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## How TESOL Educators Teach Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers

This paper reports the results of a survey of California TESOL educators about issues related to nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). A good deal of research suggests that NNESTs are as effective, if not more so, than native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and that their treatment in today's work world should be reconsidered; in addition, much research has interrogated the "native/nonnative" dichotomy itself, that is, whether we should or even can believe in "native speakers" and "nonnative speakers" of English. What seems to be missing, however, is a discussion of what graduate TESOL educators should be doing with nonnative English-speaking master's students, how they already interact with them, and if and how they treat them in any way "differently." The survey, conducted by 2 professors in a MA TESOL program, asked TESOL educators in California about how they work with and teach future teachers of ESL or EFL who are both native speakers and nonnative speakers.

### Introduction and Study Purpose

Research into issues related to "nonnative" speakers of English who become English language teachers has, by now, come into its own as a genuine academic field with its own rich array of subfields. Recent comprehensive texts such as Braine (2010) and Mahboob (2010), as well as the "classics" (such as Braine, 1999), attest to the field's legitimacy; these texts, the culmination of years of work by myriad researchers, also provide solid theoretical foundations for understanding the important roles NNESTs assume in their professions.<sup>1</sup>

One topic that still makes little appearance in the extant literature, and which this paper's two authors have noted is little discussed otherwise, is how TESOL educators treat their own MA TESOL students who are nonnative English speakers (NNSs), or how they *should* treat them, or whether TESOL educators should even consider nonnative-speaking students differently in any way. To be sure, much has been written about TESOL trainees in practicum courses, which are almost always a culminating experience in MA TESOL courses. Kamhi-Stein (2004a)—especially Part 3—provides guidelines for how to im-

prove conditions for NNESTs in practicum courses in various contexts (Brady & Gulikers, 2004; Lee, 2004) and the use of journals and journal sharing for MA TESOL practicum trainees (Brinton, 2004; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2004). Lee (2004) directly addresses NNESTs' language proficiency and the ongoing need for "improvement" thereof (pp. 244-246), a major theme that arises in the results of the current survey.

Other sources that take on directly the topic of NNESTs' language proficiency, and how teacher educators can and should address it in classrooms, are in the volume edited by Mahboob (2010). Barratt (2010) presents a set of 30 strategies for preparing future NNESTs (as well as NESTs) on nonnative English-speaker equity issues. Several of the strategies reflect concerns that our survey's respondents report having had through their years of teaching, including "Raising Awareness About NEST/NNEST Proficiency" and "Creating Awareness of Different Englishes." Whereas Barratt suggests that these are indispensable knowledge areas for future teachers of EFL/ESL, some of our respondents seem to believe that educating students on their own language proficiencies is either not their job or not particularly important. Similarly, Nemtchinova, Mahboob, Eslami, and Seran (2010) make a strong argument for including activities and assignments in graduate classes for improving NNESTs' linguistic and pragmatic competences, and not just in a stand-alone "special" course but integrated into courses already being taught. (All these sources reflect Liu's [1999] suggestion that nonnative-speaking TESOL students should be given more language training, though he argues for actually separating native-speaking from nonnative-speaking.) As we shall see, some of our survey respondents would take issue with this suggestion as well, feeling instead that language improvement is "not their job" and is best dealt with by testing a student before admission to a graduate program.

While we applaud the curricular suggestions outlined in the abovementioned literature and would be thrilled to see them implemented on a widespread basis, our observations have been that those sorts of classroom activities are rare in MA TESOL programs. In fact, questions around these topics (NNESTs' language proficiencies, their readiness for teaching a language they are themselves learning, etc.) have been particularly striking to this paper's authors, two fairly recent junior professors in a California MA TESOL program. Moussu and Llurda (2008) report that up to 40% of MA TESOL students across the US are nonnative English speakers, and our program's percentage is comparable. Before (and since) joining the faculty, however, we have never received formal or informal guidance on issues regarding our NNESTs-to-be.

As we began teaching, therefore, we faced questions: How are our nonnative-speaking and native-speaking MA TESOL students different, generally (if they indeed are)? Should we treat them differently in our TESOL theory classes (and not just the practicum), and if so, how? Should we provide them extra help? Should we grade them down for grammar or pronunciation errors? How should we talk to them about "nativeness" and "nonnativeness" and about global English varieties? How should we handle the personal conflicts we feel regarding any of these questions?

As new professors are wont to do, in order to answer these questions we turned to local colleagues for guidance and discussion, and as a result of that, became interested in how other (seasoned and junior) educators across California might answer them. We thus decided to conduct a survey inquiring into the habits and practices of California TESOL educators and their MA students—both those students who grew up with English as their first language, and those who came to English at a later time. This paper reports the results of that survey.

### Method

This study's survey text, as presented to respondents, appears in the Appendix.

As noted above, we had our own informal questions of curiosity about how California TESOL educators approached instruction with their native- and nonnative-speaking students. Through a brainstorm of such questions, the two of us generated a short set of four open-ended survey questions. We wanted to keep the number of questions low in order to not overly tax our respondents' time (thereby encouraging a better response rate); we also decided that the "issue questions" (i.e., questions on the matter of native- and nonnative-speaking students) should be open ended to allow for greater creativity in responses. The four open-ended questions were followed by five brief biographic/academic questions.

Responses to the survey arrived online via the SurveyMonkey website (Finley, n.d.) in Fall 2009. We recruited respondents via e-mail, having scanned the websites of numerous California institutions' MA TESOL programs for contacts therein, and using our own personal contacts; we also posted messages to the e-mail list of the Non-Native Language Educators' Issues (NNLEI) Interest Group of CATESOL.

Forty respondents started the survey, and 36 of those (90%) completed it. The total number of respondents for each of the four content questions (open-ended questions 1-4, as listed in the Appendix) was 38 (95%), 35 (85%), 35 (85%), and 26 (65%), respectively. Question 4 specifically noted, "If none [i.e. no response], skip to the next question," which largely explains the lower yield on that question. The percentage return provides a solid representation of the target population as it easily exceeds the "magic sampling fraction" of 10% (Dörnyei, 2007). Moreover, all responses except for question 4 exceed the minimum sample size of 30 or more that Hatch and Lazaraton (1992) argue is needed to achieve a normal distribution.

