Native and Non-Native English Language Teachers: Student Perceptions in Vietnam and Japan

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Abstract

The English language teaching industry in East and Southeast Asia subscribes to an assumption that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are the gold standard of spoken and written language, whereas non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs) are inferior educators because they lack this innate linguistic skill. But does this premise correspond with the views of second language learners? This article reports on research carried out with university students in Vietnam and Japan exploring the advantages and disadvantages of learning English from NESTs and non-NESTs. Contrary to the above notion, our research illuminated a number of perceived advantages—and disadvantages—in both types of teachers. Students viewed NESTs as models of pronunciation and correct language use, as well as being repositories of cultural knowledge, but they also found NESTs poor at explaining grammar, and their different cultures created tension. Non-NESTs were perceived as good teachers of grammar, and had the ability to resort to the students' first language when necessary. Students found classroom interaction with non-NESTs easier because of their shared culture. Non-NESTs' pronunciation was often deemed inferior to that of NESTs, but also easier to comprehend. Some respondents advocated learning from both types of teachers, depending on learners' proficiency and the skill being taught.

Introduction

Scholars such as Braine (2010) and Kirkpatrick (2010) have identified a perception in the English language teaching profession in East and Southeast Asia that native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are the ideal model for language production. Their speech is held up as the gold standard of grammatical correctness and perfect pronunciation (cf. Wang, 2012), and they are valued as repositories of cultural information. Conversely, non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs) tend to be positioned as deficient speakers of the language, with imperfect grammatical and pragmatic knowledge, poor pronunciation, and inferior knowledge about foreign cultures (Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, & Hartford, 2004). This notion persists in the face of a rapidly expanding body of evidence to the contrary. Research carried out in Europe (Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005), the United States (Liang, 2002; Mahboob, 2003), Hong Kong (Cheung & Braine, 2007), and the United Kingdom (Pacek, 2005) indicates that second/foreign language learners tend to place greater value on certain pedagogical, linguistic, and personal qualities than on a teacher's linguistic background. However, there has been relatively little rigorous inquiry into the East and Southeast Asia context, despite Braine (2010) and Kirkpatrick (2010) raising

the issue. The current study contributes to this area by investigating the attitudes of English learners in Vietnam and Japan toward NESTs and non-NESTs, and explores two research questions:

Research Question 1: What advantages or disadvantages do learners identify about learning English from a native English-speaking teacher?
Research Question 2: What advantages or disadvantages do learners identify about learning English from a non-native English-speaking teacher?

Because perceptions about non-NESTs are known to vary across social, linguistic, and educational settings (Moussu, 2002, 2010; Moussu & Braine, 2006), the study reported here explores two national contexts rather than just one, thereby enhancing the study's reliability. However, the relatively

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small sample sizes used in the study restrict the robustness of the findings, which should be treated as tentative.

This article is divided into five sections. The first three sections outline the research rationale, review recent literature about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of NESTs and non-NESTs, and describe the methods used in the current study to probe the issue. The fourth section explores the value of NESTs as models of pronunciation for second language (L2) learners and explains the effect of cultural divergence and convergence on teacher–student interactions. The issue of mutual student–teacher comprehension in the L2 is then examined, along with the benefit of being able to give complex linguistic explanations to students. Some perceived advantages of learning from both NESTs and non-NESTs are explicated. The fifth section recapitulates the study's findings, explains their significance to the current debate, and suggests areas for future inquiry.

Literature Review

"Native" and "Non-Native": A Working Definition

Davies (2004) lists the key tenets of "nativeness" as follows: (a) childhood acquisition of the language, (b) comprehension and production of idiomatic forms of the language, (c) understanding regional and social variations within the language, and (d) competent production and comprehension of fluent, spontaneous discourse. Given that all these tenets but the first may be acquired or learned post-childhood, one could argue that the only immutable difference between a native speaker and a non-native speaker of a language is childhood acquisition. Yet the native/non-native distinction permeates English language teaching (ELT) ideology (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Moussu & Llurda, 2008), perpetuating inequality between the two groups (Canagarajah, 1999), as we shall see below. The present study adopts the terms *native* and *non-native* because the distinction between them is the primary focus of this research. However, use of these terms is not intended to bestow legitimacy on the distinction, which we frame as an artificial and disempowering construct (cf. Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001).

