

# **NESTs: Disconnections between theory, research and practice**

## **Introduction**

Native speakerism is an ideology positing that native speakers provide the best models of the target language and for this reason make the best teachers of the language (e.g., Pennycook, 1994; Holliday, 2005). The ideology has been robustly criticised by scholars on a number of grounds, for example, the fallacy of the native speaker (e.g., Piller, 2001), race (e.g., Kubota & Lin, 2009); prejudice and discrimination (Houghton & Rivers, 2013) and linguistic imperialism (e.g., Phillipson, 1992; 2016). Native speaker English teachers (NESTs) are considered, by default, one of the conduits through which English language and its teaching methodology have been exported globally. It is not surprising, therefore, that discussions are generally unenthusiastic about NESTs and their influence (e.g., Bunce, 2016; Machida & Walsh, 2015; Wong et al. 2016), which has resulted in the term often exuding negative associations.

Thousands of NESTs work in a range of global contexts. Some are employed on government schemes (for example, in Hong Kong (Native English Scheme) and South Korea (English Program in Korea)); others work in private language schools or are directly employed by institutions at other levels (e.g., tertiary). While seemingly popular with students and employers (Butler 2007), as they provide a model of English to which many aspire, NESTs have been characterised as inexperienced, unqualified, and monolingual (e.g., Keaney, 2016). Few studies have challenged this conceptualisation (although see Ellis, 2016), at least partly because the emergence of English as a global language and the concomitant

recognition of varieties of English has rightly led to a growing scholarship on non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Selvi, 2016).

This article revisits the negative characterisation of NESTs and investigates whether a disconnection is visible when theoretical debates on native speakerism (e.g., Pennycook, 1994; Holliday, 2005) and empirical studies of NESTs (e.g., Bunce, 2016; Heo, 2016; Tajino & Tajino, 2000) are considered in relation to their local experiences. It will argue that the theoretical debates and empirical studies do not necessarily represent or take into account the complexities of the experiences and lived realities of NESTs, particularly those of long-term sojourners. Drawing on data from interviews with NESTs working on a variety of schemes, we will explore the heterogeneity of beliefs, views and experiences of NESTs, producing a more nuanced and complex picture than has previously been presented.

### **NESTs and LETs**

To set the context, we start with a brief consideration of terminology. We agree with scholars such as Higgins (2017) who underline the importance of constructs such as bilingual/multilingual teacher as an alternative to NNEST/NEST. However, the data that we draw on in this article were collected as part of a project investigating NEST schemes, in which labels are assigned to participants *a priori*. Furthermore, they are widely established and deeply ingrained in the field: for these reasons we use the terms NESTs and LETs (local English teachers – see below) and we begin by providing a brief description of each.

NEST is the term traditionally given to native English speaker teachers, that is, teachers who ostensibly speak English as a ‘first’ language as they often come from one of the BANA countries (Holliday, 1994), that is Britain, Australia/New Zealand and North America. There are a number of government-sponsored schemes, particularly in East Asia, which employ native English speakers to teach in the state sector (mainly in tertiary, secondary and primary

institutions, from here, TESP (see Holliday, 1994)). Many of the schemes do not require the NEST to have teaching experience or qualifications, such as the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme in Japan. In these cases, the English speaker is elevated to the position of teacher – or NEST - on their language skills alone. Others, however, do require qualifications and/or experience and this is the case, for example, in the NET (native English teacher) programme in Hong Kong and the Educational Development Trust (EDT) scheme in Brunei. Some accept ‘expert users’ of English onto the programmes (e.g. NET and EDT) while others require teachers to prove their ‘native-speakerness’ (e.g. EPIK (English program in Korea) (see Copland, Davis, Garton & Mann 2016b for a detailed description of different schemes and their requirements). On many of these schemes, NESTs work in a co-teaching relationship with a LET and support students with developing (mostly) listening and speaking skills.

We use LET in this article to describe teachers who usually live and teach in the country of their birth. In the academic and professional literature, LETs are often referred to as non-NESTs, or NNESTs (see Selvi, 2016, for a full discussion); however, we prefer the term LET as it is how most teachers in our study referred to themselves and it avoids their being defined negatively in comparison with NESTs (through the use of ‘non’) (see also Luk & Lin, 2007). We recognise, nonetheless, that not all LETs are local or speak the local language and so, as with most labels, it is not wholly fitting.

A more recently recognised phenomenon is the increase in visibility of teachers who have also learnt English as a second language and are now teaching it overseas. These teachers are often employed from overseas on NEST schemes (e.g., the eastern European teacher in the chapter by Wong et al., 2016) but may also be locally employed (as is the teacher reported on in Yanase, 2016). Another group is the large number of international educators working as English language teachers in BANA countries (e.g., Diniz de

Figueiredo, 2011). The growing number of such teachers challenges the appropriateness of the binary labels NEST and LET and indeed NNEST (as many are bilingual while others are expert users of English) and may eventually lead to the demise of the labels. Nonetheless, in many parts of the world, particularly those where NEST schemes are popular, the terms have strong “use-value” (Skeggs, 2004: 11).

Although NESTs are often the focus of studies, Selvi (2016) has noted that LETs far outnumber NESTs, and therefore do most of the work of teaching English to speakers of other languages, especially in TESEP contexts. Most have learnt English as a second language and are therefore at least bilingual. In many countries, LETs are expected to be highly skilled in English and to have a teaching qualification. However, this is not always the case and sometimes LETs struggle with teaching English either because they perceive their own English skills to be inadequate or because they have had no training in how to teach a foreign language (see Garton et al. 2011).

