



English Language for Professional Competence

KEYWORDS

Fast Food, Obesity, Nutritious Food, Calories, Problems.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses English language teaching (ELT) around the world, and argues that as a profession, it should emphasize pedagogical competence rather than native-speaker requirement in the recruitment of teachers in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as second language (ESL) contexts. It establishes that being a native speaker does not make one automatically a competent speaker or, of that matter, a competent teacher of the language. It observes that on many grounds, including physical, socio-cultural, technological and economic changes in the world as well as the status of English as official and national language in many post-colonial regions, the distinction between native and non-native speakers is no longer valid. There is more influence of the native language in English when it comes to both written and spoken.

INTRODUCTION

The English language teaching (ELT) industry has in the past several years become a major cross-cultural, trans-cultural, and worldwide enterprise. With the death of distance, the disappearance of many national boundaries, and the prioritization of regional and trans-national economies, prospects for widespread lingua franca, English being one of the most prominent, have tremendously increased, having spread under varying circumstances to diverse regions of the world predominantly through the joint outcome of Britain's colonial expansion and the more recent activity of the US. English today enjoys international recognition and vitality.

There are no precedents to help us to see what happens to a language when it achieves genuine world status. The distinction has also created a strong preference for the historical (by virtue of origin) native speaker over any other professional – generally a historical non-native to the so-called native English countries. Although, in black-and-white the distinction in itself is valid, it has, in the case of English, ceased to be reliable given the great changes in the physical, technological, economic and migratory trajectories of the present era and, above all, the permanent status of English as official and national language in post-colonial regions. These regions also have native speakers of their own varieties of English, who, as the case may be, contribute equally to the global evolution and spread of the language as well. Moreover, English emerged and evolved in these contexts through an ecologically different itinerary from the so-called native regions. The general conception of the native speaker as the infallible or perfect teacher of his or her language, which this paper seeks to redress, certainly influenced the above statement. Such a conception clearly disregards other determinant factors in ELT such as professional training, educational qualification, experience, language proficiency, and socio-cultural implications. These factors add a more relevant dimension to any meaningful ELT programme than just the status of a native speaker. A number of examples have been used to demonstrate this reliance on native-speaker origin without corresponding proficiency or professional ability in ELT.

ENGLISH ON THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM TODAY

The international arena seems to be constantly gravitat-

ing towards English. There has been since the mid-1990s a strong tilt towards English in business, technology, scholarly journals and publications, international relations and law. From a survey of foreign languages taught in the Russian federation, they found out that 60% of secondary school students chose English, 25% went in for German, and 15% took French as foreign language. These students, like many other people, see English as a means of associating with the rest of the world, which has predominantly shifted towards English expression. In the academia this shift is also evident and ranges from the award of certificates in English and the pursuit of degrees in English in non-English speaking countries to the publication of scholarly journals in English. It initially published all articles in Spanish only, but gradually shifted to English by "first publishing abstracts in English, then providing English translations of all articles. The shift from Spanish to English confirms the strength of English internationally, but the historical native speaker is someone born in one of the native English-speaking countries.

English occupies a dominant position in second language (ESL) or post-colonial countries where it is the official and national language on which national identities are built. It is also the medium of education and/or a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. This is the case with India, Singapore, parts of West, South and East Africa, and most of the other former British colonies. English is now part of the socio-cultural set up of these countries. It has a long history of naturalization, nativity, and indigenization that has resulted in the existence of regional varieties of the language generally referred to as New English, Non-native English, Indigenized Vernacular English (IVEs). Ownership of English, in this case, signals the emergence of Native speakers for each of the new varieties that cropped from the expansion of the language. Another important domain in which English has gained international renown is in book publication. This reveals that even countries that have no historical or colonial links with native English countries (particularly England or America) have adopted the language in a bid to benefit from its international wealth and ever-increasing international readership. Although in this case the proficiency and expertise of the native-speaker may not be in question, it still betrays the belief that only the historical native-speaker can do such a job.

