

The Non-Native Speaker: room to grow in language learning, role to play in language teaching

That English is the lingua franca of the world today is an undisputed fact, but any reference to the actual number of people who speak English on the planet is always prefaced by numerous caveats and considerations. Authors grow even more reticent when they need to mention statistics that distinguish those speakers as native and non-native. Crystal (2012) cautiously suggests the use of an average of the most recent estimates, arriving at the figure of between 1.5 and 2 billion English speakers, of which only between 400 and 500 million are native speakers of the language (p. 154-5).

The difficulty in coming up with those numbers arises from the fact that the distinction between native and non-native speakers – so deceptively easy on the surface – is in fact a complex matter. In the literature on the topic, tentative definitions are presented only to be questioned and proclaimed inadequate in some or in many ways. Medgyes (2021, p. 11-16) spends no less than six pages pointing out all the different faults to be found in the definitions most frequently repeated.

The layman concept would probably be expressed in accordance with one of the older definitions often quoted: ‘The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language’ (Bloomfield, 1933 apud Cook 2016, p. 177). Comparing that view to one formulated later in the 20th century, it is possible already to remark on a change of focus from order of language acquisition to the use of a language: in a more recent definition produced in the 1990’s a native speaker is ‘a person who has spoken a certain language since early childhood’ (McArthur, 1992 apud Cook 2016, p. 178). Regarding both these views, Cook points out the immutability of the historical facts of a person’s acquisition of their first language and their upbringing, which leads her to the conclusion that ‘any later-learnt language cannot be a native language by definition; your second language will never be your native language regardless of how long or how well you speak it’ (p. 178). In more recent studies the lines separating natives and nonnatives have become more opaque and the pedagogical implications of that shift for language teaching are noteworthy – an issue this essay will address below.

Several of the publications cited here delve into the difficulties of defining ‘nativespeaker’, discussing the characteristics that have been presented as distinctive of that group. Medgyes (2021, p. 11-12), however, is the most thorough of the debaters, attacking and dismantling each of those purported traits with surgical precision.

These are the aspects he lists for a native speaker of English, followed by his objections:

was born in an English-speaking country;

acquired English during childhood in an English-speaking family or environment; These are the most easily refuted characteristics. Medgyes invites us to consider the children who move away before or after acquiring English as L1; countries whose status as English-speaking is not clear; the length of time considered 'childhood'; what the dominant language is if the child is bilingual or trilingual. 3 speaks English as his/her first language;

Medgyes reminds us that the term 'native language' is not easily distinguishable from others like 'mother tongue', 'first language', 'L1', 'home language', 'dominant language', which might be a source of confusion.

has a native-like command of English;

The same argument applied in item 3 against lack of clarity applies here: 'command of English',

'knowledge of English', 'competence in English', and 'proficiency in English' are imprecise terms, as is 'native-like'. Medgyes' very acute question is 'Where does nativeness begin on a test with, say, a hundred items?' (2021, p. 12).

has the capacity to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English;

Not even native speakers are always fluent and spontaneous, depending on the task. Also, basic structures are automatized by non-natives too.

In regard to items 4 and 5 above, Guerra (2017, p. 195) proposes the use of the term 'language expert' in the place of 'native speaker' when specifically referring to the communicative aspects of language. The purpose of the new terminology is to emphasize knowledge as opposed to nationality.

uses the English language creatively;

Creative use of English is not easily defined. Also, non-natives can be linguistically creative in L2 too.

In regard to creativity, the extraordinary levels achieved by authors Joseph Conrad and Vladimir

Nabokov are ubiquitous as references of native-like proficiency. Cook (2016, p. 178) asks whether it is 'feasible or desirable for the L2 user to match these components of the native speaker'. We should note that the question of desirability is extremely pertinent, but to question if it is feasible is a moot point, as it has already been done – multiple times, by her own admission.

has reliable intuitions to distinguish right and wrong forms in English.

There are both linguistically naive and refined native speakers. Not every native speaker's intuitions are reliable.

As can be surmised from what was exposed above, the lines between natives and non-natives have been blurred and it is befitting to question, as did Medgyes (2021, p. 11), whether the native/non-native issue is the case of a dichotomy or a continuum. He illustrates the degree of frustration the terms cause by referencing different authors whose propositions range from proclaiming the death of the native speaker to suggesting the term be displaced or dropped altogether. Although he acknowledges that 'the dichotomy [nativeness and non-nativeness] does not stand up to close scrutiny', in his view the fact remains that we are all still categorized as either native or non-native speakers of a certain language (2017, foreword p. iv).

