Dismantling the Native Speaker Construct in English Language Teaching

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Chapter 1

Bringing down the wall of native-speakerism in English language teaching

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1 Bringing down the wall of native-speakerism in English language teaching

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It has been traditionally assumed that the ultimate goal of an English language learner is to achieve native-like competence. This assumption has been persistently impressed on both learners and teachers by means of statements, declarations and job requirements that take for granted the superior condition of those who align themselves as "native speakers" and offer their teaching services as "owners" and "true" representatives of the "original" and "authentic" target speech community. The actual concept of "target community" is a source of great debate regardless of its apparently commonsensical connection with a specific group of speakers. In the case of English, the target speech community is often rather stereotypically represented as made up of some kind of ideal speakers who are supposedly born, grown and educated in the UK and the US, or (although less emphatically) in a few other places of origin and education, such as Australia, Ireland and English-speaking Canada. However, not all citizens of those countries match the idealized representation offered in the English language teaching (ELT) industry. It so happens that the great majority of speakers of English are not born, grown or educated in any of them. Since Kachru's approach leading to the legitimization of speakers of English from outside the Inner Circle (Kachru, 1985), the notions of World Englishes (WE), English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Global Englishes (GE) have led to a denationalized and indigenized conceptualization of English. In other words, the language has become decentred and transformed in accordance with the specific needs of every new context in which the language has been adopted around the world.

As a reaction to the dominant ideology that established "native speaker superiority" in ELT, as well as in the teaching of other languages (Thompson & Asanov, 2024), several voices in applied linguistics have questioned over the years such assumed superiority and have argued that such ideology unfairly positions the so-called "native speaker" as the target model and the "native teacher" as the ideal instructor to help learners reach the fantasized goal of "near-native" proficiency. Phillipson (1992) was one of the first scholars to question the pre-eminence of the native speaker in ELT by including the "native speaker fallacy" as one of the five fallacies that had encumbered language teaching practices and ideologies in the 20th century. Later on, Holliday

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(2005) further developed this idea as he coined the term "native-speakerism" to identify the established belief that allocates "native speakers" the highest status in language education. The term has nicely captured the bias and discrimination imposed by the arbitrary division between the so-called "native speakers" and "non-native speakers". Previous work by Davies (1991, 2003) dismantling the native-speaker construct had no doubt been fundamental in the cause against native-speakerism, and further impulse and validation came with research documenting its existence and its impact on the profession (e.g., Houghton & Bouchard, 2020; Houghton & Hashimoto, 2018; Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Lowe, 2020; Selvi, Yazan, & Mahboob, 2024; Swan, Aboshiha, & Holliday, 2015; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). More recently, Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2024, p. 231), in a paper outlining a research agenda for the future, have slightly redefined the concept as "an ideology that presents native speakers as the ultimate models of language use and the ideal teachers of a language, thus invalidating, discriminating, and/or underestimating non-native speakers". Thus, this new definition avoids including any reference to potential East-West contrast and Western imposition of values and visions, not because we deny the existence of such imposition, but because we can also observe native-speakerism in areas that are part of the Expanding Circle and at the same time are located within the Western world. Our point is that native-speakerism is certainly combined with Orientalism (Said, 1978) and with racism, as argued by Holliday (2005) but its outreach goes beyond the imposition of Western values over Eastern communities and exerts its influence and damaging effects within the West, as well. Additionally, our definition not only emphasizes the discrimination experienced by non-native speakers but also touches upon the essentializing nature of this ideology, which establishes an idealization that limits and disempowers all speakers, with native-speaker teachers paradoxically included and constrained by the stereotypical image constructed around them that reduces their identity to the flat simplistic representation offered by the ELT industry and sought after by yearning parents who strive to find the "ideal teacher" for their children.

Despite several convincing arguments against priming a group of teachers on the simple basis of their place of birth (Braine, 2010; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Llurda, 2005a; Mahboob, 2010), teachers born outside Kachru's Inner Circle are still often looked down upon and regarded as second-rate teachers in many educational contexts (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). Numerous empirical studies have reported instances of discrimination faced by "non-native teachers" who are denied a job for which they are fully qualified because of their place of birth and their categorization as "native" or "non-native" (e.g., Clark & Paran, 2007; Paciorkowski, 2022; Selvi, 2010; Thompson & Asanov, 2024), and several attempts have recently been made to empower "non-native teachers" through teacher training initiatives that place the focus on WE, EIL/ELF, GE, and on the role of multilingual speakers in increasingly multilingual and globalized societies (Bayyurt & Sifakis, 2017; Dewey & Pineda, 2020; Llurda et al., 2018). Yet, we may find evidence of native-speakerism in a wide array

of contexts and situations, making it clear to us that this is a prevalent ideology that will take several years and extraordinary efforts to gradually eradicate, layer by layer (Calvet-Terré & Llurda, 2023; Llurda & Mocanu, 2024).

