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<th>KAVANAGH Barry</th>
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1. **Introduction**

Within the EFL industry the concept of the native speaker as the norm, model and ideal in second language teaching and subsequently as a basis for language education polices is widely accepted (Doerr, 2009). In Japan the native speaker is considered to be the best model and type of language teacher for their non-native students to aspire to both in terms of linguistic knowledge and pronunciation (Shibata, 2010, Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014). These notions however have not gone unchallenged and Ferguson (1992) claims “the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguists’ set of professional myths about language” (p.viii).

This paper initially outlines the concept and controversy of the native speaker both in relation to global English and the perceived dichotomy between native English speaking teachers (NESTS) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTS).

This is then followed by a discussion on how the notion of native speakerism pervades English language education in Japan, specifically showing how native English speaking teachers (NESTS) and non-native English speaking teachers (NNEST) are perceived by students, other teachers and the industry that they are employed in.

2. **The ideology and concept of the native speaker**

Holliday (2006) claims that “Native speakerism is a persuasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that ‘native speaker’ teachers represent a ‘western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (p.385).

However there are now more NNESTS than there are NESTS (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014) and the dominant ideology and concept of the native speaker has been met with fierce criticism. Rampton (1990) suggests the alternative term ‘language expert’. Paikeday (1985) proposes the label ‘Proficient user of the language’ whilst declaring the ‘native speaker to be dead’ and Kachru (1992) speaks of an ‘English-using speech fellowship’.

According to Davies (2003) the criteria required to be perceived as a native speaker is primarily related to being born in an English native speaking country, and he lists the main characteristics that can be attributed to the native speaker as outlined below.

1. They are born in an English speaking country.
2. The language is acquired in childhood in an English speaking environment.
3. Their first language is English.
4. They have intuition for the language.
5. They have the ability to produce fluent spontaneous
discourse.
6. They can write and use the language creatively.
7. They have a native like proficiency in the language.

This criterion however has been met with criticism and Medgyes (1999) labels these definitions of the native speaker as hazy and inconsistent. Rampton (1990) claims that being born into a particular group does not mean that you can easily speak the language well and that the native speaker concept assumes that nationality and ethnicity are the same as language ability and language allegiance.

Pennycook (1994) suggests that these characteristics are based on a native speaker ideology that stipulates that (a) there is a close correspondence between being a citizen of a nation state and being a native speaker of the national language; (b) language is a homogeneous and fixed system with a homogeneous speech and community; and (c) being a native speaker automatically endows one with a high level of competence in all domains of one's first language.

These notions suggest Irvine and Gal (2000) are a process whereby people create ideological perceptions of the linguistic differences between groups of people and Kramsch (1997) points out that the criteria of native speaker membership “is more than a privilege of birth or even education. It is acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers” (p.363).

The English native speaker population is now in the minority and non-native speakers outnumber them by 3 to 1 and consequently this has led to a situation whereby a language is now spoken by more people as a second language than a first (Crystal, 2003). With the incredible Global spread of the English language and the fact that its varieties are numerous the definition of the ‘native speaker’ and what it constitutes has become very problematic.

3. Global English and the model of the native speaker
Kachru (1992) examined the sociolinguistic profile of English in terms of three concentric circles which are replicated in Figure 1 below. The inner circle represents the roots of English and the traditional culture that it stems from. Countries within the outer circle are those that have had English brought to them through extended periods of colonization. The final expanding circle and one to which Japan belongs, are countries where English is essentially used and learned within an EFL context.

