

*The Propriety of the Native Speaker: World Englishes and the NEST/NNEST
Dichotomy*

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Abstract

Discriminating teachers' pedagogical and professional skills, solely on the basis of accent, physical appearance, and native speaker status is unfounded and unethical. The growing number of English language learners worldwide correlates to an increasing number of nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Unfortunately, NNESTs have not always shared equal status with NESTs in the field; in fact, until quite recently, NNESTs, the global majority of English teachers, were not seen by many as legitimate educators. Moreover, unity between NNESTs and NESTs seems lacking at best, and at worst a contest to claim superiority over the other. Specifically, a native speaker benchmark has divided a group of teachers sharing a common goal of teaching English, into two species with a distinct set of assets.

This article aims to reexamine and implement the perceived advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs and NESTs into a coalescent framework in which both parties can access and utilize assets thought before unique to each group. Specifically, this paper argues the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching, and six qualities thought only accessible to nonnative English speaking teachers offers one step towards unifying two disparate groups by refocusing the emphasis on the needs of our students. For instance, NESTs in EFL environments who have proficiency in their learners' L1 can empathize with the frustrations of learning a foreign language, and of course benefit from sharing a language in common. This essay seeks to move beyond the native speaker dichotomy and provide students with qualified teachers.

1. Introduction

With the current rate English is continuing to spread across the globe, Inner Circle countries can no longer dictate and control the future of English; it is now in the hands of the world—a world comprised of a diverse population of English speakers from different cultures and varieties of English. An often cited statistic by Canagarajah (1999) projects that 80% of English teachers world-wide are nonnative speaking teachers of English (NNESTs). Interestingly, however, many people both within and outside of the ELT community continue to view these educators from a native speaker perspective. That is, a primarily Inner Circle native speaker model is used as a benchmark and target of ultimate attainment by which teachers' pedagogical and professional skills are measured against. Paradoxically, these teachers will never attain native status in the eyes of many people, but are referred to instead as 'native-like.' Those falling short of the 'native-like' title are demoted to the rank of failed native speakers. This paper advocates for a perspective based on L2 users, the majority of speakers and teachers, rather than on native speakers the minority group. It also argues that a native speaker framework has divided a group of teachers with the same end goal. Moreover, I will present a foundation which implements the perceived advantages of both nonnative and native speaking English teachers via the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching and Medgyes' (1992) 6 assets.

This paper is written in the context of language teaching in Japan, where English is taught as a foreign language. Although the findings and pedagogical applications are most fully beneficial with a monolingual group of learners in an EFL environment, they also hold relevance in ESL situations.

2. Outline of the paper

The current paper is divided into two major sections. The first section traces the origins of the native speaker benchmark and explains how its reverberation through the field divided NNESTs and NESTs. The subsequent section describes a new framework, aiming to bridge a conceptual gap between theory and practice by arguing how the intersection of multicompetence, codeswitching, and Péter Medgyes' (1992) six assets of NNESTs can refocus teaching on the L2 user. I will elaborate how the use of multicompetence as basis invalidates the myth of the native speaker and will further detail the implications of this foundation regarding the use of L1 in the classroom as well as a lens to reevaluate and reply Medgyes' (1992) 6 assets.

3. From Deficit to Difference—Changing Perspectives and Paradigms in the Literature

In the last three decades, the notion of native and nonnative speakers in language teaching went from an overlooked area of research to one with a dedicated subfield of study in applied linguistics. While many academics and practitioners perceive NNESTs as bona fide educators in the field, the situations in some EFL environments, such as Japan, seems to reflect unity between nonnative and native English teachers as lacking at best, and at worst a contest for superiority between two groups who possess a common purpose. Moreover, this dichotomy is often portrayed through stereotypes in the literature with NNESTs viewed as grammar gurus who can better offer insight and teaching strategies from their experience as learners and NESTs as the proprietors of pronunciation (see e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Braine, 2010; Reves & Medgyes, 1994). However, prior to the 1980s, the perceptions of many NNESTs could not have been any different; these educators were widely viewed as second class teachers with language deficiencies. In this section, I argue that this reflects one example of how deeply the native speaker benchmark has penetrated the field of ELT.

3.1. The Native Speaker Construct

The notion of the ‘idealized native speaker’ model emerged from the Chomskian paradigm in linguistics (see e.g. Chomsky, 1965, 1968, 1986) which helped define (Inner Circle) native speakers as the perfect models of their language—i.e., the judges of grammaticality, against which others would be measured. The underpinning of this model was in Chomsky’s (1966) difference between competence and performance which emphasized the former over the latter (see also Firth & Wagner, 1997; Sampson, 1980). While this may have applicability in examining a static language in a homogenous group of monolingual speakers, it does not provide an adequate basis or account for language variation among the multilingual users and various contexts in which English is used today.