Recent scholarship has argued that taking a dichotomous approach – treating NESTs and LETs as separate groups – is dangerous. Not only does it reinforce distinctions, it also plays into native speakerist ideologies (see below), which in turn support inequitable hiring practices. This, Bayyurt (2018) contends, ‘eliminates the negotiations of being and becoming equal’ (Bayyurt, 2018), which should be central to a profession informed by a social justice agenda. We support this approach: however, we also believe that to pursue it requires us to understand more fully the experiences of teachers who work in the global English language teaching industry. This article supports contributes to developing such understandings.

### **Native speakers, NESTs and native-speakerism**

The native speaker as a construct has been widely critiqued to the extent that, in the literature at least, the term cannot be used without interrogation. Davies (1991) published the first large-scale discussion of the subject in *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* (published in a second edition in 2003, with a new title). He argues that the mythical native speaker, the one who is a “product of the homogenised, error-free linguistic Eden” (2003:214), is a useful construct in applied linguistics as the discipline requires “models, norms and goals” (p.1). The ‘real’ native speaker, in contrast, is far from ideal in terms of linguistic output, but does exist:

The concept of the native speaker is not a fiction.... the native speaker is relied on to know what the score is, how things are done, because s/he carries the tradition, is the repository of ‘the language’. (Davies, 2003: 207).

Although some challenges to this position have come from within linguistics (e.g., Paikeday, 1985) and SLA (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997), mostly they come from the sociolinguistics perspective (for a full discussion see Doerr, 2009). Kramsch (1997), drawing on Pratt (1987), famously argued that the native speaker was:

an imaginary construct – a canonically literate monolingual middle-class member of a largely fictional community whose citizens share a common history and a common destiny (p. 363).

Leung et al. (1997) examined the link between ethnicity and language. At the heart of their discussion is the recognition that, as the ethnic make-up of countries grows and develops, the notion of a nation-state sharing a common language which is passed from older generations to younger is no longer tenable. More recently, this argument has been developed by scholars interested in bi- and multi-lingualism. Rothman & Treffers-Deller (2014), for example, make the case that it is not necessary to be monolingual to be a native speaker and that ‘heritage bilinguals are natives’ (p.96) too.

Closely linked to discussions of the native speaker is ‘native speakerism’ (or the “native speaker fallacy”, Phillipson, 1992: 217). Holliday (2006) expanded the concept from an ideology which posits that ‘native speaker’ teachers provide the best models of the target language and for this reason make the best language teachers, to include language teaching methodology (p. 285). He suggests (drawing on Anderson, 2005) that Western approaches to teaching including methodological staging and monitoring, features of communicative language teaching (CLT), ‘can be seen as hiding a subtle agenda aimed at ‘correcting’ ‘non-native speaker’ culture’ (p.296).

The reasons for native speakerism are complex. At the centre, however, is the rise of English as a global lingua franca (Graddol, 2006), leading to a demand for English language which in many cases local teaching workforces have been unable to satisfy. Some governments, through ministries of education and local educational boards, have therefore employed NESTs, who either teach independently (e.g., EDT in Brunei) or support LETs with their classes (e.g., JETs). At the same time, private institutions globally have recruited NESTs to meet demands from clients who wish to learn from a native speaker, believing that this is the model to which they should aspire. This is in spite of the lack of evidence that such beliefs are warranted (see Uzun, 2018). The notion that the native speaker provides the best model of English is also challenged by the rise of English as a lingua franca and our growing understandings of Global Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015). We return to this point below.

There is another reason that native speakerism prevails. The ideology serves the interests of a specific group of teachers, those from BANA countries (Holliday, 1994), who are usually already privileged in terms of wealth and opportunity. The notion that being native speakers by default make them the best teachers provides them with a further advantage: to travel and work all around the world, sometimes with neither qualifications nor experience. It has led to the rise of the ‘backpacking’ NEST (e.g., Keaney, 2016), a

somewhat derogatory term which suggests that some NESTs are not serious about teaching English (or about integrating into local communities). Such NESTs potentially damage the credentialised NEST community.

The theoretical discussions outlined so far generally do not draw on research into how native speakerism plays out in practice. Nonetheless, there are a number of experience- and practice-based studies, many of which also convey NESTs in a negative light. Bunce (2016), for example, shows how inexperienced and unqualified, gap-year NESTs lack sensitivity to local cultures and have an inflated sense of their own importance. In this case, the young people are afforded the title 'teacher' through the simple act of walking into a classroom and standing at the front. Jenkins (2016) suggests that even experienced and qualified NESTs can lack intercultural competence and understanding. She describes how NESTs in a university language centre in the UK are shocked to learn that their students prefer to be taught by a non-native speaker, whom they find easier to understand. Other accounts report on conflict between NESTs and LETs in Vietnam (Khánh & Spencer-Oatey, 2016) and division in Hong Kong (Trent, 2016).

