A Matter of Degrees: Native-speakerism and Centre Qualification Bias in Japan

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Abstract

Native-speakerism is an ideology in English language teaching (ELT) in which so-called "native speaker" teachers, and the culture they are believed to represent, are perceived to be norm-providing both for the English language and for the ways in which English is taught around the world. While native-speakerism has been written on extensively, this study investigates one area in particular – the prevalence of "centre" qualifications (those awarded by institutes in the political West) in "periphery" educational settings. By investigating the qualifications held by instructors (both "native" and "non-native" speakers) working on large ELT programs at three Japanese universities and comparing these data to the number of similar qualifications available in Japanese universities, the research shows a possible bias towards centre qualifications in two of the institutions, and an overall bias in the data as a whole. It is suggested that this may be indicative of a subtle native-speakerism at play in which Western methods and approaches are preferred or idealised over locally developed techniques.

Keywords: native-speakerism, qualification bias

Introduction

This paper attempts to explore one aspect of the concept of "native-speakerism", as proposed by Holliday (2005). The majority of the research that has been published concerning this concept has been focused on the professional issues caused by the ideology for "native speaker teachers" and "non-native speaker teachers". In this paper I will attempt to explore another aspect of the concept which has not been given much attention by researchers, but which is symptomatic of the same ideological bias – the dominance of Centre qualifications, or degrees awarded and evaluated by institutions in the West, in Periphery institutions of higher education. I use the terms "Centre" and "Periphery" (introduced by Galtung, 1971, and adopted in the field of ELT by

Phillipson, 1992) with the understanding that these are limited in their explanatory and descriptive scope; however they are suitable for the purposes of this paper. In order to investigate this notion, data on the qualifications held by the instructors of three large-scale university English courses in Japan, a country which would be considered a Periphery educational setting, were collected, and this was then compared to the amount of similar qualifications actually available in Japanese universities. A large amount of Centre qualifications among the instructors, where alternative qualifications are available, would, I suggest, indicate a bias towards "Centre" qualifications; which itself could be seen as symptomatic of a creeping native-speakerism at play in these institutions.

Native-speakerism

"Native-speakerism" is a concept in English language teaching most fully described by Holliday (2005), which is defined as "a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that "native-speaker" teachers represent a "Western culture" from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (Holliday, 2006, p. 385). This definition encompasses three distinct ideological concerns:

1) Professional inequality among teachers caused by preference for "native" over "non-native" speakers.
2) Preference for Western-centric models of English other over varieties.
3) Deference to Western viewpoints on teaching methods.

Native-speakerism is an idea which has gained much attention among researchers, with a particular focus being placed on the first of the three points outlined above. There is a growing body of research on the topic of preferential hiring policies of "native speakers" over "non-native speakers", both before Holliday's coinage (see Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, & Hartford, 2004; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992) and afterwards, (see Clark & Paran, 2007; Kim, 2011; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010), demonstrating that there are clear inequalities faced by "non-native" speaker teachers when applying for positions in both Western and Non-Western educational settings. Similarly, much research has been conducted on the preferences held by different groups for Western models of English (see Matsuda, 2003; Saito, 2012; Sasayama, 2013), and some research exists examining the exporting of Western teaching methods into different educational settings (Appleby, 2010; Holliday 1994a). Holliday and Aboshiha (2009) refer to native-speakerism as a "chauvinistic professional discourse" (p. 671) which uses orientalist "othering" to promote ideas and concepts originating in the west, and the effects of this can be seen in a number of different ways. Not

only does the ideology of native-speakerism cause problems for "non-native speakers" in terms of employment opportunities, as noted earlier, but it is also occasionally reflected in "non-native speakers" having negative self-images (Bernat, 2008; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Kim, 2011; Pinner 2014) and students having a positive orientation towards "native" over "non-native" speaker English teachers (Alseweed, 2012; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Wu & Ke, 2009), both of which feed into the continuing professional inequalities faced by "non-native" speaker teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2014).

