfies at the maximum degree the Syllable Contact Law and does not alter the quantity of markedness. Metathesis occurs due to the lowest degree of [r] acquisition in codas (19/24 tokens preserved (79.2%)). The same features and reasons of metathesis apply also to (36). However, this child has acquired the consonant [r] in coda position in initial or medial syllable (57/59 tokens preserved (96.6%) in comparison to consonant [n] (2/3 tokens preserved (66.7%). Other cases with consonants in coda position are illustrated below (37-38).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
37) [ˈce.ik]	→ [ˈce.ci] (cake)	#051G-A: 2;8.3
38) [ˈel.sa]	→ [ˈle.sa] (Elsa)	#053G-A: 3;0.13

Both children here cannot handle these specific consonants in final or initial coda position (#051G-A: 2/3 tokens preserved (66.7%), #053G-A: 0/3 tokens preserved (0%). So, they move them in onset position forming a CV syllable, which is the least marked. Example (37) is unusual for the child, as it constitutes a loanword which bears a consonant in final position that is not permitted in Greek. Only the consonants [s] and [n] are allowed in final coda in Greek (see Malikouti-Drachman, 2001, among others). The last example includes a loanword with complex coda (39).

Adult's Form	Child's Form	Child: Age
39) [ˈpazl]	→ [ˈplas] (puzzle)	#059B-A: 4;8.24

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Complex codas are also illicit in Greek making this structure unusual for the child. As a result, it cannot produce it most of the times (2/9 tokens preserved (22.2%). In (39), the reordering of [l] in the onset of the syllable creates a well-formed cluster. The child also substitutes the consonant [z] with [s] as the former is illicit in this position in Greek. Thus, both members of the cluster in coda position are maintained. One final observation ascertained from all the instances with metathesis (21-39) is that basic condition for its emergence is the final outputs of the children to form structures allowed in Greek.

5. Analysis

In *Optimality Theory* (Prince & Smolensky, 1993) the phonological component of the *Universal Grammar* consists of a generator, a set of constraints that are universal and a function that evaluates them. The input is fed into generator which generates candidate outputs. Constraints are universal and their ranking is language-specific. All candidate outputs of this language-specific ranking are evaluated and the optimal one which will best satisfy the requirements of constraints is chosen. In language acquisition, in the initial stage of children markedness constraints dominate faithfulness, in the intermediate stage some markedness dominate faithfulness ones, while in the final stage all faithfulness constraints dominate markedness ones, as in the grammar of adult's (e.g., Demuth, 1995; Gnanadesikan, 2004). For the children's different patterns in metathesis, we rely on the *Multiple Parallel Grammars* model (Revithiadou & Tzakosta, 2004), according to which *parallel* grammars next to the *core* are employed by the children, that is, different ranking of constraints which help them acquire their target grammar.

The constraints adopted for the analysis of the children's tokens in the first environment are the following: markedness constraints: *COMPLEX(unstressed syllable): prohibits consonant clusters in unstressed syllable (Demuth, 1995: 19). NoSequence(F1...F2): disallows sequences with specific distinctive features (Bernhardt & Stemberger, 1998; Gerlach, 2010: 6). Faithfulness constraints: MAXIMALITY-IO: requires input segments to have output correspondents. LINEARITY-IO: demands the order of segments to remain intact. (McCarthy & Prince, 1995: 264, 371). The ranking which leads to the optimal outputs of the children is NoSequence(F1...F2) > *COMPLEX(unstressedσ) > MAX-IO > LIN-IO, as illustrated in table (1).

Table 1. Metathesis between two consonants

[ˈka.ti][4]	NoSeq (DOR...COR)	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	MAX-IO	LIN-IO
☞ [ˈta.ci]				**
[ˈa.ti]			*!	
[ˈka.ti]	*!			
[a.ne.mi.ˈsti.ɾas]	NoSeq (COR...LAB)	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	MAX-IO	LIN-IO
☞ [a.me.ni.ˈsti.ɾas]				**
[a.e.mi.ˈsti.ɾas]			*!	
[a.ne.mi.ˈsti.ɾas]	*!			
[o.ˈbre.la]	NoSeq (RHO...LAT)	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	MAX-IO	LIN-IO
☞ [o.ˈble.ra]				**
[o.ˈbe.la]			*!	
[o.ˈle.bra]		*!		***
[o.ˈbre.la]	*!			

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[4] We take as input the adult's output, which is the stimuli the children hear from their parents.

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According to table (1), the faithful outputs [ˈka.ti], [a.ne.mi.ˈsti.ɾas], [o.ˈbre.la] are rejected due to specific sequences they keep that cannot handle the children for the reasons mentioned in previous section. The outputs [ˈa.ti], [a.e.mi.ˈsti.ɾas], [o.ˈbe.la] satisfy the highest ranked constraint with the deletion of a segment, something that is penalized by the MAX-IO constraint resulting to their rejection. The output [o.ˈle.bra] respects the sequence of consonants but with the movement of the cluster in unstressed syllable. Therefore, it is not selected. As optimal outputs the [ˈta.ci], [a.me.ni.ˈsti.ɾas], [o.ˈble.ra] arise, which bear only violations to the lowest ranked constraint due to the reordering of segments.

For the analysis of the second environment three more constraints are added, as represented below: markedness constraints: *CODA: syllables are disallowed to have codas (Prince & Smolensky, 1993: 34). CODA CONDITION: prohibits the licensing of particular features in coda position (Beckman, 2004: 106). In our case all illicit consonants in Greek in this specific position. *APPENDIX: syllables must not have appendix (McCarthy, 2008: 300). From the previous constraints, we assume that the NoSequence is the lowest ranked and remains inactive for these data. The ranking which prohibits clusters in unstressed syllables is *COMPLEX(unstressedσ) > CODACOND > MAX-IO > *CODA > *APPENDIX > LIN-IO (table 2).

Table 2. Avoidance of clusters in unstressed syllable

['ci.tri.no]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ ['cli.ti.no]5						*
['cir.ti.no]				*!		*
['ci.ti.no]			*!			
['ci.ti.nor]		*!		*		*
['ci.tri.no]	*!					
['fu.ksi.o]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ ['fu.sci.o]					*	*
['fu.ci.os]				*!		*
['fu.ci.o]			*!			
['fus.ci.o]		*!		*		*
['fu.ksi.o]	*!					
[kɾa.'si]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ [kar.'si]				*		*
[ka.'si]			*!			
[ka.'sir]		*!		*		*
[kɾa.'si]	*!					
[struɱ.'fa.ca]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ [stu.'fra.ca]			*		*	*
[stu.'far.ca]			*	*!	*	*
[stu.'fa.ca]			*!*		*	
[stuɱ.'fa.car]		*!*		**	*	*
[struɱ.'fa.ca]	*!		*		*	
[sfɾa.'ji.ðes]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞[sfar.'ji.ðes]				**	*	*
[sfa.'ji.ðes]			*!	*	*	
[far.'jis.ðes]		*!		***		*
[sfɾa.'ji.ðes]	*!			*		

5 This optimal output violates also the constraint IDENTITY-IO due to substitution of [r] to [l], as this constraint requires faithfulness to distinctive features between input and output (McCarthy & Prince, 1995: 264). However, it is omitted as it does not affect the way metathesis applies.

