Discrimination against Non-native Speaker Teachers in ELT

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine the most relevant publications of the recent native/non-native speaker debate in ELT in order to highlight a little-known form of discrimination that affects non-native teachers when they apply for a job in ELT. Native teachers are benefited from ideological tenets such as the native speaker teacher fallacy and the monolingual fallacy, which contribute to maintain an imperialist vision of the language. This dissertation explores the problems of employment and identity that non-native educators find in their profession and proposes a way of escape to abandon linguistic imperialism: English as a Lingua Franca.

KEY WORDS: NATIVE VS NON-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHER, ELF (ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA), ELT, LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM.

RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de esta disertación es examinar las publicaciones más relevantes del reciente debate del profesor nativo/no-nativo con el fin de resaltar una forma poco conocida de discriminación que afecta a los profesores no-nativos de inglés cuando solicitan un trabajo. Los hablantes nativos se benefician de falacias ideológicas como la falacia del profesor nativo y la falacia monolingüe, que contribuyen a mantener una visión imperialista del idioma. Esta disertación explora los problemas de empleo e identidad que los profesionales no nativos de inglés encuentran en su profesión, y también propone una forma de escapar del imperialismo lingüístico: el inglés como lengua franca.

PALABRAS CLAVE: PROFESOR NATIVO VS NO-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHER, INGLÉS COMO LENGUA FRANCA, ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS, IMPERIALISMO LINGÜÍSTICO.
1. Introduction

As the demand for English language teachers in a globalized and multicultural world such as ours grows exponentially, it is impractical to try to find a single model of an "ideal teacher", which inevitably tends to diminish others. Braine states frankly in his inspirational and groundbreaking book published in 1999: “Needing to supplement my partial scholarship, I applied for a tutor position at the university’s language center and was turned down almost instantly. Instead, some NS classmates who had no teaching experience were employed. Although it was not stated explicitly, the message was clear: NNSs need not apply” (22). Traditionally, the most requested and better valued teachers are those who have English as their first language and are natives from the called Center advanced communities of the West. According to the terminology of Canagarajah, Center refers to the “industrially/economically advanced communities of the West” (79). North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand form this group of countries which claim ownership over English. In contrast, Periphery refers to “recent users of English, less-developed communities, many of whom with multilingual competence” (Canagarajah 79). It should be pointed out that both labels are defined from a socio-political perspective. Center teachers make up the so-called "Exonormative model" (according to the terminology of Kirkpatrick a well-known model of English teaching recognized for its “prestige and legitimacy”, as well as its readily available materials. It favours American and British English language teaching industries, native speaker teachers and institutions and schools that can afford to hire them (Kirkpatrick 2007, 185). However, this is a great and worrying risk because “the demand for native speakers is so high in many places that being a native speaker is the only qualification that many teachers require” (Kirkpatrick 2007, 185). It means that untrained native speakers can easily be the teachers of the new generation of students. In
addition, recent research has consistently shown that there are not enough Center teachers to cater for the needs of ELT worldwide. More than 80% of the ELT professionals are NNS (Braine 1999, Llurda 2005). Therefore, it does not make sense that only “native English speakers” can apply for the available positions even in the West (Canagarajah 77). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the unfairness affecting NNS teachers’ professional future in ELT and its connection with the Native Speaker Debate and World Englishes theoretical and methodological considerations. In the pages that follow, it will be argued that the existence of tenets such as the “native speaker fallacy” or the “monolingual fallacy” attends to hidden economic, ideological, and political motivations that discriminate NNTs with the purpose of maintain the hegemony of native teachers and institutions. This paper reviews the evidence for the discrimination and lack of democratic practices against non-native speakers and addresses the importance of multicultural perspectives and identities to enrich ELT, with the final aim of empowering English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) approach.
2. Dismantling the ‘Native Speaker Fallacy’ and the ‘Monolingual Fallacy’

