

NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE DICHOTOMY: DISTINCTIVE STANCES OF THAI TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

This research examines the critical insights of 24 Thai English teachers (TETs) at tertiary level into themselves and their native English teacher (NET) counterparts. Their reflections regarding impartiality between native and non-native English teachers were also investigated. The study reveals that there are perceived differences between NETs and TETs in many principal aspects: earnings, required teaching qualifications, administrators' viewpoints, as well as students' perspectives. The investigation into the ideal teacher of English, self-perceptions and the proportionate balance of hiring native and non-native English teachers (NETs and NNETs) in an organization are also reported. From a questioning position, it is disclosed that if NETs and TETs were treated uniformly as to reduce such disparities, their synergy and personal, professional rapport would ameliorate. Implications from the study suggest a shift from a preoccupation of issues about the native and non-native status to the enhancement of training and expertise in ELT in most cases. This includes seeking and creating opportunities to discuss critical subjects with NET and NNET professionals from diverse, multinational backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

A great deal of the ESL literature (e.g., Davies, 1991; Medgyes, 1994, Quirk, 1995) claims that in general a native English teacher (NET) is not 'better' than a non-

native English teacher (NNET), although in some associated citations (Gill and Rebrova, 2001; Medgyes, 1994), the distinction between NETs and NNETs is placed on their linguistic competence, teaching, and cultural understandings. However divergent they are, the researchers are convinced that the realms

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of inequality or injustice between NETs and NNETs in their actual workplace have not been sufficiently investigated nor has the massive contribution that NNETs make to the field of language teaching been creditably acknowledged.

According to Phillipson (1992), there is a given assumption that native speakers represent the model teachers of a language as they have a better command of fluent, correct language forms and are more conversant with the cultural appropriateness of a language. Most recently, an increasing number of voices have questioned this very ideology. Numerous TESOL professionals (Widdowson, 1994; Phillipson, 1996; Kachru, 1996; Liu, 2001; Lazaraton, 2003) contradict it and claim that such features attributed to native speakers are also within the reach of non-native speakers, given ample training, profound insights into language learning and intense exposure to a language.

In the area of ELT (English language teaching), this assumption has undoubtedly privileged NETs in that insistence on the use of authentic, natural English for instruction has made them 'superior' to their non-native counterparts. Widdowson (1994: 387) uses the expression 'custodians and arbiters not only of proper English but of proper pedagogy as well'.

In an EFL context, the ideology of native English speakers being ideal in ELT has been pervasive (Medgyes, 1996). For many, it is almost entirely accepted that NETs are indeed needed, superior, more qualified and better able to teach any ESL

course, simply because they are labeled 'native speakers of English'. As the researchers consider this challenged practice, finding out the views and stances of TETs regarding NETs and NNETs in their work units and offering them a critical view about equality have become the main interest. The researchers' specific focus lies in the aspects of injustice in the relationship between the NETs and NNETs. The rationale for exploring such inequitable realms is that there is evidence found in various work contexts that a number of EFL teachers accept the idea that a language stringently belongs to the native speaker (Medgyes, 1996). Therefore, it is likely that TETs, who believe in this conception, rarely problematise the political dimension in ELT and hold the notion that power relations are common and neutral. It is to be made clear at this stage that native speakers of English are not to blame in any way. The researchers' intents are simply to raise the awareness of TETs regarding inequality between NETs and NNETs, and to address the characteristics that reflect on true professionalism in ELT. Teachers' compensation and privileges should be awarded based on teacher' professionalism and ESL teaching experience. This in fact must play a greater role in an ESL teacher's success than status as to a native speaker or a non-native speaker. The specific research questions are:

1. What are Thai English teachers' (TETs) perceptions of themselves and of native English teachers (NETs) in their work context?
2. How do TETs perceive the subject of equality when comparing with NETs?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical framework within which this research study sits is reshaped from critical approaches to applied linguistics fostered by those who believe that applied linguistics itself lacks such a critical view in ELT (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994). The notions of critical applied linguistics are mainly influenced by Critical theory, Neo-Marxism, Post-structuralism and Post-modernism. There is a fundamental principle within this approach that anything that is taken for granted has to be questioned and problematised.

Another important composition of critical applied linguistics is an element of transformative pedagogy, which is to change things. However, absolute change is not necessarily the ultimate goal. Being 'transformative' has various levels, one of which can possibly be a level of awareness. Pennycook (2001) points out that critical applied linguistics opens up a new set of questions and concerns, issues that have not been considered in normative applied linguistics such as identity, sexuality, ethics, desire, access, and difference. These are seen in relation to issues of inequality. By this, critical applied linguistics helps to promote a particular version of what is meant by critical.