When examining these varieties of English from a global point of view could it be argued that the native speaker definition and model is limited only to inner circle membership, or do those outer circle countries, such as India and Singapore have a legitimate right to label themselves as native speakers of English? According to Nelson (1992) they do not, and he states that “...an attitude disallowing the legitimacy of the notion of a “non-native” variety of English undeniably exists.” (p.327). Such impressions have led to accusations of linguistic snobbery and linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992b); even prejudice regarding teaching job opportunities for non-native speakers (Paikeday 1985).
With the process of colonization the seeds were sown for today’s global spread of English. Within these colonized countries the mix of cultural, religious and social factors created, what Kachru (1992) refers to as ‘nativization’, a standard of English very much diverse from the variety or model spoken by its importers. But Kachru (1992) implies “Because of the nativization, these varieties have been considered deficient models of language acquisition” (p.59). Needless to say, many including Strevens (1992) suggest that non-natives find this notion arrogant, imperialist and insulting and he states that “there is no academy or other authority for English which determines the norm” (p.39). Nevertheless, he suggests, there is a persistent and unquestioned belief that the American and British native speaker models are those which should be adhered to and duplicated. 

Davies (2003) argues that there is a possibility of a standard and that “the process of standardizing is an operational definition of the native speaker” (p.65). He suggests that within the media and ELT world there is a social consensus in favour of a model type, whether the speaker be native or not. Take for example the variety of nationalities on CNN or the BBC World Service who regardless of background essentially speak according to a set model, or follow the same linguistic criteria. Also, language materials that follow this type will inevitably have an effect on those learning the language. The effect of this induced homogeneity, Davies (2003) argues, may effect language systems used and consequently make them more alike. He writes that “in this sense from the sociolinguistic point of view that I can most appropriately speak of a native speaker as someone who regards the standard language as his/her mother tongue” (p.64).

In this respect it becomes possible to talk of speakers of the standard language as being native speakers of it, and with regards to the concept of the native speaker, it can be argued that it is a more useful term in situations where the standard language has a dominant and important role to play. This would suggest that a model and definition of the native speaker is plausible in one sense.

However, the belief, argue non-native speakers, that a shared history and culture between English speaking countries like the US and the UK ‘cement them’ and separate others based on not having shared this history is a thorn in the side of the non-native speaker (Medgyes, 1999). Nelson (1992) emphasizes this when he states “for one body to claim “ownership” of English on some basis of historical antecedence is pragmatically unsound thinking” (p.337).

Davies (2003) suggests that even within the inner circle countries the English spoken in the States and the UK do not necessarily share that much in common, even people born in the same country have problems understanding one another and that sharing the same set of linguistic rules does not always lead to mutual understanding. However, as Singh (1998) points out, comparisons between native speakers and non-native speakers inevitably occur and the differences are considered non-native speaker mistakes, but the same system of comparison does not apply to British and American varieties of English which also have their differences. She points out that Indian English and British English may be different but surely they are both native speakers of the variety that they speak.

Now, non-native varieties of English outnumber their native counterparts and the process of labeling them may be difficult. Are they linguistic ‘right offs’ or ‘linguistic orphans’ as Kachru (1992) implies or can they claim to be part of the ‘native speaker elite club’? Davies (2003) suggests that membership is a “matter of self-ascription not of something being given; it is in this sense that members decide for themselves” (p.8).
4. The native and non-native English teacher

NNESTS are said to have a less than reliable knowledge of the language they teach and along with this sense of inferiority or ‘dark side’ they also have what Medgyes (1999) describes as a ‘bright side’. Non-native speakers can make comparisons between the grammar of the target language and the mother tongue and therefore help students with such structures (Mattos, 1997). It may be frowned upon in ‘English only’ conducted classes but non-native teachers who share the students L1 can do this to explain the difference between ‘although’ and ‘in spite of’ or words that perform functions rather than meaning. However, it can also be argued that a native speaker who is competent in the students L1 can also make these comparisons and analysis in English or the student’s mother tongue.

Phillipson (1992) explains that the ideal teacher should not just have near native like proficiency but also have the same linguistic and cultural background as the learners. He also states that the non-native teacher may in fact be the better-qualified teacher because they themselves have gone through the process of learning a language and can therefore relate to their learners’ needs. However this assumes that the native speaker English teacher has not learned the students’ L1. Some native English teachers residing in Japan and who are also competent in Japanese can have an understanding about how Japanese communicate and how this influences the way they learn a second language.

