

CHAPTER 9.

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS' NEEDS AND UNDERGRADUATE NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS: MEANING NEGOTIATION AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY

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Since English is not my first language, I need [] some time to speak. . . First, sentence in our mother tongue. Then, translate to English. . . I think I didn't handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time.

– ITA

[I]f they do not understand what the student is asking to be polite enough to address that so maybe the student can reword their question so that the ITA [International Teaching Assistant] can understand it and give the proper response.

– Undergraduate NESS (Native English-Speaking Student)

Back in 2007, I took what I consider to be a leap of faith; if it was not for that decision to change careers from being a customer service representative to a college-level English instructor, I would not be writing this chapter. That decision was informed by my passion for English as a language and the desire to ignite a similar spark in my students. What was shocking to me, then, is that the prestigious private Egyptian university where I taught writing did not offer any teacher preparation. Retrospectively, I suspect that that lack of teacher preparation was due to one or more of the following common misconceptions: that anyone with a bachelor's degree in English is—naturally—prepared to teach

writing, that writing studies is not a discipline, and/or that anyone can teach.¹ Period. I have to admit, however, that not having to go through any orientation or preparation was a relief—until reality hit, and I realized that I had no clue about what I was doing in the classroom.

Two years later, I decided to rectify that situation. I started a master's in TESL and linguistics at Oklahoma State University, where graduate students are required to spend their first year of assistantship serving at the writing center, while simultaneously enrolling in a teaching methodology course as well as observing experienced teachers or TAs, before they can be assigned any teaching responsibility. Since working with International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) resonates with me, I chose to teach an ITA preparation course.² What struck me—perhaps not then, but a few years later—was not only the stark contrast between teacher preparation in Egypt (or lack thereof) and that in the US but more importantly the nature of ITA preparation in the US. Preparation programs tend to feed on and amplify ITAs' vulnerabilities and instructional insecurities in the US setting. They tend to cast ITAs as “a remedial population” (Seloni 134). Furthermore, studies on ITA preparation mak[e] one-sided recommendations, such as creating accent-reduction classes or providing handbooks for assisting in the cultural adjustment of ITAs in class and for enhancing [their] communication proficiency and confidence in the classroom (Athen; Gareis & Williams; Seloni). In other words, ITA preparation programs tend to be grounded in ethnocentric views, with the goal of “Americanizing ITAs' foreign accents” (Zhou 21; Mutua). Such Americanization might underscore ITAs' feelings of otherness and emphasize their/our perceived linguistic deficiency. Not only do ITA preparation programs amplify ITAs' insecurities, but they also have been excluding their/our voices from the conversation. In other words, a plethora of literature examines ITA preparation from the perspective of undergraduate NESSs (Fox and Gay; Hsu; Li et al.; Liu et al., “Integrating;” Meyer and Mao), underscoring

1 My bachelor's degree in English entailed British literature, drama, poetry, translation studies, linguistics, cultural studies, and a few writing classes. No courses with pedagogical emphasis were offered.

2 At Oklahoma State University, ITAs are required to take an ITA test before they are assigned any teaching responsibilities. For that test, they are allowed a maximum of five minutes to present on any topic from their field of study. Based on their performance on the test, ITAs are assigned either a pass, provisional pass, or no pass. A “pass” allows them to start teaching immediately. A “provisional pass” also allows them to teach; however, they have to simultaneously enroll in a course that focuses on presentation skills (i.e., GRAD 5092). A “no pass” places them in a course that focuses on oral proficiency (i.e., GRAD 5082). After passing either course with a B or higher, ITAs are required to retake the ITA test and pass it if they are to be released to teach without additional help. For my assistantship, I taught GRAD 5082, which was pre-designed to revolve around simulations, with the goal of developing ITAs' oral proficiency skills.

deficiencies about ITAs and drawing conclusions about what ITAs need to do to meet Native English Speaking Students' (NESSs') expectations and needs. It was not until the last couple decades that ITAs were consulted about their needs, lived experiences, and/or whether or not a particular type of preparation benefits them or addresses those needs (Ashavskaya; Bresnahan and Cai; Jia and Berger-son; Luo et al.; Mutua; Ruecker et al.; Williams and Case; Zhang; Zhaou). What is scarcely present, however, is research that creates channels of conversation between ITAs and NESSs. Realizing these shortcomings in the scholarship on ITA preparation, I considered it my duty to fill these gaps by, first, creating a space for fellow ITAs to have a seat at the table and, then, inviting NESSs' voices, all while imagining possibilities for a dialogue where the two groups see eye to eye.³

It was not until the 2016-17 academic year that I finally had the opportunity to actually listen to ITAs, exploring the topic of ITA preparation from the perspectives of ITAs themselves, with the intention of amplifying their voices. During the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters, I was teaching an ITA preparation course—ESOL 5050—at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), as part of my own ITA assistantship as a doctoral student in composition and rhetoric.⁴ The course was predesigned to center around pronunciation, pedagogical skills, and US classroom culture. While teaching the course, I conducted a mixed-methods study that spanned both semesters. The goal was to examine the academic needs of ITAs and put those needs in conversation with NESSs' expectations of ITAs, with the intention of looking at ITA preparation from more than one perspective. In the context of BGSU's ITA preparation course, this study sought to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the needs of ITAs in order to effectively teach in the US classroom? 2) What do undergraduate NESSs expect from ITAs in the US classroom? 3) For an effective teaching-learning experience, how do ITAs' needs align with undergraduate NESSs' expectations?

In this chapter, I will first explore the scholarship that examines ways ITAs and NESSs interact in an intercultural setting. Then, I will introduce the mixed-methods study I conducted at BGSU to gain an understanding of ITAs' needs and undergraduate NESSs' expectations for effective teaching-learning to take place. I will then present the findings of the surveys, interviews, and focus groups, followed by discussion and implication sections. The study uncovers the alignment between what ITAs need and what NESSs expect in the US

3 During that timeframe, I was an ITA.

4 This study re-envisions a section from my doctoral dissertation. The goal of that dissertation study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing ITA preparation course in terms of addressing the particular needs of ITAs and the expectations of undergraduate NESSs as well as program administrators who are involved in preparing ITAs.

classroom, calling for a shared responsibility that takes the form of a rhetorical preparation, namely meaning negotiation preparation, of both parties involved. Unlike the rest of the chapters in this book, this chapter focuses on ITAs in primarily STEM-oriented disciplines rather than domestic TAs in composition and rhetoric; however, the results are not specific to ITAs and are generalizable to any TA in any discipline.