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Based on table (2), all faithful outputs [ˈci.tri.no], [ˈfu.ksi.o], [kɾa.ˈsi], [struɱ.ˈfa.ca], [sfɾa.ˈji.ðes] are not selected cause they contain a cluster in unstressed syllable violating this way the highest ranked constraint. The constraint CODACOND wipes out the tokens [ˈci.ti.nor], [ˈfus.ci.o], [ka.ˈsir], [stuɱ.ˈfa.car], [far.ˈjis.ðes], in which metathesis leads to unattested structures in Greek. The constraint MAX-IO ensures that the cluster is retained without the deletion of any member that constitutes it ([ˈci.ti.no], [ˈfu.ci.o], [ka.ˈsi], [stu.ˈfa.ca], [sfa.ˈji.ðes]). With the constraint *CODA is ensured that in some cases the movement of a consonant located in cluster in coda position will be the least preferable strategy if there are other options available that preserve all segments. Therefore, tokens such as [ˈcir.ti.no], [ˈfu.ci.os], [stu.ˈfar.ca] are rejected. So, as optimal the outputs [ˈcli.ti.no], [ˈfu.sci.o], [kar.ˈsi], [stu.ˈfra.ca], [sfar.ˈji.ðes] arise since they violate only the lower ranked constraints due to metathesis and in some cases due to licensing of [s] as appendix or metathesized segment located in coda position.

The same constraints and ranking are sufficient to account also for the third environment of metathesis (Table 3).

Table 3. Avoidance of cluster / consonant in coda position

[ˈel.sa]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ [ˈle.sa]						*
[ˈel.sa]				*!		
[ˈe.sa]			*!			
[ˈe.sal]		*!		*		*
[ˈpir.ɣo]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ [ˈpri.ɣo]						*
[ˈpir.ɣo]				*!		
[ˈpi.ɣo]			*!			
[ˈpi.ɣor]		*!		*		*
[ˈpi.ɣro]	*!					*
[ˈpazl]	*COMPLEX(unstressedσ)	CODACOND	MAX-IO	*CODA	*APPENDIX	LIN-IO
☞ [ˈplas]				*		*
[ˈpas]			*!	*		
[ˈpazl]		*!*		**		

In particular, the highest constraint in the hierarchy secures that the movement of coda will not create a cluster in a weak position ([ˈpi.ɣro]). The second constraint ensures that illicit codas are not formed ([ˈe.sal], [ˈpi.ɣor], [ˈpazl]), while the third constraint excludes all the tokens that delete the coda or part of it in case it is complex ([ˈe.sa], [ˈpi.ɣo], [ˈpas]). All faithful tokens are also excluded since they keep codas unchanged ([ˈel.sa], [ˈpir.ɣo], [ˈpazl]). The remaining tokens ([ˈle.sa], [ˈpri.ɣo]) emerge as optimal satisfying all the aforementioned features and if in some cases they keep a consonant in coda position ([ˈplas]) they do so with the preservation of one member of the cluster and the substitution of it with a consonant that fit into that position in Greek.

6. Conclusion

This research examined metathesis in thirteen monolingual Greek-speaking children in order to investigate if it facilitates language acquisition and if generalizations can be made, as it is a peripheral process in child speech. The results show that it is employed for three different reasons. The first has to do with specific sequences that children struggle to utter, the second with complex structures such as clusters in weak positions, namely, unstressed syllable and the third

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with consonants located in coda position or with complex codas. The advantage of metathesis in these cases is the preservation of all the segments by reordering one consonant or two consonants each other in positions in which children feel more comfortable producing them. Another advantage is that in the majority of cases the metathesized segments retain all their distinctive features. For the analysis of children's tokens, the Optimality Theory is used (Prince & Smolensky, 1993) and for the two patterns ascertained in their data the Multiple Parallel Grammars model (Revithiadou & Tzakosta, 2004). The first pattern is shown in the ranking NoSequence(F1...F2) > *COMPLEX(unstressedσ) > MAX-IO > LIN-IO, which concerns the first environment. The second bears the ranking *COMPLEX(unstressedσ) > CODACOND > MAX-IO > *CODA > *APPENDIX > LIN-IO and is related with the second and the third environment of metathesis.

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Appendix

#051G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈce.ik	ˈce.ci	2;8.3	cake

#052G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈci.tri.no	ˈkli.ti.no	2;7.4	yellow (neutral)
2	ˈci.tri.no	ˈkli.ti.no	2;7.4	yellow (neutral)
3	ˈci.tri.nos	ˈkli.ti.nos	2;7.4	yellow (masculine)
4	ˈci.tri.no	ˈkli.ti.no	2;7.4	yellow (neutral)
5	ˈpir.ɣo	ˈpi.ɣlo	2;8.8	tower
6	ksi.ˈno	sçi.ˈno	2;11.9	sour (neutral)
7	ˈfu.ksi.o	ˈfu.sci.o	3;0	magenta

#053G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈel.sa	ˈle.sa	3;0.13	Elsa

#055G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈva.tra.xos	ˈvla.ta.xos	3;3.2	frog

#056G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	va.tra.ˈxa.ci	var.va.ˈxa.ci	3;8.15	frog (diminutive)
2	ˈpir.ɣo	ˈpri.ɣo	3;8.15	tower
3	kra.ˈsi	kar.ˈsi	3;10.4	wine

#059B-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	struɱ.ˈfi.ta	stru.ˈti.fa	4;7.24	Smurfette
2	pu.ˈka.mi.so	ku.ˈpa.mi.so	4;8.8	shirt
3	ˈpazl	ˈplas	4;8.24	puzzle

#060B-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈfra.u.la	ˈfla.u.ɾa	4;7.15	strawberry
2	o.ˈbre.la	o.ˈble.ɾa	4;7.22	umbrella

#075G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	pi.ʤa.mo.ˈi.ɾo.es	pi.sa.po.ˈɾi.a.su	4;10.3	PJ Masks

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#076B-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈka.ti	ˈta.ci	4;9.10	something

#077G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	xri.ˈso.psa.ɾa	xri.ˈso.ska.ɾa	4;11.24	goldfishes
2	ˈci.ta	ˈti.ka	5;1.13	(you) look

#078G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈtin.cer.bel	ˈtri.ce.bel	4;9.26	Tinker Bell
2	struɱ.ˈfa.ca	stu.ˈfra.ca	4;10.10	smurfs

#080G-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈci.knos	ˈcin.kos	4;11.22	swan

#094B-A

	Adult's Form	Child's Form	Age	Translation
1	ˈnu.me.ɾo	ˈɾu.me.no	5;11.22	number
2	ˈnu.me.ɾo	ˈɾu.me.no	5;11.22	number
3	ˈnu.me.ɾo	ˈɾu.me.no	5;11.22	number
4	ˈnu.me.ɾo	ˈɾu.me.no	5;11.22	number
5	ˈnu.me.ɾo	ˈɾu.me.no	5;11.22	number
6	a.ne.mi.ˈsti.ɾas	a.me.ni.ˈsti.ɾas	6;1.26	fan
7	sfra.ˈji.ðes	sfar.ˈji.ðes	6;1.26	stamp

The Young Learners' Preferences for Learning English with Native and Non-native Teachers

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Abstract

This study investigates the preferences of young learners regarding English language instruction provided by native and non-native teachers. Through interviews, the research aims to understand the key factors influencing these preferences. The findings reveal the subtle preferences that inform effective pedagogical practices, highlighting the importance of incorporating diverse teaching methodologies to enhance the learning experience and outcomes for students.

Keywords: young learners, native teachers, non-native teachers, language instruction, language acquisition, linguistic background.

