NATIVE OR NON-NATIVE TEACHERS: A STUDY ON TERTIARY TEACHERS' BELIEFS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: *ELT professionals and scholars have voiced differing opinions on issues related to nativeness. Given the lack of empirical studies on this topic, the present study aims to document perceptions of non-native teachers on the issues of nativeness. The participants of the study were drawn from one hundred English teachers taught at tertiary level in Indonesia. The study found that the teachers' beliefs about the issue of nativeness varied considerably depending on the language skill concerned. However, most respondents agreed that nativeness should not be the determining factor of what constitute a good teacher of English, as educational background and teaching skills should be taken into account. This study learns that the role of non-native English-speaking teachers needs to be further explored and socialized particularly in Indonesia where such issues are rarely addressed.*

Key words*: Native-speaker teachers (NS); Non-native speaker teachers (NNS); Teacher beliefs; English as a Global Language; Teacher Beliefs.*

INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of English as an international language and as a global *lingua franca* is observable in virtually all countries of the world: from its increasing status in educational curricula to its role as the language of international business, tourism, news broadcasting, etc.

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In the specific case of Indonesia, the recognition by the government of the growing importance English now plays in the world can be seen in two areas. First, English remains to be the priority of foreign language teaching in Indonesia. This indicates that English is not confined to the elites but is expected to be learnt by all social levels. Second, the number of schools - from kindergarten to university level – in which the medium of instruction is English (see Dardjowidjojo 2002:48-49) is mushrooming. This unparalleled international role of the English language has some repercussions on the way English is taught.

One of the challenging questions faced by teachers is 'Who is the best English teacher (i.e. native speakers or non-native speakers)?' There has been much controversy and discussion surrounding the above questions. The debate however, in essence, relates to the ownership of English – whether it belongs to the international community, or whether it belongs to countries where English is the native language (see Kachru 1986, Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994, Alptekin 1996, Medgyes 1996, Rampton 1996, Canagarajah 1999, among others, for further details).

THE NATIVE SPEAKER AS A MODEL OF COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Who is a native speaker of English? A common answer would be people from America, British, Australia, Canada or from other inner-circle countries. Several scholars have attempted to conceptualize the term 'native speaker'. Davies (1991 cited in Cook 1999) claims that the first recorded definition of native speaker was "The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*, he is a *native speaker* of this language" (Bloomfield 1933:43 cited in Cook 1999). According to this definition, a person is a native speaker of the language learnt during childhood. This definition echoes many definitions of a native speaker today. McArthur (1998) defines a native speaker as a person who speaks a certain language since early childhood. *The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* defines a native speaker as "a person considered as a speaker of his or her native language" (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:188). Within this definition, a native language then is defined as the language that "a person acquires early in childhood because it is spoken in the family and/or it is the language of the country where he or she living" (Richards, Platt and Weber 1985:188).

These definitions of native speaker are rather simple but problematic. According to Kramsch (1993:49), "The notion of a generic native speaker has become so diversified that it has lost its meaning." Similarly, Kachru and Nelson (2001:15) claim that "This casual labelling [native speaker], which used to be so comfortably available as a demarcation line between this and that type or group of users of English, must now be called into serious question." First, such definitions assume that a person can only have one native language. They exclude the fact that there are many people who have more than one native language. As a consequence, bilingual users of English in the outer circle countries like Singapore or Malaysia are considered non-native speakers although they acquire English 'early in childhood' and English is 'spoken in the family'.

Another drawback is that any language individuals acquire later in life can never reach the status of "native language", regardless of how long or how well they speak it (Cook 2001). It implies the idea that monolingualism is the norm when in fact, most people in the world are bilinguals (Jenkins 2000). Another way of defining native speaker is by listing features that make up a native speaker. Stern (cited in Cook 1999:186) suggests characteristics of a native speaker of a language having:

- subconscious knowledge of rules,
- an intuitive grasp of meanings,
- the ability to communicate within social settings,
- a range of language skills, and
- creativity of language use.

