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Welcome to the third issue of the Journal of English as an International Language. This issue deals with different aspects of the topic of English as an international language and presents many important findings and suggestions to our readers. The first article is presented by Mohammad Reza Ghorbani. 'To find out what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers', Ghorbani asked '28 students who were studying in the Iranian school in Kuala Lumpur to answer the questions related to the differences between AE and BE in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling and then conducted a one-on-one interview with 10 purposively selected students.' Ghorbani points out that 'the findings of this study shows that a mixture of AE and BE is taught and learnt in the Iranian context.' Finally he concludes that 'while separating AE from BE in the Iranian situation is very difficult, teaching a reasonable mixture of them (Ameritish English) which holds intelligibility seems more desirable than a common core which lacks some features of pronunciation, syntax, and morphology.'

The second paper by Angela Loo Siang Yen 'focuses on whether the lower variety of Singapore English (Singlish) is intelligible to native speakers of English. The research questions Loo Siang Yen focus on

are 'whether there is a difference in means between that of intelligibility scores of a more comprehensible utterance such as " You go there ask" versus a virtually undecipherable one (lower variety of Singapore English) such as "Wait got no more then you know" and whether a native speaker's perception of intelligibility corresponds with his/her actual intelligibility score.' The paper concludes that 'one's perception of intelligibility might not necessarily correlate with one's accuracy in interpreting utterances.'

The third article presented by Gerry Lassche shows how student centeredness can be 'problematic in a NE Asian context', and makes 'some specific suggestions for implementing more student-centered approaches in a more culturally-sensitive way throughout.' While Lassche, in his article, 'values the merits of critical thinking and discussion', he does not 'support an uncritical and unequivocal application of student centered methodology that does not first adequately consider the extent or the timing to the local context.'

The fourth article by Ian Clark **'**seeks to reach beyond explanations regularly cited for the relatively poor performance of Japanese students on English tests required for entrance to anglophone universities.' The paper focuses on 'the notion that it is Japanese culture itself that prevents the creation of circumstances conducive to effective language acquisition' and discusses 'how the daily social and cultural practices in which Japanese students participate frustrate collaborative learning relationships in the L2 classroom.'

In her article, ‘Native Speaking English Teachers in Japan: From the Perspective of an Insider’, Nicola Galloway ‘examines the changing role of NESTs in English Language Teaching (ELT) over the last few decades. Through focus group studies at a Japanese university that employs 51 NESTs, it is concluded that qualified and experienced NESTs should be ‘Proud to be a NEST’, and it is suggested that the native/non-native distinction is less important than the expert/non-expert distinction. Indeed, while the myth of the native speaker may be dead, the concept of the native speaker “Expert Teacher” has perhaps been born.’

The sixth article by Hatim AL Qadi presents ‘practical strategies to show how content area instructors can integrate language and content to help LEP students succeed in their content area classes. From the content perspective this is referred to as education through construction, rather than instruction, and from the language view, using languages to learn and learning to use languages’ Quadi suggests ‘effective instruction when dealing with students using English as a medium of instruction should aim to facilitate mastery of academic content and promote development of the second language.’

Title
Ameritish English in EFL Contexts

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Biodata

Mohammad Reza Ghorbani is TESL Ph.D. Candidate at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). His current research interests cover language teaching, testing, and evaluation. His recent publications include a book (2005) titled Japanese educational system and another book (2001) Class action (Translation from English into Persian), both published in Iran, and a paper titled All that glitters is not gold: Curriculum alignment and improving students' test scores published in the Iranian Journal of Language Studies (IJLS), Vol. 2(1), 2008 (pp. 19-40).

Abstract
To find out what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers, 28 students who were studying in the Iranian school in Kuala Lumpur were asked to answer the questions related to the differences between AE and BE in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling. Then, the

researcher conducted a one-on-one interview with 10 purposively selected students. The results revealed that a mixture of AE and BE was taught and learnt in the Iranian schools. The BE words and grammatical sentences outnumbered those of the AE ones. However, the AE pronunciation and spelling outnumbered the BE ones. Most of the interviewed students reported that they faced problems due to the differences in their previous and new teachers' pronunciations. Bearing in mind that it is almost impossible for EFL learners to keep the two varieties separated, Ameritish English seems to be inevitable.

Key words: American English, British English, and International Language

1. Introduction

Nowadays English is considered as a window to the world and a key to access knowledge and power. This study was an attempt to examine one of the English teaching and testing issues with particular reference to the situation of Iran. The problem is that some teachers prefer to teach British English (BE), while others prefer to teach American English (AE) just for their personal tendencies. Teachers usually learn a mixture of the two original standard varieties in teacher training colleges and universities but they are not told which one to use or teach in the classroom. Consequently, different teachers teach one or both of the two varieties. From time to time English teachers are required to change schools. The first problem they face is to convince their new students that although their pronunciation is different from the previous teacher, it is acceptable and correct. This situation has led to students' lack of confidence in their teachers'

knowledge. Students learn an amalgamation of American and British English called "Ameritish English" in this study.

1.1. Objectives and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and find answers to the following questions.

- What kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers?
- To what extent can Iranian senior high school and pre-university students distinguish the difference between AE and BE in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling?
- What kind of language problems do students face when they have a new English teacher with a different English accent?

By answering the questions related to the above-mentioned objectives and discussing the implications of the findings, this study provides insight not only to Iranian English teachers but also to any EFL teacher around the world.

1.2. Research Context

Education in Iran is generally free of charge although there are some private schools, institutes and universities that are permitted to charge tuition fees. On the whole, the Iranian educational system consists of the following categories:

- Five year primary school from the age of six (compulsory education),
- Three year junior high school from the age of 11 (compulsory education),
- Three year senior high school from the age of 14,
- One year pre-university education from the age of 17 to 18, and
- University which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Medical Health (MMH) and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT).

Third grade junior high school students have to pass an examination at the provincial level in order to enter senior high schools. Third grade senior high school students have to pass an examination at the provincial or national level in order to enter the pre-university centers. Followed by pre-university education is four to seven-years of university. The last level is graduate schools, which consists of a master and doctoral program.

The Ministry of Education (ME) is responsible for formulating education policy, as well as for overseeing the operations of all public and private schools, MSRT is responsible for non-medical universities, and MMH is responsible for medical universities. Schools, some teacher training colleges and technical institutes are under the supervision of the ME which employs the highest number of civil servants. Two levels of the school structure and English

education in Iran which are more relevant to this study are explained below.

1.2.1. Senior High School Level

This level covers grade nine to grade 11, from age 14 to 17. It is divided into two main branches: academic and technical-vocational. The academic branch is divided into three mainstreams: literature and culture, mathematics and physics, and experimental sciences. The technical-vocational branch is also divided into three mainstreams: technical education, vocational education, and agriculture. Its responsibility is to train technicians for the labor market. Third grade senior high school students have to pass an examination at the provincial or national level in order to enter the pre-university centers.

1.2.2. Pre-university Education

Pre-university education includes a one-year program for 17 to 18 year old students who have to pass different courses before entering universities. At the end of this one-year pre-university course, students obtain a pre-university certificate which qualifies them to sit for the highly competitive nation-wide UEE. Admission to higher education institutions is extremely tough and thus only the most talented and studious students who perform well on the UEE can gain a place at university.

1.2.3. English Education in Iran

In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language and is practiced within a context-restricted environment, in which the textbook and

classroom teacher play the main role. The difference between English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) is that in an ESL context, English is taught as a partial or general medium of instruction for other subjects, while in an EFL context, instruction in other subjects is not usually in English (Prator, 1991).

Previously, English education in Iran formally started from second grade in junior high schools, but now it begins from the first grade. All schools at different levels follow the curriculum standards. The ME compiles, develops and publishes textbooks and teaching materials for nationwide public and private high schools.

1.2.4. Iranian Schools Abroad

The Iranian schools around the world have been established by the Islamic Republic of Iran so that the Iranian children living abroad will be encouraged to follow their studies at Iranian schools. These schools are usually less populated than the schools inside the country. Although the teaching and learning situation is different from one country to another, the Iranian educational system, rules, standards and textbooks are prescribed by the Ministry of education for Iranian high schools abroad, too. The Ministry of Education sends specialized and efficient education manpower to these schools.

2. Review of Related Literature

English as a global language has changed to suit the needs of specific contexts (Crystal, 1997). Many varieties of English have spread all over the world. International English as a lingua franca seems to be a foreign language which cannot fit in to AE or BE. That is why, as

pointed out by Jenkins (1996), native-like competencies are being replaced by international intelligibility. The term “standard English” in an EFL context like Iran doesn’t make sense.

The function of English as an international language is to communicate with people from various nations. On the one hand, teaching and sticking to only one of the prestigious standard varieties (AE or BE) seems to be too difficult because both teachers and students are exposed to both varieties through different mass media. On the other hand, teaching and learning a mixture of the existing English varieties used in countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. as an international language is neither feasible nor reasonable. According to Grzega (2005), AE and BE are the two original standard varieties from which all other native varieties of English descend. Hence, supporting a common standard based on the two main varieties that can be internationally intelligible seems to be inevitable.

As pointed out by Yamaguchi (2002), two approaches are found in the current arguments regarding devising a common standard. The first approach is to teach a prestigious standard (e.g. AE or BE). The second approach is to set up a common core which is internationally intelligible (Jenkins, 1999). Teaching standard AE or BE may be a feasible way to promote international communication but it is not always realistic. Firstly, the existence of regional varieties of the English language even in Britain implies that Standard English is a vague term. According to Norrish (1997), the appropriacy of either of them depends on the context in which it is used and the students to

whom it is taught. Secondly, as argued by Ellis' (1991), the acquisition of socially appropriate English is a gradual process even in an ESL context and cannot fully develop in an EFL context. A lot of exposure is needed to acquire and develop linguistic competence. It is particularly difficult to acquire sociolinguistic competence which is a key element in using the language appropriately. In Iran, there is hardly any opportunity for students to communicate with native or non-native speakers of English. Which standard should be used and taught has always been a controversial issue in the Iranian context.

Acquiring native-like English in an EFL context like Iran is not possible and cannot be the goal for language instruction. As emphasized by Yamaguchi (2002), not only educationally but also linguistically it is not realistic to make learners conform to a native variety beyond their needs. Adopting and keeping in touch with a prestigious Standard English is almost impossible because of overwhelming non-native input (Kachru, 1991). Given the fact that very few EFL learners develop a native-like command of English, setting up a common core is a desirable approach (Yamaguchi, 2002; Jenkins 1999, 1998, 1996).

According to Yamaguchi (2002), some researchers tried to establish a kind of simplified, neutral, universal English in the 1970s which would be intelligible and acceptable to both native and non-native speakers. For example, Gimson (1978) provided a pronunciation model "rudimentary international pronunciation" in which the phonemic inventory (number of consonant and vowel sounds) of English had been reduced. By providing "Nuclear English"", Quirk

(1981) also tried to reduce syntax and morphology. Neither of these approaches takes account of the fact that language development is an unplanned, natural, and bottom-up process. Imposing a model in a top-down manner is not realistic (Jenkins, 1998). There are other factors which implicitly exert an undeniable influence on the decisions regarding which variety to be used. For example, due to the prevailing American influence through science and technology, there is a worldwide tendency to teach and learn AE, implying that American English will inevitably dominate other varieties in the future. This will happen not due to linguistic preferences but due to scientific, political, economical, and technological dominance.

Although Yamaguchi (2002) suggests some kind of framework for the future in which learners will use a range of varieties such as International English, Standard English, Regional English, and Internet English (the English variety used on the Internet) depending on the context, such an approach doesn't seem to work in an EFL context like Iran.

3. Method

The sequential explanatory mixed method design was used in this study. A mixed method design is "a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and linking both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a multiphase series of studies"(Creswell, 2005, p. 53). He asserts that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data will lead to a better understanding of the research problem. Neither of the single approaches would seem to be sufficient to answer the research questions of this study because they are mutually

dependent (Brannen, 1992). According to Creswell (2005, p. 515), in this design the researcher:

- Places a priority on quantitative data collection and analysis.
- Collects quantitative data first in the sequence.
- Uses the qualitative data to refine the results from the quantitative data.