The contrast between qualifications and working conditions of NESTs and LETs is another concern. Wong et al. (2016) explain that in Hong Kong NESTs have a less demanding workload than LETs, a situation which researchers (e.g., Yanase, 2016, in Japan) and teachers (e.g., Binns, 2007, in Austria) reiterate. Furthermore, Carless (2006) and Tajino & Tajino (2000) point out that NESTs tend to have little experience and few qualifications. Lengeling & Mora Pablo (2012) explain that despite these lacks, NESTs in Mexico can obtain better work benefits than their LET counterparts. On the other hand, there are countries where NESTs may be treated less favourably, for example in some contexts in Japan (Rivers, 2013).

There are some positive findings about NESTs in the experience and practice-based literature, suggesting that they can have a constructive influence on learning and teaching. However, the literature on the contribution of NESTs is sparse. According to both Butler (2007) and Hadla (2013), students believe that their listening and speaking skills will develop faster if taught by a native speaker, although there is currently no empirical evidence to support this belief. LETs in Heo's (2013) study in South Korea reported that their students became more active and excited in team teaching. Although LETs in Tang's (2016) study in Hong Kong are critical of the NEST scheme and some NESTs, they agreed that NESTs offered useful language support which they did not feel able to provide themselves. Keaney (2016) is also positive about the role of NESTs arguing that the linguistic skills of qualified and experienced NESTs provide students in Brunei with excellent learning opportunities.

## **LETs**

A number of researchers have focused on the effects on LETs of collaborations with NESTs (e.g., Heo, 2013; Wong et al. 2016). LETs have traditionally been negatively evaluated by governments and employers in comparison to NESTs, which, scholars have suggested, has left them with feelings of 'inferiority' (Rajagopalan, 2005), 'inauthenticity' (Bernat, 2008) and even 'self-hatred' (Llurda, 2009) because they cannot measure up to an 'elusive' native speaker model (Clark & Paran, 2007: 409). Mahboob & Golden (2013) also draw attention to discriminatory hiring practices suffered by LETs, with NESTs often favoured over LETs in East Asia and the Middle East (see too Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018). Shin's (2008) study demonstrates that NESTs are paid higher salaries in South Korea, even though they have fewer teaching qualifications, a situation also reported in González & Llurda (2016) in Latin America.

Nonetheless, scholars have also suggested that LETs enjoy a number of advantages. Medgyes (2018), for example, points out that LETs, in contrast with NESTs, have been through the process of learning English and so can empathise with their learners and support



their language learning difficulties; Kamhi-Stein (2009) argues that LETs understand the local educational culture and so can communicate effectively with students, other teachers, and parents; and Mahboob & Lin (2016) show how LETs can harness a bilingual pedagogy to teach English effectively (see Cook and Hall 2012 for a detailed discussion of L1 and L2 use in the classroom) . Of course, some NESTs may also exhibit some of these strengths, as we will show later in our analysis and discussion, but they are commonly associated with LETs.

Advocacy has led to a re-evaluation of LETs. This readjustment is timely and important. For example, Silvana Richardson provided a rousing and well-argued plenary, at IATEFL in 2016 entitled *The 'native factor', the haves and the have-nots...and why we still need to talk about this in 2016*. In addition, a range of publications has taken up the LETs cause (e.g., Mahboob, 2010; Selvi, 2011, Medgyes, 1994, 2017) and advocacy groups such as the “NNEST Interest Section” of TESOL and TEFL Equity Advocates have undertaken important work. Nonetheless, writers such as Selvi (2016) warn against promoting the non-native speaker fallacy which posits that people are qualified to teach English simply because they have learnt it as a second language.

Before we examine the experiences of NESTs in the workplace in relation to the research literature, we introduce the project that provides the data from which we draw in this article.

### **Investigating NEST schemes around the world: Method**

The data reported on in this paper were collected as part of a wider research project (see Copland, Davis, Garton & Mann, 2016a).

The project followed a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research aims “to understand better some aspect(s) of the lived world” (Richards, 2003:10), through detailed descriptions of people’s perceptions and actions, with the major goal of gaining an insider, or emic, perspective (Copland & Creese, 2014). The research design consisted of: i) a survey of NEST schemes through document analysis and interviews to prepare an audit of current NEST schemes; ii) semi structured interviews with both LETs and NESTs working on a variety of schemes around the world (including EPIK, NET, EDT, JET, VSO and Fulbright). iii) classroom observations of co-teaching classrooms (See Copland et al. 2016a for detailed justification of the methodology and findings). Ethical guidelines from BAAL were followed, in particular with respect to responsibilities to informants.

[https://baalweb.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/goodpractice\\_full.pdf](https://baalweb.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/goodpractice_full.pdf)). Informed consent was obtained from all participants and confidentiality and anonymity protected by removing all identifying information from interview extracts. Full ethical approval was also gained from the authors’ institutions.

For this paper, we draw on the interview data with NESTs to assess their views and experiences in relation to the theoretical positions on native speakerism outlined above. We do not in any way suggest that the data presented here are representative of NESTs as a whole as the sample is small. Rather, our intention is to present aspects of the NEST experience, which have been little examined to date. We believe that the voices of these NESTs, who work in different countries and on different schemes, deserve to be heard, particularly when they contradict or nuance current understandings.

