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Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Teacher Distinctions: From Dichotomy to Collaboration

■ **The discussion on differences between native and nonnative English-speaking teachers constitutes a complex issue, involving linguistic, sociocultural, and pedagogical aspects of language teaching. The present paper seeks to uncover the myths of the native and nonnative dichotomy and make a realistic assessment of how teachers of two different backgrounds can contribute to quality teaching. It first attempts to define each category, revealing a rather blurry and artificial boundary between the native and nonnative groups. Second, the prevalence of the native speaker model in L2 education is recognized. Following that is an analysis of the pros and cons of English instruction by native and nonnative English-speaking teachers. The discussion concludes with a presentation of collaborative teaching as an innovative pedagogy that can maximize the benefits of the native and nonnative differences.**

Introduction

The following is an excerpt from a letter of rejection sent to a nonnative English-speaking teacher (NNEST) who applied at a language school in London:

> I am afraid we have to insist that all our teachers are native speakers of English. Our students do not travel halfway round the world only to be taught by a non-native speaker (however good that person's English may be). (Illes, cited in Medgyes, 2001, p. 432)

Indeed, this type of hiring decision based on native speakership is quite common. From the students' perspective, the view expressed in the rejection letter may be understandable, particularly in the ESL setting, as the students naturally seek to learn "authentic" English, which, it is perceived, NNESTs lack. On the other hand, the hiring decision solely based on the applicant's native speakership and without fully looking into his or her teaching qualifications and credentials seems nothing but a malfeasant discriminatory behavior on the part of the language school.

Thus, the issue of the native and nonnative dichotomy often invites a heated discussion, involving a wide range of complex matters such as the unclear definition of English nativity, language prestige and ownership, insufficient linguistic proficiency and low professional self-esteem associated with NNESTs, just to name a few. On the other hand, Kamhi-Stein (2001) reports the prospect of an increasing number of NNESTs, particularly in California, in the coming years, which makes the native versus nonnative discussion one of the critical and urgent issues to be dealt with in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

How should we, then, perceive the existing nativeness distinctions in the teaching workforce? How does the dichotomy affect the students? Is there any way to maximize the benefit of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in teaching professionals? The present paper attempts to disentangle the underlying components of the native versus nonnative speaker constructs. First, defining features of native and nonnative speakers are presented, revealing individual variability and nonconformity to the traditional taxonomy. Second, the native speaker model, which is widely employed in language teaching as an ultimate goal, is examined in an attempt to investigate the motivating force behind the native and

nonnative dichotomy. Third, the strengths and weaknesses of both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and NNESTs are analyzed, which may either accentuate or underplay the dichotomy. Fourth, some of the benefits from team teaching between NESTs and NNESTs are explored, indicating the gradual, necessitated transition from the dichotomy paradigm to a collaboration effort.

Native and Nonnative Definitions

The primary step in investigating the native and nonnative dichotomy is to understand the basis on which each category is defined. The most common definition of native speaker is that of bio-developmental, proposed by Davies (1991): "The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language" (cited in Cook, 1999, p. 185). In other words, a person is a native speaker of the L1 he or she grew up with. This bio-developmental approach to defining the native speakership, in essence, presents an unchangeable fact that characterizes individuals linguistically.

Perhaps going beyond the bio-developmental determination of native speakers is somewhat ambiguous. Stern (1983) suggests the following features that constitute native speakers:

1. A subconscious knowledge of rules;
2. An intuitive grasp of meanings;
3. The ability to communicate within social settings;
4. A range of language skills, and;
5. Creativity of language use. (cited in Cook, 1999, p. 186)

In regard to the subconscious knowledge of rules and intuitive grasp of meanings (1 and 2), Cook (1999) argues that some native speakers may lack metalanguage skills. In other words, they may be able to recognize grammaticality and immediately process the meaning but not be necessarily capable of explaining their rationales behind those judgments. Concerning the ability to communi-cate within social settings (3), Cook points out that native speakers do not always act appropriately in social situations. Also, creativity of language use (5) may be evident only in a handful of native speakers, such as poets or rappers. Thus, the presented features do not precisely apply to all native speakers, although a deviation from these criteria does not disqualify native speakers as such. In addition, individual variability within a group of native speakers is far greater when English varieties and dialects based on regional, occupational, generational, and social differences are taken into consideration. Kramsch (1997) conclusively states "the notion of a unitary native speaker [is] artificial" (p. 359).