The question that prevails is why is native-speakerism so persistent that the combined work of so many applied linguists over a period of three decades has not dismantled the construct and once and for all toppled the towering supremacy of "the native speaker". Fifteen years ago, I wrote that "the native speaker is under attack but I would dare say it still is in a pretty good shape" (Llurda, 2009, p. 48), and more recently Kumaravadivelu (2016) claimed that this discriminatory situation has not changed because so far the attempts have been sheer "intellectual elaborations" that have failed to produce any results in effectively decolonizing ELT, as only a "result-oriented action" will bring real practical changes and end the subaltern role of "non-native speakers". Naturally, the question that remains to be answered is: what kind of action is needed, and to what extent such action can be taken and promoted by academics whose main activity is intellectual rather than action-oriented?

Houghton and Bouchard's (2020) volume explores the resilience of native-speakerist discourses and opens paths towards undoing this hegemonic ideology. In this line, some recent studies have explored the impact of different types of training courses addressed to pre-service teachers. Such courses may use any of the different terminologies that have been applied to critically respond to the traditional and hegemonic vision of English as owned by Inner Circle-educated native speakers of a standard variety and of one of the socially validated accents. The most prominent terms that are in use in the applied linguistic literature are WE, EIL, ELF and GE. The diversity of terms responds to the different moments in which they were coined and specific particularities in their definition, but they all share a common critical vision of standard language ideology and the supremacy of native-speaker norms. Some recent works have chosen GE as an all-encompassing term (Rose et al., 2021; Selvi, 2023) but here I prefer to make an explicit reference to all of them by using the following combined acronym to encompass them all and emphasize the essential principles shared by all of them: WE/EIL/ELF/GE. This is intended both as a tribute to the legacy of the different paradigms and waves of academic enquiry and an attempt to explicitly include all contributions to the challenge to native-speakerism and standard language ideology.

A fairly recent wave of studies has focused on courses and programmes aimed at developing students and teachers' awareness of WE/EIL/ELF/GE issues and by extension non-native speakers' legitimacy as speakers and/or teachers of English. Rose et al. (2021) offer an analysis of studies published in journals up to that moment, and Selvi (2023) complements it by reporting on GE course syllabi offered across the world. Again, the relevance of these works and their alignment with the aim of this volume can be observed in the narrow connection between native-speakerism and native-oriented language teaching, or in other words, the impact of applying a WE/EIL/ELF/GE vision to ELT on the questioning of idealized native-speaker norms.

The recent proliferation of studies that look at the impact of courses centred on the promotion of a WE/EIL/ELF/GE vision in ELT and in teacher training has brought to the fore the realization that knowing about WE/EIL/ELF/GE does not entail the immediate displacement of the native speaker as the centre and a new focus on international/intercultural communication among global speakers. There are several layers in the process of awareness-raising and transformation (Sifakis, 2019) necessary for teachers to organically incorporate a non-native centred perspective in their classes. Basturkmen (2012) and Tamimy (2015) point to the divergence between beliefs and pedagogical practices, although Borg (2018) warns us against a reductionist view on beliefs/practices mismatch that do not take into account the complex non-linear interplay between them. Lowe (2022) accounts for such apparent mismatch with an analysis of "the complex web of framing and counter-framing on the part of trainee teachers" (p. 235), and Calvet-Terré and Llurda (2023) ask pre-service teachers about their views on WE/EIL/ELF/GE-related matters and observe that knowledge of ELF at the "theory level" appears to be widespread among pre-service teachers but does not seem to be integrated and incorporated into their pedagogical practices. They claim that "there is a need for a further presence of ELF-aware reflection in pre-service programmes before, during, and after practicum experiences" (p. 112). Similarly, Dewey (2014) calls for the need to develop critical awareness and critical practices, and Sifakis and Bayyurt (2018) define ELF-awareness as necessarily including integration of ELF "in one's classroom context, through a continuous process of critical reflection, design, implementation and evaluation of instructional activities".

After some pioneering theoretical works that problematized the notion of "the native speaker" and argued for the need to challenge it (Davies, 1991; Paikeday, 1985; Phillipson, 1992; Rampton, 1990), Reves and Medgyes (1994) published the first empirical study focusing on non-native teachers, based on a highly international survey. This study was followed by a surge of interest in the topic in the US, channeled by Braine's (1999) gathering of an array of prominent scholars who showcased their pride of being "non-native English-speaking teachers", and the establishment of TESOL's non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) Caucus (later turned into NNEST Interest Section) which pursued four goals: (1) to create a non-discriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth, (2) to encourage the formal and informal gatherings of non-native speakers at TESOL and affiliate conferences, (3) to encourage research and publications on the role of non-native-speaker teachers in ESL and EFL contexts and (4) to promote the role of non-native-speaker members in TESOL and affiliate leadership positions (Braine, 2010).

