ATTITUDES ABOUT PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR IN ESL AND EFL TEACHERS AND
STUDENTS

By

Laura Eickhoff

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages — Master of Arts

2016

ABSTRACT

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There is often a disparity between what is deemed prescriptively correct under the rules of standard English grammar and native-speaker norms within different varieties, which results in multiple options for classroom grammar instruction for second language learners. This study presents findings on L2 learners' attitudes towards different prescriptive and descriptive forms of grammar in cases where learning formal textbook grammar may not match many native speakers' speech patterns. Additionally, it explores how ESL and EFL students' attitudes about grammar coincide with or differ from those of their teachers. One hundred eight English language learners and instructors in the United States and China were surveyed to measure awareness of and attitudes towards standard and non-standard grammar in spoken English and how varying perceptions may affect the learning environment. Results indicated that many teachers' prioritization of prescriptive norms for their students is often in contrast to the native-speaker norms that students report to prefer. Additionally, native speakers often report a stigmatized perception of some prescriptively correct forms. All groups reported a higher preference of prescriptive grammar in writing than in speaking, citing formality and permanence as determining differences between the two modes of communication.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition in the Present Study	Use in Present Study
EFL	English as a Foreign Language	EFL will be used generally to refer to an English speaking/learning context in a country that does **not** have English as its first language. Specifically, in this study, it will be used to refer to students and teachers in China.
ESL	English as a Second Language	ESL will be used generally to refer to an English speaking/learning context in a country that has English as its first language. Specifically, in this study, it will be used to refer to students and teachers in the United States.
EFLS	English as a Foreign Language Student	In this study, this refers to Chinese students studying English at a university in China.
EFLT	English as a Foreign Language Teacher	In this study, this refers to Chinese teachers teaching English at a university in China. Their first language is Chinese.
NSPT	Native Speaker Pre-teacher	In this study, this refers to a group of degree-seeking students in studying at a university in the United States to become teachers. Their first language is English and they are early in their programs.
ESLS	English as a Second Language Student	In this study, this refers to Chinese students studying English at a university in the United States. Their first language is Chinese.

ESLT	English as a Second Language Teacher	In this study, this refers to American teachers teaching English at a university in the United States. Their first language is English.
ESLTC	L1 Chinese ESL Teacher	This refers to someone who teaches ESL but whose first language is Chinese.
ESLTK	L1 Korean ESL Teacher	This refers to someone who teaches ESL but whose first language is Korean.
L1	First Language	This refers to the native language that someone has spoken since infancy.
L2	Second Language	This refers to someone's secondary or additional language that he/she currently studies or has learned.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

Standard American, Standard British, and Standard Australian Englishes are among several international, widespread, and standardized varieties of English, but they only provide a small glimpse of the countless rule-governed varieties of English that exist in language communities across the world. The wide range of varying speech communities results in a rather heterogynous representation of people who speak English as their first language and an ambiguous definition of native-speaker norms within the language. Yet, it is not an uncommon scenario to hear language teachers explain how a "native speaker" would sound, or a student professing that he or she wants to sound like a "native speaker." The question that arises, therefore, is: What impact does this abundance of English variation have on English language education in contexts where English is learned as either a second language or a foreign language? That is, what goals do language students in different contexts have for their language usage? Additionally, how do these goals compare and contrast with those of their instructors?

One way to incorporate native speaker norms is the use of corpora in materials development and language instruction. Corpus research has been playing a greater role in current English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks and theory in order to create learning and teaching materials that are more reflective of actual language usage, rather than relying solely on prescriptive grammar rules and material writers' intuitions. Nevertheless, when taking into account variation within the English language in its many global contexts, accommodating non-prescriptive constructs in language education can be quite difficult. Presumably not all varieties can be taught. This poses a dilemma for ESL and

EFL teachers— what should be taught in the classroom? While different educational institutions or political realities account for overarching policy decisions at a given institution on whether Standard American English or Standard British English, for example, is taught, teachers are often presented with a choice in the classroom where they must choose between presenting a grammatical form by the prescriptive rules in the textbook and/or teaching students the way(s) in which many native speakers use it. The present study addresses this dilemma to better understand what learners and teachers prioritize in cases where learning formal textbook grammar may not mimic many native speakers' speech patterns. Beyond that, it also investigates if students' attitudes towards the grammar that should be taught to ESL and EFL students in these scenarios coincide with the philosophies of their teachers.

Defining Terms

Before going any further, it is important to develop a general definition for some of the terms and constructs presented in this study. To do so, however, is complex because *grammaticality* is a relative term that is largely a social construct. While *prescriptive norms* are, in their most basic forms, the rules of the language that are taught to first and second language speakers and imply a clear sense of right and wrong (Carter and McCarthy, 2006), this does not always imply that its speakers always follow these rules. It is usually the most dominant varieties within a given language that dictate its prescriptive norms, but this is not always the case. For example, while the rule that *who* serves as the subject of a sentence or a clause and *whom* should be used as a direct or indirect object or the object of a preposition in a sentence or clause is a prescriptive rule in most standard varieties of English and appears in many language textbooks, many speakers of English do not always abide by this rule, nor are they bothered by such a violation in another's utterance. A grammatical element that reflects *descriptive norms* of

grammar, on the other hand, is based on a more inferential articulation of language rules as they are used by a given population, as opposed to a strict adherence to prescribed rules, making it an observation of actual grammar usage. Again, however, this only holds true within a given dialect that is being observed and may vary greatly when compared to another variety of the language.

Because these terms are discourse-specific, *prescriptive* and *descriptive grammar* were not used in the survey instruments of this study. Instead, they were replaced by *grammatically correct* and *native-like speech*, respectively, and were referenced as sometimes being similar and sometimes being different from each other. This, however, is problematic in and of itself because, as demonstrated, most applied linguists do not classify grammar as either purely correct or wholly incorrect. Instead, one's use of a particular grammar construct can be said to either align with the formally prescribed constructs of the standard variety, which may or may not also align with the descriptive norms of real language in use, but it cannot truly be deemed *right* or *wrong*. Therefore, *grammatically correct* is only correct in its given context or working within a specific grammatical paradigm.

Student Versus Teacher Perceptions of Grammar

Many studies have addressed grammar teaching and learning preferences in ESL and international contexts. For example, Loewen et al. (2009) surveyed ESL learners and foreign language learners in order to analyze the differences in the two groups' values in grammar instruction. The study found a differentiation between how grammar instruction and corrective feedback are viewed as well as varying opinions between the ESL and foreign language learners. The ESL learners, perhaps because they were living in the second language environment, preferred communication skills practice over grammar instruction and error correction. Conversely, the foreign language learners, who had less exposure to their foreign-language

context, prioritized grammar instruction and feedback over communication practice. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) found that ESL teachers tended to prioritize language errors regarded as pragmatic issues as areas of concern over grammatical errors, whereas their EFL teaching counterparts responded with the opposite viewpoint.

In a 2002 study, Schulz also investigated language learners' perceptions of instructed grammar and corrective feedback. Unlike Loewen et al. (2009), Schulz only looked at foreign language learners, but she compared learners in Colombia and the US, and surveyed the foreign language teachers in both contexts to reveal contrasts. Overall, the foreign language students in both countries favored explicit grammar teaching and corrective feedback. The teachers' responses were a bit more varied, but they primarily agreed that grammar teaching is an important aspect of language learning, but not the only factor in learning a language. However, Hos and Kekec's (2014) study with English language instructors in Turkey found that, although many teachers professed to preferring a communicative teaching method, their actual classroom practices were often not reflective of such preferences and many times were actually closer to a grammar translation methodology.

These studies demonstrate that students' and teachers' views do not always align on issues surrounding second language grammar instruction. Similarly, attitudes towards grammar instruction have also been found to differ between ESL and EFL contexts. However, much of this research is concerned with *how* grammar is taught, but these studies do not often address *what* variety of grammar is taught. That is, there is not a lot of current research that addresses grammar in terms of defining students' "target-like" goals regarding grammar and how these compare between students and teachers in ESL and EFL contexts. While Zhang and Hu (2008) explain that standardized varieties of language tend to be the most typically favored by non-

native speakers, they point to a gap in the current literature, specifying that little research has been conducted in regards to L1 Chinese speakers' attitudes towards native speakers of different English varieties (p. 343).

Some research has touched on these issues by examining the use of corpora in the classroom. More and more language learning textbook authors and contributors have used information from corpus research to create textbooks that are demonstrative of nativelike but prescriptively incorrect uses of language (e.g. Biber & Reppen, 2002; Blass, Iannuzzi, Savage, & Reppen, 2012). Nevertheless, particularly in foreign language textbooks, there seems to be a disparity between authentic use of a particular variety of English and what is presented in textbooks (Gilmore, 2004). Tsui (2005) found that providing corpus data for language teachers with grammar questions was more effective in promoting their understanding of meaning and use than providing more dictionary-based answers to raise language awareness. More specifically, Al-wossabi (2014) pointed to a need for both spoken and written language features, as found in corpus data, to be incorporated into language teaching, particularly at higher levels in EFL settings. However, some research indicates that there is not always a desire for authentic language in the classroom. For example, Canagarajah (1993) describes that some EFL students desire a prescriptive, grammar-centric focus in the classroom, as opposed to a more authentic, language-in-usage and communicative approach because it not only aligns with their most-familiar exposure to classroom instruction within their context, but also because it enables them to keep a metaphorical distance from the language they are learning. In the case of Canagarajah's study, the students felt that approaching language learning in a rule-based, grammatical way could be a buffer between their culture and the political tensions that were associated with the

L2. That is, learning grammatical rules was more product-based and neither provided for, nor encouraged a need to interact in the L2 in any meaningful way.

Larsen-Freeman (2014) explains that these issues are unavoidable in any context and must be dealt with. For instance, even if a teacher chooses not to specifically teach a smaller, sub-variety of English, he or she must still make the decision whether or not student usage of a grammatical form from such a sub-variety should be counted as incorrect. These decisions are often made on an individual case basis by the teacher. If English instructors, many of whom are L2 English speakers themselves, have spent little time in an L1 English environment and primarily learned from textbooks filled with prescriptive grammar rules, they are arguably less likely to expose their students to more authentic language usage in the classroom or may just not be familiar enough with native speaker norms to do so, even if such resources were available. Depending on their students' expectations, this may lead to a discrepancy between student and teacher goals or realities.

Additionally, Larsen-Freeman (2007) explains that language teaching and constructing meaning through language entails communicative competence, including an acute awareness of language learners' goals in using the language and with whom they will be communicating. With that, learners require the capacity to construct meaning through grammar, which enables them to demonstrate communicative competence within a variety of contexts and empowers learners to step beyond a rule-based approach and understand the choices that native-speakers make when they use the language. To understand native-speaker agency in constructing meaning, Nunan (2001) argues, requires learners to have the ability to explore authentic language in use and recognize different ways in which people use language to express the same meaning, whether it be prescriptively correct or not. Further, Al-wossabi (2014) suggests that, even if learners do not

fully internalize the descriptive forms of grammar characteristic of a given variety, they should at least be able to recognize them. In this study, this may be found to account for some of the decisions that participants make when prioritizing either prescriptive or descriptive grammar and their agency in choosing between them.

