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CHAPTER 6

Interrogating the "Native Speaker Fallacy":
Non-Linguistic Roots, Non-Pedagogical Results

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Surfing absentmindedly through the electronic forum for second language teachers (TESL-L) one day, I was struck by a desperate e-mail from a Korean graduate student. She said, "I am finishing my MA in TESL at the end of this semester at xxx University in Boston, and I hope to return to my country. But I cannot hope to find a teaching position back home. They don't hire non-native speakers. What are the prospects for finding jobs here in the United States? Can someone give me some clues about job openings here?" I knew the sad reality of the job market in the United States and considered it kindness not to reply. I could only imagine her consternation when even in the West, advertisement after advertisement confronts her with the fact that only those who are "native English speakers" or those with "native English competence" can apply for the available positions. Fresh from graduate school, certified with a Masters or a doctorate in applied linguistics, and groomed for a career in language teaching by a reputed university, the non-native ESL teacher often discovers a gloomy professional future.

This story confronts us with the absurdity of an educational system that prepares one for a profession for which it disqualifies the person at the same time. There are many ironies and contradictions here. Why would an educational system train someone painstakingly for a job it considers unsuitable by its own definition of the ideal English instructor? Why would an educational system teach current linguistic axioms in its course work (i.e., that the superiority of dialects is a nonlinguistic issue and that matters of accent and even pronunciation are surface structure features that do not indicate one's competence in the grammatical deep structure of the language), only to refuse to implement these in its employment practices? At a time when graduate programs in TESOL are a booming business enterprise with students from many countries trained in the West for a life in the teaching profession, such gatekeeping practices in employment raise disturbing questions. With the TESOL
convention choosing “Connecting our Global Community” as its theme for 1998 and the ESOL establishment actively expanding its organizational base to the remotest parts of the world, the professional status of speakers of other Englishes remains an embarrassing contradiction to resolve. When teachers from other English speech communities are marginalized professionally, the global claims of the TESOL establishment raise much suspicion.

The notion that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of that language is labeled by Phillipson (1992) the “native speaker fallacy.” As in other applied linguistic concepts, this notion too may be provided impressive linguistic or pedagogical justifications backed by empirical research evidence. I discuss why these purported reasons do not hold water and how this notion in fact constitutes a fallacy. I proceed to argue that there are hidden economic, ideological, and political motivations that underlie this widespread assumption. Any attempt to reconfigure the relationship between the native and non-native speaker professionals in ELT has to first grapple with these nonlinguistic and nonpedagogical motivations. My aim in this chapter is to unravel the nexus of causes and consequences of the native speaker fallacy in order to understand it from a larger sociopolitical perspective. I go on to articulate the pedagogical and linguistic strengths non-native speaker teachers bring to the profession and the domains in which their expertise may be indispensable.

The Linguistics of This Fallacy

Noam Chomsky’s linguistic concepts lie at the heart of the discourse that promotes the superiority of the native speaker teacher. The Chomskyan notion that the native speaker is the authority on the language and that he or she is the ideal informant provides an understandable advantage to the native speaker in grammaticality judgments. However, the very label native speaker is questionable. With the existence of indigenized variants of English developed in postcolonial communities, many here would consider themselves native speakers of these Englishes. Some in these communities acquire English (as a first language) simultaneously with one or more other local languages to develop a fascinating multilingual competence. These are native speakers of English—just as they are native speakers of one or more local languages. To use the terminology developed by Hamers and Blanc (1989), we may call them balanced bilinguals who have acquired simultaneous bilingualism in a case of childhood bilingualism. That is, these speakers have acquired two or more languages in parallel since their earliest days of linguistic development with an almost equal level of competence in the respective languages. We must also acknowledge the fact that many in postcolonial communities speak English as the dominant or sole language of proficiency (even though their English might show influences from local culture and the vernacular). In fact, Chomsky’s native speaker of a homogeneous speech community is an idealized construction. In the hybrid postcolonial age we live in today, one has to develop the heteroglossic competence to cope with the realities of language diversity, contact, and mixing.