Native or Non-Native? Perceptions in the Field

As native-like English proficiency has long been framed as virtually unachievable after childhood (Birdsong, 1992; Felix, 1987), native speakers are viewed as the ultimate arbiters of what is correct or acceptable language (Braine, 1999). Yet Kramsch (1997) points out that native speaker speech is inevitably influenced by geography, occupation, age and social status, and that "standard" forms of English are the exception rather than the norm. Paikeday (1985, as cited in Kramsch, 1997, p. 362) frames the idea of the native speaker as the ultimate authority on linguistic correctness as a "convenient fiction, or a shibboleth."

Also, English is now used more as a lingua franca between speakers of English as a second/foreign language—including roughly 800 million users in Asia (Bolton, 2008)—than for non-native speakers to communicate with native speakers. Kirkpatrick (2010) contends that the idealized native speaker is becoming less relevant as a model for L2 learners and that a capacity for communication with other L2 users is becoming far more valuable (cf. Cook, 2005). Kirkpatrick maintains that the most appropriate linguistic benchmarks should be derived from bilingual or multilingual speakers using English as a lingua franca in region-specific contexts.

Nevertheless, the "convenient fiction" that native speakers are the ideal teachers of English language continues to dominate the English language teaching profession (cf. Wang, 2012), and teachers who are not native speakers find themselves viewed as deficient educators. This perception limits non-NESTs' job prospects: Clark and Paran's (2007) investigation of 90 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom found that 72.3% of employers made hiring decisions based on native-speakerness. Canagarajah (2005) argues that the motivations for this marginalization are not linguistic or pedagogical but economic and political. They perpetuate a hegemony that favors educators, academics, language institutes, and publishing companies in the Center countries (Kachru, 1986) where English is a national or official language. These people enjoy higher salaries, greater prestige, textbook sales, research funding, and management and academic positions. Conversely, non-NESTs in the periphery communities (where English is taught and learned as a foreign language) are relegated to what Rajagopalan (2005) calls "pariah status" (p. 284), disempowered by their dependence on Center educators, institutions, teacher-trainers, and publishers.

This "inferior language teacher" paradigm can erode the professional confidence of non-NESTs. In a survey conducted by Seidlhofer (1996), 57% of 100 non-NESTs surveyed indicated that being a non-native English-speaking teacher made them feel insecure rather than confident in the classroom. Even non-NESTS who do not subscribe to the dominant perspective often struggle against it throughout their career (Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 2005).

Research Into NESTs and Non-NESTs: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

This section examines existing research into native and non-native English-speaking teachers, beginning with research into NESTs. Mahboob's (2003) study of 32 students in an intensive English program at a U.S. college revealed a range of opinions: NESTs were perceived to have good oral skills, a wide vocabulary, and knowledge about their own culture, but they often had little facility with grammar and had difficulty explaining complex items (cf. Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). They were perceived as having little language learning experience and lacked knowledge about language

teaching methodology. Benke and Medgyes's (2005) study of 422 Hungarian learners of English at various institutions revealed that native-speaker teachers were viewed as friendly and lively, good models for imitation, and skilled at encouraging learners to speak. However, NESTs' speech could be difficult for L2 learners to understand, and the differing linguistic and cultural background of most NESTs sometimes inhibited learning. Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) study of 76 English learners at a university in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain yielded a clear preference for NESTs in the areas of pronunciation, speaking, and listening, but not in more systematic aspects of the language such as lexis and grammar because "sometimes they haven't got the knowledge to explain it" (p. 230). In the Asian context, Wu and Ke (2009) explored the perceptions of 107 Taiwanese university students toward NESTs. The majority supported native-speaker teachers as friendly, informal, and a source of encouragement to students. Respondents favored NESTs as models of pronunciation rather than as formal educators. Han's (2005) small-scale investigation of the Korean context pointed to a possible perception that NESTs lacked insight into the local educational context and sometimes failed to establish rapport with students.

