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'Native speakers', English and ELT

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'Native speakers', English and ELT
Changing perspectives

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Introduction

Traditionally, ELT has tended to establish a dichotomy between native speakers (NSs) and non–native speakers (NNSs). In this chapter, I will show the problematic nature of the concept 'native speaker', I will provide arguments challenging this established division and I will discuss how such dichotomy has, until now, been responsible for the persistent disempowerment of NNSs within the profession.

Historically, many teachers of English have been L2 speakers, so–called NNSs, and they have been responsible for the teaching of English to millions of learners worldwide. Yet their identities, roles and contributions to the profession have, for the most part, been marginalised and remain invisible in mainstream accounts of ELT, whereas NSs have generally been regarded as ideal teachers of English. Additionally, teacher training and, more acutely, ELT materials writing have often been in the hands of NSs, who at the same time have also exerted control on professional practices such as the establishment of teaching goals, approaches and methodologies and models of language use across the profession (Phillipson, 1992).

We should also note from the outset that the term 'native' is rather strongly semantically loaded, even when it is used in areas that are totally unrelated to language and language teaching. Matsuda (2003), for example, argues that the term 'native' often carries positive connotations and there is a consequent negative meaning associated to 'non-native': "*Non-native* is marginal, and *native* is dominant. *Non*-native is negative, and *native* is positive" (Matsuda, 2003: 15). Even in the natural sciences, biologists and environmentalists refer to the negative impact of 'non-native species' invading the natural habitat of 'native' varieties. Non–natives in such a context are equated to 'aliens', as can be observed in the following text taken from a sign that I had the opportunity to read a few years ago at a state park in Minnesota, USA: "Many weeds have pretty flowers, but they are a growing pain. They crowd our native plants which provide wildlife with food and shelter. These invaders are called aliens or non-natives. They are biological pollutants." The term 'alien' is clearly associated with something dangerous that needs to be kept under control. Fortunately, 'non-native speakers' are normally not considered a dangerous species! However, the overall negative connotation of the term still covers NNSs, and they are often regarded as less efficient and less capable of conducting certain tasks involving language, particularly language teaching.

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Current critical issues

Defining 'nativeness'

Noam Chomsky has often been blamed for imposing a vision of 'the native speaker' as the only valid speaker of a language. His often-cited words, "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community . . ." (Chomsky, 1965: 3), have been taken as legitimising the native (ideal) speaker as the object of analysis in linguistics and applied linguistics. However, we must recognise that the relevance of Chomsky's words to ELT has been a misappropriation, as he never referred to *real* people teaching and learning any *real* language, nor did he claim that his work should inform language teaching.

In fact, the dominant status of the native speaker over non-native speakers is such a widespread phenomenon in society and in language teaching that it cannot be simply blamed on Chomsky's words. Rather, cause can be found in largely Western approaches to language that have established the unwritten norm that modern nations must have only one language in order to establish a unified national identity built around the use of that national language (see also Carroll and Combs, and Crookes, this volume). Such national and monolingual approaches have been the norm in most European countries since at least the 1500s, but this ideology can also be found in those non-European nations in which a strong fairly unitary national identity is promoted (e.g. Japan, China, Brazil, Colombia); exceptions include rather atypical cases such as Switzerland and, to some extent, Canada. Consequently, the motto 'one nation, one language' has led to the accompanying assumption of 'one person, one language' in those countries considered monolingual and where language diversity within their borders is hardly, if at all, recognised. Against this backdrop, language has been a determining factor in establishing who is entitled to 'belong' to a given nation or community of speakers, and the notion of 'nativeness' has for a long time been the ultimate measure of identity in such contexts.

Challenging 'nativeness': overlapping language skills and competencies

Recently, however, applied linguists have been concerned with the notion of 'nativeness' and have overtly questioned its usefulness. They have also shown the problems derived from artificially dividing speakers into 'natives' and 'non-natives' without actually attending to the complexities entailed in the act of speaking.