Mattos (1997) argues that in terms of cultural knowledge the native speaker may have the upper hand but that this does not prevent the non-native speaker from obtaining such culture by living in the country or through working side by side with native speakers. Medgyes (1999) discusses how the dark side of being a non-NEST can include their relatively scant information about the cultures of English speaking countries along with their perceived lesser implicit and explicit linguistic knowledge. This he suggests, results in an inferiority complex, as they are aware that they are both learners and teachers of the same subject and he states that non-native and native teachers are essentially two different species. He lists four notions that attempt to demonstrate this. The first is that they differ with regard to language proficiency and admits that for the NNEST to achieve native-like proficiency is wishful thinking. Non-native teachers are fully aware of such shortcomings but this does not mean that it effects their teaching ability. Medgyes (1999) found in a survey of non-native teachers that the majority of them were not hampered by their language difficulties when in the classroom and the more qualified they were the more comfortable they felt.

Secondly, NESTS and NNESTs differ in respect to teaching behaviour. Sheorey (1986) found that non-native teachers are harsher than their native speaker counterparts in their appraisal of student errors. He even goes as far as suggesting that native speakers are not providing their students with accurate models as they are willing to let errors remain uncorrected. His third hypothesis is that as a result of their language disparity, differences can be found in their teaching behavior, and his final contention is that NNESTs can be equally good and competent teachers in their own terms.

The notion of the native speaker English teacher as being intrinsically better qualified than the non-native stems from the fact that they are fluent in their L1. They also have idiomatic proficiency, know the nuances of the language and its cultural connotations along with an intuition for correct and incorrect forms. Although Phillipson (1992) acknowledges these assertions he proposes that these attributes can be achieved through adequate teacher training and that “teachers, whatever popular adages say, are made rather than born, many of them doubtless self-made, whether they are
natives or non-natives” (p.14). But this is very much dependent on the attitudes within the industry, the teachers themselves and the perceptions of the students they teach.

Phillipson (1992) quotes UNESCO as saying that “A teacher is not adequately qualified to teach a language merely because it is his mother tongue” (p.15). However, there remains a strong belief within the ELT industry and a perception amongst some student learners of English that the ideal English teacher is a native speaking one (Wang, 2012, McKenzie, 2013). These sentiments are especially strong in Japan and this paper will now look at the concept of the ‘native speaker’ within the Japanese EFL context.

5. Perceptions of the native and non-native English teacher within Japanese English education

English enjoys a high degree of prestige within Japan (McKenzie, 2013) and there are now classes for toddlers and pre-school children before they enter formal English language education starting from elementary school. This section looks at how through the various shapes that English language education takes in Japan the dominance and perception of the native speaker model as being the ideal is very prominent among students and the EFL industry itself.

5.1 The private sector: the eikaiwa

Very few studies have looked at the concept of native speakerism in relation to the private sector of English language education in Japan. The country’s cities are littered with eikaiwa or English language schools and the major schools such as NOVA emphasize in their advertising that their teachers are all native speakers. Their brochures reveal good looking male and female teachers and even the Hollywood A lister Edward Norton was once part of the NOVA promotion campaign. The native speaking ‘faces’ of these schools is what Medgyes (1999) describes as good ‘public relations items’.

Kavanagh (2011) examined the notion of native speakerism in a study of the Japanese eikaiwa through questionnaires and interviews given to both eikaiwa students and native English teachers across the region of Tohoku. When the students were asked what prompted them to join their eikaiwa school 93% said it was because they would be taught by a native speaker and commented that the communicative approach employed by these native teachers was in contrast to the grammar translation method used by their Japanese teacher of English. In a follow up question nearly 60% said they preferred American English, which is perhaps not surprising given the popularity of American films and music within Japan. Students were asked if they thought the native or non-native English teacher was better and although the vast majority said the native speaker, some indicated that the perfect native speaker would have some understanding of the student’s native tongue. When comparing the answers to questions that were addressed to both the teachers and students however, Kavanagh (2011) found that some opinions were divided as illustrated in table 1.