The movement gained solid ground with the publication of two edited volumes (Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Llurda, 2005a) and the state-of-the-art paper by Moussu and Llurda (2008) that provided a comprehensive overview of the field. These works, along with subsequent books by Braine (2010) and

Mahboob (2010), significantly contributed to establishing the study of NNESTs as a fruitful area of research within applied linguistics. Since then, numerous studies have approached the topic of native-speakerism from a wide range of perspectives. Some have focused on such ideology from the perspective of the students (e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Moussu, 2006; Qiu & Fang, 2019), others have documented it from teachers' self-perspectives (e.g., Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; Mahboob, 2003), and to a lesser extent, parents' (e.g., Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020; Paciorkowski, 2022) and programme administrators' viewpoints (e.g., Clark & Paran, 2007; Comprendio & Savski, 2020; Kiczkowiak, 2020; Llurda, 2005b; Mahboob, 2003; Moussu, 2006; Paciorkowski, 2022; Selvi, 2010) have also been explored.

All this activity has undoubtedly increased the awareness of the NNEST condition and has taken major steps towards the creation of an equitable professional environment, as made evident in policies adopted by mainstream organizations like TESOL or the British Association of Applied Linguistics banning the publication in their media of ads that specifically refer to native-speaker status as a condition for hiring teachers. Yet, the complete achievement of an equitable professional environment still remains a desirable goal (Aneja, 2016; Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2025; Llurda & Mocanu, 2024), as evidenced by the instances of discrimination against NNESTs documented in empirical studies. To this end, there is a definite need for studies that address ways of "uncovering", "overcoming", and "debunking" such pervasive ideology (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024).

Identifying bricks and taking them off the wall of native-speakerism

This book is intended to add to the existing literature and provide a set of diverse and to-the-point studies that shows how native-speakerism is still present in our societies, how it can be overcome in different environments and how teacher education is a key element in dismantling the native-speaker construct and native-speakerism in ELT. This volume is composed of 12 chapters, all of them peer-reviewed by two different readers. In addition to this introductory chapter, which serves both as an overture and overview of the contents in the volume, this is organized in three parts that respectively cover a set of studies focusing on native-speakerism in Europe, Asia and Latin America, empirical studies exploring individual and collective transformations regarding English language ownership, and a final group of three data-based accounts on teacher training experiences.

The first part presents four different accounts on how native-speakerism is still present and actively working in the Expanding Circle. In spite of the three decades that have passed since Phillipson's (1992) formulation of "the native speaker fallacy", and Medgyes' (1994) publication of his seminal book on non-native English teachers, as well as the two decades since Holliday's

(2005) theorization of the concept of native-speakerism, we can see how ELT is still strongly controlled by Inner Circle gatekeepers, who build a wall that prevents new speakers from claiming ownership over English, and keeps the language as the exclusive stronghold of those arbitrarily identified as native speakers. Gatekeepers try to ensure that the industry is preserved as a huge money-making system catering for a small elite who have the power to determine what ELT should be like and what kind of people are suited for teaching English. Native-speakerism entails power and control of the centre over the periphery, and that precisely is the ultimate example of structural domination in ELT. The four chapters in Part III illustrate this by presenting four different contexts (like four bricks that are still part of the notorious wall of native-speakerism), in which native-speaker idealization is still prevalent and can be observed in an array of situations.

In Chapter 2, Júlia Calvet-Terré and Enric Llurda report on a set of interviews with the owners/managers of six private language schools in Catalonia. The analysis of the interviews reveals that, in spite of initial declarations denying the importance of nativeness as a hiring criterion, there appears to be a clear bias in favour of native speakers, and in particular those who match the stereotypical image of the "white native speaker", when new staff has to be hired for their schools.

Tomasz Paciorkowski, in Chapter 3, gives a detailed account of the context and historical circumstances of the spread of English in Poland and draws on his own empirical research to present a comprehensive picture of native-speakerism in Poland. He concludes with some views on the future of English language education that should provide good reference for language planners and educators in Poland and elsewhere.

Yuzuko Nagashima and Luke Lawrence apply in Chapter 4 a critical discourse analysis to interpret native-speakerist features in five videos posted on Instagram. The outcome of their analysis is that "an excessive and heightened form of native-speakerism" is found in those videos, which invariably adopt a neo-liberal stance in relation to language education and idealize Standard American English as the form of expression of "white native speakers", although this may be conveniently wrapped in a coat of sophisticated multimodal media.

In the final chapter of this section, Adriana González provides a comprehensive overview of English language education policies in Latin America in the 21st century. Her analysis of institutional policies shows how such policies, with the essential collaboration of transnational agencies, consistently construct the native speaker as the ideal model by attracting unqualified foreign young people as language teachers, and by promoting immersion programmes in English-speaking countries among locals.

The following part gathers four complementary chapters, all connected by the fact that they focus on emerging identities beyond the native-speaker construct. In Chapter 6, Nugrahenny Zacharias conducts an autoethnographic exploration of her moments of self-imposed silence at her work environment

in the US, caused by what she has metaphorically labelled "the ghost of native-speakerism", which is held responsible for the suppression of her own voice, which necessarily conditions her professional identity.

Nattida Pattaraworathum and Will Baker offer, in Chapter 7, a perspective into the impact of native-speakerism on culture teaching practices in a secondary school in Thailand. This study focuses on a group of ELT teachers' intercultural teaching practices and the factors that affect them, with standard English ideology and native-speakerism being prominent in determining teachers' cognition and behaviour.

Chapter 8, by Ryo Mizukura, explores the views of two teachers and four former students at a Japanese university, and analyses them with a focus on Lacanian and Deleuzian notions of desire, in relation to the "native speaker" concept. This is an attempt to bring together the literature on desire and ELT, by primarily drawing on the work by Motha and Lin (2014) and extending the scope onto the current discussion of the native-speaker construct and the necessary alternative views.

Jette Hansen Edwards provides, in Chapter 9, a rather different approach to the main topic of this volume by analysing the pronunciation of diverse Asian speakers, and by asking 45 listeners to identify their variety and country of origin, and to rate them on a "native speaker continuum". The author concludes that the results point to the existence of an emerging hybrid way of speaking among Asian speakers in the context of Hong Kong, that moves away from the traditional notions of native and non-native accents.

Part III includes the final three chapters, all about training experiences enacted in different countries and educational levels and conditions. In Chapter 10, Martin Dewey takes a narrative approach on the lived experiences of teachers and conducts a thorough reflection on the need to reassess the concept of nativeness at a British MA programme. He advocates for a model of teacher education that promotes trainees' elaboration of their own identity as teachers of Global English(es), and their engagement with language in non-categorical ways, allowing them to "identify as expert practitioners in the ELT profession".

In Chapter 11, Rob Lowe offers an investigation of the impact of a 14-week MA in ELT course focusing on ELF-based methodology on a group of four students in Japan. In so doing, he shows elements of resistance to the discourse of the instructor and the contradictions between beliefs and "implicit biases", with the ultimate goal to help understand the mechanisms that hold the native-speaker construct and bring it down in order to help future teachers develop an awareness of the problems associated with a native-speakerist vision in ELT.

Finally, Inmaculada Pineda presents, in Chapter 12, an account of an ELF-oriented course offered within an MA in ELT programme in Spain. A particularity of the described course is that it was offered during the COVID-19 crisis and it consisted of a set of computer-mediated activities combined with synchronous lectures and supervised groupwork sessions. The

chapter includes a description of the module and delves into the reflections of participants fostered by the virtual group discussions and self-reflective activities, which show a process of identity construction as prospective teachers and a transition towards feeling "less constricted by traditional assumptions about language ownership, accentism and native-speakerism".

Overall, this book aims to be like a wrecking ball that hits hard at the wall of native-speakerism. A wall that will surely not be toppled down in a single blow, as it has proven to be extraordinarily thick and resistant to several blows by prominent applied linguists. This is rather disappointing from the perspective of those who envision an ELT environment which is free of injustice, discrimination and imposed ideologies. However, we must also appreciate how this wall is already showing signs of wear and erosion, after all the combined work from different angles and at different moments in time by all the scholars who have taken issue with standard language ideology, native-speakerism, colonialism and the monolingual bias in ELT: Kachru, Paikeday, Phillipson, Widdowson, Seidlhofer, Megyes, Davies, Braine, Kamhi-Stein, Kramsch, Canagarajah, Rampton, Cook, Liu, Derwing, Lasagabaster, Sierra, Matsuda, Moussu, Mahboob, Holliday, Aboshiha, Swan, Houghton, Rivers, Bouchard, Hashimoto, Selvi, Rudolph, Yazan, Hackert, Kiczkowiak, Galloway, Rose, Dewaele, Hiratsuka, and the likes of them, among which I also obviously include all the contributors to this volume, some with a long trajectory and others at the beginning of their promising careers, but all equally committed to dismantling the native-speaker construct that has for too long constrained our professional lives and experiences in ELT and will continue to do so until we manage to bring down the wall and celebrate equity and appreciation of all the voices that speak and teach English, and any other language.

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