Critical applied linguistics borrows work from other critical domains, such as critical literacy, critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy, critical language awareness, critical sociolinguistics and critical approaches to TESOL. Due to this combining of differ-

ent elements, Pennycook (*ibid.*) suggests that it is worth looking at critical applied linguistics as a shifting and dynamic approach to questions of languages in multiple contexts rather than a fixed body of knowledge or method.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In relation to one of the principle domains of critical applied linguistics, critical approaches to TESOL attempt to relate aspects of language education to a broader critical analysis of social relations: gender, race, ethnicity, class, power, and identity. In general, the philosophies and framework underlying critical approaches to TESOL are similar to those of critical applied linguistics. However, these approaches question the taken-for-granted assumptions within the area of TESOL in particular.

Within the critical approaches to TESOL, there exist many domains or areas of interest that are subject to critical questioning. These are seen with regard to issues of unfairness. Thus, the main critical concerns might fall into areas of teacher education, materials production, and the constructs of the native and non-native speaker, to list a few examples. For this research, the emphasis is the issue of power relations between teachers who are native and non-native speakers of English.

Theoretically, as Medgyes (1994) notes, the debate over the question of native non-native dichotomy has generated a number of contentious issues. Among these, three are considered relevant. First, the na-

tive and non-native issue has been challenged on sociolinguistic grounds from the standpoint of the socio-historical spread of English (Kachru and Nelson, 1996). The notions of history and language change are then introduced and it is seen as a norm that a particular language community can develop a language variety of its own while the notion of innateness in language usage is rejected. Therefore, the sociolinguistic innovations should not be viewed as a sign of language deficiency as perceived from a hegemonic perspective, regarding English as legitimately led and approved only by certain groups of speakers.

Second, an approach has been advocated that sees the native speaker identity as a sociolinguistic construct that can be overcome within certain circumstances (Davies, 1991). Though focusing on the importance of early language acquisition and holding that for L2 learners the native speaker must represent a model or a goal, Davies explicitly rejects the idea that a native speaker is uniquely and permanently different from a non-native speaker. For him, it is clear that L2 learners can acquire native linguistic competence of the language even if they are outside an L1 environment.

The third position considers the question of native versus non-native speaker as more or less maintained regarding its application to the ELT profession. Medgyes (1992) adopts the native/ non-native contrast as a clear distinction. He asserts that the native speakers' linguistic competence constitutes an 'advantage...so substantial that it cannot be outweighed by other factors prevalent in the learning situation'

(Medgyes, *ibid*: 342). In short, non-native speakers, unlike native speakers, are permanent learners. Even if non-native speakers acquire native-like proficiency, Medgyes still labels them as 'pseudo-native speakers, perhaps due to the phonological or colloquial variability in their language use'. However, Medgyes does not conclude that native speakers are more effective English language teachers; it is pointed out that non-native teachers have an equal chance of success in their own practices.

In recent years, the inequality in the relationship between the conceptions of the native and non-native speaker has been a major topic of discussion (Singh, 1998; Liu, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; Amin, 2001). Many concerns have been directed toward the ideology that native speakers are the ideal teachers of a language (Nayar, 1994; Kamhi-Stein, 2002). According to Kramsch (1997), the idealisation of the native speaker is attributed to the importance of spoken, communicative competence in foreign language teaching since the 1960s. The linguistic authority of the native speaker has been further supported by Chomsky's notion of the terms 'native speaker' and 'competence' (1965). According to Chomsky, a native speaker is defined as an ideal speaker-listener who perfectly knows the language and at the same time competence is seen as related to intuitive knowledge of what is grammatical or ungrammatical in a language. Correspondingly, such a belief results in the assumption that a language belongs to its native speakers and has empowered them dramatically over non-native speakers in both ESL and EFL contexts.

However, Phillipson (1992: 194) calls this ideological assumption 'native speaker fallacy' and argues that non-native speakers are capable of acquiring such attributes through teacher training and exposure to the native language. Moreover, he claims that because non-native speakers of a language have gone through the process of learning a language, they are highly qualified to teach the language.

Despite the critique offered by many TESOL professionals, the dominance of being a native speaker becomes particularly distinct when the native speaker construct shapes the perceptions of language learning in different contexts. As Nayar (1994: 4) points out, English native speakers have 'the rights and responsibilities not only of controlling the forms and norms of English globally but also of dominating theory and practice of its teaching and research'.

Some recent research studies have been conducted to investigate NNETs' perceptions of themselves as ELT professionals and what they think of the native and non-native conceptions. For instance, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) examined the way non-native speaking TESOL graduate students studying in the United States viewed themselves professionally by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results revealed that though the participants perceived many differences between NETs and NNETs, the question of whether native or non-native speakers are better language teachers was not the issue. What is important was how qualified an ESL teacher is regardless of native or non-native status.

