When the Teacher Is a Non-native Speaker

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In "When the Teacher Is a Non-native Speaker," Medgyes examines the differences in teaching behavior between native and non-native teachers of English, and then specifies the causes of those differences. The aim of the discussion is to raise the awareness of both groups of teachers to their respective strengths and weaknesses, and thus help them become better teachers.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace to state today that English is the unrivaled lingua franca of the world, and that it is rolling ahead like a juggernaut. In our age of globalization, Fishman's remark that "the sun never sets on the English language" (1982, p. 18) rings truer than ever, and although there is no guarantee of eternal hegemony, the chances are that English will reign supreme for several more decades. The fact that the number of second and foreign language speakers of English far exceeds the number of first language speakers of English (Graddol 1997) implies that the English language is no longer the privilege of native speakers; the suggestion that Standard British English and American English should be superseded by English as an International Language can be heard with increasing frequency. Nevertheless, people who speak English as their native language continue to have a distinct advantage over those for whom it is a foreign tongue. Put differently, non-native speakers of English find it hard to compete with native speakers on equal terms, and this linguistic handicap applies to non-native teachers of English as well.

Native speakers and non-native speakers used to be considered two different and clearly distinguishable categories. In recent years, however, this view has come under heavy attack, as a growing number of researchers have discovered the ambiguities with which this dichotomy is loaded. New terms, alleged to better reflect the complex nature of linguistic heritage and proficiency, have been recommended to project new concepts and identities. Although there are persuasive arguments against the native/non-native dichotomy, most of them legitimate on any ground—linguistic, educational, ideological, or pragmatic—none of the alternative phrases have come into common use.

The controversy over native versus non-native distinction has also been brought to bear on language pedagogy and ELT methodology. The "native English-speaking teacher" (NEST) and its opposite, the "non-native English-speaking teacher" (non-NEST), have been deemed politically incorrect phrases, and those who still use them can expect to be accused of employing discriminatory language. Nevertheless, the superordinate terms "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" seem to persist in the language use of researchers and teachers alike. The reason for the perseverance of these terms may be that most teachers, as well as their students, *do* come from either English-speaking or non-English-speaking countries; most of them *are* either native or non-native speakers of English. But even a bilingual or polyglot whose identity may be equivocal seems to display dominant features of belonging. Therefore, it is suggested that the dichotomy, for all its shortcomings, should not be rejected, overlooked, or blurred, but rather subjected to close scrutiny.

This chapter attempts to do just that: it strives to examine differences in teaching behavior between NESTs and non-NESTs, and then specify the causes of those differences. By drawing on

both empirical evidence and on experience, it argues that most of the archetypal deviations between the two groups of teachers are ultimately attributable to their divergent language backgrounds. This is not the same as suggesting that a high degree of English-language proficiency alone is a guarantee for successful teaching. Indeed, despite their linguistic impediment, non-NESTs have an equal chance of becoming successful teachers, and it is the advantages that they have over NESTs with which this chapter is chiefly concerned. Although pride of place is granted to the teacher's language proficiency throughout the discussion, there is no denying the importance of other attributes, most notably teaching qualifications, professional skills, and experience. (The role these attributes play in the teaching/learning process is examined in detail in other chapters of this volume.)

WHO IS THE NATIVE SPEAKER?

The Linguistic Perspective

Who *is* a native speaker? A native speaker of English is traditionally defined as someone who speaks English as his or her native language, also called mother tongue, first language, or L1. The next question that springs to mind is: What qualifies someone as a native speaker? Among the criteria for "native speakerhood," the most oft-cited and, at first glance, most straightforward one is birth (Davies 1991). That is to say, a native speaker of English is an individual who was born in an English-speaking country. The trouble with this is that birth does not always determine language identity. What about Christine, for example, who was born in the United States, but moved to Austria at the age of one, after she had been adopted by Austrian parents? Since she never learned to speak English, it would be odd to define her as a native speaker of English. Or take Kevin, born in the United States, who went to live in Togo with his family when he was four, and subsequently attended a French school. Is he a native speaker of English or French—or both, or neither? If not birth, is it childhood that underpins native speakerhood? But what is the range of childhood? Where does it begin and where does it end?

The situation becomes further complicated if we consider offspring from mixed marriages. There is eight-year-old Pablo, for example, whose father is Colombian and whose mother is Finnish. Provided both parents speak to him in their respective native language, Pablo becomes bilingual. However, if the family lives permanently in Australia, the boy becomes a trilingual speaker. Does this include the possibility that Pablo is a native speaker of English?

Another problem has to do with the fuzziness of geographical entities. Which countries qualify as English-speaking countries? The United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and a few more. But how about such countries as India, Nigeria, or Singapore, where English, though widely spoken, is not the native language for the majority of the population and its use is limited to particular spheres of life? On the other hand, these countries also differ from countries like Poland, Peru, or Japan, where very few children encounter English at any great lengths before they have formal school instruction.