However one key area, which has been under-researched up until this point, is the prevalence of qualifications from Centre institutions in ELT programs in Periphery ELT settings. This is an important area to investigate because it is largely via the training signified by these qualifications that Western methodologies and educational approaches are imported into non-Western educational environments, and therefore the widespread presence of such qualifications would be indicative of a native-speakerist orientation. In addition, the fact that many people would seek to earn Centre qualifications instead of those offered in their own or other Periphery settings would demonstrate the extent to which there is an ideological belief in the superiority of Western methodologies and language models in the profession as a whole. This problem has been addressed in the past; Pennycook (1994) noted that "the export of applied linguistic theory and of western-trained language teachers constantly promotes inappropriate teaching approaches to diverse settings" (p. 159), and Holliday (1994b) argued that that "the most prestigious MA, diploma, and training courses for teachers are carried out either in BANA [British and North American] institutions, or in institutions in other countries which are staffed by BANA personnel" (p. 5). Appleby (2010) notes that this leads to a situation in which "periphery universities [become] consumers of knowledge from the center rather than producers of locally mediated knowledge" (p. 26). In this paper I will investigate the balance of qualifications in Japanese higher education by examining the kinds of ELT qualifications held by English instructors teaching on large English programs at three Japanese universities, which appear to be otherwise free of a native-speakerist orientation. This investigation will be carried out in order to discover whether there is an inherent bias in the kinds of qualifications sought after, either by instructors or by institutions, which may be symptomatic of an underlying, ongoing native-speakerism.

"Native speaker" and "non-native speaker" – a note on terminology

Throughout this paper, I will be making use of the terms "native speaker teacher" and "non-native speaker teacher". These terms are contentious, and are a major source of disagreement among scholars in the field. In part, this is because the

definition used commonly to describe what a native speaker is, and which can be found in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2010) has been demonstrated to be problematic due to its insistence on language of birth acting as a major defining criteria (Davies, 1995), and the fact that it is also used to describe proficiency, despite these two concepts not being necessarily intrinsically linked. In addition, the terms are usually used to describe people raised in Kachru's (1992) "inner circle", thus implicitly labelling speakers of non-standard varieties as "non-native speakers" (Jenkins, 2000), regardless of their mother tongue. A final point is that even those who reside in inner circle countries and would be considered "native speakers" speak wildly different local, regional, and national varieties to each other (Holliday, 2005), once again demonstrating that the concept itself is at least unclearly defined, if not in fact completely mythical (Davies, 1991, 2003). As such, it should be understood that whenever the terms "native speaker teacher" or "non-native speaker teacher" are used in this paper, they are not intended to be understood as value-free descriptions of people or groups. Rather, I am using them specifically in the way they are understood in the discourse of native-speakerism – as labels used to characterize people on ideological and political grounds. For example, it may be the case that a person who is functionally bilingual will be referred to as a "non-native speaker teacher" despite having equal proficiency in both languages, because this is the way in which they would be perceived by the professional discourse.

Methodology

There are two sets of data which needed to be collected for the analysis presented herein to be reasonably persuasive.

Available qualifications

As this study was concerned with investigating potential bias towards Centre qualifications over similar qualifications available in Periphery – in this case Japanese - institutions, it was first important to establish what qualifications were available in each setting. I decided to limit the scope of this research to postgraduate qualifications such as masters' or doctoral degrees, as this research was carried out in the tertiary sector. It would not be surprising to learn that institutions in the Centre have many qualifications available in fields such as TESOL, applied linguistics, ELT, and second language learning, however it was crucial to this research to discover whether many such qualifications were available in related fields in Japanese universities, in order for the comparison to be meaningful – after all, if no qualifications of this type were available in

Japanese institutions, it would be much less significant if instructors did not possess them. For the purposes of this study, qualifications considered related to English education included masters or doctoral degrees in English, English education, and Linguistics. An additional subject – English literature – was included because many of these courses require credits in English education, due to the close relationship in Japan between literature and language teaching.

Qualifications held by instructors

The second stage was to collect data on the qualifications held by instructors at Japanese universities. I limited this data collection to three universities, which were chosen on the basis that they run large-scale English programs featuring a number of instructors, with a relatively good number of both "native speaker" teachers and "non-native speaker" teachers. These programs were chosen for three reasons: firstly, because the information on their instructors' qualifications was either publicly available, or available to the author; while there are a number of other programs with large numbers of instructors in Japan, it was not possible to get reliable information either on some or all of the instructors at these institutions. As such, any data collected from these institutions would be incomplete and unreliable, and so was not included. A second reason for choosing these three programs was because they contained a mix of "native speaker teachers" and "non-native speaker teachers". At other universities considered for this study, their programs were based on a partnership with a Centre university, and so the majority of their instructors were connected to this institution. Other potential programs used the "foreignness" of their instructors in advertising their courses, which is explicitly native-speakerist. This research was intended to investigate the possibility of a more subtle native-speakerist bias towards Centre qualifications, and so the programs from which the data were collected were chosen on the basis that they did not have any other obvious signs of this bias. The final consideration was the type of qualifications held by instructors. Several other programs from which data could potentially have been drawn did not seem to favour instructors with language education backgrounds, and many of the instructors had qualifications in unrelated disciplines.