Inadequate as they are, the convenience of the terms 'native' and 'non-native' is acknowledged by all in the simple fact that its use is maintained in much of the literature about the issue to this day. Clearly, there is still a need to refer to these familiar albeit imprecise concepts.

Cook (2016, p. 178) takes a three-tiered approach to defining native speakers. In addition to the place of birth and upbringing criteria, she proposes a second and a third way. The second considers some of the aspects discussed above – characteristics that were initially taken to be exclusive to native speakers but are now seen as achievable by a small number of non-natives. The third criterion she invokes to distinguish natives from non-natives is the identity aspect of the language speaker, which is particularly relevant in the case of bilinguals and multilinguals language – which of the languages he or she identifies with?

The moment we speak we reveal to others a great number of facts concerning our identity: age, class, education, place of birth. We also make known where lies our linguistic loyalty. The concepts of 'inheritance' and 'affiliation' are key in the study of language identity. Guerra (2017, p. 195) explains the term 'inheritance' as a reference to language identity that originates from tradition and history, something that you inherit and pass on, while language 'affiliation' refers to a sense of attachment born of choice, of a sense of belonging to a certain group.

In her discussion of identity Cook (2016, p. 179) reaches the conclusion that 'it raises the question of which group we wish the students to belong to – the community of native speakers of which they can never be full members or the communities of L2 users?' Although I see the merit of raising the students' level the awareness of their own language identity in class, I object to the phrasing of the idea. I do not consider that 'which group we wish the students to belong to' is a valid question. That decision is not the teacher's to make. Learners already suffer too much outside influence and cultural

pressure that inevitably comes with the process of learning a language. Let the decision of where they will place their linguistic allegiance be one that they make on their own.

The issue of identity is also brought up as a possible explanation for failure to learn a second language, the reason being a rejection of a perceived threat to the community or the language the learner identifies with. In *English in Brazil: views, policies and programs*, a book that discusses the many obstacles in English language teaching and learning in that country, Leffa (2016, Position 84 of 3702) lists 'patriotic indoctrination, nationalistic pride for being monolingual, and xenophobic feelings' as sentiments that might affect negatively a student's motivation to learn English. He further explains that 'Learning somebody else's language is serving the interests of a foreign country, in detriment of one's country sovereignty. In a divided society, love and admiration for another language and culture are seen as alienation, treated with contempt and inverted to hate'. In my understanding, this is the view of an extremely small part of the population, probably circumscribed to major urban areas. In Brazil, the hegemony of Portuguese is indisputable – although Brazilians are heavily influenced by Anglo-saxon culture and Portuguese is very open (some would say excessively open) to loans from English. A resistance to English as an attempt to protect one's identity does not seem to be an issue.

The teacher's linguistic identity is relevant in the learning process. As the primary models (in more than one sense) of L2 in the classrooms, they are a reference to the students, which leads Miller and Kubota (2013 p. 246) to their reflection that understanding teachers is a necessary step to understand language teaching and learning; their identity plays a role in the process of which they are in charge.

Not surprisingly after Crystal's statistics concerning the number of non-native speakers of English in the world nowadays, Celce-Murcia calls our attention to the fact that (2014, p. 64) 'in a majority of environments, it is now more common to have an English teacher who is a non-native speaker than a teacher who is a native speaker'. That is a number that undoubtedly deserves great attention from language teaching researchers. These are the professionals at the chalkface in whose hands fall a major part of the responsibility to lead English language learners to fluency. Recent studies have shown a concern for this circumstance and an interest in NNESTs (Non-native English speaker Teachers). This is Robinson's position on the matter: 'Treating the native speaker as the model for second language learning is falling into the same trap of subordinating the group of L2 users to the group of native speakers, to which they could never belong by definition. The alternative is to treat successful L2 users as the model against which L2 users are measured' (2013, p. 454).