English Teaching Between Contexts

The choice of a language learner to target a particular variety of a second language does not necessarily imply a desire to take on an identity that entails any element of that culture beyond the grammar. Instead, as explained by Byram and Risager (1999), language learning involves learners' abilities to cope with the relationship and differences between languages and cultures of native and non-native speakers of the language "rather than attempting to cast off one's existing social identities and pretending to be a native-speaker" (p. 2). Participants' responses in this study, therefore, do not necessarily imply a particular attitude towards any given L1 English-speaking culture. Rather, they are in response to questions that ask them to compare elements of their educational contexts and the match or mismatch between grammatical varieties that they have learned and that they prefer to learn or teach. In this case, the EFL participants were all L1 Chinese-speaking students and teachers at a university in China. The context is something that must be considered in order to gain a more robust understanding of the cultural history and context that may contribute to participants' responses on the survey.

Liu (2007) describes a paradox in the Chinese English education system where the government continues to promote English education in order to promote international exchange (Pan, 2011; Pan & Block, 2011) at an earlier and earlier stage in primary schools throughout the country while there is also an overall shortage of qualified English teachers available to fill these gaps. When students reach the university level in China, Liu explains, they have not necessarily

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benefited from English education starting by at least third grade, due to components such as curricular constraints and limited resources that do not always yield the intended results of strong language ability. Peng (2011) also explains that Chinese students' transition from a lecture-based high school English curriculum to university classes requires more oral participation.

Despite the potential for more oral communication during university study, another dominant factor contributing to second language acquisition, willingness to communicate, may also account for Chinese language learners' classroom tendencies throughout their education and at the tertiary level (Peng, 2007). The traditional Confucian value system present in many facets of Chinese culture creates a common face-saving measure, or *lian*, which contributes to many students' non-confrontational attitudes or an unwillingness to participate if they feel uncertain about their abilities. The other-oriented nature of Chinese culture and protecting one's *lian* often lead to a primarily teacher-centered EFL classroom with limited participation from students.

Diligence and a submission to the teacher's authority, also elements of Confucianism, disincentivize ambiguity and guessing while promoting concrete knowledge and things like explicit grammar rules. This often stands in contrast to the collective and interaction-oriented language classrooms that are more familiar in a Western context. A higher priority on accuracy coupled with a lower priority on communicative competence is not only reflected in the general classroom climates, but is also reflected in many of China's standardized examinations (Peng, 2007). Chinese students' overall reluctance to communicate in the language classroom, as described by Peng's study, may also be associated with a stronger preference towards prescriptive grammar rules, which often coincide with a more structured, rule-focused classroom environment. Such a focus oftentimes stands in contrast to other contexts that prioritize a more communicative-based focused classroom that prioritizes interaction and successful

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communication techniques over a more explicit, form-focused approach (Liu, Zhou, & Fu, 2015; van Lier, 2001). Conversely, the objectives of many ESL programs more closely align with the notions of communicative competence under the assumption that students studying in the L2 context have more exposure to the language, and thus a more tangible application for their acquired language and skillset (Reppy & Adames, 2000). These contextual realities between the Chinese and US contexts may affect some of the participants' responses on the current survey.

Research Questions

The current study draws on several aspects of these previously mentioned studies in that it engages both ESL and foreign language learners—in this case, EFL students— and makes comparisons between student and teacher perspectives on grammar instruction. It not only investigates teacher language awareness, but also student language awareness of real-life language varieties in language usage and how this may impact their attitudes towards grammar teaching and learning.

The purpose of this research is to elicit from native and non-native English speaking students and teachers their awareness of and attitudes towards prescriptively correct and incorrect English grammar points in spoken language. Two key objectives are a) to compare ESL and EFL students' goals in learning English and b) to gain a better understanding of how grammar is taught in the two contexts. This is not a study on how to specifically teach grammar, but a study on grammar attitudes, perceptions of grammaticality, and how varying expectations may exist between what students anticipate and what teachers provide. Its intent is not to determine whether teaching standard versus nonstandard forms is better, but rather how differences in perceptions on these issues can potentially affect the learning environment. The research questions are as follow:

1. Do ESL and EFL students and teachers perceive a difference between prescriptively correct spoken English and how many native speakers talk?

2. Do ESL and EFL students prioritize prescriptively correct spoken English or native-sounding speech, if different, in their learning and speaking goals?

3. How do ESL and EFL students' prioritization of prescriptively correct spoken English or native-sounding speech align with or differ from each other and from ESL and EFL teachers' teaching philosophies?

4. Do opinions about prescriptively correct English and native-sounding language, if different, vary between spoken and written forms of production for ESL and EFL students and teachers?

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

Because this research makes comparisons between ESL and EFL students and teachers as well as general perceptibility of grammaticality and grammar attitudes, five sets of participants were recruited for a total of 108 participants. This included a group of EFL students studying English at a large university in Wuhan, China [EFLS] (n = 25) and a group of ESL students studying English at a large Midwestern university in the United States [ESLS] (n = 13), both of whom were L1 Chinese. All of the EFLSs and ESLSs were enrolled in academic courses in their respective universities while taking high-intermediate to advanced English language courses. When the data were collected, the EFLSs were enrolled in an intensive summer English communication course on their campus, and the ESLSs were in their normal fall semester schedules taking both mainstream academic and academic English courses. Of the EFL students, 88% had not spent more than three weeks in an L1 English-speaking country.

To compare teacher perceptions and attitudes, a group of EFL teachers who teach English at the same university in China [EFLT] (n = 25) and a group of native English-speaking (L1) ESL teachers who teach English at the Midwestern university [ESLT] (n = 23) were recruited. All of the teachers who participated had prior teaching experience and had at least partially completed a master's program or above in a related field. The EFLTs were all L1 Chinese. Sixty percent of them had not spent over three weeks in an English-speaking environment. The ESLTs were all L1 English.

There were two additional ESLTs that were not L1 English. In order to eliminate variability within the group of ESLTs, their results were largely excluded from the present study.

However, the data of these two participants, who were L1 Chinese and L1 Korean ESL teachers at the Midwestern university, are dealt with in detail in one section of the Results and Discussion chapter.

The final group of participants was L1 English-speaking students [NSPT] (n = 23) studying at the Midwestern university. These were all undergraduate students enrolled in a course focusing on English grammar for pedagogical purposes, but the surveys were conducted at the beginning of the semester before they received formal grammar training. This course was selected because it targeted future teachers who may eventually have a vested interest in the topic but who were also early in their training. The purpose of including this last group was to acquire perspective from native English-speaking students in the US that were of a similar age group as the ESL and EFL students surveyed. As domestic students at the university, they were in a good position to demonstrate grammar norms in the region. Their ratings of the acceptability of English utterances of varying grammatical accuracy according to Standard American English norms should provide a fairly accurate representation of what the ESL students encounter in real-world interactions outside of the classroom in the US. At the same time, they also provide insight into both the grammar norms of the future generation of ESL teachers and to their preconceived tendencies in regards to grammar teaching. A more thorough representation of the demographics of the surveyed populations can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: *Participants*

Group*	*n*	L1	Gender	Age Range	Mean Age	Education	3+ wks in L2 context
EFLS	25	Chinese	10M 15F	18- 22	19.88	Some college	88% No
EFLT	25	Chinese	6M 18F 1 Unkn.	25-46	36.5	Masters+	60% No
NSPT	23	English	2M 21F	18-23	20.57	Some college	-
ESLS	13	Chinese	3M 10F	17-22	19.38	HS/some college	Yes, currently
ESLT**	20	English	6M 14F	23-61	36.57	Masters+	-

* EFLS: English as a foreign language student; EFLT: English as a foreign language teacher; NSPT: native English-speaking undergraduate student; ESLS: English as a second language student; ESLT: English as a second language teacher

**There are also 2 additional ESLT participants: 1 is L1 Chinese and the other is L1 Korean. Their results are not included in this study, unless explicitly stated in some of the analyses.

Materials

All participants were asked to complete a background questionnaire that detailed their basic demographics, their language learning backgrounds, their English use outside of the classroom (if applicable), time spent in an L2 English environment, and a self-rating of their English language skills. The background questionnaires can be found in Appendix A. Table 2 describes the L2 English-speaking students' and teachers' self-ratings in grammar and the four skills. Participants were asked to rate their level of English on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being "Beginner" and 5 being "Advanced." While the students in the ESL and EFL environments had similar language learning backgrounds and were at approximately the same level of English, no formal or standardized tests were used to formally assess this.

Table 2: *Participants' English Self-Ratings*

	EFLS*	EFLT	ESLS
Reading	3.12	4.56	3.15
Writing	2.56	3.92	3.15
Listening	2.56	4.12	3.31
Speaking	2.4	4.0	3.08
Grammar	2.72	4.36	3.08
Average	2.67	4.19	3.15

* EFLS: English as a foreign language student; EFLT: English as a foreign language teacher; ESLS: English as a second language student

Participants were then asked to complete a survey that consisted of 25 questions. A sample of this survey can be found in Appendix B. Of this 25-question survey, 23 questions used a six-point Likert scale, and six questions were open-ended and asked for student written responses. Some questions asked for both a Likert scale rating and an open-ended response. The first part of the survey (Part A) was comprised of an acceptability judgment test where participants were asked to rate sentences on a Likert scale from 1 to 6. A 6-point Likert scale was chosen to require participants to answer each question favorably or unfavorably but not permit an arbitrary selection of a middle point. Unlike a grammaticality judgment test, however, participants were not asked to determine whether or not a given sentence was grammatically (i.e. prescriptively) correct. Instead, the participants from all five groups were asked to assess the acceptability of these sentences if they heard them spoken. They chose on a Likert Scale from 1-6, *This sounds <u>wrong</u> to me* (=1) to *This sounds <u>good</u> to me* (=6), or 0, *I don't know*.

Part A consisted of 16 sentences that were randomized. There were eight prescriptively correct sentences according to Standard English and eight similar sentences that focus on those same grammar points that are common in oral utterances by native speakers in a variety of

contexts. There are eight grammatical constructs targeted in Part A of the survey that are present in the spoken form of a large number of English varieties. More importantly, the grammatical points were selected because they represent non-prescriptively correct grammar forms that are not largely stigmatized by the general population of native English speakers and that are widespread in geographical location and social groups. Instead, they are forms that are not only used by native English speakers in the United States and beyond but that also reflect prescriptive grammar rules that many native speakers have difficulty understanding and/or articulating.

Each grammar point was represented by two sentences, one prescriptively correct and one incorrect, and the content words were changed between the two sentences so as to discourage participants cross-referencing sentences with the same grammar point. The sentences were presented in a pseudorandom order with no two consecutive sentences representing the same grammar point. The grammar issues in the acceptability judgment task were as follows (with the prescriptively correct sentences presented first): Sentences 1 and 13 (*If a student has a question, he or she should ask the teacher; The teacher will help a student if they raise their hand*) address using *they* as a third-person singular pronoun, rather than *he* or *she*. Sentences 4 and 6 (*John and I are going to the store; Me and Rachel are going to a movie*) differentiate between *I* as a first person singular subject pronoun and using the accusative/objective pronoun *me* in the same place. Sentences 5 and 9 (*I want to know whom the story was about; She was wondering who the movie was about*) distinguish between *who* and *whom* in object of a preposition relative clauses with stranded prepositions. Sentence 7 and 10 (*If I were you, I would not go to the party; If I was you, I would study more often*) were selected to show prescriptively correct and incorrect versions of *was* and *were* in sentences using present unreal conditional clauses. Sentences 12 and 3 (*He sings badly; She runs slow*) address using an adverb versus an

adjective to describe an action verb. Sentences 14 and 8 (*There are fewer people in this room than that room; There are less people here today than yesterday*) addresses using *less* versus *fewer* to modify countable nouns. Sentences 15 and 11 (*Please remember to call Mary and Me; Please return the book to John and I*) compares *me* and *I* as used as direct object, first-person pronouns. Sentences 16 and 2 (*I wish I had done my homework last night; I wish I would have known that last year*) compare *had + participle* and *would have + participle* in past unreal conditional sentences, also known as counterfactuals. All of these sentences, as they appeared on the survey, can be found in Appendix B.