Recognizing the difficulty of setting up a division line between English- and non-English-speaking countries, Kachru (1985) arranged countries into three concentric circles. The *Inner Circle* includes nations where English is the primary language. The countries in the *Outer Circle* have been historically affected by the spread of English, often as colonies; in these multilingual settings English is the second language, generally the major *intranational* means of communication. The *Expanding Circle* involves nations which have accepted English as the most important international language of communication and teach it as a foreign language. However, in Kachru's visual representation the differences are not watertight and countries in each circle exhibit a great deal of variation and internal mobility.

The Educational Perspective

The native speaker model is not only the concern of linguists and sociolinguists, but is an issue which has fueled debate among language

educators as well. The controversy became particularly acrimonious in the 1980s and early 1990s. There were a number of researchers who claimed that there is no such creature as the native or non-native speaker, an opinion well rendered by the title of a seminal book, *The Native Speaker Is Dead!* (Paikeday 1985). Ferguson formulated this radical approach as follows: "The whole mystique of the native speaker and the mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguist's set of professional myths about language" (1982, p. vii).

Considered to be useless, the native/non-native dichotomy was to be replaced by new concepts and new terms, including *more* or *less accomplished* and *proficient* users of English, *expert* versus *novice speakers,* and *bilingual speakers* to include both natives fluent in another language and non-natives fluent in English. In similar fashion, Kachru (1992) spoke of *English-using speech fellowships* to stress "we-ness" instead of the rigid "us and them" division.

In spite of the cogent arguments against the native/non-native separation, the polemic seems to have abated these days, and the weathered terms "native speakers" and "non-native speakers" are as widely used in the professional jargon today as ever. But why is this distinction so impervious to change? There are at least two possible answers. The more down-to-earth answer is that the majority of people are not borderline: they clearly belong to either the group of native speakers or to that of the non-native speakers of English. The more paradoxical answer is that the native/non-native epithet is useful, to quote Halliday, "precisely because it isn't too closely defined" (cited in Paikeday 1985, p. 64). In a similar vein, Davies remarked that "the native speaker is a fine myth: we need it as a model, a goal, almost an inspiration. But it is useless as a measure; it will not help us define our goals" (1996, p. 157).

Speaking of goals, what are the goals of language learning? For most learners, the ultimate aim is an effective use of the target language. People seldom aspire to more than what they find professionally and personally necessary. It is a case of quid pro quo. Remember that the attainment of native proficiency in English not only demands strenuous efforts, but it may also lead to a loss of native identity in one's L1—a price many would find far too great to pay.

Nevertheless, can any learner hope to achieve full mastery of a second language, with all its linguistic subtleties and cultural allusions? Most researchers agree that this is an impossible task for the overwhelming majority after puberty, but exceptions do exist. This induces further questions: What are the criteria for native proficiency? What is the cut-off point between native proficiency and various levels of non-native proficiency? Researchers are rather skeptical about the feasibility of designing adequate measuring instruments to separate the two groups. This being the case, Davies (1991) points out, membership to one or the other category is not so much a privilege of birth, education, or language proficiency as a matter of self-ascription. In other words, anyone who claims to be a native speaker is one—with the proviso, Kramsch observes, that they are in fact accepted "by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers" (1997, p. 363). However, just as non-native outsiders typically do not want to turn into natives, native insiders are not always eager to admit non-natives. In short, mobility between the two groups is possible but rare.

The Ownership of English

Granted that the majority of non-native speakers do not metamorphose into natives, can they still claim ownership of English? Or does English remain the property of natives by virtue of their better language proficiency and stronger cultural affiliation?

In this regard, Widdowson forcefully sums up the view of many other ELT professionals. He argues that English is an international language, which implies that "it is not a possession which [native speakers] lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it" (1994, p. 385). In a similar way, Norton contends that English "belongs to all the people who speak it, whether native and non-native, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or nonstandard"

(1997, p. 427). The validity of these statements can be proven most spectacularly by the example of such eminent twentieth-century novelists as Conrad, Nabokov, or Soyinka, all of them being non-native speakers of English, writing in English. Far more generally, however, it is claimed that any non-native speaker who engages in genuine communication can use the second language creatively, molding it until it becomes an adequate tool of self-expression. In short, the ideal of the multilingual, multicultural speaker to replace that of the monolingual, monocultural speaker is gaining ground in the professional literature (Kramsch 1997).

This brings us to the subject of English as an International Language (EIL). While EIL as a linguistic construct is accepted by most researchers, it is more controversial whether EIL is a *special* kind of Standard English with norms distinct from those of other standard Englishes, or *any* kind of Standard English used in international settings. It has also been observed that, short of a proper description of its grammar, EIL is no more than an idealization, an amalgam of beliefs and assumptions about rules and norms to which people adhere with varying degrees of success (Medgyes 1999a). Paradoxically, it is teachers and learners from monolingual EFL settings who typically are doubtful that deviation from standard norms is acceptable (Jenkins 1998), while the staunchest advocates of EIL as a self-contained entity are most commonly found among applied linguists and teachers who speak English as their native language.