> The rational for this approach is that the quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem; more analysis, specifically through qualitative data collection, is needed to refine, extend, or explain the general picture (ibid, p. 515).

While quantitative data gave the researcher an overall understanding about the English variety used and taught in Iranian schools, one-on-one interviews made thorough and in-depth information available to shed more light on the interpretation of the data collected by the quantitative method.

3.1. Sampling

To explore what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian EFL context, all of the 28 senior high school and pre-university students (grades 10, 11, and 12) who were studying in the Iranian school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2008 were asked to answer the questions related to the differences between AE and BE in terms of

vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling. Then, the researcher conducted a one-on-one interview with 10 purposively selected students from the same grades and in the same school. They were willing to discuss the topic. Although only 28 students were used in this study, they were rather a good representative sample because they were from different parts of Iran.

3.2. Instruments and Procedures

Although Americans and the British speak the same language and can communicate and understand one another quite well, there are some differences between these two varieties of English in terms of their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spelling. To find out what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers, four instruments were developed as explained below.

The first factor which separates Americans from the British is the vocabulary. They even use the same words with totally different denotations which lead to misunderstandings, especially to EFL learners. The following items were used to check the students' vocabulary knowledge of the two main varieties of the English language. They were asked to underline the word which they thought was more appropriate.

1. She bought a can / tin of beer.
2. He bought some candy / sweets.
3. She took her clothes from the closet / wardrobe.
4. In October it is fall / autumn.

5. A pencil and a(n) eraser / rubber are necessary tools.
6. Fill up the tank with gas / petrol.
7. It was all trash / rubbish.
8. What grade / class are you in?
9. The postman delivered a package / parcel.
10. They had three weeks vacation / holiday.

Adapted from British words vs. American words
http://hjem.get2net.dk/niels_quist/bruswor.htm

The second factor which separates the two varieties is the pronunciation. For example, unlike the British, most Americans pronounce "**r**" in last syllables. The word stress in words such as advertisement and laboratory is also different in the two varieties. The following words were used to check the students' pronunciation knowledge of AE and BE. They were asked just to pronounce the words.

1. Leisure 2. Advertisement 3. Schedule 4. Laboratory 5. Tomato
6. Student 7. Basket 8. Water 9. Privacy
10. Toward

The third important factor in comparing both varieties is the different rules of grammar. For example, the simple past tense is used in AE in situations where the present perfect tense is often used in BE. The following pairs of sentences were used to check the students'

grammar knowledge of AE and BE. They were asked to underline the sentence which they thought was grammatically correct.

1. I'll try and visit you on the weekend. I'll try to visit you at the weekend.
2. Please write me when you arrive. Please write to me when you arrive.
3. If you make a mistake, you'll just have to do it over. If you make a mistake, you'll just have to do it again.
4. He was born 3/27/1981. He was born on 27/3/1981.
5. The football team won two to nothing (2-0). The football team won two-nil (2-0).
6. The secretary said, "Mr. Clinton will see you soon." The secretary said: "Mr Clinton will see you soon."
7. The jury has not yet reached its decision. The jury have not yet reached their decision.
8. Go get your book. Go and fetch your book.
9. He dove into the water. He dived into the water.
10. You must come visit me real soon. You must come and visit me really soon.

Adapted from http://osdir.com/ml/education.english.engfor/2006-10/msg00051.html

The forth separating factor is the spelling differences such as check/cheque and center/centre which seem to be rather simplified in AE. The following pairs of words were used to check the students' spelling knowledge of AE and BE. They were asked to underline the word which they thought was orthographically correct.

1. Airplane - aeroplane 2. Check - cheque 3. Theater – theatre 4. Defense - defence 5. Woolen - woollen 6. Tire – tyre 7. Pajamas - pyjamas
8. Color – colour 9. Program - programme
10. Realize - realise

The data collected from the above-mentioned procedure answered the first question in this study, that is, what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers? Then, the students were told that there were no wrong answers indeed. So, in the second phase of the study, they were asked to distinguish between AE and BE. As to the pronunciation, the researcher pronounced the words both with an American accent and a British accent. The subject were asked to write AE or BE for the second pronunciation under each word. The data collected in the second phase were supposed to answer the following question.

To what extent can Iranian senior high school and pre-university students distinguish the difference between AE and BE in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling?

In the third phase of the study, the data collected from the one-on-one interviews with 10 purposively selected students answered the third question, that is, what kind of language problems do students face when they have a new English teacher with a different English accent? Since students' exposure to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and spelling is through the prescribed textbooks which are

provided by the Ministry of Education (ME) to be taught in all Iranian schools, the interview question focused only on the problems that students face due to the teachers' different accents. The interviews were conducted in Persian so that students can express themselves very well. They were tape-recorded and translated into English by the researcher.

4. Results

The results of this study are presented based on the three phases used in data collection. Tables 1-7 show the results of the first research question, that is, what kind of English is taught and learnt in the Iranian senior high schools and pre-university centers? Each table shows students' knowledge of AE and BE in terms of their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling.

Table 1: AE words selected by 28 students

AE Words	**Frequency**	**Percent**
can	16	57.14
candy	13	46.42
closet	12	42.85
fall	10	35.71
eraser	15	53.57
gas	12	42.85
trash	6	21.42
grade	21	75
package	11	39.28

vacation	7	25
Total	**Average**	**Average**
10	12.3	43.92

Table 2: BE words selected by 28 students

BE Words	**Frequency**	**Percent**
tin	12	42.85
sweets	15	53.57
wardrobe	16	57.14
autumn	18	64.28
rubber	13	46.42
petrol	16	57.14
rubbish	22	78.57
class	7	25
parcel	17	60.71
holiday	21	75
Total	**Average**	**Average**
10	15.7	56.08

As indicated in tables 1 and 2, the subjects selected more words from BE than AE (56.08% versus 43.92%). This result implies that students have been more exposed to words from BE than AE.

Table 3: List of words pronounced by 28 students

Words	AE Pronunciation Frequency	Percent	BE Pronunciation Frequency	Percent
leisure	18	64.28	10	35.71
advertisement	15	53.57	13	46.42
schedule	16	57.14	12	42.85
laboratory	14	50	14	50
tomato	15	53.57	13	46.42
student	7	25	21	75
basket	19	67.85	9	32.14
water	17	60.71	11	39.28
privacy	16	57.14	12	42.85
toward	7	25	21	75
Total	**Average**	**Average**	**Average**	**Average**
10	14.4	51.44	13.6	48.56

As delineated in table 3, the subjects who pronounce words with an American accent outnumbered those who pronounced them with a British accent (51.44% versus 48.56%). This result suggests that students have been more exposed to the pronunciation of AE than BE.

Table 4: AE sentences selected by 28 students

AE Sentences	Frequency	Percent
I'll try and visit you on the weekend.	12	42.85
Please write me when you arrive.	10	35.71
If you make a mistake, you'll just have to do it over.	8	28.57
He was born 3/27/1981.	6	21.42
The football team won two to nothing (2-0).	19	67.85
The secretary said, "Mr. Clinton will see you soon."	21	75
The jury has not yet reached its decision.	22	78.57
Go get your book.	16	57.14
He dove into the water.	13	46.42
You must come visit me real soon.	8	28.57
Total	**Average**	**Average**
10	13.5	48.21

Table 5: BE sentences selected by 28 students

BE Sentences	**Frequency**	**Percent**
I'll try to visit you at the weekend.	16	57.14
Please write to me when you arrive.	18	64.28
If you make a mistake, you'll just have to do it again.	20	71.42
He was born on 27/3/1981.	22	78.57
The football team won two-nil (2-0).	9	32.14
The secretary said: "Mr Clinton will see you soon."	7	25
The jury have not yet reached their decision.	6	21.42
Go and fetch your book.	12	42.85
He dived into the water.	15	53.57
You must come and visit me really soon.	20	71.42
Total	**Average.**	**Average**
10	14.5	51.79

As indicated in tables 4 and 5, the subjects selected more sentences from BE than AE (51.79% versus 48.21%). This result implies that students have been more exposed to grammatical structures from BE than AE.

Table 6: AE spelling selected by 28 students

AE Words	Frequency	Percent
Airplane	16	57.14
Check	19	67.85
Theater	20	71.42
Defense	14	50
Woolen	13	46.42
Tire	12	42.85
Pajamas	11	39.28
Color	7	25
Program	18	64.28
Realize	17	60.71
Total	**Average**	**Average**
10	14.7	52.49

Table 7: BE spelling selected by 28 students

BE Words	Frequency	Percent
aeroplane	12	42.85
cheque	9	32.14
theatre	8	28.57
defence	14	50
woollen	15	53.57
tyre	16	57.14
pyjamas	17	60.71
colour	21	75
programme	10	35.71
realise	11	39.28
Total	**Average**	**Average**
10	13.3	47.51

As delineated in tables 6 and 7, the subjects who selected words with an American spelling outnumbered those who selected words with a British spelling (52.49% versus 47.51%). This result suggests that students have been more exposed to the pronunciation of AE than BE.

In the second phase of the study, the subjects were asked to distinguish between AE and BE. As to the pronunciation, the researcher pronounced the words both with an American accent and a British accent. The subject were asked to write AE or BE for the second pronunciation under each word. The data collected in this phase were supposed to answer the following question.

To what extent can Iranian senior high school and pre-university students distinguish the difference between AE and BE in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling?

During the data collection in the second phase, the subjects were found to be unwilling to go on. They said that they were just answering by chance because they couldn't distinguish the difference between the two varieties at all. This was also confirmed by the interviewed students in the third phase of the study. So, the incomplete result of the second phase of this study wasn't valid and reliable to be reported.

In the third phase of the study, the data collected from the one-on-one interviews with 10 purposively selected students answered the third question, that is, what kind of language problems do students face when they have a new English teacher with a different English accent? After transcribing the interviews and translating them into English, the following themes (table 8) were found to be the most frequent ones.

Table 8: The most frequent themes based on the 10 interviewed students' remarks

Problem	Frequency
Uncertainty	8
Anxiety about the marks	5
Adaptation	3
No serious problems	3

As indicated in table 8, most of the interviewed students reported that they had a feeling of uncertainty when they had a new teacher. For example, one of them (R) said:

> We know that teachers pronounce some words differently but we don’t know whose pronunciation is more reliable. Sometimes we are told that a word may have two different pronunciations. But in some cases if we keep on pronouncing the words as we learned from the previous teacher, the new teacher will not accept it. Hence, such a situation has led to our uncertainty which in turn affects our motivation negatively.

Five interviewed students said that they were worried about their marks. The following quotation from one of them (A) reflects his view in this regard:

> New teachers usually have somewhat different pronunciations which make us worried about our marks. It is difficult for us to adapt our pronunciation. We don’t mind to change it but we cannot ignore our anxiety about the marks.

Furthermore, three students expressed that they would try to adapt themselves to the new conditions. One of them (F) said:

> Maybe our teachers are right but we can’t distinguish whether the previous teacher, the new teacher, or both are teaching us the correct pronunciation. Anyway, we

> need to adapt ourselves and follow the new teacher' pronunciation.

Finally, three interviewed students reported that they faced no serious problems. The following quotation from one of them (M) shows his view:

> I have had five English teachers at school so far. Since they were aware of the problem, they weren't so strict about our pronunciations. So I don't think it is a serious problem.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that a mixture of AE and BE is taught and learnt in the Iranian context. The subjects who selected words and grammatical sentences from BE outnumbered those who selected them from the AE. However, the subjects who pronounced words with an American accent and selected words with an American spelling outnumbered those who pronounced words with a British accent and selected words with a British spelling. Most of the interviewed students reported that they faced some problems due to the differences in their previous and new teachers' pronunciations.

While separating AE from BE in the Iranian situation is very difficult, teaching a reasonable mixture of them (Ameritish English) which holds intelligibility seems more desirable than a common core which lacks some features of pronunciation, syntax, and morphology. If teachers are trained to make their students aware of the differences

between AE and BE where necessary, they can reduce their anxiety and sensitivity.