Before attempting to answer those research questions, one needs to understand how undergraduate students learn in an intercultural setting in the US classroom. To do that, Oppenheim proposed a Student Mediation Model (as opposed to an information transmission model) and conducted a study where she sought to examine whether that model is helpful in understanding how undergraduates enrolled in calculus and computer science courses learn from ITAs. More specifically, she compared the performance of undergraduates enrolled in introductory courses to those enrolled in the advanced levels of the same courses. The Student Mediation Model basically acknowledges that students come to the classroom with their own background knowledge, skills, and objectives, which in combination “will have an effect on the student’s achievement and his/her joint construction of meaning with his/her ITA” (Oppenheim 13). This model implies a joint meaning construction between each student and their ITA. Thus, based on this model, students’ readiness variables—students’ prior knowledge, “self-regulation skills, self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, pre-existing attitudes towards ITAs and the first language of the student and the student’s family” (Oppenheim 12)—play a major role not only in students’ evaluation of their ITAs’ teaching effectiveness, but also in their own academic achievement. The study treated teaching effectiveness as a “relational attribute” instead of a teacher attribute (Oppenheim 13), which implies that students play a part for the teaching to be effective.

Oppenheim’s study examined more than 8,300 students enrolled in introductory and more advanced calculus and computer science courses. The findings suggested that when the instructor is an ITA, advanced students outperform their beginner counterparts, which reflected on their grades and evaluations of their instructors. The results might imply that beginner students lack the readiness to negotiate meaning with ITAs, suggesting that ITAs should not be assigned introductory courses and be assigned advanced courses instead, where students have more prior knowledge of the subject matter and of domain discourse patterns. Such knowledge enables students to construct and negotiate meaning with ITAs. In other words, students in introductory courses might lack *the cognitive capacity* to communicate effectively with ITAs and, as a result, evaluate ITAs’ communicative skills poorly. Conversely, advanced students might have sufficient knowledge of the domain that allows them to communicate

effectively with ITAs and, consequently, evaluate ITAs' communicative skills positively (Oppenheim 39). In other words, undergraduates' readiness variables play a role in their academic achievement and inform their meaning negotiation skills with ITAs. So, if students' readiness variables shape their meaning negotiation skills with ITAs, then what happens if that readiness is catalyzed?⁵ What happens if, rather than waiting for students to become ready to negotiate meaning, we equip them with such skills?

Kang and Rubin did just that when they proposed a structured contact approach that prompts interaction between undergraduate NESSs and ITAs. The intergroup contact exercise that they used in their study took the shape of "a mystery puzzle-solving activity," in which each member was given eight clues and was supposed to use only verbal communications with the rest of the members in order to solve the given crime mystery. After completing two exercises and rotating among groups, group members debriefed by sharing their differences in nonverbal communication and common cross-cultural misunderstandings (Kang and Rubin 160). The rationale for this structured contact approach was grounded in the authors' belief that "the responsibility for effective communication between native English-speakers (NESs) and nonnative English-speakers (NNESSs) should lie not only with the latter as speakers, but also with the former as active, responsive, and empathetic listeners" (Kang and Rubin 158). In other words, the authors believed in a shared responsibility between NESs and ITAs for effective communication to take place. However, in order for the proposed intergroup contact exercises to reduce undergraduates' prejudices, specific conditions need to be fulfilled. For instance, the setting needs to be casual; all participants have to hold equal statuses; and groups need to be "interdependent in ways that require or encourage frequent communication across cultural boundaries" (Kang and Rubin 159). In order for Kang and Rubin to measure undergraduates' attitudes towards ITAs before conducting the activities, 63 undergraduates rated 11 audio recordings of ITAs' five-minute mini lessons. They rated them based on "comprehensibility, overall oral proficiency, degree

5 In early 1980s, meaning negotiation was initiated by Michael Long in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) discipline as a theoretical framework that was referred to as the interaction hypothesis. The hypothesis claimed that nonnative speakers acquire the language when they engage in meaning negotiation through comprehension checks and clarification requests, particularly to overcome a communication breakdown with a native speaker. However, later scholarship was skeptical about the willingness of learners to engage in meaning negotiation in the classroom for fear of reflecting their ignorance or negatively impacting their social relationships in the classroom. Later research argued that meaning negotiation ought to be initiated by the instructors or the more experienced interlocutor (Van Der Zwaard and Bannink). The responsibility for meaning negotiation, I contend, needs to be shared by both listeners and speakers, regardless of their native- or nonnative-speaker status.

of accentedness, and teaching competence” (Kang and Rubin 161). After the contact exercises, the same group of undergraduates re-rated the same mini lessons. The success of these activities was reflected in NESSs perceiving ITAs to be “more comprehensible and instructionally competent” than they did beforehand (Kang and Rubin 157).

Another strategy that suggests a shared communicative responsibility between ITAs and NESSs and fosters their meaning negotiation skills is constructed simulation. Halleck constructed a simulation to orient new ITAs and undergraduate NESSs in the training program that she directed. The objective of the simulation was for both groups to “become familiar with the issues related to the use of international teaching assistants (ITAs) as instructors in undergraduate courses” (Halleck 137). The various roles laid out in the simulation were meant to raise ITAs’ awareness about the “problem” they may not have known existed and undergraduates’ awareness about the role they play in the “problem.” The end goal was for the simulation to “probe[] the cross-cultural competence of all the stakeholders involved” (Halleck 137). Though I reject the common perception of ITAs or their preparation as a “problem,” simulations—very much like the structured contact approach—equally engage ITAs and NESSs, in ways that can be deemed beneficial not only for preparing ITAs, but also for jumpstarting undergraduate NESSs’ readiness variables and, by extension, their meaning negotiation skills with ITAs. Moreover, strategies such as structured contact and simulations reject the traditional mindset of perceiving ITAs as deficient interlocutors. Instead, those strategies allow ITAs and NESSs to share the responsibility of conducting effective communication.

Since I was aware that BGSU’s ITA preparation program does not do that, I wanted to know what it does. So, I used my ITA preparation classroom and BGSU’s institutional setting as a research site to listen to the two groups who are directly impacted by ITA preparation: ITAs and NESSs.

THE STUDY

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The ITA preparation course is offered through the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, which is housed in BGSU’s English department. BGSU was established in 1910 as a teacher-training school (i.e., normal school) and is ranked as a tier-one institution. The population of the ITA preparation course is ITAs who lead labs or instruct classes but score between 18-24 on the Spoken English Test (SET)⁶ or 21-23 on the speaking section of the TOEFL iBT test.