The gain in status NNESTs are enjoying now – which can probably be linked to that growth in the number of non-native speakers of English on the planet – has highlighted aspects of language teaching that used to go unnoticed. Cook brought to the discussion of the native/non-native issue a novel

point of focus, one that escaped my attention in decades of teaching: the role that non-native speakers play in the coursebooks we use. She points out that in the books our students learn with, L2 speakers of English are often ‘ignorant tourists and near-beginner students’, which are not inspiring models for the learners. Instead of presenting speakers of L2 as ideal models who use English as an acquired power, what the learners often see is L2 speakers in an ‘unflatteringly powerless status’ (Cook 2008, p. 173-7). That is certainly a missed opportunity to introduce inspirational models.

Medgyes (2021, p. 54-72) explores the various advantages a NNEST can offer L2 learners:

a) students have in front of them a model of learning success, as well as a language model; b) students can benefit from the wealth of language learning strategies their teacher acquired in his/her own learning; c) although students may not know it, NNESTs are often more aware of the foreign language than NESTs as a direct result of having learned mainly through extensive use of grammar books and dictionaries; d) students can count on their teacher being able to anticipate the language difficulties they will face; e) their teacher is more likely to empathize with their difficulties because he/she remembers what it was like; f) the L1 they share with their teacher can be used to clarify instructions, make requests, etc.

I thought of a few additions to the list of advantages of a NNEST: 1) He/she can get the students’ meaning when a NEST may not because the instances of interference from the mother tongue are easily recognizable to those who share an L1: In English, the pronunciation of the –ed suffix, the absence of the schwa...

2) Having gone through the same difficulties in their own path to fluency, A NNEST can easily anticipate and prepare for certain items in the vocabulary or grammar of the material to be taught that will present difficulties to the students – which words are false cognates that will hinder the comprehension and which are cognates which will work in the students’ favor; which structure in L2 need more intensive practice because of how different it is from L1.

Upon reflection, one major advantage of teaching a foreign language as a nonnative speaker is the wealth brought by the experience of having learned a) a foreign language, any language; and b) that specific language we are now teaching. We are models, guides, and sometimes inspiration to the students who are now on the long and hard path we have walked. A NNEST does not speak the language the students are learning because he/she happened to be born in a certain country, but worked hard to achieve fluency. Their teacher was able to conquer the obstacles they are facing now and is concrete evidence that it can be done.

In a reference to Kachru's circles, Celce-Murcia) predicts that 'the future will involve greater sensitivity to and explicit training in varieties of English in inner-circle, outer-circle, and expanding-circle countries'. In that diagram, Brazil is placed in the expanding circle, which gives extra strength to the need to empower the NNESTs. In the context of global Englishes Celce-Murcia suggests that teachers think globally and act locally. Promoting teacher autonomy and sensibility seems to be the right way to go in a country where NNESTs are the overwhelming majority and are better equipped to deal with local socio-cultural particularities anyway. It is Celce-Murcia's prediction that 'published materials intended for global use will become increasingly irrelevant as more appropriate local materials are developed and used in outer-circle and expanding-circle classrooms' (Celce-Murcia 2014, p. 67-9).

The discussion of NNESTs often contemplates how stressful their job can be as a result of feelings of insecurity, fear of exposure, students' unflattering perception, and unfair competition with NESTs in the job market. It is Robinson's point of view that 'exposing future teachers to research on multicompetence or the ideology of non-nativeness allows many of them to imagine themselves as multicompetent and bilingual rather than as deficient speakers of English (2013, p. 247). On my part, I can attest to the empowering capacity of this reading. It simultaneously shows limits and possibilities. In any way, this discussion may soon cease to exist: Guerra, concluding his study, poses that it will soon be irrelevant any comparison of NESTs or NNESTs as teachers. Their intercultural competence, their teaching skills, and their language competence will be the object of assessment (2017, p. 196).

In addition to the advantages of being a NNEST, and speaking as a NNEST studying second language teaching, I would like to address the novel viewpoints we acquire by studying SLA and expanding our knowledge beyond empirical personal experience. Reading in this area we often recognize our lived experiences in the theories described and in many research findings presented (inner speech, code-switching, the distinctions between native and non-natives...). It is an interesting experience to see your personal experience – something that seemed to be singular, yours exclusively – scientifically explained and described so accurately, better than you could have done yourself. Reading about NNESTs often felt like having someone explain my mind to me.