Every EFL context has its unique features. If each context develops its own English variety, there will be too many local varieties of English in the future. Nowadays English is more needed for international communications rather than local purposes. Therefore, internationally recognized varieties of English (AE and BE) would be appropriate options to be used and taught at the universal level. Since there are many varieties of AE and BE, the most dominant varieties which are reflected in the mass media such as VOA and BBC are more desirable to be taught to EFL learners.

What is currently taught in the Iranian context is an embodiment of Ameritish English which, in itself, is not a problem. Bearing in mind that it is almost impossible for EFL learners to keep the two varieties separated, Ameritish English seems to be inevitable. If teachers are trained to be familiar with the pronunciation discrepancies of AE and BR so that they can be consistent in teaching and recognizing the pronunciation of both varieties, Ameritish English can be considered not only as a good choice for the Iranian EFL context but also as a logical option to be considered for other EFL contexts.

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Title
Intelligibility in Singapore: Survey and Discussion

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Abstract

This paper focuses on whether the lower variety of Singapore English (Singlish) is intelligible to native speakers of English. One research question was whether there would be a difference in means between that of intelligibility scores of a more comprehensible utterance such as “You go there ask” versus a virtually undecipherable one (lower variety of Singapore English) such as “Wait got no more then you know”. Another research question was whether a native speaker’s perception of intelligibility corresponds with his/her actual intelligibility score. The researcher approached foreigners and

collated their views in a questionnaire form to ascertain if foreigners generally understood informal Singapore English. Results are as follows 1. The more Singlish-like elements were found in the utterance, the lower the intelligibility score; and 2. The native speakers scored low on intelligibility even when they had a reasonably high perception of their own comprehension ability. In this research paper, the conclusion is one's perception of intelligibility might not necessarily correlate with one's accuracy in interpreting utterances.

Keywords: intelligibility, sociolinguistics, variety, mutual, communication, attitude.

1. Introduction

Intelligibility refers to the understanding of a speaker's message at a particular time in a particular situation. It ranges from absolute indecipherability to complete comprehensibility of a message. Being intelligible is a function of both linguistic and social aspects of competence. At the linguistic level, intelligibility may be affected by linguistic elements such as phonology, lexis or grammar. At the social level, intelligibility varies according to the context of situation, within which arises the following questions: 1. To whom are we required to be intelligible? 2. How much does one person want to understand another? In the case of the broad research questions (1) and (2), we are often stumped with the question of whether it is really cost-effective to be intelligible to every person we meet. Are we necessarily always intelligible to everyone? For instance, if we are lecturers, do we make ourselves necessarily more intelligible to

students as a requisite part of our profession? Do we put in this same amount of effort when we speak to waitresses or shop assistants, i.e. in the contexts where we are not professionally bound to be intelligible? Intelligibility undoubtedly requires effort, for it is much easier to construct sentences and words the way we think others understand them. It is much harder for us to realize, and perhaps acknowledge to ourselves, that our utterances are not always intelligible to others. These are reasons why the author is conducting a small scale study to investigate if one's perception of intelligibility relates positively to one's comprehension scores, as detailed in the following sections of the paper.

Historically, New Varieties of English (NVEs) have been attacked from the point of view of intelligibility. One underlying assumption of speakers of English (or any other language) is that it is best to conform to the language norm of the 'native' users of that language. A second assumption has been that the more 'native like' and error free an utterance is, the less likely it is to hinder communicative efficiency.

The issue of intelligibility arises in New Varieties of English (NVEs) because of the two above assumptions in the previous paragraph. Speakers of NVEs are seen as grappling with a 'standard' variety of English. What these speakers produce are deemed to be a hodgepodge of errors. However, Kandiah (1977, MS) argued that NVEs are not collections of errors. Rather, they are entities in their own right, having their own structures and pools of lexical items. Their utterances are not idiosyncratic (and therefore unintelligible) but rather, conform, to the inherent structure of that NVE. Intelligibility of NVEs has been seen by some people as a non

issue. They are inclined to do so because existence of intelligibility assumes that there is one prestigious variety that we subscribe to, and the closer the NVEs sound or resemble this variety, the more "intelligible" we sound. Is this assumption politically correct? The minute we comment on whether an utterance is intelligible, we ask what standard we are measuring it against. More discussion will be provided on this in relation to Wang's (1987) and Smith's (1985) research in the later part of this paper.

Let us look at a broader view of 'intelligibility'. In the article *International Intelligibility of English* , Smith and Nelson (1985) attempt to clarify the confusion surrounding the terms 'intelligibility', 'comprehensibility' and 'interpretability'. The words are assigned the following separate and more specific meanings:

(1) *intelligibility*: word/utterance recognition
(2) *comprehensibility*: word/utterance meaning (locutionary force)
(3) *interpretability*: meaning behind word/utterance (illocutionary force) (Smith and Nelson, 1985: 334)

As much of the work done on intelligibility is experimental in nature, the project begins with definitions and issues on the subject of intelligibility. The two research questions I am hoping to answer in this paper are:

1. Should there be a difference in intelligibility scores as utterances become more Singlish?
2. Do native speakers may overestimate their own ability for interpreting intelligibility?

Following the discussion on research studies pertaining to the subject, the procedure of collecting data is described. Finally, results and discussion as well as the conclusions based on the study would be presented.

2. Literature Review

Smith (1988: 274) pointed out that these three terms could be thought of as degrees of understanding on a continuum, with intelligibility being the lowest and interpretability being highest (1988: 266). In other words, *recognizing* a word is easier than understanding the *meaning* of the word, which in turn is easier than understanding the intent, purpose or meaning *behind* the word. Smith believes that interpretability is at the core of communication and is more important than mere intelligibility or comprehensibility.

Smith and Nelson (1985: 333) differed from the previous views of intelligibility in the following ways. First, they had not viewed the linguistic diversification of English with concern. They observed that for at least the last 200 years, there had been English speaking people in parts of the world who had not been intelligible to other English speaking people in other parts of the world. It was a natural phenomenon which would continue. They argued that it is unnecessary for every speaker of English to be intelligible to every other speaker of English. The speech/writing in English needs to be intelligible only to those with whom one is likely to communicate in English. Second, they did not view native speakers as the sole judges of what is intelligible in English. They observed that more and more nonnative English speakers are interacting English with other nonnative speakers. In such cases, they needed to decide what is and

is not intelligible. Nelson noted that the notion of what is 'good' or 'standard' English is expanding all the time (1995: 276). He cited Smith's (1988: 280) comment on his study of cross cultural understanding in English, that:

> *'I am pleased to learn that many native and nonnative speakers of English would label most educated speakers of nonnative English as users of Standard English…It seems clear that nonnative users do not have to be indistinguishable from nature speakers in order to judged as using Standard English…I believe that this is one of the very positive results of the cast spread of English across the globe'.*

According to Smith and Nelson (1985), the factors that affect intelligibility were not purely phonological or linguistic. They were of the opinion that the greater the active involvement (not mere exposure) a listener had with an individual or with a variety of English, the greater the likelihood that he/she will find that person or variety intelligible. They also postulated that the greater the familiarity a speaker has with a variety of English, the more likely it is that he/she will be intelligible to members of that speech community. The crucial difference is that they viewed intelligibility not as speaker or listener centred but as interactional between speaker and listener.

Smith (1985) noted that in the recorded history of mankind, there had never been a language to match the present global spread and use of English. With such spread of the language, a frequently voiced concern is the possibility that speakers of different varieties of

English will soon become unintelligible to one another. The issue of intelligibility seems to be one that is faced not only by the institutionalized second language varieties known as the New Varieties of English but also by foreign language varieties such as Brunei English and Spanish English. In the midst of so much concern, it would be helpful to sit back and consider what ‘intelligibility’ means, what the standard of intelligibility is and what affects intelligibility.

Nelson (1982, 1985) observed that in Bansal, 1976, the Indian author deferred completely to the British English model for usage and for pronunciation. Tiffen’s aim was to measure the intelligibility of educated Nigerian speakers of English to two British listeners (Tiffen, 1974: 2). Lim (1982) acknowledged linguistic variation to be inevitable and essential in a living language such as English. Nonetheless, she found that divergence form Standard English (British or American) as manifested in the nonnative variants to be also ‘disquieting’ on two issues: acceptability and intelligibility. The former has a social dimension while the latter is a question of comprehension. Acceptability and comprehension are probably judged from the perspective of the British or American. What would be the factors that affect intelligibility? Tiffen (1974: 2) considered rhythmic stress errors to be the major cause of intelligibility failure. On the contrary, apart from phonological deviations, Bansal (1976: 32) had this suggestion for the improvement of Indian English: *The normal English usage in respect of vocabulary and grammar should be maintained.* If Bansal had his way, educated Indian English would be indistinguishable from what was known as ‘**normal** English’, i.e. British English.

Wang (1987) carried out research on the intelligibility of Malaysian English (ME) based on his dissertation. ME is not unlike Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) in being considered a 'lesser' variety distinguished from the 'standard' variety in the country. In fact, Wang coined the acronym "ESM" (1987) to refer to "English in Singapore and Malaysia". It is noted that there has not been a consensus on the labels that would distinguish the two varieties of English existent in both countries. For instance, one can look at the varieties present in each country as a 'formal' and 'informal' variety, or a 'standard' and 'substandard' variety. The implications of such labels (especially the latter ones) impose upon the 'labeled' variety an unnecessary value judgment and are clearly disagreeable to many speakers of NVEs. Regardless of terminology, it is often unanimous that the language situations in Singapore and Malaysia are similar in some respects, with both countries sharing distinct varieties of English such as inclusion of particles *one* and *what*, which are further explained in the Results and Discussion section. For this reason, it is hoped that Wang's (1987) study would shed some light on the issue of the intelligibility of CSE.

Wang's (1987) research focus was to 1. gauge how intelligible Malaysian University students' English Speech was to British native speakers and 2. to analyze the main factors that contribute to intelligibility problems. The main corpus for measuring intelligibility consisted of oral interviews, although Wang also used the reading of words and sentences, and summaries. The writer approached the problems of intelligibility in two ways: 1. From the point of view of linguistic discourse factors, Wang tackled the question of "What causes intelligibility problems?" on five fronts: the

segmental, supra segmental, syntactic and lexical and discourse levels. It was found that nonlinguistic variables at the level of discourse posed as the greatest barrier to British listeners' intelligibility of ME. There was another important discovery. The British listeners' lack of the background (or the schematic knowledge that Malaysian speakers had) contributed significantly to the problems of intelligibility that they faced. This strongly suggests linguistic errors at the first four levels may affect intelligibility between native and nonnative speakers; however, nonlinguistic factors such as shared sociocultural experiences (at the fifth or discourse level) exert a greater influence on mutual intelligibility.

In Wang's (1987: 39) paper, intelligibility was defined as: *'the understanding or comprehending of utterances by the decoding/encoding process in the context of situation which often involves the listener's responses or reaction'.* Wang aimed to uncover the extent to which the second variety (or 'informal' variety) of ME is intelligible to native speakers of English. The study showed that of all the utterances in the oral interviews, only 37.5 percent caused problems of intelligibility for British listeners. This shows a high degree of intelligibility. However, Wang qualified her findings in the conclusion by noting the "strenuous effort" made by the "very willing and attentive listeners" during the listening sessions. After this brief note, Wang concluded that: '*it is almost without a doubt that ME cannot function as a means of international communication for a wide range of purposes.'* (Wang, 1987: 349).

Wang's conclusion that communication is a process of negotiation suggests that communication and mutual intelligibility

are wrought only through effort. The extolling of a positive attitude as a crucial importance recognizes that mutual intelligibility hinges upon the participants' (hearer and speaker's) attitude more than anything else. This is the position that one takes towards intelligibility. However, we take it a step further in questioning the criterion of intelligibility that is thrust upon 'New' Englishes like CSE and ME in order to reject them a status of respect among the English languages. Indeed, in the United Kingdom itself there are at least three varieties of English (Irish English, Scottish English and British English). Why is the issue of intelligibility not discussed where these varieties are concerned? Is there really perfect mutual intelligibility between these varieties, and even between British English and American English? We know that even amongst the European states and countries, mutual intelligibility is not perfect.

