

Nonnativeness

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Can Nonnative Instructors Teach English As Effectively As Native?

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Abstract

Having taught ESL/EFL for seven years has led me to believe that non-native instructors can teach English effectively since we are ESL/EFL learners ourselves. We can relate to our students through our shared difficulties and insecurities. However, a number of us face the insecurity of not being “fluent enough” to teach a language other than our native tongue. In order to familiarize both myself and other nonnative instructors and around the world teacher trainees, I conducted a research on nonnativeness. This paper explores the background of nonnativeness through qualitative research and non-native English speaking teachers. Finally, I sought to ask the students about their reactions towards non-native English instructors.

Background

In second language education, teachers come from a myriad of backgrounds. “Native English speaking teachers (NEST)” and “non native English teachers (NNEST)” are one of the efficient ways to categorize them. These types of instructors surely obtain different advantages in teaching English as second language. Needless to say, NEST can teach not only their native tongue but also their cultures, values, and histories related to the target language. Students are thereby able to learn the language intangible from NEST.

Despite the disadvantage of learning English from NNEST, there are a number of merits of studying English in their classes. In having experienced all the hardship in learning a new language, NNEST can understand their students' difficulties, goals, purposes, and feelings. Filho (2002) states that "a big strength NNSs have is being able to not only predict their students' difficulties, but also to estimate their potential". He also argues that "only NNSs can serve as models of what a successful learner should be".

There is an interesting finding by Moussu (2006).

The changes in attitudes towards NNESTs that took place during the semester were in general more significant than the changes in attitudes towards their NESTs. That is, students taught by NESTs held an overall positive attitude towards their NESTs at the beginning of the semester, and time and exposure to these NESTs did not change very much overtime. Responses to the two last Likert-scale statements reflected particularly well this strong influence of time on students' attitudes towards NNESTs. Responses to I can learn English just as well from a NONNATIVE English teacher as from a NATIVE English teacher (Q25) show that at the beginning of the semester, 14.76% of the students taught by NESTs strongly agreed, which had increased to 17.86% by the end of the semester, and increase of 3.1%; at the same time, 29.06% of the students taught by NNESTs strongly agreed to the same statement (Q25) at the beginning of the

semester, and by the end of the semester, this number had increased to 42.02% (an increase of 12.96%).

The impression of NNESTs on the other hand, is not always positive before they teach classes. Filho (2002) asserts that “NNSs seem to face more challenges in the ESL classroom by virtue of being identified as a nonnative speaker of English.” He also suggests that “having an accent associated with First World nations such as Britain, the United States, and Canada renders speakers a higher status. Some students demonstrated preference for white teachers, assuming only those teachers could be native speakers of English.”

How does the negative attitude towards NNEST alter? According to Moussu (2006), “students taught by NNESTs seemed less prejudiced against NNESTs in general than students not taught by NNESTs. Negative attitudes towards teachers did not necessarily show a relationship with nativeness.” This suggests that actual contact with NNEST provides ESL/EFL students with affirmative reaction. NNESTs, in other words, are able to prove that they are as capable of teaching as NESTs, and are able to alter the students’ behaviors toward them. In addition, there is an interesting finding by Donald (1995) states that “undergraduate judgments of NNSI teaching ability seem based on perceptions of the instructors’ linguistic nonstandardness, rather than on actual (or manipulated) language patterns.” He also maintains that “instructors judged to be more physically attractive were judged to speak in a more

standard accent and to be more Caucasian. Perceived physical attractiveness of NNSIs was the sole factor affecting judgments of interpersonal attractiveness and of teaching skill” (1995).