1. Introduction

Language learning among young learners is an important aspect of English language teaching (ELT) and English as a foreign language (EFL), where native and non-native teachers play an important role in shaping language proficiency and language instruction. The debate surrounding the efficacy of native and non-native teachers in English language teaching emphasizes the need to understand the young learners' preferences. Despite the abundance of research on this topic, this study contributes to the field due to it has been realized from the perspectives of the young learners themselves.

Recognizing the individuality of each learner, educators must go deeper into the factors that shape individual needs and preferences to develop language instruction that truly works for young learners. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the preferences of young learners in learning English with native and non-native teachers. By understanding factors influencing these preferences, such as teacher language proficiency, linguistic background, and teaching approaches, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of effective language instruction for young learners.

2. Background

This study has been done according to the perspectives of young learners, as stated by Lee and Park (2021) children in the early stages of their educational journey, typically ranging from preschool to primary school age about their own preferences of learning English with native and non-native teacher.

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According to Smith (2018) native teachers are individuals who have acquired English as their first language and typically possess a native-like proficiency level. In the case of non-nativeness, Smith (2018) defines non-native teacher as individuals who have learned English as a second or foreign language and may not have the same level of proficiency or cultural background as native speakers.

The debate on native versus non-native English teachers has been discussed by different scholars and proponents who defend their own perspective. For instance, Smith (2018) suggests that native teachers may provide authentic language information, while non-native teachers offer a deeper understanding of linguistic challenges. In the context of this study, young learners as the participants presented their responses in which they showed their awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of learning English with native and non-native teachers. Nevertheless, the participants concluded that for them is beneficial to have a non-native teacher because they do not present the language barriers, that according to García and Wei (2014) language barriers are understood as the limitations or difficulties that arise when individuals or groups are not able to use their entire linguistic resources for communication due to factors such as language proficiency, cultural differences, or social contexts. In addition, García and Chen (2019) suggest that students from similar linguistic backgrounds may benefit from non-native teachers.

Although, the participants marked their preference for be instructed by non-natives teachers, they mentioned the advantages of having a native English, a native teacher can help to improve fluency, increase speech rhythm, some other authors such as Lee and Park (2021) agree with the idea of having native speaker as teachers due to the importance of exposure to diverse linguistic models.

Moreover, the participants mentioned that they prefer non-native teachers because their way of teaching English, or according to Richards and Rodgers (2014) teaching approaches can be defined as the methodologies and teaching strategies, that are implemented by teachers to instruct knowledge and learning in a classroom.

Something that the participants also mentioned was that their non-native teachers implement activities where they can play, sing, create art crafts, among other activities, this supports the idea of Johnson, Smith, and Brown (2020) where they emphasized the importance of teaching approaches in language instruction, irrespective of teacher background, the authors argue that communicative and student-centered approaches are more conducive to young learners' language development than traditional methods.

3. Method

The objective of this research is to investigate and analyze young learners' preferences for learning English with native and non-native English teachers, with the aim of identifying key factors that influence their teacher selection.

3.1 *Qualitative paradigm*

The present study follows a qualitative paradigm. This offers a depth exploration of the processes and motivations underlying young learners' English teacher preferences by studying this phenomenon in its real-world context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By choosing a qualitative paradigm, as a researcher I could comprehend the beliefs, reasons, emotions, and experiences among others that are shaping young students' views on native and non-native teachers from their own perspectives. The ultimate objective is to arrive at a complete explanation of pedagogical preferences that is supported and rooted in real world contexts.

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This study also follows a case study methodology. According to Heale and Twycross (2017), case study is commonly use in social and humanities field. It can be defined as a study about a person or groups of people with the purpose of investigate specific phenomena, critical issues, behaviors, or events in depth. The reason of choosing this research methodology is based on the idea that case studies can provide qualitative data, allowing researchers to explore and understand a complex phenomenon.

3.2 *Context and participants*

This case study was developed in a private language institute. The group consisted of four females and three males, each with a unique educational   background. They range in age from six to ten years old. Despite their diverse school experiences, all participants are currently enrolled in an English language program with a non-specific purpose at the language institute.

Because the participants are underage, their parents received a consent letter (see appendix) with all the information about this research, and they were free to allow their daughter and son's participation. It is also relevant to mention that their names will be protected through all this the research. The data presented is what the participants answered in their interviews; however, their names are not mentioned due to each participant had been assigned a code to present their responses to protect their identity.

3.3 *Data collection instrument*

This case study used interviews as a data collection method. According to Dörnyei (2007) emphasizes the qualities of a "good" qualitative interview, highlighting the importance of natural progress and richness in detail. Considering this, I aimed for an interview process that would not only progress naturally but also provide comprehensive insights into the participants' preferences.

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002) contrast structured and unstructured interviews, pointing out the flexibility and freedom that open-ended (unstructured) interviews offer to both interviewers and interviewees. However, given the characteristics of my context and participants, I opted for a structured approach. Working with young learners, I anticipated potential challenges such as low attention span, lack of vocabulary to answer the questions, as well as the lack of knowledge to complete the questionnaire. By employing structured questions, I could maintain control over the interview, ensuring a focused exploration of the topics and directly obtaining the information I needed.

3.4 *Data analysis*

Braun and Clark (2006) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a flexible and systematic approach that can be applied to various types of qualitative data, including interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and open-ended survey responses.

After implementing the structured interviews, I translated and transcript all the information. Then I gathered all the relevant data of every participant in a macro level chart and coded the data by the research technique, code of participant, unit of meaning, and interpretation, then I construct a micro level chart with the same categories, but this time with all the information of all my participants. Once I identified the patterns that frequently were pointed out by my participants, I organized them into themes.

Considering that thematic analysis is for analyzing data, I believe this is a method makes easier this process, because it is both structured and flexible. I consider that the real

advantage of using thematic analysis lies in its ability to capture the complexities of human experiences and perspectives in detail.

4. Results and discussion

In the following sections, the results of the study will be presented to answer the research question: What are the factors that influence students' preferences for learning with a native or non-native teacher? Five themes were identified: Language proficiency, linguistic background, language barriers, and systematic and gradual teaching approaches.

4.1 *Native teachers are proficient at teaching their language.*

One of the questions that were asked to the participants was "What kind of teacher (native or non-native teacher) do you think knows more about the language?"

> "Native teacher because has spoken English since he was a baby and has always learned it and he already knows more words." (R, Int. 1)

This participant recognized the advantages of learning from a native English speaker who has a lifetime of experience with the language, a continuous learning mindset, and a perceived extensive vocabulary. Moreover, there was a pattern between this participant and the others for example:

> "Being from the United States, they already have that language and know a little more."
>
> (P, Int. 2)
>
> "Native teachers teach their language more." (F, Int. 4)
>
> "Because he is from the United States, he knows more English." (L, Int. 5)
>
> "A native teacher knows more because she is from the United States, and I think in the United States they speak like English." (E, Int. 6)

According to Krashen (1985) emphasizes the importance of meaningful and comprehensible input in language learning, native speakers are often considered optimal sources of such input due to their natural fluency and use of the language.

The perspectives shared by these learners marked the perceived advantages of having a native teacher when learning a language, particularly English. They highlight the notion that native speakers possess a natural understanding and familiarity with the language that non-native speakers may lack. In addition, they acknowledge the natural advantage that individuals from English-speaking countries, like the United States, may have in terms of language proficiency. According to the participants answers, there is a strong belief and as it was mentioned before, that native speakers provide more authentic input, which is an important factor for developing language skills.