Nonnative speakers, in contrast, are generally conceived as speakers of a language that is not their L1. Theoretically, they are deemed to lack the native speaker features presented above. However, Phillipson (1992) argues that nonnative speakers can learn native speaker abilities such as fluency, knowledge of linguistic expressions, and cultural understanding (cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). Davies (1991) also denies the unique and permanent difference between native and nonnative speakers, claiming that "L2 learners can acquire native linguistic competence of the language" (cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 415). Cook (1999), on the other hand, modestly maintains that some L2 users may achieve near-native proficiency. Liu (2001), moreover, admits his own linguistic challenge in being a NNEST in the ESL environment. In sum, nonnative speakers exhibit differing degrees of native or near-native attributes based on their education, the amount of exposure to the target language and its culture, motivation, aptitude, and so on. Thus, an attempt to classify based on nativity tends to reveal individual variability and results in blurry descriptions of native and nonnative speakers.

Prevalence of Native Speaker Model

Although the distinctions between the characteristics of native and nonnative speak-

ers are not always clear-cut, the prominence of the native speaker as the target language model is evident in L2 teaching. While the interlanguage analysis in second language acquisition (SLA) research may indicate the field's emphasis on L2 learners and its detachment from the native speaker, the research also tends to measure the learner's achievement against the norms shared by native speakers (Cook, 1999). The fact that native proficiency is considered the ultimate goal of L2 learning may not be overtly discussed in language teaching, argues Cook (1999), calling the native speaker "a ghostlike presence" (p. 190). Examples of the dominant yet implicit influence of the native speaker can be seen in many realms of language teaching, including teaching materials. The *Collins COBUILD English Course* (Wills & Wills, 1988), for instance, consists of a collection of native speaker usage and is described as a work that "focuses on the real English students will encounter and need to use in today's world" (cited in Cook, 1999, p. 189). Kramsch (1997) acknowledges the prestige endowed on native speakers since the rise of communicative pedagogy in the 1970s, claiming that "today foreign language students are expected to emulate the communicative skills of native speakers" (p. 359). What Cook emphasizes, based on this widespread native speaker model, is its detrimental effect on L2 learners as it imposes on them unrealistic goals of achieving native proficiency. Consequently, he asserts, the learners become "imitation or failed native speakers" (Cook, 1999, p. 195). Cook, therefore, calls for more emphasis on L2 users without assessing their achievement in relation to native speakers, which only points out, as Kramsch (1998) puts it, "what they are *not,* or at least *not yet*" (cited in Cook, 1999, p. 189).

On the other hand, Stern (1983) opposes Cook's view and states, "The native speaker's 'competence' or 'proficiency' or 'knowledge of the language' is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching" (cited in Cook, 1999, p. 188). Nonetheless, the prevalence of the native speaker as a standard may indicate more than just employing a specific group for a model from a practical and pedagogical point of view. Specifically, Labov (1969) discusses the phenomenon of linguistic ethnocentrism, characterized by the unreasonable expectation for the minority group to conform to the norm of the majority group, whether the group classification is based on race, class, sex, or any other features (cited in Cook, 1999). Kramsch (1997) also explicates the assumption that the primary motivation for language learning is to "become one of 'them.' But more often than not, insiders do not want outsiders to become one of them" (p. 364).

A similar social and political perspective for justifying the native speaker dominance in language teaching is Kachru's linguistic colonial construct, which seeks to describe the language users based on the colonial power structure (1997, cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). In brief, the languages of the colonizers must perpetually overpower those of the colonized. Also worth mentioning is the issue of the ownership of the English language, which is based on the assumption that a language belongs to its native speakers. This type of argument also encourages the native speakers to secure their prestigious status, particularly when the language is of considerable importance in international communication and thus receives a greater demand for usage than others. Nayar (1994) argues that native speakers "have laid claim to the rights and responsibilities not only of controlling the forms and norms of English globally but also of dominating the theory and practice of its teaching and research" (cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 417).

From the viewpoint of the native versus nonnative dichotomy, then, the native speaker model prominent in the language education sector clearly favors NESTs, as they themselves can serve as an exemplary model to the students. NNESTs, on the other hand, tend to develop professional inferiority complexes, given their linguistic impediment, and to be constantly self-conscious about how they are perceived by their students and colleagues

(Cook, 1999; Liu, 2001; Medgyes, 2001). Particularly, the area of pronunciation, in which it is considered relatively more difficult to acquire native proficiency, may exaggerate the nativeness of the teachers and further emphasize conformity to native standards. Does this mean NESTs are better teachers than NNESTs? The following section examines the strengths and weaknesses of both NESTs and NNESTs.