6 The SET test is a locally-designed test that assesses ITAs’ linguistic and teaching perfor-

PARTICIPANTS

The first group of participants was comprised of ITAs enrolled in the ITA preparation course during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. The Fall 2016 cohort consisted of ten ITAs: four doctoral students from photochemical sciences, two master's students from physics, one master's student from mathematics, one master's student from geology, one doctoral student from statistics, and one master's student from American culture studies. In other words, the majority of this cohort members were from STEM-oriented disciplines. Eight of these ITAs were from Sri Lanka and India; only one was from China and one from Japan. The Spring 2017 cohort, on the other hand, consisted of seven ITAs: four doctoral students from photochemical sciences, one master's student from mathematics, one master's student from pop culture studies, and one master's student from art. Like the Fall 2016 cohort members, the majority of this cohort was from STEM-oriented disciplines. What was unique about this cohort, though, was its heterogeneity in terms of ITAs' countries of origin: two from China, two from Serbia, one from Bangladesh, one from Italy, and one from South Korea.

The NESSs group consisted of undergraduates (regardless of rank) who were enrolled at BGSU during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. I did not collect demographic information of the NESS participants, since the goal of the study was to learn about the nature of their overall experiences with ITAs. The decision to exclude non-native English-speaking students (NNESSs) was informed by research that suggests that NESSs tend to hold more prejudice towards ITAs than their non-native English-speaking counterparts.⁷

DATA COLLECTION

Upon receiving approval for my study from BGSU's Institutional Review Board, I started collecting data. Three methods were employed to collect data during Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters: surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

During the eighth week of each of the two semesters, all ITAs enrolled in the ITA preparation course were emailed a link to an anonymous Qualtrics survey.

mance. For that test, ITAs are instructed to give a ten-minute lesson on any chosen topic from their discipline. ITAs who score between 18 and 24 are allowed to teach while simultaneously being enrolled in the ITA preparation course (ESOL 5050). Once they pass the course, they re-take the SET test with the goal of scoring 25 or higher to be released to teach. ITAs who do not meet the cut score are usually enrolled in Speech for Graduate Students, which is a course offered through the Communication Sciences and Disorders program.

7 See Mutua; Borjas; Liu; Plakans; Rubin.

Only one open-ended question from that survey is presented in this chapter. That question asked ITAs about their needs in an ITA preparation program in order to teach effectively in the American classroom.

NESSs were also recruited during the same semesters. I used the institutional email listserv to reach out to 1,000 undergraduates who were randomly chosen by the office of Institutional Research Data. Since I received only a few responses, I decided to, instead, reach out to students in person by visiting several Graduate Associates' sections of first- and second-year writing courses. During those class visits, I explained my study, requesting of students who demonstrate interest in the topic to provide their email contacts, which I subsequently used to send them a link to an anonymous Qualtrics survey. Only one question from that survey is presented in this chapter. It was an open-ended question that asked NESSs about their expectations from ITAs for an effective learning experience.

Interviews. ITAs who participated in interviews for this study were enrolled in the ITA preparation course during the Fall 2016 semester and were interviewed after course grades were released. Then, I sent an interview recruitment email to my entire former class list to gauge potential interest. Two ITAs expressed interest, and I conducted the interviews separately in my office. My questions to both ITAs inquired about their perceived needs in a preparation program. Both ITAs chose to reveal their true identities in the published study. Table 9.1 demonstrates ITAs' names, countries of origin, and academic programs.

The NESSs who participated in the interviews were the ones who expressed interest in doing so by providing their email contacts at the end of the survey. The two students who showed interest were interviewed separately in my office during the Spring 2017 semester. The interview questions revolved around their expectations of ITAs in the classroom or lab setting. One participant chose to be referred to by their real name; the other chose a pseudonym. One was a computer science sophomore; the other was a fourth-year middle childhood education student. Table 9.2 represents NESSs' names/pseudonyms, ranks, and academic programs.

Focus Groups. To abide by ethical conduct, I did not conduct the Spring 2017 focus group sessions. I made this decision because I was the primary investigator of the study and course instructor. Instead, I requested a colleague, Adam Kuchta, to facilitate two focus group sessions with the Spring 2017 cohort on my behalf. Ahead of the focus group sessions, I had informed ITAs about my study and clarified that participation in those sessions was voluntary and would not affect their grades. I provided Adam with the focus group questions, which were the same questions asked during my interviews with ITAs. Six ITAs participated in the first session; one in the second. All ITAs chose to go by pseudonyms. Table 9.3 demonstrates ITAs' pseudonyms, countries of origin, and academic programs.

Table 9.1. Interviewed ITAs' Names, Countries of Origin, and Academic Programs

ITAs' Names	Countries of Origin	Academic Programs
Yahampath	Sri Lanka	Master's in Geology
Suthakaran	Sri Lanka	Doctorate in Statistics

Table 9.2. Interviewed NESSs' Names, Ranks, and Academic Majors

NESSs' Names/Pseudonyms	Ranks	Academic Programs
Alexander	Sophomore, first-year (due to earned credit from high school)	Bachelor's in Computer Science
Marina	Fourth-year student	Bachelor's in Middle Childhood Education, Science and English

Table 9.3. Pseudonyms, Countries of Origin, and Academic Degrees of ITAs Who Participated in Focus Groups

ITAs' Pseudonyms	Countries of Origin	Academic Programs
Rick	Bangladesh	Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences
Jim	Serbia	Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences
Fred	Serbia	Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences
Tom	South Korea	Master's in Pop Culture Studies
Alice	Italy	Master's in Art
Gu	China	Master's in Mathematics

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

The research practices for this study were informed by feminist methodologies and grounded theory. Feminist methodologies were used as a theoretical framework in order for me to negotiate my subject positionality as an ITA

and the primary research investigator. The transparency, accountability, and self-reflexivity—i.e., “the fact that the researcher is part of the world he or she studies” (Maxwell 109)—that feminist methodologies offer allowed me to acknowledge and negotiate my subjectivities as an ITA to avoid a reproduction of my biases. Feminist methodologies, therefore, were used to navigate those biases that could have otherwise been disregarded or considered as factors that negatively impacted the validity of this study. Feminist methodologies insist on “a more explicit understanding and acknowledgement of how subjectivity, subject position, and sociocultural position shape our research processes and the knowledge that results from those practices” (Takayoshi et al. 113), as well as recognizing that “data are always shaped, to a large extent, by researchers’ values, theoretical perspectives, and personal histories” (Kirsch 195). Thus, feminist methodologies allowed me to not only understand but also acknowledge and question my assumptions as an ITA.