4.2 *Non-native teachers do not present language barriers with students who share a common linguistic background*

Another theme that had relevance in the findings and results of the previous data, was related to the non-existent language barrier between non-native teachers and students that have a common linguistic background. The participant mentioned this:

> "Because non-natives understand us better, as natives may not know some words in Spanish." (E, Int. 6)

This participant believes that non-native teachers, despite not being native speakers of the language that they are teaching, are capable of effectively communicating with their students and do not create obstacles or barriers related with language. The participants' responses were similar and followed a pattern where they affirmed that non-native teachers tend to understand them more. Here there are some of their responses:

> "The non-native teacher understands what I'm saying." (E, Int. 3)

> "Communicating with a non-native teacher is easier, because he doesn't speak 100% English and if he wants to tell us something that we don't understand, he could tell us in Spanish, and we will understand it." (R, Int. 1)

> "I prefer non-native teachers because we speak the same language." (P, Int. 2)

> "I prefer learning with a non-native teacher because you are not going to get stuck when you speak Spanish like a native teacher." (E, Int. 7)

While being a native teacher may provide an initial advantage, non-native teachers can also acquire a deep understanding and proficiency in a language through dedicated study and immersion.

According to Nunan (2003) the importance of understanding learners' backgrounds, needs, and motivations are key factors in language teaching. These factors should be considered by language teachers to implement an adequate curriculum in order that the language learning process can be effective for the learners.

Nunan (2003) also points out that the emphasis on learner-centered approaches and understanding learners' backgrounds aligns with the idea that shared linguistic backgrounds between teachers and students can facilitate communication and understanding in the language learning process.

The findings indicate that non-native teachers do not present language barriers for students who share a common linguistic background. The participants consistently reported that non-native teachers, despite not being native speakers of the language they are teaching, are capable of effectively communicating with their students. This is particularly evident when both teachers and students share the same first language, as it facilitates easier communication and understanding. The insights from the participants, such as their preference for non-native teachers due to shared language, support the notion that non-native teachers can bridge communication gaps more effectively in such contexts. This aligns with Nunan (2003) perspective that make an emphasis on the importance of understanding learners' backgrounds and the benefits of a learner-centered approach in language teaching. Therefore, non-native teachers with a common linguistic background as their students can offer significant advantages in language education by enhancing communication and understanding.

4.3 *Language barriers between native teachers and language students*

In contrast to the non-existent language barriers between non-native teachers and students that share a common linguistic background, the data obtained reveals an important pattern where the participants believe that native English teachers can present a language barrier with Spanish speaking students. These participants noted this:

> "Because the others can't only understand my language. Okay. Because they speak that language and don't talk our language." (R, Int. 1)

> "I prefer learning with a non-native teacher because they might explain more things to us, the meaning of things, and native teachers do not know a lot of words in our language" (L, Int. 5)

Although often is assumed that native teachers possess an inherent advantage in communication due to their linguistic background, language barriers can still arise due to factors such as differing dialects, teaching styles, and culture. Participants expressed that native teachers might struggle with certain aspects of communication and understanding specific to their linguistic and cultural context. For instance, native teachers may not be familiar with the nuances and slang of the students' first language, which can hinder effective teaching and learning.

Moreover, native teachers might use idiomatic expressions and complex sentence structures that are difficult for students to grasp. Without a common linguistic background, it can be challenging for native teachers to provide clear explanations or translations that resonate with students' existing knowledge and language skills.

Further, cultural differences can play a significant role in creating language barriers. Native teachers may not fully understand the cultural references or educational expectations of their students, leading to miscommunication and a lack of engagement in the classroom. For example, teaching styles that are common in the native teacher's country may not align with the students' learning preferences, making it harder for students to follow along and participate actively.

Additionally, the assumption that native speakers are inherently better teachers can overlook the importance of pedagogical training and empathy in language teaching. Non-native teachers who share a common linguistic background with their students often have the advantage of having learned the language as a second language themselves, which can make them more attuned to the difficulties and challenges their students face. This empathy can result in more effective teaching strategies that are tailored to the students' needs.

4.4 *Native teachers do not follow a systematic approach when teaching*

Another important aspect of the data obtained for this research, is related with approaches, the participants argue that native teacher, because it was born in an English dominant country, is expected to teach at a faster pace, possibly due to a perceived fluency or natural proficiency in the language.

"He's from the United States and he's going to teach us things faster." (P, Int. 2)

"Native teacher may teach us faster and some things may not be clear to us." (L, Int. 5)

"A native teacher may teach us faster than the other teacher." (E, Int. 6)

Despite these observations, there is no concrete evidence that native teachers do not follow a systematic approach. Instead, participants seem to have a preconceived notion that native teachers teach faster than non-native teachers. This perception could stem from the assumption that native speakers, being more fluent, might not need to adhere to a structured teaching methodology as rigorously as non-native teachers.

However, the faster pace of instruction can sometimes lead to confusion and gaps in understanding for students. Native teachers might unintentionally skip over foundational concepts or fail to explain language rules in detail, assuming that students can grasp these aspects intuitively. This can create challenges for students who may need more structured and step-by-step guidance to learn effectively.

Furthermore, the lack of a systematic approach might be perceived rather than actual. Native teachers might employ methods that are flexible and adaptive, which can be misinterpreted as a lack of structure. They may rely on immersion techniques, spontaneous conversation, and

real-life examples, which, while effective in many contexts, can seem haphazard to students used to more formal and systematic teaching styles.

In contrast, non-native teachers often rely on systematic and structured approaches due to their own experience of learning the language as a second language. They might use explicit grammar instruction, structured exercises, and incremental learning steps, which can provide clarity and build a solid foundation for language learners.

Participants' preference for non-native teachers' structured approach reflects a need for clarity and comprehensibility in language instruction. The systematic methods employed by non-native teachers can help in breaking down complex language concepts into manageable units, ensuring that students fully understand each aspect before moving on to the next.

4.5 *Non-native teacher follow a gradual approach*

As it was discussed, one participant of this research believe that native teachers teach faster, and consequently non-native teachers follow a gradual approach that helps them to acquire the language according to their learning needs. This participant pointed out this:

"Non-natives teachers go step by step in teaching others." (E, Int. 3)

This participant believes that non-native teachers, when teaching a language, are more likely to break down the learning process into small units of language. This could be seen as his experience learning with non-native teacher.

However, it is essential to recognize that teaching styles and methodologies can vary based on individual preferences, educational philosophies, and the context in which they are teaching. Some teachers may adopt more flexible approaches, while others may adhere strictly to a specific method or system. Ultimately, the effectiveness of teaching should be evaluated based on student learning outcomes rather than the nationality or teaching approach of the instructor.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of teaching should be evaluated based on student learning outcomes rather than the nationality or teaching approach of the instructor. While non-native teachers might generally employ a more gradual and structured approach, this does not inherently make them better or worse than native teachers. The success of any teaching strategy depends on how well it meets the learning needs of the students and how effectively it facilitates their language acquisition.

5. Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to explore young learners' preferences for English instruction from both native and non-native teachers, while identifying influential factors in teacher selection. The analysis revealed that participants recognized the benefits of native teachers but also acknowledged drawbacks such as language barriers. Conversely, preferences leaned toward non-native instructors due to advantages in communication and shared linguistic background.