Consequently, when used to evaluate new varieties of English, intelligibility should be perceived as a non issue. The instant it is recognized as an issue, we might fall into the danger of subscribing to the fallacy that there is one standard against which all other Englishes should be judged. The question of intelligibility cannot be answered before we decide whom the language ought to be intelligible to. Smith's (1985) article suggested that the answer to this question should be non native users of the same variety of English (instead of only the native speakers). In some cases, these non native speakers of that particular variety of English could outnumber the native users. The admittance of a standard variety of English would lead necessarily to the view that the other Englishes which do not meet this standard, are constantly striving in vain towards the standard.

The present author was presently motivated to look for a correlation between accuracy and perception of intelligibility. The reason for this is that people may assume they could comprehend the other party. It is much easier to say "Yes, I do understand what "you go take that" means". However, it is the author's belief that comprehension is best checked by (a) a series of matched meanings to the utterance; and (b) a correlation between perception of own comprehension and correct corresponding meanings to answers. I have chosen to take a more interactional approach to the research choosing to conduct a survey of native speakers, instead of using a case-study. It is interactive and authentic due to the fact that the researcher has to personally ask these questions and say the utterance in a Singaporean manner, rather than have participants read the utterances or have it uttered by non-Singapore English speakers. In either of the later situations, the Singaporean flavor to the utterance could be lost. It is hoped that the survey will be a stepping stone to future possible research on the correlation between intelligibility and attitude towards the lower variety of Singapore English.

3. Methodology

The understanding of what intelligibility means in sociolinguistic terms has prompted me to further the research on studies done to measure intelligibility, discussed in the previous section.

The research questions were

(1) Is there an increasing difference in intelligibility scores as utterances become more Chinese-like and therefore more Singlish?

(2) How accurately do native speakers perceive their own ability to interpret the utterances?

These research questions were formulated to achieve the purpose of this study, i.e. to find out the extent to which a new creole-like NNE variety such as Singaporean English affects the intelligibility of people who claim to be native speakers of the English language. The research design is simply based on a survey approach whereby people in Orchard Road are interviewed and asked if they understand three commonly used utterances in Singapore English. Only people who are native speakers of the English were selected for data analysis. Based on the research questions, the null hypotheses are set out as shown below:

First $H_{0\ (\text{null hypothesis})}$ = The intelligibility scores show no difference as the utterances become more colloquial and Singlish (in this case, containing direct one to one Chinese-English translation).

Second H_0 = Perception of native speakers' own intelligibility of Singapore English correlates with intelligibility score and answers.

The above 2 null hypotheses are what I hoped to reject since the research questions are that (a) there should be a difference in intelligibility scores as utterances become more Chinese like (and therefore more Singlish), and (b) native speakers may over or under estimate their own ability for interpreting the utterances.

Survey:

The survey questions can be found in the appendix. The survey was designed such that (1) the participant would have to fill in the duration of their stay in Singapore, up to the day they have done the questionnaire.(2) they were also asked if they were native speakers of the language. In section (3), subjects were asked to read three textual units. Each textual unit is a situational context. The participant was requested to conceptualize himself in each scenario while the researcher (a local Singaporean tertiary instructor educated in English) provided an utterance of Colloquial Singapore English corresponding to the context.

The first two utterances shown below were sentences taken from Tay's book *The Uses, Users and Features of Singapore English.* The three utterances both conformed to the linguistic and contextual dimensions by doing a small pilot study to see if Singaporeans generally agreed that the utterances should occur with the provided context and indeed sound sensible. In fact, we made it possible for people to stop and answer some questions by saying we only had three questions and that it would not take up too much time. These utterances ranged from easy to difficult in terms of comprehensibility that we observed amongst non-Singaporean friends (especially the last one where it is structurally more complex). The three utterances are:

1. 'You go there ask.'
2. 'He no bring come.'
3. 'Why so slow one? Wait got no more then you know.'

The utterances were limited to three as it is unlikely tourists would want to stay around for a long time to hear utterances in Singaporean English which they already need time to understand and process.

Subjects and Method

Thirty native English speakers approached at Orchard Road were invited to be involved in this quasi experiment. The scales used to measure levels of intelligibility were adopted from the one to five point Likert scale (see appendix). One means "makes no sense" and five means "makes complete sense). The intelligibility of the utterances was measured on a scale of one to five.

Native English speakers were approached in the Orchard Road area. The first question asked was if the foreigner primarily spoke English as a mother tongue language. It was endeavored to make each of the three utterances sound as locally flavoured as possible without appearing too contrived. Phonological intonation and paralinguistic cues were kept reasonably constant. The participant was asked if he could make sense of the utterance, by indicating his response to the sensibility of the utterance on a scale of one to five, ranging from 'makes no sense' to 'makes complete sense' respectively. In addition, they were required to indicate if they found Singaporean English difficult to understand in general. Finally, they were invited to comment on whether Singaporeans should improve their standard of English.

4. Results and Discussion

The score of intelligibility for Utterance 1 has a mean intelligibility score of 2.63, compared with 1.82 for Utterance 2 and only 1.46 for Utterance 3. There were at least 2 participants who scored four or five for Utterances 1 and 2. It was noteworthy that the range of intelligibility for Utterance 3 *'Why so slow one? Wait got no more then you know.'* lay between only one to three, and that only one out

of thirty of the participants scored three. Nobody scored four or five on the Likert scale for Utterance 3, which means that no one found that it made a lot of sense, or complete sense.

When asked to rate their ease of understanding of Singapore English, the native speakers of English scored an overall mean of 4.0 on a scale of one to five ranging from 'Very Easy' to 'Very Difficult'.

Table 1: Average Mean Intelligibility Scores

Mean for Utterance 1	Mean for Utterance 2	Mean for Utterance 3	Overall combined mean	Mean for foreigner's perception of own intelligibility
2.63	1.82	1.46	1.96	4.0

Utterance 1: You go there ask.

It is interesting how this utterance scores a much higher mean intelligibility value (2.63), meaning that most participants believe this utterance ranges from Makes little sense (Score = 2) to Somewhat makes sense (Score = 3). The reason for this could be that this sentence just lacks a prepositional "to" while maintaining content lexical items such as "you", "go", "there" and "ask", instead of the full version of "You should go over there to ask", or "Go over there and ask". This utterance is a direct translation from many Singaporeans' mother tongue language the Chinese language

You go there ask. (Ungrammatical in English)

Ni qu nali wen. (Grammatical in Chinese, despite the lack of grammatical items such as "should" "to", or "and")

Utterance 2: He no bring come.

The score for this utterance is a mean intelligibility score of 1.82, which is even lower than the first utterance. It is perhaps even more Singlish/Chinese like than the first utterance because of the fact that the Chinese language accepts "no" before the verb. The same lexical item "no" is also used for "Yes No" questions, whereas in English, one cannot say "he yes bring come" or "he no bring come". However, the less formal variety of Singaporean English does include this version of using "no" before the verb.

He **no** bring come. (Ungrammatical in English)

Ta ***mei you*** *dai lai.* (Grammatical in Chinese, despite the lack of grammatical items such as "should" "to", or "and")

Utterance 3: Why so slow one? Wait got no more then you know.
(Ungrammatical English)

Weishenme neme man de ? ***deng*** *mei**you**le na*

This utterance has the lowest mean intelligibility score of 1.82. Many native speakers of English found this utterance virtually impossible to understand and looked very puzzled. They paused for a long moment clearly trying very hard to decipher the meaning of the utterance. Problems they had included "one" which they did not realize was a *particle expressing frustration* in Singlish (the less formal variety of Singaporean English), and "wait". One of the native speakers correctly pointed out that 2 main verbs such as *wait* and *got* should

not exist side by side. However, it is possible to have “wait” and the possessive “got/have” side b

Why so slow one? ***Wait got*** *no* y side in the Chinese language. *more then you know.*

ni cai zhidao

(grammatical Chinese)

Below are some of the comments pertaining to the utterances:

1) Bad English
2) Ungrammatical
3) Poor English

Asked if Singaporeans should improve their English, most selected ‘No’. They provided the followed collated comments:

(1) Everyone does very well in attempting to speak another language.
(2) The English they speak is unique to their culture.
(3) CSE is clear enough for Americans to understand.
(4) All languages are unique. Why ask someone to learn another person’s way of speech?
(5) Visitors should learn the native language. But if improvement is necessary for the Singaporeans themselves, then yes – they should improve their English.
(6) Both yes and no. English is a language of commerce. Hence, everybody must learn the language common to all.
(7) Every country you go to don’t speak the same way you do.

Twenty three out of thirty participants circled ‘No’ for the question as to whether Singaporeans should improve their English. The seven who circled ‘Yes’ vaguely made some comment about the

pronunciation of CSE being difficult to follow. However, it was often the case that their comments gave themselves away about how they truly felt about CSE. One of them who circled 'No' gave his comment as *'There are so many tourists here; the Singaporeans need to communicate better.'* He evidently felt too shy to provide a direct answer, thinking it might be rude to the Singaporean researcher. One conclusion was that many native speakers of English might have felt the same way, but thought it would be rude of themselves to circle 'Yes' when standing before the Singaporean researcher..

Comments such as 'Poor English' and 'Ungrammatically spoken' supported the fact that the native speakers of English *had* expected the existence of a standard of English, by which other varieties must conform.

5. Conclusions.

The following overall conclusions are drawn from the survey results:

1. All three utterances scored a mean intelligibility value of 2 or below. This translates to ineffective ability to understand the complete meanings of these utterances such as "They no bring come".
2. Native speakers' own perception of their ability to understand Singaporeans' utterances scored a mean value of 4.0 on the Likert scale. This value is 2.5 higher than what they scored for intelligibility of utterances.
3. The first hypothesis H_0 is rejected. The more Chinese like the expression (and therefore more Singlish), the harder it is to gain a high intelligibility score. The intelligibility scores

lower from 2.63 to 1.46 as the utterances get more Singlish from Utterance 1 to Utterance 3.

4. The second null hypothesis H_0 is also rejected: in other words, as intelligibility scores and perception have vastly different means, this means that native speakers view themselves as better able to understand the utterances than they truly might have.

It would be good to reformulate the view of 'intelligibility' in various contexts. First, one should not think that intelligibility should be studied separately from comprehensibility and interpretability. Sajavaara (1988: 257), stated that distinctions such as the one suggested by Smith and Nelson (1985) between intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility cannot be made because there cannot be such a thing as intelligibility as a distinct phenomenon in interpersonal encounters. The reason is that transference of messages from one speaker to another is not simple a sequence where the sender is supposed to encode the message, which is then passed over to the receiver, who eventually decodes it. Instead, communication should be seen as a process of *negotiating* relevant information between two or more interactants. Both production and reception are *creative* processes which aim to establish agreement that the exchange of messages has been successful and that the information is found relevant on both sides (Sajavaara, 1988: 2534). Given such a view of communication, it is too simplistic to view intelligibility as a distinct phenomenon detached from the context of the communicative situation. In other words, the participants in the survey could be subconsciously giving us information that they could not understand

the utterances as well as they might have. In order for the researcher to formulate this opinion so that the locals could be made aware of this if results were published, they circled a score of 1 or 2 to indicate unintelligibility of Singapore English. This is not withstanding the fact that they could be perfectly truthful in the sense that they could indeed have found the utterances intelligible if they made the effort to listen.