We turn now to research into non-native English-speaking teachers. Non-NESTs in Mahboob's (2003) study were valued for their own experience as language learners, their strict adherence to methodology, and their hard work, but they were perceived as having poorer oral skills and inadequate knowledge of "Western" cultures compared with NESTs. Pacek (2005) investigated the perspectives of 89 English learners from various countries studying at a U.K. university; these learners generally valued their non-NESTs' pedagogical expertise, metalinguistic awareness, and interpersonal skills. What mattered, one respondent said, was "the teacher's personality, not nationality" (Pacek, 2005, p. 254). Similarly, 20 English as a second language (ESL) students in Liang's (2002) U.S. study of students' attitudes toward teachers' native or non-native accents were more concerned that teachers should be engaging, prepared, qualified, and professional than they were about accent. According to Benke and Medgyes's (2005) respondents in Hungary, non-NESTs set a lot of homework, planned their lessons thoroughly, prepared students well for exams, and consistently checked for errors—all things valued by students, parents, and administrators in the local educational context. Hungarian learners of English also favored non-NESTs for learning about complex grammar, partly because non-NESTs could explain grammatical items in the students' first language (L1) if required (cf. Cook, 2005), and also because non-NESTs' learned knowledge of the rules of grammar enabled them to give cogent, comprehensible explanations (Seidlhofer, 1996). Other studies have found that non-NESTs were valued as models of successful second language learners (Cook, 2005; Lee, 2000), and were sympathetic about the challenges faced by students struggling to master the L2 themselves (Arva & Medgyes, 2000).

Several studies have examined the attitudes of Asian learners of English toward non-NESTs. Cheung and Braine's (2007) study of 420 students in Hong Kong revealed a generally favorable attitude toward non-NESTs, whose perceived effectiveness matched native-speaker teachers. They also conveyed insight into English language usage, exhibited positive personality traits, could code-switch for complex explanations, and shared the educational and cultural background of their charges. The 65 Chinese college students in Liu and Zhang's (2007) study were enthusiastic about learning with Chinese teachers of English, whom they viewed as better organized and prepared than their NEST counterparts. Conversely, foreign teachers' classes were viewed as friendlier and less stressful. Todd and Pojanapunya (2008) investigated and compared the explicit (i.e., conscious) and implicit (i.e., below the subject's awareness) attitudes of 261 Thai English learners toward NESTs and non-NESTs. Subjects explicitly preferred NESTs as language educators, despite having more positive feelings toward non-NESTs. Yet testing of their implicit attitudes indicated no conclusive preference or positive feeling for either type of teacher. Todd and Pojanapunya (2008) conclude that despite a tendency to express prejudiced attitudes toward one type of teacher, students' actual behavior as language learners would be identical with either type of teacher.

To the best of our knowledge, the only study in Vietnam was done by Walkinshaw and Duong (2012), who elicited Vietnamese university students' evaluations of native-speakerness in contrast with other qualities or skills characterizing a competent language teacher. As for the Japanese context, most studies have concentrated on teachers' perceptions of the issue rather than those of students. Shibata (2010) investigated the opinions of Japanese high school teachers of English about assistant English teachers who were not native English speakers. She found that junior high school teachers ($n = 24$) were more accepting than senior high school teachers ($n = 51$) of non-native teachers. Butler (2007) elicited the opinions of 112 Japanese elementary school teachers about native English-speaking teachers. A total of 60% said that at the elementary level, English was best taught by NESTs. Chiba, Matsuura, and Yamamoto (1995) studied 169 Japanese university-level learners of English, but limited their scope to learners' perceptions of native and non-native accents. So the current study is noteworthy because it provides learner-focused insight into the Vietnam and Japan contexts.

Research Method

The current study draws on qualitative short-response questionnaire data (quantified for analytical purposes) because we wished to explore certain classroom attitudes and beliefs rather than to test specific variables (Denzin & Lincoln,

2005). We also wanted to exploit the emergent nature of qualitative research, keeping the design relatively loose and open so that it was responsive to emerging information (Dornyei, 2007). This section outlines the methodology used in this research: the sample groups, the instrument and the procedure for data collection. It also points out the study's methodological limitations.

Participants

Two participant groups, totaling100 learners of English, participated in this study. All participants were under 24 years of age. The first group of participants comprised 38 female and 12 male Vietnamese learners of English (VLEs) at an upper-intermediate level at two universities in Vietnam. Those from the first institution were taught by five NESTs (from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) and six Vietnamese non-NESTs, while those from the second studied with three NESTs (from Australia and the United States) and six Vietnamese non-NESTs. The second group comprised 50 female Japanese learners of English (JLEs) taking intermediate to advanced courses at a university in Japan. They were taught by six NESTs (from Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) and four Japanese non-NESTs. The participants were a convenience sample of volunteering students from English programs at these institutions.

Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for data collection was an anonymous self-report questionnaire in English eliciting learners' attitudes toward studying English with each type of teacher. This instrument enabled a large amount of data to be collected in a readily processable form, and was methodologically similar to other questionnaire-based studies on this subject (e.g., Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Butler, 2007; Chiba et al., 1995; Kelch & Santana-Williamson, 2002; Liang, 2002; Moussu, 2002; Pacek, 2005; Shibata, 2010; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). The data collected were attitudinal (Dornyei, 2007), eliciting participants' attitudes and beliefs about the issue being investigated. To solicit general perceptions about the issue, a guided open format was used. This format was a better fit for the study than a closed-item questionnaire because we could not anticipate the themes that might emerge and therefore could not provide pre-prepared response categories (Dornyei, 2007). Respondents wrote a brief descriptive answer to each of the following questions (limited to five to reduce participant fatigue):

1.	In your opinion, are there any advantages of learning English with a native-speaker teacher? If so, what are they?
2.	In your opinion, are there any *dis*advantages of learning English with a native-speaker teacher? If so, what are they?

3.	In your opinion, are there any advantages of learning English with a *non*-native–speaker teacher? If so, what are they?
4.	In your opinion, are there any *dis*advantages of learning English with a *non*-native–speaker teacher? If so, what are they?
5.	Are there any further comments you would like to make?

The questionnaires were written and responded to in English, thereby removing the need for translation from the L1. Although responding in an L2 may potentially affect participants' responses, their relatively high English language proficiency and their familiarity with the subject matter mitigate this. Because the study does not test English language proficiency, textual errors are ignored in the analysis except where meaning is unclear, in which case the data are excluded. The instrument was piloted with eight Japanese and nine Vietnamese learners of English to eliminate ambiguity and bias, and modified according to their responses and feedback. Piloting data were excluded from the formal analysis.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by means of information fliers distributed in classes. Students who volunteered to participate were inducted through a consent process and then invited to complete the questionnaire, which took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Questionnaires were anonymous and no other identifying data were collected. Response identification was through a three-letter code denoting the sample group followed by a number (e.g., JLE 21). After data had been collected, a coding framework was constructed by identifying emergent themes in the data. The framework's design was broad and non-hierarchical because of its largely descriptive function, which was to categorize the data by themes. The collected data were coded by one of the researchers and quantified according to the themes in the coding framework, which are presented in the left-hand side column of Table 1.

Limitations

The primary limitation in this study is the gender imbalance in the two sample groups. Only 12 of the 50 Vietnamese respondents were male, and all 50 Japanese respondents were female because the data were collected from a women's university. To redress this limitation in some measure, we refer to Walkinshaw and Duong (2012), who surveyed the same Vietnamese sample group as the current study does. (There was no Japanese sample.) This study elicited participants' perceptions of the importance of native-speakerness compared with other skills or qualities that characterize competent teachers (e.g., qualifications, experience, or enthusiasm), which participants rated on a Likert-type scale of 1 to

Table 1. Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Studying English With Each Type of Teacher.

	VLEs (*n* = 50)	JLEs (*n* = 50)	Total (*n* = 100)
NEST advantage			
Improve pronunciation	30 (60%)	27 (54%)	57 (57%)
Learn about teacher's culture	19 (38%)	15 (30%)	34 (34%)
Learn to speak natural, native-like English	16 (32%)	12 (24%)	28 (28%)
Improve listening skills	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	10 (10%)
Improve speaking skills	6 (12%)	4 (8%)	10 (10%)
NEST disadvantage			
Cultural differences	21 (42%)	11 (22%)	32 (32%)
Difficult to understand when a NEST speaks	20 (40%)	9 (18%)	29 (29%)
Difficult to be understood by a NEST when speaking	7 (14%)	9 (18%)	16 (16%)
Lack of qualifications/experience	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	9 (9%)
Cannot speak students' L1	8 (16%)	1 (2%)	9 (9%)
Cannot teach grammar/lexis well	1 (2%)	5 (10%)	6 (6%)
Non-NEST advantage			
Can explain in L1	17 (34%)	7 (14%)	24 (24%)
It is easy to communicate with teacher	10 (20%)	12 (24%)	22 (22%)
Good teacher	7 (14%)	10 (20%)	17 (17%)
Teacher can explain about grammar	4 (8%)	9 (18%)	13 (13%)
Non-NEST disadvantage			
Poor pronunciation	30 (60%)	27 (54%)	57 (57%)
Teachers make mistakes in L2	2 (4%)	5 (10%)	7 (7%)

Note. VLE = Vietnamese learner of English; JLE = Japanese learner of English; NEST = native English-speaking teacher; non-NEST = non-native English-speaking teacher; L1 = first language; L2 = second language.