Similarly, Liu (1999)'s study investigated perceptions of non-native ESL professionals teaching in the United States through the qualitative method. Regardless of whether participants preferred to be labeled as NNETs, NETs or bilingual teachers, there was no suggestion of who was the best ESL teacher. In terms of native or non-native constructs, the participants reported difficulty in affiliating with either the native or the non-native category, claiming that such a taxonomy would not sufficiently represent the true nature of being a speaker of a language and would then diminish the experiences and language skills of ESL professionals.

In Hong Kong, Tang (1997) carried out a study of 47 NNETs on their perceptions of NETs and NNETs in terms of proficiency and competency. The results showed that although NETs were believed to be superior to NNETs in speaking, NNETs were felt to be associated with better accuracy. The respondents, however, did not specify who was or would make a better language teacher.

As far as the researchers are concerned, there are yet no reports of studies undertaken to investigate the perceptions of Thai English teachers regarding NETs and TETs. In particular, the present study has taken a valuable step further to involve the issue of equality with respect to NETs. Moreover, since it would appear that this issue has not been studied in the Thai context before, the possible contribution and significance of this present study may be enhanced.

Overall, a different perspective on the issue of equality between NETs and NNETs should be taken into account (Cook, 1999; Milambiling, 2000). TESOL practitioners should shift the focus to the importance of being a professional English teacher and should consider whether an individual has received sufficient vocational training to teach English. In addition, effective collaboration between NETs and NNETs should be encouraged. Emphasising professional matters would better help reduce inequality that the labels 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' currently denote. Moreover, the ESL profession should go beyond 'respecting differences' as suggested by Edge (1996). To value diversity and to acknowledge the presence of NNETs as equal are important if that is what is meant by true professionalism.

The researchers hold a position that there exist power relations and political interests in education as a whole as well as in our own work context. After a pilot study with a group of Thai teachers of English, it was found that most of their responses are related to the expansion and internationalisation of English as natural, neutral and beneficial (Pennycook, 1994). Therefore, this effect may have led them to believe that those who are native speakers of English own the language and are ideal teachers of the language, and so they perpetuate these beliefs. Considering this, it is decidedly justifiable to question the working assumption that NETs deserve more privileges and are thought to be 'better' than non-native counterparts just simply because they are 'native speakers'.

METHODS

Research Rationale

This research was conducted within a critical framework. The aims of this paradigm are social equality and emancipation. In order to liberate or emancipate people, there is a need to consider first that people suffer from inequality and are not free. However, that is not always possible. For this study, the researchers see that some pilot participants under study and several actual respondents are unaware of their rights and situations in the first place, although some may be aware of it. Overall, the researchers attempt to question power relations critically, which is considered the first level of emancipation. After the first level of emancipation, there can be a follow-up action depending on the political framework in which people work.

The methodology employed within the critical framework is ideology critique. According to Habermas (1976), this approach is a reflective practice which enables participants to reveal their conscious or unconscious interests at work to see whether a system suppresses a generalisable interest.

The researchers followed Habermas's suggested phases to critical ideology as the stages are systematic and clearly explicable. However, some stages were combined together and adapted for suitability. Therefore, three phases remain. Firstly, before the study was started, the researchers described and interpreted what has happened in the current situation in the work context. Secondly, the participants were asked about their per-

ceptions of native and non-native speakers in their contexts. Then, the researchers offered a critical alternative to the participants, that is, an agenda for altering the situation. Finally, the researchers evaluated and synthesized both the first and second phases to see what changes to the situation in practice could be made, including how the participants were made aware of the issues of power relations.

Participants

Out of all thirty six Thai English lecturers of the English Department from five universities in Thailand, twenty four participants took part in this study based on their availability and willingness. Twenty two hold a Master's in either Applied Linguistics, English Literature or Teaching English while two others have a PhD in Applied Linguistics. Their ages range from twenty-three to over fifty and they have been teaching English from two years to more than twenty years. Eight of them have never studied or taken any course in any English-speaking country before. Almost every respondent has experience working with NETs in their work context. When asked about whom they thought native English speakers were, all except seven referred solely to Americans, British, Australians and New Zealanders.

Data Collection Methods

Two data collection methods: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed. The questions administered in both methods were similar in nature. The questionnaire was used to collect primary

data from the participants and the semi-structured interview was employed to crosscheck the questionnaire responses. By combining these two methods, it helped to obtain more complete and accurate data.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire consisted of nine items. These items were a combination of closed and open-ended questions, deliberately designed to answer the research questions. There were three specific items where the respondents were provided with three alternatives: NETs, TETs, and both groups equally. Also, there was one question item about self-perception from which one out of four options was to be selected. The respondents were then requested to expand on their choices by providing some justification.