This study provides practical insights in the ELT field. By understanding the factors influencing these preferences, such as the perceived benefits and drawbacks of each type of teacher, language teachers can develop more effective language education programs and teacher training initiatives. Specifically, the analysis revealed that young learners prefer non-native English teachers due to advantages in communication and shared linguistic background. Curriculum designers can consider incorporating more opportunities for language exchange and cultural integration into language education curricula. They can also provide support and resources for non-native teachers to enhance their language proficiency and teaching skills.

For further investigation into the young learners' preferences for learning English, a comparative analysis between participants taught by native English teachers and those instructed by non-native English teachers is justified. This analysis aims to discern potential differences in perspectives, experiences, and preferences between the two groups, contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing English teacher selection among young learners.

Despite limitations including a small participant group and data collection instrument constraints, this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of language education. As a non-native English teacher myself, I believe this analysis offers an insightful understanding of the dynamics at play in language education. Through my own experiences in the classroom, I have observed the facilities of communication and cultural exchange that occur between non-native teachers and their students.

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Mixed-ability Groups –
A Challenge or an Opportunity in Disguise

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Abstract

Language instructors have always been provoked by a variety of impediments to their students. The present article is based on the author's research, reflections and observations as an experienced language teacher in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP), branch of English Language Teaching (ELT). Success, in terms of language acquisition, is the greatest motivator and as such, considering the multifaceted nature of ELT, we all strive for it. Based on the literature review and the topicality of the problem, the author attempted to devise techniques and highlight principles to help language teachers in their work with mixed-ability groups. Bridging the gap between different linguistic knowledge and pace of learning and shedding light on the strategies that could be utilized in order to engage students to develop their full potential are still pertinent issues addressed in this paper. Adopting new practices can add value to the teaching-learning process without being detrimental to it.

Keywords: mixed-ability groups, language teaching, language learning, ESP.

1. Introduction

Language instructors have always been provoked by a variety of impediments to their students. At the macro level, sensitizing teachers to the advantages of mixed-ability groups could contribute to the greatest challenge of 21st century language teaching – personalized student-centered approach, beneficial to both educators and students. At the micro level, mixed-ability groups have always been the rule rather than the exception, as different learning styles, pace and capacity mark the teaching modality in the heterogeneous class. How to tune the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) group and turn its dissonance into harmony is the question the author tries to address in this article.

University students have different abilities, competencies and backgrounds but they share the same occupational interests. It is the same with the ESP and the General English (GE) class. Although they share the same characteristics and objectives, they are completely diverse in terms of language preparation. Both language instructors and learners respectively differ in their teaching and learning styles. Bridging the gap between different linguistic knowledge and pace of learning and shedding light on the strategies that could be utilized in order to engage students to develop their full potential are still pertinent issues addressed in this paper.

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Language teachers constantly face diversity. When a teacher is challenged by a student's deficits of knowledge, the educator is obliged to search for the best ways to assist the learner. That is how new practices are adopted to develop students' cognizant abilities and build on teachers' professional knowledge. This study also reflects on the ways to guide mixed-ability groups towards better learning outcomes as a process with its steps and principles.

2. Research questions

The present study attempted to gain insights in the following questions related to teaching and learning ESP in the context of mixed-ability groups:

(1) Whether to prioritize weak or advanced students in the mixed-ability group?

(2) How to bridge the gap between weak and strong students in the mixed-ability group?

(3) How can mixed-ability groups empower language teachers?

3. Methods

By employing the keywords "mixed-ability groups," "blended learning," "ESP", "language teaching" and "language learning," the author conducted literature review of more than 30 articles, based on the search for related to the topic articles in several databases. The primary and the secondary stage resulted in picking out the most relevant 13 articles and 3 books. Data collection also benefited from the observations and the years' experience in language teaching of the researcher.

4. Background

When the English teacher faces a class with different levels of linguistic knowledge, the challenge to tackle the problem is accepted. Normally, the demand for simple solutions is not easily addressed but the greatest reward for any instructor is the feeling of a well-organized, harmonious class without any students left behind. Multi-level classes are a difficult task, as they demand excellent managerial and leadership skills in order to implement adaptable methods tailored to the needs of each student in the classroom. In the past, enhancing student's performance was achieved through ability grouping. Nevertheless, Prodromou (1989: 2) points out that student grouping according to their test scores will always result in different progress rates due to the differences in terms of teaching methods, materials and learning styles. Byrne suggests that learning styles can undergo changes over time with students' development or can be mixed with other learning types (Byrne, 1988: 84-111). Another prominent expert at language teaching, Penny Ur, reveals her view on the topic stating that "There is in fact no such thing as a 'homogenous' class, since no two learners are really similar; and therefore, all classes of more than one learner are in fact heterogeneous" (Ur, 1991 :302). Harmer sees the heterogeneous group as an opportunity to facilitate teacher's professional growth and development by constantly searching for a relevant methodology in the particular learning context (Harmer, 1991: 77). Stephen Bax is also concerned about deploying certain methods without regard to the learning context and he suggests, "identifying key aspects of that context" to dwell upon in order to decide on how to meet "varied learner needs" (Bax, 2003: 285).

Evoking students' interest and sustaining their engagement is important not only when we step across the classroom threshold but generally in every lesson. Nurturing positive

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trainer-trainee attitude to each other also accounts for better learning outcomes. Flexible methodology based on reflective teaching is the key to involve each student in the mix-ability group. Bill Templer realizes that "we need to hold up mirrors to our practice, making us more conscious what is beneath the surface" (Templer, 2004, as cited in Harmer, 1991: Chapter 24, p. 410). Templer's words are the core of reflective teaching. Being introspective, self-analyzing and reflective can help identify our strengths and weaknesses as teachers. Templer (2004: 2) suggests keeping a classroom journal, which he considers "the best single interactive mirror" – another path to self-development. Language teaching is supposed to be a constant process of change and growth because when students learn, educators learn, too.

Enthusiasm and motivation are contagious in the classroom and the students easily gauge their teacher's zest and dedication. The concept of leadership refers to the orchestral conductor role of the language teacher, metaphorically speaking (Harmer, 1991: 107). Whether adopting a more autocratic or a more democratic teacher style depends on the instructor's personality and interpersonal skills. Developing a trainer-trainee relationship and rapport in the classroom would foster balance between the two styles and promote accountability in the mixed-ability class.

5. Results and discussion

The data analysis outlined four major trailblazing principles that the author proposes as a hypothesis (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. The 4-principle hypothesis

Taking a more holistic look at language teaching, makes us admit that all the pedagogical principles are interrelated and interdependent. If the four principles are at the four ends of the language classroom plane, balance can be kept only at the complementary presence of three of them. Performing various combinations in succession would lead to success in any aspect of language teaching and efficient language learning.

Diversity, in the language classroom context, can be regarded as the tool to enrich the collaborative environment of the participants. The principle of collaboration is in line with Bekiryazıcı's views (2015: 914) on "scaffolding" – the supporting structure that gains importance in the mixed-ability class – as a way to reach students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the point where learning occurs. These ideas are generated by Vygotsky who views the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). Effective "scaffolding" or collaboration can be achieved in the collaborative context when "Different students may have different responsibilities in the same task according to their competencies" (Bekiryazıcı, 2015:

915). Bekiryazıcı goes on suggesting pairing weak in grammar students with students who are stronger in vocabulary to be beneficial for both parties (*Ibid*.: 915). Mixed pairs and group work can also give advantage to the shyer students when small roles are delegated to them in roleplaying a dialogue, for example. Knowing the students' abilities and personalities is crucial in this regard. Dedicated teachers are used to "scaffolding" and they implement the technique every day. Those, willing to adopt Vygotsky's ideas, would consider the positive aspects of the mixed-levelled class as diversity prompts a variety of possibilities.