5. A mean rating was then calculated for the male VLE participants only and this was compared with the global average of both male and female VLE participants. The mean rating for VLE males was only 0.07 lower than the mean for both sexes, allowing us to tentatively extrapolate that a male JLE group in the current study would produce similar responses to those generated by the existing female JLE respondents. However, further research is necessary to confirm this. Another limitation is that the sample is drawn from only tertiary institutions and is not generalizable to other language learning contexts. Further enquiry is needed to investigate the wider applicability of these results. Finally, the study uses only one instrument for data collection. Although this is common for studies into this topic, triangulation with other data collection methods would have increased the depth and granularity of the information gained. Our future investigations into this topic will incorporate a multi-faceted methodology.

Findings and Discussion

The following sub-sections will examine and interpret the findings from this research, drawing on Table 1, which quantifies each sample group's responses to the questions asked in the questionnaire.

As there is not space to describe each individual result, the most frequently occurring themes are discussed: teachers as a model for pronunciation, student–teacher cultural similarities and differences, capacity of teachers to explain complex language items, and desirability of learning from both NESTs and non-NESTs.

Teachers as Pronunciation Models

The most common perceived advantage of learning English from a NEST was exposure to native pronunciation as a model for linguistic output (VLE = 60%; JLE = 54%; see Table 1), enabling respondents to improve their pronunciation by imitating a native speaker's talk "just like babies do" (JLE 19). VLE 39 commented that "you can correct your pronunciation, intonation. And you can speak English more natur[ally]" (cf. Wu & Ke, 2009). Conversely, both groups (VLE = 60%; JLE = 54%; see Table 1) listed pronunciation as by far the most salient disadvantage of a non-NEST. One commonly voiced issue was accuracy, summed up in JLE 25's assertion that "some non-native teachers can't pronounce correctly." Another perception was that non-NESTs' pronunciation was inferior, as VLE 34 mentions, "The pronunciation of a non-native-speaker teacher is normally not as good exact as a native speaker teacher."

How well does this finding match with research into other geographic and educational contexts? Of 43 international students surveyed by Pacek (2005) at a British university, 24 agreed that clear pronunciation was paramount in language teachers, but only 7 argued specifically for native-speaker pronunciation. Benke and Medgyes's (2005) study of

Hungarian learners of English affirmed that pronunciation was a benefit of learning from NESTs, but on the other hand students often struggled to comprehend NESTs' speech. Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) respondents appreciated exposure to NESTs' pronunciation, but pointed out that NESTs often failed to correct students' own pronunciation.

Although previous studies have foregrounded English learners' negative perceptions of non-native pronunciation (e.g.,Luk, 1998; Moussu 2002), the accuracy of these perceptions has been questioned. For example, Chiba et al. (1995) investigated Japanese university students' ability to identify varieties of spoken English by playing them a short English passage recited by nine English speakers from the United Kingdom, the United States, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and Japan. Only one quarter to one third of the respondents could identify the various native-speaker accents accurately; in fact, almost half failed to correctly place the Japanese English speakers! In a similar study by Kelch and Santana-Williamson (2002), L2 learners listening to recordings of native and non-native speakers' voices failed to identify the native speakers with any accuracy. These findings cast doubt on the convictions of participants in the current research, which may be guided by their pre-conceived notions about non-NESTs' pronunciation.

Student–Teacher Cultural Similarities and Differences

A frequently mentioned benefit of learning from a NEST was becoming familiar with the teacher's culture (VLE = 38%; JLE = 30%; see Table 1). This result is unsurprising, as fascination with other countries and cultures is a common motivation for learning a second language (also reported by Mahboob, 2003). VLE 24 commented, "We can know much about culture and people in that native speaker teacher's country." JLE 10's interest was comparative: "[NESTs] can clearly inform difference between Japan and their countries." This finding echoes Ryan (1998), who argues that awareness about social/cultural groups is a key part of the knowledge that teachers bring to language classrooms.