Another conceptual emphasis of the Chomskian perspective was a focus on independent grammars. For instance, Selinker’s (1969, 1972) notions of fossilization and interlanguage helped support the idea of separate grammars by using a native speaker perspective and benchmark as a measure of ultimate attainment for L2 learners. Specifically, the initial interlanguage model proposed that students traverse a path from L1 native speakers to L2 native speakers, with interlanguage representing the language during their L2 transition. Those failing to attain native proficiency in the L2 became fossilized or deficient native speakers. While

Chomsky's and Selinker's theories regarding SLA certainly represented novel and breakthrough discoveries during the 1960s and 1970s, these were largely predicated on the notions and hypotheses of first language acquisition. This foundation inherently employed a native speaker model as a linguistic and cultural target for acquisition which would reverberate through different paradigm shifts.

3.2. An Injection of Sociolinguistics

Following the rather theoretical lab-based approach to the native and nonnative speaker constructs exemplified by the Chomskian paradigm, the next shift, the NNEST movement, would broaden the scope of investigation to include a wide range of sociolinguistic variables. Specifically, scholars and linguists in the field began to view other varieties of English through a more pluricentric lens taking into account issues such as language ownership, class, race, and (access to) education (e.g., see Halliday, 1974; Higgins, 2003; Norton, 1997; Peirce, 1995; Widdowson, 1994). Under this more holistic approach, non-Inner Circle varieties of English would become recognized not as erroneous forms of an Inner Circle target, but as separate and unique varieties worthy of study (see B. Kachru, 1997; Sridhar & Sridhar, 1986). This movement also signified the legitimization of NNESTs as educators (see e.g. Higgins, 2003; Medgyes, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994).

3.3. Another Divide

Although momentous progress was made during the almost 20 year span from the 1980s until the late 1990s, it was also a double edged sword. Some research implicitly reiterated remnants of a Chomskian (in)competence model and thus marked the origin of another division between NNESTs and NESTs. Medgyes' 1992 article represents one such example of this research. Seidlhofer's (2001) assertion, "this means that the *how* is changing, but linked to a *what* that is not" (p. 140), provides a nice analogy for the analysis of this. While the legitimacy and status of both NNESTs and NESTs changed, differing degrees of an "us" versus "them" relationship between the groups remains nearly the same.

That is, despite insisting that the questions concerning the relative value of NNESTs and NESTs represent a false dichotomy which "may be conducive to forming wrong judgments about the differences" (1992, p. 347) between NNESTs and NESTs, Medgyes' argument presupposes this binary contrast, and in fact rests on the advantages and disadvantages between each group. Moreover, these merits and demerits are predicated on the remnants of the native speaker benchmark via their

derivations in terms of what they are or are not. This shares similarities how the term *nonnative*, was conceived and defined in terms of something that they were not, a *native speaker*. Although Medgyes' 1992 article bought into a comparative fallacy, his six assets raise important notions that practitioners, researchers and teacher training programs (e.g. MA TESOL programs) should address. Shortly after Medgyes, in 1999, Vivian Cook, an English linguist, proposed a groundbreaking idea that viewed SLA from the perspective of the L2 learner.

4. A New Framework

This marks the second major portion of the paper. The notions of multicompetence and the L2 will be introduced as well as their implementation as a theoretical foundation for L1 use in the classroom. The subsequent section will discuss how codeswitching can be utilized as a tool by both teachers and students, which will be followed by a re-examination of Medgyes' (1992) assets.

5. Multicompetence and the L2 User

Cook (1999) offers his notion of multicompetence as one way of going beyond the native speaker dichotomy. His idea of multicompetence, originally coined in his 1991 publication, *The poverty-of-the stimulus argument and multi-competence as "the compound state of a mind with two grammars"* (p.112), encompasses the knowledge of L1, L2, and interlanguage into one mind. That is, it accounts for the total amount of language knowledge a multilingual person possesses, rather than isolating a speaker's L1 and L2 (see Figure 1).

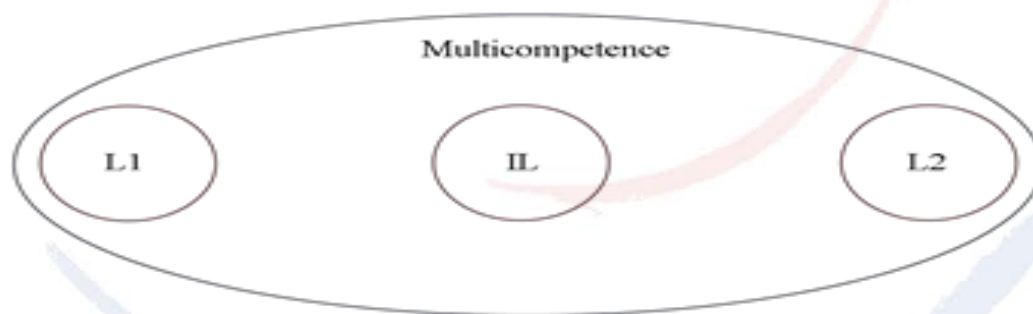


Figure 1

Moreover, all languages contained in a user's language eco-system are seen as interdependent on one another and encompasses the syntax, culture and pragmatics of each language.