After receiving all responses, we compiled and printed them in one large file, grouped by question, and read them through—both of us separately, first—to discern common themes, using open coding. The two of us then met to discuss the themes we had each independently found and then reread the responses, this time calibrated by the themes and by our ongoing discussion (focused coding). The themes and categories that appear below in the Results and Discussion section are the consequence of this method (an adaptation of the suggestions in Esterberg, 2002, wherefrom also the terms "open coding" and "focused coding").

## Results and Discussion

The discussion below follows the structure of the survey itself and its order of questions. Questions 1 and 2 each have a section of their own (as the responses to those were more numerous), while questions 3 and 4 are combined. The questions are reprinted here for easier reference. All quoted survey responses are as the respondents originally wrote them, with no editing corrections.

**Open-Ended Question 1 of 4:** What changes, if any, do you make in your teaching to accommodate nonnative speaking (NNS) students? Guiding questions – not necessary to answer all or in this order: What support do you provide to help with NNS student writing? What support do you provide to help with NNS student speaking? What else do you do to help NNS students become successful TESOL professionals? Please provide a rationale for your answers.

Question 1 received the largest number of written responses (36), and those responses tended to be quite extensive and detailed. In examining the responses, we found that answers clustered into three general themes: specific changes made to accommodate nonnative-speaking students, referral to outside support for assistance, and little or no accommodation made for nonnative-speaking students.

### *Specific Changes to Accommodate Nonnative-Speaking Students*

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they make specific changes to accommodate their nonnative-speaking students. The types of changes indicated fall roughly into two categories: additional class preparation and enhanced feedback.

A number of respondents noted that they engaged in greater preparation before teaching to avoid points of possible confusion for nonnative-speaking students:

I try to make an extra effort to review and edit my instructions for all assignments, checking for places that might be hard to NNSs understand (due to my wording, assumptions re background knowledge, vagueness, etc.).

I usually try to be as explicit as possible about what I am asking them to do ... being explicit about my expectations (save for assignments, or oral participation, etc.) helps to ensure that everybody gets the same message about what is expected, and reduces unfair stacking up the deck in favor of students who already share a lot of my expectations.

Central to these comments is an awareness of how language itself can be a source of confusion for many nonnative-speaking students. To avoid such confusion, many respondents used specific techniques that contribute to greater

clarity in the classroom. As the above comments suggest, linguistic choices that are vague or lack specificity may cause confusion for nonnative-speaking students. Many respondents indicated that to avoid this sort of confusion, they take great care with their choice of language and they spend additional preparation time examining their assignments and requirements for any sources of potential confusion. Respondents also noted that in addition to this careful attention to crafting clearly worded assignments, expectations, and explanations, they offer additional support to nonnative-speaking students through the provision of a variety of materials such as rubrics, sample assignments, study guides, practice tests, and so on. The support provided to nonnative-speaking students through these types of additional preparation benefits NS students as well. It is unclear with the current data, however, whether such additional preparation would take place in the absence of nonnative-speaking students. If not, then the presence of nonnative-speaking students would appear to facilitate better classroom practices in general.

A second change noted in many responses related to the provision of additional feedback to nonnative-speaking students. Such support almost invariably related to writing:

I make it a point to help all my students with writing but now that I think about it, I do more with my NNS. I often teach L2 writing and I extend my instruction to my NNS TESOL students as well.

I give grammar, word choice, and stylistic feedback to NNS students on their writing. I give responses to ideas in one color, and language feedback (indirect if I feel Ss can self-correct) in pencil. ... I know that many colleagues give little/no feedback on grammar, but my opinion is that students' own writing provides an ideal context for noticing and understanding one's understand grammar and vocabulary errors and for becoming aware of their recurring problems.

These comments focus on two separate issues related to language proficiency. Because the vast majority of teacher trainers in TESOL have had prior experience teaching ESL/EFL, they naturally bring with them their lived experience working with nonnative-speaking students. In MA TESOL classes this results in a greater focus on the writing skills of their nonnative-speaking students and additional feedback on both grammar and discourse problems that their students may be having. While feedback on the grammar and organization of student writing is not among the "official" responsibilities of a professor whose task it is to train future English teachers, many respondents indicated that they willingly offer additional support to their nonnative-speaking students. Clearly, one of the reasons for doing so is their own prior teaching experience; however, another reason, exemplified in the second comment above, relates to notions of language acquisition and learning in general. In this view, providing nonnative-speaking students with feedback on writing allows them to notice, better identify, and eventually correct their own errors.

### ***Referral for Outside Support***

A number of respondents indicated that although they do not specifically address the challenges that nonnative-speaking students face in class, they also do not completely ignore their needs. Instead, students are referred to outside resources for support with writing. For example, one respondent noted that:

Our MATESOL program at [name withheld] has designed a special course, partly in response to university guidelines on writing requirements for all graduate students, but largely in response to the specific constraints faced by NNS, who not only are asked to compose in a second language, but who also are usually not required to compose much back home in their L1 as HS where university students. This one semester course is comprised only of NNS who are MATESOL students and is usually taught by a MATESOL faculty member.

In this program, nonnative-speaking students are provided with additional support on writing and speaking through a specific course designed to address their needs. This design removes some of the pressure that faculty may feel to address linguistic or cultural problems in their content classes, and it also indicates a recognition that some nonnative-speaking students may need additional assistance with language to be successful at the MA level.

Other comments reflected a similar position and suggested that nonnative-speaking students needing additional assistance should be referred to various campus services for support:

I do, however, recommend that NNS students get assistance from the Writing Center available on our campus if they feel the need for it or I see the need for it in their writing. I do not penalize NNS students for speaking with an accent, obviously, but it is my expectation and that they write grammatically correctly and in the proper academic style.

