The issue of native and non-native speakers of English, relevant to a large number of questions in Applied Linguistics, is mainly important if related to native and non-native English-speaking teachers of English as a second or foreign language.

**NNEST or non-native English-speaking teachers** is an acronym that refers to the growing body of English language teachers who speak English as a foreign or second language. The term was coined to highlight the dichotomy between native English-speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST). Issues related to NNESTs attract the attention of language teachers, language specialists, teacher educators, and graduate students from all over the world.

**Native Speaker vs. Non-Native Speaker Dichotomy**

Historically speaking, native speaker is defined as “the first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language” by Leonard Bloomfield. Later on, theoretical linguistics realm placed native speaker construct into an idealized position and assumed that native speaker is the only reliable source of linguistic data by formulating the construct that of an “ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community”, as defined by Noam Chomsky. Since then, the construct has been critically discussed in the field of English language teaching. Some of the researchers argued that second language acquisition research under the dominance of idealized native speaker model creates a “monolingual bias in second language acquisition (SLA) theory”,
and “elevates an idealized native speaker above a stereotypical ‘nonnative’ while viewing the latter as a defective communicator, limited by an underdeveloped communicative competence”. On the other hand, it was further argued that the native speaker “exists only as a figment of linguist’s imagination” and concluded that it is “more like a myth than a reality.”

A questionnaire was administered to 216 subjects, ESL/EFL teachers in ten countries. The analyzed data show that differences perceived by non-native speaking teachers bias their self-image and attitudes to teaching.

The academic literature and educational principle suggest that native and non-native English speaking teachers should be treated equally, yet in many countries there is a broad social and commercial preference for native speaker teachers which may also involve racial issues. Attitudes towards native and non-native English speaking teachers have typically been investigated through questionnaire surveys, but, since such attitudes may involve prejudices, other research methods designed to elicit implicit attitudes may be preferable. In this study, the Implicit Association Test was used to investigate the implicit attitudes of Thai students towards native and non-native English speaking teachers, and results were compared with explicit attitudes elicited through a questionnaire. The results indicate that attitudes towards native and non-native teachers are complex with an explicit preference for native speaker teachers, but no implicit preference and warmer explicit feelings towards non-native speaker teachers. The reasons for and implications of these contrasting findings are discussed.

Although English is now a recognized international language and the concept of native speaker is becoming more doubtful every day, the empowerment of the native speakers of English as language teaching professionals is still continuing (McKay, 2002), especially in Asian countries like China and Japan. One of the latest examples showing the empowerment of the native English speakers comes from Turkey planning to embark on a project to hire 40,000 native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to collaborate with the local non-native English teachers (NNESTs) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Turkey. This study tries to reveal the preliminary reactions of pre-service NNESTs about this project through data obtained from open-ended surveys. The content analysis of the data showed that even before the project was initiated, most of the participants objected to it. Although some of the participants favored the project as they believed that the NESTs might be more helpful for students to improve speaking skills and to increase their cultural awareness, the majority of the participants held negative attitudes towards the project mainly because of employment and pedagogical concerns. Keywords: Native English-Speaking Teachers, Non-Native English Teachers, Turkey, Qualitative. © 2013: Abdullah Coşkun and Nova Southeastern University.

I also argue that, in ELT, native-and non-native-speaking teachers reveal considerable differences in their teaching behaviour and that most of the discrepancies are language-related. It does not follow from this, however, that non-native-speaking teachers are by definition less efficient. Indeed, I would contend that a deficient command of English may even have hidden advantages. The explicit message of this
Although non-native speakers (NNS) English teachers have taught alongside native speaker (NS) teachers for centuries, studies on the effectiveness of NNS teachers, their self-perceptions, or the attitudes of students towards these teachers, have only been conducted recently. Most of these studies have been conducted in the USA in ESL contexts. However, the majority of students worldwide learn English in foreign language (EFL) contexts, and, consequently, most English teachers work in such contexts too. This paper reports on a study conducted in Hong Kong which investigated the attitudes of university students towards their NNS English teachers. The students were queried through a questionnaire and interviews. On the whole, the students had a favorable attitude towards their NNS English teachers, although some shortcomings were indicated. Third (final) year students appeared to have a more favorable attitude than first year students.

Although historically much teaching of English has been done by nonnative-English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), research on their concerns as English educators has been neglected.

