Utility and Exposure Factors in the Viability of Native Speaker & English as a Lingua Franca Pronunciation Models for Niigata University Students: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Recent research has problematized the utility and relevance of native speaker-like pronunciation for non-native speakers of English (Jenkins 2000, 2002). According to this research, non-native speakers of English do not need to approximate native speaker pronunciation norms in order to maintain intelligibility with other non-native speakers of English (Walker 2010; O'Neal 2013). However, there are two factors relevant to any discussion about the viability of a native speaker pronunciation model or an English as a Lingua Franca pronunciation model for non-native speakers that are only tangentially addressed in such research: 1) How often do specific populations of non-native speakers use English with other non-native speakers rather than with native speakers in specific numbers? 2) How often are non-native speakers exposed to non-native speaker English rather than native speaker English? This pilot study attempts to answer both questions for the student non-native English speaker population at Niigata University in order to ascertain the potential viability of native speaker English pronunciation models. This study tentatively concludes that Niigata University students speak English with other non-native speakers more than with native speakers, but that they listen to native speaker English more than non-native speaker English, and that these two facts have significant implications for syllabus design.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Native Speakers, Non-Native Speakers, Model Viability, Pronunciation.

1 Introduction

This is a quantitative study of the usage of and exposure to Native Speaker (hereafter, NS) and Non-native Speaker (hereafter, NNS) English among Niigata University students from May 5th to May 11th, 2013, the fourth week of the spring semester. The impetus for this study arose out of a conversation about the relevance of native speaker varieties of English for Japanese students studying in English as a Foreign Language

(hereafter, EFL) or in English as a Lingua Franca (hereafter, ELF) environments. If NNS students interact in English with other NNSs of English more than they do with NS of English, then is it really necessary to teach them features of NS English that have been shown to be unnecessary for intelligible communication in international contexts? The traditional view is that even if students mainly interact with other NNS of English, NS varieties are still relevant and useful for learners because they will often listen to NS English in classrooms, textbooks, and outside the classroom through exposure to DVDs, TV programs, radio, and the Internet.

The goal of this study is to determine if this is in fact true: How much do Niigata University students interact in English with NSs and NNSs? How much do Niigata University students listen to either NS or NNS English? This is an important issue with regard to recent discussions in EFL literature regarding NS and NNS varieties of English, and the proposal of a Lingua Franca Core of pronunciation features for use by NNSs of English who will mainly use English with other NNSs (Jenkins 2000, 2002; Walker 2010). The argument for the LFC rests partly on the assumption that most students who are learning English will actually interact with other NNSs more than NSs, and therefore do not need to be held to NS standards and models with regard to pronunciation, grammar and lexis (Jenkins 2007: 8). The potential influence of the LFC on a pragmatic level is somewhat reduced by the admission that the traditional EFL pronunciation syllabus is still relevant for receptive purposes (Jenkins 2007: 25). Nevertheless, a study that illustrates how learners engage with English in an EFL environment in the modern era can offer some suggestions as to what features of pronunciation and lexis teachers should teach students and as to whether any features of NS English are relevant to teaching English as a Lingua Franca. The study can also indirectly reveal student attitudes towards different varieties of NS and NNS English and their goals with regard to how they hope to use English in the future.

This study focuses on the usage of and exposure to NS and NNS English among students at Niigata University, a university located in Niigata prefecture, Japan. Niigata City is an archetypal EFL/ELF environment, with a population of around 810,000 residents, of whom roughly 4,400 are non-Japanese residents (http://www.city.niigata. lg.jp/shisei/gaiyo/profile/00_01jinkou/gaikokujin_jyumin.html). Niigata University is somewhat of a micro-environment within Niigata City in terms of opportunities for engagement with English, as students are required to take courses in English, are assigned English homework that must be completed outside of class, and may also have more opportunities than the general public to interact with other NS and NNS speakers of English.

2　Previous Studies

The field of pronunciation pedagogy has been subject to some radical changes recently.

For almost the entire existence of Second Language Acquisition (hereafter, SLA) as a discipline separate from linguistics, NS English has been upheld as the superlative goal for NNSs to model themselves on, and the ideal situation for second language learning has been assumed to be contact between NSs and NNSs (e.g., Long 1996). However, recent research has problematized the necessity and even the possibility of attaining NS-like pronunciation fluency (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994; Jenkins 2000, 2007; Seidholfer 2011). These scholars question the applicability of NS models in a globalized world that employs English as a Lingua Franca between NNSs. This section examines the claims of both sides of the issue. First, in section 2.1, we examine the Lingua Franca Core (hereafter, LFC), which the proponents of contend helps NNSs maintain mutual intelligibility with other NNSs. Then, in section 2.2, we review the specific justifications for and the reactions to the LFC, which can tend to be extreme.

