An Autoethnographic Account of a Native English-Speaking Teacher's Change in Attitude to Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers

Simon Perry
University of Tokyo
sperry@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract

This study investigates and reflects upon how over a decade of teaching English as a foreign language my attitude towards non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) changed from a negative perception to one of admiration. Focusing on language ideology and NNEST discrimination as conceptual lenses, I detail the evolution of my attitudes across time and space as a language educator using autoethnographic inquiry. I detail how my attitudinal changes towards NNESTs evolved, from beginnings where I questioned their authenticity, due to my sociocultural background, to a status where I espoused their competence and began researching how equity can be achieved in English language teaching (ELT) for NNESTs globally. I also summarize how my lived experiences can be replicated in official policy within ELT with a focus on critical reflexivity and exposure. As a 'native English-speaking teacher,' my experiences and perceptions seek to add countenance to those documented by NNESTs, therefore offering fluidity and depth to the discussion within the NNEST movement on how equity can be achieved.

Keywords: Autoethnography, NNEST, NEST, equity, ELT

In my current academic position at a university in Tokyo I was engaged in a meeting with a NNEST colleague to discuss a potential research project. The colleague mentioned how admirable it was that a lot of my research focuses on the equitable status of NNESTs in ELT, which they felt had added impetus as I, myself, have been a native English-speaking teacher (NEST). They commended my open-minded attitude and critical stance on an issue that pervades the field of ELT, the NNEST-NEST dichotomy. This dichotomy has been a one-sided affair that has traditionally benefited NESTs and the NNEST movement has sought to address this inequality. My colleague was unaware that for a large part of my career I had been an active component in that dichotomy and the living embodiment of the insidious inequalities that pervade the status of NNESTs. It took a long time and a lot of circumstances for my eyes to be

opened to the inequitable status of NNESTs that once realized, seemed so contradictory and gratuitous. I made the decision to document my change in attitude and perception towards NNESTs throughout time and space, beginning with the story of my sociocultural background through to my current position in academia. I felt as though my story could serve as an example to those that need to be 'awakened' to the unbalanced inequalities that exist within our field of ELT, so that tenable changes can be made across the spectrum in policy and attitude.

Throughout the development of my story, I was constantly aware of the 'other' within the story, the NNESTs whom I encountered. Each interaction with and inner thought considering the 'other' was an essential subplot to the overreaching arc of my story of development and awareness. NNESTs and their equity within ELT represent the broader social and cultural context related to my story as it serves as a representation of how attitudes have been evolving in the 21st century and offers insight into future solutions for further development. On the theme of NNESTs, the paper addresses themes of unequal Englishes (Tupas, 2019), native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005), linguistic capital (Irvine & Gal, 2000), authenticity (Pinner & Lowe, 2016), recruitment discrimination (Clark & Paran, 2007; Kiczkowiak, 2020; Perry, 2023; Ruecker & Ives, 2014), discounted nativism (Panaligan & Curran, 2022), workplace discrimination (Kubota, 2021; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Ma, 2012; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu & Llurda, 2008), accent discrimination (Jenkins, 2005), and self-esteem (Braine, 2010; Moussu, 2018; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). These were the main issues I witnessed throughout my professional engagement with NNESTs and thus should be addressed as components of my autoethnography.

This paper is written in an analytical-interpretive style, which, whilst not as evocative as an emotive style, ensures that my story can be related to a broad audience of educators globally. This style also never loses sight of the broader context of this paper, which is the legitimacy and equity of NNESTs within the field of ELT and my self-reflection on my part within this issue. Thus, I aim to answer the question: What the cause was of my change in attitude towards NNESTs and how can this be replicated in official policy? I will begin the paper with a background of the major themes relevant to my story including, the origins of bias in language ideology, native-speakerism, and NNEST inequity. I will then present the story of my professional trajectory in ELT and follow it with a discussion of the major themes.

Autoethnography, Language Ideology, and the Equity of NNESTs

NNESTs

Research on NNESTs has garnered significant attention in the field of applied linguistics, offering insights into their roles, challenges, and contributions in English language teaching. Studies have explored the diverse experiences of NNESTs, addressing issues related to identity (Kamhi-Stein, 2013; Park, 2012; Perry, 2020), linguistic proficiency (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Selvi, 2014), pedagogic competency (Braine, 1999; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994), pedagogic competence within the multilingual turn in applied linguistics (Baker & Tsou, 2021; Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Cogo, 2015; Dewey, 2015), and professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Perry, 2023; Reis, 2014). Studies into student opinions of the skills and confidence of NNESTs at pronunciation teaching have been conducted, which have demonstrated unfavorable perceptions (Ma, 2012; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). This research has questioned and challenged notions of NEST linguistic superiority and professional legitimacy, thus contributing to a nuanced understanding

of NNESTs' experiences, and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach in the field of English language teaching.