The data collection was also limited to the English instructors on the courses, rather than the professors either in charge of, or involved in each department. This decision was made because professors in charge of the department are usually not responsible for teaching activities, and instead supervise the course or act as a mediator between the instructors and the rest of the university. As such, it is not always required that they have qualifications related to language or language teaching.

In the case of two of the universities, the data were collected from publicly available sources, in one case from the university's faculty webpage, and in the other from an in-house newspaper provided to students with short introductions of each of the instructors working on the course. In the case of the third university, information was collected on a personal, one-to-one basis, on the condition of anonymity. Because of this, it was decided that all data from the three universities would be presented anonymously, both in terms of the individual instructors and the institutions to which they belonged. This was done in order to keep the conditions on the data presented equal. In total, the number of instructors included in the study was 115, and the data were then categorized in two different ways. Firstly, the instructors were divided into two groups; "native speaker teachers" (referred to as "NST"s in the data) and "non-native speaker teachers" (referred to as "NNST"s) - keeping in mind the caveat discussed above regarding these terms - and their qualifications were assigned either as "Centre", or "Periphery", indicating where their qualifications were earned. If an instructor received their qualification from an overseas branch of a Centre university, such as Temple University Japan, it was considered to be a "Centre" qualification. There were only three examples of this in the data, however.

Data

Available qualifications

A search of the university database "Daigakuten" (2015) revealed that, as suspected, there are a significant number of postgraduate qualifications related to the field of English language teaching available at Japanese universities, both at the master's and doctoral level. Further investigation, which was carried out on a university-by-university basis brought to light even more qualifications than were collected even on a comprehensive database such as Daigakuten. It would be impractical to provide a full list of available relevant qualifications in Japanese universities, but it is enough for the purposes of this study to note that there are over a hundred postgraduate qualifications available in universities all over Japan related to the field of English language teaching. As noted before, these include both masters' and doctoral degrees in the specific field of English education (or eigo kyouiku), as well as more theoretical degrees in linguistics (both general linguistics and English linguistics). English literature was perhaps the most common qualification of all, with almost every department of English language and literature offering postgraduate degrees in this subject, and many of these degrees featuring courses in English education and linguistics.

It is clear from even a cursory look at the available qualifications in Japan that there are enough postgraduate degrees available either in English education

or closely related fields for it to be concerning if these qualifications are not represented among the teaching staff of these same universities. In the next section I will discuss whether or not this large number of qualifications is, in fact, represented in the qualifications held by the instructors on the three large ELT programs at universities which were investigated for this study.

Data from university programs examined

Data were collected from 115 teachers, all of who were working (either full time or part-time) on large English programs at one of three Japanese universities. These teachers held, between them, 128 postgraduate qualifications in the fields described earlier. The number of qualifications and instructors do not match exactly due to some instructors holding more than one qualification. As previously stated, the universities were selected based on accessibility to participant information, and the data for each individual institution are provided in the following sections. The data are presented both numerically, and in the form of graphs in order to give the reader an "eyeball estimation" (Hurlburt, 1998) of the balance of qualifications in each institution.

Institution A

Institution A is a large public prefectural university situated north of Tokyo, which runs a mandatory English program for it's undergraduate students. This program was established in order to improve the TOEIC scores of the students, and is taught by 19 instructors in total, 11 of whom are "native speakers" and 8 of whom are "non-native speakers", with a total of 24 postgraduate qualifications held between them (Table 1).