This comment reflects a similar perspective to those that indicated little or no accommodation for nonnative-speaking students. In this view, the instructor is responsible for identifying students in need of assistance and for making a referral to the appropriate campus-support service, but it is up to the students to pursue that help and to make the adjustments and corrections to their writing on their own. This perspective again reflects the idea that nonnative-speaking students in a graduate TESOL program should be treated in the same way as their native-speaking counterparts, but that nonnative-speaking students may need to seek additional assistance to “play at the same level.”

### ***Little or No Accommodation for Nonnative-Speaking Students***

In contrast to the responses discussed above, some respondents commented that they make little or no accommodation for nonnative-speaking students in their teaching. For example, one respondent stated:

I don't provide any extra support beyond what I would provide for anyone else—they get feedback on their writing and extra help if they ask for it. I guess my feeling is that if they are graduate students in a M.A. TESOL program and want to teach English, they should hang with the classes with little or no accommodation.

This sentiment was echoed in a number of other comments, such as:

I make no accommodations to the syllabus or course of study. Any accommodations to workload or assignments is offered to all.

There is a minimum TOEFL/IBT score expected of students in order to get into the MS TESOL program. Beyond that there are no special accommodations made in the program for students since the program they are in prepares them become teachers of English and they need a minimum competency level in order to do this.

Several important observations emerge from these comments. First, there is a strong sentiment among many respondents that any changes or accommodations made to a course should apply to both native- and nonnative-speaking students. Because these students are engaged in graduate study, these respondents argue, all students should adhere to specific expectations of graduate course work. Embedded within these comments is the notion of treating everybody the same regardless of background, linguistic or otherwise. In this view, making changes to accommodate nonnative-speaking students would mean adjusting educational standards, which few would argue to be favorable. One respondent did acknowledge the challenges that nonnative-speaking students face in this regard:

The only extra support I provide is moral: I tell non-native speakers/writers (in private) that, since they're studying in a language that is not their first, they naturally have extra challenges that the natives do not.

This theme of holding students to the same standards is echoed throughout the survey, though the specific means of doing so, as we will see in a later section ("Equality" Versus "Equity"), is quite varied, as is the interpretation of what it means to treat all students the same.

A second reason respondents gave for not making any accommodations and how they teach nonnative-speaking students relates to specific expectations about the linguistic proficiency of their nonnative-speaking students. As noted in the comments above, several respondents argued that nonnative-speaking students should have sufficient academic proficiency in English to handle graduate course work in English. Moreover, several comments suggested that because English will be at the heart of the future profession of nonnative-speaking students in MA TESOL programs, they should have a certain level of English competence.



**Open-Ended Question 2 of 4:** Do you hold NNS students to the same linguistic standards that you apply to your students who are native speakers (NS) of English? Guiding questions – not necessary to answer all or in this order: How do you address issues of grammatical accuracy in NNS student writing? In other words, do you overlook inaccuracies that you might find problematic in the work of NS students? Please provide examples of the types of things you might overlook. How do you address grammatical accuracy in student presentations or in practicum work? How important are issues of grammatical accuracy when NNS students are in front of the class? Under what circumstances would you feel it was important to comment on language issues in NNS student speaking and writing? Please provide a rationale for your answers.

Question 2 was designed to focus attention on whether or not instructors maintain the same linguistic expectations for both native-speaking and nonnative-speaking students. In some ways, this question is related to question 1 since different linguistic standards would indicate a specific change to how teachers instruct nonnative-speaking students. Its focus, however, is narrower and queries how instructors address language problems with their nonnative-speaking students. We will discuss student writing and student speaking separately.

### ***Hold Students to the Same Linguistic Standards***

Unlike the responses to the first question, which displayed a fairly even distribution between instructors who made changes and those who did not, the responses to question 2 were uniform in perspective and argumentation. Outside of a handful of responses, all respondents argued that the writing of nonnative-speaking students should be held to the same linguistic standards as native-speaking students. Here is one example:

I definitely comment on grammatical issues in student writing. As I would if it were a multilingual writing course, I point out patterns of errors. I do not “overlook inaccuracies,” and they count in the grading scheme. I point out to them that as English teachers they have to be role models for their students, and they will need to put in extra effort (which may include having a more proficient classmate proofread their work) to make sure that their written work is acceptable. These are graduate courses!

This perspective was shared by many respondents. As future teachers of English, nonnative-speaking students need to be able to produce writing that reflects a high degree of grammatical accuracy since this is the very task that they will perform as teachers in their own classrooms. In this view, it is the responsibility of the MA TESOL professor to ensure that future English teachers, native and nonnative, possess the requisite knowledge to be successful in their chosen profession and to serve as appropriate role models for their future students.

Although there was relative uniformity among respondents about hold-

ing nonnative-speaking students to the same linguistic standards, there was less agreement on exactly how this should play out in the classroom. Some comments (such as the first one above) indicated that grammatical competence in the written work of nonnative-speaking students is included in the overall grade of a given assignment. Other comments, however, suggested that although nonnative-speaking student writing is held to the same linguistic standards as that of their native-speaking counterparts, grammatical errors in student writing rarely count against a student's final grade:

I usually do not penalize (in terms of grades) for grammar errors, for either NSs or NNSs. However, if it's an important paper, I might give feedback and ask the student to resubmit after cleaning up the grammar. For timed writing, I may mark, but not great down, for grammar – unless the writing is so poor ... that I can't understand it.

[F]or most content courses, I do not emphasize grammatical accuracy and grading, and in general I would tend to overlook issues such as prepositions and articles, and to focus on the use of language to accomplish academic and professional goals.

These comments reflect a greater focus on overall coherence and overall comprehensibility than on microlevel grammatical errors. In this view, grammatical errors are not unimportant, but a premium is placed instead on the clarity of writing and the overall communicative success of the writing assignment. Although these respondents noted that they do mark and correct grammatical errors in student writing, the responses reflect a different pedagogical perspective from that of respondents who stated that they include grammatical errors as part of the overall grade of nonnative-speaking student writing. In a sense, our survey responses displayed two competing perspectives on what it means to hold students to the same linguistic standards: one that argues that grammatical errors are part of the overall grade of an assignment, and another that argues that indicating grammatical errors alone is a means of holding students to the same linguistic standards.