With regard to the interview questions, they were formulated based on the validated questionnaire. Therefore, no pilot interview was conducted. There were a total of nine interview questions, the same number of items in the questionnaire. A semi-structured interview was used, enabling the researchers to prompt the interviewees to expand their ideas when they provided incomplete answers or too little information about the areas under investigation (Cohen et al. 2000). With this, the researchers were able to pursue issues that may have been overlooked when the questions were initially drawn up. The respondents were also free to highlight any answers if they wished.

For data analysis, the data were tabulated separately according to the data col-

lection methods. The responses were first written out in phrases, after which groupings and overarching constructs were formulated. The researchers compared and discussed the formed phrases and groupings until a consensus was reached.

Limitations

There are some limitations. Firstly, the findings of the study were drawn up from only a single facet based on the TETs' viewpoints without exploring the perceptions of NNETs. Secondly, this study takes its stance from a critical paradigm, which mainly aims at emancipating people and social equality; nevertheless, in reality this is not always possible. As a minimum achievement, the researchers aimed to raise the participants' level of awareness and to question the power relation issues between NETs and NNETs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers are in accord that it is helpful to consider how the construct of power relation and inequality between NETs and NNETs has emerged in the Thai context. Although it has never been colonised before, Thailand, like other eastern countries in the world, may have accepted the power and the high status of English for two main reasons. Firstly, there is dependency of the less developed countries (the Periphery) on powerful Western countries and interests (the Center) (Phillipson, 1992). According to Galtung (1980), the perpetuation of English dominance results in the Periphery being consumers of the expertise,

methodology, and materials of the Center. Secondly, as Pennycook (1994) suggests, the expansion of English globally as international language is normally seen as beneficial and ordinary. To read in English in order to access information, technology and so on has led to discourses that have promoted the use of English for ages. The spread of English and the spread of these discourses feed upon each other (Pennycook, 1995). The English ramification undeniably comes together with the notion that Holliday (2003: 19) terms 'Position 1' where 'English is foreign to everyone but the native speaker, who is the norm to which everyone aspires'. It is in the light of this that in the EFL context in Thailand, teachers who are native speakers of English usually seem to be perceived as better, more qualified English teachers than non-native counterparts.

In relation to the findings of this study, the mixed, closed/open ended questionnaire and the interview are used in an attempt to answer two research questions. The first research question 'What are Thai English teachers' (TETs) perceptions of themselves and of native English teachers (NETs) in their work context' can be answered as follows:

Viewing Themselves

How TETs view themselves from four options provided: a) non-native teacher of English, b) bilingual teacher of English, c) multilingual teacher of English and d) native speaker teacher of English was investigated. Twenty out of twenty four selected the item 'non-native teacher of English'. The four other chose 'bilingual' and 'multilingual' teacher of English proportionately. Out of

twenty who perceived themselves as NNETs, fifteen stated that it was because they were still Thai nationals who became English teachers with sufficient English training and skills. 'Marked by pronunciation' was the other justified response provided by several. However, although a few respondents addressed the perceptions of Thai students toward Thai teachers as a factor that influenced their self-perception, they argued that with good preparation an NNET could teach better than an NET. One of them said:

"We can't change the norms and value of the students. However, as a non-native teacher of English, I might perform better if I prepare my lesson well"

As for the two respondents viewing themselves as bilingual, they claimed that since they knew two languages well, they were entitled to this opinion. This claim was strengthened when one of the two cited TETs' awareness of psychological aspects of learning, the advantage of the use of L1 to facilitate L2, and TETs' sensitivity to the needs of students. The two other who chose 'multilingual' attributed this to the fact that language was endless acquisition and thus language teachers must not ignore an opportunity to cultivate it. One of them added that he can speak more than two languages, and thus perceived himself as such.

The reason why the majority still perceive themselves as NNETs is probably because they believe that they are still Thai no matter how much exposure to English they have and that their insights into Thai are superior to those of English. The research-

ers' assumption is that for most of them to be a 'bilingual', one must be equally proficient in both languages. To add to this, according to Medgyes (1994) the terms 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' almost expressed obvious, universally accepted concepts associated with 'native English speakers' and 'those whose first language is not English' respectively.

In fact, all participants in this study could be considered 'bilingual' as they can use at least two languages fluently (Tang, 1997; Harding & Riley, 2003). In a broader framework, to minimise the label of 'non-native', NNETs should see themselves as bilingual or multilingual teachers of English. NNETs may even perceive themselves as a bilingual or a multilingual for self-encouragement.

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) argue for a need for more studies in the area of self-perception or self-image as ELT professionals due to the fact that there seems to be a scarcity of such studies. As teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions often influence the way they teach (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), it is therefore important to investigate how NNETs position themselves in the ELT profession.