2.1 The Lingua Franca Core

NNSs use English to speak to other NNSs more often than NSs (Crystal 1987; Gnutzmann 2000; Seidlhofer 2008, 2011). This fact raises the following important question that English teachers must contend with at some level: if most speakers of English are NNSs, and if most NNSs speak English with other NNSs, then what pronunciation norms might be more relevant and useful for international communication in English? According to advocates of the LFC, because "native speakers have ceased to be the 'true repository' of [English]," NS pronunciation norms no longer retain superlative importance (Seidlhofer 2008: 63). In place of a NS model of pronunciation, advocates of a more relevant set of pronunciation norms propose the LFC (Jenkins 2000, 2002; Walker 2010).

The LFC is a set of "pronunciation features which occur in successful NNS-NNS communication and whose absence leads to miscommunication" (Jenkins 2007: 25). The LFC consists of all of the following features: 1) all consonants in the NS inventory, except for /θ/, /ð/, and dark L, are essential to mutual intelligibility between NNSs; 2) voiceless plosives require aspiration to distinguish them from voiced plosives; 3) appropriate vowel lengthening or shortening before fortis and lenis consonants is critical to mutual intelligibility; 4) using the British intervocalic /t/ maintains intelligibility better than the North American intervocalic /t/, which is often articulated as a flap /ɾ/; 5) the North American English retroflex approximant r, /ɻ/, is preferred to the British English post-alveolar approximant r, /ɹ/, for mutual intelligibility between NNSs; 6) vowel epenthesis between consonants is acceptable because it has no impact on mutual intelligibility between NNSs, but consonant cluster simplification is not, especially in lexeme initial clusters; 7) articulating and distinguishing the vowels /ɜː/,/i/, /ɪ/, /u/, and /ʊ/ is critical to mutual intelligibility between NNSs; 8) pitch accents, which Jenkins calls nuclear stress, are important to the maintenance of mutual intelligibility between NNSs as well (Jenkins 2000, 2002; Walker 2010).

Pronunciation features that are not essential to mutual intelligibility between NNSs are considered non-core features. Non-core features do not aid mutual intelligibility, and sometimes they even attenuate or inhibit it (Jenkins 2000, 2002; Walker 2010). Pronunciation features that are non-core include all of the following features: 1) the exact articulations of the /θ/ and /ð/ phonemes are not vital to mutual intelligibility, and can be replaced with /f/ and /v/ respectively; 2) /l/ can replace the dark/l/ phoneme without any detrimental effect on mutual intelligibility; 3) other than the five vowels mentioned in the core features, exact vowel quality is not necessary to the maintenance of mutual intelligibility; 4) pitch movement, except for pitch accents, is unnecessary to the maintenance of mutual intelligibility; 5) word stress is unimportant to mutual intelligibility; 6) stress-timing is not necessary for mutual intelligibility; 7) vowel reduction and weak forms inhibit mutual intelligibility between NNSs; 8) certain features of connected speech like assimilation, palatalization, and coalescence do not actually aid mutual intelligibility.

Although the list of features in both the core and non-core is very specific, Jenkins (2007) did not intend the LFC to be a monolithic foundation for a new English pidgin, which is something that many critics of the LFC have never grasped (see Sobkowiak 2008; Trudgill 2008a; Scheuer 2008). Quite the contrary, the LFC can be, and even should be, adapted to local conditions and local needs as they arise. As Jenkins (2007) herself states, NNSs are "entirely free to adjust even the core features if this suits local communication needs. The point of the LFC is that the pronunciation norms in any given interaction are determined by ELF users themselves" (26). In other words, the LFC is an extremely variable set of features that can be, and often are, and indeed should be, reconstituted in every NNS-NNS interaction.

2.2　The Justifications for and against the LFC

Jenkins's LFC proposal has been met with some acceptance (Seidlhofer 2008, 2011; Walker 2010; Matsumoto 2011; O'Neal 2013) and a deluge of criticism (Dauer 2005; Sobkowiak 2008; Trudgill 2008a, 2008b; Scheuer 2008; Remiszewski 2008; Schwartz 2008; Szpyra-Kozlowska 2008). Arguments in favor of the adoption of the LFC center on three issues: the first is practicality, in the sense that NNSs are more likely to speak English with other NNSs and therefore should learn an English pronunciation that is pursuant with that objective reality (e.g., Jenkins 2000; Matsumoto 2011; O'Neal 2013); the second is ideological, in the sense that coercing students to learn a NS model even if they are unlikely to actually converse with NSs is a manifestation of linguistic imperialism (e.g., Jenkins 2000; Phillipson 1992); the third is teachability, in the sense that advocates of the LFC claim that expunging non-core features from the major targets of a pronunciation syllabus makes teaching English simpler, although Jenkins insists that simpler does not necessarily mean easier (e.g., Jenkins 2008). The arguments against the adoption of the LFC run the gamut from purely ideological arguments (e.g., Sobkowiak 2008), valid