One of the pioneers in challenging nativeness was Paikeday (1985), who declared the native speaker 'dead'. Paikeday's early thesis revealed the need to problematise the native-speaker construct. However, the most influential challenge to the dominant notion of the native speaker comes through the work of Alan Davies, who very carefully attempted to deconstruct the native-speaker concept and ended by claiming that native-speaker competencies and characteristics are not in fact exclusive to speakers born into the language. According to Davies (2003: 210), there are six fundamental ways in which native speakers have been characterised in the research and methodological literature of ELT, of which only the first totally excludes second language speakers. They are:

1   The native speaker acquires the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker in childhood.
2   The native speaker has intuitions (in terms of acceptability and productiveness) about his/her Grammar 1 (idiolectal grammar).
3   The native speaker has intuitions about those features of the Grammar 2 (standard language grammar) which are distinct from his/her Grammar 1 (idiolectal grammar).

4   The native speaker has a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse, which exhibits pauses mainly at clause boundaries (the 'one clause at a time' facility) and which is facilitated by a large memory stock of complete lexical items.

5   The native speaker has a unique capacity to write creatively (and this includes literature at all levels, for example, from jokes to epics, metaphor to novels).

6   The native speaker has a unique capacity to interpret and translate into the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker.

Apart from point one, which directly appeals to the order in which languages are acquired, none of these characteristics establish a firm division between first and second language users. Rather, they appeal to capacities and skills, and second language users can and do develop intuitions about their Grammars 1 and 2, produce fluent spontaneous discourse, write creatively, and interpret and translate. This leads Davies (2013: 5) to make the following claim:

> there are native speakers and there is 'the native speaker.' The first is all of us, the second an idealization. We are all native speakers of one or other code, language, idiolect. Some of us are educated, some not, some literate, some not, some creative orators, some not, and so on. The idea that all these native speakers are at C2, the highest level on the Council of Europe's framework for reference scale, makes no sense. Some perhaps are, but they are unusual.

'Nativeness' and ideology

Whilst Davies' discussion examines nativeness in terms of language users' capabilities, other authors have examined the ideological underpinnings of the concept. In 1992, Phillipson (1992) argued that a 'native speaker fallacy' had contributed to linguistic imperialism, whereby the belief that NSs were the ideal teachers of English facilitated the spread and influence of dominant UK and US language and culture around the world (see also Pennycook, this volume). And in the last fifteen years, several works have further examined the consequences of the simplistic dichotomy which divides all speakers of a language in the two categories of NSs and NNSs. Among such works, we may refer to Holliday's concept of 'native-speakerism'(2005, 2006; see also Holliday, this volume), which he defines as "a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterised by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (Holliday, 2006: 385). Leaving aside the fact that this definition might be interpreted as emphasising an 'East-West division', and accepting that native-speakerism can also affect language teaching and teachers within the Western world, it clearly accounts for the socially accepted superiority of the 'native speaker' over the rest of the world's speakers of English and assigns the former innumerable qualities and values that give them the aura of being the 'ideal language teacher'. The discourse of native-speakerism is evident in the bias against NNS teachers on the international job market (Clark and Paran, 2007; Selvi, 2010), for example, a point we return to later in the chapter.

Holliday (2005) further connects native-speakerism to the cultural narrative of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and to the much broader and perverse ideology supporting the basic division between 'in-groupers' (us) and 'out-groupers' (them): racism. Specific connections between native-speakerism and racism in ELT have been raised, for example, by Amin (1997), Chacón (2006), Kubota and Lin (2006, 2009) and Motha (2006, 2014). Holliday (2005, 2006) further argues that native-speakerism has imposed a preference for a certain type of classroom task and

activity based around the idea of 'learner-centredness', and it identifies non-Western practices and cultures as, for example, 'hierarchical', 'passive', 'undemocratic' or 'traditional'. Consequently, he claims that "dominant professional discourses must be put aside if the meanings and realities of students and colleagues from outside the English-speaking West are to be understood" (Holliday, 2006: 386). More recently, Houghton and Rivers (2013: 14) have expanded the concept and define native-speakerism as "prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination, typically by or against foreign language teachers, on the basis of either being or not being perceived and categorised as a native speaker of a particular language, which can form part of a larger complex of interconnected prejudices including ethnocentrism, racism and sexism". In this, they are arguing that, in particular contexts (e.g. Japan), so-called native-speaker teachers can themselves be marginalised through stereotyping and discriminatory practices.

