

## **Native-speakerism revisited: Global Englishes, ELT and intercultural communication**

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### **Abstract**

The English language functions as a global lingua franca, and as the number of non-native speakers of English surpasses the number of native speakers of English, the ideology of native-speakerism is challenged. Viewing from the paradigm of Global Englishes (GE), English is no longer the sole property of its native speakers. This paper first discusses and presents a general picture regarding standard language ideology and the ideology of native-speakerism, and links the notion to how such ideas would exert an influence on teacher recruitment and intercultural communication in English language teaching (ELT). This paper then employs narrative inquiry from Chinese ELT professionals who have education experience abroad to reveal how they negotiate their professional identities in relation to privilege and marginalization when working with native English speaking colleagues. This paper argues for the importance of moving beyond the idealized native speaker model from the GE paradigm to challenge the ideology of native-speakerism in various aspects of ELT, in particular, in expanding circle contexts.

**Keywords:** Global Englishes, native-speakerism, ELT, Intercultural communication

### **Introduction**

The world of ELT (English language teaching) has experienced various ideological debates and reforms in the 21st century. Traditionally, it was taken for granted that English is the property of its native speakers, so that the native norm is the only yardstick to evaluate the success of English learning. With the spread and development of English as a global language, the number of learners, speakers, and users of English has been increasing dramatically. The number of non-native speakers of English (NNSE) has surpassed the number of native speakers of English (NSE). Along with that, a number of post-colonial varieties of English, called 'New Englishes' (Platt, Weber & Ho, 1984), have been formed with their features of phonology, morphology, and syntax being codified. Research from the paradigm of WE (World Englishes) has challenged the restricted native

standard from the sociolinguistic perspective. As Kachru (1992, pp. 10-11) argues, 'English acquires a new identity, a local habitat, and a name. [...] English has now, as a consequence of its status, been associated with universalism, liberalism, secularism, and internationalism'. The recent development of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) goes even further to legitimate all users of English, from which the native standard does not enjoy any privilege for international and intercultural communication. The importance of mutual intelligibility, negotiation, and accommodation skills in communication is emphasized in this paradigm (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). In this paper, the term GE (Global Englishes) is used as an umbrella term that covers the varieties of English from the WE perspective and recognizes the fluidity and complexity of language use from a wider context within the ELF paradigm.

This paper will explore the concept of GE in further detail. Even with arguments toward viewing English from a sociolinguistic perspective to challenge its ownership (Widdowson, 1994), the ELT world today reacts slowly where native ideology is still entrenched, in particular in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. With the development of ELF, the ELT world is experiencing an era of transition in which its standards and learning goals are being reshaped. However, in many ELT settings, native ideology is so entrenched that any deviation from native use is regarded as 'errors' of language production. Language assessment is also very much based on the native standard, and English is often tested in a vacuum, without testing any real communication strategies or problem-solving skills (Fang, 2017). This has led to the argument of native-speakerism as a prevalent neo-racist language ideology (Holliday, 2005, 2006; Kabel, 2009) existing both visibly and invisibly in ELT today.

### ***Decoding Native-speakerism***

The field of TESOL has witnessed a transition period where the development of ELF has brought about viewing the English language from a fluid perspective. Thus, from the perspective of GE, the dichotomy between native and non-native English speaker has lost any genuine meaning because such classification does not reflect the current use of English as an international language (Liu, 1999; Mahboob, 2010; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). Such distinction is, in fact, problematic because 'it is narrow, discriminatory, and signifies ownership of the language [...] [and] promotes the dominance of a standard English language and culture and downgrades other varieties of English (Faez, 2011, p. 380). The concept of native speaker is a myth (Lippi-Green, 2012) and native-speakerism creates a hierarchy and inequality in ELT.

