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New Voices in the Classroom: Nonnative English-Speaking Professionals in the Field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

This special theme section of *The CATESOL Journal* focuses on nonnative English-speaking (NNES) professionals, a topic that, over the last few years, has received increasing attention in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The interest in NNES professionals in TESOL is not surprising given that large numbers of English teachers from around the world come from NNES backgrounds. While there are no precise statistics on the numbers of NNES professionals in California, the relatively high numbers of NNES pre-service teachers from diverse backgrounds presently enrolled in credential and master of arts (MA) in TESOL programs suggests that California's teaching workforce is becoming increasingly more diverse—culturally, ethnically, and linguistically.

According to Braine (1999), "a non-native speaker of a language is defined against a native speaker of that language" (p. xiv). However, identity as a native speaker of a language is an issue open to debate since, as argued by Nayar (1994), a native speaker could be defined against one, several, or all of the following factors:[1]

(a) primacy in order of acquisition; (b) manner and environment of acquisition; (c) acculturation by growing up in the speech community; (d) phonological, linguistic and communicative competence; (e) dominance, frequency, and comfort of use; (f) ethnicity; (g) nationality/domicile; (h) self-perception of linguistic identity; (i) other-perception of linguistic membership and eligibility; (j) monolinguality. (p. 3)

Until 1996, NNES professionals saw themselves as having limited visibility and voice in the TESOL profession. However, at the 1996 TESOL convention, NNES professionals gained voice when George Braine organized a colloquium titled, "In Their Own Voices: Nonnative Speaker Professionals in TESOL."[2] This colloquium, the first in a series of annual TESOL colloquia addressing issues related to NNES professionals, gave rise to what could be called "The NNES Professionals' Movement." Specifically, in response to the interest generated by the colloquium, the Nonnative English Speakers in

TESOL (NNEST) caucus was established in 1998 (Braine, Liu, & Kamhi-Stein, 1998). Additionally, dozens of articles and findings that arose from doctoral dissertations focusing on issues related to NNES professionals (e.g., the native speaker construct, NNES teacher identity and its impact on ESL students, teacher preparation and NNES student teachers) began to be published in refereed journals.

In 1998, at the CATESOL conference held in Pasadena, I organized a colloquium titled "Overcoming the Barriers Faced by Nonnative English-speaking Teachers." To the surprise of the panelists,[3] the colloquium generated great interest among the 80 or more attendees who were teachers and administrators from both native English-speaking (NES) and NNES backgrounds. A frank and lively discussion during the colloquium led several CATESOL members to suggest the formation of a NNES professionals' interest group (IG) in CATESOL. In December 1999, the CATESOL Board of Directors approved the establishment of an IG titled "Nonnative Language Educators' Issues" (NNLEI), occasioning CATESOL to become the first U.S. TESOL affiliate to establish such a group. It is only appropriate, therefore, that CATESOL publish a theme section designed to expand the existing professional literature on the topic of NNES teachers.

The articles showcased in the theme section focus on several issues. For example, two of the articles deal with the self-perceptions of NNES professionals teaching in ESL settings. In the article titled "Nativism, the Native Speaker Construct, and Minority Immigrant Women Teachers of English as a Second Language," Nuzhat Amin, born in Pakistan and currently an adjunct professor in the Women's Studies Program at McMaster University in Canada, reports on the results of a study designed to investigate the manifestation of the concept "native speaker" in the classrooms of eight minority immigrant women ESL teachers in Toronto. Amin found that these minority women teachers faced specific challenges, including lack of credibility due to their ethnicity and their students' perception of them as learners of English. However, the teachers in Amin's study felt that it was precisely their nonnative status that enabled them to implement effective classroom practices conducive to language learning. These practices included but were not limited to building community, disrupting the native speaker myths of birth and linguistic intuition, and designing materials that promote inclusiveness.

The second article focusing on NNES practitioners in ESL settings is the one co-authored by Kamhi-Stein, Aagard, Ching, Paik, and Sasser. This article, titled "Teaching in K-12 Programs: Perceptions of Native and Nonnative English-speaking Practitioners," reports on a study that compares the perceptions of Southern California's K-12 practitioners from NES and NNES backgrounds in relation to their professional preparation, their level of job satisfaction, and their degree of comfort teaching various skill areas. The results of the study showed that the two groups of professionals shared a positive view of (a) their professional preparation, (b) the support received from formal and informal networks, and (c) their language skills. In contrast, a higher percentage of NNES practitioners reported they were teaching early

elementary grades, they were slightly more negative than their NES peers in their evaluation of school administrators, they exhibited more positive self-perceptions about their instructional abilities, and they saw their nonnative status as contributing to their professional abilities.