Similarly, grounded theory was an additional methodology—and method for that matter—that helped mitigate my subjectivities and account for my “position, privileges, perspective, and interactions” (Charmaz 13), allowing the data to lead the conversation. It is important to acknowledge that my ITA subject position might have guided my interpretation of the data (Takayoshi et al. 107). However, grounded theory coding was applied in order to bring participants’ perspectives to the forefront, enabling me to “define what constitutes the data and to make implicit views, actions, and processes more visible” by “conceptualiz[ing] what is happening in the data” (Takayoshi et al. 113). More specifically, like feminist methodologies, grounded theory allowed me to be reflexive during the coding and data-based theory construction. Furthermore, I maintained an open mind during the coding process. Instead of imposing my assumptions on the codes or considering those perspectives as truths, those perceptions were considered as merely one way—rather than the only way—of understanding the data (Charmaz 132-3). Because “very few studies can actually only be accomplished using one method” (Takayoshi et al. 111), I used a mixed-methods approach, consisting of surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Those data were analyzed through the implementation of grounded theory. Data coding was “a series of passes” (open/initial and selective/focused). During open coding phases, “fragments of data—words, lines, segments, and incidents—[were examined] closely for their analytic import” (Charmaz 109). Open coding was followed with focused coding which “reveal[ed] points of interest, insight, and discovery that [were] not evident just from the name (or definition) of a given code” (Broad 5). During focused coding, “the most significant or frequent initial codes” were used to “sort, synthesize,

integrate, and organize large amounts of data” (Charmaz 113). Eventually, super codes and theory emerged from the flexible-yet-rigorous process of grounded theory.

RESULTS

ITAs SURVEY RESULTS

A total of sixteen ITAs participated in the survey. This chapter explores ITAs’ responses to only one of the survey questions. That question asked them about their needs from a preparation program in order to effectively teach their students. In response, three ITAs expressed satisfaction with the components of the existing preparation course in improving their communicative skills. One of the three listed “pronunciation” and “teaching method[s]” as needs from the preparation program. More specifically, two of the three ITAs identified mini lessons⁸ as “very helpful” in making them “more confident” and in exploring “strategies to use with students.” In addition, one ITA described the required audio “self-reflection” as “very valuable and helpful because we are becoming consciousness [sic] about our improvement and development.” Contrastingly, three ITAs expressed dissatisfaction with the existing preparation course, with one of the three stating “this program should have training for ITAs like us who need[] to run labs.” Similarly, another ITA said that they need “training related to subject matter.” Two ITAs were specific about needing “communication with native English-speaking students” and “more exposure to native speakers or other persons [who] have similar fluency levels like native [speakers].” That should help improve their “aural comprehension” especially because the English they find in textbooks is different from “real’ daily English among students.” Three ITAs were more concerned about their “pronunciation skills” and their fluency. One of the three stated that they need someone to “correct” their individual sounds. Another ITA said, “I need to learn how to make natural pauses, to [expand my] vocabulary[,] and become more [comprehensible].” And one ITA simply stated, “Keep practic[ing] teaching to students.”

Figure 9.1 represents ITAs’ needs that were expressed in the survey based on the frequency of their mention.

8 Mini lessons are interactive ten-minute lessons that ITAs were assigned to present on any chosen disciplinary topic. During those lessons, their peers and I interacted with the presenters like undergraduates would. The lessons were video recorded. Within a week, ITAs were asked to watch the video and record an audio self-reflection, identifying strengths and areas for improvement in their performance.

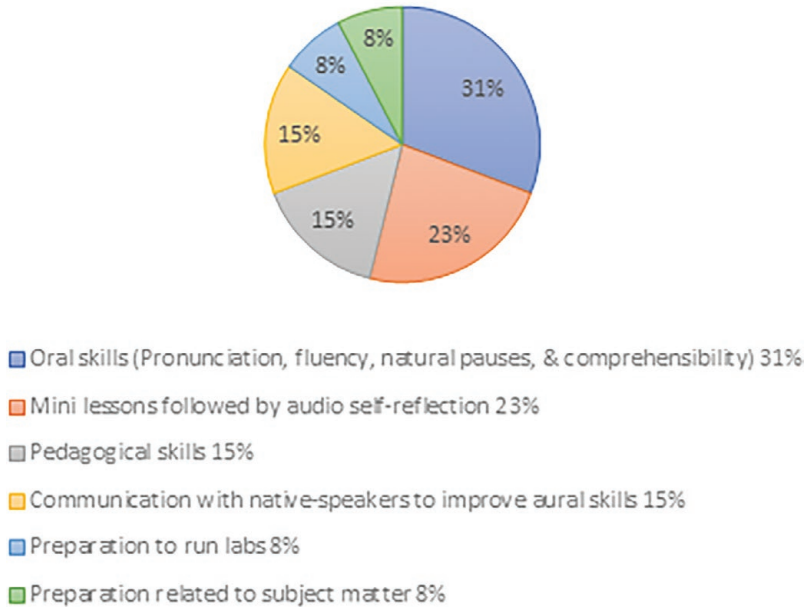


Figure 9.1. Pie Chart of ITAs' Needs as Expressed in the Survey and Their Frequency

NESSs SURVEY RESULTS

A total of sixty-seven undergraduate NESSs completed the survey, forty-four of which indicated they had had actual experiences with ITAs. Therefore, the responses of the twenty-three remaining participants were excluded since they were not based on actual experiences. This chapter examines the responses of those forty-four NESSs to only one of the survey questions—the one that asked them about their expectations from ITAs, whether in the classroom or the lab, in order for them to learn effectively.

Pedagogical expectations. Thirteen NESSs ($\approx 30\%$) made comments relating to ITAs' pedagogical skills. Three NESSs expressed their expectations of ITAs to be able to teach, saying, "I expect ITAs to be able to teach me well enough that I understand and retain the information" and to be able to "teach to multiple learning styles." Closely related, three NESSs discussed ITAs' ability to explain concepts. For example, they stated, "I expect them to be able to explain the material coherently," and "to help [me] understand what the professor is saying." The third NESS suggested that ITAs should "read instead of explain[]" the assigned pages as a way for ITAs to "feel comfortable"

explaining the material. Four NESSs addressed their expectations of ITAs to be knowledgeable about the content area, material, and subject matter of the class. Three expected ITAs to “be able to communicate with [students]” clearly in terms of articulating course requirements, teaching effectively, helping students “better understand the material [they are] trying to learn,” and “making sure [ITAs] help me until I understand.”

Fluency and clarity of speech. Ten NESSs ($\approx 23\%$) focused on their expectations from ITAs to speak the English language fluently, clearly, and slowly. For example, NESSs expect ITAs to “[h]ave clear English,” be “fluent in English and-[] confidently speak it,” to “effectively speak the language spoken in the classroom,” and to “know the proper English to be able to teach the material.” One NESS addressed the pace of ITAs’ speech, expecting ITAs to “[t]alk slow [sic] and pronounce things more clearly,” as “some times [sic] they just talk to [sic] fast, and it sounds like their first language.”