The L2 user comes as a natural extension of the multicompetence lens. A non-monolingual speaker is seen as unique user and person in their own right, free from descriptors such as a failed native speaker. Cook (2005) defines an L2 user as, "a person who uses another language for any purpose at whatever level, and is thus

not covered by most definitions of either bilinguals or L2 learners” (p.47). The multicompetence and L2 user approach take into consideration that many of people in the world use at least two languages with many more that use a multitude of languages for different purposes. When viewed in this context the native speaker framework shifts from a structure of normality to one of uncommonness. That is successful communication can and does span more than one language at a time (codeswitching) and occurs between those possessing a gamut of proficiencies. As a theoretical foundation for my framework, it provides a constructive basis to address L1 use in the classroom and re-evaluate Medgyes’ 6 assets. It will soon be monolingual native speakers who find themselves lost in a multilingual world.

6. Codeswitching and L1 Use in the Classroom

Codeswitching denotes one tool accessible to bilinguals. However, what exactly defines a bilingual? Or perhaps more specifically, what levels of proficiency do bilinguals possess? Bilinguals represent not a homogenous group of people, but rather individuals who possess different ranges of proficiency in more than one language (cf. V. Cook, 2002; Han, 2004). Although some bilinguals have equal (balanced) proficiencies in more than one language, they represent a minority group among bilinguals as a whole. For example, Cook (1999, 2005) argues that plotting native speaker proficiency as an ultimate attainment goal represents an unreasonable, if not impossible objective, with the exception of people who are monolingual speakers of two languages (balanced bilinguals). Not surprisingly, the differing proficiency ranges equate to a diverse use of codeswitching between bilinguals. This encompasses not only the linguistic features of codeswitching (e.g., inter- and intra-sentential switching), but also extralinguistic variables such as identity and power. Even under a multicompetence lens, the fear of negative transfer may represent a topic of contention for teachers. However, I argue that the benefits of positive transfer significantly outweigh the possible detriments of negative transfer in EFL environments. The following sections will discuss some possible uses of L1 in the classroom (via codeswitching) and its benefits to students and teachers.

5.1 Codeswitching by Students (Limited Proficiency Bilinguals)

The use of codeswitching by students can be utilized as a tool to repair breakdowns, express personal feelings, fill lexical gaps and can also foster stronger classroom solidarity which may lead to improved motivation (Fotos, 2001; Nishimura, 1995). For instance, I will introduce two examples gathered from out of class recordings submitted by some of my students.

Example 1

I'm going present...*chau wa*...I'm going to present. {I'm going present...I mean...I'm going to present...}

This student's use of codeswitching signaled her repair of a grammatically incorrect item.

Example 2

Is it *totteiru*? {Is it recording?}

The code switch to Japanese was used to prevent the breakdown of her inquiry. While the students in each example learners utilize Japanese for different functions, they both used English as a base grammar. Research by other scholars (Vivian Cook, 2001; Eldridge, 1996; Fotos, 2001; Kite, 2001; Macaro, 2001, 2005) show that contrary to popular belief, linguistically and pedagogically, codeswitching can improve coherence among students as well as offer the teacher possibly more effective classroom management methods. Macaro (2005) insightfully writes:

the trick for the teacher is to encourage the learners to make evaluative strategies such as: 'when am I likely to be better off sticking with language I know already (e.g. formulaic expressions; whole sentences I have used in the past) rather than generate new sentences via translation. Balanced against this I must try to address the task as fully and as creatively as I can.' (p.77)

When used in a constructive and sparing manner, the use of students' L1 and codeswitching in the classroom can facilitate more L2 production as it keeps the flow of a conversation intact. Fotos' (2001) study observed that an improved classroom atmosphere and enhanced motivation represented a couple positive effects for students.