Hiring Policies

Let us now turn to the teaching profession within the framework of the native/non-native dichotomy. While non-native speakers of English are generally contented with their non-native status, non-native teachers of English often feel disadvantaged and discriminated against. Their complaint is mainly leveled at unequal job opportunities: teaching applications from even highly qualified and experienced non-NESTs often get turned down in favor of NESTs with no such credentials. For example, here is a letter of rejection sent to a non-NEST applicant by the principal of 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)" (Illés 1991, p. 87).

Language schools which advertise themselves as employing only native English speakers often do so with the excuse that NESTs are better for public relations and improve business. Another explanation is their clients' alleged needs. With reference to newly arrived immigrants in the United States, an American teacher argued that "a teacher's lack of native instincts about American English usage and cultural expectations could be detrimental to [the immigrants'] chances in job interviews" (Safadi 1992).

In spite of these arguments, hiring practices in the two ELT strongholds, the United States and the United Kingdom, are in a state of transition. While in the past, major organizations involved in ELT often shut their eyes to discrimination against non-NESTs, albeit never officially endorsing it, today the same institutions are in the habit of making clear and progressive policy statements. Incidentally, the most important resolution was the one passed by the Executive Board of TESOL in 1991, which not only expressed its disapproval of discriminatory hiring policies, but also decided to take steps to abolish all forms of restriction based on the applicant's native language.

It must be admitted, though, that discrimination in hiring policies is not a priority issue in most parts of the world, mainly because the percentage of non-NESTs in search of a teaching job in English-speaking countries is negligible. Perhaps to a lesser extent today than in the past, non-NESTs typically work in EFL and NESTs in ESL environments. While brain drain does not seriously affect the language teaching profession, other forms of discrimination are far more acute.

The Center and the Periphery

The Center/Periphery dichotomy was imported into ELT by Phillipson (1992). To the Center belong powerful Western countries where

English is the native language, whereas the Periphery is constituted of underdeveloped countries where English is a second or foreign language. ELT today is a huge enterprise and, as Phillipson argues, organizations as well as individuals from the Center have high stakes in maintaining its operation. Research projects, aid programs, and training courses are run by and/or in the Center, quite often under the auspices of powerful government agencies such as the United States Information Service and the British Council. Standard ELT methodologies are often based on the needs and background of the NEST who teaches in an ESL rather than an EFL environment (Holliday 1994). Recommendations submitted by native speaker experts are often taken at face value and acted upon by local authorities.

In ordinary classrooms in the Periphery, Phillipson states, NESTs are invariably granted jobs with a salary far exceeding that paid to local teachers. In certain countries and historical circumstances, even backpackers with no teaching qualifications or teaching experience are extended a warm welcome. The ELT business is backed by a book trade which serves the interests of the Center and disseminates its prevailing ideologies and methodologies. Communicative language teaching often is imposed on Periphery classrooms while tried and tested methods are condemned, despite their popularity among teachers and learners (Liu 1999). Most textbooks imported from the Center not only destroy national ELT publishing, but also are ill-suited for local needs, projecting a "to-whom-it-may-concern" aura. As a consequence, Periphery experts become more and more dependent on the Center-based ELT establishment (Canagarajah 1999), and the attainment of sustainability remains but wishful thinking as a rule.

The needs and attributes of local teachers had been all but ignored until the 1990s, when an interest in the non-NEST gained momentum. This recognition was long overdue considering that there are far more non-NESTs in the world than NESTs, and that their numbers are rapidly growing. In addition to numerous articles and a collection of essays written on the subject (Braine 1999), a full-length book is wholly devoted to an analysis of the distinguishing features of non-NESTs (Medgyes 1994). Most of the ideas presented below have been borrowed from this book.

NESTS AND NON-NESTS: PROS AND CONS

As mentioned above, native speakerhood is an intricate concept, which includes birth, education, the environment in which the individual is exposed to English, the sequence in which languages are learned, levels of proficiency, self-confidence, cultural affiliation, self-identification, and political allegiance. There are two ways out of this maze. One is to shortcut it by abandoning the neatly defined categories of native versus non-native, offering instead the image of a line, along which non-natives move towards the native end. The other route leads through the retention of the native/non-native construct for all its apparent weaknesses. From a theoretical stance, the first option appears more promising. From a practical point of view, however, the second one is more straightforward, if only because the larger part of the world's teaching pool falls into two fairly clear-cut categories: NESTs and non-NESTs. Hence the decision to choose the second route for the purposes of this chapter.

Most commonly, a non-NEST may be defined as a teacher:

■ for whom English is a second or foreign language;
■ who works in an EFL environment;
■ whose students are monolingual groups of learners;
■ who speaks the same native language as his or her students.

This definition only partially applies to a much smaller group, that of non-native teachers who work in ESL environments, often with students from heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds. By extension, the NEST may be defined as the opposite of the non-NEST, most characteristically as a teacher who speaks English as a native language.