According to Stern (1983:341) these characteristics are the strengths of native speakers which he terms "the native speaker's competence", "proficiency" or "knowledge of the language". Stern believes that this competence is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency in English language teaching. In addition to the characteristics above, Davies (1996:154) adds three more characteristics of a native speaker:

- the ability to produce fluent discourse,
- knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the "standard" form of the language, and

- the ability to "interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker".

Rampton (1996), finally, lists the features that most people associate with a native speaker of a language as follows:

- The language of a native speaker is inherited, either through genetic endowment or through birth into the social group stereotypically associated with it.
- Inheriting a language means being able to speak it well.
- Being a native speaker involves the comprehensive grasp of a language.
- Just as people are usually citizens of one country, people are speakers of one mother tongue.

These lists of features seem commonsensical but there are arguments that can be put forward against their validity. According to Cook (2001), the characteristics which are commonly associated with native speakers are not necessarily the prerogative of native speakers. ESL or EFL speakers may be able to acquire some if not all of those native-speaker features. As Phillipson (1992:194) observes, "None of these virtues is [...] something that well-trained non-natives cannot acquire." Rampton (1996:19) further argues that not all individuals who inherit a language from childhood are able to speak it well or "produce fluent discourse". The ability to speak a language well is something learned and not granted. It is a skill that needs to be continually practiced and developed.

Due to the fact that there is no satisfactory definitions and characterization of the term 'native speaker', the goal of English language teaching to achieve native-like competence is no longer relevant. It is unreasonable to take such a poorly defined construct as a model of competence in English language pedagogy (Tay 1979, Le Page 1988, Philipson 1992, Gupta 1999, Pennycook 1994, Seidlhofer 1999, Jenkins 2000, McKay 2002).

The second reason is English used in the inner, outer and expanding circles serves different purposes and needs. Thus, an approach based on the notion that all learners of English need to achieve the so-called 'native-

speaker' competence will contribute little to serve the various language needs of these people. Jenkins (2000:9) rejects the term "native speaker" altogether, as she claims that

> it is entirely inappropriate, indeed, offensive, to label as 'non-native speakers' those who have learnt English as a second or foreign language and achieved bilingual status as fluent, proficient users. The perpetuation of the native/non-native dichotomy causes negative perceptions and self-perceptions of 'non-native teachers' . . . It leads to 'non-natives' being refused places on EFL teacher training courses, limited publication of their articles in prestigious international journals, a simplistic view of what constitutes an error...

Therefore, she proposes the following new terms, instead of the native/non-native distinction:

MES – Monolingual English Speaker, for those L1 speakers who speak no other language fluently.

BES – Bilingual English Speaker, for both those L1 speakers who speak another language fluently and for L2 speakers who speak English fluently.

NBES – Non-Bilingual English Speaker, for those L2 speakers whose English may have progressed only to the level at which it serves their particular international communicative purpose (Jenkins 2000:11).

NATIVENESS AS A QUALITY OF THE IDEAL TEACHER OF ENGLISH

Despite all the arguments against the concept "native speaker", it is still widely believed that nativeness is an important, if not the most important, quality of teachers of English. This is what is referred to as *native speaker fallacy*, "according to which native speakers of English are automatically the best teachers of the language" (Canagarajah 1999:126).

In many parts of the world, native-ness is a determining factor in the ELT job market. Cook (2001) shares his experience regarding this. In London, native speakers of English were preferred for teaching English partly because

people claimed that students asked for their money back if they found they were being taught by a bilingual user of English. Similarly in Indonesia, English courses and institutions prefer native-speaker teachers because they attracted more students. Indeed, as Canagarajah (1999:126) observes, most institutions, even outside the inner-circle countries, "still stubbornly insist that the English instructors must be 'native speakers'". As a consequence, native speakers are often paid significantly higher than bilingual users of English irrespective the educational background of the bilingual teachers. The survey conducted by Govardhan, Nayar, and Sheorey (cited in McKay 2002: 42) showed that the most common requirement found in advertisements for English language teachers was being a native or native-like speaker of English.

Paradoxically, even many non-native teachers feel inferior in comparison to native speakers. In her 1995-1996 survey of 47 nonnative ESL teachers in Hong Kong, Tang (1997) found that her participants believed native ESL teachers were superior to non-natives in speaking (100%), pronunciation (92%), listening (87%), vocabulary (79%) and reading (72%). Whereas, Seidlhofer (1999) in her survey of English teachers in Austria indicated that a majority (57%) of the respondents felt that being bilingual teachers of English made them feel insecure rather than confident.