Traditionally, language institutions have subscribed to the belief that "the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker". According to Phillipson's so-called *native speaker fallacy*, “native speakers of a language have a better command of fluent, idiomatically correct language forms, are more knowledgeable about the cultural connotations of a language” (194). In addition, the very fact that non-native speakers of a language have undergone the process of learning a language makes them better qualified to teach the language than those who are born to it (Braine 1999, XV). This should be an outdated fallacy, not only because nowadays there is modern equipment to acquire native skills such as pronunciation or cultural awareness, but also because of the context in which the tenet emerged. The origin of the fallacy takes place in the Commonwealth Conference in Uganda 1961; hence it is also called the “Makerere tenet” (Braine 1999, XIV). The idealization of the native speaker is due to “the importance placed on spoken communicative competence in foreign language pedagogy since the 1960s” (Braine 1999, XV). Linguistic theorists, with Chomsky as their major representative, considered NS as “the only reliable source of linguistic data” (Moussu 315). Chomsky stated that the NS is an “ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly”. For him, “competence has to do with intuitive knowledge of what is grammatical and ungrammatical in a language” (Braine 1999, XV). However, the idealized NS cannot exist, since their speech is influenced by several sociolinguistic factors, like geography or social status. Native speakership is the “acceptance by the group” of natives. (Braine 1999, XV).

Canagarajah first examines the linguistic basis of the fallacy by critiquing its Chomskyan origins. He also questions the application of the fallacy to ELT pedagogy, pointing out that knowledge of other languages (by NNTs) can foster more effective language teaching. According
to Chomsky, “the native speaker is the authority on the language and the ideal informant” (Canagarajah 78). Nevertheless, Canagarajah states that “Chomsky’s native speaker of a homogeneous speech community is an idealized construction” (79) in the hybrid postcolonial age we live in today. Therefore, the “Native speaker” label is questioned due to the existence of varieties of English developed in postcolonial communities, where there are many multilingual speakers with English as the dominant or sole language of proficiency. Canagarajah reports on the political implications of the “English only” ideologies and “Standard English” dominance, which empower linguistic imperialism and diminish other varieties of English. He also defines the fallacy as “linguistically anachronistic” and criticises the disjunction between research awareness and professional practice in ELT (79).

Another fallacy that usually goes hand in hand with the previous one is the *monolingual fallacy*. According to this tenet, “L1 is not considered to play a useful function in the acquisition of English and is considered to harm the process of second language acquisition” (Philipson 196). It is a notion that clearly goes against multilingualism and cultural diversity, since “Center speakers are perceived to be threatened by the democratization of the social mainstream with the inclusion of other languages or language groups” (Canagarajah 81). However, “first language can help build a cognitive bridge to the second language, apart from addressing student concerns regarding language maintenance, identity conflict, and cultural clash” (Canagarajah 80). And the only kind of practitioners who possess that beneficial quality are the NNS teachers, whose multilingual competence develop “a deep metalinguistic knowledge and complex language awareness” (Canagarajah 80). Canagarajah indicates that “their insider status in the community provides them an intimate awareness of the learning styles, language attitudes, and functional
needs of the students so that they can develop an effective curriculum and pedagogy” (Canagarajah 81).

Therefore, the undervaluation of NNTs is not understandable after knowing these advantages, but rather because of the traditionalist vision of the NS ideology, which prevails over others in ELT. According to Canagarajah, the native speaker fallacy is “based on the view that the language of the native speaker is superior and/or normative irrespective of the diverse contexts of communication, that the corruption of the language can be arrested by the prescriptive role of the native speaker teacher, and that the language acquisition is conditioned by the dialect of the teacher to which the student is exposed” (80). Therefore, it is possible to stand by what can be called a policy of convenience for Center professionals, who are obviously interested in promoting their universally applicable conditions of work. In the same way, publishing houses are also keen on refraining from Periphery content. As Canagarajah points out, “the native speaker fallacy together with the monolingual fallacy thus saves textbook publishers precious money because they do not have to employ those fluent with other languages/dialects for producing ELT material” (Canagarajah 86). And this brings us to the employment concerns associated with the ELT enterprise such as the discrimination against those teachers who cannot fulfil the requirements to be hired.
3. Employment and Identity Concerns in Non-native Educators

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in non-native academics and teachers. It was in a 1995 TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Conference when NNS firstly raised their voice against discriminatory hiring practices in ELT. However, there is still a long struggle to secure the same rights in hiring NNS. Despite TESOL organization's explicit opposition to these practices against NNT, "a significant number of native speakers in ELT do not support their employment to teach English in ESL contexts" (Braine 1999, XVI). NNT are often considered “by-products” (Braine 1999, XIII) and they find it much harder to find employment. In the advertising world, the fact that only those who are ‘native English speakers’ can apply for the available positions is abundantly clear. These discriminatory required qualities are condemned by TESOL-SPAIN Position Statement. It is clearly stated in their web “that all teachers should be evaluated and valued solely on the basis of their teaching competence, teaching experience, formal education and linguistic expertise” (Web). No matter how they oppose these practices, many NS still follow the “exonormative model”, whose methodology is based on the two tenets mentioned before. NS often excuse this discrimination arguing that ESL students prefer to be taught by them. In fact, some students ingeniously subscribe to the fallacies because of their experience with barely proficient English teachers in their own countries. However, “as they become better acquainted with qualified, competent, non-native teachers, students offer clamour to be in their classes, knowing that the non-native teachers better understand their language problems” (Braine 1999, XVI).