Second, it is not necessary that the speech be **completely** intelligible to those with whom we are likely to communicate. Sajavaara thought that the importance of language for communicative success is often exaggerated. This is because in message processing, the speaker or hearer makes use *of all the available information* which he thought is relevant, irrespective of whether it is embedded in the language code or just present in the context (Sajavaara, 1988: 255). This is a point that Kandiah would agree with. He viewed the issue of intelligibility as a canard
i.e. a false piece of news (Kandiah, personal discussion, 24/9/97). Intelligibility may be thought of in this way because instead of concentrating on achieving communicative success, linguists have used intelligibility as a yardstick with which to beat New Varieties of English for deviating from the native norm. If their genuine concern were to achieve cross linguistic and cross cultural understanding, they might want to consider the fact that speakers of New Varieties do know how to accommodate and tailor their language to other speakers of English when placed in an international context. For instance in this context, one could change the Singaporean intonation to a more native-speaker like one. Conversely, it is interesting and

heartening to note that many native speakers of English who have worked for a number of years in Singapore have started using the *lah* jokingly, presumably a marked attempt to be seen as likeable and more readily acceptable by the locals. This is precisely the point that Smith and Nelson made when they observed that past studies have not allowed for the natural tendency on the part of speakers to modify their speech as a result of feedback from their conversational partners or to adapt their speech to a specific audience. There might be room for contemplation of further research on this area in the future.

Implications on Gaps between Intelligibility and Comprehension Scores

One of the most important and interesting findings in this paper is the fact that many of the native speakers of English scored 4 or 5 out of 5 on Question 4 on how well they understand Singapore English, yet they were unable to comprehend the three utterances well (the mean for comprehensibility is below 2 – which means "makes little sense" for all three utterances). Some of the data showed the following comments written by foreigners:

Table 2: Selected Extracts of Native Speakers' Interpretation

Utterance	**Actual Meaning**	**Perceived Meaning written by the native speakers**
He no bring come	He did not bring something.	1. He did not come. 2. He brought it but he forgot to come. 3. He did come, but did he bring it? I don't know.

You go there ask.	Please go over there to ask.	1. You can walk over there to ask. 2. You go there and ask.
Why so slow one? Wait got no more then you know.	Why are you so slow? If you wait any longer, there will be nothing left. You will realize the consequences.	1. ? 2. Slow coach? Don't understand second sentence. 3. He/She is a slow one, and not a fast one. Is the sentence about waiting? 4. Huh? ??????? 5. Waiting brings no more knowledge?

It is both comforting and worrying that native speakers of English do wish to identify themselves as being able to understand what Singaporeans (or any other non-native speakers of the language). The issue is comforting in the sense that native speakers understand the meaning of attempts at intelligibility and are happy about acknowledging that a language such as Singapore English can also be understood internationally. This is one step we take toward the globalization of the language and acknowledgement of an increasingly successful variety of English, i.e., Singapore English. It is also worrying at the same time because messages may not be conveyed twice or thrice to ensure complete comprehension and locals might take for granted that utterances are already understood. Attempts at intelligibility may sometimes stop at complacency at the expense, perhaps, of politeness, or perhaps an unwillingness to appear "dumb" and "un-cool" or "un-hip". I observe that Singaporean English could be increasingly perceived as cool as the country does well socially, for it does give some expatriates (particularly native

speakers of the language) a thrill to emphasize Singaporean particles positively such as the "lah" to show that they fit into Singapore.

The issue of whether it is appropriate to hire more native speakers of English for primary and secondary schools is often discussed in many countries. As a researcher, my concern is the fact that some native speakers of English might think that they do understand what the students are talking or writing about, when they might not. This might impede ability to help the students, unless they are aware of their own perception of ability to comprehend certain non-native utterances. Conversely, misinterpretation could happen both ways, for intelligibility (or the misperception that it is taking place) is a two-way issue.

Finally, the best advocate towards ease of mutual intelligibility is to acknowledge the establishments of new varieties of English such as Singlish (the lower variety of Singapore English) to be an entirely new entity which is not a hodgepodge of errors, but a variety which has its own systematic rules. For instance, Alsagoff and Ho (1998: 128) pointed out that *anything also can* (which means anything will do) is a phrase that makes sense to Singaporeans because it has its own grammatical rules, i.e., it only makes sense when also is inserted between *anything* and *can*, *anything* being first in sequence. If it were really the case that this phrase is a mere hodgepodge of errors, we should be allowed to shuffle the words around without any consequences. However, **Can also anything* and **Also can anything* are unacceptable utterances to the Singapore English speaker (Alsagoff and Ho, 1998: 128). Increasingly, as many tourists and foreign workers come to Singapore to work, it is invariably the case Singaporeans are not the only ones who will have

to change their intonation and attitudes to accommodate to this pool of foreign talent. In a similar manner, these foreigners who hope to work or be educated in Singapore, as well as regular tourists, would have to increasingly adapt to Singapore English by observing the rules of the NVE while positively accepting it and accommodating to it. While intelligibility is viewed as a non-issue due to imperialistic connotations, my opinion is that mutual intelligibility of any variety, coupled with positive attitude and perception, should be the goal that all of us move forward to in order to scale new heights in achieving global understanding.

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APPENDIX

I am a researcher doing a survey on Singapore English and hope to receive your cooperation.

1) How long have you been in Singapore?

______years ______months ______days

2) Would you consider yourself a native speaker of the English language?

Yes / No.

3) Can you make sense of the following sentences?

(i) Please rate from 1 to 5.

(ii) Please write down what you think they mean in the blanks provided.

1 = Makes no sense.
2 = Makes little sense.
3 = Somewhat makes sense.
4 = Makes sense.
5 = Makes a lot of sense.

Please circle the appropriate number.

a) You approach a salesgirl with a request for information and she says to you : Utterance 1.

1 2 3 4
5

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b) A male friend is expected to arrive with something in his possession. He appears and his friends comment : Utterance 2.

1 2 3 4
5

---

c) Two friends are rushing to the music store to buy the latest album. One turns around to the other and says: Utterance 3.

1 2 3 4
5

---

4) In general, rate your understanding of Singapore English

1 2 3 4
5
Very Difficult Difficult Neutral
Easy Very Easy

5) Should Singaporeans improve their English?

Yes / No.

Reasons:

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Title
Student-centeredness: A cautionary tale

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Biodata
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Abstract

Student-centeredness (SC) is the en vogue concept in curriculum design nowadays, and a reality check is needed. If SC is defined in terms of a purely student-led problem-solving approach, problems with the application of SC in an NE Asian context can be framed in terms of four large issues: first, the effect on teachers in terms of lower student respect, depersonalization, employment attrition, and decreased expertise; second, the mismatch of learning styles due to student-led dislike of group-work, which leads to ineffective group formation, heightened by an avoidance of conflict and therefore shallow discussion; third, the self-selection of familiar topics to avoid local and textbook-designed socio-cultural taboos, which potentially

leads to greater and potentially-problematic teacher-led social activism, converging together against the local status quo; fourth, the self-selection of easy tasks, which lowers performance standards, limits the amount of topic coverage due to time inefficiencies, and obscures achievement when learning goals are not specified a priori. These issues are interspersed with suggestions for situating SC more favorably within an NE Asian context.

Keywords: student-centered, teaching, problems, NE Asian context

Student-centeredness, or SC, is a term that originated in a wider educational movement out of the humanistic school of the 1970s which fore-grounded the emotions and values of students (Richards, 2002). Some feel that the era of methods has passed on, while its heir, the communicative approach, has emerged from the ashes (cf. Richards and Rogers, 2001). Yet, some researchers were already making concrete associations between SC and communicative approaches (ie Taylor, 1983; Maley, 1984). And so, rather than having passed on, it would seem as though there has been a shift in general educational emphasis from “teaching” (ie methods) to “learning”, but with power and choice as negotiable currencies as the continuing theme (O’Neill and McMahon, 2005). For example, the large body of literature which has accumulated on motivation (Dornyei, 2001a and 2001b) and interpersonal group dynamics (Dornyei and Ehrman, 1998; Dornyei and Murphey, 2003) emphasizes - after the humanistic tradition - the inner processes of students and their orientations to others, to the learning content, and their own sense of life purpose. SC is a buzzword for standard

teaching practice in general education (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005; Darling, 1994); and in the ELT literature, the call to motivate students, become more aware of their needs, and center them more in the learning process, is similarly strong and has been for sometime (ie Nunan, 2005, Richards, 2002).

I heard a story that, once upon a time, a student of Socrates asked the great teacher, "How do you always seem to know the wise path?" Socrates answered, "I watch where everyone is going, and then I go in the opposite direction." When ideas take on the form of conventional wisdom, it is sometimes prudent to re- examine assumptions, and go in an alternate direction. McKeon (1998) suggests that a one-size-fits-all application of best practice, such as seems to be the case with SC currently in some circles, is probably not going to be effective. I believe that the concept of "student-centeredness" has reached that level with regard to its application to the NE Asian context. As Gomez (2007) puts it: "teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogy have come to represent an either/or choice in relation to pedagogical power when, as often construed, teacher-centered pedagogy equals oppression and student-centered pedagogy equals liberation or democracy." Somehow the literature on SC has gotten off the track of the gradualist middle path, and has veered toward a more extreme and simplistic application, with an eye toward radicalizing the learning agenda. It is this dichotomization of the role of the teacher in the classroom that I take issue with; instead, I believe that SC is a concept that needs to regain a sense of proportionate application that writers implied in its younger years (cf. Taylor, 1983).

In this paper, I will first describe briefly what SC stands for in the literature. I would like to show how this conceptualization can be problematic in a NE Asian context, and I will make some specific suggestions for implementing more student-centered approaches in a more culturally-sensitive way throughout.

1.0 Definition

It is important to note that the idea of SC emerged originally outside of ELT, but was gradually grafted into it. Any conceptualization of the term would have to take into historical account this general educational domain, and a current treatment would also be enhanced with well-chosen references from this domain. In essence, student-centered learning is about the amount of choice and power students exercise in the classroom (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005). Areas of choice could include evaluation, roles, syllabus content and learning goals, among others (after Nunan, 1988). A summary of SC could include the following characteristics:

Students	Teachers and methods
Students are active participants (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005) Students develop an increasing sense of autonomy, independence & responsibility (Nunan, 1988; O'Neill and McMahon, 2005) Students understand expectations and are encouraged to use self-assessment measures (Nunan, 1988) Learners have different learning styles (concrete, analytical, communicative, and authority-oriented) (Nunan, 1988)	Emphasis on authentic, meaning-based language use, context-specific to learners' workplace needs (Nunan, 1988) Tendency for activities to be group-oriented (Nunan, 1988) The teacher is primarily a facilitator and offers resources and support (O'Neill and McMahon, 2005) SCL tends towards a constructivist, discovery-led approach (constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it) (von Glasersfeld, 1995; O'Neill and McMahon, 2005) Teachers provide problems, or open-ended questions to guide the student so that they arrive at a conclusion or solution that is satisfactory to themselves (Problem-based Learning)

Students. By active, I mean that students are brought into the decision-making process as much as possible, for making extensive choices over learning content, its scheduling, and its assessment. It is through this process of growing responsibility that students gain a sense of increasing autonomy, learn how to learn independent of the classroom context. Being active decision-makers, they understand what is expected of them, indeed, these expectations are self-directed and self-assessed. The onus for this transfer of power in the classroom rests on the realization that it is ineffective to create learning processes that treat students as generic products: they are

unique individuals who bring different skill sets and resources to bear upon their learning, and go about it in varied ways.

Teachers. The skillful teacher is one who can actualize this dynamic potential in her students. There is a need, then, to engage students with motivating learning content by bringing greater authenticity into the classroom process. This includes communicative language activities involving language and ideas that students can use in their own real worlds, and in which students can bring their personal experiences to bear upon. Because of the uniqueness of each student, grouping students to work together allows better resource allocation, maximizes communicative interaction, and encourages the potential for students learn from each other. Respecting the collective knowledge of students means that teachers realize that they do not know more than students, and thus an inquiry-led, teacher-facilitated process in which the answers are not pre-determined is more appropriate.

2.0 The problems

The following four questions will serve as the framework for discussing some important issues regarding SC. Those four questions are

- ❖ Where might teachers fit in?
- ❖ How might students work?
- ❖ What problems might students choose?
- ❖ What could students learn?

2.1. Where teachers fit: Sidelined

The keyword for teachers in SC is *facilitate*. According to the characterization above, teachers do this by asking questions which help guide students to satisfactory conclusions. In other words, if teachers provide ready-made answers, they can short-circuit the discovery of learning. Students need to find the answers themselves in order to learn best.