## Participants

To recruit participants for the project, purposeful sampling was used. We derive the term from Patton (1990) where purposeful means targeting those informants who are potentially ‘information-rich’ and from whom ‘one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research’ (p.169). Therefore, we identified individuals who fitted our key criteria (native-speakers or local English teachers) and who had worked or were working on ‘native speaker schemes’ and were available and willing to be interviewed. Drawing on our academic and professional contacts, snowballing from other teachers on the same scheme, and internet searches, we identified suitable NESTs and LETs. For this article, we analyse interview data from 16 NEST interviews with NESTs in Brunei on EDT (1); Taiwan on Fulbright scheme (3); South Korea (on EPIK) (7); Japan (on JET) (4) and Hong Kong (on NET) (1). Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes.

In order to gain as complete a picture as possible of the lived realities of teachers on NEST schemes, it was important to draw on the experiences of NESTs in different countries rather than examine one country (e.g., South Korea) or one group (e.g., JET) only. As well as range, it was also necessary to include data from NESTs with different qualifications and experience: as far as we are aware, there are no studies to date that have compared data from NESTs in as many contexts as we do in our study (Copland et al. 2016a). Details of the participants can be found in Table 1. The level of L2 proficiency is based on participants’ self-reports.

Please include Table 1 here: Details of NEST interview participants about here

## **Procedures**

The interview schedule was designed focusing on the original research questions (see Copland et al. 2016a: 5). It provided key questions for each interview, but as the approach

was semi-structured, each interviewer was also free to probe and follow-up as appropriate in order to investigate in as much detail as possible the teachers' responses (Richards, 2003). Altogether, four researchers carried out the interviews: the three writers of this article and a colleague based in Taiwan. All interviews were carried out in English. Most were conducted face-to-face and others were conducted on Skype and by telephone.

In this research, a constructivist view of interviews was taken, in which interview data are not viewed as objective accounts of external reality but as a form of interaction jointly constructed by the interviewer and interviewee (e.g., Mann, 2016). As such, each interview encounter creates a unique interactional event. This constructivist approach to our interviews created a space in which informants could articulate their individual views and experiences.

The questions elicited participants' views on: their classroom roles; their relationships with the LET; what they understood to be the purpose of government policy regarding NESTs; successes, changes and challenges; what NESTs wished they had known before taking up their posts; and advice they would give to new recruits. These themes were identified as salient based on our reading of previous research in the field. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded.

According to the criteria for rigour outlined by King & Mackey (2016) we undertook three elements of triangulation: 'methodological' (e.g., collecting teachers' experiences and views via observation and interview), 'source' (using a common methodology in collecting data in different contexts), and 'analytical' (involving different researchers in analysis, joint-interview and coding meetings). We consciously developed a team approach to both interviewing and coding and we were also reflexive about team processes (Creese & Blackledge, 2012). For example, we discussed recordings and transcripts considering issues such as self-disclosure, stance, and interactional management. These meetings were recorded with a view to reporting on our practices at a later date.

One of the hallmarks of an interpretative study is the ‘recognition of diverging observations and multiple realities’ (Duff, 2008: 29) and having multiple researchers involved in coding creates potential rigour in producing a reliable account of the data as long as the team communicates well. To ensure this, we undertook both ‘team interviewing’ (where in the piloting stage we jointly interviewed an informant refining questions and prompts) as well as jointly refining our coding process (developing coding sheets, mind-mapping and working closely with transcripts). We also coded several interview transcripts independently before having two meetings where we refined existing deductive codes and developed more emergent and inductive ones. A full account of this team process can be found in Copland et al. (2016a).

## **Results**

In this section we present the interview data, organised according to themes that were identified above as salient to theoretical discussions of NESTs

### **The concept of native speakerism**

On the issue of native speakerism, only one NEST used the term directly. It was when the interview was focusing on classroom language:

*Extract 1*

**I:** Right, so why do you do that, why do you stick to English in the classroom?

**P:** That's a good question, I was speaking to someone else about this recently, the idea of a native speakerism and I think it's an interesting thing, the role that you get, you kind of define it yourself, don't you?

**I:** Yeah

**P:** I don't know. <Pause> Yeah, perhaps I should, I mean I can speak Japanese, maybe I should <laughs> I don't know!

As can be seen, the NEST introduces the term 'native speakerism' himself, which he relates to language choices in the classroom, although the negative framing of the question ('why do you stick to...?') could suggest to the interviewee that the interviewer has a stance regarding classroom language (that translanguaging is preferable). The interviewee seems to suggest that native speakerism, as seen in the English-only classroom, is both assigned and self-imposed as native speakerism to his sense of identity and the role he takes on as the non-Japanese speaking classroom teacher. He acknowledges that he is not sure why he does not share his bilingualism with the class.

Three NESTs recognised that their position was predicated on their being 'native speakers' - but only one implied that this was unfair:

*Extract 2*

We've received so much freedom, not based on our qualifications, per se, but based on the fact that we are native speakers.

Two teachers stated explicitly that being a native speaker was important. One suggested that her lack of classroom experience was off-set by her ability to speak English by stating 'I'm

not really an expert but I am like a native speaker'. Another revealed beliefs about using and learning a language that would be challenged in many academic (and pedagogic) fora:

*Extract 3*

Our English is essentially flawless, even if a Korean teacher speaks very good English, she'll make a lot of mistakes ... and if those mistakes are made in class, then those mistakes get told to the students and then the students end up learning the wrong thing. I can give you a good example of that. There was an English play, competition, and I was the judge ..they were doing the *Little Red Riding Hood* with the girl and the wolf and during the play, these poor kids they'd spent all this time doing all the preparations ..., but for some reason me and the other native teachers were confused, because they kept saying, 'oaf' instead of wolf. 'Oh look, it's an oaf, oaf!' And we were all looking at each other, 'Why does he keep saying oaf instead of wolf?' Anyway, later on we hear the Korean teacher talking to them and the Korean teacher was saying 'oaf' too!