It is encouraging that more and more linguists are challenging the native speaker fallacy and highlighting the advantages of bilingual teachers of English. Cook (2001) suggests that bilingual teachers may be a better model than the model embodied by native speakers. Bilingual teachers, by definition, have commands of two languages. Furthermore, they have gone through the same stages or "L1 filter" (Seidlhofer 1999:238) as their students. Therefore they know what it means to learn a second language themselves. Seidlhofer (1999:240) refers to bilingual teachers as 'double agents' who have the following advantages to offer:

1. They are at home with the language(s) and culture(s) they share with their students, but they also know the relevant terrain inhabited by the target language. Thus, they are suitable to be agents facilitating learning by mediating between the different languages and cultures through appropriate pedagogy.

2. Since they were once learners of the language themselves, bilingual teachers usually develop a high degree of consciousness/declarative, knowledge of the internal organization of the code itself.

Britten (1985:116 cited in Phillipson 1992:195) also shares a similar view. According to him, the ideal teacher is the person who "has near-native speaker proficiency in the foreign language, and comes from the same linguistic and cultural background as the learners". He further thinks that bilingual teachers of English may in fact be better qualified than native speaker, if they have gone through the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and if they offer insights into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners. Success in learning a foreign language may correlate highly with success in teaching. Native-ness of the language teacher, thus, should no longer be an issue in English language teaching since native-ness contains many drawbacks due to its poor conceptualization and/or as a model competence for English language teaching.

Given the controversy embedded in the term 'native speakers', this study attempt to give contributions to the debate. I feel that one way to address this issue is to analyze local teachers' own beliefs regarding the issue of nativeness. Since teachers play a central role in the delivery of language instruction and are also responsible for motivating their students to learn, it is essential that teachers themselves are aware of the beliefs they are operating from. Through this awareness, perhaps teachers can also reflect if their present beliefs are worth maintaining or should be adjusted in the light of the current status of English in the world.

THE STUDY

A. The aim of the study:

The study attempted to describe, examine and interpret the teacher beliefs with regard to the nativeness of teachers of English. Exploring a crucial aspect of the beliefs and understanding of this concept, this study aimed to raise awareness of Indonesian faculty and students of the misconception embedded in the term 'native speaker' and reasons leading to such a misconception.

B. Participants:

One hundred teachers participated in the study. 94% of these teachers were non-native teachers of English. The majority of these teachers (70%) came from five universities in Central Java, Indonesia. All of the teachers taught English at tertiary level. The majority held either a BA (52%) as their highest degree, or an MA degree (42%), while the remaining 6% had a doctorate degree. The teachers varied greatly in terms of age and the length of their teaching experience.

C. Data and instruments of data collection:

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire while the qualitative data were obtained from interviews. The hybrid use of a quantitative and qualitative approach helped to increase the validity and reliability of the study. The interviews were conducted on 12 teachers, all of them non-native speakers, teaching in 5 universities in Central Java, Indonesia. They were selected on the basis of their teaching experience, sex, type of lessons taught and educational background. The interview lasted between 15 and 25 minutes and conducted both in the teachers' mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia) and English, although most respondents preferred to use English.

FINDINGS

This section deals with teachers' beliefs about the role of native speakers in English language teaching. Figure 1 displays the relevant data from the questionnaire.

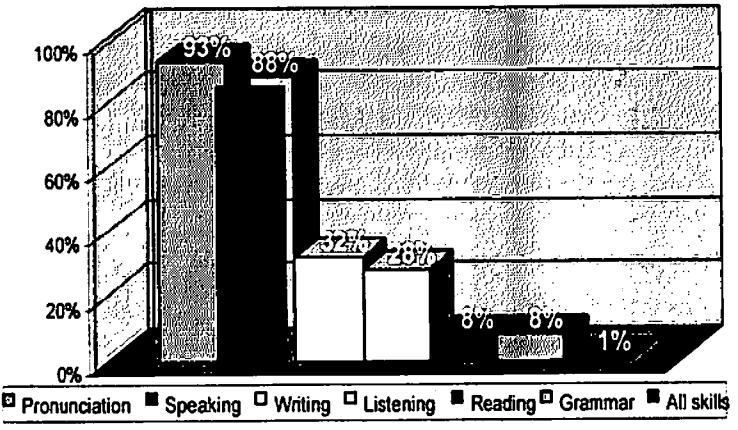

Figure 1: Teachers' beliefs about the role of native speakers in relation to the teaching of language skills