This is problematic in at least several ways: first, teacher facilitation may reinforce an attitude that teachers are not objects of authority or respect. Recalling the margin-center schema Gomez (2007) describes, it is not simply a matter of replacing one authority (the teacher) with another (the learner). Gomez (2007) views power and authority as something to be shared, not dominated by one or the other. Under the sway of a polarizing view of SC, teachers may feel compelled to cede authority and their expertise from the classroom context. Duff and Uchida (1997), for example, while researching in the Japanese language school context, recommend that morphing from a teacher-student relationship into friendship is preferable.

On the other hand, a concept of democratic learning may be alien to Asian contexts, and any diminishing of the teacher's authority could be interpreted in terms of diminished respect. Xiao (2006a) conducted a survey of Chinese students studying in Ireland, and found that Irish teachers who used a more communicative, "free-talking" style of teaching were perceived as having less authority and competence than teachers who through structured classes showed pre-class preparation (ie Chinese NNESTs from the students' prior

learning experience). Interestingly, though, the same author (Xiao, 2006b) also found that students in the earlier years of university study preferred more communicative classes, but significantly, this preference for group-work diminished as they progressed through their course of study, as they wished for classes more oriented to passing language tests for workplace entry. This could be explained as evidence that increasing workplace-salience in learning correlates with an increasing preference for authoritative teaching. Similarly, Lei (2007) shows that Chinese students have a remarkably consistent view toward teacher's knowledge being an influential or essential factor for successful learning: 100% agreement across 225 English-major university students.

Two main problems are working in tandem on this problem: university students see NNESTs and native teachers teaching different kinds of content and thus value them differently, and also they can see a disconnect between the relevance of that teaching content for examinations. Several things could be done. First, there needs to be an ongoing revision of entrance / exit exam interview procedures to give greater emphasis to communicative tasks to make that learning content more relevant. Second, communicative, "free talking" classes should comprise a necessary component of the curriculum, but are not sufficient as the total content. Proportionate time should be given for specific content, which may be taught in different ways; culture courses taught through projects; business English classes taught with native language supplements, etc. Third, communicative classes could be taught by both ex-pats and NNESTs. Although some NNEST professors may feel some insecurity about

their language ability to manage the teaching, it would give both sides a better appreciation for what's involved, and raise the credibility of the ex-pat teachers. At the very least, broaching the process would start some much-need discussion of the issue, and if some bias arises ("teaching such classes is beneath my status"), it needs to be dealt with in an open manner.

A second negative consequence of student prioritization is that it may compel the teacher to submerge her own feelings, personality, and identity in order to give the greatest possible freedom for student expression of their needs, and to safeguard against exposing various students' sensitivities. Yet, some preliminary evidence suggests that such a prerogative may very well be impossible to fulfill. Duff and Uchida (1997) observed that "implicit cultural transmission [from teacher to student] was very evident." This may happen because, just like students, teachers come into the class possessing their own deeply-held notions of cultural identity. So, while there many kinds of teacher styles in the EFL classroom (see Hales, 1996 for an anecdotal description), SC may end up encouraging the teacher to take on the role of entertainer to facilitate positive self-regard and avoid criticism. In Duff and Uchida (1997), the most popular teacher was the entertainer, who is described as possessing a "cultivated sense of humor and a dramatic flair." Of course, this kind of teacher may not always be popular. To take one example from Zhenhui (2001):

> Liu Hong, a third-year English major in Jiangxi Normal University, China, was in David's office again. After failing

> David's oral English course the previous year, Liu Hong had reenrolled, hoping to pass it this year. Unfortunately, things were not looking promising so far, and she was frustrated. When David asked why she was so unhappy in his class, she said: "I am an introverted, analytic and reflective student. I don't know how to cope with your extroverted, global and impulsive teaching style?"

The difference in students' expectations may well come from the differing teaching contexts. The Duff and Uchida example was from a private language school, whose teachers may not have been considered "professional" by their students, whereas the university professor in China was expected to be show certain reserved qualities associated with that status. If a teacher moves from the language school to the university level in their career, they may well find a distinct change in what is considered "successful" teaching, and suffer from dissonant senses of their own ideal teaching selves. Again, this may echo the findings of Xiao (2006a and 2006b). In any case, the issue of a mismatch between learning expectations and teaching is discussed further in the next section 2.2. In Ms. Hong's case, it would have been preferable if her department had a range of course options available, so that course selection could be made more flexible to allow for different kinds of teaching styles. Course descriptions would therefore need to describe the manner of teaching (group discussions, lots of participation, etc), not just a syllabus and a scoring outline, so as to facilitate an informed choice for students.

The act of submerging one's personality suggests another connected issue: what kind of teacher style will become more popular? A constructivist approach to teaching and curriculum may act to indirectly pre-select certain kinds of teachers. An open-ended teaching approach requires hands-on, on-the-spot monitoring, and close interpersonal coaching. An outgoing, sociable, "bright and cheery" personality would lend itself well to such a coaching role, like Duff and Uchida's (1997) entertainer above. On the other hand, more low-key, reserved or "serious" teachers might well find themselves unable or unwilling to undertake dramatic changes in the way they conduct student-teacher relationships. Such teachers could find themselves gradually marginalized out of the ELT profession, and such winnowing may already be occurring at the entry level of teaching colleges (a tendency which Khurana (2007, 14) refers to as isomorphism, or the tendency towards homogeneity within an organizational field). Biodiversity is important because a wide range of genetic variety allows environments to be less susceptible to sudden massive changes. Departments need to value teaching style diversity as well: having a wide variety of teaching approaches in the educational system could provide intellectual "inoculation" for students as they prepare to enter an increasingly complicated workplace.

History is usually about the winners (Taleb, 2007, 100ff), and research follows suit with *confirmation bias*: a tendency to find corroborating evidence and the discounting or silencing of contrary evidence. Taleb warns against forming opinions that are unconcerned with such "silent evidence" because they are prone to a "cemetery

effect": only those who succeed to the end are counted, while the cemetery is full of those who did not succeed. With respect to SC, teacher/student attitudes are usually measured at the end of a course of study, and thus the focus may tend to emphasize only those who have to one extent or another "bought into the system." Ms. Hong, in the example above from Zhenhui (2001), may well become one of those dropouts, whose aversion with a particular teaching style will thus pass under the radar if student surveys are administered at semester's end. Further, when attrition does occur, I suspect that there is rarely follow-up with the drop-outs, the primary reason being confirmation bias, and another reason being procedural difficulty: they are harder to track down once they leave the classroom, and they may, understandably, not wish to dwell on their failure to continue in the process and so not wish further participation. Thus, research which studied the characteristics of (1) teacher candidates who fail, and why, and (2) students who drop out of classes, and why, might give some important clues about the complete impact of any particular method or educational principle.

A third problem is that SC can marginalize the teacher from a position of content-domain expert to process facilitator (Gomez, 2007). The teacher may know what appropriate target performance would look like, what kind of performance might be expected in context-specific workplaces (a business presentation, for example), but students may come up with alternative discourse forms. Expert feedback that a teacher could provide is muted, out of a sense of obligation to applaud student performance and to minimize damage to student self-regard. And so some teachers may feel as Maher did

when she asks, “Why have I often felt so powerless in my own teaching career, caught between things that students said or did that I thought were wrong, even harmful, and the idea that I should always be ‘facilitative’ and democratic?’’ (Maher, as cited in Gomez, 2007). Such situations could also be referred to as “invisible pedagogies” (Martin 2000), or a “pedagogy of disappearance” (Gomez, 2007), and have been found in some cases to marginalize students because of language skill deficits once they enter the workforce. An irony emerges here: under the guise of liberating students in the classroom, the result is that students are unprepared to deal with the real world and thus are more exploitable (see section 2.3).

Teachers may feel compelled to react this way out of a lack of clear communication or guidance by departmental administration. To mitigate this, input from all faculty members, ex-pat and NNEST, fulltime and part-time, could be institutionalized through surveys, mixed task forces, and regularly-scheduled focused departmental meetings. Out of this greater inter-departmental communication, the department should create and publicize curriculum statements for language learning objectives and graduation achievement requirements, holding teachers and students accountable via exit examinations. That way, everyone knows what is expected, and as long as the objectives are achieved, the route is left up to the teachers and students to negotiate.

The idea of teachers scaffolding student performance (ie Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development) towards the achievement of pre-determined objectives may also get short shrift in simplistic

applications of SC (eg Gorksi, 2002), a position that I argued against in Lassche (2005). Again, Gomez suggests that this movement away from such theoretical foundations is influenced by the use of the margin center schema described earlier (Gomez, 2007). Thus, in Lassche (2007), I called for a more structured, genre-based approach (cf. Feez, 1998) to teaching business English, with specific regard to business presentations. I came to this decision after I noticed that, time after time, my Korean and Japanese students universally opted for topically-based report-like content, rather than for issue-based, persuasive content.

2.2. How students work: Mismatched learning styles

An SC approach has students work in collaboration with other learners, and make decisions about group membership; who they will work with and how. In places that value social cohesion and have high context cultures, however, group membership has been largely determined already before the teacher entered the classroom. Reid (2000, 74) describes the situation this way:

> The hierarchy of groups in each person's life begins with the basic unit, the family. It extends outward to include neighborhood, school, job, union, Sumo wrestler's fan club, karaoke singing circle, ikebana society, and so on. Each group is entitled to loyalty from its members, and these various loyalties essentially define a Japanese life. The groups you belong to make up who you are. The group is your identity.

Students form groups in their classes that they may rarely change from throughout the year, and in some cases throughout their academic careers (Manes, 2006). Because this membership is so static, movement to another group becomes very difficult to engineer, and adherence to group norms and beliefs is a precious commodity, in Japanese *wa,* in Korean, *pyonghwa*. Thus, when collaborating with other members in the group, the give-and-take and balance of views that might be expected in a Western context does not take place. Instead students may seek to avoid (1) conflicting in a group setting, (2) criticizing each other, or (3) holding to a belief in authoritative contra-distinction to other members. In many Asian contexts, to express a position in conflict with the group consensus is selfish and disloyal, and is considered a grave error (*meiwaku,* in Japanese): something that the other members of your group would find troubling or shameful (Reid, 2000, 75). Breaking with the group consensus renders an individual as a social outcast: *wang-ta* (in Korean), or *hikiko-mori* (in Japanese). In contrast, the West tends to regard individuality much more highly: consider the more positive and almost heroic connotations of *lone wolf*, *maverick*, the *cowboy*, James Dean aka the *rebel*.

When members of a group differ in terms of their linguistic abilities (reading, speaking in public, persuading others, listening, or debating during meetings) the most skilled student may dominate and get their views accepted by the group (Gastil, 1997), and this pattern could be accentuated if the leader happens to hold some status qualifier, like being older or having a higher social ranking (Reid, 2000). Thus, the consensual result of group work may simply be a reiteration of

deeply-held beliefs that students came into class with. Forcing students to "look at" the "facts", in a sense bringing out the potential to agree or disagree openly and break ranks with the group, could be viewed by the Asian student with at best resolute and stony silence, or at worst open hostility toward the teacher and possible repercussions on tenure if the methods and reactions were ongoing.

The whole notion of group-oriented classroom work is a basic issue, brought up long ago by Nunan, Brindley and others from their AMEP research (eg. Nunan, 1988, 95 – 97). Paper after paper has been published in Asia in the last 10 years which cite the mismatch between the "Asian learner" and Western constructivist approaches. To name several: Peacock (2000), for example, has shown that Chinese students in Hong Kong have a pronounced dislike for Group Learning, or a learning preference for studying with others, confirmed by Xiao (2006a) on Chinese learners in Ireland, and Xiao (2006b) with mixed results on students over their university course of study.

Bressan (2005, 73ff) describes how the compliant Chinese would gain the favor of the Irish teachers because of their learning orientation, while students from the Indian sub-continent would argue loudly and often. Bressan (2005, 75) attributes some of this behavior to a historical context of aggrievement against past British colonialism. For example, in Bressan (2005), teachers are encouraged to force students to face the reality of Western methodology: since "intercultural teaching is here to stay," "assimilating" students into a Western style of teaching may be necessary when working with those

who are “rigid and not open-minded”. Bear in mind, these were Irish teachers working in Ireland with students from China, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The students presumably self-selected to have their course of study in a Western culture, and still resisted group-oriented work. How much more resistance would have been expected among students who are still in China, or Korea, or Japan? Do expat teachers go ahead with assimilation projects in those countries?