For these reasons, we have to develop new terminology to reflect the complex linguistic competence of postcolonial English speakers. Continued use of the label native speaker will only serve to reinforce the spurious Chomskyan notion. Less problematic are the labels Center speakers of English and Periphery speakers of English, partly borrowed from B. Kachru (1986) and partly based on terminology used in political economy for these two set of communities. The label Center is a construct from political economy and refers to the industrially/economically advanced communities of the West, which sustain their ideological hegemony by keeping less-developed communities in Periphery status (see Frank, 1969; Wallenstein, 1991). Foremost among the Center nations are the communities of North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, which claim ownership over English. Periphery speakers of English are defined in this chapter as historically recent users of this language, many of whom would display sound multilingual competence in many codes—including the Center’s standard dialects as well as their indigenized variants of English—which they would use in contextually appropriate ways. There are of course others in the Periphery whose competence is dominant in the vernacular, with lesser degrees of proficiency in Center or Periphery variants of English.

It is important to note that the native speaker fallacy is linguistically anachronistic. It flies in the face of some basic linguistic concepts developed through research and accepted by contemporary scholars. Thus it creates a disjunction between research awareness and professional practice in ELT. For instance, we take for granted that all languages and dialects are of equal status; that there are no linguistic reasons for the superiority of one dialect or language over the other; that languages in situations of contact will always undergo modes of indigenization or vernacularization; that language learning is a creative cognitive and social process that has its own trajectory not fully dependent on the teacher (much less the teacher’s accent); that the contextually relevant variants of the language have to be used in different situations; and that language change or diversification cannot
be stopped by attempts at purification or standardization. However, the
native speaker fallacy goes against these basic assumptions. It is based on
the view that the language of the native speaker is superior and/or
normative irrespective of the diverse contexts of communication; that the
corruption of the language can be arrested by the prescriptive role of the
native speaker teacher, and that language acquisition is conditioned (in
behaviorist terms) by the dialect of the teacher to which the student is
exposed. Thus this fallacy enforces traditionalism in our profession.

Although the superiority of the native speaker generates a whole set
of linguistic problems, its application in the pedagogical domain is even
more questionable. Is a native speaker necessarily a good teacher? Does
the fact that one displays good pronunciation and correct grammar
(these value-ridden notions will themselves be challenged) make one a
successful teacher of that language? Language teaching is an art, a
science, and a skill that requires complex pedagogical preparation and
practice. Therefore, not all speakers may make good teachers of their first
language. On the other hand, it is possible to make a case that speakers
with multilingual competence, even in a situation where the language is
a foreign or second language, may make successful language teachers.
Their proficiency in more than one language system develops a deep
metalinguistic knowledge and complex language awareness. It is for
these reasons that Britten (1985) paradoxically argued that such
multilingual speakers may have a sounder grasp of English grammar and
even be more effective teachers of the language than the so-called
native speakers.

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the use and awareness of
other dialects/languages can help a person facilitate the process of
second language acquisition (SLA) much better. There is growing
realization that the first language is not a problem but a resource in SLA
(see Y. Kachru, 1994; Sridhar, 1994). First language can help build a
cognitive bridge to the second language, apart from addressing student
concerns regarding language maintenance, identity conflict, and cultural
clash. Periphery speakers can use their vernacular competence to relate
English better to students from their own communities and help them
integrate English more effectively into their existing linguistic repertoire.
Auerbach et al. (1996) showed, from participatory research in ESL classes
in the Boston area community centers, that teachers from the
communities of the immigrant students are able to do a good job in
relating English literacy to the challenges, needs, and aspirations of the
learners and facilitate second language acquisition. Their insider status in
the community provides them an intimate awareness of the learning
styles, language attitudes, and functional needs of the students so that
they can develop an effective curriculum and pedagogy. (See also
Kamhi-Stein, Chap. 10, this volume, for the inspiring role of non-native
teachers as positive models for their ESL students.)