Table 1: *Data from Institution A*

Institution A	"NST"s – 11	"NNST"s - 8	Total
Centre	11	10	21
Periphery	0	3	3

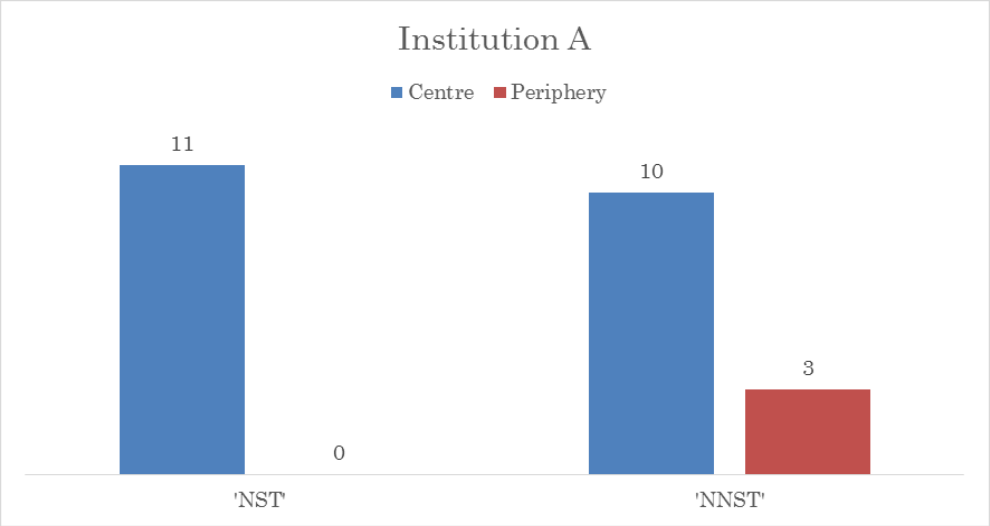

Figure 1. *Centre and Periphery qualifications in Institution A*

It is clear that in Institution A, there is a definite slant towards Centre qualifications, both among the "native speaker" staff and the "non-native speaker" staff. While there were some qualifications earned at Japanese universities among the instructors, these were an extremely small minority of the total qualifications present in the group. It is also perhaps notable that all of the Periphery qualifications were earned by "non native speaker" teachers, and that all of the teachers who had these qualifications also had a Centre qualification such as a masters degree. I will return to some of the possible implications of this later in the discussion section.

Institution B

Institution B is a sizable private university in Tokyo, which runs a large-scale English program designed to improve the communicative English skills of its first-year undergraduate students. On this program it employs 59 instructors in total, with 47 "native speaker" teachers and 12 "non-native speaker" teachers, who held 59 postgraduate qualifications (Table 2).

Table 2: *Data from Institution B*

Institution B	"NST"s – 47	"NNST"s - 12	Total
Centre	46	12	58
Periphery	1	0	1

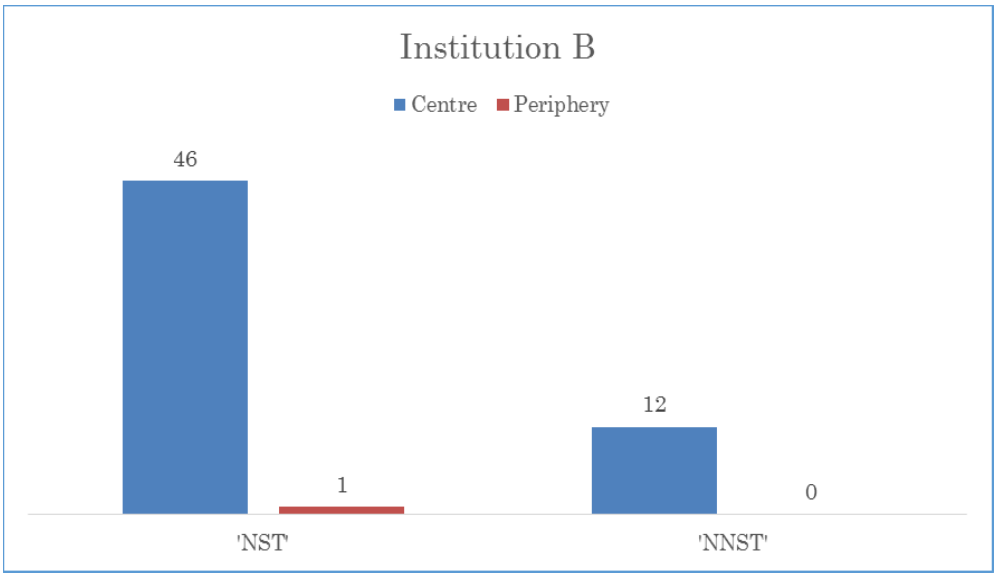

Figure 2. *Centre and Periphery qualifications in Institution B*

In Institution B, the qualifications were even more dramatically off balance, with all but one of the 59 qualifications having been earned in Centre institutions. What is perhaps interesting to note is that the one Periphery qualification that was found in the data were earned by a "native speaker" from an inner circle country, while the "non-native speaker" staff, who came from a variety of national backgrounds, had all earned their qualifications at Centre universities.