A way forward to resolve this kind of conflict is to recognize that group-work *requires* it, especially if intimacy and trust is to build between members so that more effective group-work can occur downstream (Dornyei and Murphey, 2003, 141ff). Dornyei and Murphey (2003, 50ff) offer a model of group development based on four stages: group formation, transition, performing, and dissolution. Group formation is the stage in which students get to know each other and develop rapport. At the second stage of development, conflict often emerges, sometimes in seemingly irrational or illogical ways, with disagreements and competitions brewing between students or student groups jockeying for position in favor with the teacher. They caution against skipping stages in which teachers want to get “straight to the point.”

Bressan’s (2005) research is very interesting, because it provides some telltale details on why group-work might not have been effective. Closer inspection of the case can suggest ways for enhancing a more balanced SC application. When analyzing this situation, the author does not mention any need for ice-breaking

activities, or content specifically designed to enhance cross-cultural understandings, prior to commitment to "getting down to work." Instead, the author gives praise for Confucian-style work ethics, and disapproval for the "less disciplined" students from elsewhere whose attitudes arise from speculated historical animosities - a tone of favoritism that Bressan admits to and which was probably not lost on the students. Controversial topics for discussion, for example "corruption in your country", were met with growing hostility between the groups.

Had Bressan and his colleagues initially spent more time on group-building, working with topics that built trust and collaboration between these cultural groups, holding discussion of controversial topics (ie corruption) at a later time might have been received with less resistance. In addition, Bressan describes this course as an upper-intermediate "foundation course" for business school students. I would recommend avoidance of global issues for entry level, compulsory or core courses. A foundation course could probably deal with content more related to academic writing or business presentations, providing students with skills they would readily need for their business school careers. Bressan also describes the methods employed for some of these discussion classes: conducted on a "whole class" basis, with one student taking the floor at a time to reveal their opinions. In this situation, a case study style coursework, whose defined structure might lower the personalization of topics/issues and require simultaneous contributions by each group member, would help as well. Dornyei and Murphey suggest other

well-founded and classroom-tested ideas for building group cohesion (2003, 60ff) and resolving conflict (2003, 140ff).

What Bressan's (2005) work shows also is that teachers often have misguided views of what SC entails. Forcing students to accept Western modes of teaching without taking account a process for gradually making them comfortable with the idea, of presenting topics which may have been distasteful without allowing students choice over their inclusion, do not fit in with an SC approach to teaching. Zeng and Murphy (2007) also describe some Chinese NNESTs, who despite training and years of teaching in the field, believed they were teaching communicatively when in fact they were not, a finding which has been echoed around Asia; for example, in Chou (2003), with Japanese NNESTs; Nonkukhetkong, Baldauf and Moni (2006), with Thai teachers; and Pirverdiyeva (1998), with Azeri teachers.

In cases where expats find themselves immersed in a foreign culture, the same caution against the use of global issues for compulsory classes is warranted. Again, recommended here are clearly-stated course descriptions which discuss the learning orientation and topic coverage in terms students and administration can understand, so that students can expect to have discussion on controversial topics. Teachers would be well-advised to involve departmental discussion and / or vetting of topics and issues so that support is institutionalized. When students do have a complaint, the department does not need to save face and arbitrarily choose sides. Finally, it would be advisable to limit class sizes at 15 or 20 students with

upper-level discussion-based language courses, so that teacher-student rapport can develop, and monitoring of potential intra-student conflict can be headed off.

2.3 What students choose: Self-selection of superficial topics

SC classes allow students to make decisions about how and what they will learn, and thus intrinsically motivate them to reach goals they have set for themselves. Students construct new knowledge and skills by building on their current knowledge and skills. So goes constructivist theory (cf. von Glasersfeld, 1995). At least one large, multi-faceted issue arises out of this description. What kinds of problems will students choose for themselves? The logical response might be that they will choose what is already familiar or comfortable. So, how did they acquire their initial and familiar body of knowledge, what is the nature of this knowledge, and would this prior knowledge color their downstream acquisition and interpretation of further knowledge?

Greaney (2007) asserts that what students already know and have learned has been shaped by the socio-cultural experiences they bring into the classroom. Their prior learning has oftentimes been shaped by textbook content with socio-cultural agendas. He provides some evidence that if negative stereo-types of people or ideas, distortion of history, and ideologically-driven cultural interpretations are learned from textbooks and classroom content early on, they often form the basis of beliefs and expectations in the future. As seen in Bressan (2005), one agenda in education today should be to challenge such

socio-culturally-based assumptions, *vis-à-vis* a revisionist view of education.

The reality, however, is that sometimes these contentious issues do not see the light of day in the classroom, or that students simply opt out of participation, as the Chinese students did in the Bressan (2005) study. When students self-select course content, they rarely stray from the ethnocentric positions they came into the class with (Greaney, 2007). Further, Nel (2006) explains that language textbooks are often curtailed through attention to the PARSNIP acronym: avoid discussion of politics, alcohol, religions, sex, narcotics, isms, and politics. Thus, textbook topics on culturally-loaded discussions are often trivial, to make them safer and more “distributable” (read profitable). This seems to have been the case, for example, in Stapleton (2000). While expressing dissatisfaction with how cultural topics were treated in textbooks, most teachers approached topic selection rather arbitrarily anyway, and ended up choosing overt examples (ie obvious) rather than covert ones (ie which require a deeper interpretative discussion) (Stapleton, 2000, 300ff). At least for Korea and Japan, pre-university textbook content is controlled exclusively through in-house governmental publishing and testing processes. In these countries, the governmental agencies involved should take on a policy of gradually democratizing textbook content through wider stakeholder participation and reducing the monopolistic position currently typical. How far this would be possible in China is unclear to me at the present time.

Knowing this possible selection outcome, the savvy SC teacher may deliberately ask an "open" question, which turns out to be a leading question in disguise. However, the very act of providing alternative sources of information to students to investigate, in order that they may come to their "own conclusions", may be interpreted as an act of inciting dissension. For example, China censors any topic relating to Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, to such an extent that all internet sites on the subject are unavailable to search engines like Google and Yahoo, an issue of ongoing dispute (Watts, 2006). At the same time, what appears to be more student-centered on the surface (students looking at source materials for themselves), is what Finke (1997) describes as the replacement of "one scholarly expert for another" – the classroom teacher exchanged for the computer and unfettered access to the internet. Finke (1997) asks two very important questions: "But do these enthusiastic claims about information technology confuse knowledge and information, transmitting with educating? Does student-centered learning refer only to students' passive assimilation of data or does it require more active participation from them, more interaction both with their teachers and with their peers?"

If SC involves sensitivity and responsiveness to students' needs, should teachers be social activists in the classroom, intending to replace the myths and assumptions, or deeply-held beliefs that students carry around in their heads? For example, the Peace as a Global Language Conference series
< http://www.pgljapan.org/> aims to do just that: "We aim to bring together students, teachers, academics, activists and members of the

local community to exchange ideas on how to make the world a better place." The Global Issues in Language Education Special Interest Group of JALT
< http://jalt.org/global/index.html> has a similar aim: "promote global awareness, international understanding, social responsibility and action to solve world problems through content-based language teaching drawing on fields such as global education, peace education, environmental education and human rights education." But, better for who, and who decides what is better or what is not? A question remains, whether teachers should even be engaging in social activism as the stated aim in English classes to begin with. If students are captive audiences in classes, and feel a compulsion to please the teacher, would they be pressured towards acceptance of the teacher's particular moral inclinations? Edge (1996) wrote a particularly scathing rejection of such practice:

> Taking on educational responsibilities under false pretenses is utterly repellent... If there are people overtly engaged in TESOL with the covert purpose of exporting their moral and/or religious certainties to the rest of the world, they are engaged in a project that deserves the accusations of linguistic and cultural imperialism that are leveled against it. (p.1)

In Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt (2001), such discussions which openly question cultural traditions are valued by ex-pat language teachers, but devalued by Japanese NNESTs. Thus, a clash can form between the teacher's desire to challenge the "oppressive foundations of society", and the desire of students and the wider FL community to have classes which provide a comforting, non-threatening atmosphere

of understanding and trust, but perhaps limited to the banal discussion of "how was your weekend?" When applying SC, which aim is supposed to win out, and is a compromise even ideologically possible, or merely a sellout of principle?

Take the case of Gillian Gibbons, a primary teacher in an international school, located in Sudan (CNN, 2007). When she had the students (aged 7) self-select the name of their class teddy bear, they chose "Mohammed", much to the consternation of the local authorities and inflammatory local groups who chose to seize upon the occasion for their own ideological purposes. The innocence of the teacher and the impact of this event on the impressionable minds of these children are essentially irrelevant to the local authorities. That this incident happened at all is unfortunate. Ms. Gibbons was a seasoned teacher from the UK, but when she was placed into a new cultural context, it would have been useful to help her to sensitize course content by encouraging more co-teaching, classroom observation, and faculty mentoring with more acculturated expats.

Finally, the whole of idea of questioning established authority, and exploring assumption and belief through independent analysis, may be an alien, frightening concept to many NE Asian learners. China, Japan and Korea are often characterized as being more socially cohesive, high context societies (Kim, Pan and Park, 1998). In high context societies, students expect small close knit groups, and reliance on that group. Professional and personal lives often intertwine. A low context culture demands independence, and expects many relationships, but few intimate ones. A high context individual

is more likely to ask questions rather than attempt to work out a solution independently, and the questions are likely to be asked from the same few people.

As mentioned earlier, groups may choose to explore topics only superficially, because group development has stalled at the initial "forming" stage, which is characterized by dependency relationships within those "closely-knit" groups (Smith, 2005). Deeper discussion of personal beliefs and the exchange of alternative ideas would occur only after the group goes through the angst-ridden "storming" stage – a potential to be avoided within high-context culture. Note too, the implicit hierarchy of values in the group development model: that working through conflict toward a free discussion is construed as more effective. This comes with the hint of moral superiority: independence (stage 4) is hierarchically more advanced than dependency (stage 2). In any case, student choice over topic and content selection should be gradually integrated in the curriculum, and only as they progress academically and linguistically (see Nunan, 1999) by demonstrating mastery of "truly important topics or concepts within the discipline" (Gardner, 2007, 32).

The whole revisionist movement (independent decision-making and analysis based on investigation rather than belief based on authority) may be considered as morally superior in the West. However, whether such a paradigmatic shift in education is valued here in North-East Asia is much less understood, and may be merely a newer form of Western imperialism, in a way that Edge (1996) suggests. The construction and support for such curriculum and classroom

designs and their underpinning ideologies may go unchallenged by the compliant student, held hostage to certain achievement expectations and respect for teacher authority. In the event a challenge is raised, though, the ex-pat teacher is probably the first one expected to concede defeat, and conform to the local cultural context, if the Gibbons case above is any example. This may be a positive end-result for the Asian student, but the idealistic ex-pat teacher holding to a simplistic concept of SC ends up feeling as though she has betrayed her ideals, and disenfranchised her students, when this may not be the case.

Perhaps what is needed is a re-conceptualization of SC, one which does not place priority on independence at the expense of dependency. Instead, could TESOL start a discussion on the idea of a middle path, toward *interdependence* (after Covey, 1989, 187)?

> As we become independent – proactive, centered in correct [universal] principles, value-driven and able to organize and execute around the priorities in our life with integrity – we can then choose to become **interdependent** – capable of building rich, enduring, highly productive relationships with other people.

As far as I know, this would be a relatively new concept within TESOL, and a study which explored its application, and the possible benefits such an approach would confer especially with regard to a re-orientation of the roles of students and teachers in the classroom, would be well worth the effort.