The converse of this was that NESTs in Vietnam and Japan were often unfamiliar with local socio-cultural and socio-linguistic norms (cf. Han, 2005). Respondents (VLE = 42%; JLE = 22%; see Table 1) reported tension between NESTs' and students' culturally informed notions of classroom interaction:

> They have different values and communication styles. I sometimes feel that there are some misunderstandings and miscommunications between students and teachers. (JLE 1)

> Different cultures may sometimes cause misunderstandings between the teacher and students. For example, my American teacher surprised so much when she saw same sexual student in my class holding [hands] together. (VLE 21)

Although the respondents do not explicitly mention pragmatic differences, these are probably in play. L2 learners and NESTs often have different protocols for negotiating teacher–student interaction (Levy, Wubbels, Brekelmans, & Morganfield, 1997; Yates, 2005), particularly with potentially face-threatening classroom speech acts such as requests, disagreements, and reprimands. If a strategy is interpreted by either interlocutor as overly direct or impolite, the result may be a failed learner–NEST encounter with a knock-on effect for future relations (Boxer, 2002; Walkinshaw, 2007). Interestingly, fewer Japanese than Vietnamese respondents mentioned this factor, suggesting that they found it less salient. The reason may be that NESTs at Japanese universities, often hired for their considerable teaching experience in Japan (McCrostie, 2010), may have adapted their teaching and interpersonal style to align with Japanese classroom interactional dynamics. The Vietnam context has not been studied in depth, but hiring practices there tend to be less stringent, so NESTs may be less experienced and less acculturated to local educational practices, thereby raising the likelihood of classroom communicative failure.

In contrast with their perception of NESTs, Table 1 shows that respondents from both groups found communication with a non-NEST easier (VLE = 20%; JLE = 24%), partly due to their shared cultural schemas (also noted by Cheung & Braine, 2007). JLE 34 commented that they "can ask the [non-native speaker] teacher a favour without hesitation," whereas according to VLE 20, "sometimes, learning with native speaker teachers make me stress." The issue is partly socio-pragmatic: Learners who share their teacher's cultural background can judge more easily how to frame requests or opinions, what topic restrictions exist, and when to take or relinquish the floor (Cazden, 2001; cf. Walsh, 2002).

Explaining Complex Language

Another advantage raised by both sample groups (VLE = 8%; JLE = 18%; Table 1) is non-NESTs' perceived ability to explain complex linguistic items in a comprehensible manner. VLE 23 said, "They can explain some difficult problem for us effectively." On the Japanese side, JLE 26 commented that non-NESTs offered "more efficient teaching than [native] speaker in terms of grammar," which JLE 42 noted was "good [preparation] for the entrance exam." Their opinions echo previous research on this topic (e.g., Mahboob, 2003; Medgyes, 1994). Arva and Medgyes (2000) found that

> Grammar occupied pride of place on the non-NESTs' list. Thanks to both their own learning experience and pre-service training, they claimed to have in-depth knowledge of the structure of English as well as a metacognitive awareness of how it worked. (p. 362)

NESTs, on the other hand, were perceived by some respondents as being less adept at explaining complex

grammar and lexis (VLE = 2%; JLE = 10%). Respondents commented,

> Sometimes a native English speaker cannot explain a new difficult word easily to understand. (VLE 9)

> Sometimes they can't answer my questions about grammar because these kinds of things are too natural for them, and they don't know why. (JLE 44)

This finding too evokes earlier research: A NEST participating in Arva and Medgyes's (2000) study observed drily that "most native teachers I know never really came across grammar until they started teaching it" (p. 361).

Let us turn from pedagogical aptitude to linguistic facilitation: VLEs (34%), and to a lesser extent JLEs (14%; see Table 1), expressed satisfaction that their non-NESTs could resort to the L1 if required (cf. Cheung & Braine, 2007). A shared L1 expedited comprehension, as VLE 41 noted, "Non-native [speaker teachers] can use mother tongue to explain for students that students may not understand in foreign language." The use of the L1 in the classroom has traditionally been anathema because it contravenes the principles of communicative language teaching (cf. Trent, 2013). However, Cook (2005) argues that the L1 is useful for giving instructions quickly and explaining complex grammar, which is the context in which respondents advocated its use. They also valued the L1 for negotiating comprehension: "I believe that it's better to ask in Japanese . . . than not to understand in only English" (JLE 22).