If the superior claims of the native speaker teacher do not hold
water, why does this notion carry such importance in our profession? It
is here that we realize the ideological value of this concept. Even if the
concept does not have any linguistic or pedagogical validity, the political
and economic consequences deriving from this notion are attractive to
those from the dominant speech communities. Such is the force of the
economic and political interests behind the ESL enterprise that even basic
linguistic notions may be suppressed or distorted to support these
ulterior motives.

The Political Economy of the Fallacy

We need to consider the native speaker fallacy in the context of the
English-only ideologies that are gaining ground in Center communities
these days (see Lucas & Katz, 1994). Phillipson finds the native speaker
fallacy to be enjoying popularity in the context of demands that the
medium of teaching should be English only. According to what
Phillipson (1992) labeled the monolingual fallacy, L1 is not considered to
play a useful function in the acquisition of English and is considered to
harm the process of second language acquisition. There is thus a backlash
against the accommodation of multilingualism and cultural diversity in
schools and institutions while English is being legislated as the sole
language of interaction/communication in these situations. This
movement is an attempt to protect the interests and values of Center
speakers of English, which are perceived to be threatened by the
democratization of the social mainstream with the inclusion of other
languages and language groups. Groups such as U.S. English are
lobbying for a constitutional amendment that would establish English as
the official language of the United States. The House of Representatives
of the U.S. Congress has passed a bill that makes English the official
language. In the debate on the bill, the speaker of the House, Newt
Gingrich, referring to bilingual educational programs stated,

This isn't bilingualism. This is a level of confusion, which if it
was allowed to develop for another 20 or 30 years would literally
lead, I think, to the decay of the core parts of our civilization....
Is there a thing we call American? Is it unique? It is vital
historically to assert and establish that English is the common

In such a context, the bilingual/multilingual Periphery English teachers may be considered a hindrance to socializing students into monolingual schools and social institutions. Their multilingualism in fact becomes a liability as it could encourage the very processes of ethnic/linguistic diversity that the mainstream feels threatened by.

We should also note the movements insisting on standardizing English in order to understand the idealization of native speaker teachers. It is in the context of arguing for standard English that Quirk (1990) endorsed the value of native speaker teachers. It is feared that Periphery variants of English will spoil the purity of English and affect mutual intelligibility among speakers of the language. Native speaker teachers, on the other hand, will serve a useful function in containing the development of indigenized variants of English and restricting the further diversification of the language. More positively, they would spread the Center variants of English to new learners and thus contribute to the dominance of these standard dialects. Therefore, native speaker teachers can be expected to play a helping role in the linguistic hegemony of Center Englishes over Periphery variants.

Furthermore, because teachers of English are not expected to possess a knowledge of Periphery languages or Periphery Englishes in order to be good teachers, the professional gate is opened wide for a cadre of Center teachers. At a time when English teaching jobs are hard to come by, the native speaker fallacy creates a global demand for Center teachers. The professional license these traveling teachers need in order to qualify as ESL instructors is virtually their identity as native speakers. An ESL teaching job is their birthright. The beneficial consequences of the native speaker fallacy will be appreciated by Center teachers especially at a time of reduced funding for ESL/bilingual education in many institutions and the continuing recession/downsizing in Western societies. Many English majors and Ph.D.'s are joining the ranks of the unemployed in the Center.

The native speaker fallacy not only helps preserve the few jobs available in the Center for native speakers but also to monopolize the ESL teaching jobs in the Periphery. One has only to eavesdrop on the electronic forum TESL-JB (devoted to employment issues in ESL) to read the often frantic messages by U.S. and British teachers on the prospects of finding jobs in Korea, Japan, China, or the Middle East. Fortunately for them, these countries very specifically advertise that "only native speakers" will be considered for employment. In fact, among the worst culprits to popularize and/or legitimize the native speaker fallacy are the Periphery academic institutions themselves. That Center variants of English should be the norm and that Center speakers of that language are the models seem to have been effectively internalized in these Periphery communities. This goes to show the international hegemony of this discourse. Ironically, even those whose interests may be harmed by this pedagogical assumption implement it unquestioningly.