Understanding and responding to questions. Nine NESSs ($\approx 21\%$) referred to their expectations from ITAs to understand and respond to their questions. For example, one stated that they expect from ITAs “[t]o be able to understand and answer questions effectively.” Another said, “[t]o be able to assist us with questions from lectures.” Two indicated that they perceived such question/answer interaction as “a joint effort” in terms of “stay[ing] on the same page and avoid[ing] miss communication [sic].” The second comment further added, “Or if they do not understand what the student is asking to be polite enough to address that so maybe the student can reword their question so that the ITA can understand it and give the proper response.” In other words, NESSs expect ITAs to not only be able to understand and respond to questions, but also to negotiate meaning with students by asking for repetition or paraphrase in a way that ensures that both interlocutors are on the same page, avoiding miscommunications. Contrastingly, two of the nine NESSs did not see themselves as active agents in communications with ITAs, placing the onus entirely on ITAs. They expected ITAs to be able to “explain what they mean,” paraphrase themselves “[i]f they cannot think of the word(s),” and “efficiently bypass language barriers in order to convey their messages in an understandable way.”

Equal university-wide pedagogical and communicative standards of TAs and ITAs. Seven NESSs (16%) indicated that they have no different expectations from ITAs than they have from any other instructor. In other words, they hold ITAs and domestic TAs to the same expectations, such as “[p]rovid[ing] an environment for [students] to learn and understand clearly,” being “able to teach the material,” and “effectively communicat[ing] any misunderstandings in directions for lab, anything to help understand that

material that they are wanting [students] to know for the course/lab.” One NESS elaborated saying:

I expect them to be as prepared as native North American teacher assistants. There should be a standard which the University sets, and if people can't reach that [sic] they shouldn't be allowed to be in the classroom. That goes for any TA, foreign or “American.”

This comment calls on the institution to set equal standards for TA and ITAs in terms of their pedagogical abilities.

Four of the 44 responses were eclectic, addressing NESSs' expectations from ITAs to be “understanding and patient,” be “willing to help,” “adapt to the class eventually,” and use “real life examples of the material that is easy to relate to.” Only one of the 44 NESSs skipped the question. Figure 9.2 represents NESSs' expectations from ITAs that were expressed in the survey based on the frequency of their mention.

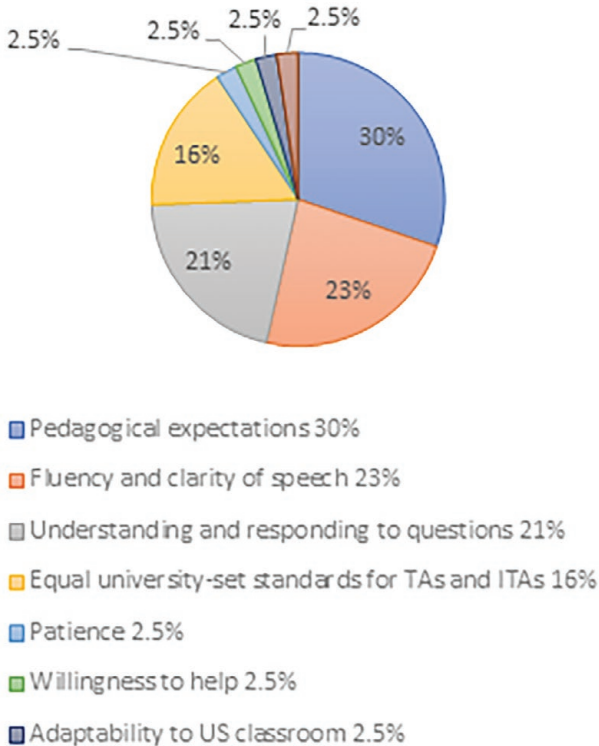


Figure 9.2. Pie Chart of NESSs' Expectations from ITAs as Expressed in the Survey and Their Frequency

Codes that emerged from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Five codes emerged from the analysis of the survey results, interviews, and focus groups. Table 9.4 demonstrates those five codes.

Table 9.4. Codes that Emerged from Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups

Codes that Emerged from Data Analysis
Contact with native English speakers
Meaning negotiation strategies
Creating rapport with ITAs
Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but when?)
Classroom cultural differences

Contact with native English speakers. During my interview with Yahampath, he expressed a sense of satisfaction with the existing ITA preparation course; however, he identified a need to spend more time with native English speakers. He stated, “I think we need more friends from [the U.S.] to [practice English with]. We don’t automatically come to that accent.” However, because the affordance of practicing English with native English speakers is not available for him, he enjoys practicing English with the professor of the lab he is running. And the fact that she, the professor, is also a nonnative English speaker makes her more comprehensible for him. He stressed, “She’s the person which I understand mostly in our department because [she] speak[s] slowly and she mainly stress[es] words so I can listen (laugh).” Thus, from an ITA’s point of view, it is important to have opportunities to interact with undergraduate NESSs during the semester; however, when these opportunities do not present themselves to ITAs, then practicing communicative skills with someone who does not speak English as a first language becomes additionally beneficial since they tend to speak at a slower pace than a native speaker does and are generally more comprehensible. Yahampath suggested that “arrang[ing] some time [for ITAs] to meet with native [English speaking] students” would be a necessary component in an ITA preparation course.

During focus group sessions, Rick echoed the same need for more opportunities to interact with native speakers. Like Yahampath, Rick found such interactions to be a pressing need. He clarified:

So I think the course structure is okay, but what I found very much helpful here is just I mean, we learn pretty much everything about English before coming here like grammar, pronunciation, intonation, everything, but what we lack was

that some native speakers in my country, for myself. I say that I didn't meet any native speaker before coming here. So I mean just speaking with native speakers helps a lot.

Thus, an obvious need for ITAs is to be provided with opportunities to interact with “native speakers” by way of practicing speaking English and listening to it being spoken. Though, technically, practicing English with nonnative speakers is beneficial for English language learning, ITAs seem to prefer their interlocutors to be native speakers.

In the second focus group session, Adam asked Rick's opinion about whether he envisions those interactions with NESSs to be taking place in the ITA preparation course, to which Rick responded immediately in the affirmative. Rick explained, “it's because of improving your pronunciation like native speakers. Sometimes language is easier to learn by just mimicking. Not by following rules or something.” More specifically, Rick suggested that NESSs could be invited to class on a volunteer basis and participate in “maybe some kind of discussion, or [ITAs] explaining some topics to them. Also having something interesting, just discussing with them.” Due to graduate students' typically busy schedules, Rick had little opportunities to interact with native English-speakers outside the classroom. Rick characterized his interactions with native-speaking colleagues to be limited to “academic materials and those kind of things.” Even when Rick added that he had a couple of native English-speaking “friends,” he elaborated saying, “sometimes I share with them, just everyday stuff, nothing else.” Rick's brevity in describing those friendships reflects their quotidian nature, possibly, due to the heavy workload of graduate school. Rick commented, “You know how things go in the grad school.” With the heavy demands of graduate education, ITAs find the ITA preparation course to be an ideal space where those desired interactions with native English-speakers could take place.