Recruitment discrimination was highlighted by studies conducted by Clark and Paran (2007) and Ruecker and Ives (2014), which demonstrated overt bias against NNESTs who were limited in opportunities due to discriminatory practices. More recent research done by Kiczkowiak (2020), who demonstrated there remain concerns about the proficiency of non-native speakers, and Perry (2023), who analyzed Japanese ELT institutional inconsistencies between recruitment policies and language ideology, highlights that there is an increase in NNEST recruitment and growing unity among them, but this is not reflected in ideology and teaching pedagogies within ELT institutions. In relation to NNEST legitimacy, accent and ELT pedagogy are relevant to my story. Studies of ELT materials and methodologies offers insight into how they often carry inherent cultural biases, favoring native English speakers and Western cultural norms, which can lead to the marginalization of non-native English speakers (Kubota, 2021; Kumaravadivelu, 2006), yet there remains resistance to change in ELT curriculums (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019; Humphries & Burns, 2015).

Looking at accent, Jenkins (2005) comprehensively explored how accent discrimination diminishes the self-esteem and self-worth of NNESTs and reduces their professional legitimacy. The disfluency perceptions of NNESTs were highlighted by Dragojevic et al. (2017), meaning that NNESTs are automatically placed in an 'out-group' and 'othered' from 'native' English speakers, based solely on their accents. The concept of unequal Englishes (Tupas, 2019) aligns with the 'othering' of NNESTs as the variation of English you speak determines the inequalities you face, particularly in the classroom. NNESTs may internalize the negative stereotypes that are purveyed in ELT, regarding accent, ethnicity, authenticity, and linguistic capability, leading to lower self-esteem in their professional roles (Braine, 2010; Moussu, 2018; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Native-speakerism and those responsible for promoting this are direct causes of this negative perception towards NNESTs, which is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Native-Speakerism

Native-speakerism is an ideological concept imminently related to the equity of NNESTs. Holliday (2018, p.1) states that native speakerism is "an ideology that upholds the idea that so-called "native speakers" are the best models and teachers of English because they represent a "Western culture" from which spring the ideals both of English and of the methodology for teaching it." It is an ideological construction that creates a dichotomy within ELT, where NNESTs, the vast majority of English language teachers, are 'othered' and seen as lesser educators, despite their competency being as high as, if not higher than their 'native' colleagues. Holliday explains how a cultural deficiency is implied towards NNESTs, who have become commodities in an industry dominated by the native-speaker ideal (2015), where issues of culturism within native-speakerism mean the 'other' is created against the notion of the ideal 'native-speaker'. Pinner and Lowe (2016) made the link between native-speakerism and authenticity, through authority, culturism, and cultural capital. Authority has been granted to those from the sociopolitical west, which has led to the culturist 'othering' of groups such as NNESTs. The result of this is cultural capital being gained by native speakers who can give the impression that access to this capital is through western institutions and ideologies. In another guise of native-speakerism, Panaligan and Curran (2022) termed the notion 'discounted nativeness' to refer to the results of their study into Filipino English teachers online, who were

being taken advantage of for their high levels of English proficiency, sometimes being advertised as 'American native speakers.' However, their wages were not on a par with what 'American native speaker language teachers' would earn. The eleven participants in their study all experienced discrimination from students and maltreatment by the platforms that employed them on 'temporary' contracts.

Autoethnography

Autoethnographic accounts of the lived experiences of NNESTs have emerged in recent years that offer insights into their lived experiences. Ellis and Bochner (2000) argue that autoethnography, as a research method, bridges the gap between the subjective and objective, fostering a nuanced understanding of language acquisition, identity formation, and communication patterns. This method facilitates a reflexive exploration of the researcher's own linguistic journey, promoting cultural sensitivity and contextual richness. Autoethnography aligns with the qualitative paradigm, allowing for the exploration of diverse linguistic phenomena in real-life contexts, enriching applied linguistics research. It is a developing methodology within applied linguistics, which tends to consist of methods that are distanced, objectifying, and neutral, often ignoring the "I" in research. As a field of enquiry autoethnography performs empirical research that is self-reflexive, consciousness-raising, and value-centered (Bochner & Ellis, 2022). The autoethnographic approach is critical and reflexive, allowing for a commitment from the writer to human rights and social justice (Bochner & Ellis, 2022).