These grammar points were checked against *the Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) in order to verify that their prescriptive and descriptive forms were prevalent in American English (Davies, 2008). They were also checked against the *British National Corpus* (BNC) and a native speaker of British English to select descriptive forms that are also prevalent in British English (Davies, 2004).[1] To corroborate the corpus data and measure its applicability in the Midwestern variety of English, the grammar points were also cross-referenced in consultation with native English speakers who currently resided in the same region as the US university where part of the data were collected.

Figure 1 shows the examples given to students at the beginning of the survey, which the researcher reviewed with them before they began. The researcher emphasized that they would not be answering whether or not the sentence follows a grammar rule, but whether it sounds acceptable in their personal grammar. That is, a sentence may not be prescriptively correct, but it may sound ok to them or vice versa. Participants were also informed that all of these examples specifically pertained to spoken English, not written.

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[1] The one exception is the counterfactual structure "if I would have…," which is rare in British English.

Figure 1: *Part A of Survey, Example*

	This sounds <u>wrong</u> to me.	This sounds <u>good</u> to me.	I don't know.
Example: *I no like nothing.*	1 2 3 4 5 6		0
Example: *She often likes to eat cake.*	1 2 3 4 5 6		0
Example: *I seen you yesterday.*	1 2 3 4 5 6		0

Part B of the survey varied slightly to address the contexts and student/teacher positioning of the participants. Therefore, three slightly different versions were given to the two groups of students, the two groups of teachers, and the group of native English-speaking undergraduate students in the US. All formats asked participants to share their opinions about what varieties of grammar are taught or preferred and if spoken and written English grammar should be treated differently. Many of these questions then asked the participants to explain their answers in writing. This section also addressed whether the participants would prioritize sounding *native-like* or *grammatically correct*, if there were a difference between the two in a particular instance. Additionally, it asked about participants' perception of English spoken by native speakers and its adherence to formal grammar rules and if this was different in writing than speaking. As discussed in the literature review, these two terms are both ambiguous and, oftentimes polarizing, but they were chosen because it was not feasible to expect all participants to be familiar with the difference between the terms *descriptive* and *prescriptive grammar*. Furthermore, using these terms in this manner alongside open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to explain how they interpreted these terms in the questions and the potential divide between them as a way to contextualize their answers. Although this presents the risk of

participants' varying interpretations contributing to discrepancies in answers, one objective of this research was to analyze issues that can arise when notions of what constitutes native-speaker speech and what is considered grammatically correct. As such, it was important for the survey to allow participants their own definitions and interpretations despite the ambiguity that they may present. The results pertaining to this issue will be addressed in greater detail in the discussion section of this paper.

Procedure

All surveys and background questionnaires were given in paper form in both China and the United States. The EFL students were an intact classroom studying at the university in Wuhan during Summer 2015, and the EFL teachers were instructors at the same university. Similarly, the ESL students, all of whom were also L1 Chinese, were also drawn from an intact classroom during Fall 2015 at the Midwestern university, and the ESL teachers were from the English language center at the same university. Data from the L1 English undergraduate students were also collected during Fall 2015. The background questionnaires, the Likert scale items from the surveys, and the open-ended questions were all entered into Excel spreadsheets for qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Friedman, 2012) was used to code the data in order to draw on common and recurring themes. In line with current guidelines surrounding grounded theory, data were generally coded to label all responses, and then cyclically reevaluated to connect repeated themes. From there, the data were analyzed to compare variations between the five groups of participants as well as variation within these groups. Quantitative results from the surveys and background questionnaires were

then used to either corroborate or contrast the qualitative codes yielded by participants' written responses. In line with Chiovitti and Piran (2003), participants' actual quotations were used to articulate coding categories and theories, and, as emphasized by Corbin and Strauss (2008), theory was built through "use of concepts and their development, theoretical sampling, and saturation" to fit the data into the determined categories (p. 303). For example, if a large percentage of ESLTs rated the prescriptively correct sentences in Part A of the survey as *unacceptable* and explain that they mostly focus on sounding "natural" when they speak in class, it may be possible to hypothesize that ESL teachers prioritize descriptive grammar norms over prescriptively correct grammar instruction.

There is a basis for grounded theory use in applied linguistics research. For example, Gan, Humphreys, and Hamp-Lyons (2004) used a grounded theory approach to investigate high and low-achieving EFL students studying at Chinese universities in order to analyze student motivation and outcome. From their data, Gan et al. drew six themes that demonstrated different factors in their results. The inductive, data-driven nature of grounded theory is beneficial in this particular study because there are a lot of factors being considered with little previous research that incorporates all of these factors, meaning it is difficult to begin the analysis process with pre-existing themes and constructs. As seen in the literature review of this paper, the many factors, such as prescriptive and descriptive grammar, globalization, and the Chinese and US education systems had the potential to direct the data in any number of ways. As a result, grounded theory provided the opportunity to use the data to ascertain themes, rather than prematurely superimposing them in advance.

CHAPTER 3

Results and Discussion

Perceptions of Language Usage and Varieties

Research Question 1 asked whether or not ESL and EFL students and teachers perceive a difference between prescriptively correct spoken English and the way many native speakers talk. Part A of the survey, the acceptability judgment test, was used in order to investigate this issue. Table 3 and Table 4 presents the mean ratings of the sentences that were prescriptively correct according to the rules of Standard American English. The Likert scale went from 1: *This sounds wrong to me* to 6: *This sounds good to me*.

Prescriptive forms. As can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4, the two sets of teachers answered similarly and rated the sentences higher overall with no significant difference between their ratings, while the two sets of students rated these sentences similarly with a lower overall average, also with no significant difference between the two groups of students. Both groups of English teachers rated the sentences as more acceptable than the two groups of L2 English students. A one-way ANOVA test indicated that, while there was no significant difference within the two sets of teachers nor the two sets of students, there was a significant difference in the ratings of the prescriptively correct sentences between the two sets of students and teachers with the students in both contexts rating the prescriptive sentences significantly lower than the teachers in their respective contexts. For the EFL context, $p < .001$, and $p = .031$ for the ESL context. The group of L1 English undergraduate students (NSPTs) were between the set of teachers and the set of students in how they rated the prescriptive sentences and were only significantly different from the EFLS group, who had rated the sentences lowest overall between the five groups of participants, at $p < .001$. Because accepting the prescriptive form and

accepting the descriptive form are not mutually exclusive phenomena, it is possible that some

participants may have felt as though either variety of a particular grammar point are acceptable

and rate them similarly. In such cases, it is difficult to say whether an individual actually favors a

certain form. Part A of the survey only asked participants if they found the forms acceptable if

they were to hear them spoken, not whether or not they use such forms themselves.

Other than the EFLTs, all groups, EFLSs, NSPTs, ESLS, and ESLTs, rated Sentence 5 (*I

want to know whom the story was about*) as the lowest score out of all of the prescriptively

correct sentences with an average score of 3.6 between those four groups. With this average

almost right at the middle point on the Likert scale (3.5), this seems to indicate that these groups

do not have a highly favorable opinion of a well-known prescriptive grammar rule. No

participants responded to the question by stating that they were unfamiliar with the existence of a

grammar rule distinguishing between the use of *who* and *whom*. This, therefore, seemed to

indicate that using or not using the prescriptively correct form was either a matter of personal

choice or the absence of the construct in their productive knowledge, rather than a participant

never having been introduced to it. This *who/whom* distinction will be covered more extensively

in a later section, as it was also presented as an open-ended question in Part B of the survey.

Unlike the other groups, the EFL teachers rated Sentence 14 (*There are fewer people in this

room than that room*) as the lowest at 3.88.

There was little consistency in which sentence the five different groups rated as the most

acceptable out of the prescriptively correct sentences. Both the EFLTs and the ESLSs rated

Sentence 7 (*If I were you, I would not go to the party*) as the most acceptable, at 5.92 and 5.46,

respectively. With an average of 5.95, the ESLTs also rated Sentence 4 (*John and I are going to

the store*) as the most acceptable out of the eight prescriptive sentences. The EFLS chose

Sentence 15 (*Please remember to call Mary and me*), and the NSPTs choosing Sentence 1 (*If a student has a question, he or she should ask the teacher*), with 4.68 and 5.74, respectively. As was expected, most students and teachers were generally ok with all of the prescriptive forms of the sentences. The variability in results and ratings of the different sentence that did exist, both between the groups and within the groups, may demonstrate, to some degree, that not all grammar points are valued equally or may be attributed to other factors in the sentences besides the targeted grammar constructs.

Table 3: *EFL Prescriptively Correct Means in Acceptability Judgment Test*

	EFLS*		EFLT	
1 *3rd p. prn.*	4.32 (1.52)	[3.69,5.04]	5.28 (1.24)	[4.69, 5.75]
4 *sub. prn.*	4.2 (1.83)	[3.57, 5.16]	5.56 (1.16)	[5.03, 6.02]
5 *who/whom*	3.2 (1.83)	[2.34, 3.94]	4.96 (1.52)	[4.28, 5.55]
7 *pr. cond.*	4.56 (1.78)	[4.19, 5.54]	5.92 (0.4)	[5.74, 6.09]
12 *adv./adj.*	3.67 (1.71)	[3.0, 4.55]	4.92 (1.67)	[4.18, 5.57]
14 *count n.*	4.0 (1.62)	[3.38, 4.8]	3.88 (2.05)	[3.09, 4.74]
15 *obj. prn.*	4.68 (1.38)	[4.03, 5.33]	5.8 (0.82)	[5.43, 6.13]
16 *pst. cond.*	4.17 (1.97)	[3.38, 5.07]	5.2 (1.63)	[4.52, 5.91]
Average	4.1		5.19	

* EFLS: English as a foreign language student; EFLT: English as a foreign language teacher

Table 4: *ESL Prescriptively Correct Means in Acceptability Judgment Test*

	NSPT*		ESLS		ESLT	
1 *3rd p. prn.*	5.74 (0.62)	[5.42, 6.01]	5.08 (1.55)	[4.14, 6.02]	5.7 (0.73)	[5.36, 3.04]
4 *sub. prn.*	5.7 (0.93)	[5.23, 6.11]	4.92 (1.44)	[4.05, 5.8]	5.95 (0.22)	[5.85, 6.05]
5 *who/whom*	3.71 (1.19)	[3.17, 4.26]	3.54 (2.03)	[2.31, 4.76]	3.95 (1.88)	[3.07, 4.83]
7 *pr. cond.*	5.65 (0.49)	[5.39, 5.85]	5.46 (1.13)	[4.78, 6.14]	5.65 (0.75)	[5.3, 6.0]
12 *adv./adj.*	4.7 (1.49)	[3.89, 5.26]	4.85 (1.52)	[3.93, 5.76]	5.35 (1.04)	[4.86, 5.84]
14 *count n.*	5.35 (0.98)	[4.87, 5.8]	4.31 (1.75)	[3.25, 5.37]	5.3 (1.08)	[4.79, 5.81]
15 *obj. prn.*	4.3 (1.33)	[3.66, 4.92]	5.15 (1.46)	[4.27, 6.04]	5.4 (1.27)	[4.8, 6.0]
16 *pst. cond.*	5.64 (0.73)	[5.28, 5.96]	4.0 (2.12)	[2.72, 5.28]	5.9 (0.31)	[5.76, 6.04]
Average	5.1		4.66		5.4	

* NSPT: native English-speaking undergraduate student; ESLS: English as a second language student;
ESLT: English as a second language teacher

Non-prescriptively correct forms. Table 5 and Table 6 illustrate the mean ratings of the prescriptively incorrect sentences, which were considered acceptable by a set of native speakers who live in L1 English countries and referenced against two corpora before the survey was administered. Out of the five groups, the NSPT group rated this set of sentences as the most acceptable overall, followed by the two ESL groups. The two EFL groups rated these as the lowest. A one-way ANOVA test demonstrated that the NSPTs' ratings were significantly higher than both the EFLSs and the EFLTs at $p = .001$ and $p < .001$, respectively. There was significant difference in the ratings of the NSPTs and the two ESL groups.