Hence NNT bring something unique to the ESOL profession: empathy. They can achieve a special connection with students, since they "are role models; they are success stories; they are real images of what students can aspire to be (Thomas 12). Nevertheless, NNT usually have a
struggle of self-perception when they also subscribe to the ideologies coming from the *Center*, as the insistence on the use of “authentic, naturally occurring English” for instructional purposes (Braine 1999, XV). One of the dangers of stereotypes is that they can make those who are pigeonholed believe in these depictions and unconsciously try to maintain them. They affirm that "this (lower) proficiency in English exerts an adverse effect on their teaching" (Braine 2005, 22). This lack of confidence is due to the fallacy that there is only one kind of English, the “right” kind spoken by people belonging to the “inner circle”, which “undermines the competence of both NSs and those who have ‘near native proficiency’ in international varieties of English” (Thomas 7). This belief makes them "custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but of proper pedagogy as well” (Braine 1999, XV).

All this brings a credibility problem to NNT, since their students see them as “a foreigner” teacher (Thomas 7). Prejudices toward NNT force them to struggle twice as hard to achieve what often comes as a birth-right to their NS counterparts: “recognition of their teaching ability and respect for their scholarship” (Braine 1999, 23). The major problem is when prejudices come from the academic institutions, which are in charge of providing a future for these teachers. It is quite contradictory “an educational system that prepares that one for a profession for which it disqualifies the person at the same time” (Canagarajah 77), leaving out the “pedagogical and linguistic strengths non-native speaker teachers bring to the profession and the domains in which their expertise may be indispensable” (Canagarajah 78). Despite being contradictory, this model is globally sustained because of the two tenets mentioned above, which serve to protect the interests of the Center speakers.

Language teaching must be a paradigm of multiculturalism and diversity. NNT often tend to be considered by-products even in Periphery countries because of their less prestigious state
regarding NS, which makes them employable at a lower cost, causing disparities in salary and benefits. A case in point are “teachers from Britain, often with mere 3- or 6-month teaching certificates, were paid twice the salary of highly qualified and experienced English teachers from the Indian subcontinent and enjoyed housing and other benefits unheard of by the latter” (Braine 1999, 22). Amin reports on another example of sexism and racism to disempower NNT in Canada. She claims that “Canadian ESL students make two major assumptions of the ideal ESL teacher: The first is that only Whites can be native speakers English and the second is that only NSs know proper Canadian English” (74). In the academic field, NNSs often need to adhere to the standards set by their NS peers to be published in international journals (Thomas 8). As we can see, what qualifies NS as ESL instructors is their identity in many cases. Following the native speaker fallacy, “Center communities should be protected from foreign competition” (Canagarajah 83). This is linked to protectionism in trade and employment, a theory which is coming back again nowadays, especially in the United States of America. According to this theory, “an ESL teaching job is their birthright” (Canagarajah 82). Hence Center varieties are the norm and Center speakers are the models to follow even in Periphery communities, where it is very contradictory to join Center pedagogical practices with local/traditional approaches. Therefore, it is really needed to eradicate all the unfair pedagogical practices linked to the native norm in order to democratize employment through “free competition, free movement, equal sharing of products and ideas and open employment prospects for both Center and Periphery ELT professionals” (Canagarajah 88).
4. English as a Lingua Franca Putting forward a Solution

A great debate present in most languages of the world is to decide who the language belongs to. In the case of English, it is much more important, since this is the most spoken language in the world and, in turn, the most taught in all classrooms worldwide. Traditionally, the greatest tendency to spread a language has been linguistic imperialism. According to this practice, “NS teachers are models of correct usage, and as such there are considerable demands on the NNS instructor to appear to be a native speaker. The students strive to achieve near-native proficiency in the standard presented in the instruction” (Modiano 27). However, Canagarajah argued that “conducting language teaching by treating Center dialects and discourses as the norm is an important form of political control over the Periphery” and, what is more, “ELT enterprise can carry out Center hegemony in political-economic terms in Periphery communities, reproducing Center ideologies and institutions globally” (Canagarajah 88). The most common method of linguistic imposition has always been standardization, which benefits NS from a language. NS teachers spread the Center varieties, contributing to the dominance of these standard varieties and preventing the development of the “indigenized” ones of English and the diversification of the language (Canagarajah 82). Linguistic imperialism designs culturally intrusive educational programs which “do not promote cross-cultural communication in the NNS to NNS context” as well as do not “provide learners ample opportunity to construct an 'identity' in the foreign tongue which reflects their L1 personality” (Modiano 28).