Autoethnography had emerged as a potent research method, offering a unique blend of personal experience and academic inquiry. Scholars like Ellis (2004) assert its efficacy in unveiling rich cultural insights, acknowledging the researcher's subjectivity as a tool for comprehending complex phenomena. This method fosters a deep, contextually embedded understanding of various social and cultural aspects (Reed-Danahay, 1997). By intertwining personal narratives with scholarly analysis, autoethnography creates a bridge between the individual and the societal, enhancing the authenticity and depth of research outcomes. It stands as a valuable approach, particularly in disciplines where personal experiences significantly contribute to the research landscape.

When summarizing autoethnography, Chang (2008) states, "Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 43). As a research method it sits at the crossroads of narrative research and ethnographic traditions offering flexibility and creativity difficult to ascertain in more orthodox empirical research. Using this method, the researcher's voice is heard. Cooper and Lilyea (2022) state that "Autoethnography fills a gap in traditional research where the researcher's own voice typically is not overtly included as part of the research" (p. 198). However, whilst containing the author's personal story autoethnography extends this to a broader cultural context.

A collaborative autoethnographic inquiry by Selvi et al. (2022) offers a critical analysis of the concept of 'non-nativeness' in ELT. They discussed how their understanding of criticality in and beyond language education had evolved over time with a focus on identity, experience, privilege, marginalization, and inequity. Yazan (2019) also individually documented his experiences as a transnational scholar working in the United States. He focused on the complexities of identity construction as a non-native speaker of English who had been an

English teacher in his home country who continued his professional journey by working with emergent bilinguals in the United States. In a Japanese EFL context Hiratsuka et al. (2023) shared their lived experiences of native-speakerism and how it affected their professional trajectories. Zacharias (2019) also provides an account of the effects of native-speakerism on a transnational English teacher who had moved from Indonesia to the United States. She states that the negotiation of identity for a NNEST begins before entering the classroom, and in her case embedded native-speakerism and self-marginalization were key components. Regarding NESTs, such as myself, there is less research to have been conducted using autoethnography. Thus, this paper offers a platform to juxtapose the lived experiences and evolution in attitudes and beliefs of subjectivities that can highlight the irrelevance of any perceived dichotomy between NEST and NNEST. My story does not offer a counterpoint to the documented stories of NNESTs, it instead serves to add countenance to their experiences.

To put my story into context it is important to first examine the influence of sociocultural backgrounds on bias in applied linguistics, which is a multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications. Bourdieu (1977) contended that individuals' linguistic development is intricately tied to their cultural and social contexts. He introduced the concept of "habitus," which refers to a set of dispositions, inclinations, and attitudes shaped by an individual's social context. Regarding language, the habitus of an individual shapes not only language acquisition but also their attitudes, beliefs, and biases towards different linguistic varieties (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu also argued that linguistic forms and linguistic competence contribute to an individual's accumulation of "symbolic capital." Mastery of language, particularly the dominant language of a social context, such a 'native' standard English in ELT, can enhance one's social standing and access to resources. Therefore, linguistic competence, as a form of cultural capital, can impact educational success and, consequently, social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). Relevant to the equity of NNESTs, Irvine and Gal (2000) argue that linguistic differentiation is a product of sociocultural processes, where power dynamics and social hierarchies influence language attitudes and contribute to linguistic biases, thus the sociocultural contexts of language ideology serve as a lens through which individuals perceive and evaluate linguistic practices, often leading to biases. Language ideology is intricately linked to and influenced by sociocultural factors, influencing perceptions and attitudes toward language varieties. Language ideology and its implications are prominent in the inequities witnessed in ELT, which are addressed in this paper through a focus on the equity of NNESTs (Braine, 1999; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994) and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005).

Method

Ethical Issues of Autoethnography

The unique ethical issues in autoethnographic research involve reflections of family members, co-workers, and friends, which, in this study, was navigated by obtaining permission from the individuals identified and using pseudonyms. The places of work are not mentioned by name and exact dates are not given when referring to the chronology of my personal story. Regarding the accuracy and legitimacy of my written personal history, fact checking was done through a system of triangulation and through conversing with many people involved in the story.