While all groups rated the "native-like" sentences as relatively lower overall than the prescriptively correct sentences, the NSPT group rated them less than half a point lower than the prescriptive sentences at .49 lower. The student groups, EFLSs and ESLSs, rated them .74 and .92 points lower, respectively. Interestingly, the teacher groups saw the biggest discrepancy with -1.88 for the EFLT group and -1.38 for the ESLT group. While it seems reasonable that the two groups that rated the prescriptively correct sentences the highest, the teachers, would see the biggest difference in scores, the relative positioning of the five groups' ratings in the second set of sentences, when compared against each other, depicts a different story. The EFLT group demonstrated a predictable pattern where, overall, they provided one of the top ratings for the prescriptive sentences and the lowest rating for the descriptive sentences. However, the two native speaker groups, the NSPTs and the ESLTs, rated the prescriptively incorrect sentences as more acceptable than the non-native-speaking groups. This indicates that the native speakers were either unaware that the sentences were prescriptively incorrect or that they simply found them, overall, to be relatively acceptable in spoken English. In either case, the three non-native-speaking groups did not respond as favorably on the same items.

The ESLTs' ratings for the set of descriptive sentences were 1.38 points lower than the set of prescriptive sentences, but still they rated the descriptively correct sentences at an average of 4.02 on the Likert scale of acceptability. This seems to indicate that, while ESL teachers generally seem to prefer the prescriptively correct version of the sentences, they are not reflecting a significantly higher degree of favorability for prescriptive forms. The EFL teachers did not demonstrate this same degree of flexibility. It may also be possible that, in the case of the prescriptively correct sentences and the ESLTs, the teachers were acknowledging that that set of sentences sound good because they know that they are prescriptively correct and should, therefore, be rated accordingly. At the same time, they may then have ranted the prescriptively

Table 5: *EFL Prescriptively Incorrect Correct Means in Acceptability Judgment Test*

	EFLS*		EFLT	
2 *pst. cond.*	3.0 (1.62)	[2.15, 3.75]	4.8 (1.87)	[3.95, 5.55]
3 *adv./adj.*	2.75 (1.75)	[2.23, 3.87]	2.6 (1.71)	[1.85, 3.32]
6 *sub. prn.*	3.29 (1.76)	[2.12, 3.58]	2.79 (2.0)	[1.95, 3.64]
8 *count n.*	4.22 (1.59)	[3.42, 4.98]	3.92 (2.0)	[2.99, 4.67]
9 *who/whom*	3.29 (1.63)	[2.63, 4.17]	4.44 (1.69)	[3.66, 5.09]
10 *pr. cond.*	3.0 (2.08)	[1.93, 3.87]	2.56 (1.76)	[1.88, 3.37]
11 *obj. prn.*	3.28 (1.81)	[2.54, 4.16]	2.48 (1.56)	[1.88, 3.2]
13 *3rd p. prn.*	4.04 (1.54)	[3.41, 4.79]	2.88 (2.01)	[1.97, 3.69]
Average	3.36		3.31	

* EFLS: English as a foreign language student; EFLT: English as a foreign language teacher

Table 6: *ESL Prescriptively Incorrect Correct Means in Acceptability Judgment Test*

	NSPT*		ESLS		ESLT	
2 *pst. cond.*	5.78 (0.6)	[5.5, 6.04]	3.77 (2.17)	[2.31, 3.98]	5.5 (1.19)	[4.94, 6.11]
3 *adv./adj.*	4.52 (1.59)	[4.05, 5.31]	4.08 (2.18)	**	4.05 (1.54)	[3.29, 4.81]
6 *sub. prn.*	3.22 (1.62)	[2.62, 4.02]	3.62 (2.36)	***	2.95 (1.54)	[2.33, 3.78]
8 *count n.*	5.61 (0.72)	[5.27, 5.92]	4.62 (1.71)	[1.66, 5.49]	3.79 (1.81)	[2.92, 4.66]
9 *who/whom*	5.45 (0.96)	[5.02, 5.88]	3.31 (2.02)	[1.9, 5.25]	5.2 (1.2)	[4.69, 5.84]
10 *pr. cond.*	3.22 (1.7)	[2.58, 4.06]	3.0 (2.27)	[1.39, 6.33]	3.85 (1.69)	[3.0, 4.68]
11 *obj. prn.*	3.91 (1.68)	[3.34, 4.75]	3.08 (2.11)	[-.03, 3.46]	2.3 (1.22)	[1.67, 2.86]
13 *3rd p. prn.*	5.17 (1.23)	[4.99, 5.74]	4.42 (2.15)	[0.4, 3.31]	4.55 (1.5)	[4.12, 5.36]
Average	4.61		3.74		4.02	

*NSPT: native English-speaking undergraduate student; ESLS: English as a second language student; ESLT: English as a second language teacher

**3. She runs slow. is constant. It has been omitted.

***6. Me and Rachel are going to a movie. is constant. It has been omitted.

incorrect forms based on their own native-speaker intuition. In reality, this could also hold true for some of the other groups of participants, but there is not enough information in the data to definitively draw any conclusion on that matter.

Once again, the range of ratings for the prescriptively incorrect sentences indicates that some forms are more acceptable to participants than others. Unlike with the prescriptive sentences, however, the two groups of teachers, EFLTs and ESLTs, aligned in rating Sentence 11 (*Please return the book to John and I*) as the lowest out of the eight sentences, at 2.48 and 2.3, respectively, meaning the prescriptively incorrect usage of *I* as a direct object pronoun was the least acceptable to the teachers. There was more variation amongst the three groups of students. The EFLSs rated Sentence 3 (*She runs slow*), the NSPTs rated Sentence 6 (*Me and Rachel are going to a movie*), and the ESLSs rated Sentence 10 (*If I was you, I would study more often*) as the least acceptable out of the eight descriptively correct sentences, at 2.64, 3.21, and 3.0, respectively.

There was a bit more consistency in which sentences the different groups of participants rated the most favorably because the two sets of teachers and the NSPTs responded similarly, and the two sets of students responded similarly. The NSPTs and both sets of teachers, the EFLTs and the ESLTs, rated Sentence 2 (*I wish I would have known that last year*) as the most acceptable out of the eight descriptive sentences, giving it 5.78, 4.8, and 5.5, respectively. The student groups, the EFLSs and the ESLSs, rated Sentence 8 (*There are less people here today than yesterday*) as the most acceptable out of this set of sentences with ratings of 4.04 and 4.62, respectively. The EFLSs also rated Sentence 13 (*The teacher will help a student if they raise their hand*) the same as Sentence 8 with a 4.04. There was variability not only in how all five groups rated the sentences, but also between individual participants within groups. These

findings indicate that the acceptability of these sentences is largely subject to personal preferences.

Overall, all five groups of participants rated the prescriptive set of sentences as more acceptable than the descriptive set of sentences. Figure 2 illustrates the average ratings of all five groups for the prescriptively correct and prescriptively incorrect grammatical constructs. A repeated measures ANOVA and a paired samples t-test revealed that all five groups of participants rated the prescriptively correct sentences as significantly more acceptable than the descriptive variations. The significance of each group are as follows: EFLS, $p = .002$; EFLT, $p < .001$; NSPT, $p = .012$; ESLS, $p = .008$; ESLT, $p < .001$. These results indicates that participants perceived a difference between the two sets of forms with all groups rating the prescriptive sentences as more acceptable overall. Beyond that, however, there was little consistency in how the groups responded. The between-group variation in which forms were rated as the most and least acceptable for both sets demonstrates that there is neither consistency between the two groups of students nor between the students and the teachers in either context. Furthermore, it demonstrates that certain errors in prescriptive grammar are more acceptable than others. With the exception of the prescriptively correct usage of *whom* being rated the lowest of the prescriptive sentences by all groups but the EFLTs, however, there was little agreement on how the different sets of grammatical forms fare when compared against each other. These results, however, must be interpreted with caution because it is difficult to ascertain whether or not groups are responding to elements of the sentences in the acceptability judgment test beyond the prescriptive versus descriptive factor.

Figure 2: *Results of Acceptability Judgment Test*
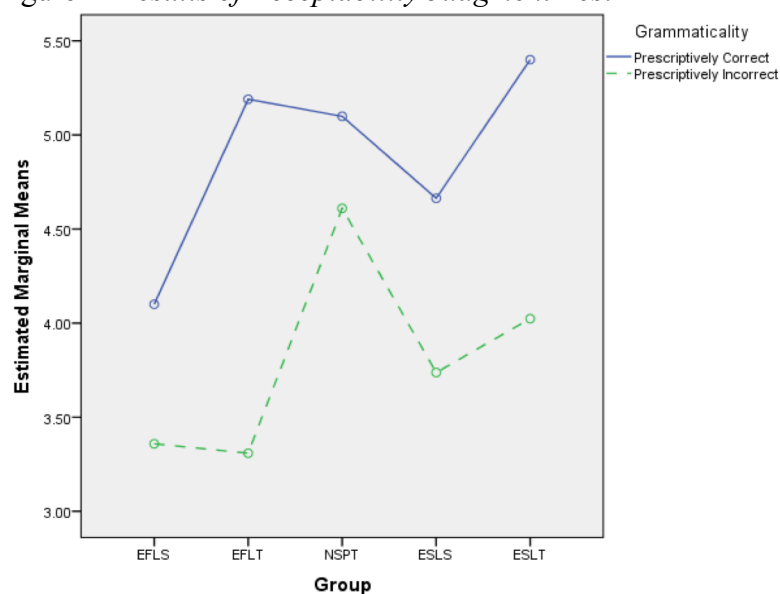
The mean ratings of the prescriptively incorrect sentences showed that the ESL students and teachers, as a group, rated them as higher overall than the EFL students and teachers as a group, but there was not as much consistency when looking at the individual grammar points. The overall disparity between students' and teachers' responses and between the EFL and ESL contexts may be attributed to the general grammatical knowledge of the participants, but it may also point towards a difference in attitude regarding grammar rules, as either strict or more fluid in a limited number of grammatical structures. If it is the latter, such discrepancies between the groups of students and teachers implies a need for more classroom discussions where students and teachers can address potentially different perceptions of variability in grammar and which varieties are taught.

