‘native’ & ‘non-native’ English teachers contrasting opinions

Ross Thorburn
51Talk, China
What is a “native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?

Cheung’s findings

Students showed a positive attitude towards NNETs

- The majority would rather learn from local NNS English teachers instead of NS teachers.
- They liked studying with NNETs.
- Most did not encounter problems with NNETs because of their ‘non-nativeness’.
- NNETs taught as effectively as NTS.
Lord Voldemort
“You-Know-Who”
“He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named”
“much research begins with the notion that there really are two types of teacher… such research does nothing but strengthen the hegemony of native-speakerism.” (Holliday, 2014:3)
What is a “native English teacher”?

What are their perceived strengths?
What is a “non-native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?
Who Am I?

What is a “native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?
What is a “native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?

*able to produce spontaneous and fluent discourse* (Medgyes, 1992)

*able to speak without a foreign accent* (Scovel, 1988)

*use their native language routinely* (Bloomfield, 1933)

“the only immutable difference between a native speaker and a non-native speaker of a language is childhood acquisition” Oanh & Walkinshaw (2014, 2)
What is a “non-native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?
What is a “non-native English teacher”? What are their perceived strengths?

“teach learning strategies more effectively”

“provide learners with more information about the English language”

“more able to anticipate language difficulties”

“benefit from sharing the learner’s mother tongue”

Medgyes (1992:346-7)
Who sets students’ expectations?
What do sales people think?
Who was surveyed?

- 324 sales and service staff
- 151 adult students
- 97 parents
- 552 teachers
  - 273 self-identified as "non-native English teachers"
  - 279 self-identified as "native English teachers"
Importance of different qualities in teachers

Which group is better at teaching grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc.?

Would you pay more to learn from a “native English teacher”? 
sales and service staff

parents and students

teachers

strongest native-speakerist views

weakest native-speakerist views
How important is it for a teacher...

to be a native speaker
How important is it for a teacher... to speak students’ L1

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I would pay more to study with a “native English teacher”
Parents and students think “native English teachers” are better at teaching pronunciation, but…

…students often can’t tell the difference between native and non-native pronunciation.

Chiba et al., 1995
The ability to speak the same first language as students was considered the least important quality, but…

…research has established that judicious use of students’ L1 is beneficial for language learning.

(Schmitt, 2008)
73% of parents and students would pay more to learn from a “native English teacher”, but…

…parents and students think “non-native English teachers” are better at teaching grammar and vocabulary.
Summary

Sales and service staff...
- set expectations for students
- hold more native speakerist views that parents, students and teachers
- believe using students’ L1 has little value in language teaching
- see less value in “non-native English teachers” than parents and students do
What is a “native English teacher”?

What are their perceived strengths?

Cheung’s findings

Students showed a positive attitude towards NNESTs

- The majority would rather learn from local NNS English teachers instead of NS teachers.
- They liked studying with NNESTs.
- Most did not encounter problems with NNESTs because of their ‘non-nativeness’.
- NNESTs taught as effectively as NTS.
market demand “is used to justify current discriminatory recruitment practices."
“just because the market demands something does not mean that the market cannot be made to perceive things differently”

(Richardson, 2016)

how?

can the market be made to perceive things differently
We must include sales and service staff in our discourse on native-speakerism.

Such inclusiveness seems especially appropriate in a movement aimed at eliminating discrimination.
‘native’ & ‘non-native’ English teachers contrasting opinions

References


Richardson, S. (2016). The ‘native factor’ – the haves and the have-nots…and why we still need to talk about this in 2016. Plenary session presented at IATEFL Online, Birmingham, UK.

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