This extract illustrates some of the negative attitudes attributed to NESTs discussed in the literature. Not only does the teacher say that NESTs speak better English and are better models for students than LETs, he also suggests that good teachers need to speak 'flawless' English or learners will learn 'bad' English.

The comments above demonstrate the range of attitudes NESTs held with regard to being a native speaker, which we discuss in more detail below.

As described in the research cited above, native speakerism is not only a matter of privileging the employment of those who happen to have learnt English as a mother tongue. It also encompasses methodology, particularly communicative language teaching approaches.

In this study, NESTs realised that CLT was not always appropriate. In Japan, one suggested that classroom activities that she introduced made the LET uncomfortable:

*Extract 4*

you can't just impose the communicative way on the school and the team teacher and the kids, and in particular, I realised it was really unfair, because I was expecting the team teacher to take the disciplinary role, but I was planning lessons that were causing chaos, so it was deeply unfair.

While a NEST in Korea criticised those who tried to change classroom practices as soon as they arrived:

*Extract 5*

[NESTs] have to learn to understand their place...you can't come in, if you've been teaching for two months and go, 'Well, we're going to do... No, this book is garbage, we're going to throw that out, that's stupid and we're going to do things my way, because I know.' And I've seen people <laughs> with three months in Korea with no teaching degree say this to a LET who's been teaching for 30 years and you can just see the smoke coming out of their ears.

Both NESTs, far from imposing their own views or believing that they know best, showed sensitivity to the local educational culture and respect for their LET counterpart. This attitude was held by the majority of NESTs in the study and shows a more culturally aware and flexible attitude than is often portrayed in previous research.

### **Workload and classroom roles**

Although only one NEST refers directly to native speakerism, others demonstrate awareness of the characteristics commonly associated with it, such as the belief that, in



contrast with LETs, it is easy for NESTs to find work with limited qualifications (e.g., Binns, 2007; Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2012). This NEST in Korea stated:

*Extract 6*

I felt like I was stealing a living, compared to these people that were experienced and she'd [the LET] lived in Australia for however many years and I'm there, I've got a month-long certificate, a few months in a European country.

He suggests that in comparison to his Korean counterpart, he had fewer qualifications, less experience and had put in a lot less effort to secure his post, but 'stealing' is explicitly in terms of unfairness. A Japan NEST also noted the disparity between her workload and that of LETs:

*Extract 7*

Just my regular duties are quite minimal compared to what the regular Japanese Teacher of English, because I wasn't a home room teacher and didn't have any type of other responsibilities... I couldn't do a lot of things because I wasn't qualified. So in that sense I wasn't entirely equal on the playing field.

This NEST also acknowledges her lack of qualifications and details some of the ways she was unable to play the full teacher role in the same way as the LET.

A number of NESTs focus on how hard they work in class. Nine indicate that in at least some of the co-taught classes, they took the lead role and did most of the work, as in this case:

*Extract 8*

My typical class usually, is not like team teaching, I do all those things, preparation, from preparation and then all the making of flash cards and then lesson plans.

One NEST provided a vivid illustration of the LETs' contributions in one context:

*Extract 9*

Ninety-five percent of the time, the LETs stood at the back watching. That was quite clear cut, there was two males, two men, three women; the men, one of them didn't turn up hardly ever, another one would pace the back of the room <laughs> sometimes he would bang his head against a wall!

While it could be argued that LETs did not take part in the lessons because they felt threatened or lacked confidence to teach alongside the NESTs (see Machida and Walsh, 2015), four NESTs suggested that the reason was because the LETs saw the team-teaching lessons as an opportunity to rest or to catch up on other work. As described above, NESTs recognised that LETs had a heavy workload and a range of different commitments; however, descriptions such as this suggest that NESTs were not always happy with the practice.

On the other hand, four NESTs described how the LET had supported them particularly when they were very new to the classroom, as this NEST describes:

*Extract 10*

I worked with these two teachers and they showed me the ropes and they told me how to deal with students and the most effective ways to teach with them, but at all times, very much so, I was under their guidance and under their instruction.

These accounts suggest that criticisms of NESTs as conveyors of western pedagogical approaches – a feature of native speakerism - are not always sustainable and that some NESTs at least acknowledged the help and support they received from their LET counterparts. An additional point that is rarely discussed in the literature is that LETs may have the choice about whether they take part in the lessons, challenging the view that LETs lack control.

*Experience and qualifications*

It was noticeable with the participants in this study that the ‘backpacking NEST’ was not much in evidence. This maybe a result of the convenience sampling used which meant that more experienced and qualified NESTs were more likely to hear about and be willing to participate in the research. There may also be more ‘backpackers’ working outside established schemes. Only six NESTs were short-term sojourners and three of these were on Fulbright scholarships. Ten out of sixteen interviewees had spent four years or longer in the country. Furthermore, only three had no qualifications in teaching while six had qualifications in language teaching that are at post-graduate level in the UK (see Table 1).