English as a global language

I hope to have made it clear by now that behind the apparently innocent term 'native speaker' lurks a stigmatisation of individuals who do not fit the socially established pattern of the 'ideal native speaker'. This pattern is often determined by a speaker's place of birth and his or her physical appearance rather than by linguistic and/or pedagogical competences; and this discourse can be applied to native and non-native speakers of all languages. However, focusing on the particular case of English, we observe that the language has spread all over the world in different waves of expansion, bringing it to places where the majority of speakers do not speak English as their first language. This phenomenon is reflected in the establishment of two paradigms in the applied linguistics literature that make these new contexts of English use their main focus – World Englishes (WEs, which, put simply, identifies and recognises the value of localised varieties of English, for example, Indian English or Nigerian English) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF, which refers to English language communication between speakers who do not share first language) (see Seargeant, this volume). WEs and ELF showcase the need to deal with all users of English in the world today and to avoid restricting research to so-called native speakers.

The emergence of ELF, in particular, has challenged the theoretical division between NSs and NNSs. Communicative situations involve speakers who are capable of interacting successfully in English. The communicative success of such oral or written interactions does not depend at all on the place of birth of speakers or the order in which English was learnt (as a first, second or third language) but rather relies on the communicative skills of each of the participants. Thus, a distinction between NSs and NNSs is rendered irrelevant, as some 'native speakers' may fail to accomplish a successful interaction whereas some 'non-native speakers' will manage to reach their purported goal and satisfactorily conclude their interaction. Consequently, Modiano (1999) has proposed the "centripetal circles of International English", a classification of speakers of English as an international language inspired by, but significantly altering, Kachru's three concentric circles (Kachru, 1986, 1992; see Seargeant, this volume). In Modiano's view, an 'inner circle' of English is made up of speakers – both native and non-native – who are proficient in *English as an international language*; in other words, they can communicate in English, but do not necessarily have to follow 'native-speaker' models of English to be successful. Just outside this group, one could find speakers – again, both native and non-native – who are proficient in English but were not efficient communicators in *international* contexts. In other words, native speakers in this grouping can communicate well with other native speakers; non-native speakers communicate effectively in English with speakers who share the same L1 background as themselves. The last group is made of learners who are in the process of developing proficiency in English. The use of the word 'centripetal' to refer to these circles expresses the tendency of all speakers to gradually

move towards the Inner Circle and reach the ultimate goal of being proficient international English speakers. In Modiano's model, therefore, English use and status is not based around 'nativeness' or notions of where speakers were born or the country they come from; rather, it focuses on speakers' proficiency in expressing themselves in English to other speakers of English as an international language.

From native/non-natives to language users

Languages develop and flourish in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and, until recently, such communities of practice were largely determined by geographical constraints, restricting languages to well-defined groups of speakers (with the occasional exceptions of foreign-born citizens who entered a new speech community). Globalisation, however, has lowered such geographical barriers, and now communities of practice exist among people living in distant places and sharing a particular interest or professional focus. Using online technologies or travelling regularly, such communities maintain a constant flux of communication that binds them together regardless of their place of birth and/or residence. These new global communities of practice are establishing a new use of English as a Lingua Franca, as we have seen, that is not necessarily connected to any group of native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011). Rather, what characterises all these members of the global English-speaking community is that they are competent users of English. This leads us to the notion of English language *user* as opposed to *native* English speaker.

Several authors have suggested alternative terms that could successfully act as a substitute for *native speaker*. Noting that there is no reason to maintain the term *native speaker* as the "arbiter of grammaticality and acceptability of language", Paikeday (1985) embraced the alternative term *proficient user*, which more clearly captures contemporary concerns in the areas of linguistics, second language acquisition and language teaching. Rampton (1990), meanwhile, suggested *expert speaker* in order to include all successful users of a language, regardless of their mother tongue or place of birth. And Cook has extensively written about an alternative term – the *L2 user*. According to Cook (1999), this term suits the needs and reality of all speakers who have learned the language as an L2. Cook (2007) specifically claims that the goal of a language learner is to become a 'L2 user' rather than to become a 'native speaker', and therefore L2 teaching should be based on the L2 user as the target model for teaching (Cook, 2005). He further claims that using the native speaker as the goal of language teaching condemns all L2 learners never to reach this unachievable (i.e. NS) status and, therefore, to remain as perennial learners of the language regardless of the level of competence and achievement in English they attain. In Cook's view, once L2 learners can use the language and successfully function in the L2, they become L2 users, and this is, or should be, the goal of L2 language teaching.