### ***Do Not Hold Students to the Same Linguistic Standards***

While the overwhelming majority of responses stated that nonnative-speaking students are held to the same linguistic standards as their native-speaking counterparts, a few comments stood out in marked contrast.

I don't honestly think it's possible to hold NNS students to exactly the same standards as NS students. Of course, there are exceptions and many NNS students write as well or better than NS students. But the vast majority are clearly NNS writers and one sees this immediately. When possible, I encourage the students to take an advanced ESL writing course or to seek assistance through the college's tutorial service.

I do not hold them to the same grammatical standards as the native speaker. I do hold them to same cognitive standards. I also provide various opportunities for them to continue to grow in English as well as pursue higher-level cognitive development by utilizing both their L1 and English. I will offer suggestions, strategies, and additional resources for the student to continue developing their various literacies.

These comments raise important questions about demanding the same linguistic standards from both native-speaking and nonnative-speaking students. As the first comment indicates, the gap between the writing of native- and nonnative-speaking students is often very clear, and unlike their native-speaking counterparts, nonnative-speaking students are still in the process of acquiring English. This view seems to suggest that it is simply unrealistic to hold all students to the same linguistic standards since all students do not bring the same resources to the table. This sentiment is echoed in the second comment, which argues that nonnative-speaking students should be held to the same cognitive standards and should be expected to engage intellectually at the same level as their native-speaking counterparts, but that nonnative-speaking students are in the process of L2 development and, as a result, should not be held to the same grammatical standards.

While this perspective contrasts with that of those respondents believing that nonnative-speaking students should be held to the same linguistic standards as native-speaking students, the real difference seems to lie in the answer to how best to help nonnative-speaking students with their ongoing L2 development. For those who think that nonnative-speaking students should be held to the same linguistic standards, marking patterns of errors and even grading students down for those errors is meant to contribute to L2 development. As one individual noted, students need to be made aware of their error patterns before they can be expected to identify them on their own and self-correct. Thus, correcting nonnative-speaking student errors contributes to language development. In contrast, those respondents who stated that they do not hold nonnative-speaking students to the same linguistic standards reflect the perspective that because nonnative-speaking students generally are not at the same level of linguistic development in English as their native-speaking counterparts, it is unfair to hold them to the same linguistic standards. These two views represent different perspectives on language acquisition and language development, and they result in significant differences in classroom practice.

In spite of these different perspectives regarding the writing of nonnative-speaking students, there was agreement on certain contexts in which nonnative-speaking students should not be held to the same linguistic standards as native-speaking students. For example, several respondents noted that students write in a variety of genres in their classes and that the specific type of writing affects the degree to which the instructors address grammar errors. When the writing is more informal (such as in online discussion-board postings), grammar errors are often overlooked provided that they do not interfere with communication. Other comments noted that specific contexts such as timed quiz-

zes and exams also merit greater flexibility regarding grammatical accuracy and volume in the writing of nonnative-speaking students. As one respondent noted:

On tests and papers I never count off for grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors, although I do “correct” these to give feedback to all my students. The one place I do try to accommodate NNSs is on tests were almost always, they tend to write less than the NSs and this sometimes means their answers are too terse to be fully accurate, so I try to be sensitive to this time constraint on L2 usage.

### ***Linguistic Standards and Speaking***

While responses reflected a variety of perspectives regarding linguistic standards and the writing of nonnative-speaking students, there was a much greater consensus about linguistic standards and the speech of nonnative-speaking students. The majority of these comments noted the additional stress caused by speaking in public and indicated that any feedback provided to students on their speaking is done individually outside of class time. Below are two representative comments:

I don't address grammatical inaccuracies in student presentations, often times it is pronunciation issues that I address and that to only afterwards. Unless it impedes understanding I don't see a need to address grammatical accuracy.

I do overlook grammatical inaccuracy in speech (say in an oral presentation) as long as it doesn't interfere with communication. It's more important for them to present the content than to present a perfectly formed English utterance.

A number of important perspectives are reflected in the responses. First, there is recognition of the added stress caused by public speaking and the relatively spontaneous use of language. In this sense, speaking differs from writing because it offers less planning time, fewer opportunities for revision, and much more ongoing, immediate processing. It is worth noting that responses reflected the same concern about writing contexts that placed similar constraints on nonnative-speaking students' language use, such as quizzes and timed exams.

A second perspective reflected in these comments mirrors an idea found in the responses of those who claimed not to hold nonnative-speaking students to the same linguistic standards in writing as their native-speaking counterparts. This perspective argues that successful communication is the goal of oral language use and unless problems interfere with successful communication, there is no need to address grammatical accuracy in speaking. In this view, grammatical inaccuracy or pronunciation problems are worth commenting on only when they impede successful communication. Though this perspective seems to contrast with the viewpoint found in many of the responses regard-

ing the writing of nonnative-speaking students, most comments indicated that they do, in fact, provide feedback on speaking in some fashion after the presentation is complete. In this way, the approaches to addressing grammatical accuracy in the writing of nonnative-speaking students, and their speaking, are not so different, though the means and timing for giving the feedback as well as the amount of feedback given probably do differ. This is likely due to the idea reflected in the final comment above, which argues that there is a greater stigma attached to ungrammatical writing and for this reason it is more important to hold nonnative-speaking students to the same linguistic standards in their writing as their native-speaking counterparts because the consequences for poor writing will be more severe than they will be for ungrammatical or accented speaking.