Therefore, the ITA preparation course should make room for authentic interactions with undergraduate NESSs—interactions that might bear close resemblance to their everyday experiences in the lab or the classroom. Those interactions could take the shape of either small-group discussions, engaging activities, or invitations for undergraduate NESSs to be potential audience for ITAs during mini lessons, which, by extension, could create meaning negotiation opportunities that might expand the rhetorical prowess of not only ITAs, but also NESSs.

Meaning negotiation strategies. During focus groups, a few ITAs expressed communicative struggles with undergraduate NESSs. Tom, for example, pointed out that his struggles are rooted in “two problems:” first, “aural comprehension” challenges due to students' use of “different pronunciation and slang;” second, difficulties in handling student questions. Tom elaborated:

Since English is not my first language, I need [] some time to speak because, as Rick mentioned, we need time. First, sentence in our mother tongue. Then, translate to English. But at times, yeah, I think I didn't handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time. Okay, so? (laugh)

Tom, like Yahampath, struggled with aural comprehension; they both expressed difficulty in understanding their students' speech. Fred and Jim chimed in, expressing similar struggles in terms of needing more time to be able to respond to students' questions. What Tom, Fred, and Jim were actually expressing is a need for meaning negotiation strategies that would help them navigate communicative situations and buy themselves some time to be able to formulate responses to students' questions. Tom's struggle with handling student questions echoes NESSs' expectations of ITAs to understand and respond to undergraduates' questions as well as know how to request paraphrase or repetition when needed.

As an undergraduate NESS, Alexander engaged in meaning negotiation with ITAs in labs and classrooms. When I asked him if he faced trouble during those interactions, he stated, "Yeah. Sometimes you have to ask [the Geology ITA] to repeat herself or to speak up." Alexander affirmed that often times he took initiatives to negotiate meaning with that ITA by asking her for repetition or requesting that she raise her voice. Alexander did not, however, express any frustration about having to negotiate meaning with ITAs. In fact, he expressed his willingness to exert effort or labor to reach full comprehension. He explained, "as long as I can pretty much piece together what [ITAs]'re saying, I'm usually not too picky about how they say it." A sense of empathy can be inferred from Alexander's responses, especially when he explained:

She wasn't bad. She was actually a really good teacher. She reiterated things very well. Pronunciation was like the thing and like volume. So I feel like she was a lot more quiet. But I feel like it wasn't necessarily her fault. I feel like it might have been a cultural thing. But other than that I've never had any problems or anything like that. No.

Hypothesizing that the ITA spoke quietly due to cultural norms, Alexander showed a sense of empathy toward his ITA. Instead of expecting her to quickly adapt to the US classroom culture, he expressed willingness to compromise, especially as he recognized her as "a really good teacher" who "reiterated things very well."

But Alexander was not an exception in his willingness to negotiate meaning with ITAs. Marina expressed not only willingness to negotiate meaning with

nonnative English speakers, but also a sense of gained intellectual stimulation. Marina's awareness, for instance that ITAs often struggle with slang, shapes her speech production. She explained:

It's usually like helping me to take a step back and be like, "How am I speaking when I'm speaking to somebody who doesn't speak English as a first language?" cause obviously like I use a lot of slang, I grew up here. So like a lot of the times I have to like stop myself and be like, "No [Marina]! Use real words!"

Like Alexander, Marina did not express any frustration during meaning negotiation practices. In fact, she perceived them as intellectual stimulants or brain games. She elaborated:

I know that one friend, he's from Turkey, and a lot of the times we'll be having conversations, and you know like deep conversation going on for hours. Super intelligent man, but sometimes he couldn't get the right word. So he would sit there and try to describe it. And I almost feel like we're playing Charades sometimes because he'd be like, "ah, ah, when there is steam coming," and I'm like, "Smoking?" and he'll be like, "Yes" (laugh). So I think that like I feel like that helps my brain sometimes because of like I don't know it makes me think a little bit more.

It could be hypothesized that Marina's daily interactions with nonnative English speakers at the young age of fifteen might have informed her perception of meaning negotiation as a practice that is not only integral to communication but also intellectually stimulating.

Though Alexander and Marina cannot be considered an epitome of the undergraduate NESS population who have had little or no prior interactions with nonnative English speakers, their successful interactions with ITAs are inspirational; they can inform the conceptualization of ITA preparation in two ways. First, early interactions between ITAs and NESSs can accelerate the latter's readiness variables for meaning negotiations with the former. Second, both groups need to share the responsibility of effective communication as they collaborate to negotiate meaning.

Creating rapport with ITAs. Marina had dramatically more positive experiences with ITAs who tried to create rapport with undergraduates and connect with them than those who did not. Though she "wasn't super fond of" the first ITA she had due to his initial nervousness in class, she realized that in time he started

feeling more comfortable and even being “silly” with students, which completely changed her perception of him. Similarly, she had quite a positive experience with a nonnative English-speaking professor because “[h]e’s like trying to interact, trying to get to know us, cares about us, and trying to connect with us.” Contrastingly, ITAs who did not try to create rapport with undergraduates were perceived negatively by Marina, who explained, “But the ones I’ve had for chemistry and right now biology, they’re very science-focused, like they’re like ‘I am only here to like grade your papers and you know give you the information.’” Marina’s observation might have implications on ITA preparation in terms of addressing undergraduates’ needs for rapport, a sense of care from and connection with their instructors.

Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but when?).

During focus groups, Tom, Fred, and Jim expressed common struggles understanding the slang that NESSs often use. Rick, on the other hand, had a different experience. He stated:

I understand idioms very well. I mean my aural comprehension is good, my academic language is also good. . . . But the problem is I work in labs, so it just sound weird when you always use academic language with the students, I mean I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to sound academic all the time.

Rick seemed to be at a more advanced stage of second language acquisition than his peers were. Unlike Tom, Fred, and Jim, Rick’s struggle did not stem from his inability to understand the slang that NESSs use, but rather from his inability to produce those expressions in a way that could help him create rapport with students. Such rapport, in Rick’s opinion, is impossible to create when an ITA relies on academic language. He explained:

[Academic language] creates a bit of a distance between students and the instructor, I think. It seems like you’re not connecting with them, you know. I mean that some language makes you more closer to your students than other language. If you use standard academic language all the time, students sometimes don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions. In lab they have so many questions that they feel maybe stupid, I don’t know; “I don’t need to ask them to the instructor.” That’s not true. They should approach and ask those questions. So I think when you can get more close to your students in the way that they use the language, they feel more connected to you.