Institution C

Institution C is also a private university in Tokyo with a large and prestigious English program employing 37 instructors. The balance of "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" instructors is, in contrast to the other two programs described above, weighted in favour of the "non-native speaker" instructors, of whom there are 25 in contrast to 12 "native speakers". In total, these teachers held 45 postgraduate qualifications related to ELT (Table 3).

Table 3: *Data from Institution C*

Institution C	"NST"s – 12	"NNST"s – 25	Total
Centre	12	11	23
Periphery	3	19	22

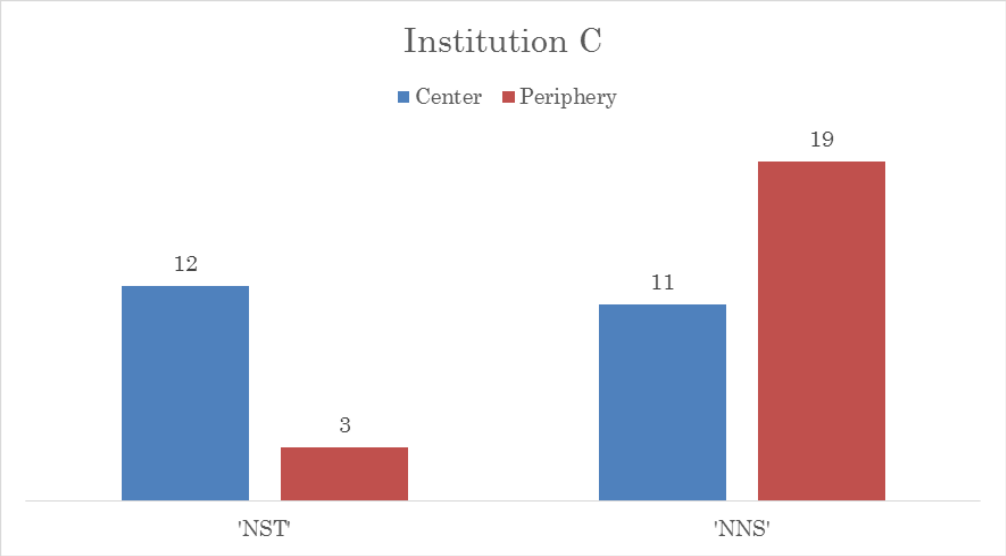

Figure 3. *Centre and Periphery qualifications in Institution C*

Institution C, in contrast to the other two programs investigated, actually had an almost equal balance of qualifications from the center and the periphery. This was also, perhaps relatedly, the only program which had more “non native speaker” staff members than “native speakers”. These “non-native speakers” were from a variety of national backgrounds, with instructors hailing from countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas, and degrees earned from institutions both in and outside of Japan.

Totals

The total number of qualifications held by instructors is given in the tables and figures below. It is notable that the number of Centre qualifications dwarfs the number of Periphery qualifications in the data as a whole. This favouring of Centre over Periphery qualifications is most obvious among the “native-speakers” from whom the data were taken, as would be expected. However, even though the “non-native speakers” had a better balance of Centre and Periphery qualifications, it is important to note that the number of Centre qualifications was still higher among these instructors than Periphery qualifications (Table 4 and Figures 4 and 5).

Table 4
Total number of Centre and Periphery qualifications in the three institutions

Centre Total	102
Periphery Total	27
“Native speakers” total	73
“Non-native speakers” Total	55
“Native speakers” Centre	69
“Native speakers” Periphery	4
“Non-native speakers” Centre	33
“Non-native speakers” Periphery	22

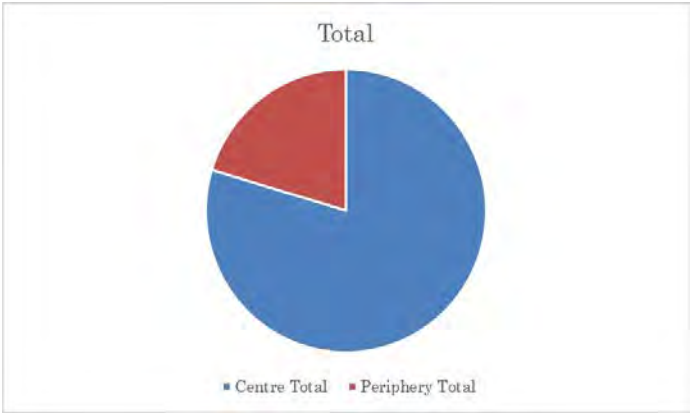

Figure 4. *Total number of Centre and Periphery qualifications in the three institutions*