When we look into the international dimensions of English and its role as the world's lingua franca, this idea of the L2 user becomes particularly relevant because it describes millions of speakers of the language who are running international organisations, participating at international conferences and meetings or doing business at a global scale for whom English is the main language of professional communication. Such a view is gradually challenging traditional notions of 'native speakers' being the goal, providing the language model and being the arbiter of success in second/English language teaching and learning. Although many language teachers and researchers (both native and non-native) still consider the native speaker the ultimate example of good language use, this perception is gradually changing. More and more of them are taking forward the arguments of those who question the authority of the native speaker, recognising that such authority is based on a fallacy or 'myth' which finds no match in 'real' and contemporary English language usage around the world.

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Implications and challenges for ELT practice and practitioners

Within the field of ELT, these discussions have had a profound impact and have brought the issue of nativeness to the fore, making an increasing number of language teachers and teacher educators aware of the need to challenge pre-established assumptions and recognise the equivalent role that all kinds of English speakers can make to the ELT profession (Braine, 1999). Such pre-established assumptions were – and still are – visible in the higher prestige of NSs over NNSs within ELT and the many examples of discrimination suffered by non-natives across the profession, some of which have been reported in empirical studies, for example Mahboob et al. (2004), Clark and Paran (2007) and Selvi (2010). In all these studies, employers showed a preference for native speakers, and being a NS appeared to be an important feature in the selection of new teachers.

In addition to fighting discrimination by *employers* against non-native teachers, there is still a lot of work to be done to change the minds and preconceptions of many English *teachers* and *learners* in order for them to appreciate the values of different types of language teachers. Simultaneously, we need society at large to address and work towards changing stereotyped views. These are often presented in the media, as reported, for example, in a study showing how non-native speakers are often portrayed in Latin America as incompetent speakers and non-native instructors are considered responsible for the failure of English education policies, whereas native speakers are presented as the ideal solution to the problem of low proficiency in English (González Moncada and Llurda, 2016). Likewise, we need to be aware of problems and discrimination experienced by NSs teaching English in expanding circle countries, where their externally imposed 'native-speaker identity' causes them to suffer from discrimination by local citizens (Houghton, 2013; Rivers, 2013; Rivers and Ross, 2013; see also earlier in the chapter).

Implications and challenges for ELT practice

Once it is accepted that English no longer 'belongs' exclusively to its native speakers, as Widdowson (1994) convincingly argues and as posited by the World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca paradigms, and if we accept Cook's argument (2005; see above) that learners should aspire to be successful L2 users rather than 'imitation' native speakers, then we need to question the common assumption in ELT that native speaker English should be the target for learners. What is the point in teaching specific aspects of a particular variety spoken by a restricted number of people if the goal is to communicate with a much wider and more global population? Consequently, what model of English (if any) should be given to learners? And what variety or varieties should be used in class? These questions are frequently asked by teachers who want to move beyond the dominant native speaker model of English and try to find an answer to their particular classroom needs.

Although the establishment of World Englishes and ELF research has provided powerful arguments for the need to reconceptualise models of English in ELT, the lack of descriptive work on ELF initially made it difficult for teaching professionals to incorporate an ELF approach into their teaching practice. Additionally, initial discussions as to whether ELF was a single variety or not (see Seargeant, this volume) led to questions about whether there would ever be a single standard of ELF to be implemented in language teaching. However, the abundance of current research on ELF has revealed the creativity of ELF users and the diversity of solutions found to solve communication problems. In effect, ELF is now seen as a function or range of practices rather than as a specific variety built around specific linguistic features of English, ending the debate on ELF unity versus diversity, and at the same time clearing the way for proposals that

emphasise English language diversity over alignment with a single standard norm (Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011; Pitzl, 2012). Furthermore, a basic principle in language teaching should be the prioritisation of overall communication over the maintenance of particular native-speaker norms. The proof of successful learning is when a message reaches its target and is understood, rather than concerns about whether an L2 user's production matches the production of a selected group of native speakers. In other words, when we challenge the status of idealised native-speaker language as a target for learning, we automatically make intelligibility the ultimate goal in communication, as we no longer attempt to imitate an imagined native speaker but rather focus on conveying our message to a real audience. Negotiation of appropriate forms by all participants in a conversation – regardless of their L1 – is fundamental.