Rick believes that ITAs’ use of slang—unlike academic language—could have a powerful effect on their approachability and the rapport that they desire

to develop with undergraduate NESSs, who, by extension, would feel a sense of relatability and trust toward ITAs.

Though ITAs seemed to agree that their use of slang would help them create rapport with NESSs, they disagreed about when such production would be deemed appropriate. Alice, for example, contended that ITAs' comprehensibility should take precedence over their ability to use slang. She explained, "[Rick]'s an instructor, so he has to speak in an academic way. And the slang will come in later, you know." She directed her advice to Rick, saying, "I just feel that right now you have to worry about being comprehensible. And to give the class the information. . . This is important." In other words, Alice saw a need for ITAs to comprehensibly deliver subject matter to students, and slang production should happen organically at a later stage.

ITAs' emphasis on slang was also echoed by undergraduate NESSs. Alexander expected ITAs to be able to understand the slang that NESSs typically use in the classroom and lab. He explained that it "would be good for [ITAs] to learn I guess lingo and like slang. . . like the extremely crucial thing is obviously the classroom, but I feel like [understanding slang] would completely help them understand their students a lot better." Though Alexander did not identify slang production as an expectation from ITAs, he viewed ITAs' ability to understand slang as important for their aural proficiency.

Classroom cultural differences. When I asked Marina about what ITA preparation should entail, she listed "pedagogy skills" as an important component. Second on the list was understanding classroom cultural differences, such as US students' expectation for quick responses and fast information. However, the one aspect that had the worst impact on Marina's learning experience is NESSs' unmet need for detailed instruction and scaffolding of information. More specifically, Marina pointed out that ITAs often forget that undergraduates in the US do not necessarily have the same amount of knowledge that ITAs have or the level of knowledge that they would expect of undergraduates in their home countries. Marina shared an experience with an ITA that could clarify this specific need of NESSs. She related:

So one of my issues right now is that my TA doesn't, like he will lecture on the concepts real quick, but then he doesn't really tell us like what we're doing. Like he'll read the title. So he'll be like, "This is your diffusion lab," and then he'll be like, "Okay, start." And we're like, "Okay. I read the lab, (laugh) but I don't know what this thing is that they're talking about. Can you just like point it out real quick?" And then I know he definitely gets frustrated because we're asking him so many

questions, but um I wish that he would just lay everything out before, so we know where we're going, what we're doing.

In other words, that ITA did not provide much details to transition from the theoretical part of the lab to the practical part. Such lack of scaffolding as an instructional strategy, Marina hypothesized, might be informed by ITAs' wrong assumption that undergraduates would know how to make that transition on their own or possess the knowledge that helps them to do so. Additionally, ITAs expressed "frustration" with students' questions, making the latter feel inadequate in requesting clarification. One additional factor that could have amplified the tension between ITAs and their undergraduate NESSs is the fact that it was an introductory-level course—courses that are typically anxiety-ridden for undergraduates, especially those who are not science majors.

Marina's negative experience with that ITA reflects the complexity of cross-cultural classroom settings, calling for an ITA preparation that demystifies several ITA misconceptions and addresses undergraduates' unmet needs. Therefore, a US-classroom-culture component seems to be essential for ITA preparation. However, what could be even more beneficial than merely teaching ITAs about the US classroom setting is creating cross-cultural contact zones where ITAs and undergraduates could actually interact. Those contact zones should revolve around the following: ITAs' misconceptions about the amount of content knowledge undergraduate US students typically bring to introductory courses, undergraduate NESSs' expectation for a fast-paced classroom, NESSs' need for informational scaffolding, NESSs' expectation of ITAs to show willingness to address questions, and ITAs' unawareness of undergraduates' anxiety in introductory courses and the cultural cues that might be construed as rudeness in the US classroom, such as belittling students' limited knowledge about the subject matter and showing frustration with their questions.

DISCUSSION

In my positionality as an ITA, I approached this study with my own biases and prejudices, anticipating tension⁹ and discrepancies to emerge as I listened to ITAs and undergraduate NESSs. However, as themes emerged, I soon realized that there is a wide area of agreement and overlap between ITAs' needs and NESSs' expectations when it comes to ITA preparation (see Table 9.5).

ITAs unanimously expressed a need for interactive opportunities with undergraduate NESSs. Though ITAs interact with NESSs in classrooms and labs, ITAs

9 See Liu; Major et al.; Mutua; Plakans; Rubin.

lamented the fact that the intense demands of graduate school—that emotional labor that Courtney Adams Wooten in this collection tries to untangle—prevent them from taking part in extracurricular activities or creating friendships with NESSs. To address ITAs' needs for additional interactions with undergraduate NESSs, the ITA preparation classroom can be a space where NESSs are invited to participate in mini lesson activities, which is another need for ITAs where they can practice their pedagogical and meaning negotiation skills in an authentic classroom setting. Alternatively, these interactions can take place through a structured contact approach (Kang and Rubin) and/or constructed simulations (Halleck). Such structured contact activities and simulations can take place during orientation week, when undergraduates and ITAs are getting acclimated to their new educational environment. Engaging in those activities as early as the orientation week might also act as a catalyst for undergraduates' readiness variables (Oppenheim). Those activities have the potential of enhancing meaning negotiation skills as well as oral proficiency skills such as clear pronunciation, fluency, natural pauses, and comprehensibility—areas where ITAs' needs aligned with NESSs' expectations. In a sense, like Leslie R. Anglesey's chapter in this volume, this reenvisioning of orientations resists the banking model where ITAs—and undergraduate students, for that matter—are made to perform as mostly-idle listeners rather than being active participants during orientations. As ITAs and undergraduates do so during those meaning negotiation activities, the former can gain experience in addressing the latter' questions by adopting strategies that could help them buy time, allowing them to process student questions and articulate responses accordingly. Moreover, undergraduates can practice ways to request paraphrasing or repetition of information from ITAs.

