‘Non-native English-speaking teachers’ (NNESTs) have tended to be conceptualized within ELT along the same lines as NNS in general. The second language acquisition literature traditionally ‘elevates an idealized “native” speaker above a stereotypicalized “nonnative”, while viewing the latter as a defective communicator, limited by an underdeveloped communicative competence’ (Firth and Wagner 1997: 285). The resulting (in)competence dichotomy positions the NNS/NNEST as a deficient or less-than-native speaker (cf. ‘near-native’, Valdes 1998). In an attempt to solve this problem, a number of alternative terms have been suggested, for example ‘proficient user’ (Paikeday 1985), ‘language expert’ (Rampton 1990), ‘English-using speech fellowship’ (Kachru 1992), and ‘multicompetent speaker’ (Cook 1999). However, the field is still a long way from reaching a consensus about whether to adopt any of these labels.

Debate about this issue is particularly important in the realm of teaching and learning English as an International Language (Jenkins 2000; McKay 2002). In this context, NNS are estimated to outnumber their ‘NS’ counterparts by three to one (Crystal 2003), the ownership of English is shared by all its speakers, regardless of their ‘nativeness’ (Widdowson 1994), and 80 per cent of English language teachers worldwide are thought to be NNESTs (Canagarajah 2005). Nevertheless, NNESTs are often accorded lower professional status than ‘native English-speaking teachers’ (NESTs) (Mahboob 2010). It is widely accepted that the presence of ‘native speakerism’ (Holliday 2005) of this kind in the English language teaching profession leads to ‘unprofessional favouritism in institutions, publishing houses, and government agencies’ (Medgyes 2001: 433), frequently also resulting in unfair employment discrimination (Selvi 2010).

Phillipson (1992: 185) refers to such unethical treatment of qualified NNESTs as a result of the ‘native speaker fallacy’: a prevalent assumption that ‘the ideal teacher of English is a NS’ (ibid.). Using the NS as a benchmark for teaching employment in this way can cause NNESTs to suffer from the ‘I-am-not-a-native-speaker’ (Suarez 2000) or ‘impostor’ syndrome (Bernat 2009), leading to negative consequences for their teacher persona, self-esteem, and thus their in-class performance as well. Consequently, the global ELT enterprise has been criticized for positioning the NS as the ideal English teacher and thereby creating a false dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs (Moussu and Llurda 2008). The need to go beyond the NS as a benchmark in English language learning and teaching...
has therefore been widely argued for in the field (Braine 1999, 2010 Mahboob op.cit.).

Subscribing to the dominant ‘either/or discourse’ (i.e. NEST or NNEST) in this area has also been seen as problematic because it attempts to establish a direct causal relationship between language proficiency and pedagogical practices (Braine op.cit.). Such discriminatory attitudes have led the US TESOL organization to adopt two ‘position statements’ (TESOL 1992, 2006) opposing such discriminatory practices. As a result of such initiatives, the ELT field is now moving towards a more encompassing ‘both/and discourse’ (i.e. NEST and NNEST) that embraces the strengths and limitations of both teacher populations in various teaching settings (Matsuda and Matsuda 2001). This reconceptualization enables cooperation and collaboration that can foster more educationally, contextually, and socially appropriate English language learning opportunities (Mahboob op.cit.). As a result, on a micro level, learners of English as an international language can gain access to a wider sociolinguistic and intercultural repertoire (McKay op.cit.). On a macro level, it lends further support to the establishment of a professional milieu that ‘welcome[s] ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity’ (Selvi 2009: 51).

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