pedagogical counter-arguments (e.g., Szpyra-Kozlowska 2008), legitimate empowerment issues (e.g., Schwartz 2008; Dauer 2005), and even to the fact that some students, even students who understand that they will use English mostly in international encounters, want a native-speaker pronunciation model/goal (Timmis 2002).

Assessing each justification and each criticism is beyond the scope of this paper. Accordingly, this study focuses its figurative lens and examines only one of the core justifications of the LFC: absolute numbers. A central argument offered in support of the LFC pronunciation syllabus is the fact that NNS-NNS communication is more prevalent than NS-NNS communication, and from this fact the decision is made to base English instruction on features that make communication in that context more successful (Jenkins 2009; Seidlhofer 2008; Walker 2010; Matsumoto 2011; O'Neal 2013). That is, proponents of the LFC claim that it is much more practical to teach NNSs the LFC because NNSs are far more likely to use English with other NNSs than they are to use English with NSs (Seidlhofer 2011).

However, some scholars have attempted to rebut this claim (Sobkowiak 2008; Trudgill 2008a, 2008b). These scholars claim that basing the viability of a pronunciation model on the prevalence of a type of communication is unwarranted. First, Sobkowiak (2008), invoking philosophical arguments, claims that numeric superiority alone does not justify a pronunciation model. Second, Trudgill (2008a), although admitting that there are numerically more NNSs than NSs of English, doubts that there are more NNS-NNS communications than NS-NNS communications. He insists that the absolute number of interactions in English, not the absolute number of communicators who use English, should be the determinative factor, and concludes that "it is safe to assume that there is still very much more native than non-native English usage" (Trudgill 2008a: 78). That is, Trudgill (2008a), like Sobkowiak (2008), believes that pronunciation models should be based not on the numerical superiority of the absolute number of speakers, but rather the absolute number of interactions. This paper attempts to assess whether the central justification for the LFC is valid, and in order to assess its validity, we next turn our attention to the means by which the LFC will be assessed in this study.

3　Methodology

This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How much time do Niigata University students listen to and speak English? 2) Do Niigata University students speak English more with NSs or NNSs? Do Niigata University students listen to NS English or NNS English more? In order to do so, this study used a survey instrument to collect data. The survey instrument used to collect the data for the study was a timesheet which asked the students to check boxes to indicate how much time they spoke or listened to English over the course of a week. The instrument was written in Japanese by one of the authors, and checked by a NS of Japanese.

Survey Instrument

Data was collected on two occasions over a two-week period. However, this study only used the data collected from the second week. The first week of data collection was designed solely to familiarize the participants with definitions and survey procedures. The data set consists of data collected from fourteen different English classes: each author collected data from the classes they teach; one author collected data from six classes, and the other author collected data from eight classes. The total number of surveys that were collected from study participants was 358, 205 from one author and 153 from the other author.

Students were required to check boxes that indicated how many minutes or hours they had listened to or spoken English during the previous week. The survey instrument divides the timesheet into fifteen time interval choices: 1) zero, 2) zero to three minutes, 3) three to six minutes, 4) 6 to ten minutes, 5) 10 to twenty minutes, 6) 20 to thirty minutes, 7) 30 to sixty minutes, 8) one hour to one hour and fifteen, 9) one hour 15 minutes to one hour 30 minutes, 10) one hour 30 minutes to one hour fourty-five minutes, 11) 1 hour 45 minutes to two hours, 12) 2 hours to 2 hours and 30 minutes, 13) two hours 30 minutes to three hours, 14) three hours to four hours, and 15) more than four hours.