Native English Speakers: Ideal English Teachers?

When asked about the participants' perceptions of the assumption that native speakers are ideal teachers of their language, more than half of the participants stated that they tended to agree with this presupposition on the condition that native speakers were

equipped with certain attributes i.e. teachers' responsibilities, language knowledge, and the understanding of students' problems. Apparently, they viewed themselves as less linguistically competent than native counterparts. Several participants in this cohort added that native speakers might be more qualified to teach listening, speaking and pronunciation but they must be well grounded in Linguistics and Phonetics. However, when it came to language structure and rules, non-native speakers could be equally competent and in some cases better. As one respondent commented:

"I think native speakers acquire the language rules. They do not learn them as formally as non-native speakers. So, I don't think they can explain grammar rules prescriptively unless they have learned how to do so".

However, eight participants held that this assumption was difficult to generalise. It depended on the teachers' knowledge and abilities. Therefore, if NNETs are well trained in ELT, they could be as qualified as NETs. Quite the opposite, two other participants strongly believed that native speakers were ideal teachers as they were born to the language.

It can be drawn up that the participants have expressed their perceptions in two varied ways. One group has taken this assumption based on teachers' training and capabilities in English teaching regardless of teachers' native languages. On the contrary, the other are likely to accept the presupposition as they hold that being 'native' has more advantages, though many factors are

to be considered.

Overall, the general consensus did not candidly suggest that NETs are necessarily better than the non-native counterparts as there are other components related. In fact, the notion that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker of that language is initially labelled by Phillipson (1992) as a fallacy. There are hidden economic, ideological, and political motivations that underline this assumption (Canagarajah, 1999) as it prevents the critical development of the TESOL professional community by denying the participation of NNETs on equal terms. According to Medgyes's (1996) survey of NETs and NNETs in ten countries, the two groups of teachers have an equal chance of success as English teachers and both groups are qualified to serve as models for their students.

Perceived Differences between NETs and NNETs

All respondents reported various responses to the inquiry. Interestingly, ten agreed that the main difference was accent and pronunciation. Six other perceived the differences in terms of confidence and overall proficiency in language use. According to them, NETs were more confident and proficient simply because they were native English speakers. They would be able to converse with students more freely and thus more classroom dynamics are generated. However, two teachers pointed out that being less confident was advantageous to the NNET, as learning materials would be carefully selected before teaching took place:

“Because Thai teachers are less confident, they are very careful when teaching, which becomes an advantage because materials to be taught would be meticulously examined before teaching”.

Few other teachers referred to different teaching styles, a positive value of Thai society toward NETs as well as NETs' in-depth knowledge of linguistic nature of English. Additionally, as reflected by this particular grouping, higher income of NETs and greater persistence in teaching of TETs were the perceived differences reported.

Another two teachers commented that the best role model for teaching listening and speaking skills was NETs, while TETs were capable of teaching reading and writing with native-like competency. Other responses were that TETs are very proficient in content teaching regardless of their language proficiency and that TETs usually hold higher teaching qualifications.

By and large, the participants in this study saw themselves differently from their native speaker counterparts. The perceived differences lay not only in English proficiency, particularly pronunciation and accent, but also in their language confidence, cultural understandings, teaching styles, and other various issues. The responses were similar to those in Reves and Medgyes (1994) and Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) in that the participants in all these studies did see the differences between NETs and NNETs with regard to their linguistic and pedagogical behavior. Tang (1997)'s study shows quite the similar results: NNETs in her study reported specific

differences between NETs and NNETs especially in speaking, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary and reading. What this current study has found, which seems to be different from other recent studies is the reference to income and teaching qualification. The disparity of income and qualification between NETs and NNETs could then lead to the questions regarding social equality and training necessary for one to be a good EFL/ESL teacher.

Remuneration

The responses revealed that all participants believed that NETs received higher pay including extra teaching wages. Six respondents reasoned that it was a normal practice as seen in many teaching institutions, without giving any specific explanation. Five others claimed that it was a norm in Thai society for the NET who was thought to be more efficient in ELT to deserve better pay while four others said that to attract these NETs to stay and work in Thailand as long as possible, they must be well remunerated apart from being given other additional benefits. In addition, these teachers were able to choose to work for almost any school since they were in great demand.

‘Just being a native speaker of English will get better pay’ was common response given by three participants. Several others stated that the NET tended to motivate the students better and that sometimes teaching experiences mattered. Two responses was directed toward the NET's monthly pay, which should match what he or she earned as a standard of living in his or her country, which was higher than the regular

salary of the TET.