Data Collection

I developed self-reflective data based on a series of questions designed to ignite personal memory data. The reflections were made with potential research in mind adding focus to

relevant data and discarding the experiences that had no effect on the research question. As part of the system of triangulation, I addressed factual, social, and emotional elements by accessing external data such as a personal diary, photographs, and social media posts. What's more, I connected with colleagues past and present, who were able to aid me in my reflections and offer me external insights that I could use to clarify and contrast my reflections. This was to offset the limitations in memory data as I could get clarification about the 'truth' and accuracy of certain memories, particularly regarding the factual elements. This process enabled me to contextualize personal experiences with the lens turned inward (Adams et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

I chronologically listed relevant events and experiences from my time as an English teacher that pertained to the research topic, which started in the summer of 2007 and extends to the present day. These were recorded onto a voice recorder as a series of stories and recollections, which were then transcribed and added to with notes ready for coding. I used a mix of emotion and descriptive coding in analyzing the data (Saldaña, 2016). Emotion coding labelled the feelings I recalled related to the research topic and descriptive coding was applied to capture the experiences of my relation to NNESTs within ELT. The ethnographic element to my data analysis was based on triangulating my inner thoughts with external events and texts, such as photos and diary recordings. To generate more validity to the analysis process I also adopted a narrative approach, as autoethnography is a form of storytelling. It involved making a chronology of life events and turning points that represented moments relevant to the research topic. I labelled the narrative as cognizance, which tied in with the sociocultural analysis I was undertaking of my trajectory in attitudes towards NNESTs. These methods were synthesized with the transcribed data I recorded from conversations with past and current colleagues. This data was coded according to the same methods as described above and used for clarification purposes only.

The Story of my Professional Trajectory in ELT

I was born to white working-class parents, both of whom are British nationals. English was the only language used in my household growing up and nobody in my extended family had any knowledge of an L2. My formative years were predominantly spent in a village in Lincolnshire, UK, until the age of 11 when I went to boarding school in Stamford, Lincolnshire where my schoolmates and the teachers were almost exclusively British and white. After school I took a 'gap year' (a year off between school and university) at the age of 18 and spent half a year in Zimbabwe volunteering at an orphanage. Here my main task was to teach English to the children due to my being British by nationality. I had no qualifications but was deemed worthy as the language teacher, and I recall this seeming to be a logical conclusion as it was 'my' language. It gave me a sense of belonging to something cultural and I felt empowered with the responsibility of passing on 'my' language, even though I had no technical knowledge in how to do so effectively.

Years later, following university and working in a field related to my university studies, I made the decision to uproot to Madrid, Spain to teach English. This decision was made after I had enjoyed the experience of teaching English in Zimbabwe. I wanted to pursue language teaching as a career but in a setting where I could also learn about a foreign culture and its language. I gained my Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) over one month in Madrid and was then deemed to be a qualified English teacher. My recollections of

the course are that my classmates were entirely made up of British and Irish nationals. Being a native English speaker was not a pre-requisite to enter the course, but we were informed that we had to be 'fluent' in English. Towards the end of the course an instructor told us informally that there would be little chance of employment in Spain if we were not nationals of an English-speaking country, and due to Spain being in the European Union this was further narrowed down to mostly British and Irish nationals. In a conversation with a British colleague who did the course with me neither of us recalled NNESTs ever being mentioned, and I never encountered any 'non-native' English speakers in the academy, thus my exposure to NNESTs was non-existent and it did not occur to me at that time that people from countries where English was not the L1 did or even could teach English. At the academy we were versed in the total immersion method of teaching the language with several seminars that focused on grammatical structures that were necessary to teach. The general ideology of the academy was that we were the representatives of the language and its custodians. It was our responsibility to pass on this language to students in Spain and globally and I entirely subscribed to this view.

With the CELTA certificate in hand, I applied for and was offered a job by a private language school based in central Madrid. The job advertisement had stated that the position was for 'Native English-Speakers' and listed the countries they were willing to recruit teachers from, which included the UK. As part of my in-house training, I was helped by a senior teacher called Agata, who told me she was from Wisconsin, USA. I felt conflicted as she had a reasonably thick accent that did not resemble any North American accent and I recall initially being skeptical of her ability to guide me and I also questioned her legitimacy as a senior teacher. Whilst authoritative in her tone I noticed her hesitancy in addressing certain topics with me, such as when discussing how the students like their accents to be corrected. It was clear she felt an element of inauthenticity in passing on this information to a 'native' English speaker, and I felt that it was inauthentic in her doing so. Months later I found out she was a Czech national, who had been living in Spain for many years. Amongst colleagues we would complain about her senior status within the academy as we did not see her as a true representative of the English language. She had been asked by the academy manager to disguise her true origins and inform students that she was an American citizen, to protect the reputation of the academy and to ensure her legitimacy before the students. Agata was an extremely competent teacher and shared many pedagogic ideas with me that helped me improve as a teacher and by the end of my time in the academy I had grown to respect her abilities as an educator, which I deemed to be far superior to my own. This experience ignited the beginning of my change in attitude towards NNESTs but my belief in the method of 'total immersion' and in 'native-speakerism' remained strong.