There was something of a divide between those NESTs with in-country experience and qualifications and those with less experience and fewer/less prestigious qualifications in terms of how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis their co-teacher. Eight of the less experienced/qualified NESTs spoke of their admiration and appreciation of their co-teaching LETs, particularly those who played a mentoring role and helped them to develop their teaching skills. The qualified/experienced NESTs took a more critical line but the inherent superiority of NESTs, as portrayed in the literature, was little in evidence here. Two felt that they were treated as inferior and that the skills they brought to class meant that they should be recognised as capable. One said:

*Extract 11*

We don’t like to feel like we’re an assistant. We want to be an equal teacher but sometimes [the LET] will talk down to us.

While the other focused on the issue of teaching:

*Extract 12*

We’ve been trying to do a bit more actual *teaching* in the lessons, but the Japanese teachers still can’t quite come to grips with the fact that we might actually be able to teach something.

These reports demonstrate a tension between the professional identities of some NESTs - as qualified and experienced teachers - and how they perceive they are positioned by LETs – as classroom assistants (in Japan, the label ‘ALT’ – assistant language teacher – is generally assigned to all NESTs working in team-teaching relationships). They challenge native speakerism as they suggest that even credentialised NESTs have little control over what they must teach in the classroom.

### ***Monolingualism***

In terms of NESTs’ languages, it is noticeable that in this sample all NESTs spoke the language of their hosts to some degree: nearly half were highly skilled (see Table1). Being bilingual provided some NESTs with choices when it came to what language to speak in the classroom: the three NESTs in Taiwan all spoke enthusiastically of drawing on what they called ‘Chinese’, the language of education, in class, suggesting that like LETs, NESTs too can develop situated and plurilingual linguistic models of classroom language use (Mahboob & Lin, 2016). However, for two NESTs classroom language choice was sometimes difficult and complicated by external factors. One, a bilingual NEST who was ethnically Japanese, was asked to ‘pretend not to understand Japanese’ by a co-teacher. In another class she said that she was asked to use Japanese to ensure that children understood what to do, but she found herself using ‘broken Japanese’ in a bid to maintain this ‘foreign’ identity. Another NEST, who is ethnically white British but had lived and taught in Japan for many years, told us that in most cases he did not speak Japanese in class, ‘except for comedy purposes’. If a child spoke to him in Japanese, he replied in English. He explained:

#### *Extract 13*

If they’re causing trouble to such an extent, then I’ll go and speak to them, just *quietly*, so the other students can’t hear, in Japanese, and just say, ‘Come on!’ Yes,

but the strange thing is I'll do it quietly, I don't know why?.... I think I don't want the other people to hear me, which is so strange, isn't it?

These examples demonstrate the complexity of language choice for NESTs. Some are constrained by the institutional policy or team-teacher's preferences; others having trained as communicative language teachers, may believe that a target language only classroom is the ideal model. Others may be affected by a strong underlying if unspoken assumption – a hegemony – that NESTs will speak English only. This is revealed in extract 13 where the NEST seems to be questioning using Japanese in class for the first time despite having taught there for many years.

### *Intercultural incompetence*

One important aspect of intercultural competence in classrooms is sensitivity to local norms. Not all NESTs in the study demonstrate such an understanding. However, in the interviews, many suggested that they recognised the contingencies of the local classroom environment and adjusted their practice accordingly (see extracts 5 and 6 above). Indeed, NESTs were often required to make constant adjustments to their teaching approach, as explained here:

#### *Extract 14*

I have a different co-teacher for every grade, so I actually have four of them...[with]the grade three teacher I'm on one side of the television, he's on the other side at the front. The grade four teacher, I lead on some things and then she'll lead...The grade five teacher has her own plan and doesn't always tell me ...so I'm more like a resource.

Other NESTs showed similar adaptability to local context. In fact, only two NESTs explicitly stated that they believed that part of their role was to model interactive and

engaging classroom activities to LETs and both were well-qualified and experienced and worked on schemes which had an explicit teacher training aim.

In terms of intercultural competence, the NESTs in this study were often agile and accommodating, unlike the gap year NESTs in Bunce's (2016) study. Even the NESTs who felt their professional identities were challenged by being positioned as an assistant teacher accepted their assigned classroom roles and focused on engaging students in learning.

### **Discussion**

The findings from the study suggest that there are some disconnections between the dominant discourses in the literature on native speakerism and the practicalities and realities of the NEST experience. In this section we will discuss these disconnections.

Our data supported the often reported reality that NESTs generally have lighter workloads than LETs (e.g., Yanase, 2016). However, what is not often reported is the other work performed by NESTs. Findings show that they worked concurrently with different teachers who had different approaches to team teaching, often demonstrating agility as well as an ability to compromise. They were put in charge, sometimes without any substantial support from LETs, even when they lacked qualifications or experience. Leaving NESTs to teach alone could be the result of LETs feeling disenfranchised from the teaching process (e.g., Llurda, 2005) or because they were not confident that their English was sufficient to team teach effectively (Copland et al., 2016), or because it gave them some much needed time for other duties. However, it is also clear from the data presented here that in some contexts LETs can decide whether to team teach or not, are able to tell NESTs what they can and cannot do, and are therefore powerful and not powerless (as such choices are not usually available to the NESTs).