In fairness to NESTs, I felt obliged to list a few of the disadvantages I perceive in being a NNEST. The most present I can observe in my own practice is that in countries like Brazil, where classroom English is a precious opportunity to expand the quantity and quality of the English input of the students, the use of L1 with learners can easily become excessive and diminish the amount of exposure to L2 in the classroom.

Another, which I have no means to measure, is that the fact that the students are easily understood by their NNEST teacher may create a misleading notion that they would be understood just as easily by native speakers of the target language. The constant struggle to make oneself understood – perhaps a necessary step in language learning – is absent in their comfortable interaction with their NNEST.

I will pursue more information on this issue because of its relevance to my professional practice as a non-NEST, but also because I know that doing so means I will be learning about myself, about the linguistic learning experience that has made me the professional that I am and largely contributed to forming my identity.

The reasons why I code-switch in class.

a) The languages of a bilingual or multilingual are always activated; executive control is the only reason why one is chosen over the other(s) and maintained in a certain context. b) Sometimes the word you need occurs to you in L2 and the translation to L1 is not immediate. You use the foreign word while waiting for the L1 version to come to you or for someone to help you translate. c) There is also the case that a word from another language occurs to a bilingual because it seems to express a certain idea more succinctly, more precisely or more colorfully. If the receptor happens to be monolingual in such an occasion, the speaker may choose to use the word nonetheless – to satisfy an inner to express an idea precisely –and follow it with an explanation of the concept of the foreign term. I find that this is often the case when I am teaching the L2 and it is my view that it is not only permissible but desirable, as it enriches the content of the class. It seems to me that the origin of this practice is the same that explains why speakers in every language resort to the use of such foreign terms and expressions as *bildungsroman*, *deus ex machina* or *zeitgeist* and I believe that if we allow ourselves to make use of similarly useful terms in class it would count as stimulating input in the target language. Cook mentions ‘oneupmanship’ as a possible motivation for code-switching in those circumstances, but I believe that in language teaching that idea can be discarded.

In the same line of thought, it is relevant to remember that in the context of English being taught in Brazil the use of English words and expressions is commonplace in the media and adopting that practice in class is bound to contribute to the expansion of the students’ vocabulary.

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The layman concept would probably be expressed in accordance with one of the older definitions often quoted: ‘The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language’ (Cook 2016, p. 177, citing Bloomfield, 1933). Comparing that view to one formulated later in the 20th century, it is possible already to remark on a change of focus from order of language acquisition to the use of a language: in a more recent definition produced in the 1990’s a native speaker is ‘a person who has spoken a certain language since early childhood’ (Cook 2016, p. 178, citing McArthur, 1992). Regarding both these views, Cook points out the immutability of the historical facts of a person’s acquisition of their first language and their upbringing, which leads her to the conclusion that ‘any later-learned language cannot be a native language by definition; your second language will never be your native language regardless of how long or how well you speak it’ (p. 178). In more recent studies the lines separating natives and non-natives have become more opaque and the pedagogical implications of that shift for language teaching are noteworthy – an issue this essay will address below.

Several of the publications cited here delve into the difficulties of defining ‘native speaker’, discussing the characteristics that have been presented as distinctive of that group. Medgyes (2021), however, is the most thorough of the debaters, attacking and dismantling each of those purported traits with surgical precision. The seven aspects of a native speaker of English that Medgyes collected are listed below, followed by objections and considerations from several authors:

Aspect 1: was born in an English-speaking country;

Aspect 2: acquired English during childhood in an English-speaking family or environment;

These are the most easily refuted characteristics. Medgyes invites us to consider the children who move away before or after acquiring English as L1; countries whose status as English-speaking is not clear; the length of time considered as 'childhood'; what the dominant language is if the child is bilingual or trilingual.

Aspect 3: speaks English as his/her first language;

Medgyes reminds us that the term 'native language' is not easily distinguishable from others like 'mother tongue', 'first language', 'L1', 'home language', 'dominant language', which might be a source of confusion.