Before proceeding to question 3, we should note that there were several contexts in which respondents thought it was important to correct linguistic problems in student speaking. For example, a number of respondents indicated that they correct any errors in speaking that interfere with communication or that stigmatize the student in any way. Other comments noted the importance of being able to present oneself appropriately in contexts such as job interviews and stated that when language interferes with this ability, it is important to address those language problems in student speaking. Other comments cited similar problems that can arise as a result of inaccuracies in speaking, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as the teaching practicum and actual classroom placement. As one respondent wrote, inaccuracies in student speaking can result in overly harsh comments from master teachers, who may refuse a student teacher because his or her speech has too many errors or is too accented. Others also indicated that accuracy and fluency are both major issues in the teaching practicum, but their solutions were quite different: Some responses noted the importance of students' being able to handle language at a minimum ACTFL Advanced Low level in the program, while others offered additional support during office hours to "coplay" the lesson the student is going to teach to provide the student with greater confidence and also to address whatever problems he or she may have with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

The responses to question 2 indicated much greater clarity on how to address inaccuracies in writing than in speaking. Although respondents recognized the importance of a certain degree of grammatical accuracy and intelligible speech among nonnative-speaking students, the exact means for helping them achieve that was not clear. Overwhelmingly, responses noted that they address grammatical inaccuracies in writing, but that they do not do so in speaking unless they interfere with communication. Nonetheless, specific contexts were noted in which grammatical and pronunciation accuracy was important for nonnative-speaking students. This "dilemma" between written and spoken proficiency would benefit from more research.

**Open-Ended Question 3 of 4:** In your view, what issues are involved in holding NNS students to the same standard as NS students? In what ways could these issues be addressed?

**Open-Ended Question 4 of 4:** Please explain here your thoughts or concerns—if any—about the “NS/NNS” dichotomy or any other aspect of the above questions. (If none, skip to the next question.)

Questions 3 and 4 of the survey resulted in fewer overall responses than questions 1 and 2, with generally less content (fewer words) per response. We therefore combine the discussion of these questions in one section. Question 4 provided an “out” with the suggestion that if respondents had no thoughts or concerns on the matter of the NS/NNS dichotomy, they could move on with no response. This resulted in a smaller yield for this question, 65%. Still, three salient themes emerged from questions 3 and 4 that we found thought provoking: the question of what it means to treat students “equally,” the trouble with the idea of a “dichotomy,” and the role of World Englishes as they relate to NNESTs.

### *“Equality” Versus “Equity”*

One respondent articulated the first theme eloquently:

The issue is that we shouldn’t confuse equal treatment with equity. Equal treatment means you treat everyone the same way, which disadvantages those who don’t come in with the same background as the teacher expects. Equity means you recognize that everyone has different background experience, and that the playing field is not level, so you make adjustments here and there so that everyone has an equal opportunity to reach the standards (which you have made explicit to all).

This response delineates a reasonable, “middle-ground” stance, acknowledging that of course students start their MA programs and attend classes with differing backgrounds and proficiency levels, but an effective educator attempts to understand each student and work with that student’s strengths (and weaknesses). In this view, to treat all students “equally” might mean, for example, ignoring *everyone’s* pronunciation challenges, whether native speaking or non-native speaking, rather than recognizing that nonnative speakers may very well need extra feedback on certain consonants while a native speaker could benefit from instruction in why that nonnative-speaking student’s consonants sound the way they do.

Despite this tension just described, if question 3 were worded as a Yes/No question (“Do you believe NSs and NNSs should be held to the same standard?”), the above-cited response would probably be a qualified “yes.” Many other responses would concur, and these help elaborate the issue of “equality” versus “equity.” For example:

For me the main issue is how we can support students, such as with writing courses and tutoring as needed, but ultimately many of our NNS students graduate without resolving many grammar accuracy issues. At the same time, many NNS student do work that is better than that of many NS students in terms of ideas, organization, and development, even though

there grammar may have some inaccuracies. The issue for me is how we can better assist and support those NNS students who enter with very low level writing skills and for whom language continues to get in the way of academic success in our program.

This response gives credit to nonnative-speaking MA students as often achieving better results in classes, implying that while one should provide extra aid for nonnative speakers in certain areas—grammar, mostly—overall they don't require *more* help than native speakers and that they therefore can be held to similar overall standards. The idea that nonnative speakers are generally as successful, often more so, than their native-speaking counterparts was commonly expressed, as exemplified in this excerpt:

All in all ... I believe that NNS's are not disadvantaged, and in many (perhaps most?) of my classes over 25 years of teaching at [institution name withheld], my very top student has been a NNS—despite the fact that in almost every class I've ever taught, the composition of those classes have been about two thirds NS's.

On question 3, some respondents felt quite strongly about holding all students to the same standards, an unqualified “yes” on the question of whether native speakers and nonnative speakers should be treated similarly:

I believe that NNS students should be held to the same academic standards as NS. As TESL educator, I see my role in boosting the professional confidence of my NNS students and aspiring them to meet these standards. Being a NNS does not justify not knowing the subject one teaches.

This is the quality of education and it never occurred to me that I should treat the students differently.

However, despite the many responses indicating that native and nonnative speakers should indeed be held to the same standards, responses to question 3 were by no means united in this sentiment. Several indicated that it is not even possible, nor just, to hold nonnative speakers to the same standards as native, as in these responses:

Having NNS ESL teachers is very important in a state like California. Holding NNS students to the same standard as NS students might discourage some students who are excellent teacher candidates from pursuing a career in the field. [Response continues with several suggestions for addressing the issue with students.]

We all know there are NNS students who are gifted scholars and prospective teachers but who will never have nativelike proficiency and whose writing and speech will probably always have minor errors. So I don't feel

that we can hold NNS students to the exact standards as NS students. On the other hand, there are NNS students in TESL programs/courses who have noticeable and sometimes serious language problems and these cannot be ignored. But TESL educators are not necessarily the ones who can and should be their language teachers. [Response continues.]

These responses reflect a sentiment previously expressed in NNEST literature (see, for example, Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 2001; Pasternak & Bailey, 2004; Snow, Kamhi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006) that proficiency and “nativeness” are not one and the same; good language teachers are not necessarily fluent or even completely proficient speakers of that target language. Whether a speaker is native or not should therefore not be a prerequisite to being a language teacher.

On question 3, those respondents who believed in holding all students to the same standards outnumbered those who thought that nonnative speakers should be given a “break” of sorts, but this latter group—exemplified in the two quotes above—cannot be disregarded. Those responses hearken to an underlying feeling among many—even in the former group—that differences between native and nonnative speakers exist, just as differences exist among any separate types of student (or indeed human) groupings or individuals, and that it behooves educators to make note of those differences, responsibly. Also, people often self-identify among a group, whether or not others (their teachers, their employers, etc.) perceive them as belonging to that group, and to deny a self-identification (e.g., a student’s own description of herself as a “nonnative speaker of English”) may be wrong. We take up this point in the next section.