Learning From Both Types of Teacher

Fourteen respondents (VLE = 10; JLE = 4) advocated learning from both NESTs and non-NESTs, depending on the learners' proficiency and the skills being taught. VLE 3 commented that this combination is "the best way to study a language," while JLE 33 stated that "native speaker teacher is necessary [. . .], but good non-native speaker teacher is also necessary." Respondents pointed to NESTs' and non-NESTs' perceived complementary strengths in teaching different skills and different levels of ability:

> When teaching English grammar to Japanese people, it's better to have both native speaker and Japanese teacher, but for speaking English it's best to have native speakers. (JLE 19)

> [T]he learner in low level should learn with non-native speaker in order to understand well[.] [W]hen they are in advanced level, learning with native-speaker teacher is the best choice. (VLE 46)

This finding is supported by Benke and Medgyes's (2005) study: 64.9% of their subjects believed that non-native teachers can support elementary language learners better than native speakers. One reason is that L2 learners at lower levels may have difficulty understanding NESTs' speech, while another is non-NESTs' greater facility for explaining lexico-grammar (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Llurda & Huguet, 2003; Mahboob, 2003)—both issues raised by respondents in the current study. Conversely, higher level students who are already familiar with the mechanical aspects of their L2 may prefer NESTs for increasing their spoken fluency and mastering different spoken registers. NESTs are perceived as reliable models of authentic language (cf. Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Llurda & Huguet, 2003) and familiar with the various genres of English (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Davies, 2004), and therefore better equipped to teach more advanced learners. In sum, the current data affirm existing research findings in signaling a preference for both types of teacher, though not necessarily in tandem.

Conclusion

The issue of parity between native and non-native-speaker teachers needs to be foregrounded because even though the vast majority of English language teachers worldwide are non-NESTs, many non-NESTs in the ELT industry are sorely disenfranchised (see Clark & Paran, 2007, for the U.K. context). The issue is particularly salient in Asia, where native speakers are often the industry's ideal model and American English the preferred variety (Young & Walsh, 2010). The current findings respond to questions about how these teachers are perceived by learners and what qualities they bring to the language classroom.

Specifically, the data show that NESTs were valued as models for authentic, natural pronunciation, despite comprehensibility issues. Grammatical explanations were not viewed as a NEST forte (cf. Benke & Medgyes, 2005). Respondents appreciated learning about NESTs' cultures, but also experienced a cultural and communicative gap in NEST-fronted classrooms. Also, NESTs often could not communicate in their students' L1. Non-NESTs' pronunciation was viewed as non-authentic and their speech less fluent than native speakers', but respondents appreciated their ability to code-switch to the L1 when required. In addition, non-NESTs' ability to explain complex grammar was valued. Although some respondents criticized non-NESTs' limited knowledge of English-speaking cultures, others valued working with teachers who shared their own cultural norms and values. Finally, the sample highlighted the benefits of learning with both NESTs and non-NESTs (cf. Benke & Medgyes, 2005).

Let us briefly sketch the implications of these findings for teaching English as a lingua franca, which frames multilingualism (rather than native-speakerness) as a cornerstone of language teacher competence (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Our data indicate that non-NESTs' multilingual competence was a boon for the English learners in the two participant groups because it underpinned three primary perceived advantages of non-NESTs: Their ability to code-switch when teaching

complex items, their understanding of the complex nature of second language learning, and their pedagogical competence, borne of their own experience as second language learners (Ellis, 2002). This finding should benefit the self-esteem and professional confidence of multilingual non-NESTs, and should boost their reputation in the ELT profession (Braine, 2010). Another potential positive outcome is a move away from the idealized notion (among teachers, parents, and administrators) of NESTs as a default model for students to emulate (Phillipson, 1992). Rather, monolingual NESTs may come to be viewed as potentially constrained by their lack of second language learning experience.

In proposing future research trajectories, we echo Moussu and Llurda's (2008) call for further research into this topic outside of the British, Australasian, and North American (BANA) context. This would help to address an imbalance in research focus: Although the greater part of English language learning and teaching takes place elsewhere in the world (Kirkpatrick, 2007), much of the existing research originates in the BANA countries or in Europe, which have the most resources and funding for research. We also advocate further research into the complementary skillsets of NESTs and non-NESTs and the practical application of these skills in language classrooms. Specific research foci could include the educational contexts, levels of learner proficiency, and linguistic sub-skills most closely corresponding to NESTs' and non-NESTs' respective strengths.

In sum, the current research findings advance the debate on this topic by highlighting the unique and often complementary skillsets of NESTs and non-NESTs at tertiary institutions in Vietnam and Japan. More broadly, these findings are one more nail in the coffin of the notion—still prevailing in Asia—that non-native English-speaking teachers are second-class educators and inherently inferior to native-speaker teachers.

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