Our findings also show that many NESTs respect the LETs with whom they work. LETs are described as busy, skilled, and in charge. It was reported, for example, that LETs supported inexperienced and unqualified NESTs, particularly in the early stages of their tenure, helping them to plan lessons and giving them feedback on their performance. Again, in these contexts at least, the LETs are dominant and in control rather than inferior (Rajagopalan, 2005) or inauthentic (Bernat, 2009). Of course, the LETs may perceive their positions differently. However, the following quotation, taken from the interviews we conducted with LETs as part of the original project, suggests that at least some LETs identify with this positioning:

*Extract 15*

mostly that native English speaker I cannot (say) them as a teacher because not enough er education background and no degree. The reasons how they are hired is just extremely I feel sorry about it. They are not a teacher

NESTs can also recognise the high-quality contribution that LETs make. They acknowledge their dedication and commitment to their students. Many accounts of the relationship focus on conflict (e.g., Khánh & Spencer-Oatey, 2016) and division (e.g., Trent, 2016), but NESTs in our data mostly admire and value LETs.

The issue raised by Jenkins (2016) that NESTs may lack skills in communicating with students and by Mahboob & Lin (2016) that they use a methodology that may be insensitive to local educational contexts is perhaps best answered by examining LET rather than NEST interviews. Nonetheless, our data suggest that NESTs can also be sensitive, interculturally aware and adaptable and are often able to work within and adapt to local norms, although this might happen after some time in post. It is also evident that some NESTs, at least in our study, need to be flexible and adaptable across different relationships. One NEST, for

example, was working with four teachers a week, each of which expected him to behave in the classroom in different ways. He not only recognised this fact but willingly adapted his behaviour to their expectations (extract 14). Another explained how through introducing communicative language activities in the classroom she placed her co-teacher in the role of disciplinarian as the students were unused to working collaboratively and hence misbehaved (extract 4). This, she said, ‘was wrong’ as she had placed the LET in an invidious position. Furthermore, apart from the NEST in Hong Kong (which has a long and complex history with regard to both English language and employing NESTs), none mentioned resentment from LETs (our LETs interview data is generally – though not wholly – positive, as are reports from small-scale research by Choi, 2001, 2009). We are not suggesting that no NEST acts with insensitivity or cultural incompetence (see, for example, Bunce, 2016) but that the picture is more complex than has been suggested in the literature.

Native speakerism is an ideology that favours the native speaker, native speaker English and native speaker methods (e.g., Holliday, 1994; 2006). NEST schemes may contribute to this ideology, particularly where NESTs are not required to have experience or qualifications, through attributing teaching credentials purely on the basis of perceived first language. It emerged from this research that at least two NESTs explicitly subscribed to the ideology in terms of language when they referred to their own English skills as superior to those of their local colleagues. These comments suggest that some NESTs lack an understanding of the global nature of English or of the many varieties of English that exist: the anecdote of the LET teaching ‘oaf’ instead of ‘wolf’ is an example of this lack of awareness (mispronunciation of a word is not the prerogative of non-native speakers and neither is it possible for any speaker of a language, native or otherwise, to be flawless, as Davies (2003) pointed out). There is substantial work to be done in sensitising NESTs in



particular to concepts such as Global Englishes, English as an international language and  
ideolects so that they can recognise when they are in danger of promoting native speakerism

Other NESTs displayed features of native speakerism when they discussed  
methodology, which Holliday (2006) included in his definition of the term, suggesting that  
Western approaches such as CLT ‘can be seen as hiding a subtle agenda aimed at ‘correcting’  
‘non-native speaker’ culture’ (p.296). However, the two teachers who advocated the CLT  
approach had been engaged specifically by government agencies to support LETs with  
teaching in a communicative way: it is difficult to hold them to account for doing the job for  
which they were employed. Other NESTs in our study were less enthusiastic about CLT and  
its suitability for the contexts in which they worked (extracts 5, 6, 8, 16).

The suggestion that NESTs lack linguistic skills in host languages, perpetuating the  
monolingual bias in TESOL (e.g., Phillipson, 2016) is not borne out in the data. All NESTs  
we interviewed spoke the language of their hosts to some degree, often to a high standard,  
chiming with the findings of Ellis (2016). It was rarely the choice of the NESTs to speak  
only English in the classroom. Most schools (and some countries) had a classroom language  
policy that was ‘English only’. NESTs were not encouraged to model their bilingualism and  
some were chastised for doing so. In these cases, monolingualism is a government or  
institutional policy, not a quality of the NEST. A notable exception was Taiwan, where  
NESTs drew on both English and Chinese. In all interviews, these NESTs had strong  
rationales for using both languages in class, which included modelling the language learner  
and modelling the bilingual and bicultural subject.

The issue of lack of qualifications and experience is also of interest. In our data,  
seven NESTs had post-graduate level qualifications in TESOL related areas. In addition, nine  
NESTs had substantial experience, although when they first arrived in their adoptive country,  
they had little experience. Some NESTs told us they had even mentored LETs; one described

how he had been supported on arrival by a LET some years previously and had recently provided mentoring for a LET who was in her first teaching job. This is a far more reciprocal state of affairs than is usually reported.

## **Conclusion**

This article offers an original discussion of the disconnection between the discussions of native speakerism and the concomitant largely critical accounts of NESTs in the literature and the reported experiences of NESTs in the classroom. It suggests that the literature does not currently represent the range of experiences and realities of these teachers and that criticisms of NESTs, therefore, are not always reasonable. Indeed, the discussion has shown that NESTs' accounts of their experiences and practices contradict in some respects the negative connotations that the label NEST usually conveys. NESTs in this project for the most part:

- Respect LETs and recognise them as rightly in control in their classrooms
- Are at least to some extent bilingual
- Can be both experienced and qualified
- Are sensitive to local educational norms and work hard to work effectively within them.