The Native English Teachers (NETs) Scheme has been in place for over 20 years in secondary schools in Hong Kong and yet how students perceive these teachers is under-researched. This article reports a study which analyses student perceptions of the advantage and disadvantages of learning English from NETs and their non-native counterparts, local English teachers (LETs). Data were collected through semi-structured group interviews with 30 secondary students studying in three different schools in Hong Kong. Content data analysis was conducted, and main themes that emerged from interview transcripts were categorized. Results show that the perceived advantages of LETs include their proficiency in students' L1, their knowledge of students' learning difficulties, the ease students experience in understanding their teaching, and in communication. The perceived advantages of NETs are their good English proficiency and ability to facilitate student learning. The disadvantages of one category of teachers appear to be the reverse of the advantages of another. Data also show that some students experience anxiety when encountering NETs and tend to prefer certain teaching styles. This study has significant implications for classroom teaching practice and teacher professional development.

This study revisits the issue of the native versus the non-native speaker in the area of ELT. Its main goal is to examine the teaching behaviour of two groups of teachers, native and non-native, who have exhibited differences not only in
terms of their language backgrounds, but also in terms of their qualifications and relevant teaching experience.

**Status of NNESTs in ELT Profession**

Problematic nature of the native speaker-non-native speaker dichotomy was blended with the growing body of literature discussing the unfair treatment and marginalization of non-native English-speaking teachers in the ELT profession. Robert Phillipson (1992) formulated "native speaker fallacy", which suggests that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaking teacher. Being a non-native speaking teacher was considered to be a distinct quality by George Braine (1999) who argued that “the very fact that non-native speakers of a language have undergone the process of learning a language makes them better qualified to teach the language than those who are born to it”.

The inappropriateness of discriminatory practices against NNESTs in English language teaching profession was highlighted by George Braine (1999) as follows:

"...highly ironic, considering the profession’s strident championing of multiculturalism, diversity, and other sociopolitical causes, often on behalf of ESL students and immigrants. Although ESL students are praised and admired for the multiculturalism and diversity they bring into language classes, non-native English teachers, who can contribute their rich multicultural, multilingual experiences, are often barred from the same classes."

Peter Medgyes (1994) characterized native English-speaking teachers as informal, flexible, and confident and characterize NNEST as follows:

- good role models
- effective provider of learning strategies
- suppliers of information about the English language
- better anticipators of language learning difficulties
- sensitive to language learners’ needs
- facilitators of language learning as a result of shared mother tongue

**Advantages of using the term “NNEST”**

There are basically two arguments that support the use of term "non-native English-speaking teachers". First, it is believed that the term is necessary to distinguish between native and non-native English-speaking teachers as well
as strengths attributed to these groups. Second, it is also believed that the term is necessary to highlight the discrimination based on the dichotomy

**Disadvantages of using the term “NNEST”**

Opponents of the term argue that “differentiating among teachers based on their status as native or nonnative speakers perpetuates the dominance of the native speaker in the ELT profession and contributes to discrimination in hiring practices” [13](Maum, 2002). Below are some of the alternatives to replace the term “NNEST”:

- Anglophone Teachers of English
- Bilingual English Speaking Teacher (BEST)
- Legitimate Teacher of English
- Transnational English Teacher
- Translinguistic English Teachers [14]
- Multilingual/Multicultural English-speaking Teachers
- Diverse English-speaking Teachers

**Discriminatory and Anti-discriminatory Practices**

Despite the fact that today, about 80% of English language teachers in the world are non-native English-speaking teachers,[15] English is no longer considered to be an exclusive possession of native speakers,[16] and it “belongs to all people who speak it, whether native and nonnative, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or non-standard” (Norton 1997),[17] NNESTs encounter discriminatory practices all around the world. There have been several research studies exploring the hiring preferences of administrators which empirically demonstrated the importance of ‘nativeness’ as a job requirement. In addition, online job repositories such as Dave’s ESL Café, Chronicle of Higher Education, or TESOL’s Online Career Center host job advertisements which include ‘nativeness’ as a job requirement. Discriminatory practices against NNESTs in English language teaching generated a series of institutionalized anti-discriminatory practices such as “Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practices” [22] and “Position Statement against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers of English in the Field of TESOL” [23] In addition, it was decided in ASEAN 2005 Conference to establish “Centers for English Language Training” in South-East Asian countries to support local solutions to local needs by means of local tools.[24]
An extremely active discussion on a LinkedIn professional group called English Language Services Professionals has caught my interest. This group is one of the most active English teaching groups on the Internet, with almost 13,000 members. Here's the question that begins the discussion:

*I've been looking for a teaching opportunity for two years and I'm sick of the typical "Native speakers only" phrase. Why do they allow TEFL certificates for non-natives then?*

This is a discussion that needs to be had in the world of English teaching. I have my own opinion on the matter, but let's first start off with a quick overview of the current situation in the English teaching world. To be very general, as well as to oversimplify the discussion, let's admit that there is a perception by some that native speakers of English are better English teachers.