Self-reported Knowledge of Native-like Speech

At this point, it is important to address, when non-native English speakers are asked to prioritize what they deem *native-like speech* versus *grammatically correct speech*: how aware are L2 language speakers, especially those in an EFL context, of actual native-like usage of the

language? In fact, when no particular dialect or form is specified, it is not even safe to assume that the native-speaker participants are all working under the same mental construct of what a *native speaker* sounds like, although an effort was made to select fairly universal grammatical issues on which to focus. The final question on the survey for both the students and the teachers asked participants if they think that they have a good idea how native English speak and whether or not if they [native speakers] always use correct grammar. It also asked participants if, when they speak, do they think they sound more like how native English speakers sound or like the English from textbooks and whether or not there is a difference between those two things. As can be seen by the following example, answers varied greatly. Responses from the EFL students and teachers will be reported and discussed first with two quotes from EFLSs and two from EFLTs.[2]

> *Ex 1*: "I think native English speakers have already speak well. I think they always use correct grammar. Some of words I speak are from textbooks and some sound like native English speakers, the later I always learn from US TV series. It's a little casual or random." (EFLS1)

> *Ex 2:* "A native English speaker seems to not always use correct grammar. It doesn't matter to him. I hope I can sound more like a native English speaker. Native English speakers, they have many accents. And textbooks are more formal." (EFLS10)

> *Ex 3*: "I can't distinguish different kinds of native English speakers speak very well. And in class, I prefer more to sound like English from textbooks because students cannot well follow me if I choose a native style. They may feel confused even if when I use some slangs, etc." (EFLT3)

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[2] Some quotations used throughout the paper have been modified to fix spelling mistakes, but no words were changed or omitted from the quoted sections.

Ex 4: "I'll let students listen to the English recorder and watch American movies to

imitate the native speakers' sound. The sound of native speakers is different from

ours. So if the students want them understood, they should know the difference

between the native speakers and foreigners." (EFLT18)

Students such as EFLS1, who explained in her background questionnaire that she

watches English movies and TV and listens to English movies, are an example of L2 English-

speakers who believe they express some native-like tendencies in their speech. However, that

very same participant states that native speakers "speak well" but also "casual and random."

EFLS10, who also reports use of English media outside of class, also distinguishes between

textbook and native-speaker English and hopes to sound more like the latter. Despite these

students' professed confidence in knowledge of native-speaker English, one of the teachers of

these students, EFLT3, explains that she personally cannot distinguish between English varieties

well and prefers to sound more like textbook English, whereas EFLT18 explains that he

purposely goes out of his way to expose his students to different English varieties in the

classroom. This variation in teaching approaches reflects a difference in prioritization of English

norms and varieties and points to a possible discrepancy between student and teacher

expectations in the EFL classroom.

In the case of the previous four quotations from EFL students and teachers, it appears that

the students and teachers were not always in accordance with each other on how well the

respective groups believe they recognized native-speaker norms or if those norms ever vary from

typical textbook English. However, it is also clear that there is variation within these groups

when asked this question, implying not only that participants may have had different amounts of

exposure to native-like English prior to the survey, but also that their claimed familiarity with other English varieties may not often transfer to actual usage of a less-standard variety. Eight EFL students specifically stated that they did not think native speakers always use correct grammar, whereas only four stated that native speakers always speak grammatically correctly. The other 13 EFLSs either stated that they did not know or did not specifically answer the question. However, the vast majority of these 25 EFLSs also indicated that there was a difference between native speakers and textbook English, and many of them explained that they sound more like the latter. The majority of the EFLTs also indicated that they found a difference between native-speaker English and textbook English, but most also said that they tend to rely mostly on the textbook English, due to familiarity and confidence in the grammar rules, or that they attempt to find a balance between the two varieties.

A similar recognition of a difference between native-speaker norms and English language textbooks coupled with a tendency to sound more textbook-like was revealed with the ESL students. Interestingly, as exemplified with the following accounts of native-speaker tendencies in language usage, this pattern tended to hold true with the native English-speaking ESL teachers as well.

> *Ex 5*: "There is difference. Just like native speaker will say some word that we'll not learn or see from textbook. I sound more like textbook, because I studied that and teachers teach me that in China." (ESLS1)

> *Ex 6*: "Not everyone who speaks English uses grammar correctly, but I think native speaker always. I speak more likely learning from textbooks. It's more formal. But I try to speak like native speakers." (ESLS16)

Ex 7: "Yes usually I know English varieties. I probably sound more proper when I teach because students wouldn't understand if I didn't -and as a professional, I'm expected to. This doesn't mean I wouldn't address this in class." (ESLT7)

Ex 8: "My use of English has been influenced by my experiences in the world and any education, so while I'm very aware of differences in a NS language use, I know my own is a blend." (ESLT19)

This small sample of explanations alone demonstrates that there was little consistency in the responses of the various groups and that there was no major consensus on whether or not the L2 English-speaking participants believe themselves to be familiar with what native speakers sound like. While the ESL students had spent much more time in an English-speaking country than the majority of the EFL students and teachers, they did not expressly demonstrate in their comments a much higher degree of familiarity or confidence with what native speakers sound like. Like the EFL groups, they explained that there was a difference between textbook grammar and the grammar of a lot of native speakers, but their comments did not allude to a significantly more articulable difference between the two than the other non-native English-speaking groups.

For ESLS1 and ESLS16, their reported English-speaking tendencies reflect their language upbringing in China, resulting in English that is "more like textbook" because, according to ESLS1, "I studied that and teachers teach me that in China." Both of these ESLSs recognized that there was a difference between the two varieties of English, but they explained that their educational past accounted for their tendency to still lean towards more textbook-like English, despite both having been in the US for more than one year. While this, in and of itself, does not necessary present a problem, many of their teachers, such as ESLT7 and ESLT19, explain that they sometimes use more textbook English in class to be a comprehensible and good

model for students. Again, that is not a problem. What may result is an issue is if these ESL students interpret their teachers' speech to be in coherence with the native-like norms in the region. Inconsistent expectations between students' goals in language production and teachers' language production in the classroom may result in mismatched and uninformed self-reported speech varieties in students. That is to say that, if an ESL student relies on his/her ESL teacher to be a gauge of native-like norms, because that teacher may be his/her most consistent exposure to a native speaker, then that student may assume his/her own speech to be native-like because it matches that of the teacher. However, if the teacher actually uses more monitored, possibly less natural-feeling, speech in the classroom, the ESL student may not actually be hitting the target-like norms that he/she anticipated or set as a goal. As a whole, the native English-speaking pre-teachers, NSPTs, reported that they acknowledge that they do not always speak grammatically correctly. The ones one did respond saying that they often make a point to take grammar into account were the ones who pointed to things like their English major or future career as a teacher to account for their conscious attention to grammar.

The variability in results from the English language learners makes their answers to previous questions that asked about their desire to speak like a native-speaker become somewhat more interesting, considering many of the participants in China have relatively little exposure to native speakers. This is especially true for the participants in China, but the L1 Chinese ESL students studying in the US also have the potential to have very limited exposure to native speakers, despite their close proximity, because many students studying in an ESL context still largely remain in and interact primarily within their cultural communities. If students in either context do not go out of their way to expose themselves to authentic use of the L2, their expressed desires to sound native-like, may be somewhat misinformed because their perception

of a native speaker may not be entirely authentic. For example, monitored teacher-talk in an ESL or EFL classroom, where the teacher intentionally abides by grammar rules that he/she may normally not, is arguably a less authentic representation of how native speakers typically speak in more natural settings. Because of this, it is important to reconcile student and teacher expectations and create realistic, and mutually agreed upon learning goals.

Prioritization of Prescriptive Rules

Research Questions 2 and 3 examined how ESL and EFL students prioritize prescriptively correct spoken English versus what they perceive to be native-sounding speech, if different, in their learning and speaking goals and how this compares to ESL and EFL teachers. Upon initial inspection, it appears that there are some disparities in expectations and learning goals between students and teachers in both the EFL and ESL setting. While the EFL and ESL teachers' beliefs often seemed to align over their goals for their students to sound native-like in English, there was a difference between the standards to which the two groups of teachers held themselves when speaking English in the classroom. When the two groups of teachers' answers did align in regards to Research Questions 2 and 3, they seemed to contrast as a set with the two groups of students. Conversely, when the two groups of teachers contrasted, this was also reflected with the two groups of students, creating an ESL versus EFL disparity.

One example of the two sets of teachers' answers converging can be seen in Question 18: *My **main goal** is to teach my students to sound like a native speaker in English in how they use grammar*. In response, the EFL and ESL teacher groups answered the lowest, with averages of 3.8 and 3.4, respectively, on a Likert scale from 1-6 of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. By comparison, EFL and ESL student scores were at 4.68 and 4.77, respectively, when asked a parallel question about their intentions to sound native-like. Both the ESL and EFL students

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professed to prioritize native-like speech over grammaticality, which was different than how their teachers prioritized the two options.

In contrast with the phrasing of Question 18 was Question 17: *My **main goal** is to teach my students to speak grammatically correctly in English*. In this case, the EFL and ESL teachers rated grammaticality higher than native-speaker speech, at 4.04 and 3.45, respectively. Here, the EFL students' ratings were lower than the teachers in their context in regards to grammaticality at 3.92. The ESLSs rated this question as higher than their teachers at 4.31, which stood in contrast to the answers to the previous question. This inconsistency may be partially attributed to the smaller sample size of ESL students. Overall though, these findings seem to indicate that the students' goals of native-like speech are higher than their teachers' expectations for them. However, the general wording of this question may lead to interpretations that also include aspects such as pronunciation and lexicon, meaning that grammar may not be the only contributing factor to these findings.

With regard to how the groups of participants create standards for themselves when using or not using elements of prescriptive grammar, the ESL and EFL teachers results were more in contrast with each other and more in line with the students in their respective contexts. For example, Question 20: *Do you always try to use "who" and "whom" correctly when you speak? Why or why not?*, found that 65% of the ESLTs answered *no* compared to 24% of the EFLTs. For the same question, 61.54% of the ESLSs responded *no* compared to 48% of the EFLSs. This indicates that their beliefs were in line with those of their teachers. That is, the foreign language learners and teachers both paid more attention to the prescriptive rule when speaking, while the second language learners and teachers placed less value on abiding by it. When answers that were coded either *no* or *sometimes* were combined, the difference between the ESLTs and the

EFLTs became even more pronounced, at 90% and 36%, respectively, while the ESLSs and

EFLSs grew closer, at 61.54% and 64%, respectively. However, some students indicated that

their degree of variability was more a matter of lower language skills than choice.

To support their assertions, the EFL groups often pointed to their assumption that

distinguishing between these two pronouns was a characteristic of native-speaker speech or their

formal grammar training. Because these grammar points were included in the textbooks, the EFL

teachers made a point to teach them to their students, and their students made a point to

remember them for exams. Unlike the native-speaking participants, the EFL participants

expressed confidence in their knowledge of the grammatical construct and a commitment to

using it correctly.