Finally, a few respondents took issue with question 3 itself, as in the following:

There is a problem with the premise of this question. It implies that NNS students need to be held to a different standard. They may or may not have some particular issues with language form, as such, but in terms of intellectual rigor, expectations, academic preparedness I don’t see a clear cut difference along native/non-native lines.

We acknowledge that our survey question 3 could have been worded somewhat differently, which is why we provided the alternate wording in the discussion above (modified to “Do you believe NSs and NNSs should be held to the same standard?”).

#### ***“Dichotomy” Versus “Continuum”***

Many respondents reacted negatively to the mere mention of the notion of a “dichotomy” between native and nonnative speakers, as worded in question 4 of the survey. Three of the 26 respondents to question 4 referred, instead, specifically to a “continuum”:

It is, of course, not a dichotomy but a continuum. We have had native-born



students in our TESOL with far greater grammar problems than many of our non-native speaker International students. We have had African-American bi-dialectal students, Generation 1.5 students, and international students, all of whom had greater or lesser degrees of problems with academic English.

The whole native speaker/ non native speaker dichotomy is problematic. I think it is more of a continuum than a dichotomy.

Other responses simply noted distaste for the concept of a dichotomy:

I don't think it's a dichotomy at all—in fact, I completely reject this kind of thinking entirely. Dichotomies such as this are wholly misleading and misguided; in this case, they're also damaging to students. Who's a “native speaker,” anyway? As a social science, applied linguistics abounds with these false dualities, and the sooner we realize that, the better. Let's not perpetuate nonsense.

Not all respondents objected to the characterization of native and nonnative speakers as a dichotomy, and a few appeared to accept it overtly. One such response:

I believe that this dichotomy will always exist in teacher education courses with NNS so we have to address this frankly in class. One issue is that many of these future teachers would like to teach in California but may not be allowed to if their language really isn't native-like.

Question 4 was set up partly to invite critical responses to the concept of a NNS/NS dichotomy, and one cannot speculate about the 14 respondents who chose to skip the question. On the whole, however, the great majority of question 4's respondents appeared to take issue with the concept of a dichotomy, several of them citing relevant literature on the matter.<sup>2</sup>

We welcome the fact that so many respondents disliked the continuing description of a “dichotomy” between native and nonnative speakers. Past researchers have convincingly demonstrated its problematic nature. Pasternak and Bailey (2004), declaring the debate over NESTs versus NNESTs “overly simplistic” (p. 170), prefer to shift the discussion away from nativeness toward a framework that addresses what teachers should be able to do in the classroom, and draw a distinction, instead, between “procedural” and “declarative” knowledge. A general paradigm shift such as this would be highly appropriate in a field that includes a majority of English speakers who began and spent much of their early lives with languages other than English, and it is comforting to know that (if our survey responses are representative of TESOL educators generally) those who are preparing ESL/EFL teachers-to-be are “on board” on that score.

Why does the consistent expression of the NS/NNS dichotomy persist nonetheless? For the general population, the answer to this seems fairly evi-

dent. Languages are still highly associated with nation-states and cultures, even when, through time, they have spread into states and cultures in which they traditionally were not present, or only minimally. The Latin of classical Rome continued to be called “Latin” for hundreds of years after it had spread into outlying provinces and morphed into distinct separate languages, and it continued to be associated with imperial Rome at least until the fall of that regime. Similarly, for many, English, as the still-reigning lingua franca, is still considered “at home” in the Inner Circle countries (see Bolton & Kachru, 2006), and those who do not grow up in those countries naturally would consider themselves “nonnative” speakers if and when they learned English.

But for English language-teacher educators knowledgeable about World Englishes and sensitive to the fact that many of our MA TESOL students go back to countries to teach English students who may very well never set foot in an Inner Circle country, the problematic use of “native” and “nonnative” seems to endure anyway. Part of the reason may be that, to date, no one has coined a satisfying alternative set of formulations. But another explanation lies with our MA TESOL students themselves and how they self-identify. Students who would *not* claim themselves “nonnative” speakers of English, having just begun a program of study in the US after arriving from Taiwan, Iran, or Brazil, are rare to nonexistent. During their courses of study, depending on the program, they will come into some contact with research on World Englishes and the problem associated with defining “native.” But their self-identification of “nonnative” is likely to continue, and teacher educators are not likely to forcibly “correct” that self-identification. Inasmuch as one’s languages are tightly bound to one’s identities, to insist to anyone that his or her chosen self-identification is actually *wrong* may be an affront, and clearly it is preferable to avoid what may be perceived as a partial denial of someone’s identity. Thus, educators continue using the simple labels and hang on to the dichotomy.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, any attempts now being made to bring about a paradigm shift away from the “native”/“nonnative” dichotomy are hampered by the combination of (at least) three forces:

1. The lack of alternative terminology to “native” and “nonnative”;
2. The influence of the general public’s entrenched perception of languages and their home states or cultures; and
3. The possible inadvisability of insisting to international MA TESOL students that they should stop thinking of themselves as “nonnative” speakers, thereby denying them an identity they have become comfortable with.

Suggestions for further research and curricular reforms could begin with an understanding of these obstacles, and we take them up in the section on Further Research below.