Strengths and Weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs

Many researchers have expressed their doubts about the assumption that native speakers can teach the language more effectively than nonnative speakers. Phillipson (1992) calls it the native speaker fallacy, arguing that "there is no scientific validity to support this proposition" (cited in Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999, p. 415). NESTs and NNESTs have distinct characteristics, which have either positive or negative effects when they engage in language teaching.

First, as mentioned earlier, the discrepancy in linguistic abilities between the two groups constitutes the major argument in favor of NESTs. Medgyes (2001) also discusses the unique and insecure position of NNESTs, in which they play dual roles of teaching and learning English at the same time.

Second, differences in language skills lead to different teaching behaviors. NNESTs have a tendency to stress accuracy, forms, grammar rules, and formal registers. NESTs, in contrast, are likely to emphasize fluency, meaning, language in use, oral skills, and colloquial registers (Medgyes, 2001). Medgyes attempts to rationalize these differences in emphasis and concludes that NNESTs may focus on the areas where they feel more secure in teaching. She further elaborates the controlled and cautious pedagogic approach of NNESTs:

> Preoccupied with their own language difficulties, [NNESTs] are reluctant to loosen their grip over the class. As group work and

pair work often create unpredictable situations full of linguistic traps, [NNESTs] favor more secure forms of class work, such as lock-step activities. (p. 435)

However, Jun Liu, a nonnative assistant professor of English at the University of Arizona, shares his open and constructive approach to teaching, disclosing his lack of understanding in the language and turning it into his strength, even gaining the students' trust as a result. He states:

> My students appreciate me because I tell them that I need to consult my native speaker colleagues about a word, a phrase, or a sentence. My students appreciate me because I provide them with examples of my struggles completing difficult writing tasks. They appreciate me because they feel free to comment on different drafts of a summary or paper and criticize papers including mine. As a NNES professional, I empower my students through empathy, sailing with them to the shore instead of summoning them from the shore. (Liu, 2001, p. 59)

Thus, NNESTs have the advantage of providing a better learner model to the students, as opposed to the language model presented by NESTs (Medgyes, 2001), which makes the third point of difference in the native versus nonnative construct. On this account, Cook (1999) comments that NNESTs can alleviate, if not eliminate, the students' language-learning anxiety by presenting an attainable model, while NESTs may intimidate the students with their linguistic perfection and unfamiliar cultural expressions.

Fourth, as revealed in Liu's confession above, NNESTs may better assist the students by sharing specific language-learning strategies with which they have actually experimented and succeeded. According to Wenden and Rubin (1987), language-learning strategies are defined as "specific actions employed to facilitate the learning and recall of one or several components of proficiency"

(cited in Medgyes, 2001, p. 437). Different learners employ different strategies. Therefore, the strategies that proved effective for the NNESTs may not work for the students, yet the discussion about various strategies can lead to the students' increased awareness for discovering the strategies that best fits their personalities, language backgrounds, and levels of motivation. The students can surely benefit from the NNEST's practical advice and caring encouragement based on his or her own experience in second language acquisition.

Fifth, NNESTs are skillful in articulating the aspects of the English language, since they have deliberately learned, not acquired, the language with an objective and analytical outlook. Medgyes (2001) summarizes the components of linguistic expertise expected to be seen in language teachers: a) language proficiency, b) language awareness, and c) pedagogic skills. As discussed earlier, native speakers tend to lack metalanguage skills, or language awareness. While the first component, language proficiency, is normally associated with NESTs, the language awareness ability tends to be one of the strengths of NNESTs. Language awareness specifically represents "explicit knowledge about the language, which does not necessarily assume near-native language proficiency" (Medgyes, 2001, p. 437). Therefore, NNESTs can use their conscious learning of the target language to explain specific linguistic rules, for example, in a manner that the students can logically comprehend.

Sixth, based on their superior metalanguage skills, NNESTs can better predict the areas of relative difficulty for the students, which allows them to create effective syllabi and lesson plans that anticipate the students' linguistic needs. Medgyes (2001) states, "Whereas NESTs have better intuitions about what is right and wrong in language use, [NNESTs] have deeper insights into what is easy and difficult in the learning process" (p. 437). Of course, experienced NESTs can do the same. If they have the experience of learning a foreign language, it is even more benefi-

cial since it indicates that they have an analytical view of language in general. Nonetheless, having achieved a high enough level of proficiency in the target language to teach it, NNESTs have the advantage of a comprehensive and critical view of the language, which benefits them in recognizing and relating to the students' learning difficulties.

Still, caution needs to be taken in applying the NNEST's learning experience. For example, if a NNEST's L1 is Japanese, his or her L2 learning experience may be quite different from that of a student from, say, Saudi Arabia. The students' L1 knowledge affects greatly the areas of difficulty that they find in the target language. Other factors, such as cognitive and affective variability, also point to diverse areas of the L2 property in determining the degree of difficulty. Thus, learner variation needs to be taken into account when evaluating learner performance, which is particularly crucial in an ESL setting where the classroom consists of students with various backgrounds.