The *English Today* debate between Quirk and Kachru has drawn upon the issue of whether the standard English ideology should be insisted on as the only model of ELT. In the debate, Quirk (1990, p. 9) viewed non-native English as ‘deficit’ and therefore referred to the non-standard forms of English as ‘half-baked quackery’ and claimed that only Standard English can be used as a teaching model. From a liberation linguistics perspective, Kachru argued that non-native English is just a ‘difference’ and critiqued Quirk’s deficit linguistics position.

According to Holliday (2005), native-speakerism is the ideology that native English speaking teachers (NESTs) set the ideal for both ELT and teaching methodology as they represent Western cultures. This is an entrenched language ideology in many ELT settings where NESTs are often seen as the arbiters of the English language, teaching methods from the West are adopted, and ELT materials and textbooks are imported from the West. These materials and textbooks are very much native-speaker oriented and represent the cultures and values of the West (Gray, 2010; Kubota, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2016). Local professionals may not be able to contextualize the materials and simply take the ideology of native-speakerism for granted as a form of ‘self-marginalization’ (Fang, 2018; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The concept of GE has not been applied in many EFL settings, while native-speakerism is still prevalent in both people’s minds and actual practices. This paper, therefore, argues that both social inequality and entrenched native ideology still exist in the ELT field, particularly in traditional expanding circle contexts.

One reason is that the ownership of English is not challenged by language teachers, as many still believe in the dominance of NSEs in ELT and that the native standard is the only norm to evaluate the success of language learning. Many local non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) may still view themselves as imperfect models for their students, thus endowing privilege to NESTs. NESTs, in many EFL contexts, gain privilege in terms of housing and pay scale regardless of their own educational backgrounds and teaching ability (Fang, 2018; Miyazato, 2009; Yeh, 2002). Another reason may lie in the lack of resources to challenge this neo-colonial and neo-racist perspective. Despite gaining knowledge about GE and recognizing the various forms and functions of English, ELT practitioners may not be able to apply the relevant theory into practice. They are often told what and how to teach by using textbooks, with assessment models simply testing students’ language skills in a vacuum. In this way, they lose the initiative and freedom to challenge the fixed language ideologies. As Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 22) argued, ‘the process of marginalization and the practice of self-marginalization bring to the fore the

coloniality, rather than the globality, of the English language. They cast a long, hegemonic shadow over the activity of TESOL’.

The ideology of native-speakerism also exists in teacher recruitment. For instance, Ruecher and Ives (2015, p. 733) analyzed internet-based information for teacher recruitment in the Asian context and found that ‘the ideal candidate is overwhelmingly depicted as a young, White, enthusiastic native speaker of English from a stable list of inner-circle countries’. As argued, this is a recurrent theme as the job market still views native speakers with privilege. My own autoethnographic research and interview results also reveal the different treatments between NESTs and NNESTs, particularly in terms of lower employment benefits for local professionals. Thus, the ‘whiteness metaphor’ is still entrenched in many EFL contexts (Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Kubota, 2004; Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003) and ‘emerges in the notions of *privilege* and *marginalization*’ (Fang, 2018, p. italics in original), about which local ELT practitioners struggle to make their voices heard. However, as shown above, language policy and recruitment practices have been slow to challenge the *a priori* authenticity of NESTs

### ***Native-speakersim in Intercultural Communication***

The ideology of native-speakerism also exists when students learn the English language in relation to intercultural communication. Guilherme (2002, p. 155) points out that ‘learning/teaching a foreign language/culture implies taking an ideological view of the world beyond our cultural borders which reflects the way we perceive ourselves within our own culture and its position towards the Other’. When viewing the use of English as a foreign language, the idea that NSEs should be the arbiters seems quite understandable. This leads to curriculum designs and textbook contents that focus solely on Anglophone cultures. To a large extent, textbooks (including their producers and publishers) have generated a false image between the local and the global and create an invisible hierarchy between the *center* and the *periphery* (Gray, 2010; Fang, 2011; Shin, Eslami & Chen, 2011). It seems reasonable that NESTs are recruited to teach such cultural contents. However, as mentioned above, English is more often used in many emergent settings where NSEs are only the minority. When EFL/ESL speakers communicate in English with people outside their speech communities, they frequently do so with other NNESTs. They interact with ‘cultural actors, that is, on the intercultural encounter’ (Guilherme, 2002, p. 124).