Whereas Center-based teachers are assured of ESL jobs in the Periphery communities, Periphery teachers find it difficult to teach in the Center. The native speaker fallacy protects jobs for Center teachers in their home institutions. This should be seen from the perspective of protectionism in trade and employment that is gaining favor in the United States and many other Center communities these days. There is a widely shared feeling that the jobs and products of the Center communities should be protected from foreign competition. It might appear that the native speaker fallacy has done for ELT, more effectively and far ahead of time, what other industries are attempting to do in their own fields to protect jobs for Center-based professionals/workers. I must grant that in some Center communities there is greater flexibility than in some Periphery institutions when we consider their advertisement for professionals with native linguistic ability rather than an identity as a native speaker. It is this leeway that enables Periphery professionals like me to receive appointments in Center academic institutions. However, native linguistic ability is often interpreted narrowly to mean Center-based pronunciation or accent and does not include the deep structural features like grammatical competence. Because the manifestation of native linguistic ability is determined by superficial linguistic signs, even such flexible terminology is inadequate to guarantee teaching positions for Periphery professionals.

In the context of such a job market, we have to ask some disturbing questions on the place of teacher training for Periphery scholars/professionals in Center academic institutions. There are many graduate students from Asian, African, and Latin American countries undergoing training in U.S., Canadian, and British institutions today. Although these institutions are generating enough money through programs like MA's in TESL and Ph.D.'s in foreign language education, for what purpose are these foreign scholars being trained? Have these institutions considered carefully the employment prospects for the students they train as teachers? If after their training these teachers would be subject to the native speaker fallacy when they apply for teaching jobs, these programs are training them for a life of unemployment. It is indeed tragic that persons who have spent valuable
time and money on professional training should end up disqualified from practicing that job for spurious reasons. In the light of such an obvious contradiction (i.e., training Periphery scholars for language teaching while also subscribing to the native speaker fallacy that denies them job opportunities), perhaps the only rationale for such training programs is the pecuniary motive. There is a double whammy here: not only do Center institutions make money on training Periphery teachers, they eventually exclude them from these professions in order to monopolize the jobs.

The native speaker fallacy also contributes to the narrow definition of expertise in ELT. If it is one's accent and pronunciation that qualify one to be a teacher, then the sense of professionalism developed in ESL is flimsy. In effect, teaching is defined primarily in terms of linguistic considerations. Imagine the level of expected professionalism if, even now, Center subjects who travel to the Periphery for a variety of personal reasons are often pressed into service as English teachers by virtue of their native speaker status. Such undue emphasis on the linguistic status/proficiency of the teachers excise them from understanding the local languages, cultures, and social conditions of the communities where they are teaching. They are not under any compulsion to develop their pedagogical practice in terms of the larger social, political, and cultural conditions of the communities where their students come from. It is not surprising then that Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (1992) find the professional base of ELT very narrow. They find that teacher educational programs do not provide adequate orientation in sociology, cultural studies, or even foreign languages to those trained. If teaching is defined on the basis of one's linguistic identity, the other dimensions of instructional competence may not receive adequate attention. Therefore, unless the native speaker fallacy is effectively challenged and dismissed, we may not develop a formidable sense of professionalism in ELT that orients to language learning and the language learner in a holistic sense.