The data shows that the respondents believed that pronunciation and speaking skills were those for which native speakers were preferable, with 93% and 88% of responses respectively. The most common reason for favoring native speakers to teach speaking and pronunciation was the assumption that native speakers would provide:

- the 'right' exposure to language use with regard to appropriacy, accuracy and naturalness,
- many up to date words or expressions, and
- the experience in communicating with people whose language the students learned.

NATIVE SPEAKERS AND VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

The comments of favouring native-speaker teachers to teach pronunciation and speaking skills might reflect common misconceptions about native speakers. Many respondents believed that people from the Inner Circle countries spoke 'perfect' and 'standard' English. This conviction probably stems from a lack of awareness about lectal levels. Most teachers tend to associate "native speaker" English to the language used in the coursebooks they use in class. Consequently, they disregard the great variety of accents that exists within the speech communities in the Inner Circle countries.

The lack of awareness about these issues has resulted in negative attitudes towards other varieties spoken in the Outer Circle countries. When asked which variety represented the best models for teaching English, the majority of the respondents responded British, American, and Australian English. However, a few respondents mentioned that they would introduce other varieties from the Outer Circle countries although they would not teach them.

The most frequently cited reasons for not using English varieties from the Outer Circle as a model was that 'they contain many grammatical errors' and that 'they are not real English'. The interview with Teacher G and H illustrate this.

> *... when Singaporeans speak English their accent are quite bad ... like Asian English or Chinese English therefore I think it is not real English.*
>
> *I don't think I will teach Singlish [Singaporean English] I think I will try to introduce my students that there is other varieties of English called Singlish and give them an example but I don't think I will teach Singlish because based on my experience again Singlish is very different from British English and American English and spoken Singlish contains many grammatical mistake so I don't want to introduce that to my students.*

The comments indicate that for some respondents the 'real', 'original' and 'standard' English was only the English of people from the Inner Circle countries. By contrast, they felt that the varieties of English of those in the Outer Circle countries were only the subvarieties of the English of people from the Inner Circle countries. Therefore, the English of the Outer Circle countries were rated as 'unreal', not standard and not original. Again, this shows unawareness of lectal levels. For example, what is often referred to as 'singlish' is indeed a basilectal variety of English in Singapore, but by no means the only variety of English that Singaporeans use. As with the case of all speech communities in the world, people use language in very different ways according to contextual parameters, levels of education, etc.

The negative attitude towards the varieties from the Outer Circle countries held by most respondents could be due to the low exposure of the acrolect varieties from the Outer Circle countries. It seems that the respondents might be only exposed to the basilect varieties of English from the Outer Circle countries.

CONTRADICTING BELIEFS

The preference for native-speaker teachers to teach speaking and pronunciation skills was not matched for other skills, most notably grammar and reading (see Figure 1). Some of the reasons put forward by the respondents for thinking that native speakers might not be suitable to teach grammar were:

- native speakers have no idea of the rules since they acquired it naturally,
- they often make grammatical mistakes, and
- Indonesian teachers have a better understanding of the grammar problems faced by local students.

The reasons suggested by the respondents for disfavoring native speakers to teach grammar actually contradict with the reasons for favoring them to teach pronunciation and speaking. On the one hand, the respondents stated that one of the reasons for preferring native speakers to teach pronunciation and speaking was because they provided the 'right' exposure to language use with regard to appropriacy, accuracy and naturalness. On the other hand, the comments they put forward for not suggesting native speaker to teach grammar showed that the respondents realized that native speakers often made mistakes. This contradiction indicates that the reasons for preferring native speakers might not be well thought through.