The representation of native-speakerism in textbook design reflects a lack of critical language awareness of ELF and intercultural literacy needed to view intercultural communication from the broader ELF paradigm. For

example, in terms of English textbook design, Gray (2010) has critically revealed the neoliberalism of the cultural contents of global textbooks with an argument against the culture of the new capitalism. Gray (2010) also found that many ELT teachers tend to uncritically accept and even enjoy the new capitalist values embedded in textbook contents. It is important for ELT teachers to challenge the ideology of native-speakerism shown in textbook contents and develop a broader sociocultural perspective rather than a value-free and passive perspective toward employing ELT materials. Moreover, they should be able to evaluate and adapt the cultural content represented in a course textbook critically to develop students' critical language awareness and intercultural literacy.

### **The Study: Teacher Voices – Privilege and marginalization**

This section reports on some teacher interview data that shows the entrenched ideology of native-speakerism in ELT in the context of Chinese higher education (see Fang, 2018 for a detailed discussion and analysis). The interviews were conducted at the end of 2015 with local Chinese ELT teachers who were at the time teaching at a southeast Chinese university. The method of narrative inquiry was adopted for data collection as discourse can be a valuable tool for eliciting meaningful data. By adopting interview as narratives from a poststructural perspective, the participants were able to tell their stories while constructing, negotiating, and re-constructing their identities through the process of story-telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

### **Findings and Analysis**

#### ***Chloe's Narrative***

Chloe worked as an English instructor before she pursued a master's degree in an inner circle country. She hoped to share her various cultural experiences and stories with her students and hoped that the students would make some changes in terms of English language learning. She has been working as a university instructor for more than three years when participating in this interview.

When asked about the relationship between academic degrees and salary scale of the teachers when she was abroad, she believed that, in general, NESTs and NNESTs earned the same pay as the working conditions in this country were equal. Asked whether NESTs have certain advantages in the university where she works in China, she gave an affirmative answer. During the interview, she expressed that she struggled

being a Chinese NNEST: ‘this is a realistic problem. In the field of English education, international teachers receive higher pay, doubled, and even more, compared to Chinese teachers with the same qualification and academic degree’. Another issue she mentioned regarding native-speakerism was that being an NNEST: ‘Students prefer international teachers, especially NESTs, because they have little contact with NESTs and have an immanent idea that NESTs teach more authentic English’. She also lamented that ‘students tend to choose the classes lectured by NESTs. On the one hand, students feel that it is real English communication, and, on the other hand, students have not developed a mature mindset of English learning’.

She also mentioned during the interview that in the job market, for example, NESTs tend to secure a job easily with higher pay if they have the same qualification compared with NNESTs (even sometimes if they do not have the same qualification). However, Chloe further commented that some Chinese teachers can also gain popularity among students; students may not highly evaluate a course lectured by some NESTs because, for example, NESTs sometimes cannot accommodate the class content according to students’ English level. However, NESTs are often automatically perceived as being in a privileged position and having superior teaching skills before students actually get to know their teaching styles and manners.

At the end of the narrative, Chloe seemed to be quite optimistic regarding the marginalization of the NNESTs, saying that the situation may change in the future. With the trend toward globalization and mobility, the global market of English instructors will expand and become more competitive. With an increasing number of Chinese teachers with high qualifications with experience abroad, NESTs will face fierce competition from bilingual Chinese teachers. In the future, the dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs will most likely fade away.