The narrow sense of professionalism has a different consequence for Periphery teachers. It prevents them from developing their expertise in ways relevant to their local community needs, apart from forcing them to be obsessed with native-like pronunciation or other narrow linguistic proprieties. Many Periphery professionals feel compelled to spend undue time repairing their pronunciation or performing other cosmetic changes to sound native. Their predominant concern is in effect "How can I lose my accent?" rather than "How can I be a successful teacher?" The anxiety and inhibitions about their pronunciation can make them lose their grip on the instructional process or lack rapport with their students. Merrit and her team of researchers pointed out from ethnographic observations in African classrooms that local teachers display a "linguistic insecurity" deriving from their concerns about "proper English" (Merrit, Cleggmo, Abagi, & Buny, 1992). This affects their pedagogical effectiveness in the classroom. The researchers suggest that they would be more effective teachers if they can only assume that their own variants of English and the ubiquitous mixed codes (i.e., mixing of Swahili and English) are pedagogically valuable for both content instruction and second language acquisition. The debunking of the native speaker fallacy can therefore liberate Periphery teachers to give more attention to the other serious concerns relating to their professional practice—such as the learning styles of their students, and the cultural traditions, social conditions, and economic needs of their communities. They should also negotiate the complex language attitudes, hybrid codes, and sociolinguistic patterns developing in their communities as they engage in language teaching.

Furthermore, we must consider the situation in ELT where expertise is defined and dominated by native speakers. In fact teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and testing experts are predominantly from the Center. Language teaching consultants have to make periodic trips from Center academic institutions to guide, counsel, and train Periphery professionals on the latest developments in teaching. The native speaker fallacy appears to legitimize this dominance of Center professionals/scholars in the circles of expertise. However, the constructs and notions developed by such experts are not always relevant to the realities of international ELT enterprise. Center experts cannot relate well to the complex social, cultural, and pedagogical challenges played out in Periphery classrooms. In fact, Phillipson (1992) characterized the governing assumption of Center language teaching circles in the following manner: "Part of the professional identity and image of the Center applied linguistics institutions is that their skills are universally relevant" (p. 238). Similarly, Widdowson summed up the assumptions motivating Center pedagogical activities in Periphery contexts with thinly veiled sarcasm in an interview conducted by Phillipson: "We've always tended to make the same basic error, which is to assume that somehow it is the local conditions that have to be 'adjusted to the packaged set of concepts we bring with us rather than attempt to look into the real issues, practical as well as ideological, of implementation and innovation within those contexts" (quoted in Phillipson, 1992, p. 260). This is a policy of convenience. Because Center professionals know best their own conditions of work, it is advantageous for them to promote these as universally applicable. It is by challenging the
dominance of the native speaker expert and letting more Periphery teachers enter the professional inner circles that we can theorize the radically different realities found in Periphery classrooms.

The native speaker fallacy eventually feeds into the auxiliary pedagogical services associated with the ELT enterprise—such as the production of textbooks and other teaching aids. Because it is less complicated to rely on the competencies and background of native speaker teachers, publishing houses in the Center find it convenient to produce textbooks and audiovisual aids based on their own norms and expectations. Such textbooks would use discourses, situations, and cultural content familiar to native speakers as the publishers can confidently assume that the teachers who use these books worldwide—that is, those from their own communities—would be able to understand the content and teach it without problem to local students. Similarly, audiotapes provided for listening comprehension and speaking instruction carry British or U.S. English. Testing services such as TOEFL also treat U.S. English as the norm. Using other languages, dialects, and discourses in such material would put the largely monolingual Center teachers and examiners at a disadvantage. The native speaker fallacy together with the monolingual fallacy thus saves textbook publishers precious money because they do not have to employ those fluent with other languages/dialects for producing ELT material. Imagine what it would take to recruit speakers of languages spoken in all the communities where ESL is taught in order to produce textbooks relevant to their unique situations? It is therefore economically advantageous for these publishing houses to refrain from using indigenous languages and local English dialects in the material produced for the Periphery.