The global financial crisis of 2008 took its toll on my first academy, and it eventually had to close down, but I was fortunate enough to find employment at another academy in Madrid. Again, the job requirements specified that you had to be a 'native English speaker' from an English-speaking country. However, the owners and senior management, who interviewed me and set the curriculum, were non-native speakers of English from a range of countries, which I immediately felt to be contradictory. The curriculum was rigid, and textbooks were used that espoused native-speaker ideals. It was at this time that I began to critically reflect upon what I was teaching and why. I noticed that the textbooks were not particularly relevant to many of the students I was teaching, and that they did not represent the reality of where I came from, just the idealized version of it. As much as passing on linguistic knowledge about how to communicate in English I felt as though I was selling a culture but in discussion with colleagues

my sentiments were isolated for the general consensus was that the textbooks offered great value.

From Madrid I made the decision to venture out of Europe to experience teaching English in Asia, as I felt this would make me a more rounded educator, as well as offering an opportunity to experience life beyond Europe. I began employment at an international school in Chongqing, China as an English teacher, where there were three non-Chinese English teachers at the school; myself, a Filipino NNEST named Erwin, and a Russian NNEST named Irina. I immediately realized that the local staff treated me differently to my two colleagues and more responsibility was placed on my shoulders despite being new and with the same title as my two NNEST colleagues. The local teachers were quite open about how I was deemed to be more legitimate, 'the real thing' as I was informed by one teacher over coffee. Erwin seemed to accept this and mimicked an Australian accent, which he would work on constantly by listening to tapes and watching online content. He told me it was a common phenomenon among Filipino NNESTs and would help him gain employment outside of his country. However, throughout my time in China I noticed a gradual decline in Erwin's mental state at work and he eventually opened up to me about a crisis of identity he was going through. The mental health issues suffered as a result of this eventually led to his resignation and return to the Philippines. Irina had more self-confidence in her abilities as an English teacher and was adamant she was as good as if not better than the majority of NESTs she had worked with during her time in Asia, often bemoaning how under-qualified they were in comparison. However, she was pessimistic about her future as an educator in the field of ELT stating that she knew she had a 'ceiling', which was her current job. Her dream was to move to the US or UK to be an educator but stated that it was "a waste of time" for her even trying. In China, my subjectivity was becoming more attuned to the abilities and legitimacy of the 'others', and it was a simple matter of exposure and lived experience that began this shift.

In China my experiences encouraged me to go back into higher education so I could explore the theory of language teaching in depth and in turn become a better educator and global citizen. I returned to the UK to undergo an MA program in applied linguistics, where the vast majority of my cohorts were NNESTs from various places around the globe. It was an illuminating experience with my classmates and professors, many of whom had been NNESTs themselves, giving me valuable insight and further exposure to communicative competence across borders. I learnt to reflect upon the consequences of my prior beliefs, attitudes, and 'othering' of people, often sharing my experiences and using them as a platform to conduct research into equity in ELT. What's more, I was recommended the book 'The Non-Native Teachers' (Medgyes, 1994), which highlighted the unfair dichotomy between NEST and NNEST, reinforced what I recognized as the skills NNESTs possessed, and introduced how self-esteem suffers among NNESTs within their chosen field. After completion of my master's degree, I worked briefly at a university in Scotland for the summer teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) on a pre-sessional program designed for potential postgraduate students that had not yet reached the required level of English proficiency for that university. It was on this program that I first worked with NNESTs in an environment where their legitimacy was never questioned. The leaders of that program understood that the students enrolling in the course were very receptive towards NNESTs, as we were judged on our abilities, and not on our nationality or race.