Aspect 4: has a native-like command of English;

The same argument applied in aspect 3 against lack of clarity applies here: 'command of English', 'knowledge of English', 'competence in English', and 'proficiency in English' are imprecise terms, as is 'native-like'. Medgyes' very acute question is 'Where does nativeness begin on a test with, say, a hundred items?' (2021, p. 12). A complete change of the direction of our focus is suggested by Cook, taking into account that very few L2 learners 'can ever pass for natives'; in her view, 'SLA research should be concerned with the typical achievement of L2 learners in their own right rather than with that of the handful of exceptional individuals who can mimic native speakers' (2016, p. 177). An even broader perspective of the issue considers the impact that unquestionable proof of the impossibility of a non-native achieving nativelikeness would have on second language studies: 'the question behind all of the questions in the field of SLA is whether L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition are the same thing [...] If we had definitive evidence that learners can't become nativelike, that would suggest a major difference between L1 and L2 acquisition' (VanPatten, Smith and Benati 2020, p. 185).

Aspect 5: has the capacity to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English;

Medgyes' response is that not even native speakers are always fluent and spontaneous, depending on the task. Also, basic structures are automatized by non-natives too.

In regard to items 4 and 5 above, Guerra (2017, p. 195) proposes the use of the term ‘language expert’ in the place of ‘native speaker’ when specifically referring to the communicative aspects of language. The purpose of the new terminology is to emphasize knowledge as opposed to nationality.

Aspect 6: uses the English language creatively;

Medgyes questions that view saying that creative use of English is not easily defined. Also, non-natives can be linguistically creativity in L2 too. In regard to creativity, the extraordinary levels achieved by authors Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov are ubiquitous as references of native-like proficiency. Cook (2016, p. 178) asks whether it is ‘feasible or desirable for the L2 user to match these components of the native speaker’. We should note that the question of desirability is extremely pertinent, but to question if it is feasible is a moot point, as it has already been done – multiple times, by her own admission.

Aspect 7: has reliable intuitions to distinguish right and wrong forms in English.

There are both linguistically naive and refined native speakers. Not every native speaker’s intuitions are reliable.

As can be surmised from what was exposed above, the lines between natives and non-natives have been blurred and it is befitting to question, as did Medgyes (2021, p. 11), whether the native/non-native issue is the case of a dichotomy or a continuum. He illustrates the degree of frustration the terms cause by referencing different authors whose propositions range from proclaiming the death of the native speaker to suggesting the term be displaced or dropped altogether. Although he acknowledges that ‘the dichotomy [nativeness and non-nativeness] does not stand up to close scrutiny’, in his view the fact remains that we are all still categorized as either native or non-native speakers of a certain language (2017, foreword p. iv).

Inadequate as they are, the convenience of the terms ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ is acknowledged by all in the simple fact that its use is maintained in much of the literature about the issue to this day. Clearly, there is still a need to refer to these familiar albeit imprecise concepts.

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In her discussion of identity Cook (2016, p. 179) reaches the conclusion that ‘it raises the question of which group we wish the students to belong to – the community of native speakers of which they can never be full members or the communities of L2 users?’ Although I see the merit of raising the students’ level the awareness of their own language identity in class, I object to the phrasing of the idea. I do not consider that ‘which group we wish the students to belong to’ is a valid question. That decision is not the teacher’s to make. Learners already suffer too much outside influence and cultural pressure that inevitably comes with the process of leaning a language. Let the decision of where they will place their linguistic allegiance be one that they make on their own.

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Not surprisingly after Crystal’s statistics concerning the number of non-native speakers of English in the world nowadays, Celce-Murcia call our attention to the fact that (2014, p. 64) ‘in a majority of environments, it is now more common to have an English teacher who is a non-native speaker

than a teacher who is a native speaker'. That is a number that undoubtedly deserves great attention from language teaching researchers. After all, these are the professionals at the chalkface in whose hands fall a major part of the responsibility to lead English language learners to fluency. Recent studies have shown a concern for this new setting in second language teaching, as well as an increased interest in NNESTs (Non-native English speaker Teachers). Cook argues that nativelikeness is an impossible measure of success for second language learners if we are working with the definition of a native speaker as 'a person who has spoken a certain language since early childhood' (2016, p. 182), and in that way we are denying our students achievable goals and thus setting them for failure and frustration. This is Robinson's position on the matter: 'treating the native speaker as the model for second language learning is falling into the same trap of subordinating the group of L2 users to the group of native speakers, to which they could never belong by definition. The alternative is to treat successful L2 users as the model against which L2 users are measured' (2013, p. 454).