Thus, a realistic answer to the question of 'What model should be used in teaching?' must point to the need to expose learners to a diversity of *Englishes* in order for them to be well-prepared to understand English spoken by speakers from anywhere of the world. Obviously, each particular group of students will have specific needs and prospects for communicating with some groups of speakers of English more often than with others. Thus, teaching English in Singapore or Malaysia will have to take into account the fact that learners will be more likely to use English with Chinese and Australian speakers than with Irish or Germans; conversely, Italians will probably need to use English with other Europeans more often than with Japanese or Australians. Yet globalisation has made the world a fairly small place, and one should never discard the possibility of communicating in English with somebody living on the other side of the planet.

We also need to distinguish between the productive and receptive skills that English learners and users need. When it comes to receptive skills, given the wide range of possible English varieties that L2 users may encounter in their lives and the strong connection between intelligibility and familiarity with a particular variety (Gass and Varonis, 1984; Smith et al., 2014), the more varieties learners are exposed to, the more able to understand them the learners will be. However, if we are concerned about productive skills, then a different approach is obviously needed, as we cannot reasonably expect learners to speak several varieties of English. For learners to be able to convey their messages in an intelligible manner, they are likely to need to choose less marked forms of the language, avoiding local pronunciations or idiomatic expressions that may obscure the meaning to the nonmembers of their local community of English language practice. As Seidlhofer (2003: 22) indicates:

> Abandoning unrealistic notions of achieving 'perfect' communication through 'native-like' proficiency in English would free up resources for focusing on skills and procedures that are likely to be useful in EIL talk. (. . .) Needless to say, exposure to a wide range of varieties of English and a multilingual/comparative approach (. . .) are likely to facilitate the acquisition of these communicative abilities.

Two further fundamental aspects that need to be considered for ELT practice are language awareness and multilingualism. Throughout the twentieth century, much mainstream ELT pedagogy did not attend to language awareness, that is, explicit conscious knowledge about language (see Svalberg, this volume). This was in part due to the rise of audiolingualism in the 1940s/50s through to the 1960s/70s (see Hall, this volume, ch. 15), for example, and communicative language teaching from the 1970s onwards (see Thornbury, and also Hall, this volume, ch. 15). However, it was also partly due to the fact that language awareness was considered irrelevant for students aiming to achieve native-speaker competence. However, language awareness has been increasingly appreciated since the 1990s (James and Garrett, 1992; Schmidt, 1993; Andrews, 2007), and the challenge to native-speaker authority has emphasised more clearly the important role of language

awareness in language education, as non-native teachers are often more aware of aspects of the language than native speakers, who may tend to rely on their intuitions rather than on their conscious knowledge of the language.

With regard to multilingualism, current approaches to language learning have increasingly questioned monolingual approaches to L2 teaching such as those proclaiming the need to use an 'English-only' approach in the ELT classroom, and the positive role of the L1 – and any previously known languages – in the process of L2 learning has been reappraised (see, for example, Kerr, this volume). Thus, there is an increasing literature claiming that using the learners' L1 in the second language classroom is more a help than a hindrance to language learning (Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005), and, more recently, Creese and Blackledge (2010) and Garcia and Li (2014) have shown the positive effects of moving across languages (which they refer as *translanguaging*) in second language development.

Current developments in multilingual education clearly support the idea that we need to move away from traditional native (monolingual) approaches to ELT. In short, transcending the nativeness paradigm (Brutt-Griffler and Samimy, 2001) contributes new ideas and new foci of attention to ELT by detaching it from idealised visions of native-speaker models and goals and bringing "a more open view of language models and standards, calling into question the need to reproduce a restricted set of socially prestigious forms of language" (Llurda, 2015). This may appear as lacking in ambition to some professionals, who have worked hard to instil the native-speaker ideal in their students. But with the exception of those learners who are in the process of becoming citizens of an 'inner circle' country and who may wish to become as indistinguishable as possible from speakers from that country, the majority of ELT learners worldwide do not need to pass for native speakers. They simply need to be fully competent in using English as a Lingua Franca in any given context or situation they may encounter. Catering for these learners requires changing the way ELT is carried out.