My positive experience on the MA program led to me enrolling on a PhD program in Tokyo, Japan because I wanted to be based in Asia, where I planned to conduct my research and collect

data. The PhD program provided the perfect conducive environment to turn theory and thoughts into words regarding my beliefs on the changes needed in ELT, with a particular focus on NNESTs. Within my seminar there were numerous NNESTs conducting research into ELT, looking for evidence of how the industry could evolve, particularly regarding their equitable status. I gave talks about my research concerning NNEST equity and was often approached or contacted by NNESTs keen to share their experiences of discrimination. It was during my PhD that I first encountered tangible changes at an institutional level. I found part-time employment at a university in Tokyo as a lecturer in English as a lingua franca (ELF) due to ELF and translanguaging being components of my doctoral research. I had been recommended by my PhD supervisor as he felt I would learn more from the program. The university in question was the first in the world to offer an English language program based entirely on the concept of ELF, which is what encouraged me to apply. As a NEST, I was in the minority within the department, but this was not an issue as the focus was on how we could successfully deliver a language program that did not subscribe to native-speaker standards both linguistically and culturally.

In the final year of my PhD studies, I was employed in my first full-time position as a lecturer in English at a private university in the suburbs of Tokyo. For the first time I had liberty to design my own curriculum for seminars based on English learning and I saw it as an opportunity to put into practice ideas I had developed that focused on communicative competence and were not preoccupied with grammatical and lexical accuracy, especially as the title of one of the seminars was 'communication skills'. I also placed more emphasis on communicative competence than grammatical accuracy in the assessment methods developing a rubric based largely on pragmatics and task achievement in making a podcast, rather than giving a prescribed oral presentation. However, my proposed curriculum was met with resistance, and I was sent some curriculums from past lecturers that I was advised to adhere to. These were entirely based on native-speaker standards, with activities that related to western cultural ideals and practices. The recommended set textbooks were also unimaginative and when I queried about the changes, I was advised that this was how it had been done so it was prudent to continue in this way.

I currently work at a university in central Tokyo as an assistant professor teaching and researching in sociolinguistics, where I focus on equitable practices and language use. I also teach English language programs at the university with a significant number of NNEST colleagues who continue to guide and inspire me. There were no requirements for native speakers nor was country of origin a relevance in the recruitment process, creating an equitable and productive environment that fosters diverse, critical, and challenging pedagogies. Throughout my story I have evolved in both a professional and social sense as I moved away from adherence to NS standards towards an understanding of the fluid and diverse nature of language use globally. I have gradually understood that pedagogic competence in language teaching is not related to a standard ideology based on race, ethnicity, or nationality but on an ability to connect with students aiding their communicative abilities. Accents, appearance, and background are irrelevant factors in determining who can and should be deemed legitimate in language teaching. My story serves as an example of how attitudes are not concrete and can evolve over time, especially with a continuation of hearing about the lived experiences of people who have gone through the issues we face today.

Discussion

Within the NNEST movement there is space for in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of those in ELT, with my story coming from the perspective of a NEST. This contributes to the insightful autoethnographic research conducted by NNESTs (Hiratsuka et al., 2023; Selvi et al., 2022; Yazan, 2019; Zacharias, 2019) and seeks to contribute to change in ELT from the perspective of the NNEST movement. By using an autoethnographic approach in addressing NNEST inequity, where this comes from, and how it can change, I offer an insight into how attitudes and beliefs can evolve over time from a perspective of native-speakerism to a more inclusive and global perspective. By immersing my story into the cultural and ideological inequities present in ELT I can offer insights and solutions that can contribute to redressing the inequalities still present.

Background

Throughout my story I encountered major themes that influenced the attitudinal changes in my professional and social subjectivities, which came about due to critical self-reflexivity and exposure to NNEST competencies. Before this evolution, my sociocultural background influenced my linguistic development and the attitudes and biases that were inherent in this (Bourdieu, 1977). The dispositions, inclinations, and attitudes of my habitus had been shaped by my individual social context, which was of a white male brought up in rural England where exposure to varieties of global Englishes was limited. What's more, my initial foray into ELT was in an environment where native-speakerism was prevalent and an alternative ideological stance seemed distant and irrelevant. I viewed my native status as an English speaker as a vital component of my symbolic capital, which had enabled me to move outside of the UK and gain employment as an English teacher, first in Africa, then in Spain some years later. This capital had gained me entry to a teacher education program and enabled me to gain a certification without any prior experience, thus enhancing my social mobility. I assumed that I sat atop a social hierarchy within my chosen professional field with such powerful linguistic capital (Irvine & Gal, 2000), which led to me 'othering' people within that field for a I felt they lacked authenticity (Pinner & Lowe, 2016).