Seventh, although Medgyes (2001) raises the assumption that NNESTs are more sensitive to their students than NESTs, it is rather an overgeneralization based on partial evidence, and thus debatable. He claims that NESTs have an ambiguous idea of their students' desires and objectives, as well as their linguistic and cultural upbringings. However, the degree of sensitivity to the students' needs is based on the teacher's personality, teaching philosophy, and experience, which does not require the native and nonnative dichotomy to play a role in its discussion.

On the other hand, Liu (2001) describes his humanistic teaching style, which is based on serving the students' needs. He claims that his struggle in learning English and western culture allowed him to develop greater understanding of what his students are up against. In other words, his sensitivity to the students is, to a large extent, the result of having taken the same path the students are pursuing. This type of unique experience is more likely to belong to NNESTs. In this regard, NNESTs may have a better chance of developing greater sensitivity toward the students' learn-

ing challenges. Nonetheless, there are many empathetic NESTs as well, regardless of their lack of experience in learning the target language as their L2. Therefore, the sensitivity criterion should be attributed to neither NESTs nor NNESTs as their general tendency.

Last, NNESTs can make the most of their ability to communicate in the students' mother tongue, which, however, generally applies to the EFL context. The ability to explain some aspects of the target language in the students' L1, nonetheless, is considered to be one of the strengths of NNESTs. Historically, the use of the students' mother tongue in ESL instruction constituted one of the critical points of discussion in second language acquisition (Medgyes, 2001). Specifically, NESTs asserted English-only instruction, driven by their insecurity about being unable to speak the students' L1. Yet, in the 1990s, sensible use of the students' mother tongue was allowed (Medgyes, 2001). The decision was based on the recognition of the students' L1 as a valuable tool to teach the L2. However, the L2 instruction in L1, or with a combination of L1 assistance, again, applies only to a monolingual classroom.

Thus far, various strengths and weaknesses of both NESTs and NNESTs have been examined. Although NESTs typically are perceived as better teachers than their nonnative counterparts because of their native instinct in the English language, NNESTs also possess unique and effective features that can be used in language classrooms. The present section has naturally highlighted the strengths of NNESTs, since their capabilities and potentials tend to be underestimated, as seen in the rejection letter introduced at the beginning of this paper. Nonetheless, as Medgyes (2001) emphasizes, both NESTs and NNESTs "are potentially equally effective teachers, because in the final analysis their respective strengths and weaknesses balance each other out. *Different does not imply better or worse!*" (p. 440). The following section will investigate some specific ways to maximize the strengths of NESTs and NNESTs, while compensating for their weaknesses.

Collaboration

Medgyes (2001) encourages team teaching, or collaboration, between NESTs and NNESTs:

> Since each group [has] its own strengths and weaknesses, they would complement each other well in any school. A proportionate number of natives and nonnatives would give the further advantage of offering a variety of ideas and teaching methods. (p. 439)

Collaboration effort is an attempt to underscore the positive qualities that NNESTs bring to the teaching, which is the main tenet of the difference approach (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). On the other hand, the dominance approach places NNESTs in relation to the NESTs' completeness in teaching qualifications, exaggerating, implicitly or explicitly, the deficiencies attributed to NNESTs (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). When working with NESTs as equal and respected colleagues, however, NNESTs, as well as NESTs, are empowered by learning from each other and together contributing to successful teaching in an innovative way. Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) claim that collaboration is not only desirable but also unavoidable. With the field's increasingly diversified makeup of teaching professionals, collaboration between the teachers of linguistic, cultural, and social variations has become one of the most common teaching styles in recent years. Consequently, the establishment of an effective communication channel among the teachers by working collaboratively with one another toward predetermined common goals brings considerable benefits, generating well-rounded lesson syllabi and leading to further professional growth.

Nunan (1992) defines team teaching as "a system whereby a group of teachers jointly undertake a program of work with a group of students" (cited in Medgyes, 2001, p. 439). In practice, several native and nonnative teachers agree to enter into a collaborative rela-

tionship, in which they exchange teaching ideas and concerns by way of presentation, discussion, journal exchange, and so on, and share the teaching time, if they decide to and are allowed to by the school program. Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) elaborate ways for winning teacher education based on team teaching: "[The collaborative] model strives for integration (NESTs and NNESTs), cooperation (mutual sharing), and addition (NEST strengths plus NNEST strengths), all of which can lead to the type of collaboration that increases the effectiveness of teacher education programs" (p. 110). The most notable example of collaborative teaching in the NEST-NNEST context is the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, more commonly known as the JET program. The program invites native English speakers to Japan, where they teach English to Japanese learners, assisted by qualified Japanese teachers of English (Tajino & Tajino, 2000, cited in Medgyes, 2001). The success of the program has been documented and often referred to as an example of effective NEST-NNEST instruction.