The second principle is Adaptation, which contributes to the dynamics in the mixed-ability group. In the context of the ESP course, picking up materials related to the particular occupational setting brings about sustaining students' interest. Du sheds light on that principle in terms of the choice of teaching language, the design of teaching activities and the use of teaching methods and strategies in line with the mental, social and physical worlds of teachers and students to create dynamic linguistic contexts and accomplish successfully teaching tasks (Du, 2016: 34-35). Du's idea (*Ibid*.: 34) that teachers and learners interact in the process of language choice and adaptation to communicative contexts supports Bax's approach to dethroning methodology in favor of context (2003: 286).

Differentiation, as a teaching principle, sparked from the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approach with a focus on learner differences. Employing differentiated instruction inevitably raises the question whether this strategy is an empowerment or an impediment. In a recent study, Kamarulzaman, Azman, and Zahidi (2017: 78) found out that differentiated instruction benefits the gifted students. Tomlinson, (as cited by Kamarulzaman, Azman, & Zahidi, 2017: 80), who advocates differentiation ardently, concluded that if learner differences in terms of the learner readiness, interest and learning profile match the pedagogical components (i.e. content, process and product) learner engagement and achievement increase. Although all students have access to the same material, using a variety of techniques results in students' responses at variance according to their learning styles, preferences and capabilities. One of the teacher's aids offering personalized experience is AI. AI-powered technologies are being harnessed in language teaching providing learner's own pace of learning (according to their level), objective instant assessment and feedback. AI can be the teacher's helping hand and a time-saving tool with its various options and techniques. This ingenious technology fully meets today's students' needs. Although it questions teachers' reluctance and willingness to apply it extensively on a regular basis. Moreover, its launch needs language professionals to gain 21st century skills and training.

Innovation is another leading principle in the contemporary language classroom. Innovation in language teaching is as essential as evolution in the history of humankind. Serdyukov (2017: 8) views innovation as a three-step process: an idea that needs to be implemented, the subsequent outcome and change as a result. Some time ago, I came upon a catchphrase: "Be smart. Use smartphones in class". Innovation and technology go side by side in the digital age, but Serdyukov (*Ibid*.:12) considers it to be only a means for the innovative teacher or learner. Overall, transforming the classical methods into new technological types, in line with the current trends, is impossible without the balanced use of information technologies. In this context, "the key words such as wish, responsibility, open-mindedness, eagerness, and dedication clearly show the importance of teachers' professional autonomy if they are expected to move further on the continuum of professional development" (Balçıkanlı & Özmen, 2019: 21). Piloting an interactive live quiz in my ESP classes on the topic of hygiene turned out to be beneficial in terms of arousing students' interest and they all shared the same opinion. On the other hand, it was a new barrier for me to overcome, which is time-consuming and demands a suitable learning environment. Embracing innovation challenges teacher creativity in order to generate effective dynamic learning space. It also enhances student engagement and brings about learner autonomy

in the diversity of the mixed-ability group. Innovation or constant change is what triggers progress and makes the teaching-learning experience a satisfying journey, advantageous to both parties.

The conducted research provided a link between the author's hypothesis and the research questions.

Research Question 1: Whether to prioritize weak or advanced students in the mixed-ability group?

Ansari considers the dilemma whether to focus on the more advanced students or ignore the weaker ones (Ansari, 2013: 110). Here comes the role of the instructor to engage the students and rely on tailored to their needs activities to provide a positive atmosphere and ensure that all students reach their full potential in the different-level group. Positive feedback is also crucial and every effort should be praised. Low and high achievers are the parts of the same puzzle as we, as teachers, always try to reach each of our students. Ansari (*Ibid.*: 113) states that "teaching should appeal to all senses, all learning styles and all intelligences", based on a meaningful context for all. Ansari goes on suggesting visuals as a suitable means of attracting attention for all age groups and proficiency levels (*Ibid.*: 113). Starting a lesson with a thematic crossword, a quiz, a riddle or a joke are some of the ways to trigger students' attention, create an amiable learning environment and get the most of the lesson.

Research Question 2: How to bridge the gap between weak and strong students in the mixed-ability group?

Hordiienko and Lomakina (2015: 40), in a recent study, found out that teachers find it difficult to balance between fast, average and weaker learners as the latter feel demotivated and inferior. The data yielded in their study provides significant evidence that peer tutoring facilitates the educational process, affects student motivation positively and results in better achievements. Adopting such a groundbreaking strategy is described in scientific literature as successful in the system of higher education (*Ibid.*: 41). Another strategy suggested by Hordiienko and Lomakina (2015: 41) that can be helpful in this regard is the application of the principle of differentiated instruction. Approaching an assignment according to its complexity to be sure that both weak and strong students will cope with it is a guarantee for favorable outcomes. To provoke the more advanced students and to debunk the complexity of the task for the weaker ones is a challenging but achievable endeavor that requires empathy, positivism and leadership skills.

Research Question 3: How can mixed-ability groups empower language teachers?

Language teacher roles in blended learning settings can be viewed from the perspective of a problem-solver, a psychologist, a mentor, a motivator and a collaborator to name a few. Professionalism speaks loudly when the teacher subtly blends all these roles. It is a process, the result of experience, competencies and knowledge gained over time. Mixed-ability groups foster creativity and teacher autonomy, boost confidence and provide opportunities for professional growth. As Murray (2010: 3) states, "One of the main reasons to pursue professional development is to be empowered – to have the opportunity and the confidence to act upon your ideas as well as to influence the way you perform in your profession." This way, teaching turns into the art of inspiring and positive change.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the basic pedagogical principles that underlie teaching methods are essential contributing factors to a positive classroom atmosphere and student advancement. Adopting new practices can add value to the teaching-learning process without being detrimental to it. Focus should be put on the variety of roles of ESP teachers if we want to plant the seeds of knowledge. Further research should be conducted on the ways of developing

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differentiated learning context and materials. Embracing these principles will highlight the building blocks of successful language teaching and learning. At this point, language teaching transforms the learning process and teaches life lessons – to contribute to collective spirit, and respect and value the assets of everyone – skills necessary for either the academic or the social or professional arena.

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EFL Teachers' Perspectives
Towards the Use of Textbooks in Classroom

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Abstract

This paper addresses the research of exploring EFL teachers' perspectives towards using textbooks, their strategies, and challenges in using the textbook in the classroom. The participants of the study were a diverse group of teachers at the language department at the University of Guanajuato, in Guanajuato, Mexico, encompassing various levels of teaching experience and proficiency levels. This was a case study utilizing the qualitative method as the approach, semi-structured, was conducted. The results showed that the perceptions were neutral towards using this material; the participants recognized the benefits and the disadvantages of using instructional material. There were two main difficulties expressed by the teachers: meaningful learning and cultural awareness. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in textbook use in EFL classrooms. Finally, these research findings are expected to help other EFL teachers make well-informed choices about textbook selection, adaptation, and enrichment to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: teachers' perspectives, textbooks, EFL.

1. Introduction

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), textbooks have traditionally acted as essential resources for instructors, providing structured content and instructional guidance. However, the function and efficacy of textbooks in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom have been the topic of significant debate and study.