Native-Speakerism

In my initial encounters with NNESTs, such as Agata, my innate feelings were that they were inauthentic, supporting Pinner and Lowe's (2016) claims that authenticity and native-speakerism are components that should be considered together when regarding discrimination in ELT. This was professional discrimination no different to that demonstrated in the studies of Clark and Paran (2007), Ruecker and Ives (2014), Kiczkowiak (2020), and Perry (2023). I was fully engrained in the ideology of native-speakerism and due to circumstances, such as encounters with NNESTs and opportunities to work in international locations, I was able to begin a period of critical self-reflection influenced by this exposure. However, many NESTs will not have the opportunities to travel nor work with NNESTs. Some will remain in their home country, and it will be difficult for them to consider that the ideology and method they are espousing in their teaching is biased and responsible for some of the inequalities present in ELT.

Another episode of the inequalities exposed by native-speakerism was in China, where Erwin and Irina were examples of Panaligan and Curran's 'discounted nativism' (2022). Both were being taken advantage of for their high levels of English proficiency, but their wages were not on a par with what I was earning. They also had temporary contracts, not unlike the online

teachers in Panaligan and Curran's study, that were controlled by exploitative agencies, who could arrange for working visas that the school would only offer to native English teachers. My contract was directly with the school and had benefits included, such as flights paid to travel to my home country. This exposure to clear maltreatment ignited a period of critical self-reflection, which led to my postgraduate studies. It is not false modesty to suggest that I was an inferior English teacher to my NNEST colleagues in China. I had a CELTA, but Erwin and Irina had studied language education at university, with Irina being qualified at postgraduate level. Erwin and Irina had been employed because they were well qualified and the agency knew they would be good employees for the international school where they were placed, but they were also considered to be cheap labor, thus their discounted nativism was beneficial to their employers.

NNESTs

I recalled how NNESTs would share their experiences with me about the discrimination they had suffered in ELT (Kubota, 2021; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Ma, 2012; Mahboob, 2004; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). A very visible form of NNEST discrimination is in recruitment. Agata's status as a senior teacher at my first ELT academy was a prime example of the contradictions and inconsistencies in NNEST recruitment and ideology, as was the methodology at my second academy in Madrid being set by non-native English speakers to a doctrine that followed an ideology of native-speakerism. These examples support Perry's research (2023) into ELT institutional inconsistencies and contradictions in Japan, demonstrating that it is a global trend. Accent is also a very visible field of NNEST discrimination, which was a difficult but essential component of my personal evolution in perception of the authenticity of NNESTs. The evolution of Erwin's accent during the time I worked with him in China demonstrated how accent discrimination against NNESTs leads to lower self-esteem, as seen in the studies conducted by Jenkins (2005). Erwin dedicated hours to adopting an Australian accent to enhance his legitimacy before his employers and colleagues, leading to a crisis of identity and ultimate resignation from his position.

At the university in Scotland where I taught on a pre-sessional EAP course, I saw how receptive students were to NNESTs, supporting the results of research conducted into NNEST competencies (Baker & Tsou, 2021; Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Braine, 1999; Cogo, 2015; Dewey, 2015; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1994). As Irina correctly indicated NESTs are frequently under-qualified in comparison to their NNEST colleagues, due to their nationality often being a sufficient marker of their expertise in teaching English. The competencies of my NNEST colleagues in China were conspicuous and my lack of creativity and originality was exposed in comparison. I had until then relied on my 'nativeness' as an indicator of my expertise, which had hindered my development as a language educator, something that became clear to me once I was exposed to a more global experience of language education. I witnessed firsthand the issues in self-esteem that my NNEST colleagues suffered from, relating directly to previous research conducted into this (Braine, 2010; Moussu, 2018; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Erwin and Irina were both passionate language educators with a lot to offer but neither now works in language education having become disillusioned with the industry.

Changes in ELT pedagogy to ensure the equitable status of NNESTs would mean changes in methodologies and curriculums, but such change meets resistance due to deep sentiments of the native-speaker ideal embedded in ELT. I shared my experience of how in my second

academy in Madrid, I used prescribed textbooks to teach the classes, which conveyed the ideology of native-speakerism (Kubota, 2021; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). These textbooks opened my eyes to how western culture is sold in ELT curriculums (Holliday, 2005, 2015; Pinner & Lowe, 2016), thus adding to the symbolic capital the 'native' teachers and 'othering' the 'non-native' teachers. At the tertiary level it was similar in my first full time employment at a university in Tokyo, where my curriculum for English language courses was met with resistance due to it focusing more on communicative competence and less on structure. The main argument seemed to be that it was not how things 'were done' lending credence to the previous conducted into resistance towards change in ELT curriculums (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019; Humphries & Burns, 2015).