Furthermore, the survey instrument was split into two broad sections: the first section at the top of the survey instrument contains three questions to ascertain the amount of English speaking, and the second section at the bottom of the survey instrument contains five questions to ascertain the amount of English listening. In the speaking section, the survey instrument asked students about the context in which they used English. The top three questions of the survey instrument provided the participants with three broad situational contexts for speaking: 1) English usage in class with other classmates and the teacher, 2) English usage outside of class with familiar people (e.g., friends, classmates, family, etc.), and 3) outside of class with unfamiliar people (e.g., strangers, customers at work, etc.). The distinction between speaking and listening was defined in terms of conversational participation. That is, students were told to include English usage in the speaking section if they were participants in a conversation, even though conversation naturally involves listening. In the listening

section, the survey instrument asked students to consider the amount of time spent listening to English in the following contexts: 1) in class, 2) watching TV or movies, 3) on the Internet (e.g., YouTube, websites, etc.), 4) music (on the radio, CDs, iTunes, etc.), and 5) podcasts and radio programs. The timesheet also asked students to consider whether they spoke with NS, NNS, both or "NS/NNS?" for each of the categories. The students were directed to choose the category "NS/NNS?" when they were unsure as to the NS or NNS status of their interlocutors.

The survey was handed out and explained to the students in English and Japanese, together with an activity that had students think about the NS/NNS dichotomy. "Native Speaker" was defined geographically as a person from one of the following countries: the USA, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Australia, or New Zealand. "Non-native Speaker" was defined as a person from any other country. Students were then given approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey based on their memory of English usage over the previous week. As such, the survey instrument is a subjective assessment of English usage and exposure, and not an objective measure of English practice among the students.

4 Results

In the following section, the survey results will be tallied and displayed in 3D bar graphs that compare the exposure to and usage of English according to three categories: NS, which stands for "Native Speaker," NNS, which stands for "Non-native Speaker," and "NS/NNS?," which is the item students were asked to select when they were unsure whether their interlocutors were NSs or NNSs. One chart displays the aggregate results for each item on the survey instrument.

Chart 1: English Spoken in Class with Teachers and Classmates from May 5th to May 11th

122 students of 357 (34.17%) claimed that they spoke English in class with NSs. 271 students of 357 students (75.91%) claimed that they spoke English in class with NNSs. 10 students of 357 students (2.8%) could not determine if their in—class interlocutors were NSs or NNSs. More students claimed that they spoke English with NNSs than NSs in class. The majority of the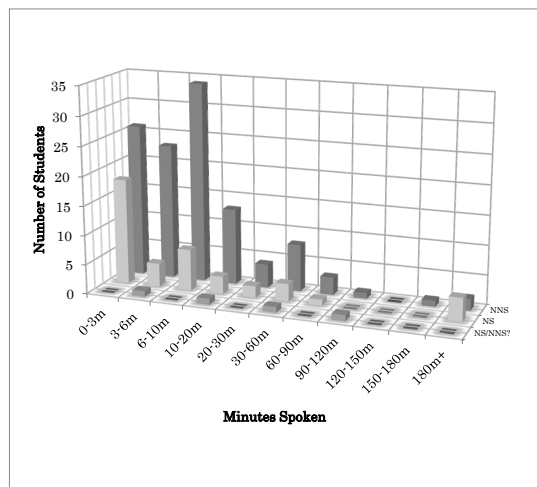 students who claimed that they spoke with NSs, 46 students (37.7%), spoke English with NS for 3 minutes or less. The majority of the students who claimed that they spoke with NNSs, 80 students (29.52%), spoke English
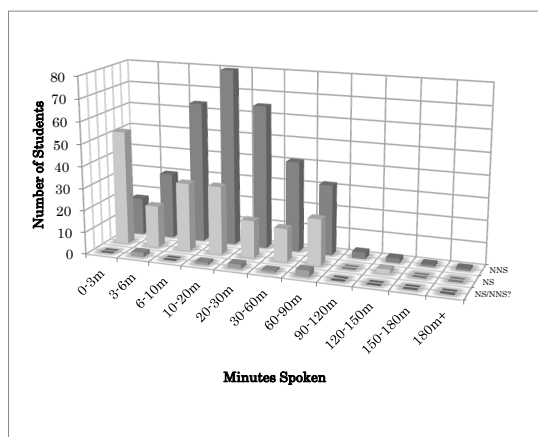
with NNSs for about 10-20 minutes.

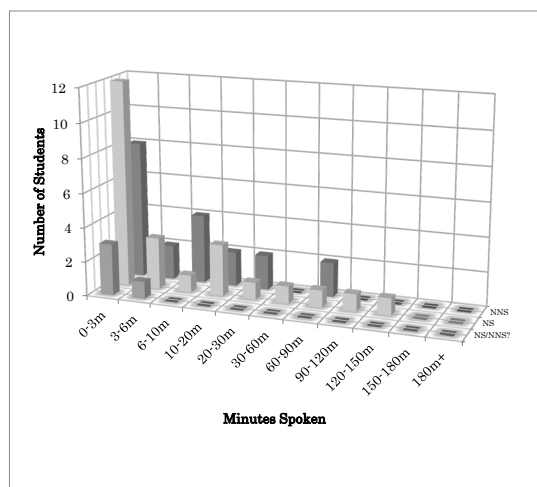*Chart 2: English Spoken Outside of Class with Familiar People from May 5th to May 11th*