Ex 9: "Yes, because I were taught to use it correctly when I was a little child, and now it

becomes nature." (EFLS1)

Ex 10: "Yes, we must use them correctly in our exam." (EFLS22)

Ex 11: "Most often. The textbook differentiate them clearly." (EFLT2)

Ex 12: "Yes. As a teacher, it's necessary to give Ss a correct example." (EFLT21)

There was more apparent variation in the ESLSs where some of the ESLS group also

pointed to their formal grammar instruction as causation for their adherence to prescriptive

grammar, while others, who prioritized comprehensibility in their speech, did not necessarily

equate that with complete accuracy in prescriptive grammar. As all of the language learning

students who participated in the survey were from China, they presumably all shared similar

backgrounds in terms of English grammar instruction. The major difference between the ESL

and EFL groups of students in that the ESLSs were, at the time of the survey, living in an L1

English-speaking environment and taking classes from L1 English-speaking instructors, whereas 88% of the EFL students had not spent more than three weeks in an L1 English environment.

> *Ex 13:* "No. Sometimes I pay more attention to the meaning rather than grammar."
>
> (ESLS2)
>
> *Ex 14:* "Yes, always. Because I have learnt it for many years. When somebody uses
>
> wrong, I will feel little uncomfortable, but it's ok." (ESLS12)

The biggest contrast, however, was in how the native-speaking participants responded. Many between these two groups referred to the distinction between *who* and *whom* as unnecessary, confusing, or even "pretentious" (ESLT1; ESLT10). Of the NSPT group, 86.96% responded *no* when asked if they differentiated between *who* and *whom* in spoken English, and 100% responded as *no* or only *sometimes*. This was reflected in many of the L1 English groups' comments. What is interesting here is that it was the native speakers who were rejecting the prescriptive grammar rule far more adamantly than their non native-speaking counterparts. In this case, it appears that the prescriptive form was actually more stigmatized by this group than the descriptive form.

> *Ex 15:* "No, because it is generally accepted now to use 'who' even if it should really be
>
> 'whom.' 'Whom' sounds much too formal." (NSPT7)
>
> *Ex 16:* "No. I don't care if I use them correctly, and it often sounds pretentious if you
>
> overuse 'whom.'" (ESLT10)
>
> *Ex 17:* "If native speakers drop the use of 'whom,' why should I have different
>
> expectations for my students?" (ESLT15)

Question 24 asked participants to respond to the statement, *As a speaker of English, it is*

important to me that I always speak grammatically correctly. As with Question 20, the results

were split between the two contexts with a separation between the EFL groups and the ESL

groups. The EFL students and teachers seemed to prioritize grammatical accuracy more than

those in the ESL context, responding with 3.52 and 4.4, respectively. As demonstrated here, the

EFLS group often equates grammatical accuracy with being able to effectively communicate.

The EFLT group also prioritizes grammatical accuracy but acknowledges that effective

communication is not always contingent on grammatical accuracy.

> *Ex 18:* "Grammar is the primary [purpose] of learning English. If I want to make
>
> progress, I should speak grammatically." (EFLS24)
>
> *Ex 18:* "If I always speak grammatically correctly, I can make myself much understood."
>
> (EFLS13)
>
> *Ex 20:* "It is important to speak grammatically correctly, but to communicate is more
>
> important." (EFLT14)
>
> *Ex 21:* "Communication comes first. But we should try to be accurate in speaking."
>
> (EFLT5)

The ESL students and teachers rated this question as 3.08 and 2.91, respectively, with

NSPT rating it at 3.28. The split between the two teacher groups, the EFLTs and the ESLTs, was

the largest at a difference of 1.49. This means that the native-English teachers in the US appeared

to prioritize grammatical accuracy in their speech less often than their L1 Chinese English-

teaching counterparts in China, matching what many participants included in their written

comments for this same question. However, this question hits at different underlying concepts in

non-native and native speakers. For non-native English speakers, trying to speak "grammatically

correctly" is a matter of trying to get the language right. With the native speakers, it implies more of an assumption that they have a choice about whether or not they want to abide by the prescriptive standards. Similar to with Question 20, which asked about usage of *who* and *whom*, the native speaker participants express knowledge of the prescriptive rule, but whether that was knowledge of the rule's existence or declarative knowledge of its function is unclear. Nevertheless, the L1 English groups, ESLTs and NSPTs, did not, overall, express a huge concern with using the prescriptive forms correctly. As seen with ESLT3, the need to abide by the rules of prescriptive grammar becomes less relevant when a particular grammatically correct form is less frequent than its non-prescriptive counterpart.

> *Ex 22:* "As long as I am able to successfully convey the message of communication, I do
>
> not always pay attention to the nitty gritty grammar rules." (NSPT9)

> *Ex 23:* "I like to be a model of effective communication to my students." (ESLT19)

> *Ex 24:* "I want to use grammar correctly the majority of the time. However, the exception
>
> is when something that is grammatically correct is very rarely spoken." (ESLT3)

The ESLSs who studied in the same context were also able to discern that the native speakers who they have encountered were not always preoccupied with some of the rules of prescriptive grammar. Presumably then, this group's notion of what native-speaker speech sounds like would reflect such inconsistencies in grammar usage that are likely different than how they learned grammar.

> *Ex 25:* "It's important. We should speak grammatically correctly if we can. But if we
>
> forget it at that time, just pass it. Listeners can also understand us." (ESLS12)

Ex 26: "I think native American speakers don't always care about the grammar."

(ESLS16)

Despite their differences, all language learners surveyed tended to prioritize that their main intention when speaking English is to be understood. This meant that, although there were many similarities in the comments, this was not completely reflected in how the different groups, on average, rated this question on the Likert scale. This seems to indicate a potential discrepancy between the ESL and EFL groups of language learners in the degree to which they attribute communicative competence to grammatical accuracy. This trend may also be reflective of pedagogical norms in the respective contexts, as were discussed in the literature review.

With the earlier quotations, it can be seen that, although the two EFL groups rated grammatical accuracy highly on the Likert scale when compared to the two ESL groups and the NSPTs, they still, on the whole, seemed to recognize the reality that perfect grammar is not a necessary component of communicative competence. Instead, the EFLSs and EFLTs seemed to be expressing the notion that there is something like a threshold level of English grammar that must be achieved to be understood, and errors past that point can be more easily ignored or forgiven. The actual level of grammatical accuracy is not something to which any participants explicitly point, and it likely depends on the given situation. The ESL participants and NSPTs seemed to reflect the similar sentiment that grammatical errors do not automatically derail a conversation with a native speaker. Perhaps their lower ratings on the Likert scale for whether or not it is important to always speak grammatically correctly is indicative of the ESLSs time spent in the L1 English environment where their interactions have anecdotally proven that other communicative strategies can compensate for some grammatical shortcomings, resulting in

lower inhibition in communicating with native speakers while not yet having perfected their grammatical competence.

Differences Between Grammar in Speaking and Writing

Research Question 4 examined the difference between ESL and EFL students' and teachers' prioritization of prescriptive grammatical accuracy between written and spoken English. Question 21: *It is more important to be grammatically correct in writing than in speaking.* This is one point in the data where all five groups seem the most closely aligned in their responses. The ratings were as follow: EFLS = 4.6, EFLT = 5.5, NSPT = 5.22, ESLS = 5.46, and ESLT = 5.45. These were the highest that all of the groups rated any of the questions, on average. It appears that, despite the variations among groups about the importance of prescriptive grammatical accuracy in spoken communication, all groups believe that prescriptive grammar should be of a higher priority in written English communication. Most often, this was due to what participants referred to as degrees of formality between the two media, but many participants also pointed to the idea that written texts are somewhat permanent whereas conversations are more fleeting and easier to forget. In their surveys, participants indicated that the increased formality in writing and the perception of its relative longevity of written words in comparison to spoken ones warrants increased attention to the norms of prescriptive grammar:

Ex 27: "Because writing is more formal than speaking." (EFLS13)

Ex 28: "In speaking, it is more important to communicate, give response, etc. without too much time to 'think.' Writing is more formal." (EFLT13)

Ex 29: "Writing, especially academic writing, should be grammatically correct because writing is generally viewed as more formal than speaking." (NSPT7)

Ex 30: "Writing is used for a long time to think and it is formal." (ESLS10)

Ex 31: "More is at stake, 1st impressions, stiffer standards." (ESLT5)

Ex 32: "There is permanence in writing, and the opportunity to edit, proofread, etc.

Academic writing has higher standards." (ESLT16)

Differentiating between written and spoken English based on degrees of formality, where written form is typically considered to be more formal than its spoken counterpart, mimics what is often portrayed in language classrooms. Aside from more formal speeches and presentations, students often utilize their speaking skills primarily to engage in class discussions — rather informal conversations, for the most part. Conversely, writing classes throughout a curriculum usually emphasize the importance of complete sentences, which mandate proper grammatical forms, and a gradual progression to producing texts such as essays, which are often formal in nature. Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to say that all teaching of writing has an aim of a formal register or that spoken English instruction targets purely informal speech. Here again, it becomes apparent that, like when it comes to how language teachers and language students prioritize between *native-like speech* and *grammatically correct speech*, formality levels between written and spoken English is largely context -specific. Whether or not a descriptive grammar of a native speaker's speech should be considered grammatical or whether or not spoken English should attend to standard, prescribed grammar is a gray area. Of more importance is how the individual perceives or conceptualizes the dichotomy and how it effects his or her choices in language learning, teaching, or use.

This perception of a clear distinction between written and spoken media stems from a conflation of formality with permanence and the fact that it often stands decontextualized without as many context clues to aid in comprehension. A written piece of work is more tangible, and typically more long-lasting, so that a teacher or student can return to time and time again to

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determine the writer's competency in the language. As such, perceived grammatical errors are more glaringly apparent. Additionally, the increased amount of processing time and the possible opportunity to proofread and edit, especially in formal writing such as in an academic context, as described by ESLT16, creates both higher levels of expectations and more opportunity to evaluate the achievement of such expectations. The more fleeting aspect of spoken language, because it is most often not recorded, allows the interlocutor to more easily pass over minor grammatical errors in favor of general communicative competence. If the speaker is understood and there are no glaring mistakes to cause a breakdown in communication, then perceived grammatical mistakes are more easily forgiven. Results for Research Question 4 imply that Part A of the survey would most likely yield different results if participants were asked to rate the sentences based on their degrees of acceptability in written English, as opposed to spoken English.

This pattern is similar to what was addressed in a previous section in regards to Research Questions 2 and 3 where many students and teachers in the second language context favored communicative competence and mutual understanding over grammatical accuracy, meaning they did not always find the latter to be a mandatory prerequisite for the former. Specifically with those in the second language context, participants explained that they obviously valued being understood by a conversation partner, but that minor deviations from the norms of prescriptive grammar does not usually disqualify someone from that goal. Yet, when specifically asked to differentiate between spoken and written English, participants from the foreign language context began to echo this same sentiment.

Ex 33: "The aim of speaking is to understand. It doesn't care much about your grammar.

But when we are writing, we need to express ourselves more accurate so that can

make ourselves understood easily." (EFLS12)

Ex 34: "To some extent writing is permanent and functions in a more strict and serious

way. Mistakes in writing might cause more damage in information circulation."

(EFLT10)

Ex: 35: "Writing is a more demanding task and accuracy is an important feature.

Speaking serves as a tool of communication. If we can exchange ideas,

grammatical mistakes can be forgiven." (EFLT24)

It appears that, when formality is taken into consideration, EFL students and teachers begin to equate a perceived, diminished degree of formality to coincide with a decreased emphasis on grammatical accuracy. In doing so, some EFL participants began to lean towards the tendencies shown with the ESL participants who viewed comprehensibility as paramount in language exchanges but did not always need grammatical accuracy to achieve that end.