5.2 Codeswitching by Teachers

Just as codeswitching can facilitate the use of the target language in the classroom for students, teachers can also benefit from employing it as a tool. Forman (2010) offers ten principles for the use of L1 in the EFL classroom (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

1	Cognitive	L2 development	To explain L2 vocabulary, grammar, usage, culture
2	Affective	Solidarity	To facilitate easy, 'natural' interaction amongst students and with teacher
3		Interpersonal development	To develop collaborative, team-work abilities
4	Pedagogic	Time-effectiveness	To make good use of limited classroom time
5		Comprehensibility	To convey meaning successfully
6		Inclusivity	To ensure that all students can participate
7		Contingency	To respond to immediate teaching/learning needs
8		Classroom management	To maintain discipline
9	Socio-political	Globalised communication	To enable students to move flexibly and effectively across two languages
10		Political positioning	To resist the political dimension of global English

For those in teaching environments where contact between students and teachers occur one a week for 90 minutes, codeswitching can offer teachers a powerful tool to build repertoire with students. Additionally, classroom management via students' L1 can become much easier as a teacher can more accurately assess and respond to students who are on or off task. Codeswitching can also be used to ease understanding of the target language (e.g. English) by replacing seemingly difficult words with glosses in the students' L1. Moreover, Macaro (2001, 2005) suggests that the codeswitching in this context can help rather than hinder students' ability to recall and remember new vocabulary. Perhaps the most beneficial and realistic outcome from judicious codeswitching is the authenticity it provides as well as the focus on the L2 user.

7. Medgyes' Six Assets

Péter Medgyes, a Hungarian EFL teacher, published a seminal article and then a book (1994) which scrutinized the position and roles of NNESTs and NESTs in TESOL. Although his two works were the first to assert that both 'native' and 'nonnative' speakers of English could be successful teachers, these suppositions were accompanied by the observation that each group possessed a distinct set of

characteristics. Despite the flaws in his original argument, Medgyes' six traits represent a good objective for NESTs to aspire for. The six inimitable qualities thought unique to NNESTs are as follows:

1. Only non-NESTs can serve as imitable models of the successful learner of English.
 2. Non-NESTs can teach learning strategies more effectively.
 3. Non-NESTs can provide learners with more information about the English language.
 4. Non-NESTs are more able to anticipate language difficulties.
 5. Non-NESTs can be more empathetic to the needs and problems of their learners.
 6. Only non-NESTs can benefit from sharing the learners' mother tongue.
- (pp. 346-7)

NESTs learning their students' L1 are adding another tool to their repertoire of teaching methods. With the exception of the first trait, the others will become more and more beneficial as the teacher develops greater fluency. In most of the classes that I teach I code switch between English and Japanese with students. However, with two of my classes, I took an L2 based approach. Based on informal comments from student surveys, I found that students in the L2 only class wished I spoke Japanese, while the others classes remarked it was a benefit. While further more structured and formal research is required, if the informal comments gathered verbally and via surveys are indicative of the results, it would seem in the best interests of NESTs in EFL situations to learn and develop proficiency in their students' L1s. As a limited proficiency bilingual who does not represent a model of the successful learner of English, the pedagogical benefits of sharing an L1 and the ability to express my struggles and successes in learning Japanese to students have proved invaluable for me.

8. Conclusion

While it seems unlikely the label *native speaker* will disappear from peoples' minds and the lexicon of English, the term itself has grown in breadth and depth from the definition concerning the order a person acquires a language. For instance, the term has gone beyond the purely linguistic qualities, and now accounts for other variables such as social factors, e.g., personal affiliation and association (see e.g., Davies, 1991, 2003; Rampton, 1990). I hope that we can move beyond native speaker status and accept people based on their merit rather than the language they are born into.

I have also attempted to provide a brief history of the native speaker benchmark in the fields of applied linguistics and ELT. This section will discuss how notion of multicompetence, codeswitching and Medgyes' six assets can be reframed to move past a native speaker standard and also bring teachers together. As discussed earlier, Cook's (1999) concept of multicompetence combines into one model all languages accessible to a user. Moreover, it emphasizes defining ultimate measures of acquisition in terms of the L2 user rather than on the native speaker. In other words, it serves as the theoretical underpinning of this trifecta. Now that we can view access to multiple languages (regardless of a user's proficiency) as a tool, as opposed to a deficit, the proverbial door has been opened for codeswitching and the re-application of Medgyes' assets.

Fotos (2001) argues that limited proficiency bilinguals can employ codeswitching as a learning strategy. Employing the same framework, a NEST with some knowledge of the students' L1 would also fall into this classification and as such have access to the same benefits. When viewed under a multicompetence lens, this notion has potentially powerful benefits for both teachers and students. That is, it grants NESTs access to a toolbox of assets once thought unique to NNESTs. Although codeswitching by limited proficiency bilingual teachers may not be as beneficial as those performed by a more proficient user, it may have positive wash back effects. For instance, if you just arrived in a foreign country with no knowledge of the local language and someone greeted you in your L1, would it not make you feel a little better? Likewise, limited use of a student's L1 will hopefully evoke a feeling of safety and express your empathy with the outcome leading to more production in the target language.

By adapting a multicompetence view of language in the classroom I hope we can move past the notion of the idealized native speaker, help our fellow colleagues and improve our own teaching techniques. I hope the future of English teaching entails a world in which teachers are judged not by native or nonnative status, but by their pedagogical and professional skills.

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