Apart from speaking and pronunciation, most respondents did not think that native speakers were necessarily the best teachers. According to some of them, teaching was an art, so acquiring the language naturally did not make a person a better teacher. Even so, they admitted that being native speakers of English could bring some benefits especially to teach speaking.

The following were Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher L's comments:

> *They [native speakers] are the life model to teach speaking but if you ask them to teach grammar, I cannot guarantee. Content courses are also a little bit difficult for them. When I was studying at Atmajaya University pursuing my master's degree, it was easier for me to understand Pak Nyono* [her lecturer in Atmajaya University, a non-native speaker] *than my native-speaker lecturers. It was just hard to understand him even though Pak Nyono also spoke English all the time. I think teaching is an art in transferring knowledge. In teaching the most important thing is how to simplify a difficult concept using comprehensive and coherent language.*
>
> *...I know that a native speaker has an advantage because they are the perfect model but teaching is not only giving information. Teaching is an art. I remember in the past we have some -we called it student-teacher* [a native speaker]- *but they were not well-prepared. They were given materials to teach but they could only teach 15-20 minutes. They were supposed to teach 50 minutes. They could not modify the materials. They could not make it more interesting; they could not simplify difficult knowledge to be simpler. So, for me a native speaker is important but native speakers without any background knowledge on for example phonology or education is also less valuable.*
>
> *...almost 70% teachers of English are non-native speakers and they also can bring success for the students like me. I only have two native speaker teachers when I was studying. The rest were non-native speakers. Most of the classes were successful. So I think native speakers are needed in certain things ... speaking probably. Once in a while students need to be exposed to native speakers but it is not the most important thing.*

The reasons stated by Teacher C, D and L for rejecting the idea that native speakers are the best teachers of English were drawn from their experience either as language learners or as teachers.

Other participants like Teacher H and Teacher K suggested that the qualities of a good teacher of English should be established on the basis of competence or educational background.

> *... I cannot guarantee that they will become a good teacher but if they have some teaching background I am sure they will be a good teacher.*
>
> *Well that depends on the native speakers. If the native speakers are graduated from English and literature or TESOL major, I believe they have good capabilities in teaching English but sometimes native speakers don't have that qualification so I would say it depends on the native speaker; it depends on their educational background.*

Many of the respondents that I interviewed thought that native speakers are not to be preferred for 'content courses' such as Phonology, Linguistics, and Applied Linguistics. One of the reasons stated by the respondents was that native speakers might not be able to adapt the context of the materials to the students' context, while non-native teachers might give a better explanation or relevant examples closer to students' culture since they share similar learning contexts. As Teacher I indicated:

> *Native speakers are not necessarily a good teacher. On one hand they may have difficulty in teaching concerning concepts (in literature). On the other hand, the students themselves may encounter difficulties in understanding them. Native speakers might not be able to contextualize the teaching materials according to the learning contexts of the students. They tend to teach using their contexts* [from the English-speaking countries]. *The non-native speakers are better in this sense. They can contextualize the materials so it will be suitable for the students here.*

The data analysis illustrates that there were contradicting beliefs with regard to the preference for native-speaker teachers to teach English. The preference for native-speaker teachers to teach speaking and pronunciation skills was not matched for other skills, most notably grammar and reading. However, most respondents agreed that nativeness should not be the

determining factor for a good teacher of English. Educational background and teaching skills should be taken into account in determining the qualities of a good teacher. Indeed, there are many successful learners of English in Indonesia who have never had a native-speaker teacher.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the issue of nativeness, the analysis of the data revealed a multi-faceted picture. Essentially, the teachers' beliefs varied considerably depending on the language skill considered. For pronunciation and listening skills, for example, a high preference for native speakers was expressed. This reflected a commonly held belief, according to which people from Inner Circle countries invariably speak 'perfect' and 'standard' English.

For other skills, however, native speakers were considered less suitable, most notably for the teaching of grammar and reading. In addition, most respondents agreed that nativeness should not be the determining factor of what constitutes a good teacher of English, as educational background and teaching skills should be taken into account. This study learns that the role of non-native English-speaking teachers needs to be further explored and socialized particularly in Indonesia where such issues are rarely addressed.

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