Eighteen students of 357 students (5.04%) claimed that they spoke English outside of class with familiar NSs (friends, classmates, colleagues, family, etc.). Ninety-two students of 357 students (24.77%) claimed that they spoke English outside of class with familiar NNSs. Three students of 357 students (0.003%) could not determine if their interlocutor was a NS or a NNS, which demonstrates that three students did not comprehend the explanation of the term "familiar." More students spoke English outside of class with NNSs than NSs. The majority of the students who spoke with NS, nine students (50%), spoke English with NSs for less than three minutes. The majority of the students who spoke with NNSs, 28 students (30.43%), spoke English with NNSs for six to ten minutes. However, the students were not required to differentiate between spoken English homework assignments that were assigned as outside of class work and genuine spontaneous English usage between friends. Accordingly, the data should not be taken as a direct representation of spontaneous English usage outside of class.

Chart 3: English Spoken Outside of Class with Unfamiliar Speakers from May 5th to May 11th

Sevateen students of 357 students (4.76%) claimed that they spoke English with unfamiliar NSs outside of class. Thirteen students of 357 students (3.64%) claimed that they spoke English with unfamiliar NNSs. Four students of 357 students (1.12%) could not determine if his/her unfamiliar interlocutor was a NS or a NNS. More students spoke English outside of class with unfamiliar NSs than NNSs. The majority of the students who claimed to speak English with unfamiliar NSs outside of class, nine students (52.94%), spoke English for less than three minutes. The majority of the students who claimed to speak English with unfamiliar NNSs outside of class, 5 students

(38.46%), also spoke English for less than three minutes. Furthermore, the majority of the students who spoke English with unfamiliar interlocutors whom they could not determine were NSs or NNSs, three students (75%), also spoke English for less than three minutes, which demonstrates a categorical similarity between the three types of interactions.

*Chart 4: Listening to English in Class from May 5th to May 11th*

316 students of 357 students (88.51%) claimed to have listened to NS English in class. In other words, 41 students (11.49%) claimed that they never listened to NS English in class even though the survey was conducted in classes that are taught by NSs, which demonstrates that 41 students neither understood nor followed instructions. 244 students of 357 students (68.34%) claimed to have listened to NNS English in class. More students claimed to have listened to NS
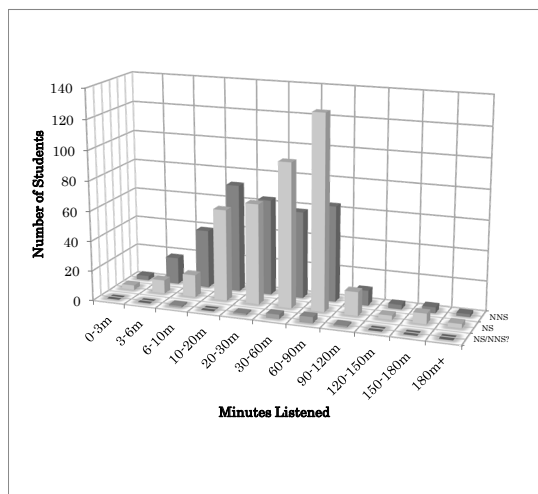
English than NNS English in class. The majority of the students who listened to NS English in class, 143 students (40.05%), listened to English for 30 to 60 minutes. 244 students (68.34%) listened to NNS English in class. The majority of the students who listened to NNS in class, 59 students (24.18%), listened to English for 10 to 20 minutes. 11 students of 357 students (3.08%) could not determine if their in class interlocutor was a NS or a NNS. Among these students, the majority, 4 students (36.36%), listened to in class English for 60 minutes to 90 minutes.