The emphasis of second language teaching so far has always been on the native speaker, be it in the models present in textbooks, in the preference for native speakers as teachers, or in the choice of pronunciation models. There seems to be, however, a new paradigm just around the corner, which has only made itself noted in the research studies, not in the textbooks, not in schools, and certainly not in the perception of the general public. The premise of this new trend is eloquently expressed by Cook when she says that by teaching language learners only what native speakers can do 'we are limiting the students' horizons' (2016, p. 183). That is to say, we are failing to explore the powers that people acquire when they become bilinguals.

One of the powers speakers of a second language gain is codeswitching – changing from one language to another mid-speech or mixing words or sentences from different languages. That is an ability that is exclusive to those who have acquired a second language and is employed in a diversity of situations, such as keeping certain information from the monolinguals around you, quoting someone else, or mixing structures from two language for some effect (humor, for instance; Brazilian speakers sometimes add the English suffix *-tion* to a Portuguese word to make it funny: *enrolation*, *atrapalhation*). Codeswitching has particular pedagogical significance in language teaching when the teacher is a non-native and share L1 with his students, meaning that the switching from L1 to L2 will not happen exclusively among the learners. Cook sees the phenomenon as a natural occurrence, given the context, and that what is unnatural is faking a monolingual L2 situation (2016). Agudo (2017) provides a sociocultural point of view to the discussion informing that when L1 is used in class learners are closer to their zone of proximal development.

My reading about codeswitching led me to reflect on my own reasons to codeswitch in class and here is the fruit of that reflection: a) The languages of a bilingual or multilingual are always activated; executive control is the only reason why one is chosen over the other(s) and maintained in a certain context. b) Sometimes the word you need occurs to you in L2 and the translation to L1 is not immediate. You use the foreign word while

waiting for the L1 version to come to you or for someone to help you translate. c) There is also the case that a word from another language occurs to a bilingual because it seems to express a certain idea more succinctly, more precisely or more colorfully. If the receptor happens to be monolingual in such an occasion, the speaker may choose to use the word nonetheless – to satisfy an inner to express an idea precisely –and follow it with an explanation of the concept of the foreign term. I find that this is often the case when I am teaching the L2 and it is my view that it is not only permissible but desirable, as it enriches the content of the class. It seems to me that the origin of this practice is the same that explains why speakers in every language resort to the use of such foreign terms and expressions as *bildungsroman*, *deus ex machina* or *zeitgeist* and I believe that if we allow ourselves to make use of similarly useful terms in class it would count as stimulating input in the target language. Cook (2016) mentions oneupmanship as a possible motivation for code-switching in those circumstances, but I believe that in language teaching that idea can be discarded. In the same line of thought, it is relevant to remember that in the context of English being taught in Brazil the use of English words and expressions is commonplace in the media and adopting that practice in class is bound to contribute to the expansion of the students' vocabulary.

The gain in status NNESTs are enjoying now – which can probably be linked to that growth in the number of non-native speakers of English on the planet – has highlighted aspects of language teaching that used to go unnoticed. Cook brought to the discussion of the native/non-native issue a novel point of focus, one that had so far escaped my attention in decades of teaching: successful and empowering roles of L2 users are not found in textbooks. In fact, the role that non-native speakers play in the course books that we use is insignificant. Cook points out that in the books our students learn with, L2 speakers of English are often 'ignorant tourists and near-beginner students', which are not inspiring models for the learners. Instead of presenting speakers of L2 as ideal models who use English as an acquired power, what the learners often see is L2 speakers in an 'unflatteringly powerless status' (Cook 2008, p. 173-7). That an achievement gained with such arduous and prolonged work, and one that is so useful and desirable worldwide be relegated to a minor role in textbooks is an error in judgement that one hopes will soon be corrected. For the moment, however, not introducing these inspirational models is certainly a missed opportunity to lure the learners' interest.

Medgyes (2021) explores the various advantages a NNEST can offer L2 learners: a) students have in front of them a model of learning success, as well as a language model; b) students can benefit from the wealth of language learning strategies their teacher acquired in his/her own learning; c) although students may not believe it, NNESTs are often more aware of the foreign language than NESTs as a direct result of having learned mainly through extensive use of grammar books and dictionaries; d) students can count on their teacher being able to anticipate the language difficulties they will face; e) their teacher is more likely to empathize with their difficulties because he/she remembers what it was like; f) the L1 they share with their teacher can be used to clarify instructions, make requests, etc.