### ***The Role of World Englishes***

Many researchers have discussed (e.g., Kamhi-Stein, 2004b; Pasternak &

Bailey, 2004) how difficult it is to even define a native speaker, and many of our respondents echoed this challenge (one, cited above, quite forcefully: “Who’s a ‘native speaker,’ anyway?”). The definition is particularly complex as different varieties of English become more established and widespread and as the numbers of speakers and teachers of those varieties increase. Jenkins (2006), in a comprehensive review of World Englishes research, describes the convergence of grammatical patterns among different nonnative speakers of English—in other words, similar grammatical patterns in speakers of English across a wide range of L1s that are different from the patterns in use in “native-speaking” countries such as the US, Great Britain, or Australia and that speakers from those latter countries would consider “wrong.” This phenomenon, coupled with the fact that (as Jenkins, 2006 reminds us also) nonnative speakers are far greater in number than native speakers, poses the question of what “standard English” even is, or could be, and who would be in a position to define it. What variety should we teach and instruct our future teachers to teach? The question of “which English is the right one?” is not new. As Widdowson (1994) put it in his inimitably confident manner:

How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England, the United States, or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgement. They are irrelevant. The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. . . . Other people actually own it. (p. 385)

The fact that many of our respondents recognized the difficulty in defining a standard, and of determining what brand of English is best acquired and taught, is thus heartening, and this paper’s authors would hope instruction on these complexities are happening in MA TESOL programs. We are not yet convinced they are, however, on the scale that researchers such as Barratt (2010), Nemtchinova et al. (2010), and (earlier) Kamhi-Stein (1999) propose. We would therefore add our own voices in suggesting that education on these matters would go a long way, in the long run, in alleviating some of the inequities that NNESTs face in the workplace.

### **Suggestions for Action and Future Research**

As the authors read, discussed, and digested the data gathered in this survey, and categorized its results, we developed several ideas for further research and action suggested by the respondents’ attitudes and positions. We summarize here these ideas, which are both theoretical and practical.

First, we strongly support the goal—already established—of providing continuous English language support for MA students. Such support would involve writing, since research papers (and other forms of writing) remain the most common way that formal course work is submitted, but ideally also speaking: A minimal proficiency level of pronunciation is required for a future teacher to be intelligible. None of our survey respondents reported that their TESOL programs offer courses that focus on pronunciation, nor have we

seen such courses being offered (though some respondents refer their students to pronunciation workshops). Whether or not to develop such courses may understandably be somewhat controversial, as it could prompt the exclamation, “You’d make native speakers take pronunciation lessons?” (“Accent reduction” would ideally be discouraged, as that involves an implicit subjugation of a speaker’s cultural identity.) In any case, we side with research by Barratt (2010), Kamhi-Stein (1999), Lee (2004), Liu (1999), and Nemtchinova et al. (2010), among others, in pushing the idea of ongoing language help for teacher trainees and in-service teachers.

Second, we wondered how best to go about breaking the habit of referring to the dichotomies of “NS/NNS” and “NEST/NNEST.” To be sure, the false dualism of these persistent labels represents a debate that is “unlikely ever to be resolved” (Braine, 2010, p. 9). However, if nothing else, a systematic effort can continue to be made in MA TESOL programs to interrogate the oversimplification of the labels and to lead master’s students to a more liberal understanding of what “native speech” is and how the students could rethink their own linguistic backgrounds. Different terminology can be used: One of us, for example, prefers to refer to “people who spent their childhoods mostly with a language, or languages, other than English,” or to “students of complex linguistic backgrounds.” (Both of these descriptions could of course refer to a huge percentage of higher-education students in California in general, not just MA TESOL students; see Ferris, 2009.) These are clunky, unwieldy expressions, but they will have to do in discussions on the matter until preferable, easier terminology is developed.

Third, and directly related, we encourage the continuation of work on NNESTs’ self-perceptions of identity and ways to overcome the challenges of “feeling like a nonnative.” Such research (amply described in chapter 3 of Braine, 2010) could be expanded to TESOL students in MA programs, not just student teachers in practicum courses or in-service teachers. After all, much of a teacher’s expertise is informed by the content of an MA program’s theory courses, and thus TESOL educators can have an important influence on the future identities and performances of their teachers-in-training. Thus, included in master’s courses could be theoretical discussion on identity (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 2007; Norton, 1997; and for NNESTs in particular, Morita, 2000); empirical research on how certain aspects of identity are acquired or modified across languages (Ishihara, 2010, on pragmatic choices specifically) and how students “reimagine” their “multicompetent” identities (Pavlenko, 2003); or hands-on, practical suggestions for overcoming the anxieties that NNESTs may feel when entering the workforce after their MA studies (Wu, Liang, & Csepeyli, 2010) and for embracing their nonnative speaker roles in general (Medgyes, 2001).

Finally, we suggest the further expansion of NNEST classroom research using video data. Surveys such as the one reported here are helpful in determining respondents’ general attitudes; research on NNESTs that relies on observations and interview data are also useful in describing general issues of identity and in suggesting certain strategies for self-understanding. Looking

at video recordings, on the other hand, is to date the most reliable method of closely analyzing how participants in interaction construct their identities in real time, on a turn-by-turn basis, and how they make their attitudes publicly available to relevant other participants—not just to researchers in self-impressions, but to the people they're engaging with when it actually counts. It is one thing for TESOL educators to report in a questionnaire or interview that, say, they “reject the NS/NNS dichotomy”; how that rejection is manifested in actual interaction may be an entirely different thing, and video data help greatly in determining the reality of day-to-day behavior. Works such as Duranti (2009) and Duranti and Goodwin (1992) have made a clear case for the benefits of using video data in linguistic anthropology. Such methods could be employed for further research on TESOL educators as well as on NNEST teachers (and teachers-to-be) themselves.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with any research study, this one had limitations. For one, we did not ask for biographical information beyond age, academic rank and experience, and location on the survey, largely because we wanted to minimize the amount of time it took to complete (and thus raise the yield rate). As such, we were unable to draw any conclusions from subsets of respondents (male or female, different language backgrounds, or the like). Also, while we did ask respondents how long they had been in their current positions, and about their ranks (lecturer, assistant professor, etc.), the numbers of respondents in those subsets were not large enough to take valid interpretations. We thus decided to draw conclusions based on the whole respondent set. These limitations could be somewhat alleviated by a larger study—perhaps over a larger geographical area—though they remain restrictive for this particular project.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Overall the responses to our survey reveal a TESOL educator population that has given a good deal of critical thought to issues surrounding their nonnative English-speaking MA students. TESOL instructors generally make modifications to their teaching practices with their nonnative-speaking students in mind—that is, they teach differently from the way they would in the absence of nonnative-speaking students. However, they generally hold all students—nonnative- and native-speaking—to the same linguistic standards, though exactly what “same standards” means varies from person to person: “Equity” does not necessarily equal “equality.” Many educators question the NNS/NS dichotomy itself, deeming it problematic and unconstructive and noting that the widespread existence of various forms of Englishes renders the notion of “native” nearly indefinable.