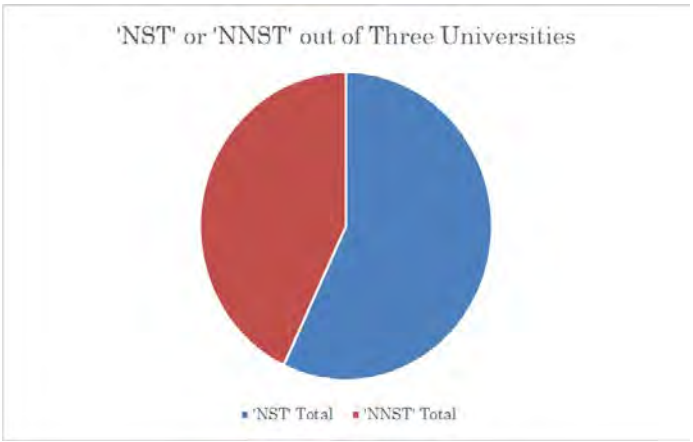

Figure 5. *Total number of "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" instructors in the three universities*

Discussion

As can be seen from the data shown above, in the three institutions, there was a general preference shown for Centre qualifications over those earned in the Periphery. However, the picture painted by the data on an institution-by-institution level is not so clear.

Certainly, it appears that at least one of these institutions - Institution B - has a strong native-speakerist bias in the qualifications that are held by its teaching staff. In fact, 98% of the qualifications held by its teaching staff are from institutions in the UK, the US, or Australia, and this is true of both its "native speaker" and "non-native speaker" staff. While one of the "native speaker" instructors holds a qualification earned from a Periphery institution, this is very much an outlier in the data, and it may be that this instructor's "native speaker" status was enough to compensate for the fact that their qualification was not from a Centre institution. It seems anomalous that, given the vast amount of qualifications related to language education available in Japanese universities, as discussed earlier, such a vast majority of qualifications held by the instructors in this English program would be from institutions in the political Centre of the ELT business.

A similarly native-speakerist position seems to be discernable in the pattern of qualifications earned by instructors at Institution A. While there are more examples of qualifications earned at Japanese universities present in this department, they are still a small minority of the total, and Centre qualifications are still dominant among the staff, both "native-speaker" and "non-native speaker". Perhaps most tellingly, all of the instructors who hold these periphery qualifications also hold similar or higher-level qualifications from Centre universities (e.g., an MA from a Japanese university in linguistics, and an MA or PhD in TESOL or a related field from a Centre university). This may show that the Periphery qualifications were not an important factor in their hiring, and that the Centre qualifications (generally speaking earned more recently) were a stronger contributing factor, though it cannot be inferred reliably from this data alone whether or not they played a role in the decision making process of hiring. In any case, it is still true that no instructors working in this department had degrees or qualifications earned solely in Japanese or other Periphery institutions, and this would appear to be evidence of a possible native-speakerist bias on the part of the university or the faculty.

Naturally, any inferences drawn from this data must be tentative, as there are many confounding factors that may come into play. For example, it may be

the case that very few people with appropriate Periphery qualifications applied for jobs in these programs, and so accordingly very few of these people were hired. This is certainly possible, but such a line of reasoning seems suspicious. If an employer had a staff of almost exclusively "native-speakers" and claimed that this was simply because no "non-native speakers" applied for the job, I think we would be cautious in believing them. The global "non-native speaker" movement around the world, and the forceful campaigning on the part of "non-native speakers" over their professional exclusion (Clark & Paran, 2007; Kim, 2011; Mahboob & Golden, 2013 ; Selvi, 2010) has demonstrated that such a claim would be rather unlikely to be true. We might instead infer a bias on the part of the employer, either in the ways in which they seek out applicants for jobs, or the ways in which candidates are chosen. This bias may be conscious or even subconscious, with the employer potentially unaware that they were exercising a prejudice, but it would seem highly unlikely that no bias was in play at all. We would, I think, be wise to exercise similar caution in the case of qualification bias. However, even if it were true that applicants with Periphery qualifications were not forthcoming this may still be, I would argue, evidence of a wider native-speakerist bias - a belief among teachers and among the profession at large in the superiority of Western teaching methods and approaches, the training in which is signified by these Centre qualifications. While we must be tentative in the inferences we draw from this data, it seems reasonble to suggest that a native-speakerist bias is, at some level, at the root of the qualification imbalance.