The second notion presented in the theme section concerns NES and NNES teacher collaboration. This theme is reflected in the article by Aya Matsuda and Paul Kei Matsuda, titled "Autonomy and Collaboration in Teacher Education: Journal Sharing Among Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers." In this article, Matsuda and Matsuda argue that collaboration in teacher preparation is desirable since it promotes the creation of communities in which future teachers learn from one another and view their diverse backgrounds—whether professional, cultural, or linguistic—as strengths rather than weaknesses. Matsuda and Matsuda's article also describes a successful case of collaborative teacher development in which electronic dialogue journals provided the medium for NES and NNES teachers to learn from their diversity.

Also focusing on the topic of NES and NNES teacher collaboration is the article co-authored by Luciana Carvalho de Oliveira and Sally Richardson titled "Collaboration Between Native and Nonnative English-Speaking Educators." In this article, Carvalho de Oliveira and Richardson argue that while most educators recognize the benefits of collaboration with other colleagues, many may not be aware of the numerous benefits that can be attained by NES and NNES teacher collaboration. Furthermore, Carvalho de Oliveira and Richardson describe their process of collaboration and explain how it has enhanced their instructional practices.

Addressing the self-perceived needs of TESOL students enrolled in an MA program in Southern California is "Diary Studies: The Voices of Nonnative English Speakers in a Master of Arts Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages," co-authored by Elis Lee (a former ESL learner originally from Brazil and currently teaching for the ESL Credit Division at Glendale Community College) and Loren Lew (A NES professional currently teaching for the Non-Credit ESL Department at Glendale Community College). In the article, Lee and Lew analyze the journal diaries of four NNES students and conclude that even though the participants reported experiencing language anxiety and underestimating their language ability, they used coping mechanisms to overcome their perceived difficulties. A qualitative analysis of the diary entries also showed that the students believed that their first-hand experience of the English language acquisition process contributed to strengthening the program in which they were enrolled.

While the article by Lee and Lew reflects the concerns that many NNES teachers have at the beginning of their teaching career, the article by Jun Liu, titled "Confessions of a Nonnative English-speaking Professional" argues that NNES professionals can be as successful as their NES peers. Liu describes his professional development experiences, including being an EFL learner and teacher in China, being a graduate student in the U.S., and serv-

ing as chair of doctoral dissertation committees at the University of Arizona. Liu articulates the hurdles he has faced as well as the successes he has experienced, concluding the article by arguing that "the success of a TESOL professional does not depend on whether one is a native speaker or a nonnative speaker of English" (p. 63).

Finally, the article titled "Issues in Hiring Nonnative English-Speaking Professionals to Teach English as a Second Language," co-authored by Kathleen Flynn and Goedele Gulikers, two community college administrators, answers questions related to the hiring process in ESL settings from the point of view of a NES professional (Flynn) and a NNES professional (Gulikers). The article answers six questions designed to address various issues, including program administrators' expectations when hiring NNES professionals, the types of support systems that administrators should make available to NES and NNES teachers, ESL students' perceptions' regarding their NNES teachers, and the role that MA TESOL programs should play in the professional development process of NNES teachers.

I believe that the contents of this theme section represent the state of the art in research and practices related to NNES professionals. I hope that readers who are encountering this topic for the first time or who have only a passing familiarity with the topic will consider future collaborative projects with NES or NNES colleagues. I also hope that the articles in the theme section will provide insights into an emerging area of professional interest in California. I invite you to read the articles and reflect on their value to your professional practices.

Acknowledgment

Author

Lía Kamhi-Stein, editor of this theme section, is an associate professor at California State University, Los Angeles, where she teaches in the MA TESOL program. She is originally from Argentina where she was an EFL learner, teacher, and EFL program coordinator. Her teaching interests are ESL and EFL methodology and the teaching practicum. Her research interests are academic literacy, the integration of computer-mediated communication tools in TESOL teacher preparation, and nonnative English-speaking professionals. She was a founding member of TESOL's NNEST caucus and served as the caucus's first newsletter editor. Currently, she is the NNEST caucus chair (2001-2002). In CATESOL, she was a founding member of the NNLEI IG. She served as CATESOL's secretary (2000-2001) and was elected CATESOL president for 2002-2003. She has published in TESOL Quarterly, TESOL Journal, TEXT, The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, *as well as in other journals and edited volumes.*

Endnotes

[1] This special theme section is not designed to define who is a native or a nonnative speaker of a language. For information on this topic, please see Davies (1991), Nayar (1994), Phillipson (1992).

[2] For a description of the colloquium, see Braine (1999).

[3] The colloquium panelists included the author, Elis Lee, Joseph Wei, Christina Lee, and Sally Gardner.

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