With the rising strength of the economies of some English as foreign language (EFL) countries, especially in the Asian sub-continent, there is likely to be a drastic growth in the number of books published in English in these areas. The proliferation of publications in these predominantly L2 and L3 regions, however, predicts a diminishing attachment to some of the varieties that have been highlighted as the authentic (i.e. the native varieties).

Trends in the 1990s and the early 2000s show that variations in speech patterns have rendered English tongues, whether native or non-native, very distinct and that some parts of the vocabulary are peculiar to particular regions – West Africa, India, Australia, Britain or The Caribbean. The two components of English are taught and learned without [extensive] variation are its grammar and its core vocabulary. This means that native speakers have just the same intelligibility and communicative challenges to cope with as non-native speakers. English is still the effective medium that links the far parts of the world and their diverse mother tongues on the international platform. However, the insistence on the native origin requirement by some ELT employers is putting the clock back on the international intelligibility accommodations speakers make to one another and risks.

THE NATIVE SPEAKER: SOME THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The use of the native speaker has a long history in all sub disciplines of linguistics. From methodologies to theories of language study the native speaker occupies a basic position as a springboard for the judgment of language production and evaluation. The major conviction behind the native speaker is that s/he can at anytime give valid and stable judgments on his or her language. S/he is capable of identifying ill-formed grammatical expressions in his or her language even though s/he may not be able to explain exactly why they are ill-formed. Many linguistic schools of thought have based their findings on native speaker judgments and performances.

Prejudices and bias have been central to descriptions of the New English. There is no other standard." While the native speaker may be deemed ideal for ELT, it is far from saying s/he is infallible, as Hocking wants us to believe. This is because the most native speakers of English in the world are native speakers of some nonstandard variety of the language. On this ground, they like the non-native speakers (especially those for whom English is an official language) have similar proficiency, professional, and socio-cultural stages to deal with claiming ownership of varieties of colonial languages, which they used as official and national languages. The distinction of non-native speakers became prominent and was based on the perception of the colonial subjects by the colonialists as backward, primitive, non-literate, and unimportant masses. The varieties have been found to be systematic and logical in the variations they exhibit. More non-native teachers are involved in ELT than native, when English is progressively being detached from the native English-speaking countries, when lesser attention is being paid to accent, when the so-called non-native speakers of English outnumber the native, some institutions still run after and are caught by the fever of recruiting only (historical) native-speaking teachers.

CORRELATION AND THE NATIVE SPEAKER

Is the native speaker infallible? Being a native speaker is no guarantee for competence in communication. Communication itself is far more latent than the words used

in the process. This is because there is a large infrastructure of social and cultural elements that determine what must be said and how it must be said. Moreover, from a purely grammatical point of view, even in native are as, poor and inefficient speakers are still found. Error analysis in linguistic study did not emerge from the study of non-native speakers but from the study of native speakers. An Englishman, who loves a sentence, that is lucid and logical, feels it a shock to hear his native language maltreated by those who are just as English as himself. Do levels of competence and proficiency apply to a native speaker? The issue of correctness, that is, respect for rules of the language, is so complex that being a native speaker does not automatically qualify one as a competent speaker. Several factors account for this; language change, dialect variations, socio-cultural contexts, professional backgrounds, cultural variation and so forth. It therefore means native speakers can be classified on a scale of competence just like other speakers who acquire proficiency in the language. And in ELT, which today has moved far beyond the borders of the UK or US, and with the emergence of several regional norms of the language, the socio-cultural element often the major defining icon of these norms is very important.