The results of Research Question 4 indicate that all groups prioritize prescriptively correct grammar much more in written English than in spoken English, due to perceptions of the former as being more permanent and formal. This implies that, while teachers may want to expose students to more informal spoken language in the classroom and be more lenient in upholding traditionally prescriptive norms in Standard English, they should hold their students accountable to a different standard in their writing. It is still possible to say that some more informal writing assignments might not be as stringent in these rules, but this was the overall sentiment expressed in the survey data. This reflects the norms that exist in L1 English university

degree courses that generally also expect native and non-native English-speaking students to follow formal grammar rules in their essays and assignments. Even so, it is not completely accurate to claim that native English-speaking undergraduate students successfully adhere to prescriptive grammar rules in their academic writing.

Effects of Student and Teacher Migration

The conversation surrounding differing levels of prioritization of prescriptive grammar among EFL and ESL students and teachers cannot be fully understood without acknowledging how the two contexts are often interrelated. While the participants in this study responded to the surveys based on their current contexts, many of them have undoubtedly been influenced by time spent in other language-learning contexts. All of the ESLTs had spent at least some time in a non-L1 English-speaking country, and all of the ESLSs had originally started learning English in their home country of China, which is an EFL context. On the other hand, of the participants who took the survey in China, only 60% of the EFLTs had spent more than three weeks in an L1 English-speaking country, and the majority of them were there for less than a year. Of the 25 EFLSs, 88% of them had not spent more than three weeks in an L1English-speaking country, and none of them had spent more than four weeks in one. Residing in a relatively un-Westernized city in central China, their exposure to L1 English speakers in general was also very limited. As a result, much of their expressed professions of familiarity, or lack thereof, of native-like English could be accounted for by limited exposure to non-L2 English speakers.

The ESLS group of participants gives a glimpse of how student migration may impact perceptions on native-like speech and grammar because they are the peers of the EFLSs and first learned English through an EFL approach in a non-Western context. However, the effects of teacher migration between EFL and ESL contexts has not yet been addressed in the present

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study. To address this scenario, data from two ESL teachers will be examined. Originally excluded from the data for consistency purposes in the L1 English-speaking ESLTs, these two participants are from China and South Korea and are current ESL teachers at the same Midwestern university as the ESLSs, the ESLTs, and the NSPTs. They are 26 and 30 years old, respectively, and were both seeking graduate degrees at the same university while they were teaching. While these two case studies are not enough to draw definitive conclusions about the effects of teachers moving between EFL and ESL contexts, they do highlight some themes to consider when recognizing that thousands of English teachers and students move between countries every year into contexts different from the ones in which they were originally trained in the language and/or teaching methodologies and ideologies. Table 7 provides the Likert scale ratings on Part A of the survey for both of the two participants. For the prescriptively correct items, the L1 Chinese teacher (ESLTC) and the L1 Korean teacher (ESLTK) rated the items similarly, with an average of 5.75. These high ratings indicate that these two teachers at least find prescriptively correct grammar to be largely acceptable.

Table 7: *Prescriptively Correct & Incorrect Ratings in Acceptability Judgment Test*

	ESLTC*	ESLTK	
Prescriptive			
1 *3rd p. prn.*	6	6	
4 *sub. prn.*	6	6	
5 *who/whom*	5	4	
7 *pr. cond.*	6	6	
12 *adv./adj.*	6	5	
14 *count n.*	6	6	
15 *obj. prn.*	6	6	
16 *pst. cond.*	6	6	
Average	5.88	5.63	5.75
Descriptive			
2 *pst. cond.*	6	3	
3 *adv./adj.*	6	5	
6 *sub. prn.*	6	1	
8 *count n.*	6	2	
9 *who/whom*	6	6	
10 *pr. cond.*	5	1	
11 *obj. prn.*	6	1	
13 *3rd p. prn.*	6	2	
Average	5.88	2.63	4.25

* ESLTC: English as a second language teacher, L1 Chinese; ESLTK: English as a second language teacher, L1 Korean

Where they differ is more interesting. While the ESLTC's and ESLTK's average for the descriptive sentences was 4.25, the two participants rated this set of sentences very differently. The ESLTC rated the descriptive sentences at the exact same score as the prescriptive sentences: 5.86. In contrast, the ESLTK rated them at an average of 2.63. This indicated that the ESLTC found the prescriptive and descriptive sentences to be equally acceptable, whereas the ESLTK found the prescriptively incorrect sentences to be significantly less acceptable than the prescriptively correct ones.

The discrepancy between the two L2 English ESL teachers' ratings was articulated in their varying explanations for Question 22, which asked whether they preferred to teach their students to use proper grammar or sound more native-like, if there was a difference:

Ex 36: "I don't want they (my Ss) sound like the textbooks. They should be 'authentic.' So my teaching goal is to help them to be more sound like native speakers." (ESLTC)

Ex 37: "Once they (my students) feel comfortable with the use of proper grammar, they can then use the language at their discretion. Anyway, it seems more important for me to teach them standard rules first." (ESLTK)

Whereas ESLTC aimed for "authenticity" with her language learners, ESLTK explained that "proper grammar" must be an initial priority for language learners, and they could play with the language on their own after that point. Interestingly, when asked about their choice to make the *who/whom* distinction, both of these participants expressed that they did not prioritize this descriptive rule. In fact, in Part A of the survey, the prescriptively correct sentence using *whom* was the lowest that either participant rated any of the prescriptive sentences in terms of their acceptability, at a 5.0 and 4.0 on the Likert scale. On the contrary, they both gave Question 9, which used *who* prescriptively incorrectly as a direct object pronoun, the highest rating possible — a 6.0 on the Likert scale. When asked if they distinguish between the subject and object pronouns, the participants explained as follows.

Ex 38: "No, I don't. Usually people use it wrong (I mean 'whom') anyway. I don't think it's that big of a deal." (ESLTC)

Ex 39: "I don't think I care much about 'who' or 'whom'. I think I use 'who' more

frequently because it can be used in a wider range of contexts." (ESLTK)

While the limited data set of the two L2 English-speaking ESL teachers is not enough to predict a trend, their data does provide some insight into teachers who first learned English in an EFL setting that was different from their current place of employment in an ESL setting. Although ESLTK did prioritize prescriptive grammar, he also indicated that, once language learners learn "proper grammar," they can then begin to use language "at their discretion." This response demonstrates a middle ground between how many of the EFL and ESL teachers responded: first, students need to learn the rules, then students can make more informed decisions about whether they care to always abide by them. Likewise, the ESLTC references the misuse of the prescriptive *whom* as not "that big of a deal" and rated the descriptive form as more favorable. This notion of a flexible language is not typical of traditional, Confucian Asian ideas of education and face saving. It is possible that the years that these two participants have spent living in the L1 English context and teaching English have had an effect on their perspectives of language teaching and learning that have grown apart than their roots in a different educational system.

Implications

The differences in the educational structures and expectations between the United States and China may account for some of the discrepancies between the various groups of participants and how they prioritize grammaticality in spoken English. The L1 Chinese students currently studying in the United States also provide an opportunity to observe the evolution that some students undergo when entering into a new educational context. These findings could be

beneficial in helping to align student and teacher expectations in the classroom in order to create clearer goals in teaching and learning. While it is not always necessary for student and teachers to be in direct alignment on such issues, creating an open dialogue about what types of language the teacher is providing and why can help students to become more aware of language variation and to structure their goals accordingly.

Regardless of classroom goals targeting either prescriptive norms or native-like patterns, grammar instruction itself implies a more dynamic process that mandates a more holistic approach in teaching. Like with Purpura's (2012) operational model of investment, as cited in Purpura (2014), language knowledge must consist of learning grammatical forms, their semantic meanings, and their pragmatic realities, which includes knowledge of sociolinguistic meanings such as differing language varieties. Approaching grammar development as a skillset, rather than simply a set of rules implies, according to Larsen-Freeman (2007) that, "even if the English learner has no need or desire to speak as a native speaker of English does, she or he will be able to interpret the meaning of proficient English speakers in the way that they intend" (p. 51). This is a key element in the world of L2 grammar teaching because it implies that, regardless of language learners' target goals in the language, they should at least be somewhat familiar with different varieties of English in order to understand a native-speaker interlocutor. Even learners who have no objectives in sounding like what they deem to be a native speaker, language instructors hold some responsibility in exposing learners to a variety of different language norms. The issue, once again, is that this does point back to fact that languages exist in a large number of varieties, obliging educators to focus on only a few.

In the case of teachers and students who move between ESL and EFL contexts, the results of this study demonstrate a necessary awareness of cultural differences in educational

practices between the contexts and, oftentimes, may need to be accompanied by additional teacher training (Getty, 2011). In today's context with increased transnationalism involving what Duff (2015) describes to be a complex, non-binary process "with multiple intervening (and subsequent) points of dwelling," (p. 57) English instruction no longer takes place entirely as an EFL or entirely as an ESL, and students must learn how to negotiate the interactions between their homegrown identities and language learning experiences in a more globalized context (Gu, 2009). L1 and L2 English-speaking teachers migrating across borders to teach and English language learners traveling between countries to receive an education can potentially lead to mismatched expectations in grammar ideologies and goals between students and teaching in these hybrid contexts. As a result, it is necessary to examine expectations and natural tendencies of students and teachers in these two contexts to ensure that either they align or they are frankly addressed to avoid misunderstanding in learners' and teachers' goals and grammar usage.

Students entering L1 English contexts to study or are studying within English-medium-of-instruction universities in their home countries demonstrate an increasing need for needs analyses that address the transition involved with English for academic purposes (EAP) or degree programs entirely in their second language (Evans & Morrison, 2011). Teacher education programs, whether they be pre-service or in-service, should also take into account the effects of students and teachers who may be switching between an ESL and EFL context with various systems of education. For example, teachers in the United States could benefit from discussing their intentions to present prescriptive rules and couple them with descriptive norms of the region as a way to enhance communicative competence. One such of example of this can be seen in the following quotation from an ESLT. If this particular teacher has these intentions for his students,

then this could be an effective means of creating mutual expectations and understanding in the classroom.

> *Ex 40*: "There is a lot of variation in 'native' Englishes, and I think it's more important for
> students to be exposed to authentic English use." (ESLT4)

Recognizing fluctuation among language varieties, however, can problematize international standardized language assessment practices. While creating international standards and benchmarks do provide beneficial consistency in testing that makes it possible for language learners to be accepted into international positions at universities and for career placement, the choice of language variety that they employee is, by nature, more of a reflection of testing companies' prescribed norms that may or may not be reflective of the norms in the context in which the tests are being administered. However, the suggestions of Brown (2013) and Brown (2014) to create more context-based and driven forms of assessment do not offer a solution to this predicament, as they would then not be inherently transferable to other contexts. It is therefore, possible to argue that the prescriptive standards of the dominant varieties of a language are the necessary foundations of international standardized assessments. With that said, additional consideration must be given for certain prescriptive forms that are used by virtually no native speakers. As a result, test preparation for these exams in all contexts may not match descriptive norms and expectations of the given region, but they would require students and teachers to at least be aware of such norms in order to succeed.