Although it would seem normal for various justifications to be offered regarding NETs' receipt of better pay, many respondents in this study have specifically regarded 'being native speakers of English' as the reason for which better pay is awarded. Viewing this issue from a critical stance, it can be seen that the power relations imposed by the label 'native speakers of English' are strong that a clear line between native speakers and non-native speakers is drawn regardless of teachers' experiences, knowledge and skills as good ESL teachers. The researchers seem to agree with Kachru and Nelson (1996: 79) that being labeled as a native speaker is 'of no particular a priori significance, in terms of measuring facility with the language'. However, as they (*ibid.*: 79) stress, for a non-native speaker 'it is almost unavoidable that anyone would take 'second' as less worthy', not to mention 'nonnativeness'.

Teaching Qualifications

In terms of teaching qualifications, more than half of the respondents acknowledged TETs as higher degree holders. Out of this, twelve added that for TETs to teach at tertiary level, they must have at least a Master's degree while it is acceptable for NETs to hold their first degrees and teach in Thailand because they are native speakers of English. Some even added that sometimes native English speakers' fields of studies were not related to ESL at all but they were hired to teach since they were native speakers of the language. As one said:

"One of the native English speakers that I know of used to work in jail before. Without any ESL training, he can teach English in university".

Five others who believed that TETs were more educated provided diverse opinions: Thai teachers' determination to obtain a higher degree to work as English instructors, and the need to study higher to lessen a non-native speaker label. The latter illuminates the issue of obtaining a higher degree as an offset for 'nonnativeness' in English (Kachru and Nelson, 1996).

"I think because Thai English teachers are not native English speakers, it would then seem necessary to have a Master's as a replacement in order to increase credibility".

'Both groups equally' was commented by another seven respondents, three of whom indicated that in general, native English speakers are not trained to be ESL teachers while mostly TETs are. Perceiving both groups as qualifiedly equal, the two others rationalised that in general highly educated NETs do not like to work abroad as the remuneration is low and there is no motivation.

Despite the finding in this study that TETs happen to have superior qualifications, it seems that native English speakers have been equipped with privileges in relation to hiring practices merely because they are 'native speakers'. Rampton (1996) and Canagarajah (1999) assert that native English speakers without teaching qualifications are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers

than qualified and experienced NNETs, especially outside the United States or the United Kingdom. As far as Thomas (1999) is concerned, notions that native English speakers have sufficient ability to teach ESL owing to a 'native speakers' label undermine the training and required skills for ESL teaching. They are false assumptions that challenge the credibility of non-native speakers of English. They also challenge the credibility of 'real' ESL professionals, both native and non-native, who have years of training and skills.

Ideal Proportion of NETs and NNETs in the Workplace

Based on a hypothetical situation, the participants' perceptions of what ideal proportion of NETs versus NNETs should be employed in their workplace were sought. Three choices were offered: more NETs, an equal number of NETs and NNETs, and more NNETs.

Almost all acknowledged that to appoint an equal number of both groups of teachers would be most appropriate as to maintain equilibrium. Most of the replies referred to the advantages and disadvantages that both groups possessed and thus suggested finding a balance. In addition, some remarked that in order to promote diversity, equality and exchange of ideas, they would employ both group of teachers squarely. Three other participants thought that they would hire more NETs so as to benefit Thai students and to increase the university reputation to match international standards. Nonetheless, one in favor of hiring more NETs further argued that this was very difficult to do so

in her university since to employ many NETs would require a lot of expenditure.

"In reality, we need more native speakers. Still, it is almost impossible to hire a lot of native English teachers for public schools due to limited budget. That's why there are more Thai teachers. For private universities, it might be more likely because they may be able to afford that".

The vast majority of respondents in this study envisaged a fair balance between NETs and NNETs in employment, as they would nicely complement each other. A proportionate number of natives and non-natives in the staff possessed the additional advantage of offering a wide variety of ideas and teaching methods. Although the desirability of native/non-native interaction and cooperation would seem to be strength, many schools in EFL contexts like Thailand prefer a greater number of NETs (TEFL Asia, 2001) for some reasons: public relations and native English speakers' higher language proficiency. Medgyes (1994), approving employing native and non-native English teaching staff in moderation, adds that he would consider the importance of language background as a top selection criterion, because of its tremendous effect on teaching practice. Many specific initiatives in particular countries have confirmed the importance of NETs and NNETs co-operation (Gill et al., 1994; Wiseman, 1994; Kamhi-Stein et al., 1999). In addition, research conducted by Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) found that by sharing strengths and insights from various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, native and non-

native English speakers in their study benefited and grew professionally both as individuals and as a group.