Chart 5: Watching English TV/Movies from May 5th to May 11th
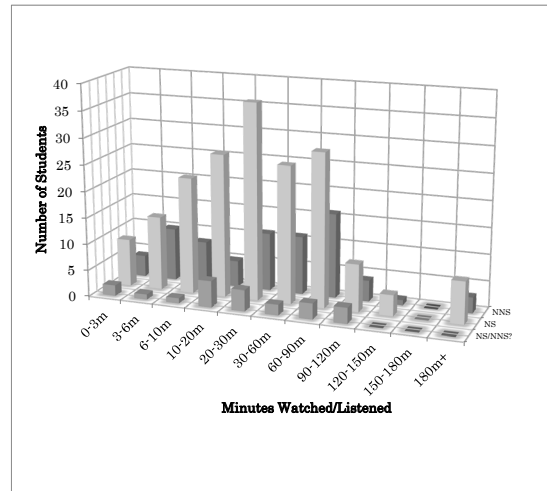
137 students of 357 students (38.37%) claimed to have watched English TV shows or movies in which NS actors appeared. 31 students of 357 students (8.68%) claimed to have watched English TV shows or movies in which NNS actors appeared. More students claimed to have watched English TV shows or movies in which NS actors appeared more than they watched English TV shows or movies in which NNS actors appeared. A majority of the students who watched
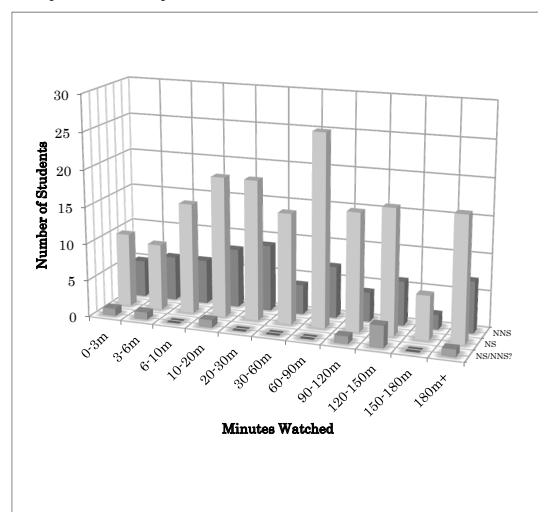
English TV shows or movies in which NS actors appeared, 26 students (18.97%), watched TV or movies for 60 to 90 minutes. A majority of the students who watched English TV shows or movies in which NNS actors appeared, 9 students (29.03%), watched TV or movies for 20 to 30 minutes. 9 students of 357 students (2.52%) could not determine if the actors that appeared in the TV shows or movies that they watched were NSs or NNSs.

Chart 6: Listened to/Watched Internet English Media from May 5th to May 11th

One hundred and fifty four students of 357 students (43.13%) claimed to have watched or listened to Internet English media in which NSs appeared. Forty students of 357 students (11.20%) claimed to have watched or listened to Internet English media in which NNSs appeared. More students claimed to have watched or listened to Internet English media in which NSs appeared than watched or listened to Internet English media in which NNSs appeared. A majority of the students who watched or listened to Internet English media in which NS actors appeared, 37 students (10.36%), watched or listened to Internet English media for 20 to 30 minutes. A majority of the students who watched or listened to Internet English media in which NNS actors appeared, 16 students (40.00%), watched or listened to Internet English media for 60 to 90 minutes. Twenty-one students of 357 students (5.88%) claimed that they could not determine if the actors that appeared in the Internet English media to which they exposed themselves were NSs or NNSs.

*Chart 7: Listening to English Music from May 5th to May 11th*

One hundred and eighty students of 357 students (50.42%) claimed to have listened to English music performed by NSs. ONe hundred and fifteen students of 357 students (32.21%) claimed to have listened to English music performed by NNSs. More students claimed to have listened to English music performed by NSs than NNSs. A majority of the students who listened to English music performed by NSs, 36 students (20.00%), listened to English music performed by
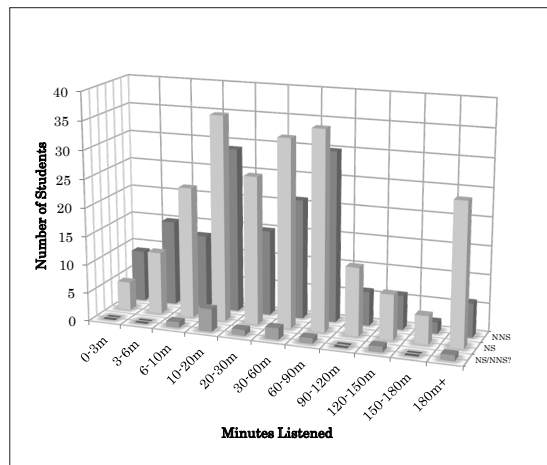
NSs for 10 to 20 minutes. A majority of the students who listened to English music performed by NNSs, 30 students (26.08%), listened English music performed by NSs for 60 to 90 minutes. Eleven students of 357 students (3.08%) claimed that they could not determine if the music to which they listened was performed by NSs or NNSs.