Implications and challenges for ELT practitioners

This section is specifically devoted to issues surrounding NNS teachers. The changing perspectives on nativeness affect all actors in ELT, and teaching approaches need to be transformed and adapted to accommodate new realities. However, non-native teachers have suffered from a lack of self-confidence and a feeling of illegitimacy within the profession (Medgyes, 1994; Bernat, 2008), which has often led to their professional identity being based solely on their 'non-nativeness'. Here, I argue that the new perspectives on English and on nativeness discussed in this chapter will hopefully lead to changes to their identity. Establishing the L2 user (Cook, 2005) instead of the native speaker as the goal of ELT is a fundamental step in this direction, and an increase in opportunities for use of the L2 in class, plus awareness of the role and scope of English as a Lingua Franca, will lead to empowerment and increased self-confidence among NNS teachers of English (Llurda, 2009).

L2 speakers of a language cannot be permanently considered to be L2 learners. At some point, they are bound to be competent enough in using the L2 to be granted the term L2 users (Cook, 2005). When considering the distinction between L2 learners and L2 users, it may be useful to look at who might constitute each of these two groups. As can be seen below, teachers are difficult to classify, and they deserve to be included in a category of their own (Llurda, 2012):

i   Learners: These are the people who initiate their language learning process. They generally hold a rather naïve perspective and may have an idealised vision of the learning process and its goal, which they may tend to think is to become similar (if not identical) to native speakers

(Xu et al., 2010). In the case of young learners, their parents are often willing to pay big sums of money for 'the correct model' and may complain if the teacher they are assigned is not a native speaker. This idealised vision constitutes a very lucrative business in some countries that receive vast numbers of young students who are sent there in order to learn 'proper' English.

ii Users: This group of people is composed of those who have learned the language and have actually had the experience of using it with a diversity of speakers of different origins and accents. These speakers are aware of being speakers of English as a Lingua Franca and have appropriated the language, becoming *owners* of it, with the right to innovate and find new communicative solutions without feeling inadequate (Cook, 2002).

iii Teachers: Paradoxically, not all non-native teachers regard themselves as users of the language, in spite of the fact that they have developed a high level of proficiency in English. Teachers' specific orientations towards mastering the formal aspects of the language, together with traditional training that used to place the native speaker centre stage, may have affected the way they perceive themselves. As a consequence, teachers can be divided into two further subgroups:

a The *essentialists*, who promote the *essential* aspects of the English language and culture, projecting the idea of English as the exclusive property of native speakers. Here, we may encounter many university English departments, for example, anchored on traditional native-speaker values and on the supposed virtues of native varieties over any other variety or accent (Llurda, 2004). These teachers assume the role of ambassadors or even custodians of the *true* (i.e. native-speaker) language (Sifakis, 2009). These teachers often refuse to consider themselves as *users* and keep regarding themselves as *permanent learners* in pursuit of the elusive *native-speaker condition*.

b ELF-aware teachers, who see themselves as L2 users and are aware that the goals of ELT are not to create pseudo-native speakers but to help learners become confident users who can communicate effectively in a diversity of situations and contexts. These teachers prefer to take on the role of *mediators* or *facilitators* rather than *custodians* or *ambassadors*. These teachers do not suffer from low professional self-esteem caused by their permanent quest for the native-speaker condition (Llurda, 2009) and project realistic goals onto themselves and their students.

Obviously, NNS teachers have a big challenge ahead of them, but NSs need to adapt to the new situation, as well. They all are competent users who have often been educated in the traditional paradigm of one standard language form that needs to be protected from *corrupted* forms of language. Many of them are not aware of being ELF users, which may lead to NSs imposing their own particular realisation of the language or may lead NNSs to fear not performing up to the expected (native) standard together with a fundamentalist fervour in defending the values of the native speaker. As pointed out by Sifakis (2007), a paradigm shift is taking place, and teachers need to gradually change their views along with it. A traditional orientation includes such aspects as standard language ideology, native speaker orientation, monolingual bias and negative attitude towards errors, whereas the new ELF-based orientation is based on such concepts as multilingualism, World Englishes, ownership and pre-eminence of intelligibility over native speaker imitation. Sifakis and Bayyurt (2015) report how a training programme in Turkey for non-native teachers with an ELF/WE perspective has engaged participants in a transformative journey. At the end of the process, they were more aware of their own condition as non-native teachers and of the issues involved in ELT, as well as broader issues related to their national educational system. Thus they became more reflective teachers, better prepared to critically take on the challenges of the profession.