### *Jason’s Narrative*

Jason majored in English in his undergraduate study in Mainland China and entered an outer circle context for his master’s degree. In his narrative, Jason wanted to see things from a more diverse and tolerant perspective. Jason mentioned that his teachers were from different geographic regions when he was pursuing his master’s degree. He came back and worked as an English teacher because he hoped to apply the knowledge he had learned to classroom teaching and to bring meaningful learning experiences to his students. He commented that: ‘my teachers in primary and high school adopted a mechanical way of English teaching. I found that even if I would have studied English for more than 10 years, I could not communicate with others fluently. It is a pity. I was exposed to different and more open teaching methods in my university and my English

improved. Therefore, I hope to change the current English teaching situation and make changes to provide appropriate English teaching methods according to students' English levels'.

Jason also believes that NESTs are more popular in ELT in China, as the majority of language learners have few opportunities to come into contact with them and students are curious as to whether they can communicate smoothly in English. Jason also stated that 'students believe that it would be good to imitate NESs and believe that they speak more authentic English'. Jason also used his own example in his narrative. When he was looking for a job, he found that being a native speaker was a basic requirement for candidates: 'people have a stereotype that NESTs have a higher level of English competence with good pronunciation. Recruiters do not pay enough attention to whether English teachers understand theories of language learning. They only focus on language competence'.

Although he did not know whether there is a discrepancy in the pay of his fellow teachers when pursuing his master's degree, Jason did feel that there was discrimination against Chinese teachers and a preference for NESTs in China. He mentions that with the same teaching load and same job title, NESTs receive higher pay with fewer research tasks, which he feels is unfair. The majority of the international teachers are from developed countries (mostly from the US), and the university is not able to recruit NESTs at a lower salary. The current job market in China is not that optimistic: even if the salary is not high enough, there are still many Chinese applicants for jobs. Jason also mentioned another reason: 'international teachers are popular among Chinese students'. He argued that international teachers should have a larger workload as they have fewer research tasks. In terms of a qualified English teacher, Jason used the word facilitator. He argued that teachers should not only be practitioners of theory but also researchers themselves. They should be able to use English to effectively communicate with others and to express their points of view.

### ***Emily's Narrative***

Similar to Jason, Emily is a new graduate from an MA program. She had plans to study abroad and had a clear goal of being an English teacher. She entered an inner circle context for her MA as she wanted to make ELT changes in China and hoped to update her teaching knowledge in order to help her students in the future. In Emily's experiences of studying abroad, she had a teacher from Greece. Emily expressed that her Greek teacher would repeat herself and even correct her own pronunciation during lectures: 'I could understand her accent but the teacher may have cared a lot about her English accent'. When talking about any discrepancy in terms of

remuneration and workload, Emily mentioned that NESTs and NNESTs had the same workload when she was abroad.

However, when discussing her work situation at the university in China, she would separate things into the ‘ideal and real’. Emily argued that no matter what the mother tongue and skin color are, both NESTs and NNESTs are, on an ideal level, able to be qualified English teachers. However, in reality, the privilege of NESTs is rather salient in her working environment. She argued that: “international teachers do not do any research, but they can still survive as university instructors. [...] My students told me that sometimes they are not so dedicated to extracurricular activities either”. Emily mentioned the problem that, if international teachers receive *a priori* higher pay than Chinese teachers without any further in-depth consideration, this will strangle the professional identity and personal endeavor of Chinese teachers, and NNESTs will no longer have a say in this field which is a grievous and realistic concern.

Emily further narrates a crucial reason why NESTs would enjoy a privilege: ‘they gain certain advantages as the majority of Chinese teachers never hear the concepts of ELF and WE. They will tell their students to choose classes offered by NESTs as they are more authentic. When I first worked as a university teacher, I tried to weep, but failed to shed a tear’. Emily pointed out that although some Chinese teachers may have a lower language competence, this should not be a reason to encourage students to choose English classes offered by NESTs without a second thought. Again, students may set up a stereotype that NESTs teach better English compared to NNESTs. She further commented that students cannot be blamed: ‘The advantage may be rather complex. Chinese students and Chinese people endow the privilege for them. At the same time, they have their own additional advantage’. Emily pointed out a serious problem which is that most of the Chinese teachers work hard but some NESTs are not as devoted to their work as their counterparts, although she mentioned that we cannot ‘knock them down with one stroke’. Moreover, she noted, NESTs easily gain the job and enjoy higher pay and better treatment, but some do not prepare for their class beforehand and some give a fake score to students. She said that they enjoy certain privileges from multi-faceted aspects, but some do not work properly for their pay. Emily believes that a qualified English teacher should meet the students’ and parents’ needs, be flexible and devoted to English teaching, and conduct research for their professionalism.