This idea that only non-native speakers of English need not apply for English teaching jobs comes from a number of arguments:

Native speakers provide accurate pronunciation models for learners. .1
Native speakers innately understand the intricacies of idiomatic English usage. .2
Native speakers can provide conversational opportunities in English that more closely mirror conversations that learners can expect to have with other English speakers. .3
Native speakers understand native English speaking cultures and can provide insight that non-native speakers cannot. .4
Native speakers speak English as it is actually spoken in English speaking countries. .5
Students' and students' parents prefer native speakers. .6

Here are some counterarguments to the points above:

Pronunciation models: Non-native English speakers can provide a model of English as the Lingua Franca, and will have studied correct pronunciation models. .1
Idiomatic English: While many learners would like to speak idiomatic English, the fact is that most of the English conversation they will have, and should have will be in non-idiomatic standard English. .2
Typical native speaker conversations: Most English learners will be using their English to discuss business, holidays, etc. with OTHER non-native English speakers for the majority of the time. Only true English as a Second Language students (i.e. those living or wanting to live in English speaking countries) might reasonably expect to spend most of their time speaking English with native English speakers. .3
English speaking cultures: Once again, most English learners will be communicating with people from a wide variety of cultures in English, that
doesn't mean that UK, Australian, Canadian or US culture will be the main topic of conversation. Native speakers use 'real-world' English: This is perhaps of importance only to English as a Second Language learners, rather than English as a Foreign Language learners. Students' and students' parents prefer native English speakers: This is more difficult to debate. This is purely a marketing decision made by the schools. The only way to change this 'fact' would be to market English classes differently.

**The Reality Of Non-Native English Speakers Teaching English**

I can imagine that a number of readers might also realize one important fact: State school teachers are overwhelmingly non-native English speakers in non-native English speaking countries. In other words, for many this is a non-issue: Non-native English speakers already teach English in state schools, so there are plenty of teaching opportunities. However, the perception remains that, in the private sector, native English speakers are preferred in most cases.

**My Opinion**

This is a complex issue, and having benefited from the fact that I am a native speaker I admit to having had an advantage for certain teaching jobs throughout my life. On the other hand, I have never had access to some of the cushier state teaching jobs available. To be blunt, state teaching jobs offer much more security, generally better pay and infinitely better benefits. However, I can also understand the frustration of non-native English speakers who have gained mastery of English, and who can help students in their own native language. I think there are a few criteria for making a hiring decision, and I offer these for your consideration.

1. The native / non-native teacher decision should be based on students' needs analysis. Are the learners going to need to speak English in native English speaking countries?
2. Qualifications must be considered: Just Speaking English doesn't make a teacher qualified. Teachers need to be judged on their qualifications and experience.
3. Non-native speakers have a distinct edge for teaching lower level students as they can explain difficult grammar points in learners' native tongue with great accuracy.
4. The perception of native speakers is best seems antiquated in the global English speaking environment. Perhaps it is time for private schools to revisit their marketing strategies.
5. Native speakers do have the edge when it comes to idiomatic language skills. Imagine an English learner is going to move to the US to work in a company, a native English speaker with a bit of knowledge about that industry will be able to quickly latch on to idiomatic language, as well as jargon that the student will need.
Please take advantage of the opportunity to express your own opinion. This is an important discussion, that everyone can learn from: teachers, both native and non-native speakers, private institutes that feel the 'have to' hire native speakers, and, perhaps most importantly, students.

**What do you think? If you were a learner, would you prefer to be taught by a native speaker?**

Generally, I agree with the article but do take exception to the comments about native speakers from different English-speaking countries, i.e., teachers from '...two English speaking countries sound entirely different so the model pronunciations they give will not be the same'. I am assuming that the author is from the United States so feel the need to point out that not all Scots sound like Mike Myers in 'I married an Axe Murder' nor all Jamaicans use patois. Of course there might be slight differences in pronunciation but if this so much as to be a problem has she never heard of video, CDs, etc.? Also, I am a native speaker teaching in Spain and, I can assure you, many Spanish teachers of English have quite abysmal pronunciation of basic English vocabulary. My son, who is bilingual, attends the local school but often has difficulty in understanding the non-native teachers of English. Try getting any non-native teacher of English to say 'muscle' or, better still, 'debris'!