Voices of Non-native English Speaking Teachers

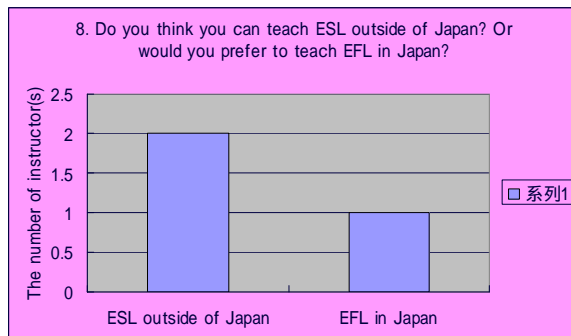
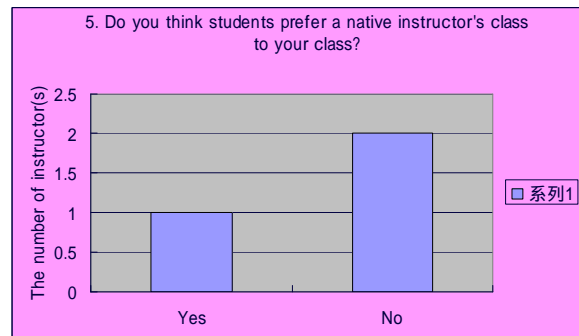
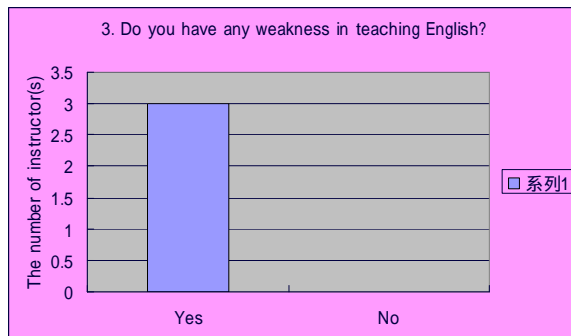
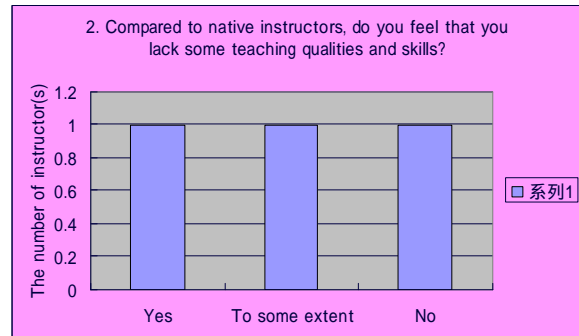
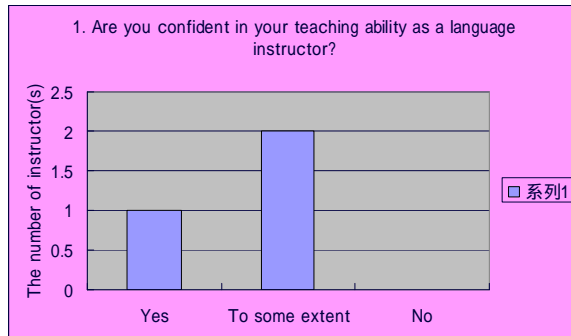
It is confirmed by some research that NNEST obtain as much approval as NEST from students, especially from those who are taught by NNEST. This is believed to ease a number of NNEST of the anxieties which bothers most of all NNESTs; no matter how professional and educated we are, ‘nonnativeness’ interferes with our confidence stability. In this section, I will examine NNEST’s confidence level as English instructors.

The questions posed to NNESTs are demonstrated below. The nine prepared questions aimed to make them reflect on themselves as language instructors, compare themselves with NEST, and speculate upon their students opinions. This research is aimed not only at measuring NNEST’s confidence level but also at demonstrating to new instructors and students that even professional NNEST instructors with a variety of experiences have to some extent, insecurity of being nonnative in teaching a language. Through this research, I endeavor to encourage non-native English instructors in the world who keep struggling to produce more advantageous classes for students.

I asked three non-native English instructors who are all Japanese. Their first language is Japanese, they have a master degree in TESOL; and one of them is a PH.D student. Two of them in their mid forties; the other is his thirties. They have more than ten years' experience teaching English and are enthusiastic about teaching. Instructor A's personality is outgoing, friendly, talkative, and is good at teaching output skills with high oral skills. Instructor B is serious, organized, industrious, and is good at teaching input skills with both oral and writing skills. Both A and B have lived in the U.S. for several years. Instructor C is organized, serious, friendly, and is good at teaching grammar with high aptitude in grammar. He has not lived outside Japan.

1.	Are you confident in your teaching ability as a language instructor?	Yes / to some extent / No
2.	Compared to native instructors, do you feel that you lack some teaching qualities and skills?	Yes / to some extent / No
3.	Do you have any weakness in teaching English?	Yes / No
	Please describe your weakness	
4.	Which subject do you prefer to teach?	
5.	Do you think the students prefer a native instructor's class to your class?	Yes / No
6.	Which subjects do you believe that nonnative instructors are good at teaching?	
7.	What elements do you think native instructors do not possess compared to you?	
8.	Do you think you can teach ESL students outside of Japan? Or would you prefer to teach EFL students in Japan?	
	ESL outside of Japan / EFL in Japan	
9.	What do you think makes your students enjoy your class?	
10.	Write some comments on yourself as a nonnative instructor.	