### *Joyce’s Narrative*

Joyce obtained her doctorate in an inner circle context. She was interested in her major but did not plan to be an English teacher during her



MA studies. She hoped to explore English teaching and TESOL in more detail and decided to work as an English teacher in China.

Joyce expressed that there was no difference in terms of payment between NNESTs and NESTs when she was aboard. However, she believed that NESTs have a higher ‘face validity’ and can find a job more easily compared to NNESTs. Joyce also mentioned that students tend to believe in the authenticity of NESTs in the ELT field. Sometimes, Chinese and NESTs may have certain misunderstandings due to different treatment. Joyce claimed that international teachers got much higher pay even if they had qualifications similar to Chinese teachers. However, concerning research, Chinese teachers have more specific requirements. Joyce then argued that regardless of nationalities, teachers with similar academic qualifications should receive the same treatment. In regard to the professional identity of the teachers, Joyce believes that it is necessary for English teachers to introduce the global status of English to students, encourage students to learn English for specific purposes, and adjust teaching approaches according to students’ language level. In terms of localized variety, Joyce believes that, although English is not a common language used in China, she cannot deny that Chinese people will process their own English for communication purposes. She also noted that localized English does not make a great impact on testing, but it is necessary to reduce the requirement of specific target accents.

## **Demystifying Native-speakerism**

Taken as a whole, the narratives above clearly indicate a discrepancy in the treatment between NESTs and NNESTs. Although the notorious dichotomy between NSEs and NNSEs has been challenged due to the global status of ELF, such as with Cook’s (1999) notion of multi-competence), the social norms of native ideology are still deep-rooted. The binaries of NSE/NNSE and NEST/NNEST are contested in that these dichotomies ‘fail to allow conceptual and descriptive space for learner, user, and teacher experiences negotiating translinguistic and transcultural identities’ (Rudolph, Selvi & Yazan, 2015, p. 34). From the teacher narratives, we can see that it is difficult for local Chinese English teachers (CETs) to enjoy the same status as international teachers, especially NESTs. However, we should also recognize that the concepts of *privilege* and *marginalization* are fluid and are shaped differently in various contexts. To a large extent, CETs are marginalized in the ELT field regardless of their professional and academic qualifications. The ELT situation in some expanding circle countries may create an invisible hierarchy that “NESs are better models and

that the English language belongs to NESs are still being generalised and rooted into people's belief systems" (Fang, 2015, p. 208).

Regarding the complex notion of identity, the interviewed teachers expressed a concern that people tend to neglect the use of ELF in ELT. The teachers in this study were aware of and had a critical perspective on the marginalization and position of their professional identities. However, the current language policy in China is still largely native-oriented, and the native versus non-native dichotomy is still salient in real practice (see also, e.g., Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997; Lippi-Green, 2012). Given the fact that the interviewed CETs voiced the situation of marginalization, it is imperative that ELT moves from its native-oriented ideology to view the global status of English and to newly conceptualize the existing ELT models. Currently, the local practice of ELT is largely based on monolingual native-speakerism (cf. Holliday, 2005). We see the power of NESTs and the lack of any process to empower the NNESTs in ELT. Although a critical perspective has been taken by many scholars in various contexts, changes are difficult to implement if the current language policy adheres to the native standard ideology. Fang (2015) has argued that there is a lack of multilingual perspective on language policy in the Asian context, while research on language attitude will be necessary to 'raise the awareness of language learners to address their needs, and recognise any of stereotypes and expectations they have of a language' (Fang, 2015, p. 65).