The basic assumption, then, is that NESTs and non-NESTs are two different species, and teachers belong to either this or that category. Given this, four assumptions follow (Medgyes 1994):

1. NESTs and non-NESTs differ in terms of their language proficiency
2. They differ in terms of their teaching behavior
3. The discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in their teaching behavior
4. They can be equally good teachers on their own terms

In order to validate his assumptions, Medgyes carried out a survey which included 325 teachers from 11 countries; 86 percent of the participants were non-natives and 14 percent natives. Although the sample was fairly large, the author suggested caution in interpreting the results, largely because the project was based on questionnaire-elicited self-reports, which reflect a teacher's *stated* behavior rather than his or her *actual* behavior; there may be a wide gap between the two. In any case, the results reported here have been obtained from this survey; for detailed statistical analyses, see Reves and Medgyes 1994.

The Linguistic Handicap

Not surprisingly, the primary advantage attributed to NESTs lies in their superior English-language competence. Their superiority was found particularly spectacular in their ability to use the language spontaneously and in the most diverse communicative situations. Non-NESTs, on the whole, are well aware of their linguistic deficiencies and of the all-pervasive nature of their handicap. In no area of English-language proficiency can they emulate NESTs: survey participants viewed themselves as poorer listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. True enough, long stays in English-speaking countries, hard work, and dedication might help narrow the gap, but very few non-NESTs are ever able to catch up with their native colleagues. When asked

to identify the major source of difficulty, most non-NEST participants mentioned vocabulary, together with idiomatic and appropriate use of English. This was followed by problems in speaking and fluency, pronunciation, and listening. Grammar featured to a far lesser extent and so did writing skills, whereas reading skills and cultural knowledge were not even mentioned.

Many non-NESTs participating in the survey commented about their inferiority complex caused by the defects in their English-language proficiency and about some kind of cognitive dissonance due to the double role they played as both teachers and learners of the same subject. All these problems together constitute the dark side of being a non-NEST. In view of these results, the first assumption, namely that NESTs and non-NESTs differ in terms of their language proficiency, may be regarded as confirmed.

Differences in Teaching Behavior

When asked whether they perceived any differences in teaching behavior between NESTs and non-NESTs, 82 percent of the participants gave a positive answer. Furthermore, they stressed that the discrepancy in language proficiency accounted for most of the differences found in their teaching behavior. Thus both the second and third assumptions above seem to have been borne out by the survey findings. The collated results are supplied under comprehensive headings in Table 1.

In explaining the differences, many participants pointed out that non-NESTs are usually preoccupied with accuracy, the formal features of English, the nuts and bolts of grammar, the printed word, and formal registers. Many lack fluency, have a limited insight into the intricacies of meaning, are often in doubt about appropriate language use, have poor listening and speaking skills, and are not familiar with colloquial English. It is only logical to assume that non-NESTs place an emphasis on those aspects of the language that they have a better grasp of. If they have a restricted knowledge of context, they tend to teach unfamiliar language elements

Table 1. Perceived Differences in Teaching Behavior Between NESTs and Non-NESTs

NESTs	Non-NESTs
own use of English	
speak better English	speak poorer English
use real language	use "bookish" language
use English more confidently	use English less confidently
general attitude	
adopt a more flexible approach	adopt a more guided approach
are more innovative	are more cautious
are less empathetic	are more empathetic
attend to perceived needs	attend to real needs
have far-fetched expectations	have realistic expectations
are more casual	are stricter
are less committed	are more committed
attitude to teaching the language	
are less insightful	are more insightful
focus on:	focus on:
fluency	accuracy
meaning	form
language in use	grammar rules
oral skills	printed word
colloquial registers	formal registers
teach items in context	teach items in isolation
prefer free activities	prefer controlled activities
favor group work/pair work	favor frontal work
use a variety of materials	use a single textbook
tolerate errors	correct/punish for errors
set fewer tests	set more tests
use no/less L1	use more L1
resort to no/less translation	resort to more translation
assign less homework	assign more homework
attitude to teaching culture	
supply more cultural information	supply less cultural information

in a context-poor environment or in isolation. Preoccupied with their own language difficulties, they are reluctant to loosen their grip over the class. As group work and pair work often create unpredictable situations full of linguistic traps, non-NESTs favor more secure forms of classwork, such as lock-step activities. Similar reasons were claimed to account for the non-NEST's preference for standard coursebooks, which by their very nature provide security. For the same reason, non-NESTs are inclined to adopt a more controlled and cautious pedagogic approach. Incidentally, these results tie in nicely with more recent data reported by Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999). (Further divergences displayed in Table 1 are dealt with in the following sections.)

Before providing arguments to prove the fourth assumption, let us turn to a discussion of certain advantages attributed to non-NESTs over NESTs.

The Bright Side of Being a Non-NEST

One item in the questionnaire inquired whether the participants thought the NEST or the non-NEST was a better teacher. While an approximately equal number of votes went for either option (27 percent for NESTs and 29 percent for non-NESTs), 44 percent inserted "both," an alternative which had not even been supplied in the questionnaire. The proportion of participants who chose non-NESTs as their favorites is high, especially given their linguistic inferiority. It follows from this that non-NESTs should be in possession of certain unique features that NESTs lack. But what are they? What gives non-NESTs their competitive edge? What assets enable them to make up for their linguistic handicap?