Another possible implication that needs to be examined further is the need for increased attention to spoken language corpora and how they can be used in language teaching and learning and a developing representation of descriptive grammar (Davis, 2006). While a lot of research has been done promoting the use of corpora in language classrooms (e.g. Belz &

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Vyatkina, 2005; Liu & Jiang, 2009; Tsui, 2005), little attention has been given to spoken corpora and how they can be used to influence informal second language speech, as opposed to written production. One such example of a spoken corpus, *the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MiCASE), consists of over 1.8 million words and is a compilation of academic English speech (Römer, 2002). Similarly, *the British Academic Spoken English Corpus* (BASE) hosts about 1.6 million words (Nesi & Thompson, 2005). Although academic speech often differs from more informal language, it may provide some valuable insight regarding differences between written and spoken forms of English in general.

Continued research and development dedicated towards corpora of spoken varieties of English could be used to help teachers in various contexts make more informed decisions about actual language usage and use it to inform their teaching decisions. Jenkins (2006) argues that this should also include corpus analysis of varieties of English beyond the most dominant ones, such as Standard British or American English, while Meunier (2012) also advocates for language learners corpora in EFL teaching. One benefit of using a language-learner corpus is that L2 English speakers, especially in EFL settings, interact with many non-native English speakers from a variety of backgrounds. Becoming more familiar with non just non-standard native English varieties, but also some tendencies of norms of non-native speakers, can be valuable in such interactions. Although an extensive task, Carter and McCarthy's (2006) *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide: Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage* is one such example of a book that acknowledges differences within one variety of English, Standard British English, and categorizes grammatical structures based on their acceptability in written and/or spoken Standard British English or other varieties of the language.

This study demonstrates that there is often a contrast between student and teacher expectations of classroom grammar instruction that needs to be addressed. Teachers in both contexts often reported a desire for their students to learn to be grammatically accurate above sounding native-like, but the students tended to prioritize the latter. While that may be something that is sometimes more difficult for EFL teachers to provide for their students, L1 English-speaking teachers obviously have the capacity to do so. The native-speaking teachers admit to not adhering to many prescriptive grammar rules in day to day interactions, yet many also say that they tend to monitor their grammar in classroom speech. ESL students anticipating an authentic representation of English may not realize that that is not always the case. As many participants highlighted, even if they desire to sound native-like, many admittedly were unsure what native speakers even sound like. This is not to suggest that English teachers not monitor their speech at all in the classroom. Instead, teachers could take advantage of teachable moments to integrate descriptive language varieties into the classroom. Perhaps even just a receptive knowledge of non-standard forms could help broaden students' knowledge of different varieties of the language. Additionally, each teacher must make a choice for him or herself on how to address this issue in the classroom and decide whether or not non-standard forms should be counted as error on things like assessments. Whatever a teacher decides, this is something that should be communicated to the students.

Although the L2 English participants seemed to equate communicative competence with a higher degree of grammatical accuracy than the native speaker groups, all five sets of participants agreed that it is a primary goal in language learning. If the use of prescriptively incorrect grammar does not impede communicative competence, the issue then is not what variety of grammar a language learner or teacher prioritizes, but whether or not those

expectations are clearly communicated to the other party involved in the language learning process. Teachers who closely monitor their speech and strictly adhere to the rules of prescriptive grammar should make sure their students are aware that their speech may not always be what a native English speaker may consider natural or authentic. Particularly for the cases where the native-speaking participants expressed negative, almost stigmatized, perception of some prescriptively correct grammar rules, like with *whom* as a direct object pronoun, students may be interested in knowing and benefit from the knowledge that the correct form of some constructs is not always the most socially acceptable. That is not at all to say monitored teacher talk is pedagogically questionable, but simply that, when exposing students to different varieties of a language, they may often benefit from a discussion on how those varieties align with or diverge from what is in the textbook. Students who are made more aware of such variation are then in a better position to make more informed decisions about their language learning goals and strategies.

The way that participants in this study drew a distinction between written and spoken forms of English can also be used to inform teaching. While it may be fair to say, in many instances, that writing is a formal medium that has a degree of permanence, that does not mean that there is never a place for prescriptively incorrect grammar in certain forms of writing, such as certain emails or personal reflection journals. Additionally, while conversations may be a more fleeting form of language, some spoken language, such as speeches have the potential to be preserved like a written essay could be. It may be beneficial for teachers to consider addressing these differences between written and spoken English and the implication that the grammar between them must be inherently different. Introducing students to a variety of authentic written materials and interactions may help to demonstrate that native speakers do not always treat

written English as a formal practice completely divorced from variations in grammar. For example, some types of personal correspondences, particularly in this digital age, such as blogs and social media posts reflect many non-prescriptively correct forms used by native speakers. Certain genres of written classroom work that students may encounter or be asked complete also offer the potential to use one's own voice and play with language more than prescriptive rules. That does not mean that teachers should necessarily push students away from prescriptive grammar in writing, nor would that be wise in many academic settings, but that students could benefit from the recognition that the wide variety of written media through which language can be communicated can potentially reflect as much variation as its spoken counterpart. Introducing students to these concepts will, again, allow them to make more informed decisions about their target language usage.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size. Because the participants were divided into five distinct groups based on their language learning and teaching backgrounds, the sample size of each group individually was somewhat limited, making generalizations more difficult to draw. Another limitation of the study was that, while the survey collected students' and teachers' self-reported grammatical preferences and professed attitudes towards English grammar learning and teaching, actual classroom practices of the participants were not observed to cross-reference how their attitudes and habits actually align. One last limitation is that the descriptive sentences used in the survey that were not prescriptively correct were based off of English that may be less familiar or less important to the students and teachers in China, compared to other varieties. There was also a limited set of examples of sentences used that varied between the prescriptive and descriptive forms, and it is not clear if certain

participants were responding to a different part of the sentence, rather than the part with the

targeted grammatical form. Totals were taken for the set of prescriptively correct sentences as

well as the set of prescriptively incorrect sentences, but the averages do not delineate differences

in acceptability between the different forms. Certain prescriptive norms may be prioritized

differently, making certain prescriptive mistakes more egregious than others. Further research

should be done to investigate this possible phenomenon further.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

In January 2016, the American Dialect Society (ADS) named the pronoun *they* the 2015 word of the year (Guo, 2016; Steinmetz, 2016). More specifically, the society selected *they* as a singular pronoun. While the choice did not reflect a trend in popular culture in the traditional sense, ADS's choice reflected a trend in English dialects to sidestep the gender binary and the absence of a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun. While the society explained that their choice was largely chosen for its use to represent somebody who chooses not to self-identify as either male or female, its use in also exemplary of language evolution and large-scale organizations' adaptations to language forms that are becoming increasingly prevalent. In a similar effort, *The Washington Post* updated its style guide in 2015 to allow for the previously third-person plural pronoun *they* to be used as a singular pronoun to refer to someone without identifying them as either male or female (Poynter, 2015). This was done in an attempt to account for the previous lack of a singular third-person pronoun that often resulted in a default masculine pronoun to be used.

While these examples demonstrate that language is constantly changing and evolving, they also demonstrate that mainstream and reputable institutions are also evolving in their acceptance of previously prescriptively incorrect forms of language use. When a major, respected US publication allows *they* to act as a third-person singular pronoun, others may follow suit and make the form more socially, professionally, and academically acceptable. Without an international board to dictate matters in English language acceptability, such as the French Academy, the rules of English remain largely subject to its speakers and the natural variation between its different users, from whichever language community they may come. As non-standard forms continue to emerge and grow in prevalence, it may mean that some older

prescriptive standards begin to subside and become replaced by new conceptualizations of the English language. Concurrently, language goals and learners' and teachers' prioritization of given standards will likely evolve and adapt to these changes. This warrants an open dialogue between students and teachers in developing classroom goals and expectations that are reflective of learning a language whose speakers are as varied as its grammatical choices.

APPENDICES

Sample Survey

PARTICIPANT NUMBER: ESL / EFL_____

STUDENTS —PART A:

For the following questions, please rate if the statement sounds acceptable **to you** if you heard it **spoken**. You are not saying whether or not it follows a grammatical rule, but if it would sound ok **to you** if you heard somebody say it. Please circle the number that matches your opinion. THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER!

	This sounds <u>wrong</u> to me.						I don't know.
Example: *I no like nothing.*	(1)	2	3	4	5	6	0
Example: *She often likes to eat cake.*	1	2	3	4	5	6	(0)
Example: *I seen you yesterday.*	1	2	(3)	4	5	6	0
1. If a student has a question, he or she should ask the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
2. I wish I would have known that last year.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
3. She runs slow.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
4. John and I are going to the store.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
5. I want to know whom the story was about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
6. Me and Rachel are going to a movie.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
7. If I were you, I would not go to the party.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0

8. There are less people here today than yesterday.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
9. She was wondering who the movie was about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
10. If I was you, I would study more often.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
11. Please return the book to John and I.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
12. He sings badly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
13. The teacher will help a student if they raise their hand.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
14. There are fewer people in this room than that room.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
15. Please remember to call Mary and me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0
16. I wish I had done my homework last night.	1	2	3	4	5	6	0

STUDENTS — PART B:

Please answer the following questions about **your opinions** about English speaking and grammar.

17. My **main goal** in English is to speak grammatically correctly.

False		Somewhat True			True
1	2	3	4	5	6

18. My **main goal** in English is to sound like a native speaker in how they use grammar.

False		Somewhat True			True
1	2	3	4	5	6

Please Continue →

19. There is sometimes a difference between what native English speakers say and what some grammar textbooks teach. For example, traditional grammar books show a difference between "who" and "whom" depending on how it is used in a sentence. How important is it to you that you sound like a native English speaker, even if it means you may not be grammatically correct?

Not Important		Somewhat Important		Very Important	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Please Explain:

20. Do you always try to use "who" and "whom" correctly when you speak? Why or why not?
Please Explain:

21. It is more important to be grammatically correct in writing than in speaking.

False		Somewhat True			True
1	2	3	4	5	6

Please Explain:

22. In an English class, would you rather be taught proper grammar or how native speakers sound, if there is a difference between the two?

Proper Grammar				Native Speaker-like	
1	2	3	4	5	6

Please Explain:

23. Native English speakers <u>always</u> speak grammatically correctly.

False		Somewhat True			True
1	2	3	4	5	6

Please Continue →

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24. As a speaker of English, it is important to me that I <u>always</u> speak grammatically correctly.

	False			Somewhat True			True
1		2		3	4	5	6

Please Explain:

25. Do you think you have a good idea how native English speakers speak and whether or not they always use correct grammar? When you speak, do you think you sound more like how native English speakers sound or like the English you learn from textbooks? Is there a difference?
Please Explain:

Thank you.

Appendix B:

Sample Background Questionnaire

Background Questionnaire (EFL STUDENTS)

1. Participant Number: _____ 2. Gender: M___ F___ 3. Age: _____

4. Native Language (first language): _____

5. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (Circle one)

     High school

     Some college

     Completed college

     Graduate school

6. Have you used or studied English outside of school (tutoring, special English classes, English movies, TV, music, etc.)? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

7. Other than English, what languages have you studied or used? (Please write languages, number of years studied, and proficiency/level.)

_____

_____

_____

8. Have you ever spent longer than 3 weeks in an English-speaking environment? (circle one)

     YES   NO

     If YES, how long did you stay there? _____

     Did you study there? Please explain. _____

     _____

9. How do you rate your level in English?

	Beginner				Advanced
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5

10. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your language background? If so, please write it here:

Thank you.
ALL INFORMATION WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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