To our minds, the most important research that has been done on nonnative-speaking teachers is the work that investigates NNESTs' own self-described identities and attitudes, and how they can best negotiate those identities to give them the confidence to succeed in their careers. Other salient research involves the study of World Englishes and their influence on English language teaching

(ELT), and the suggestions for improving the working conditions of NNESTs everywhere. All that existing research should continue. In addition, however, we would like to see more work on TESOL educators' attitudes toward their teachers-in-study and on their classroom practices. Our own experience, and the comments of this survey's respondents, have indicated that MA TESOL students incubate a lot of new ideas about English teaching through their theory courses, and their educators have a certain effect on them, directly or indirectly via their treatment. We hope with this study to have helped make a start in this subarea of NNEST research.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Our use of scare quotes around “nonnative” indicates our informed understanding of the problematic definition of the term, a topic that many of our survey's respondents addressed and that we take up in this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Among these were Arva and Medgyes (2000); Ferris (2009); and Snow et al. (2006). We should note that the respondent who referenced Arva and Medgyes (2000) oversimplified those authors' conclusions, using the article merely to argue that “NNESTs are just as good as NESTs provided they are well prepared.” The claims Arva and Medgyes make, suggested by their study's findings, are more nuanced than that, indicating, for example, that there is a certain place in the classroom even for untrained NESTs.

<sup>3</sup>One anonymous reviewer made the well-taken point that, in contrast to our discussion here, “Some TESOL programs and professors are working with international students so that they ‘reclaim’ the term and stop seeing it as a problem ... so that they can develop alternative views about their status.”

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## Appendix SurveyMonkey Text

### Page 1

Introduction to survey for NNEST educators in TESOL

This is a survey aimed at TESOL educators. It will ask your opinion about the issues involved in educating non-native speakers of English who are M.A. TESOL students in California.

You are eligible to take the survey if you are a university instructor associated with an M.A. TESOL program in California and you teach M.A. TESOL students.

The next page is the survey's consent form. The survey consists of four open-ended questions and a few brief biographical questions, all of which should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

We greatly appreciate your participation!

### Page 2

Consent information

The following is the text of the consent form "Agreement to Participate in Research." Clicking "Next" at the bottom of this page and continuing on with the survey indicates agreement to participate in the study. Please do not write any information that could identify you on the survey.

Responsible Investigators: Dr. Stefan Frazier, Dr. Scott Phillabaum

Title of Protocol: Survey on "How TESOL Professionals Educate NNEST Students"

1. This survey investigates the habits and practices of TESOL educators in training and teaching their NNEST M.A. students.
2. You will be asked to answer a set of four open-ended questions and a few biographical questions on this survey website.
3. Risks or discomfort: No risk or discomfort to you are anticipated.
4. Benefits: The results of this survey, if published, should be of general interest and instrumental usefulness to all educators in M.A. TESOL programs in California and around the world.

5. If the results of this survey are submitted for publication, some outtakes of certain responses may be included in the manuscript. However, the sources of those responses will remain anonymous, and all respondents' identities will be safeguarded for confidentiality. SurveyMonkey.com's feature that allows for tracking of IP addresses has been disabled for this survey.

6. There is no compensation for participation in this survey.

7. Questions about this research may be addressed to Dr. Stefan Frazier, Dr. Scott Phillabaum.

8. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose not to participate in the study.

9. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right to not answer questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with Dr. Stefan Frazier, Dr. Scott Phillabaum.

### Page 3

#### OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 1 OF 4:

What changes, if any, do you make in your teaching to accommodate nonnative speaking (NNS) students?

- Guiding questions - not necessary to answer all or in this order:
- What support do you provide to help with NNS student writing?
- What support do you provide to help with NNS student speaking?
- What else do you do to help NNS students become successful TESOL professionals?

Please provide a rationale for your answers.

[text box here]

### Page 4

#### OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 2 OF 4:

Do you hold NNS students to the same linguistic standards that you apply to your students who are native speakers (NS) of English?

- Guiding questions - not necessary to answer all or in this order:
- How do you address issues of grammatical accuracy in NNS student writing?

- Does your approach differ with NS student writing? In other words, do you overlook inaccuracies that you might find problematic in the work of NS students? Please provide examples of the types of things you might overlook.
- How do you address grammatical accuracy in student presentations or in practicum work? How important are issues of grammatical accuracy when NNS students are in front of the class?
- Under what circumstances would you feel it was important to comment on language issues in NNS student speaking and writing?

Please provide a rationale for your answers.

[text box here]

### Page 5

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 3 OF 4:

In your view, what issues are involved in holding NNS students to the same standard as NS students? In what ways could these issues be addressed?

[text box here]

### Page 6

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION 4 OF 4:

Please explain here your thoughts or concerns - if any - about the “NS/NNS” dichotomy or any other aspect of the above questions. (If none, skip to the next question.)

[text box here]

### Page 7

Biographic / academic information

THESE ARE THE LAST FEW QUICK QUESTIONS.

How long have you taught at the institution in which you teach M.A. TESOL students?

- 5 years or fewer
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21 years or more

What is your academic position at the institution in which you teach M.A. TE-SOL students?

- Part-time lecturer
- Full-time lecturer
- Full-time tenure-track professor
- Full-time tenured professor
- Other

What is currently your main teaching focus - i.e. which courses do you mostly teach (please choose one)?

- TESOL
- Linguistics
- Composition
- English
- A combination of ... (please specify below) [text box here]

Please state the name of your institution here. [text box here]

Please state the institution's location (city). [text box here]

Page 8

Thank you!

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey!

If you should have any questions, please contact:

Dr. Stefan Frazier, Dr. Scott Phyllabaum