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Thus, the question that remains is: 'What kind of teachers are needed in ELT?' One may still wonder about the qualities of native and non-native teachers, but separating NSs and NNSs only distracts our attention from the key issue of teacher training and expertise. Thus, the answer to the above question can only be inclusive: all kinds of teachers are needed in ELT, as long as they develop professionally and show expertise in teaching the language as needed by their students. Medgyes (1994), for example, claims that cooperation between native and non-native is optimal, and similar conclusions have been reached by de Oliveira and Richardson (2004) and Matsuda and Matsuda (2004). Thus, all teachers add their specific talents to the profession, and it is fundamental that they go through adequate and extensive training. Unfortunately, teachers and their employers often think that knowing the language makes good training unnecessary. However, in order to develop expertise, teachers must develop insights and skills, plus a critical stance, that can only be acquired through training. Teachers' biographies also play a role, and there are obviously differences between teachers who have travelled around the world and those who have never left their hometown, as there are differences between those who have heard and spoken English since birth and use English as their main language of daily communication with their immediate relatives and those who have learned it as an additional language and mainly use it for professional purposes. But the relevant issue is that language teaching does not require teachers to be monolingual users of English but rather people with enough competence, awareness, and resources to help learners become confident users of the language. Different personalities, different biographies and different teaching styles are equally valid to reach such a goal. There still are teachers who lack self-confidence and who may feel inadequate for the job. Others may feel overconfident due to their 'native' condition. They all need to abandon the native-speaker paradigm, based on an ideal perception of language, and focus on their own condition as users, their teacher awareness and their teaching skills.

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter has been to examine changing perspectives around the 'traditional' distinction between native and non-native speakers and the values that were attached to each type of speaker. Contemporary accounts suggest that the dichotomised classification of language users in these two apparently mutually-exclusive groups makes no sense when actual speakers communicating in the real world are considered, particularly when the community of users of English worldwide is not restricted to members of a given localised community, but instead comes from each corner of the world. Changing perspectives on native speakers and on the nature of English as a global lingua franca have immediate implications for ELT practice and practitioners.

Thus, views on native and non-native speakers are changing, and these changes are bringing a paradigm shift in the way ELT is understood and practised. Such a transformation in perspective is not yet complete, as many teachers and learners are still guided by idealised, native-speaker oriented visions of English and English language learning. However, it is my contention that perspectives are gradually changing in a process that will not stop until it has reached all members of the global ELT community.

Discussion questions

- Is it really possible to define a 'native speaker' of English? What difficulties can you think of regarding this concept?
- To what extent do 'native speaker' discourses prevail in your own professional context? Is there any element of discrimination based on the native/non-native distinction?

- What advantages for the learner may be derived from an approach that focuses on the 'L2 user' rather than the 'native speaker' as the goal of ELT?

Related topics

Appropriate methodology; Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Language awareness; Language teacher education; Method, methods and methodology; Politics, power relationships and ELT; Questioning 'English-only' classrooms; World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca.

Further reading

Braine, G. (2010) *Nonnative speaker English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth*. New York: Routledge. (This book is a readable compendium of where and how far research on non-native English speaker teachers has brought us.)

Davies, A. (2003) *The native speaker: Myth and reality*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. (This is an updated version of a book originally published in 1991 in which the author thoroughly dissects the meanings and implications of the native speaker concept.)

Llurda, E. (ed.) (2005) *Non-native language teachers: Perceptions, challenges and contributions to the profession*. New York: Springer. (A collection of papers showing how non-native teachers can contribute to the language teaching profession; it includes empirical studies expanding the scope of non-native teacher research, opening new directions and applying a diversity of methodologies.)

Medgyes, P. (1994) *The non-native teacher*. London: Macmillan. (The beginning of interest in non-native teachers, with innovative suggestions and implications for the language teaching profession.)

Moussu, L. and Llurda, E. (2008) 'Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research'. *Language Teaching*, 41/3. 315–348. (A review article providing a comprehensive view of research, including an introductory discussion of the concept of nativeness and an overview of methods of research, with indications of possible future directions.)

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