Partly inspired by the teachers participating in the survey, Medgyes advanced a second set of assumptions. Namely, compared to NESTs, non-NESTs can:

1. provide a better learner model;
2. teach language-learning strategies more effectively;
3. supply more information about the English language;
4. better anticipate and prevent language difficulties;
5. be more sensitive to their students;
6. benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue.

Below, we elaborate on these six assumptions.

1. Non-NESTs Provide a Better Learner Model

Any language teacher can set two kinds of models before the students: a language model and a learner model. Medgyes's basic claim is that, while NESTs make better *language* models, non-NESTs can provide better *learner* models. In terms of a language model, non-NESTs are relatively hindered, since they are learners of English just like their students, albeit at a higher level. Although a more proficient non-NEST is likely to provide a better language model than a less proficient one, non-NESTs cannot rival NESTs. In compensation, as it were, only non-NESTs can be set as proper learner models, since they *learned* English after they acquired their native language, unlike NESTs who *acquired* English as their native language—two completely different processes (Krashen 1981).

Another area of investigation concerns a comparison of learning success and teaching efficacy. In this regard, two questions may be asked. The first one is, Do you have to be a successful learner in order to become a successful teacher? Medgyes's answer is a tentative yes, arguing that a successful teacher by definition is a successful learner of English: poor language learners do not make good language teachers. This is not to deny that there are unsuccessful learners equipped with outstanding teaching qualities which help them offset their language deficiencies. However, such teachers are few and far between, and hence only those non-NESTs should be set as models who are successful learners themselves—anything less is a compromise.

The second question is, Does every successful learner become a successful teacher? The answer to this question is a definite no. If a perfect command were a sufficient prerequisite for successful teaching, Medgyes contends, NESTs would by definition be better teachers—which they are not! With respect to non-NESTs, too, it is common experience that successful learners turn out to be lousy teachers. This may be explained by several factors, most evidently by inadequate professional training. It appears, then, that success in learning English is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success in teaching it.

2. Non-NESTs Teach Language-learning Strategies More Effectively

It is a truism that some people pick up languages more quickly and effectively than others. Success depends on several things, such as background,

436

motivation, age, intelligence, aptitude, level of education, and quality of instruction, as well as knowledge of other foreign languages. An additional factor with a bearing on success is the use of *language learning strategies*. What are they? Language learning strategies, according to Wenden and Rubin (1987), are specific actions employed to facilitate the learning and recall of one or several components of proficiency. Facilitation implies not only making the process easier, but also making it "faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations" (Oxford 1990, p. 8).

All learners employ language learning strategies. Success with learning largely depends upon the ability to select the most appropriate strategy for dealing with a specific learning task. Good learners are capable of gleaning a repertoire of strategies which suits their personality as well as their particular learning environment. However, the majority of language learners grope in the dark unless they are fortunate enough to receive tailor-made support from knowledgeable teachers. Although researchers have long been intrigued by the question of the teachability of strategies, hardly any tangible results have been produced thus far. After having interviewed seven extremely successful language learners, Stevick concludes that there is no common pattern emerging: everyone seems to learn in his or her own way. What works for some learners utterly fails for others: "Hardly a clear model for an aspiring language student who wants to profit from their example!" (1989, p. 138).

As successful learners of English, non-NESTs are supposed to be conscious strategy users, able to tell which strategies have worked for them and which have not. Thus they stand a better chance of sensitizing their students to the employment of strategies than their native-speaking colleagues do. Their ability consists in imparting their own learning experiences as well as providing assistance for students to discover other strategies that should work specifically for them. To be fair, NESTs have also pursued strategies in their contact with foreign languages. However short-lived or distant their learning experience may have been, they may harness it in their job as teachers of English.

3. Non-NESTs Supply More Information About the English Language

Any language teacher's expertise consists of three components: (a) language proficiency, (b) language awareness, and (c) pedagogic skills. While language proficiency implies skills *in* the target language, language awareness involves explicit knowledge *about* the language, which does not necessarily assume near-native language proficiency. In his or her role as an instructor, the teacher obviously exhibits varying degrees of pedagogic skills as well.

Returning to a comparison of teaching behavior between NESTs and non-NESTs shown in Table 1, non-NESTs were found to be more insightful than NESTs. This follows from the differences in the process of mastering the English language. Their acquisition being largely unconscious, NESTs were perceived as largely unaware of the internal mechanisms directing language use and, therefore, less able to give their students relevant information about the target language. On the other hand, non-NESTs have amassed a wealth of knowledge about the English language during their own learning process. Their antennae can intercept as a possible source of problems even the minutest item which NESTs may take no notice of. Put differently, whereas NESTs have better intuitions about what is right and wrong in language use, non-NESTs have deeper insights into what is easy and difficult in the learning process.

Naturally, NESTs are also capable of refining their language awareness. They can improve, provided that they avail themselves of the opportunities offered by teacher education, foreign language learning, and, above all, experience. Those NESTs who have spent an extended period of time in a host country and have taken pains to learn the students' mother tongue should be incomparably more knowledgeable than those who have not.