All this makes Periphery scholars and communities more and more dependent on the Center-based ELT establishment. The legitimization of the Center norms and competencies through the native speaker fallacy—including the concomitant dominance of Center professionals in the development of expertise, professionalization, and production of teaching materials—makes Periphery teachers look up to the Center for professional advancement and assistance. This has serious implications for their professional identity. Their autonomy as a discourse community is also affected. They are in fact torn between Center norms and Periphery practice; Center expectations and Periphery classroom conditions; Center prescriptions and Periphery realities. This leads to a schizophrenic state of teaching practice. There are many contradictions that characterize the everyday teaching experience of Periphery teachers—as I witnessed in Sri Lankan English-teaching circles. They may profess Center pedagogical fashions, but practice local/traditional approaches in the classroom. They may believe that the sole medium of ESL courses should be English only, but practice considerable code switching in the classroom. They may reward standard British/U.S. English in examinations, but use Sri Lankan English for classroom communication. Such tensions pose severe constraints on their ability to develop an independent professional identity and pedagogical discourse. Periphery teachers need to be empowered to theorize the realities and needs of their local classrooms in terms of the indigenous pedagogical and linguistic traditions.

We must not fail to note how the native speaker fallacy prevents the democratization of the TESOL establishment. The fallacy prevents the critical development of the TESOL professional community and its discourses as it denies the participation of Periphery teachers on equal terms. This is not simply a question of more inclusive treatment of Periphery professionals in the ELT establishment; much more is at stake. The very terms and notions that define our understanding of language teaching and second language acquisition are impoverished because the unique insights Periphery professionals can provide from their experience and background are suppressed. Periphery professionals can shed new light on teaching that may critically redefine the assumptions and practices of TESOL. To provide just a single example, Y. Kachru (1994) and Sriwhan (1994) alerted us to what they call the “monolingual bias” in SLA models. They argued that the assumptions of SLA, as they are conceived in the 1990s, are based on the monolingual norms existing in Center communities. Such notions do not relate to the dynamic multilingualism existing in Periphery communities where speakers acquire English together with some other local languages and use it as part of an integrated repertoire with other codes and discourses. They call for a new paradigm for language acquisition that takes into account such postcolonial contexts of hybrid communication. Many such theoretical, research, and pedagogical contributions that may be made by professionals from the Periphery will be silenced if they are not accommodated on equal terms in the professional community.

It is important therefore to take stock of the material and ideological consequences of this fallacy that dominate the profession so much that even basic research findings are suppressed. As ELT becomes a profit-making multinational industry in the hands of Center agencies, there are obvious economic benefits involved here. The fallacy also furthers the ideological hegemony of the Center. Although traveling teachers from the Center would carry western ideologies directly into Periphery classrooms and communities, the cultural/pedagogical practices they
promote through their textbooks, teaching materials, and methods would conduct this ideological domination more subtly. Conducting language teaching by treating Center dialects and discourses as the norm is an important form of political control over the Periphery. This is especially significant when the Periphery threatens to nativize English according to its own needs and traditions. It is no exaggeration that the ELT enterprise can carry out Center hegemony in politicoeconomic terms in Periphery communities, reproducing Center ideologies and institutions globally (as argued by Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). It is through ideologies such as the native speaker fallacy that the Center is able to reap the material benefits envisioned through English. The chairman of the British Council stated in his Annual Report 1983-1984 (with a use of telling images): “Our language is our greatest asset, greater than North Sea Oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remains highly sought after. I am glad to say that those who guide the fortunes of this country share my conviction in the need to invest in, and exploit to the full, this invisible, God-given asset” (quoted in Phillipson, 1992, p. 144-45). One cannot miss the very direct connection drawn here by this responsible cultural officer between his particular brand of English, foreign investment, and material rewards.

Reconfiguring the Professional World

Before concluding, I wish to outline more balanced ways of understanding the roles and responsibilities of Center and Periphery English teachers. Creating changes in our profession and in the classroom can go a long way toward empowering Periphery communities and instilling democratic practices in our classrooms and communities. If the types of economic and political domination described above can be accomplished through unfair pedagogical practices, changing the professional world should in turn have an impact on the larger sociopolitical realities.