Result and Analysis



3. Do you have any weakness in teaching English? Please describe your weakness.

Instructor A	colloquial use of words, preposition, articles, plural/singular
Instructor B	I do (can) not entertain students
Instructor C	I can never be a native speaker of English. Especially, I am bad at output skills compared to input skills.

4. Which subject do you prefer to teach?

Instructor A	reading, listening, speaking
Instructor B	writing
Instructor C	Grammar

6. Which subjects do you believe that nonnative instructors are good at teaching?

Instructor A	In all subjects (depending on the students' levels)
Instructor B	reading
Instructor C	grammar

7. What elements do you think native instructors do not possess compared to you?

Instructor A	They may not be able to relate to students' weakness.
Instructor B	Many, if not all, native instructors are not familiar with "why" Japanese learners have difficulty learning English. Some native teachers do not have enough knowledge of prescriptive grammar.
Instructor C	They might not know how difficult (yet enjoyable) it is to learn English.

9. What do you think makes your students enjoy your class?

Instructor A	casual atmosphere, balance (play study)
Instructor B	I think they enjoy my class when they know that they are "learning."
Instructor C	If students can feel that their English is actually improving, I think it will give them high motivation.

10. Write some comments on yourself as a nonnative instructor.

Instructor A	If well planned out, even a nonnative instructor could lead effective classes.
Instructor B	I love learning English myself, and that is something I can communicate to whomever I teach.
Instructor C	I think both nonnative and native instructors can complement each other. Therefore, as a nonnative instructors myself, I would like to believe I have some roles to play.

The ten questions are categorized into three themes: 1) self analysis of teaching ability 2) preferred and skilled subject and reasons, and 3) self comparison with native instructors.

1) Self analysis of teaching ability

The 1st, 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 9th items are to determine nonnative instructor's self-analysis of teaching ability. Three of the participants reported that they had weakness in teaching; they have, at any rate, confidence in their teaching abilities. Since they have more than ten years teaching experience, they know their strong teaching points, which strongly relates to their confidence level. Two of them are willing to teach ESL classes outside of Japan, and this suggests that they are certain about not only their English proficiency but also their pedagogies. As for the 9th item, their comments demonstrate that they are familiar with the method to create enjoyable and understandable classes for students to sustain their learning motivation.

2) Preferred and Skilled Subject and Reasons

The 4th and 6th items are categorized in this section. Interestingly, instructor A and B who have exposed themselves to other countries prefer and are good at all subjects but grammar; instructor C who has been in Japan for his life prefers and is good at teaching grammar. This suggests that although all language instructors are familiar with the significance of the role of language systems, living in foreign countries allows them to realize that grammar is not the only language element necessary for communication.

3) Comparison with Native Instructors

2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 10th items are in this category. According to the survey, three of them are acquainted with their own teaching strength which is to instruct input skills. The other strength they are certain about is that nonnative instructors can understand the weaknesses and difficulties involved in the process of learning a new language, since they are and were also second/foreign language learners.

Instructor A mentions that “if well planned out, even a nonnative instructor could lead effective classes.” B states “I love learning English myself, and that is something I can communicate to whomever I teach”, and C states that “I think both nonnative and native instructors can complement each other. Therefore, as a nonnative instructor myself, I would

like to believe I have some roles to play.” Overall, in spite of any weaknesses, nonnative instructors are positive and, to a good extent, confident in their teaching abilities and the roles of the nonnative.

Students’ reaction towards Non-native English Speaking Teachers

The research finding suggests that NNESTs have, to some extent, a negative impression for all their language abilities compared to NEST; however, their teaching changes the students’ attitude towards them. In other words, once NNEST prove that they are capable of teaching as professionally as NEST, their non-nativeness becomes a nonfactor in a language class.