As stated by Ahmadi and Derakshan (2016), textbooks are valuable in each language classroom, and they have several roles in the English Language Teaching curriculum and help the process of language teaching and learning. The selection and use of instructional materials, specifically textbooks, are of great importance to decisions that have an important influence on teaching and learning outcomes in EFL environments.

The purpose of this study is to explore EFL teachers' perspectives on using textbooks in the classroom in the Universidad de Guanajuato English programs. Moreover, this research attempts to add to the existing body of information on EFL curriculum and material development by exploring the complex dynamics of textbook use in EFL classrooms. The findings of this study may help curriculum designers, material developers, and EFL practitioners make informed

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choices about textbook selection, adaptation, and enrichment to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

2. Literature review

This section will provide a comprehensive discussion of the main concepts that integrate and complement the papers' understanding and the theoretical framework, as well as a detailed exploration of the principles and ideas that support the research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject.

2.1 *English as a foreign language*

According to Si (2019), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is regarded as English as a Foreign Language. EFL means learning a language (English) in a non-English-speaking country. In the EFL field, the class is usually monolingual and lives in their own country (Krieger, 2012).

EFL refers to the teaching or the learning of a foreign language (English) by non-native speaker students in countries where English is not the principal language used in their country. In this context, students are learning a language because it is an essential tool for their professional growth and future. As is known, there are numerous languages in the world, and English is one of the most spoken ones, but the time for learning in the classroom for learners is limited. Teaching programs can only provide limited samples of language that teachers are required to teach. Due to this, students absorb part of what they are exposed to, misunderstand part of it, and forget part of it (Swan, 2012).

2.2 *Language textbooks*

Due to the fact that this article is based on EFL textbooks, it is important to understand what a language textbook is. Language textbooks are an essential part of EFL. As cited in Bojanic et al. (2016), according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, textbooks teach a particular subject and are used especially in schools and among colleagues. Textbooks, as cited in Mahrudin et al. (2023), are one of the learning tools that provide a variety of materials and are used by teachers as teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Pratma and Retnawati (2018) stated that textbooks are a learning media tool used as learning material in class. Textbooks help as a tool for learning and teaching material in class. This material contains certain types of things that help with a better comprehension of the subject seen in class. Widodo (2018) asserts in his article that textbooks carry messages described in the visual and verbal text; this serves as a complement to a better understanding.

EFL textbooks aim to provide learners with the necessary knowledge; textbooks usually combine contemporary and traditional approaches to language teaching and learning (Bojanic et al., 2016). Based on the given definitions from Bojanic, the English textbooks aim to convey the necessary knowledge, skills, and information about certain materials to prepare students for their cultural backgrounds.

Textbooks in language classes have been of great help to teachers; some teachers can find them useful and others may not, because it could be difficult for teachers to create their own language teaching materials. According to Mahrudin et al. (2023), textbooks, especially in English, are a teachers' tool used as reference material for teaching and learning situations and have relevance in the textbook. Most of the time, teachers use commercial language textbooks because they are signed by the school administration for their use and fit the course outcomes, but sometimes these books do not fit with the students' needs or the teachers' teaching style. If this

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does not fit with the teachers' styles, their beliefs can influence the instructional practices due to their attitudes being an essential factor in the effectiveness of the use of textbooks in the classroom. For instance, it is important to know the different teachers' perspectives on this kind of material.

2.3 *Culture in the educational field*

The term 'culture' is discussed by Rajabi and Ketabi (2020), where they mention that culture refers to the system of knowledge shared by a group of people, beliefs, attitudes, and worldview, among others. Also, this includes material objects and knowledge about their purpose and use. In the field of English language teaching (ELT) pedagogy, numerous definitions represent the interaction between language and culture.

Culture in the EFL field, as mentioned by Gomez (2015), has been considered to be a static entity that represents the main collective sociocultural norms, lifestyles, and values that are learned and shared by the people of a community. Culture in EFL is represented in the textual and visual materials in English textbooks, either as presenting the culture of the target language (Wininger & Kiss, 2013).

This paper will focus on this concept related to the ELT field. As mentioned above, culture in EFL is represented in the textual and visual material in the commercial textbooks by representing the culture of the target language. Most of the textbooks used in EFL classes do not contain enough exercises that students can relate to and use their language. Even if the textbook serves as a tool for reference material for teachers, it does not work well for students. Due to this, the learning for students becomes slightly challenging because the content is not related to their context and does not connect with them.

3. The study

The research question used in order to carry out this qualitative research was "What are the teachers' perspectives on using textbooks to promote language acquisition?" This question will help to discover and obtain specific data for the proposed objective of this research.

Thus, employing a qualitative methodology for this research holds meaningful advantages due to the complex nature of understanding teaching practices, material usage, and contextualized points. A qualitative paradigm can provide vital descriptive nuances often missed by empirical data alone regarding educational settings. In the qualitative methodology, first the object of the study is looked at by the researcher, who then determines the methods and types of data most likely to shed light on it (Heigham & Crocker, 2009). The flexibility and explanatory depth of qualitative research effectively match inquiries into EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of textbooks in the classroom. This approach amplifies educator voices through descriptive investigations of authentic educational contexts. By capturing rich narratives centered on teachers' experiences, the study builds more meaningful lines for understanding and transforming EFL materials, ultimately aiming to improve the effectiveness of textbooks in meeting the diverse needs of both teachers and students.

The method employed to carry out this research was the case study. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of almost every aspect of a subject to identify patterns and causes of behavior. The interest of this study lies purely in one particular case itself. Stake (1995), a leading case study researcher, defines three broad types of case study. In an outlier case, the researcher is familiar with the place where the research is going to be carried out.

By using a case study method, there is an opportunity to see the relationship between phenomena, context, and people and explore the causes of the phenomena by using many different

sources of data and triangulation. According to Yin (1994), the major strength of a case study is the opportunity to use many different sources of data. Also, Hays (2003) stated that the use of multiple methods and multiple sources as forms of triangulation makes case study findings more comprehensive. In this study, the study method helped to identify patterns in participants' responses regarding the use of technology in the classroom and to note the different ideas of each participant, leading to a suitable conclusion. To obtain data within a qualitative paradigm, it is necessary to use instruments that help gather qualitative data, such as semi-structured interviews, which were the ones used in this study.

3.1 *Context and participants*

This case study was developed in the language department of the Universidad de Guanajuato, which is located in the Guanajuato capital. The language department is known for its diverse language programs and varied student body, which results in an ideal environment for analyzing the perspectives of English as a foreign language teacher.

The participants of this study are a diverse group of EFL teachers, both men and women, from the same department. The majority of them have been taught English for approximately ten years. To collect a diverse range of perspectives, this study includes teachers from different levels in the department. Overall, the participants' experience qualifies them to offer complete and diverse perspectives on the use of textbooks in EFL classrooms.

3.2 *Inquiry tools*

In this research, interviews were conducted. According to Kathlin deMarrais (2003), qualitative interviews are used when the researcher wants to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular experiences. The goal of using interviews is "to complete a picture" as much as possible in front of the words and experiences of the participants. The intent is to discover that person's view of an experience or phenomenon of study. The interviews that were used in this research were semi-structured interviews to gather nuanced data on teachers' perspectives based on their direct textbook implementation. The implementation of semi-structured interviews allows deeper probing into EFL teachers' beliefs, reasons, and decision-making processes regulating textbook implementation than restrictive surveys. Interviews embrace participants sharing anecdotes, frustrations, and adaptation strategies, which show richer rationales influencing behaviors beyond surface reporting (Dörney, 2007).