Chart 8: Watching or listening to English Podcasts & Radio from May 5th to May 11th

Thirty-one of 357 students (8.68%) claimed to have watched and/or listened to English Podcasts or English radio in which NSs appeared. Eleven of 357 students (3.08%) claimed to have watched and/or listened to English Podcasts or English radio in which NNSs appeared. More students claimed to have watched and/or listened to English Podcasts or English radio in which NSs appeared than listened to English Podcasts or English radio in which NNSs appeared. Only one student of 357 students (0.28%) claimed
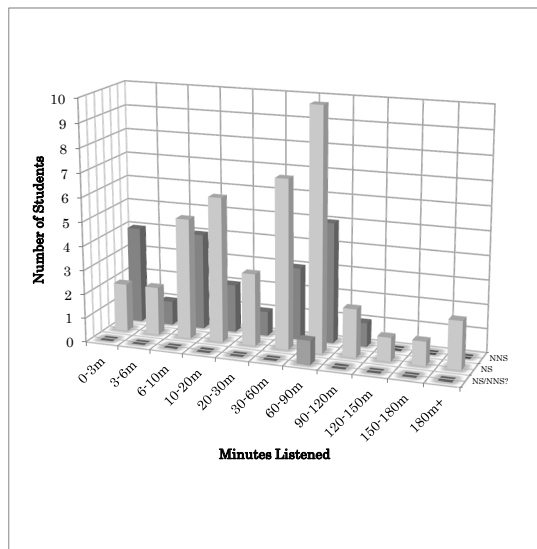
to not be able to determine if the people who appeared in the English Podcasts or English radio which he/she watched and/or listened to were NSs or NNSs.

5　Discussion

This study endeavored to ascertain whether Niigata University students spoke English more frequently with NSs or NNSs, and whether Niigata University students listened more frequently to NS English or NNS English. The results of the survey provide some tentative answers. The results that are displayed on charts 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate that Niigata University students are not only far more likely to use English with other NNSs, they are also more likely to speak English with other NNSs for longer periods of time. Some Niigata University students did speak with NS outside of class, but never in comparable numbers and never for as long. On the other hand, the results displayed on charts 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 demonstrate that Niigata University students were far more likely to listen to NS English than they were to listen to NNS English. That is, Niigata University students are more likely to speak English with other NNSs than with NSs, but are also much more likely to listen to NS English than NNS English.

Although it is true that the students are more likely to speak English with fellow NNSs than NSs, it is also very true that many students did not speak English with anyone at all. As chart 1 demonstrates, only 34.18% of the survey population claimed to have had any English contact with their teachers; in other words, 65.82% of the survey

population never had any spoken English contact in English with their teachers, including their NS teachers at Niigata University—a frightening statistic. But the students have few spoken interactions with other groups of people as well: chart 2 reveals both that about 95% of the survey population had no spoken English contact with NSs outside of class, and that 75% of the survey population had no spoken English contact with NNSs outside of class; chart 3 exposes an even sharper, if unsurprising, deficit of spoken English. Even among the students who did speak with someone in English outside of class, the interaction was temporally superficial—under 10 minutes in almost all cases. Additionally, the English usage that occurred outside of class can be largely attributed to the weekly Skype conversation homework mandated in one of the two author's oral communication classes. That is, almost all of the spoken English among the survey population, whether inside of class or outside of class, was not the result of spontaneous interaction or of independent student volition. While the data *prima facie* indicates that NNS-NNS interaction is more frequent, the low numbers and lack of choice dilute the importance of spoken contact when compared with total overall contact with NS English (i.e., speaking *and* listening).

Of course, how L2 learners actually engage with English is an important factor in the design of any pronunciation and/or listening skills syllabus. The recent focus on learner-centered approaches prevalent in modern SLA theory also places importance on needs analysis and learning goals, as well as a consideration of learner beliefs with regard to how and what the students themselves want to learn. This move towards learner autonomy has also played a role in the recent debate regarding the types of English learners should learn, and whether or not English for international communication would be a preferable model for students (see Jenkins 2007; Trudgill 2008a; Matsuda 2003; Timmis 2002).

If we consider the frequency of learner engagement with different types of English as one of the factors relevant to the development of a pronunciation and/or listening skills syllabus for the students, then the results of this survey tend to indicate that NS English is still relevant to our students. In terms of spoken interaction in English, our results also show that students do speak with NNS more than NS. This finding is in line with arguments proposed by supporters of the LFC who argue that learners do not need to aim for NS pronunciation to be successful communicators (Jenkins 2007; Walker 2010). However, the results also reveal that the students spend significantly more time listening to NS English. Furthermore, upon comparison of overall spoken and receptive usage, it is clear that our students spend far more time listening to English than speaking it. Consequently, a counter-argument in support of a pronunciation and/or listening syllabus based on NS norms could be made on the basis that teaching features of NS English will be more beneficial to the students because aural contact with English is still mainly with NS varieties of English. The data reflects a student preference for NS English, even though such preferences may be subject to outside influences, in

particular, the availability of media and the coerced nature of student contact in English through teacher-directed homework activities.