I thought of a few additions to the list of advantages of a NNEST: 1) He/she can get the students' meaning when a NEST may not because the instances of interference from the mother tongue are easily recognizable to those who share an L1 – in English, the pronunciation of the *-ed* suffix, the absence of the schwa... 2) Having gone through the same difficulties in their own path to fluency, A NNEST can easily anticipate and prepare for certain items in the vocabulary or grammar of the material to be taught that will present difficulties to the students – which words are false cognates that will hinder the comprehension and which are cognates which will work in the students' favor; which structure in L2 need more intensive practice because of how different it is from L1.

Upon reflection, one major advantage of teaching a foreign language as a non-native speaker is the wealth brought by the experience of having learned a) a foreign language, any language; and b) that specific language we are now teaching. We are models, guides, and sometimes inspiration to the students who are now on the long and hard path we have once walked. A NNEST does not speak the language the students are learning because he/she happened to be born in a certain country, but worked hard to achieve fluency. Their teacher was able to conquer the obstacles they are facing now and is concrete evidence that it can be done.

In a reference to Kachru's circles, Celce-Murcia (2014, p. 67-9) anticipates that 'the future will involve greater sensitivity to and explicit training in varieties of English in inner-circle, outer-circle, and expanding-circle countries'. In that diagram, Brazil is placed in the expanding circle, which gives extra strength to the need to empower the NNESTs. In the context of global Englishes Celce-Murcia suggests that teachers think globally and act locally. Promoting teacher autonomy and sensibility seems to be the right way to go in a country where NNESTs are the overwhelming majority and are better equipped to deal with local socio-cultural particularities anyway. It is Celce-Murcia's prediction that 'published materials intended for global use will become increasingly irrelevant as more appropriate local materials are developed and used in outer-circle and expanding-circle classrooms'

The discussion of NNESTs often contemplates how stressful their job can be as a result of feelings of insecurity, fear of exposure, students' unflattering perception, and unfair competition with NESTs in the job market. There are also flagrant misconceptions in the public opinion, sometimes associated with racism, as can be seen in Miller and Kubota's report of a case of false beliefs held by non-Caucasian teachers. They believed that 'their ESL students thought only white people could be native speakers of English and that only white people know *real* English' (2013, p. 246). As is often the case, one proposed intervention to solve the problem is to educate the ill-informed. It is Robinson's point of view that 'exposing future teachers to research on multicompetence or the ideology of non-nativeness allows many of them to imagine themselves as multicompetent and bilingual rather than as deficient speakers of English (2013, p. 247). On my part, I can attest to the empowering capacity of this reading. It simultaneously shows limits and

possibilities. Regardless, if some of the predictions made above come true, this discussion may soon cease to exist: Guerra, concluding his study, poses that it will soon be irrelevant any comparison of NESTs and NNESTs as teachers. Their intercultural competence, their teaching skills, and their language competence will be the object of assessment regardless of their origins (2017).

In addition to the advantages of being a NNEST, and speaking as a NNEST studying second language teaching, I would like to address the novel viewpoints we acquire by studying SLA and expanding our knowledge beyond empirical personal experience. Reading in this area we often recognize our lived experiences in the theories described and in many research findings presented (inner speech, code-switching, the distinctions between native and non-natives...). It is an interesting experience to see your personal experience – something that seemed to be singular, yours exclusively – scientifically explained and described so accurately, better than you could have done yourself. Reading about NNESTs often felt like having someone explain my mind to me.

In fairness to NESTs, I felt the need to come up with a list of at least a few of the disadvantages I perceive in my performance as a NNEST. The most present I can observe in my own practice is the reverse of one of the advantages mentioned above: the ability to interact with the students in their L1. In countries like Brazil, where classroom English is a precious opportunity to expand the quantity and quality of the English input of the students, the use of L1 with learners can easily become excessive and diminish the amount of exposure to L2 in the classroom.

Another, which I have no means to measure, is that the fact that the students are easily understood by their NNEST teacher may create a misleading notion that they would be understood just as easily by native speakers of the target language. The constant struggle to make oneself understood – perhaps a necessary step in language learning – is absent in their comfortable interaction with their NNEST.

I am certain that I will pursue more information on this issue because of its relevance to my professional practice as a NNEST, but also because I know that doing so means I will be learning about myself, about the linguistic learning experience that has made me the professional that I am and largely contributed to forming my identity, bilingual that I am.

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