Kavanagh (2011) points out that students who commented that all English teachers be native

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<td>Should all English teachers be native speakers?</td>
<td>Yes 37%</td>
<td>Yes 67%</td>
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<td>No 63%</td>
<td>No 33%</td>
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<td>Beginner students need Japanese NNESTS. Do you agree?</td>
<td>Yes 43%</td>
<td>Yes 47%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No 57%</td>
<td>No 53%</td>
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speakers emphasized that through a native speaker they can learn to speak naturally and with good intonation and pronunciation. The majority of teacher responses in contrast disagreed with the notion that all English teachers should be native speakers and stated that qualified non-native teachers can teach just as well as their native speaking peers. Within the literature many studies suggest that the non-native is better suited for beginner students (Medgyes, 1999). This study replicated these findings with the majority of students stating that the non-native teacher can explain new vocabulary and grammar without lengthy exposition. The native speaker teachers polled agreed and suggested that in terms of confidence the non-native teacher may be less intimidating. In a similar study Matsumoto (2015) found that high-level English language students’ valued exposure to natural English by native speakers whilst the lower levels wanted Japanese teachers detailed grammar instructions. Interestingly she found, like Kavanagh (2011), that the native speaker should teach speaking, conversation, pronunciation and listening rather than the more passive skills of reading and grammar, which is a reflection of how English is taught in Japanese high schools (Shibata, 2010).

5.2 Japanese schools

Japanese education within Junior and High schools has traditionally employed the grammar translation method and after 6 years of tuition many students feel they cannot speak the language sufficiently for effective communication (Murphy, 2010). In 1984 the Japanese Ministry of Education carried out research that was aimed to reform English language teaching and proposed a new communicative approach by employing native speakers as assistant language teachers (ALTs) within the school system and from this recommendation the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program was established. Historically these ALTs stemmed from the inner circle countries but official figures from 2001 show that it is not just the esteemed variety of American or British English but also a wide regional and socially diverse group with teachers from Ireland, New Zealand and Wales. This exposure to social and geographical diversity even within the inner circle countries can allow students to be exposed to non-standard forms of native English speech and pronunciation. As of the year 2000 ALTs are also coming from the outer circle countries and although still a small number it appears to be growing every year (McKenzie, 2013).

However, the perception that native ALTs are the best model for Japanese students to follow is still strong (Shibata, 2010). In a study of Japanese English teachers’ perceptions of native and non-native ALTs Shibata (2010) found that Junior high school teachers approved of non-native ALTs who both displayed either non-native like grammar or accent. However, high school teachers of English preferred their ALTs to have native like grammar rather than a native like accent or pronunciation. This Shibata (2010) suggests may be a result of differing pedagogical goals. Communicative competence is now the focus at Junior high schools whereas grammatical accuracy is placed high in importance as a result of it being emphasized in university entrance examinations.

Since 2011 all elementary schools have incorporated English into their curriculum and the teachers responsible for its execution are the students’ homeroom teachers who may have no language teaching experience or English language ability at all (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2013). They do however, have ALTs to support them. In a study of who is better suited at the Japanese elementary school level native or non-native teachers Oga-Baldwin & Nakata (2013) found that elementary students are more inclined to imitate a similar model as reflected by
their homeroom teacher than a socially distant one such as an ALT. Although the non-native homeroom teacher may be the behavioral model they do concede that ALTs remain the linguistic standard. These results are in contrast to the findings of Butler (2007) who found that Japanese elementary school English teachers believed that the ideal model for student behavior was the ALT.