Administrator's Viewpoints

The participants gave quite diverse responses to how TETs were perceived by the administration in their context as compared to NETs. More than half indicated similar responses such as 'quite similar to NETs' and 'fair and respectful to both groups to some extent'. However, nine respondents arguably remarked that the administration favoured NETs more. Their claims include 'not giving chances to new Thai teachers', 'Thai teachers being less reliable' and 'native English teachers being better paid'. Some added that NETs are favoured and treated with more respect and privilege than TETs and that the administration would try to satisfy NETs as much as possible. This is illuminated by some of following quotations:

"They will always consider language competency of native English speakers is higher as English is their language".

"They would assume that native English speakers need more care, so they tend to please those teachers. It's like they want to keep those teachers for long for a good reputation of the university".

Only one respondent believed that both groups of teachers were fairly treated by the administration considering teaching experiences and qualifications.

Given this emergent finding, it is inter-

esting to note that no participants perceived themselves to be superior to NETs in the eyes of the administration although many indicated similar values given to both groups of teachers. The notions that the administration attempts to please NETs in order to persuade them to work and stay in school or university in the long term can be attributed to some reasons: commercial purpose, demand exceeding supply, language nativeness and authenticity, to name a few. No matter what the genuine reasons are, Maum (2002) asserts that when one tries to differentiate among teachers based on their status as NS or NNS, it perpetuates the dominance of the NS in the ELT profession and certainly contributes to discrimination in hiring practices.

Although it is obvious that TETs outnumber their native counterparts in Thailand, the researchers observe that TETs are at times regarded as 'second class' during the hiring process even in their own context. Avasadanond (2002) states the economic effect of having NETs on the teaching market in Thailand on NNETs including Thais; i.e. unemployment or losing job opportunities. He says,

Non-white teachers will have an extremely hard time finding employment in most schools, even if they speak perfect English and have all the required degrees or certificates and teaching experience. (p.3)

This ongoing practice becomes more obvious particularly in international schools or universities, where English is used as medium of instruction. One example often

noticed is advertising for English teaching positions placed on websites or in newspapers. “Native English speakers required” is what is usually written, although in reality Thai applicants are allowed to apply.

Students’ Attitudes towards NETs and NNETs

Most respondents noticed that the students could definitely see the differences. Overall, their responses can be categorised into two major groups. One group indicated that the students perceived TETs to be more understanding and helpful, and because of this they wanted to study with them, even though TETs seemed to be more strict about rules and discipline. One even claimed that some students perceived TETs to be better with content and more concerned with grammar. Another larger group said that the students thought that pronunciation was a main difference and that they preferred to study with NETs especially for listening and speaking. NETs were thought of having different teaching styles and cultures and of facilitating an easy learning atmosphere. Here are some responses from the latter group:

“Absolutely, Thai students take Thai instructors for granted for listening and speaking sessions”.

“I think Thai students feel very comfortable in farangs’ class (NETs’ class): there is a relaxed atmosphere”.

“Students prefer to study with native English teachers considering language use and listening practice”.

There are also several voices from the respondents suggesting that it is not necessarily true that NETs are considered better, as it depends on individual teachers’ experiences and teaching styles and even students’ own perceptions.

The finding shows that the participants realised the students’ perceived differences between NETs and NNETs in many ways. Although TETs may be seen as more attentive and thoughtful, many ESL students prefer to study with NETs. Amin (1994) conducted a study to find out teachers’ perceptions of their ESL students’ ideal teachers. The teachers believed that some ESL students consider only native speakers to know ‘real’ and ‘proper’ English and only white people as native speakers of English. This is in line with the finding in this study in that the teachers in both studies perceived a higher value of the students placed on NETs given English language proficiency particularly with pronunciation. Lippi-Green (1997)’s study also indicated that teachers with non-native accents were perceived by students as less qualified and less effective and were compared unfavorably with their native English speaking colleagues.

A survey conducted in Thailand by Walenciak to ask students if they would enroll in classes taught by Thais or other non-native English speakers in private language schools found that the majority of the students would strongly prefer only non-Asians instructors (Avasadanond, 2002). These students have a preference to study with NETs as they hope to improve their English accent. Some expect to gain new learning experiences apart from being ex-

posed to social and cultural differences, things they claim are unavailable from TETs.

However, Braine (1999) asserts that ESL students will initially subscribe to the native speaker fallacy, that is, NETs are perfect models in language learning. However, as they become better acquainted with qualified, competent, NNETs, students often enjoy being in their classes, knowing that NNETs better understand their language problems and can help them learn successful strategies to become competent learners.

As for the second research question ‘How do TETs perceive the subject of equality when comparing with NETs? The answer to the question can be supplied as follows:

Perceptions of Equality

Offering a critical viewpoint to the participants by questioning whether it would be appropriate and about what would emerge if TETs and NETs were treated equally by the administration was intentionally placed towards the end. This is because the researchers intend to see how these participants would react after being asked about various aspects of the native and non-native English teachers.