4. Non-NESTs Better Anticipate and Prevent Language Difficulties

Having jumped off the same springboard as their students, non-NESTs are intrinsically more perceptive about language difficulties than

NESTs. For them to discover trouble spots requires little time and energy; messages can be exchanged merely by winking an eye. Most non-NESTs have developed a "sixth sense," and those who have been on the job long enough are able to predict, with a fair degree of accuracy, what is likely to go wrong before the student opens his or her mouth. In possession of this anticipatory device, non-NESTs stand a good chance of preventing linguistic problems which materialize in the form of deviant usage or, for want of a better word, errors.

As Table 1 shows, NESTs and non-NESTs behave differently with regard to error correction. Since native speakers generally view language as a means of achieving some communicative goal, they tend not to make a fuss about errors unless they hinder communication. In contrast, non-NESTs are notorious for penalizing errors, grammatical errors in particular, probably because they regard English primarily as a school subject to be mastered and only secondarily as a medium of genuine communication. Another reason for their heavy-handed attitude may lie in their deficient knowledge of English. In any case, teacher education should perhaps place more emphasis on strategies for error *prevention* than on techniques of error *correction.*

As far as NESTs are concerned, those expatriates who stay put in one country manage to gather far more experience about their students' specific language problems than those who drift from place to place, year after year. Since language is a major carrier of, and in fact is inseparable from, a people's culture, familiarity with the local language can bring NESTs closer to their students' cultural roots and shed light on the students' inability to comprehend a specific language element.

Speaking of culture, Table 1 indicates that NESTs and non-NESTs also differ in terms of their attitude toward teaching culture. By virtue of coming from an English-speaking country, NESTs are able to provide more information about their native culture. However, the more the English language spreads and diversifies in the world, the less it remains the privilege of NESTs, which harks back to the issue of English as an International Language addressed earlier.

To be sure, the non-NEST teaching in a monolingual class has far more background information about his or her students than even the most well-informed NEST can. Indirectly, this knowledge is instrumental in enhancing the teacher's capacity to anticipate and prevent cross-cultural difficulties.

5. Non-NESTs Are More Sensitive to Their Students

As Table 1 demonstrates, non-NESTs are potentially more sensitive on several counts. First, they can be more responsive to the students' real needs. In contrast, NESTs, working either with linguistically heterogeneous groups in an English-speaking country or with monolingual groups overseas, probably have but a vague picture of their students' needs and aspirations, including their linguistic, cultural, and personal backgrounds.

Second, thanks to thorough familiarity with the teaching/learning context, non-NESTs are in a position to set realistic aims for students. For example, they are more cognizant of the constraints of the national curriculum, the teaching materials available, and the examinations to be taken. They are also better able to gauge the level of motivation that students studying in a particular type of school are supposed to have.

Third, due to their deeper understanding of the prevalent circumstances, non-NESTs are usually stricter than their native-speaking colleagues. If they are aware of an imminent language examination, for instance, they will adapt their teaching methods to the stringent exam requirements; this may involve having to assign more tests and more homework. Living in a kind of symbiosis with the students, non-NESTs cannot afford to be as casual as NESTs.

It must be added, however, that a higher degree of sensitivity is merely a potential: just as there are non-NESTs who exhibit precious little empathy, some NESTs are amazingly understanding. It must be repeated here that, in addition to teacher education, the best sensitivity training for NESTs is to learn the language of the host country.

6. Non-NESTs Benefit from Their Ability to Use the Students' Mother Tongue

As native speakers of the local language, non-NESTs can obviously take advantage of this shared competence, provided they are allowed to harness it.

To use or not to use the mother tongue? This was one of the thorniest problems in language teaching methodology throughout the twentieth century as the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other. Until recently, the monolingual principle predominated, mostly advocated by NESTs, if only because they themselves felt disabled by their lack of competence in the students' first language (L1). As a consequence, non-NESTs were made to feel either defensive or guilty at their inability or unwillingness to conduct a class entirely in English. In the 1990s, however, the judicious use of the learners' native language was once again legitimized. Among the reasons for its comeback is the recognition of the L1 as the most genuine vehicle of communication between non-NESTs and their students in the monolingual classroom. Another major reason is that the native language proves to be a powerful teaching/learning tool in countless situations. Suffice it to say, today non-NESTs may switch into the L1 at their discretion, and so may NESTs—to the extent they can.

WHO IS MORE VALUABLE, THE NEST OR THE NON-NEST?

One item in the survey questionnaire inquired about the ideal proportion of NESTs or non-NESTs to be employed in schools. Whereas 52 percent of the participants said that they would prefer an equal number of NESTs and non-NESTs, 17 percent favored more NESTs and 31 percent more non-NESTs. A further breakdown of the data reveals that both native and non-native participants would rather have a majority of their own language group in the staff; as there were more non-NEST than NEST participants in the sample, the balance of choice tilted towards non-NESTs.