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**anastasiya** said on 20 August 2013 07:27:
from my learning languages experience I can say that non-natives can be better teachers. natives usually feel difficulties in explanations, while non-natives see everything that can be difficult for their students and everything their student should pay attention to. non-natives usually have technology of explaining the material + they can show the structure of the language, so their student will definitely have better understanding

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**windchild81** said on 8 July 2013 01:35:
Why would anyone want to learn from someone who does not have native level English?
The need to explain grammar? Most teachers spend too much time with
grammar, and the kids don’t spend any time speaking or reading or even LISTENING to English.

Unless you have NATIVE LEVEL speaking, etc, why take this job?

**gabrielaguedes** said on 12 February 2013 17:42:
I am Brazilian and an English Teacher. It took me a lot of learning, training, and an exchange experience to say that if you have the ability, care, patience, etc. Your student won’t care if you are a native or non-native. You just need to be well prepared to embrace your career as a teacher.

**grina** said on 12 September 2012 03:08:
The native speakers can pronounce well but not all of them can explain the grammar well. I have nice and bad experience with some native speakers. I think maybe because they don’t prepare their lesson well or lack of grammar. For me native or non native teachers have the same ability as long as they prepare their teaching material well (grammar, pronunciation, class management, etc).

**Erinna** said on 12 August 2012 01:40:
I totally agree with Benjiman, teaching is much more than pronouncing and mastering a language, teaching means knowing how to enrich and challenge students' knowledge.

PS. Of course there are lots of vocational and great native teachers!

**Benjiman** said on 3 July 2012 03:08:
Obviously, I'm non-native speaker, but I can say that I'm a good teacher. I've been preparing high school students to present FCE for the last 8 years with great success.... And we'll all agree that this (FCE) is a highly respectable level. No matter where you were born, teaching is a matter of vocation, commitment and never-ending work. I've been lucky enough to gain my students' trust and to have rapport with them, too. In my opinion, this is more important than just having an excellent pronunciation, which is something a native-speaker didn't actually worked for. It was something naturally given. Good methodology, rapport and knowledge of the subject will certainly make the difference.

catejazz said on 27 March 2012 15:14:
Unfortunately, native speaker teachers rarely understand the difficulties of their students (unless they have learned the students' mother tongue as their own second language)... I totally agree with Thompathou, with teenagers and adults beginners it's often better a non-native speaker teacher. Not to mention the fact that non native speakers can prove as living models for their students. (How often have I told my students: If I made it, anyone can!!) I am both a native speaker teacher for my students of Italian and a non native speaker teacher for ESL and Spanish and I've worked with a lot of native speaker teachers - unfortunately that doesn't equal to them being great teachers..

marcellka said on 29 October 2011 20:47:
Though I am not a native speaker, I dare to say I am a good teacher. Many of my students passed their entrance exams in English. Being native speaker does not equal a good teacher. If you study English and education at University, you can be a good teacher.

zoeharrison said on 21 September 2011 14:35:
aker does not equal a good teacher. If you study English and education at University, you can be a good teacher.
**zoeharrison** said on 21 September 2011 14:35:
The native vs non-native theme can be applied to any language - French, German, Arabic, Russian etc.

When I studied French and German in high school, my teachers were 100% fluent, native speakers. They helped us to learn all the nuances of the language, as well as be exposed to the proper accent. Proper training / learning is an extremely important element for those planning to work or study abroad. Imagine learning to speak French from someone who has a Greek accent (nothing against the Greeks as I am one) as opposed to someone who has an authentic French accent. Which experience will serve you best when you decide to work in Paris?

**thompathou** said on 12 July 2011 12:41:
I know of very few native English speakers who are good at teaching lower adult level students, especially if they have no experience with learning a second language themselves.

Native speaker teachers shine with young learners (whose brains are like sponges) and upper intermediate-advanced learners.

At least that's my 2p

**dannyfatkullin** said on 17 March 2011 13:20:
I am a learner and I would definitely prefer a teacher who is a native speaker. Most non-native teachers’ English is lacking, to say the least. It makes no sense to say a teacher who is fluent in the local language would be better in any way;
the whole point is to speak the local language as little as possible, so a native English speaker who doesn’t know a word of the local language would be ideal.

Native speakers and non-native speakers can both succeed as ESL teachers.

THANKS

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