In terms of professional identity, it can be seen from the narratives that CETs feel that they are struggling for professional legitimacy in a field where research seems to be more significant than teaching and service. Some teachers mentioned that qualified English teachers should update their knowledge and understanding of the global status of English. This, however, is seldom mentioned in the teaching curriculum of ELT in China (see also Fang, 2016). Although globalization has urged people to view English from a broader perspective and the ownership of English has been challenged within the paradigms of WE and ELF (Jenkins, 2007; Kachru, 1992; Seidlhofer, 2011), the local practice seldom realizes the notion of ELF. The 'whiteness metaphor' still heavily shapes the ELT field in expanding-circle contexts (see Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Kubota, 2004; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003) and invisibly emerges in the notions of *privilege* and *marginalization*. Local practitioners struggle to make their voices heard on these issues, and language policies and recruitment practices have been slow to challenge the *a priori* authenticity of NESTs.

From the teachers' narratives, we can summarize that teachers should be sensitive to the global spread of English, learn to challenge the native-oriented ideology, and understand students' needs and goals in learning within a local context. It should be noted that the native-oriented

model views NSEs as the only yardstick and that this violates the multilingual and multicultural reality (Baker, 2015; Li, 2016). The understanding of local practice in ELT and the reconceptualization of ELT models to fit the complex context of communities of practice has been pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (2003). The parameter of particularity of Kumaravadivelu's post-method pedagogy requires teachers to be both sensitive to the local contexts of language teaching and to negotiate their professional identities.

Interestingly, other non-Chinese NNESTs may be privileged compared to local Chinese teachers but are still hierarchically lower than NSETs. The translinguistic and transcultural identities of Chinese teachers, though, challenge the fundamental categories of being Chinese and being a Chinese teacher. This, in many respects, is an example of being situated in complexity even while interpreting one's experience (with emotion) in the black-and-white binary of being privileged/marginalized, without accounting for the fluidity of privilege and marginalization, and the complexity of the negotiation of self/other in and across the linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national borders of identity (Nathanael Rudolph, personal communication, see also, Rudolph, 2016).

## **Closing Remarks**

It is clear that the notion of native-speakerism, based on previous studies and my own experiences, is still entrenched in ELT. The invisible association of privilege and marginalization is still salient in both TESOL methodology and practice, as well as in recruitment for ELT professionals. There is much that can be lamented about ELT practice in many contexts, even with the native-speakerism revealed by many NNESTs, because the professional legitimacy of local NNESTs has not yet been firmly established. If monolingualism is treated as the norm in ELT, bilingualism or multilingualism will be regarded as a deficit rather than as beneficial for language learners, and thus NESTs will remain privileged. Therefore, this paper has argued the importance of challenging 'the ideology of native speakerism that constructs and maintains borders between the Self and Other within the ELT field' (Fang, 2018, p. 37). From this perspective, language policies and practices should not be monolingually oriented, but rather should be multilingually oriented.

To sum up, the ideology of native-speakerism is not easy to challenge, given the lack of awareness and understanding of ELF theory by quite a number of ELT practitioners. This paper only reports a case of several ELT practitioners who realize the struggle of being NNESTs in the

field and have started to challenge the ideology of native-speakerism. It should also be pointed out that such ideology also exists in teaching intercultural communication, where Anglophone cultures are regarded as the norm that language learners should follow, but not vice versa. In fact, against the backdrop of globalization, norms should not be fixed, but should be negotiated through the process of intercultural communication. NSEs should also raise their awareness of cultural diversity to co-construct communication with various interlocutors. It is also important to note that privilege and marginalization are not fixed but depend on different contexts. This paper is by no means fully representative and cannot be generalized into other different contexts. However, it is hoped that the English language will be viewed from a critical ecological perspective, and that native-speakerism will be challenged and re-visited by stakeholders including language policy makers, ELT professionals, and language learners.

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