Be that as it may, the idea of a mixed staff is wishful thinking for most schools in most parts of the world. Short of NESTs, schools use the few around as efficiently as possible. On grounds of their native proficiency in English, in many places NESTs are assigned advanced level groups and conversation classes. Elsewhere, in order to make their contribution accessible to everybody, they are torn into as many small bits as there are groups in the school. Needless to say, NESTs are not always pleased with this task allocation—a recurrent complaint is that they are regarded as rare animals in a zoo (Árva and Medgyes 2000).

These results correlate strongly with the results of another item in the questionnaire which asked: Who is the better teacher, the NEST or the non-NEST? As mentioned previously, a similar percentage favored either NESTs or non-NESTs, whereas nearly half the respondents said that the two groups had an equal chance of success. When asked to justify their choice, participants typically referred to the differences summarized in Table 1. The same attribute was often judged as a positive feature by some and a negative feature by others.

Apart from a few extremists, survey participants expressed moderate views. They agreed that since each group had its own strengths and weaknesses, they would complement each other well in any school. A proportionate number of natives and non-natives would give the further advantage of offering a variety of ideas and teaching methods. Some respondents referred to the desirability of native/non-native interaction and cooperation; "There is a lot we can learn from each other!" one person remarked.

Organized collaboration and its most intensive form, team teaching, have become fairly well researched areas in recent years (Nunan 1992). Team teaching is a system whereby a group of teachers jointly undertake a program of work with a group of students. In the context of NEST/non-NEST collaboration, the largest and best documented team teaching initiative has been developed in Japan, called the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, also known as the JET program (Tajino and Tajino 2000). The program's primary aim is to recruit young native speakers from English-speaking countries to

teach under the guidance of, and together with, qualified Japanese teachers of English.

Let us reiterate: NESTs and non-NESTs teach differently in several respects. Non-NESTs are (more or less) handicapped in terms of their command of English. Paradoxically, this short-coming is their most valuable asset, as it helps them develop capacities that NESTs must struggle to acquire. NESTs and non-NESTs 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!* Thus the question, Who's worth more, the native or the non-native? is pointless, conducive to drawing wrong conclusions from the differences discovered in teaching behavior. It is suggested, therefore, that language teachers should be hired solely on the basis of their professional virtues, regardless of their language background. The data and the arguments supplied thus far seem to be powerful enough to validate the fourth assumption put forward on page 434, namely that NESTs and non-NESTs can be equally good teachers on their own terms.

CONCLUSION:
THE IDEAL TEACHER

In recent literature, the concept of the ideal teacher has gained some notoriety, especially in relation to the native/non-native dichotomy. It appears that the glory once attached to the NEST has faded, and an increasing number of ELT experts assert that the "ideal teacher" is no longer a category reserved for NESTs. It is becoming a generally accepted view that outstanding teachers cannot be squeezed into any pigeonhole: all outstanding teachers are ideal in their own ways, and as such are different from each other. The concept of the ideal teacher resists clear-cut definitions, because there are too many variables to consider.

In order to get a better grasp of the ideal teacher, however, let us suppose that all the variables are kept constant momentarily, except for the language proficiency component. In relation to non-NESTs, the question arises: Does

somebody with a better command of English stand a better chance of becoming an ideal teacher? In other words: Is a more proficient speaker a more efficient teacher as well? All other things being equal, the answer is yes: *the ideal non-NEST* is someone who has achieved near-native proficiency in English. The importance of this attribute is seldom questioned in the literature. Britten (1985) claims that an excellent command of English is a major selection criterion and a good predictor of a non-NEST's professional success. Lange (1990) rates language proficiency as the most essential characteristic of a good language teacher, and Murdoch (1994) calls it the bedrock of the non-NEST's professional confidence. Liu's (1999) study conducted among non-native TESOL students at a university in the United States confirms that English-language proficiency is generally recognized as a make-or-break requirement in ESL environments as well. Therefore, it must be a valid claim that the most important professional duty that non-NESTs have to perform is to make linguistic improvements in their English.

In contrast, the success of NESTs hinges on the extent to which they can acquire the distinguishing features of non-NESTs. In view of this, *the ideal NEST* is someone who has achieved a fair degree of proficiency in the students' native language. Cook (1999) must be right in saying that the multicompetent, multilingual teacher is qualitatively different and incomparably more capable than the monolingual teacher.

The trouble is that "all other things" are never equal in the classroom, so the phrase "the more proficient, the more efficient" is only partially valid. In this regard, Samimy (1997) mentions certain factors which are as important as language proficiency, particularly relevant teaching qualifications and extent of one's teaching experience. Seidlhofer reiterates this point: "There has often been the danger of an automatic extrapolation from *competent speaker* to *competent teacher* based on linguistic grounds alone, without taking into consideration the criteria of cultural, social and pedagogic appropriacy" (1996, p. 69). Indeed, an issue waiting to be addressed is the complex relationship between the different aspects of teachers' classroom

practice. The study of the non-NEST remains overall a largely unexplored area in language education.