Carvalho de Oliveira and Richardson (2001) provide a detailed analysis of collaborative teaching, in which they describe their own team teaching experience that resulted in better instruction and teacher empowerment. Specifically, Luciana Carvalho de Oliveira (a NNEST) and Sally Richardson (a NEST) initiated a collaborative teaching practice at California State University, Hayward (CSUH). Some of the benefits for Luciana were improved vocabulary and pronunciation and a better grasp of sociolinguistic implications in the target language, which led to more self-confidence and a wider range of teaching techniques. On the other hand, Sally, the NEST, gained a practical understanding of the students' learning processes and strategies, an internalized knowledge and sensitivity toward other cultures, enhanced modification skills to adjust her English to the specific level of the students, and so forth. Collectively, skills of the NEST and NNEST benefited the students, providing them with more mean-ingful opportunities to increase their cultural and linguistic awareness.

Moreover, the collaborative teaching additionally benefited both teachers by reducing preparation time, since they could share the course curricula and teaching materials for their respective classes. Feedback and evaluations were exchanged after the instruction for further improvement. Constructive discussion between the two generated many innovative and inspirational teaching ideas. One of the pivotal advantages of collaborative teaching is that the participating teachers can "together accomplish and learn more than they could if they were working alone" (Saltiel, 1998, cited in Carvalho de Oliveira & Richardson, 2001, p. 123). The team teaching case study by Luciana and Sally demonstrates just that.

In addition, the two educators also attribute their successful collaboration to appreciating the differences in each other's views, teaching styles, and expertise. Baldwin and Austin (1995) emphasize that a successful collaborative relationship entails all the team members' understanding and practice of mutual trust and respect. In particular, partnership between NESTs and NNESTs, who tend to differ in their cultural, educational, and social orientations, may require strenuous effort to establish a trusting relationship. Yet, the benefits to be reaped from such collaborations are immeasurable.

Conclusion

The issue of the native versus nonnative dichotomy has received considerable attention in recent years. As a clear indication, in 1998 a caucus was established in the TESOL organization in an effort to address and clarify the perceived complexities related to nonnative teaching professionals (Kamhi-Stein, 2001; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2001). The present paper has examined various aspects of the native and nonnative distinctions, first defining each category, recognizing the prevalence of the native speaker model in L2 education, analyzing the pros and cons of learning the

target language from NESTs and NNESTs, and finally presenting collaborative teaching as an innovative teaching method that can maximize the benefits of the native and nonnative differences.

Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) propose a new term, "international English professional," to replace the native-nonnative dichotomy and call for the implementation of the following recommendations to pursue a new direction for a more equitable and empowering structure in the field:

1. The reexamination of [NNESTs'] experience through their self-representation, exploring how their goals and values contribute to the shaping of the international professional;
2. The adoption of discursive practices and paradigms in TESOL that place [NNESTs] at the center rather than at the periphery by discarding the native-nonnative dichotomy as the main construct through which they are conceived;
3. The exploration of the diversity of the international English professionals' experience from ESL and EFL contexts, so that the…teacher preparation program's goals are balanced between the two;
4. The drawing of implications for SLA and teacher education in different international contexts. (p. 428)

The stated goals above acknowledge the "multicompetence" of NNESTs (Cook, 1999, p. 190), respecting and valuing their contributions to the field, rather than segregating them and perpetuating the fruitless division between native and nonnative teachers. On the other hand, Liu (2001) suggests that awareness of the nonnative status, self-cultivation, and self-refinement are the keys for NNESTs to excel in the field. In short, mutual effort on the part of both NESTs and NNESTs is required to put an end to the discriminatory and unproductive dichotomy, so that regardless of language background, all teachers can fully engage in developing the students' boundless potentials.

In addition, Kramsch's perspective on nativeness should portray the issue with a refreshing outlook:

> Seen from the perspective of linguistic travel and migration rather than from that of the traditional sedentary, bounded opposition native/nonnative, the notion of native speakership loses its power and significance. Far more interesting are the multiple possibilities for self-expression in language. In that regard, everyone is potentially, to a greater or lesser extent, a nonnative speaker, and that position is a privilege. (1997, p. 368)

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