Changes at an Institutional Level

ELT remains a field dominated by notions of native-speakerism (Pinner & Lowe, 2016), and there remains resistance to change in recruitment policies (Perry, 2023) and in adapting ELT curriculums (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019; Humphries & Burns, 2015). Yet, it is important to gather data that may be used in furthering the call for change, in a manner that ensures more equitable practices, especially for NNESTs, the largest demographic of educators in ELT. I identified two key areas that were essential to my evolution of attitudes and beliefs towards NNESTs: critical reflexivity and exposure.

Critical self-reflection means understanding how our perspectives, assumptions, and identity are socially constructed through critical reflection. My ability to reflect critically on my attitudes and beliefs in the early stages of my career enabled me to consider alternative viewpoints to an ideology I assumed to be stable and concrete. Education played an essential role in my evolution, and whilst it is not essential for every ELT educator to go through postgraduate study, it must be recommendable that institutional policy requires constant critical self-reflection when making decisions about hiring and methodology. On my teacher training program, we were encouraged to reflect on our pedagogic qualities and on how we delivered our curriculums, but there was no emphasis on self-reflection of our position within the field of ELT and whether our environment was equitable and inclusive. Such self-reflections mean the just incorporation of a wider range of ideas and approaches to language teaching, which can only benefit the industry as a whole and the students learning English globally.

Exposure means being in the presence of NNESTs in a professional environment. Inherent bias can be reduced when the 'other' demonstrates their abilities and debunks ideologies that may be present due to sociocultural background (Bourdieu, 1977). Whilst global demand for NNESTs is increasing it will mean they are exposed to their NEST counterparts. There will inevitably be resistance at first but as they demonstrate their skills this resistance will gradually wane as NNEST legitimacy is solidified. At an institutional level there can be manipulation regarding exposure to NNESTs in the form of teacher training programs where more NNESTs can be employed to conduct such training where NESTs are the prominent student body. Had I been instructed by NNESTs on my CELTA program I would have immediately lent more authenticity to the entire notion of a group of non-native English speakers being teachers of the language. In schools and universities globally the manipulation of exposure means equitable recruitment processes, where nationality is not a prerequisite and conditions are equal for all new employees, such as in my current employment. In curriculums there needs to be more diversity in materials, such as a wider variety of listening exercises exposing more diverse

English accents, and more visual representation of subjects not traditionally associated with western cultures.

Critical self-reflection and exposure to NNEST competencies are easily admissible to teacher training programs, ELT institutions, and individuals within the field of ELT globally. My own sociocultural background and initiation into ELT meant I was blind to this, but had I been made aware of equitable policies and practices in my teacher training programs and the ELT institutions where I initially worked my evolution as a critically self-aware educator would have been more seamless and pacier. Future research on how to incorporate these factors into ELT will be useful to lessening resistance and encouraging scholars and educators to evolve in their attitudes and beliefs through reflections on their own habitus. A focus on institutional change will be useful to maintain the movement towards equity that could come from the top down. Whereas a focus on research into critical self-reflexivity lends credence to change from the bottom up.

Conclusion

There was a resolution to my journey, which was my heightened awareness of the unjust attitudes towards NNESTs. This meant that the critical self-reflection regarding my status and the status of the 'other' within my chosen professional field of ELT had enabled me to evolve and recognize the legitimacy of a group that had been denied it for so long. This journey and my story have not yet ended, as there are many factors still to consider and reflect upon regarding equity within ELT and how my position can be influential in helping the sector evolve into the 21st century. Autoethnographic research by professionals within ELT will be essential to future understanding of subjectivity and equality in a field that needs to evolve with a rapidly diversifying linguistic landscape. How individuals respond to and experience concepts such as transnationalism and multilingualism within language education is a particularly worthy area of future study from both a narrative and ethnographic viewpoint. Autoethnography "requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively" (Ellis, 2013, p. 10). This is a useful mantra for all of those working in language education as we continue to seek equitable practices on a global scale.

About the Author

Simon Perry is an assistant professor in the Center for Global Education, The University of Tokyo, Japan. He researches issues in sociolinguistics and equity in language teaching. His current focus is on the non-native English-speaking teacher movement and discourse in digital spaces. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1987-902X

Declarations

Availability of data and materials: The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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