Whilst our sample size is small and unrepresentative and further research is needed, a potentially important finding of the study is the indication that there is likely to be a sizeable group of NESTs around the world who are long term sojourners. While the numbers may be comparatively low when contrasted with the large numbers who join NEST schemes for their first living abroad experience, they are nonetheless substantial, as a visit to any TESOL conference will reveal. However, we would suggest that these participants are an oft ignored

group in the literature (although see Ellis, 2016). They are mostly bilingual, bicultural and consider the country in which they work home. They would, in other contexts, be considered immigrants. They have therefore a sophisticated and multifaceted relationship with their countries of residence which goes beyond their representation as NESTs.

English (2004) suggests that teachers such as these:

Are not the colonizers of the earlier time, nor are they totally disconnected from the white Western world from which most of them originated. (p.225)

They are rather part of the movement of people which characterises globalisation. To date this group has not been fully explored in the literature yet they could provide a unique lens through which to reconsider the tenets of native-speakerism in an increasingly diversified world. The focus on these teachers in this article also contributes to current calls to move beyond binary concepts of NESTs and LETs/NNESTs (e.g., Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Houghton, Rivers & Hashimoto, 2018; Rudolph, Selvi & Yazan, 2015, among others) through the identification of teachers who do not fit into common conceptions of NESTs in terms of either behaviour or identity.

Some NESTs in our study, nonetheless, showed little awareness of concepts such as native speakerism or understood the potentially invidious position that being a native speaker places them in. Worryingly, some still seem to believe that speaking English as their first language means they are better teachers and better role models for students. It behoves the schemes employing NESTs to provide training in countering native-speakerism ideologies and how these are manifest in schools, staffrooms and classrooms. As Morgan & Ramanathan (2005) have argued, there is an imperative to decolonise English language teaching which involves questioning the influence of the West in the teaching industry.

Furthermore, the academic TESOL community also has a role to play in countering native speakerism discourses in the professional domain. Currently, most discussions of

native speakerism take place in high level journals such as *TESOL Quarterly* and *Applied Linguistics*, journals it would be rare for NESTs (and indeed many teachers) to read, because of issues such as inaccessibility (Sato & Loewen, 2019). Academics and teachers walk parallel lines, with generally few connections between them. It is our view that scholars could work harder to disseminate theoretical understandings and related concepts of native speakerism to those they affect, especially when these views are locally consequential. NESTs, particularly those who regard teaching overseas a career choice, are well-placed to provide empirical evidence of the complexities of working as NESTs and to provide local responses to theoretical concerns. Currently, the disconnection means that neither group benefits from the insights of the other.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers whose detailed comments greatly improved the article. We would also like to thank all the LETs and NESTs who took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences with us.

Fiona Copland (Professor of TESOL) is the Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling, Scotland. She has taught in Nigeria, Hong Kong, Japan and UK. Her research interests are in linguistic ethnography, teacher education and primary school languages, supervising doctoral students in these areas.

Sue Garton is Reader in English Language (TESOL) at Aston University. She has over 25 years' experience in teaching English and English language teacher education, working with teachers from all over the world. Her research interests are in language policy and planning and language teacher education, especially at primary level.

Steve Mann (Associate Professor) currently works at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick. He has experience in Hong Kong, Japan and Europe in both English language teaching and teacher development. Steve supervises a research group of PhD students who are investigating teachers' education and development.

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Table 1: Details of NEST interview participants

	<b>M/ F</b>	<b>Country of work</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Qualificatio ns</b>	<b>Experience as NEST in host country</b>	<b>NESTs' L2</b>	<b>Face to Face or Skype ?</b>
1	M	Japan	UK	CELTA; MA TESOL related	Over 10 years	Proficient	F
2	F	Japan	UK	CELTA; DELTA	Over 10 years	Proficient	F
3	F	Japan	USA	CELTA	5 years	Intermediate	F
4	F	Japan	Japan	MSc TESOL related	Over 2 years	Expert	F
5	F	Korea	Canada	1year Canadian Teaching License	4 years	Intermediate	F
6	F	Korea	USA	100 hour TEFL Certificate	Less than 1 year	Elementary	F

7	M	Korea	UK	MSc TESOL related	6 years	Intermediate	S
8	M	Korea	UK	CELTA	4 years	Not known	S
9	M	Korea	USA	100 hour TEFL certificate	8 years	Expert	S
10	F	Korea	USA	100 hour TEFL certificate	1.4 years	Elementary	F
11	M	Korea	UK	100 hour TEFL certificate	4 years	Elementary	S
12	M	Taiwan	USA	None	12 months	Proficient	F
13	M	Taiwan	USA	None	Less than 1 year	Proficient	F
14	F	Taiwan	USA	None	Less than 1 year	Proficient	F
15	F	Hong Kong	UK	1 year UK teaching license	4 years	Intermediate	F
16	M	Brunei	Australia	1 year Australia teaching	Over 5 years	Not known	F



				license, MA, PhD TESOL related			
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CELTA = Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults

DELTA = Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults