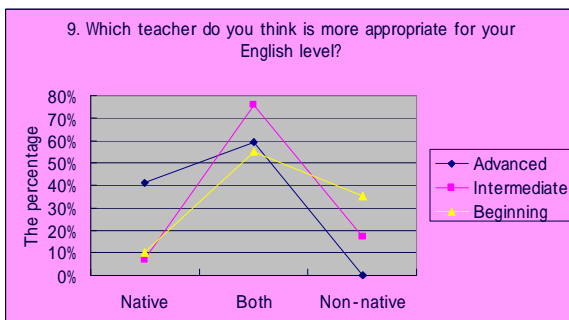
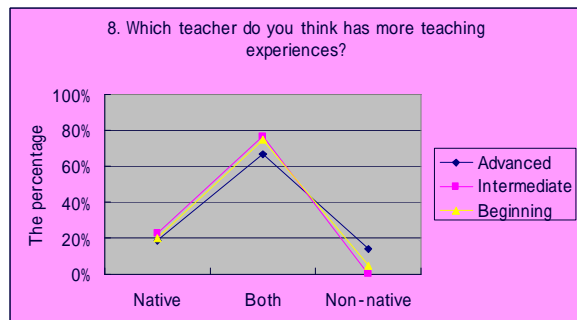
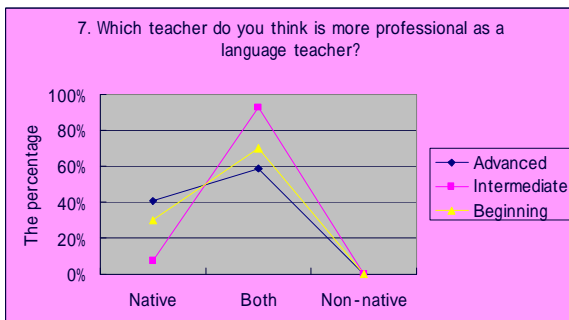
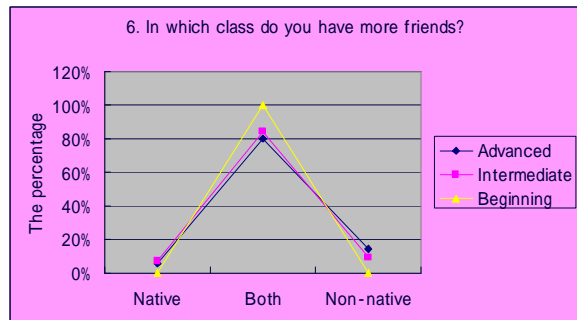
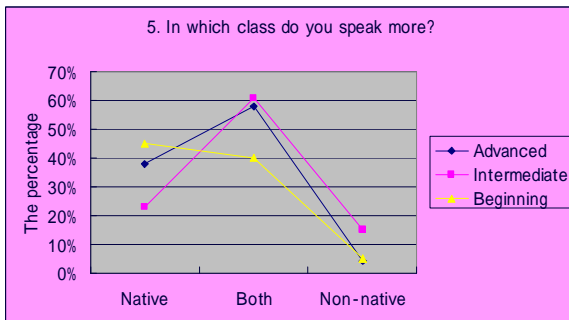
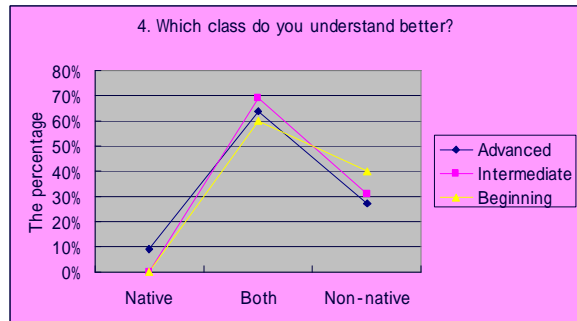
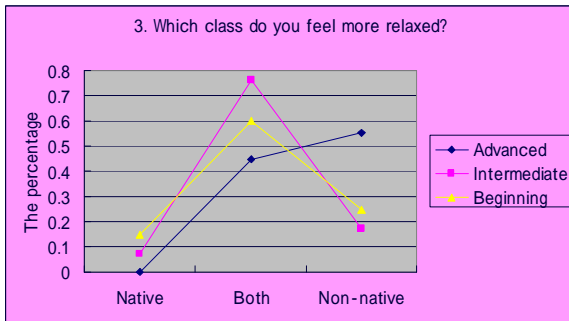
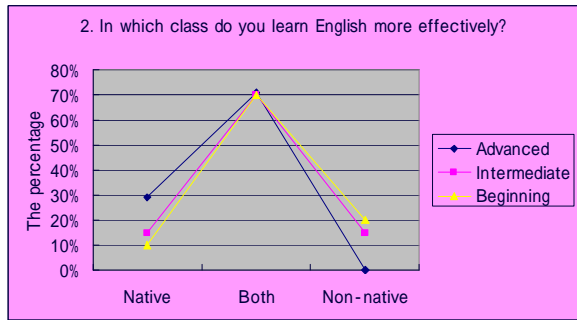
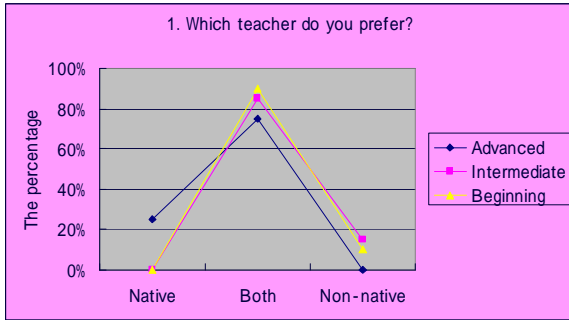
I came to wonder if the results of such research are applicable to the students at the school where I teach. This curiosity led me to prepare questionnaires in order to collect data on how the students regard NNEST in a language class.

In order to collect appropriate data, research was conducted in three different language level classes: advanced, intermediate, and beginning levels. The advanced class consisted of twenty international students from Nepal, Cambodia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, China, France, and Japan, whereas the intermediate and beginning classes were composed of twenty

and thirty Japanese students. The questionnaires are demonstrated below.

Compare native and non-native English instructors and answer the questions.			
1. Which teacher do you prefer?	Native	Both	Non-native
2. Which class do you learn English more effectively?	Native	Both	Non-native
3. Which class do you feel more relaxed?	Native	Both	Non-native
4. Which class do you understand better?	Native	Both	Non-native
5. In which class do you speak more?	Native	Both	Non-native
6. In which class do you have more friends?	Native	Both	Non-native
7. Which teacher do you think is more professional as a language teacher?	Native	Both	Non-native
8. Which teacher do you think has more teaching experiences?	Native	Both	Non-native
9. Which teacher do you think is more appropriate for your English level?	Native	Both	Non-native
10. Write some comments on native and non-native English instructors below.			

Result



The tables above illustrate the results of each question. Overall, nativeness did not affect the students' opinions for both native and non-native instructors. An advanced student commented, "as long as non-native instructors have proper pronunciation, it does not matter." Another student mentioned that "both instructors have the advantages. For a beginner, native instructors may be too hard; however, as learners reach a certain level, it is the best that they learn from a native. Compared to non-experienced native instructors, experienced non native instructors are familiar with the learners' needs and the best way to improve their skills." This comment is a pleasure for every teacher: "as long as the teacher is kind and a good person, we are happy to be in his/her classroom."

There are some outstanding differences in some of the answers. The first table illustrates that more advanced students tend to prefer native instructors to non-native, and they can study more effectively in native class. Interestingly, however, they can relax more in non-native instructor's class, which demonstrates that their preference does not necessarily affect their relaxing level. The result of question four provides us with the idea of an advantage of non-native instructors; they can offer plain explanation for students since they are familiar with the students' problematic language weakness. The result of fifth questions does not surprise us. The students make more output in native instructors. It is a positive aspect that native instructors do not speak the students' first language since the students are required to

speak only English in order to communicate with the instructor. Also, native instructors put more emphasis on output skills than non-native, which generated the result. Some non-native instructors may not like seventh and eighth results. Slightly more students consider native English instructors more professional and have more teaching experiences than non-native. The ninth outcome may also be unfavorable for non-native instructors. The advanced level students especially think that native instructor's class is more appropriate for them, which suggests that non-native instructors need to prove that they are capable of and possess high standard teaching skills with sophisticated language abilities and knowledge so that students can feel secured to attend their classes.

There is no significant distinction between native and non-native instructor on other tables. Overall, it is analyzed from this research that the students regard native instructors as more experienced and professional, which leads especially advanced level students to believe that they are more appropriate for their language level. Although more students assume that native instructors are more skilled as language teachers, they feel more relaxed in non-native instructors' classes. In addition, they have better understanding in non-native instructor's class. On the other hand, the students do not have a distinctive preference between non-native and native instructors. The comments of some students suggest that it does not matter who teaches English as long as he/she is a nice person with correct pronunciation.

Although the data in this research is limited and further research is surely necessary to make a strong conclusion, one conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that not only native but also non-native instructors can provide effective English language classes.

Conclusion

NNESTs' understanding abilities of their students' difficulties, purposes, goals, and feelings are advantageous in ESL/EFL; however, even fruitful teaching experiences and educational backgrounds do not allow NNESTs to fully obtain confidence stability. The research aimed at familiarizing NNESTs and teacher trainees with the students' reactions towards them demonstrated in this paper illustrates that although more students assume that native instructors are more skilled as language teachers, they feel more relaxed in non-native instructor's class. On the other hand, the students do not have a distinctive preference between non-native and native instructors. The comments of some students suggest that it does not matter who teaches English as long as he/she is a nice person with correct pronunciation.

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