To design the interviews, the initial step involved identifying the principal themes based on the research question. Subsequently, a list of open-ended questions was developed, corresponding to each identified theme and designed to elicit detailed responses. Following this initial phase, the first step in conducting the interviews was the selection of participants. This process considered various factors, such as including teachers with different levels of experience.

During the interviews, the objective was to facilitate a guided conversation using the structured interview format while allowing participants the flexibility to discuss the topics they deemed significant.

Interview transcriptions were required for data analysis, allowing manual coding to identify key concepts and patterns in the responses, thereby allowing the draw of comprehensive conclusions.

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4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1 *Structure and organization of classes*

At the moment of the interview, the participants were asked about the advantages and disadvantages. One of the participants said that textbooks have the base of contents such as grammar and vocabulary, among others, as can be seen above in the answer.

> *"I think it is better to work with textbooks because you have the base of the contents like grammar, vocabulary etc."* (JM, Int.2)

The teacher emphasized that using a book helps them to structure and organize their classes and lessons because it assures a measure of structure, consistency, and logical progression in a class. Also, another teacher mentioned that textbooks provide them with multiple resources, as mentioned by the participant "BM" in interview 2 (two).

> *"I use the readings from the textbooks...some of the readings have interesting topics...sometimes it is hard to try to get, like listening material for the students."* (BM, Int. 1)

The participant stated that for her, it is easy to find material in the textbooks that can be used in her classes that she cannot find or get easily. Both teachers mention the use of different material from the textbook in their English classes. Textbooks provide input into classroom lessons in different forms, such as text, activities, explanations, and so on (Huntchinson and Torres, 1994, as cited in Dinah, 2013).

The organization of the lesson is one of the most important parts of the English class. Most of the time, if the teacher does not follow a direct plan, it can be easy to follow the organization of a textbook, and look for the order of certain topics, and also use the material provided by them. As is mentioned by Dinah (2013), teachers' ways of teaching usually depend on the use of textbooks in the classroom.

4.2 *Engaging material and material adaptation*

Engaging material was another relevant concept that arose in the data organization. One of the teachers expressed that textbooks offer engaging activities for their students, while other teachers rather modify the activities in the textbooks because most of the time activities are not related to the students' context. See the answers below.

> *"Advantages, the students have a variety of fun activities, such as games, songs, puzzles and more, interesting for them."* (JM, Int. 2, Q.6)

> *"I often change the material to make it more relevant to my students' culture. I also modify activities to match their skill levels."* (MV, Int. 3, Q8)

As can be seen in the answers above, at the moment of doing the interview, the teachers were asked about the advantages and the disadvantages of the use of textbooks in the classroom, and also, they were also asked if they realized adaptations to the books they used. These two answers were interesting to discuss because we could see two different points of view. One of the teachers mentioned that students have a variety of activities that are interesting to them, while the other teacher mentioned that he prefers to modify or change the material to make it more relevant to his students. Irujo (2006) believes that teachers must have the ability to know how to choose the best material for instruction and to adapt or change materials in the textbooks. Also, according to Richards (2001), it is essential for teachers to develop the ability to adapt textbooks.

Another interviewed teacher also demonstrated that she thinks that it is important to find a way to balance textbooks, students' needs, and learning styles in order to create engaging material for them, as can be seen in the following answer.

> *"Finding the right balance between textbooks and student needs, means creating*
> *lessons that include interesting content and consider how each student learns."*
> (MV, Int. 3, Q9)

First, an EFL textbook should suit the needs, interests, and abilities of the students. For students, textbooks should be attractive and should reflect students' needs and interests. Gilmore (2007) stated that by incorporating authentic forms of media like new clips, commercials, and podcasts, among others, can promote practical target language usage and culture while improving listening skills and engagement in students.

4.3 *Cultural awareness and meaningful learning*

Two of the interviewed teachers mentioned that textbooks most of the time do not have meaningful activities for students due to the context not being related to the students' own context. One of them mentioned that textbooks contain vocabulary, words, or phrases that are not very likely for students to use, also, she made mention that most of the books are from the United States or England, so the vocabulary or the context of the readings are not the ones that students are related to. Because textbooks are not related to students' context, they do not have meaningful learning, as can be seen in the next sentences:

> *"I do have to say that the topics, they are, they have vocabulary, words or phrases*
> *that it's not very likely for students to see or use,...they have vocabulary from those*
> *contexts and we do not have vocabulary from our context."* (BM, Int. 1, Q. 6)

> *"I often change the material to make it more relevant to my students' culture..."*
> (MV, Int. 3, Q8)

As can be seen, both participants agreed with the statement about their students' cultures. Therefore, the teachers believed that they should pay attention to the information about the culture in the textbook and that material from the textbooks should be authentic in order to be relevant for students' real lives and contexts. According to Richards (2001), as cited in Dinah (2013), authentic materials have a positive effect on the learners' motivation and learning because they relate more to the learners' needs.

One of the teachers, at the moment of being asked about her teaching methods, she mentioned that she teaches to their students the basics of the language grammar but that she also tries to use the students' own examples in order to make them the center of the class, as can be seen in the answer cited below.

> *"I do teach them like the grammar points but I try also to have their own examples.*
> *I try to use topics where they are the ones being the center of the class and not just*
> *me giving them the information."* (BM, Int. 1, Q. 3)

This answer can lead us to the concept of "meaningful learning." This concept refers to educational experiences that actively involve learners by tapping into their interests, goals, and existing knowledge to create personally engaging and relevant connections. Gilmore (2011) stated that integrating examples and socio-cultural issues relevant to students' backgrounds would increase comprehension.

With this obtained data, we can conclude that cultural awareness and meaningful learning in EFL refer to intentionally incorporating intercultural elements and student-centered personal connections throughout English instruction to foster engagement, communicative abilities, and students' perspectives.

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5. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to understand and explore some perceptions that teachers of English as a second language hold regarding the use of textbooks in language classes. The results showed that the perceptions were neutral towards using this material; the participants recognized the benefits and the disadvantages of using instructional material. The findings demonstrated that the use of textbooks could be helpful for foreign language teachers in the organization and planning of language classes, as well could also be used as a support for teachers' teaching if they are used correctly. The activities from the textbooks can be adapted and modified to be relatable and interesting for students, and according to the obtained data, most of the time, books are not made in a real and relatable context for the students.

The purpose of this study was to gather perspectives regarding the use of textbooks in the classroom. The findings were intended to help other English teachers make well-informed decisions when selecting and using a textbook. Additionally, the findings should help teachers consider different opinions from other educators about how textbooks can be applied in classes as instructional material.

Despite some constraints, such as a limited number of participants and challenges with the data collection tools, this study provides useful information for solving class-planning and organization issues. By extending the number of participants, this research could offer deeper findings supporting the understanding of English instructors' attitudes toward textbook use in the classroom. For further research into the EFL teachers' perspectives towards the use of textbooks in the classroom, a comparative analysis of EFL students' perceptions besides teachers' perceptions on the use of textbooks in the classroom will be complimentary. The study will aim to set out to understand the students' preferences towards the use of this material in class, contributing to teachers making a clearer decision in the selection of textbooks.

As a novice English teacher, I have encountered and witnessed various challenges when it comes to using textbooks as teaching materials and when not to use them. I think this research has improved my understanding of the intricacy of using a textbook in the classroom and all the factors that influence choosing one.

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