In conclusion, within the framework of the native/non-native division, the ideal NEST and the ideal non-NEST arrive from different directions but eventually stand quite close to each other. Both groups of teachers serve equally useful purposes in their own ways. In an ideal school, therefore, there should be a good balance of NESTs and non-NESTs, who complement each other in their strengths and weaknesses. Given a favorable mix, various forms of collaboration are possible, and learners can only gain from such cross-fertilization.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your native language? Are there any "complicating factors" concerning your linguistic and cultural identity?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the native speaker/non-native speaker distinction? What are your arguments for or against?
3. **a.** If you are a native speaker of English, do you think that the English language is your property, or are you willing to share the "copyright" with non-native speakers?
   b. If you are a non-native speaker, do you believe you have the right to "tinker" with the norms and rules of English to the same extent as native speakers have?
4. Take a close look at Table 1 in this chapter. Which are the points your own experience supports and which are the ones it challenges?
5. In addition to the six advantages assigned to non-NESTs, can you think of any more? In addition to their linguistic superiority, can you list any further assets for NESTs?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. In a replication study, Davies (1996) measured differences between native and non-native speakers of English in terms of grammaticality judgments. His sample consisted of applied linguists with experience as English teachers. All the non-native participants (18 persons)

were highly proficient speakers of English; the native speakers (16 persons) were mostly speakers of British English. Davies included 12 sentences in his survey, and the participants were required to rate the sentences on a 4-point scale as follows:

1 The sentence sounds perfect. You would use it without hesitation.
2 The sentence is less than perfect—something in it just doesn't feel comfortable. Maybe lots of people could say it, but you never feel quite comfortable with it.
3 Worse than (2), but not completely impossible. Maybe somebody might use the sentence, but certainly not you. The sentence is almost beyond hope.
4 The sentence is absolutely out. Impossible to understand, nobody would say it. Un-English.

Here are the 12 sentences to be rated on the scale:

1 Under no circumstances would I accept that offer.
2 Nobody who I get along with is here who I want to talk to.
3 We don't believe the claim that Jimson ever had any money.
4 The fact he wasn't in the store shouldn't be forgotten.
5 What will the grandfather clock stand between the bed and.
6 I urge that anything he touch be burned.
7 All the further we got was to Sudbury
8 That is a frequently talked about proposal.
9 Nobody is here who I get along with who I want to talk to.
10 The doctor is sure that there will be no problems.
11 The idea he wasn't in the store is preposterous.
12 Such formulas should be writable down.

Grade these sentences on the 4-point scale. Remember to give 1 point for a perfect sentence and 4 points for a totally unacceptable sentence.

Here are the results of Davies's study:

Sentence	Mean Natives (N=16)	Non-natives (N=18)
1	1.1	1.1
2	2.7	3.0
3	1.6	1.8
4	1.7	1.6
5	2.7	3.5
6	1.7	2.5
7	3.3	3.0
8	1.2	2.2
9	2.3	2.5
10	1.0	1.0
11	1.7	1.5
12	3.0	3.3

Note that the aggregate mean for all 12 sentences for natives and non-natives is 1.99 and 2.23, respectively. This suggests that natives are more tolerant of uncertainty with regard to grammaticality. Compute your own score and compare it with the mean of natives and non-natives in Davies's sample. Are you more or less tolerant than either group?

2. Give an honest answer to this question: Suppose you were the principal of a commercial language school in your country. Who would you prefer to employ?
a. I would employ only native speakers even if they were not qualified teachers.
b. I would prefer to employ NESTs, but if needed I would choose a qualified non-NEST rather than a native without ELT qualifications.
c. The native/non-native issue would not be a selection criterion (provided the non-NEST was a highly proficient speaker of English).

Ask three or four colleagues about their choices. If there are discrepancies between your views, justify your preference. Has anyone hedged their bets by saying "It depends"? Ask them to explain their ambiguous stance.

3. If you were asked the above question in the context of an ordinary state school, would your choice be different? How about your colleagues' choices?

4. In groups, collect as many features of the successful language teacher as you can. Suppose that the "ideal teacher" is someone who has a maximum score of 25 points. Individually, allocate as many points as you wish for each feature within the maximum 25 points. Then, in groups again, compare your scores and argue for your allocation.

5. Interview ten non-native speakers of English to find out what traits they value most in language teachers. Do they specify any features which are more characteristic of non-NESTs than NESTs?

FURTHER READING

Braine, G., ed. 1999. *Non-native Educators in English Language Teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
A collection of essays that articulates the concerns, struggles, and triumphs of non-native teachers, mostly those living and working in the United States.

Davies, A. 1991. *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
A thorough discussion of the native/non-native dichotomy from an applied linguistic perspective, going beyond the immediate concerns of the language teacher.

Graddol, D. 1997. *The Future of English?* London: The British Council.
A thought-provoking book about the current position and the future of English as the lingua franca of the world. It examines the possible effect of globalization on the status and spread of English.

Medgyes, P. 1999. *The Non-native Teacher*. Revised second edition. Ismaning, Germany: Hueber Verlag.
A provocative book analyzing the differences in teaching attitudes between NESTs and non-NESTs, with language improvement exercises for the non-native teacher.

Phillipson, R. 1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
A passionate and much-cited analysis of the causes and impact of the dominance of English worldwide. The book criticizes several ruling dogmas in ELT.