A claim that holders of Centre qualifications would not be interested in jobs in large English teaching programs is also brought into question by the data from Institution C, given in the table above. Institution C shows a striking difference in the balance of qualifications held by its instructors compared to the other two English programs investigated for this study. In this university, the numbers of "native-speakers" and "non-native speakers" is almost exactly the same, and this is also true for the kinds of qualifications held by those instructors. In fact, this was the only program examined in this study in which the number of Periphery qualifications held by the instructors was almost exactly the same as those awarded by Centre institutions. In addition, the qualifications were gained not only from Japanese universities, but also from a number of Periphery areas including institutions in Asia and Europe. This shows a strikingly different situation from that of the two other institutions from which data were drawn. In Institution C there is no clear native-speakerist bias in terms of the qualifications held by instructors. In fact, it seems the vast majority of those employed on this program earned their degrees in their home country, with a small number both of the "native-speakers" and "non-native speakers" having earned their degrees abroad. While it is important, as noted earlier, to exercise caution in interpreting these findings, it seems that Institution C does not have an overt native speakerist

bias in favour of degrees earned in Centre settings. It is also possible to cautiously infer a weak or potentially absent preference for Western methods and approaches to English instruction, showing that the institution is willing to value the training and qualifications of periphery settings. This stands in contrast with the other two ELT programs examined for this study, both of which appear to overtly prefer Centre-trained instructors to those who have received their language teaching education in a more Periphery setting.

The data from this study appear to point towards an overall native-speakerist bias within the Japanese tertiary ELT sector, based on the provenance of the qualifications of the instructors on the three programs investigated. This conclusion is made more compelling when we consider the fact that qualifications related to English and English language education are common in Japanese universities, and that even the "non-native speakers" on the programs discussed were far more likely to have Centre qualifications than to have those earned in Periphery institutions.

There is, however, a confounding result in the form of Institution C, which showed a much stronger balance of qualifications among the instructors on the university's English program. This is important, as it demonstrates that a native-speakerist qualification bias is not universal, and that the tertiary sector in Japan may be becoming more sensitive to these critical issues in English language teaching. A more in-depth study would have to be conducted in order to show in what ways, and to what extent, such a bias is present in the industry, however this paper has demonstrated that, at least in the institutions studied, there appears to be a native-speakerist bias at play with regard to qualifications, one that is likely based on the questionable belief that Western language teaching methods and expertise are in some way superior to the methods and expertise of those in other educational settings.

Conclusion

In this paper I have documented some evidence of a possible creeping native speakerism in Japanese higher education. Of the three large English departments from which the data for this study was drawn, Centre qualifications were dominant in two, with Periphery qualifications being only marginally represented among the program instructors. While one institution did display a clear balance of Centre and Periphery qualifications, including a more cosmopolitan collection of qualifications from non-Japanese Periphery institutions, the overall balance of qualifications in these programs did seem to clearly tilt towards qualifications from the Centre being far more substantially represented than those from Periphery institutions. While, as noted earlier, it is important to be cautious in over-interpreting the results from a small study like this, it seems to lend weight

to the notion that Centre qualifications are more highly valued by these institutions than those earned in Periphery settings. This bias points to a native-speakerist disposition among the staff and administrators of these institutions, in which the teaching methodology and expertise of the Centre is desired over local methods and expertise, due to the erroneous belief that they are inherently superior.

Further research will be needed to discover whether or not this issue is widespread throughout the rest of the Japanese tertiary ELT sector. Considering the negative effects that native-speakerism has had on members of the profession, and the undesirable political implications that lie behind such an ideological bias, it is imperative that we come to understand the subtle ways in which such prejudices continue to be played out in educational institutions. In this paper I have provided some evidence of one area - qualifications of instructors - in which native-speakerism appears to be influencing decisions, and this is something that should be considered carefully and critically in order for the ELT industry to move towards a more fair and equitable orientation with regards to speakerhood and local expertise.

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