ELT PRACTICE AND THE NATIVE-SPEAKER FEVER

In many EFL countries, the quest for native speaker or native-like proficiency is still high. It is less so in the ESL countries where education is the barometer for proficiency in the language. This is basically because English in these contexts is introduced in school and is used generally in formal situations and in education related jobs. English, as said above, is the official language of these countries. But in the EFL contexts, English is an additional language whose importance is dictated by its economic and international necessity. There was no indication that an American, British, Australian, etc. would be preferred. This further indicates that it is not the quest for perfection that drives this demand for native-speaker teachers but rather a social prestige. This is primarily because ELT is a profession and not a natural part of a native-English speaker. In this first advert, more emphasis is laid on the status, i. e. the origin, of the prospective applicant rather than on his or her level of education and professional experience. There is no room for the so-called non-native speaker who could be a proficient and experienced professional.

The priority of place given to the native requirement, although not specific to any country, indicates that native-speaker origin is rated above university degree and professional experience, which are not mandatory. So, as the advert indicates, a native speaker would not need a university degree or professional training in ELT to qualify for this job. Some prospective employers insist on native-speaker origin together with other requirements. In the following advert, it does not only suffice to be a native speaker, but a dynamic, professional and experienced native language trainer. Here at least, attention is partially paid to certain ELT-specific qualities, which may eliminate some of the so-called native speakers. This is not the case with the advert above that gives gospel credence to native origin rather than to professional and pedagogic competence.

The search for native-speaker teachers of English referred to above as a fever has gripped not only the ELT field but also other domains of normal life. It is interesting that other jobs that do not require language transmission as ELT equally require native-speaker status. Germany

is the holiday destination for holidaymakers from various linguistic backgrounds, prominent among them Japanese, Chinese, and other Asians. The native-speaker fever is fuelled by the belief that native speakers are perfect in their language. This might be true but it is not the case in every situation especially in ELT. This is because there are many more challenges of a different kind to overcome in the ELT classroom than just living up to the status of a native speaker. These examples drawn predominantly from Germany indicate that the teacher must be quite familiar not only with his English language material but even more with the socio-cultural, socio-political and other ecological realities of Germany, to be effective. Language teaching is not independent of societal and socio-cultural reality. For any-ELT exercise to be successful it has to incorporate these aspects from the given society and not from the native. This brings the language closer to the learner and bridges any communicative gaps that could be caused by differences in societal reality. This makes the native-speaker requirement insufficient and to some degree unnecessarily restrictive.

REDEFINITION OF STANDARDS:

It can be deduced from the above quest for native-English teachers and employees that the employers are in search of high standards based on social judgment. The social prestige component of it has nullified the quest for competence and proficiency. Such insistence on native speaker perfection defeats the intent of globalization and, rather than providing globalization jobs to all. For instance, on the website of the "Global English School" in Thailand, this rather non-global statement is used as a source of pride: All of our English teachers are native speakers, teaching natural English as it is spoken in real conversation. It must be realized that English has become too complex to be tied to the strings of native and non-native statuses. Its complexity can be likened to that of an oil tanker that spilled oil on the Welsh coast while trying to enter the terminal. Blame or praise for it cannot be directed to just one source irrespective of whether it is native or not because both sources have been instrumental in the trajectory of English around the world. There is therefore a need for the redefinition of standards. Competence or proficiency and not origin must be judged as a prerequisite for especially ELT positions. Not all native speakers are proficient in their native languages. ELT is not a natural element of native speakers but a profession that requires due training and efficiency. Moreover, how native a native speaker must be cannot be effectively measured and tested because there is great variation in native standards; there are many substandard and non-standard varieties of the so-called native varieties.

CONCLUSION:

Finally, it is important to note that while the term native may still be too restrictive, its traditional restriction may have been overcome. In the next decade, those areas said to be using English as a second language would have many speakers who use English as their first language. They will be native speakers of their variety of English. Will those, as a matter of fact, be non-native speakers or native speakers? Again, English in these zones is taught exclusively by historical non-natives. So, native-speaker origin and status, in the light of this paper, are less realistic parameters that need to be corroborated with professional training, efficiency, competence, and proficiency in the ELT enterprise.

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