5.3 Japanese Universities

Studies that have examined the native and non-native teacher distinction within Japanese universities have tended to look at the impressions of the NESTs and NNESTS from a students perspective. Chiba et al (1995) examined the perceptions 169 Japanese university students had of samples of English from the inner circle (UK and US), the outer circle (Hong Kong, Malaysia and Sri Lanka) and the expanding circle (Japan). Their results showed that Japanese students were more inclined to prefer the inner circle variety of English over the outer and expanding circle speech examples. Students who demonstrated strong favoritism toward American or British models of English and their respective cultures were less approving of non-native accents found within the outer and expanding circles. They described how in Japan, Japanese English has a negative connotation. Chiba et al (1995) conclude that "In an EFL situation like Japan, it is a rather arduous task to arouse students’ attention to world Englishes. Increasing familiarity to different varieties of English will surely be one of the pedagogical methods since familiarity can improve intelligibility of those varieties for Japanese people, and thereby improve acceptance of non-native varieties” (p.85).

Some studies have addressed the preferences Japanese students have among the varieties of native speaker English. Cargile et al (2006) found that when 113 Japanese university students were presented with audio samples of standard American English and African-American vernacular that the former was rated higher in terms of status and the latter as being more attractive. In a similar study by Moloney (2009), Japanese university students rated standard Australian English as higher in status than non-standard or broad Australian English. What these studies show is that even within the inner circle native varieties of English there exists preferences or biases in student’s perceptions of what makes for a good model and standard of English. This it can be argued, is further fueled by the Asian EFL industry itself (Amin, 1999). It may be difficult to imagine for example that a Geordie or a person with a thick Irish accent be more welcomed within some English language schools in comparison to someone with a more standard variety. This has implications for job opportunities and Paikeday sarcastically writes that "when people start recruiting native speakers of English do they really mean ‘white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Scots maybe, but no Irish need apply’ (p.33).

Some studies however have shown how the non-native teacher or NNEST can be seen favorably by Japanese university students. Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) found that even though Japanese students perceived NNESTS to have inferior pronunciation it was easier to understand. They also considered NEST’s to have a worse knowledge of grammar than NNESTS and that the cultural differences between the student and teacher led to classroom tension. Regardless of these findings however students valued NEST’s as being the ideal teacher for authentic English. Walkinshaw and Oang (2014) conclude that the preference for the native speaker is particularly salient in Asia and Japan as the industry’s ideal model with American English its preferred variety.

The discussions show that while within the academic field the concept and idealism of native speakerism is not a valid one, perceptions among the
EFL world and of the students themselves, still outweighs this academic consensus. According to a study by Matsuda (2003) for example, high school students believed that English still belongs to native speakers of the language and 45% of students surveyed suggested that foreigners would not understand their Japanese accented English.

6. Conclusion

Bolton (2008) states that English is used as a lingua franca between speakers of English as a second or foreign language and Kirkpatrick (2010) argues that the idealization of the native speaker is losing its glamour for L2 learners and that the ability to communicative with other L2 learners is becoming the motivation to learn English. McKenzie (2013) suggests that language attitudes towards non-native speakers of English may be changing because of the remarkable growth of global non-native varieties of English. This notion however may not yet be applicable to the EFL industry within Japan.

NESTS and NNESTS both have their value within the ELT industry and as the literature shows some NNESTS may be better equipped for lower level or beginner students, whereas advanced university students who have primarily been taught grammar at high school, may seek a native English speaking teacher so that they can improve the productive skills of speaking and pronunciation as well as their discussion and critical thinking ability in the L2.

Rather than debate who is better suited for Japanese students of English, be it the native or non-native, it is important that both are qualified teachers with a clear pedagogy and defined goals. Not all native speakers make good teachers regardless of the language they teach, whether it be English or Japanese. Rather than place of birth as a teaching qualification what is needed is competent and highly proficient English speakers to teach the language that is now spoken more by non-native speakers and taught more by non-native teachers.

References


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