Lest my argument in the preceding section be misconstrued, I must state that the case I am making here is not for setting aside Center positions for Periphery professionals or for placing restrictions on the employability of Center professionals in the Periphery. Even the good old laissez faire exchange practices should suffice: free competition, free movement, equal sharing of products and ideas, and open employment prospects for both Center and Periphery ELT professionals. It is such democratic practices that will ensure a healthy sharing of experiences, views, and expertise that can set our profession on solid intellectual and pedagogical footing. The native speaker fallacy affects the egalitarian nature of these interactions and exchanges, helping Center professionals monopolize these resources and, thus, serving to impoverish our profession.

As we reconfigure the relationship between Center and Periphery professionals, it is good to observe some basic pedagogical distinctions well known in our circles. Distinguishing ESL and EFL situations, we can say that Periphery professionals have an advantage in teaching students in communities where English is learned as a second or widely used language for intracommunity purposes (often with indigenous communicative norms). On the other hand, Center professionals may make a greater contribution for students learning English as a foreign language for use in Center communities for institutional/formal purposes or for specialized purposes in restricted contexts of use (i.e., English for Specific Purposes). Hence a second distinction: English for international uses in Periphery communities (whose discourses and conventions Periphery professionals know firsthand) and English for international use where mutual intelligibility is important. Furthermore, even in the Center, a Periphery professional may teach courses on English literacy (even if he or she does not have a British or U.S. accent) as formal written English has codes and conventions that are internationally shared. As in all languages, English prose has relatively more in common than speech across different dialect users. Teaching of speaking for formal/institutional purposes in international contexts might require the services of Center professionals to develop the skills appropriate for the specific Center community the student hopes to interact with. If using the native linguistic norm as a blanket requirement for all communicative situations is unwise, so is the insistence on the authority of the native speaker teacher for all language teaching/learning contexts.

Widdowson (1996) pointed to certain developments in the pedagogical domain that might turn out to provide more authority and demand for Periphery professionals. He referred to pedagogical practices such as learner-centered, self-directed, and collaborative teaching approaches, which he interprets as encouraging the autonomy of the learner. These pedagogical approaches conflict with the demand for authenticity in language learning. Widdowson (1994) interpreted authentic use as having to do with the uses and structures of English in the traditional native speaker communities. He therefore argues: “A pedagogy which combines authenticity of use with autonomy of learning is a contradiction. You cannot have it both ways” (p. 387). In fact, autonomous learning by Periphery students in terms relevant to their
needs, values, traditions, and aspirations will contribute to developing appropriate forms of English that are authentic in their own context—making them move away from Center notions of authentic English. The fact is that the expectation of authentic use privileges the professionalism of native speaker teachers and the textbooks, curriculum, and expertise developed in Center communities. However, if one values the strategies and styles of learning the students themselves bring to SLA in order to acquire the language efficiently in terms of their own communicative needs, he or she cannot impose on the students the authority of native speaker teachers or native Englishes. Widdowson argued that autonomy of learning would in fact privilege the expertise of Periphery teachers. It is they who know best the typical learning styles, strategies, needs, and contexts of use of second language students and can thus facilitate their language acquisition in ways that suit their interests.

It is possible that some may consider my argument for more professional opportunities for non-native teachers in the Center as motivated by vested interests. They might wonder why these teachers cannot go back to their own Periphery communities for jobs but attempt to teach in the Center. In response, I first observe that in the postcolonial world where there is great fluidity in migration and settlement patterns, it is impossible to deny the presence of teachers and students from Periphery communities in the Center. Furthermore, the claims of Widdowson and Auerbach's experience in Boston show that non-native teachers have a positive role to play in the socialization and language acquisition of members of their own communities in Center locations. At a deeper level, my critique is of the discourse that marginalizes non-native teachers whether in the Center or the Periphery. The unequal employment opportunities for native and non-native teachers whether in Center or Periphery communities is only a surface manifestation of this discourse. The deconstruction of this discourse will hopefully lead to a healthy critique of the narrow-minded distinctions made in the professional world and enable more democratic professional practices.