Therefore, it is essential to give up on the linguistic imperialism and begin to cultivate both an insider’s and an outsider’s attitude toward English, whether teachers be NS or NNT. First of all, we must bear in mind that “NNS teachers are ideally endowed with the capacity to teach a language that belongs to the wide community of its speakers worldwide” (Llurda 8). The NS’s
domination over the ELT expertise should finish, since Center experts cannot relate well to the complex social, cultural, and pedagogical challenges played out in Periphery classrooms, which is crucial for a successful teacher. According to Phillipson, “part of the professional identity and image of the Center applied linguistics institutions is that their skills are universally relevant” (238). Center professionals should change instead their policy of convenience for a broad vision of multiculturalism and linguistic varieties. Canagarajah states that “the use and awareness of other dialects/languages can help a person facilitate the process of second language acquisition (SLA) much better” (80). The first phenomenon that easily comes to mind is codeswitching, “switching between two or more languages when the speaker and the interlocutor share more than one language and dialect” (Macaro 63). It is a more linguistically and culturally accurate practice that facilitates communication and an asset that the monolingual teacher cannot possess.

It is important that NS positions give up their “chauvinism” and begin to be tolerant to understand the pragmatics of the “New Englishes” (Kachru 113). The democratization of English has come up with the English as an International Language approach (EIL). Modiano argues that “models of English in Europe are evolving from NS-dominated to lingua franca-oriented” (4). For the first time a natural language has been given an unprecedented and enviable role as universal language.

“EIL ideologies, the notion of the language as the property of the L2 speaker, presuppose not only that prescriptive, culture-specific notions of ‘standard English’ play subordinate roles in the development of NNS standards, but also that the cultures of the native speaker are given less weight in comparison to the importance of the cultural contexts in which L2 speakers communicate cross-culturally” (Modiano 26).
The culturally pluralistic NNS practitioners understand the manner in which their pupils perceive 'foreignness' in others and their labour is to “establish lingua franca platforms for the educational standard” (Modiano 41). Hence it is necessary not to disdain the interdependence of language and culture: “learners have to be aware of the diverging cultural reality of the target speech-community if they are to attain a satisfying level of proficiency in a non-native language” (Loveday 177). Thus, non-native teachers are crucial not only for the development of English as a lingua franca, but also to understand and take advantage of the cultural mix of the current globalized world.
5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper is concerned with the handicaps that English-speaking Center communities have assigned to NNS in order to maintain their hegemony in the ELT-enterprise. This study has found that traditionally NS of English has been considered the “ideal teachers”, whose prestige and identity have been enough requirements to be hired in an employment in detriment of NNT. The native speaker fallacy together with the monolingual fallacy have benefited Center practices, which have contradicted the multiculturalism and cultural diversity linguistic principles of learning a language. Their extension has been so extensive and internalized that even some NNT have subscribed to them. This problem of self-perception is harmful because “it sometimes stands in the way of NNS being all that they possibly can be and of realizing their full potential” (Thomas 10). Not everybody is capable of teaching their first language and identity cannot be the only requirement to be a teacher because “language teaching is an art, a science, and a skill that requires complex pedagogical preparation and practice” (Canagarajah 80). Mutual intelligibility is critical in the classroom; however, “being a native speaker is no guarantee of mutual intelligibility” (Kirkpatrick 2014, 26). Taken together, these ideas suggest that the more effective teachers are proficient multilingual speakers. Canagarajah states that “their proficiency in more than one language system develops a deep metalinguistic knowledge and complex language awareness” (80). And not only multilingual, but also local. Firstly, local teachers are a very good investment because they will remain in the education system, and, being in a local model, they “increase their self-confidence and self-esteem” (Kirkpatrick 2007, 189). More broadly, research is also needed to end the distinction between native and non-native speakers, because in an increasingly multicultural world valuing skills such
as empathy, teacher expertise or linguistic proficiency should be more relevant when hiring an ELT professional than a label constructed according to their birthplace.
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