Almost every participant said it would be appropriate to reduce discrepancy and promote fairness since both groups of teachers would cooperate and work together effectively. Some quotations can help illuminate the findings:

“Equality should be conducted in the workplace. It is proper and nothing negative will happen but satisfaction”.

“I think it is appropriate; at least, Thai teachers would be more encouraged to work”.

“Very appropriate as it would result in racial equality”.

“Highly appropriate, but native English teachers may be unhappy”

As seen above, some added that TETs would be more motivated to work while one believed that NETs might not be content. However, several participants argued that nothing would happen as both groups of teachers were accepted and important for the university. Interestingly, one warned that NETs might not accept this, owing to their beliefs that they deserved to be paid better because they were native English speakers. Here are some of the interviewees’ quotations:

Regarding the potential equality between NETs and TETs by the administration, it is found that ninety percent of all participants agreed that it would be appropriate to minimise the differences and that both groups of teachers would cooperate effectively. The attitudes tended to be more positive than negative.

There is evidence that many research studies have addressed the issue of equality between NETs and NNETs in the ESL profession. However, none to very few may have essentially investigated the perceptions

of NNETs to understand how they become aware of the possibility of equality, specifically within the Thai context through TETs. Therefore, the researchers are convinced that the present study is unique and its results are worth considering.

As the aims of this research are not only to explore the perceptions of TETs of themselves and of NETs, but also to question the issue of power relations between NETs and NNETs, the researchers thus put forward the issue of inequality and brought it to the teachers' attention. On the whole, according to the most participants, they indicated that equality should be promoted, which means that to some extent they are aware of the inequalities within their own context.

It is interesting to see that after they viewed themselves as equal, most responses were directed toward better teacher collaboration and gap reduction. It is clear that mutual benefits are visible with a mixture of NETs and NNETs. Non-native speakers can supply native speakers with a lot of support (Gill and Rebrova, 2001). For example, NNETs can help with learning the host language and dipping into the culture of the host community. On the other way around, Preston (1984) mentions that the linguistic judgments and intuitions of sophisticated, qualified native speakers are worth taking into account. Thus, NNETs can turn to their native colleagues with linguistic questions during the planning or conduct of lessons. Additionally, the existence of multinational and multicultural staff contributes to a better understanding of each other's traditions, customs and mentality,

helps us eliminate prejudices and stereotypes, and creates a higher degree of tolerance towards each other.

Maum (2002) reiterates that NNETs are beginning to see themselves and to be viewed by others as equal partners in the ELT profession, both in the institutions where they teach and within the professional organisations that represent them. This movement is supported by TESOL, an association that represents teachers of English to speakers of other languages, which approved the formation of non-native English speakers in TESOL Caucus in 1998. This recognition has given NETs more visibility in the profession and has helped create a professional environment for all TESOL members, regardless of native languages and places of birth (NNEST Caucus Website, n.d.).

Though a small scale effort, this study has at least established some interesting and useful insights into the related issues of native and non-native speakers of English including power relations, which could benefit other researchers interested in this critical domain. Further, several implications can be drawn from the study. Firstly, the idea that 'the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker' (Phillipson, 1992: 185) needs to be examined in order to raise the cooperative consciousness of both NETs and NNETs and teacher trainees. Secondly, in the area of TESOL, more emphasis should be placed on the multidimensionality and expertise than on nativeness and authenticity. Finally, there should be more formal discussions on specific issues and concerns related to ELT professionals from diverse

cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which would benefit both NETs and NNETs.

CONCLUSION

The participants have offered various perceptions with regard to native and non-native English speaker issues mainly by comparing themselves to native speaker counterparts. Moreover, with the methodology employed in the study, ideology critique, they were offered a critical standpoint, allowing them to see the power structures between NETs and NNETs from a different angle. Indeed, most of the participants reported perceived differences between NETs and NNETs in many aspects. More importantly, most of them could detect power relations and inequality within the labels 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers'.

Although many participants referred to advantages native speakers have over non-native counterparts such as the appropriate contexts of language use and linguistic competence, the question of who are better language teachers appeared to be rather irrelevant. What is more important to them seems to lie in teachers' knowledge, training in ELT and expertise. O'Neill (1991) asserts that proficient non-native speakers can be just as good as native speakers are. It is also interesting to note here that several participants believe that if NETs are well-equipped with pedagogical skills, experiences and training in English teaching as well as the understanding of student problems, then it is hard to deny that NETs can be highly qualified teachers of their language.

In the domain of critical issues in TESOL, the debate over the relative concerns of NETs and NNETs will continue. While it is still of interest to ELT professionals, NETs and NNETs should continue to sharpen their expertise and seek opportunities to discuss agendas related to teaching professionals to raise their own awareness. As a result, they can then better understand the issues related to both non-native and native speakers of English.

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