We can only imagine the sociopolitical consequences of empowering Periphery teachers of English. It is not only that teachers will use pedagogies and material that are socially and culturally relevant for their students, but also that they will feel more comfortable about using language teaching to negotiate the sociopolitical realities of their communities through a more critical and transformative pedagogy. The English language and its discourses will themselves undergo considerable changes. English will be nativized more constructively and consciously to complement the local needs and aspirations. If English language teaching in Periphery communities is to be conducted in a socially responsible and politically empowering manner, the authority for conceiving and implementing the curriculum and pedagogy should be passed on to the local teachers themselves.

Epilogue

It is suitable to end with a story, having started this chapter with one. This story makes a provocative point on the pedagogical possibilities that are available for Periphery teachers. Although I have argued that being multilingual provides certain pedagogical advantages for Periphery teachers, I want to take my argument a step further here. The professional world is perhaps ready to ponder how even those Periphery professionals who are not perfectly competent in the deep structure of the English grammatical system may serve as successful teachers. To appreciate the significance of this story, we must first note that despite the intent of the native speaker fallacy, there are not enough Center teachers to cater to the needs of English teaching worldwide. Therefore more than 80% of the ELT professionals internationally are non-native speakers. These are the teachers working in the remote corners of the world in small village classrooms, often meeting under trees in farms and fields away from the eyes of the professional pundits of the Center. These English teachers are village elders, parents, and priests who may often possess only a smattering of English. I am not ashamed to say that it is such a charismatic rural teacher who initiated my own learning of the language that has sustained me to this point in earning a doctorate in English linguistics and serving in the faculty of an English department. Obviously, much more than proper English or the Queen's accent were required by my village schoolteacher to do the magic of providing a solid foundation for my English education. My teacher instilled in me his own curiosity toward the language, the ability to intuit linguistic rules from observation of actual usage, a metalinguistic awareness of the system behind languages, and the ability to creatively negotiate meaning with speakers and texts. These are the secrets of successful language acquisition that were passed on to me by my village teacher. This solid teaching on learner strategies still sustains me as I continue to explore both my vernacular and English. At a time when learner strategy training and self-directed learning are fashionable concepts, it should not be difficult to understand the extreme case of a Periphery teacher with "poor" grammar and "bad" pronunciation functioning as a good teacher. Paradoxically, such a teacher may lead the student to acquire (if need be) even Center versions of English. It is through such language teaching practices that non-native teachers in remote parts of the world succeed in
teaching appropriate English to many students today—whatever the pundits in the Center may prescribe.

References


CHAPTER 7

Minority Women Teachers of ESL: Negotiating White English*

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The Context

In the field of English as a Second Language (ESL), much attention has been and continues to be paid to the race, ethnicity, culture, and gender of the learners, but far less attention has been given to how these variables in the teacher may impact on the classroom. Thus, the different experience of visible minority teachers has been left unaddressed by most writers on ESL. Even in critical writing on ESL (see, for instance, Cummins, 1989; Peirce, 1993; Rockhill & Tomic, 1995), the teacher is positioned as White and an implicit juxtaposition is made between the powerful (White) ESL teacher and the powerless (mainly non-White) minority student. This is so because critical theory, which addresses the inequalities that are perpetuated in the ESL classroom, is written from the perspective of White teachers. Kambi-Stein and Thomas (Chap. 10, and Chap. 1, respectively, this volume) make similar points. For example, Kambi-Stein says that in TESOL, the issue of minority teacher representation is a “non-issue,” and Thomas says that although TESOL has a diverse membership, in some cases the presence of non-native teachers is “totally ignored” within TESOL.

In this chapter, I position myself as a visible minority immigrant woman and as a teacher of adult ESL students in Toronto, Canada. I bring to this chapter an experiential basis that is different from that of White writers on this subject. Building on my own experience and the findings of a study that I conducted on minority ESL teachers in 1994 in

* Some parts of this chapter have appeared in TESOL Quarterly. See Amin (1997).