The results of the survey provide some evidence that supports the teaching of features of NS English, and that NS varieties are still relevant to learners, because students clearly aurally engage with NS varieties far more than NNS varieties. Learner choice and autonomy were key factors behind the establishment of the LFC, and if this is the case then our findings support the teaching of NS varieties because students show a preference for that; in other words, frequency justifies pedagogy. This of course does not preclude the teaching of other varieties of English, but it does suggest that some part of the syllabus should deal with features of NS pronunciation.

Of course, other factors are relevant to decisions about what to teach students and how to design a pronunciation syllabus. Some studies have suggested that it is important to expose students to a variety of different Englishes that will reflect their needs in the real world (Matsuda 2003). However, it is apparent that L2 learners often have a preference for traditional NS varieties and these remain their preferred models (Matsuda 2003; Timmis 2002). Commentators in the NS versus NNS debate have considered the differences between a pronunciation syllabus and receptive skills syllabus, and LFC advocates concede that NS varieties are still relevant for receptive skills (Jenkins 2007: 25).

However, the results of this study should be taken with a healthy measure of doubt. There are several factors that have influenced the potential accuracy and validity of our data. One of the main dilemmas for a study such as this is the definition of "native speaker." Determining who is a native speaker of a language depends on whether one comes at the issue from a linguistic, sociological or political perspective. This study defined "Native Speaker" in accordance with geographical criteria, which is needless to say a gross over-simplification. The definition of "Non-native Speaker" in this study was also problematic because it was defined in negative terms: anyone who was not a Native Speaker was defined as a Non-native Speaker, which is deterministic in the extreme. To further complicate this issue, it can be difficult for speakers to determine if their interlocutor or a speaker is native or not, Despite the fact that a pre-survey exercise and discussion was conducted to highlight the distinction between NS and NNS and then defined to the students as speakers from inner circle countries, some students may have mistakenly believed a NNS was a NS, and vice versa. Another possibility is that the dichotomy between Native Speaker and Non-native speaker was not a salient distinction to the students to begin with; it might be true that the juxtaposition of Native Speaker and Non-native Speaker is more important to the researchers than the students. Indeed, small numbers of students could not determine whether their interlocutors were Native Speakers or Non-native speakers, which attests to that possibility.

Another important factor that could have influenced the accuracy of the data was that students were required to estimate their usage over the whole week and record their results in the time intervals provided. This is a difficult task to perform with accuracy, and it is important to acknowledge that our data may reflect problems with recall of English usage over the preceding week. Further, some students may have overestimated their usage to impress their teacher or recorded an idealized view of how they would have liked to have used English, rather than recording actual usage for that particular week. As such, the results are very subjective.

6 Conclusion

The results of this study allow one to draw some tentative conclusions about student exposure to English both inside and outside of the classroom, which can inform decisions on pronunciation and listening skills syllabi. The results of this study suggest that features of NS English are a relevant consideration for any choices concerning pronunciation and listening skills course designs because there was a clear preference shown for NS varieties outside the classroom. Student choice demonstrates that NS English is an English with which students willingly engage. Similarly, the results of this study suggest that features of NNS English are also a relevant consideration for any choices concerning pronunciation and listening skills course designs. Although opportunities for speaking English seem to be rare, the data does show that Niigata University students speak English with NNSs more often than NSs. This finding concurs with justifications offered by supporters of the LFC, who argue that features of NS English pronunciation are not necessary for effective communicative for NNS of English, mainly because they will not speak with NS very often, if at all.

However, these conclusions should be viewed with a healthy amount of doubt. First, the data this study obtained may not reflect real student choices; after all, many of the interactions tallied in the survey were the product of obligatory homework. Second, students claim to spend significantly more time listening to English than speaking it. Thus a case can be made that it is more valid to teach Niigata University students at least some features of NS English because this will help them understand the English to which they choose to listen, which will feed into more positive experiences with English learning. Proponents of the LFC concede that receptive skills with NS English may be needed, but it could be argued that pronunciation and receptive skills are two sides of the same figurative coin. It would seem that as pronunciation feeds into improved receptive skills as well, then teaching NS pronunciation might benefit our students more than focusing on features useful for mutual intelligibility. Despite the limitations of this pilot study and some of the validity issues with the data, the results tend to support the view that Niigata University students are volitionally listening to NS varieties of English and that NS English is what

teachers need to teach students in order to help them fulfill their roles as international citizens.

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