Those meaning negotiation activities could also address the pressing need for intergroup rapport that was expressed by not only ITAs but also NESSs. Such rapport could be initiated during those activities that take place before the semester starts and continue throughout ITA preparation. Since ITAs unanimously expressed a need to understand and produce slang by way of creating rapport with NESSs, a slang component could be added to ITA preparation, especially considering that NESSs also expressed the expectation that ITAs should be able to comprehend the slang they typically produce in classrooms and labs. However, from my own experience, teaching and learning slang does not work if done in a vacuum. In other words, rather than explicitly teaching ITAs slang terms, they should be encouraged to organically learn slang *in situ* during interactions with NESSs and use the acquired terms during ensuing interactions; otherwise, there is a risk that the terms might remain in ITAs' inactive vocabulary instead of moving to their active vocabulary. ITAs should also be encouraged to request paraphrasing from NESSs, if needed, rather than pretending or assuming that they understood what was said.

Table 9.5. ITAs' Needs, NESSs' Expectations, and Where There is an Overlap

ITAs' Needs	Where Needs and Expectations Overlap	NESSs' Expectations
Opportunities to interact with NESSs	Pedagogical skills	Express willingness to address NESSs' questions (without frustration)
Mini lessons followed by self-reflections	Oral skills (clear pronunciation, fluency, natural pauses, & comprehensibility)	Adjust unreasonable expectations of ITAs about NESSs' content knowledge
Preparation specific to running labs	Meaning negotiation skills (NESSs expressed willingness to negotiate meaning with ITAs, & ITAs expressed a need to buy time to respond to NESSs' questions)	Information scaffolding as an instructional strategy
Preparation related to subject matter	Rapport and sense of care (ITAs expressed a need to learn slang, & NESSs expect ITAs to understand slang)	ITAs' awareness of NESSs' anxiety in introductory courses
		ITAs' patience & willingness to help
		ITAs' adaptability to US classroom culture & use of real-life examples
		University-wide standards for pedagogical and communicative skills of domestic TAs and ITAs

Though ITAs and NESSs agreed that rapport is essential for building successful instructional relationships, NESSs articulated that expectation from a different angle than that of ITAs. While ITAs perceived their acquisition of slang to be a necessary means for achieving rapport with NESSs, NESSs perceived rapport through an intercultural lens. They craved a sense of care from ITAs. Since instructor-student rapport might be culture-specific, ITAs should be made aware of a variety of cultural practices that NESSs pointed out and that are valued in the American classroom and lab settings that might otherwise be lost on ITAs. For example, showing care for undergraduate students, learning and calling them by their names, and getting to know them through small talk in the beginning of class are all practices that could create rapport between ITAs and NESSs.

ITAs' adaptability to US classroom culture could also be achieved through various means. For instance, as NESSs underscored, ITAs need to express willingness to negotiate meaning with undergraduates and address their questions without showing frustration, demonstrate awareness of students' typical anxiety in introductory courses, adjust unreasonable expectations about undergraduates' content knowledge, and reflect their patience and willingness to scaffold information. It was noted that ITAs often made what would be perceived in the US classroom as rude remarks as they commented on students' level of knowledge and/or moved from theory to application in labs without enough scaffolding of information. ITAs' adaptability to these cultural expectations could reflect well on their pedagogical performance, which is another need that was identified by NESSs as well as ITAs.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings demonstrate more alignment than tension between ITAs' needs and NESSs' expectations (see Table 9.5). In fact, those shared needs and expectations can be encapsulated in three components: meaning negotiation, awareness of US classroom culture, and pedagogical preparation. The rest happens organically.

Beyond orientation week, and since it can be challenging to have NESSs volunteer their time in the ITA preparation classroom, one way meaning negotiation can be implemented is through programmatic collaborations—collaborations between ITA preparation programs and any other program whose students need interactions with English language learners (ELLs), such as linguistics and/or TESOL programs. The rationale for envisioning programmatic collaborations is the fact that, ideally, meaningful collaborations are the ones that accrue mutual benefits to all parties involved, which is also how ITA-NESS relationships ought to be. The typical focus of courses like methods in TESOL, phonetics, and applied phonology is for students to establish a foundation of the English phonetics system as well as the proper pedagogical methods to help ELLs acquire clear pronunciation. Because of that focus, students might benefit from interacting with ITAs and better understanding the pronunciation challenges of speakers of various languages. And since the typical student population of those courses is either NESSs or ELLs whose command of the English language is considered sufficient, then ITAs would also benefit from these interactive opportunities—a need that ITAs have expressed.

To achieve such collaborations, undergraduates in linguistics and/or TESOL programs could be invited to ITAs' min-lesson presentations, where authentic, mutually beneficial interactions between ITAs and NESSs could take place

and, by extension, oral proficiency, meaning negotiation, and slang acquisition organically happen. More specifically, ITAs and NESSs can become conscious of, and benefit from, meaning negotiation processes through a few rhetorical interventions, such as posing and responding to questions, requesting repetition or paraphrasing of unclear questions or responses, using fillers to gain time while trying to articulate responses, and implementing comprehension checks.

Those meaning negotiation practices could also raise ITAs' awareness about the US classroom culture—a prominent NESS expectation—as ITAs imagine ways to create rapport with undergraduates and understand their anxiety about the subject matter. In addition to meaning negotiation, ITA preparation could also guide ITAs in conducting beginning-of-semester needs analysis in order to understand students' academic needs and level of content knowledge. Furthermore, ITA preparation courses should present informational scaffolding as an instructional strategy, where clear explanation is provided to transition students from theoretical to hands-on components in labs and classrooms. An agenda is offered for each lesson, and the board is used as a compensation strategy.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND CONCLUSION

This study did not come without limitations. My subject positionality as an ITA could have been problematic in the sense that my biases might have influenced not only the data analysis process, but also data collection. My obvious identity as an ITA, which presented itself in my accented speech and race, could have silenced NESSs or made them uncomfortable sharing their honest perspectives about ITAs during survey recruitment and interview phases of the study. This concern might be valid, though unavoidable. That is why, during data analysis, reflexivity was vital as I acknowledged my own biases and assumptions as an ITA, constantly reminding myself that it is data that should guide my findings—not my own biases.

Despite the limitations, this study underscores and reifies the importance of listening to ITAs in order to understand their needs and use that knowledge to design preparation programs. There is a danger in assuming that ITAs come to the US classroom as empty vessels (to echo Kathleen Blake Yancey, Rob Cole, Amanda May, and Katelyn Stark's astute observation in this collection), and in offering them preparation programs that make them feel deficient. That is why it is essential to capitalize on their pedagogical experience and learn what they know about the US classroom culture, and, then, to build on that existing knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that undergraduates' readiness variables are not homogenous; thus, rather than waiting for them to be ready to negotiate meaning with ITAs, they need to be engaged in ITA

preparation by way of preparing them for the increasingly diverse US classroom. Otherwise, ITAs would continue to shoulder the meaning negotiation labor that ought to be shared with their undergraduates for an even and fair distribution of labor in the American classroom.

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