2.4 What students learn: Limited content achievement

Constructivism is about students constructing new knowledge, and arriving at conclusions satisfactory to them (von Glasersfeld, 1995). But, this new knowledge may not be really informative, and the conclusions may not be consonant with larger workplace and society-at-large expectations. Again, as SC is a product of Western educational dialogue, it would not be surprising if this lack of academic rigor went along with it, and why it would not gain much traction with most Asian learners. In a wide-ranging report of college readiness, ACT (2007) complains that American students have not learned the appropriate skills when they enter high school, which then accumulates at the college level. Their white paper is a call to return to rigorous standard-setting to hold schools and teachers accountable. And these calls for educational reform have been found globally (UNESCO, 2000), as well as in Japan (eg Poole, 2003, Matsuura, Chiba, and Hilderbrandt, 2001) and Korea, with specific regard to English education (Chosun Ilbo, 2007). Friedman (2007, 388), lamenting the American context, suggests “that we do more to push our young people to go beyond their comfort zones, to do things right, and to be ready to suffer some short-run pain for longer gain.” A case in point from Friedman (2007, 342):

> The [American] economy is producing jobs at the high end and low end, but increasingly the high-end jobs are out of reach of many. Low education [standards] means low-paying jobs, plain and simple, and this is where more and more Americans are finding themselves. Many Americans can’t believe they aren’t qualified for high-paying jobs.

If there is such impetus and calls for accountability, will student-selected topics and student-based assessment be sufficient to meet the challenge? To hold that line, the "open question" from the teacher to kick-start student-led discovery will actually need to reflect the realities of administrative and societal pressures, realities that students may not be concerned about or even aware of. To that end, institutions need to identify learning objectives that are broad enough to foster a variety of realizations, yet specific enough to provide accountability. They can do this by referring to various internationally-recognized benchmark systems as possible point of departure for this process, for example:

1. CAN-DO from the council of Europe: <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp>
2. ACTFL proficiency guidelines: <http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm>

Perhaps, ironically, NE Asian institutions need to re-consider hopping on the bandwagon when it comes to learning English. No country wants to be left behind in the globalization world-flattening race that Friedman (2007) is describing; but in so doing, requiring every student from every department to undergo English language training may not be entirely necessary or the most efficient use of limited resources. Could institutions re-examine the "English-as-compulsory" issue, in terms of the entire curriculum: is it critical that all departments have such a core course? Is English really more important as a mandatory course than other-language study (ie other

Asian-based languages), or other skill areas, such as in the maths or sciences?

Learning how to learn, and helping students' connect their learning with real world needs is important to SC. It would be consistent to help enable students to specify their personalized learning goals *vis-à-vis* the curricular objectives, through various course orientation activities, and *in situ* evaluation and feedback sessions. If learning English is not critical for music students, or nursing students, etc, to do their jobs in their local settings, a more SC approach which tied learning to real-world needs would have to conclude that, no, perhaps time and resources would be better allocated elsewhere.

In addition, student discovery is not very time-efficient. Making mistakes and learning from them is a luxury that many curriculums do not provide for. Besides, learning from mistakes does not guarantee that students will learn the fundamental concepts expected (after Gardner, 2007), and complicate progression to the next level of language acquisition. Student-led discovery may work for only a few very carefully selected areas of English (like general rules of grammar, basic listening or speaking skills), but probably will not be a necessary or sufficient solution for the teaching of more in-depth concepts, like rhetorical staging.

Connected to this idea of timing, I recall sitting in several SC-themed conference presentations over the years, and have been struck by the disconnect between the presenter's belief (that self-discovery is the best way), and the actual mode of communication, which invariably

was lecture-style. I believe this occurred because the presenter had a lot of information to cover, wanted to cover some specific and essential points, had limited time to present with, and thus was compelled to use one-way transmission. This is an example of a tradeoff that can exist between a teacher-led provision of learning structure and a student-led opportunity for free choice. The more the teacher increases structure, and clarifies the learning goals, the more likely students will achieve pre-determined, externally-set curriculum objectives. But, the chance for students to have minority views and unique learning objectives is greatly reduced. On the other hand, decreasing such structure can give greater voice to students' needs and concerns, but can lead also to greater frustration as they struggle to find suitable goals, processes to accomplish them, and models for assessing what they have done. This is possible especially in contexts where students have had little or no experience with a constructivist educational model, and such may well be the case for countries like Korea, Japan, and China/Hong Kong.

What this also tells me is that there needs to be an honest acknowledgement by ELT practitioners that a tradeoff between teacher-led and student-led processes exists, that this is necessary for student-centered course adjustment, and that it should largely locally-determined for answering when and how much (after Gardner, 2007). In line with this, it would make sense to have more effective streaming of students according to interest-level and language aptitude. That way, hopefully, classes would be more homogenous (i.e. minimized range) in the quality (i.e. level of difficulty) and

quantity (i.e. how much to accomplish), and thus reduce the chance of mutually incompatible learning objectives within one class.

3.0 Discussion

Personally, I value the merits of critical thinking and discussion. Indeed, that is what motivates me to take what could be viewed as a very unpopular and contrarian position among my peers on this topic. At the same time, having spent more than ten years in this part of Asia, I have to wonder about the value of the work I have done, and to what extent my teaching styles and beliefs have impacted on my students. If I am indeed concerned about the sensitivities and needs of my students, I feel that I must come to a conclusion in which I am torn between (a) being too soft, with an eye to emergent readiness for gradual accommodation, and (b) being too tough, believing that students are better served to learn how to learn and think for themselves, even if they would not personally choose that for themselves. And so, ironically, my position mirrors that of many of my Japanese students and peers:

> The younger generation of Japanese seems to be unsure on two fronts: unsure whether they can live without the security, in both psychological and real terms, that comes with valuing the tenets of "wa", or group society, and at the same time, unsure whether or not they can embrace individualism. (Manes, 2006)

What I cannot support, though, is an uncritical and unequivocal application of SC methodology that does not first adequately consider the extent or the timing to the local context. Gardner (2007) has

written a book in which he discusses a general curriculum for the 21st century. Of particular relevance is his notion of a process of gradual integration: discipline precedes creative license (Gardner, 2007, 99). Nunan (1988) took much the same track in his design of a learner-centered curriculum. I believe that Gardner, who describes himself as an educational progressivist in the volume, would not position SC as the pedagogy for all classrooms in all levels of learning development, but instead would apply it discretely and proportionately, bearing in mind individual developmental learning paths and the specific learning domain. To those factors, I would add the constraints of the local cultural context, which has been the thrust of this paper.

The suggestions I have made throughout this paper involve two main types: first, generally increasing the amount of choice available to the students by making more explicit what students can expect in a given program with a given teacher, and second, increasing the communication within and among the administrative / pedagogical stakeholders, a black box that is usually hidden from the students' observation. Opening up the process for all involved is definitely consonant with a SC approach, and would improve teacher practice and learning outcomes for students.

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Title

Collaborative Learning: The Cultural Barrier to Effective Language Acquisition in Japanese Classrooms

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Abstract

This article seeks to reach beyond explanations regularly cited for the relatively poor performance of Japanese students on English tests required for entrance to anglophone universities. It ventures the notion that it is Japanese culture itself that prevents the creation of circumstances conducive to effective language acquisition. This article concerns itself with a relatively new and understudied domain - the sociocultural perspective regarding L2 learning interactions. The sociocultural perspective (also known here as the neo-Vygotskian approach) builds on Vygotskian theory by recognizing that, no matter how well teacher-fronted a class may be it is

collaborative learning relationships that have the potential to facilitate L2 learning more effectively than expert/novice or other kinds of peer/peer interaction (Storch 2002 2004, Lantolf & Thorne 2006) in the classroom. The following seeks to discuss how the daily social and cultural practices in which Japanese students participate frustrate collaborative learning relationships in the L2 classroom.

Key Words: Japan, culture, sociocultural, collaborative, sociolinguistics

The Sociocultural Perspective: Challenging the Mainstream

The explanations which address why Japanese students of English consistently attain some of the lowest scores in the world (ETS website) on such standardised language proficiency tests as the TOEFL test fall into two broad categories: Firstly, Japanese students lack the incentive to master the language because they do not need to use it in their daily life. Secondly, the problem is said to reside in method of English instruction typically deployed in Japanese public schools, particularly at high school level. In a nationwide study (Koike 1993), found that around 75% of 1412 senior high school teachers focused on reading comprehension, grammar, and translation in order to prepare their students for the all important university entrance examinations (Takanashi 2004). These explanations have become near clichés over the years and there is surely a good deal of accuracy in any observation so often repeated. These are areas of great complexity and certainly worthy of the special attention that they have received in research literature elsewhere.

This article seeks to argue a deeper explanation by looking at the issue of English Language Acquisition (ELA) through a sociocultural lens. The research on the sociocultural perspective is of interest for two reasons: a) because this approach to language instruction exists in stark contrast to what is realistically possible in Japanese classrooms while b) it unpacks the exciting possibilities of this approach in the L2 classrooms of more receptive cultures. It is also of interest because the field of sociocultural interactions in the classroom remains a much understudied area of pedagogical research (Pennycook 2001), even in national circumstances favourable to the adoption of this approach. One explanation for this dearth of sociocultural research outside Japan is the manner in which studies have been constricted by a narrow traditionalist purview of mainstream SLA work. Pennycook (2001: p.143) remarks, "...the learner has been cast as a one-dimensional acquisition device...as a sort of language learning machine." Lantolf (1996: p.716) suggests that SLA "presents a lopsided and uncritical view of both itself and the scientific tradition from which it arises, and it precipitously dismisses those who would challenge it." Rampton (1995: p.294) points out that SLA studies, "could probably benefit from an enhanced sense of the empirical world's complex socio-cultural diversity." Similarly Gebhard (1999: p.544) argues for a 'sociocultural perspective' that takes as a starting point "an understanding that the origin and structure of cognition are rooted in the daily social and cultural practices in which an individual participates."

These criticisms of mainstream English Language Acquisition (ELA) research have a particular resonance in Japanese classrooms where students are analogous to 'black boxes' expected to function as receivers and decoders rather than actively communicate in pairs or small groups. The expected function of the Japanese language student contrasts with the widely held belief of scholars like Walsh (2006: p.16) who recognize that, “language is used as a vehicle for communication and as a conduit through which opinions, feelings, emotions, and concerns are expressed and information...transacted.” However, the prescriptive rules of social interaction deny public schools and universities in Japan the realistic possibility of developing language programmes which deploy a Vygotskian approach (Mantero & Iwai 2005, Wray 1999). As Takanashi (2004: p. 9) notes, “Japanese society tends to value formality in public contexts. This is true of schools in Japan. Hence, formality is more important than creativity in the language class”. Cortazzi (1990) reinforces the lack of creative collaboration in Japanese classrooms and remarks that students are expected to memorise someone else’s correct sentences instead of creating new sentences for themselves. The next section defines the conditions necessary for 'collaborative' interaction through the sociocultural lens.

The Sociocultural Perspective: Collaborative Learning in Japan?

Within the purview of Vygotskian theory, classroom internalization is largely dependent on social construction. From Vygotsky comes the insight that only a small proportion of a student’s cognitive development is self-constructed. By far the larger proportion is done by internalizing a successful performance seen in another person in

their social environment and/or by working collaboratively with their peers in the construction of more powerful strategies. In this 'constructivist view' of learning, as opposed to the increasingly problematic 'reception view', the teacher provides meaningful and appropriate guidance and extension to the learners' experience. Appropriate guidance means that teachers: a) should not support the student in activities in which s/he is already capable and b) should focus on supporting the learners attempts to make sense of their experiences and enable them to cross the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). The ZPD is in one way the learning 'space' that exists between learners and also the spectrum of achievement only available with the support of other learners (Vygotsky, 1978).

From a sociocultural perspective when students take on collaborative roles in an interaction, they are assisting each other equally while attempting to solve a particular linguistic challenge or problem. For this reason the word collaborative in all its forms has been avoided unless it exhibits the following features of a 'collaborative relationship' (Storch 2002). In order to meet Storch's neo-Vygotskian definition of collaboration students must experience a learning relationship during which they:

- offer positive corrections;
- provide positive confirmations;
- assist in the completion of their partner's sentences;
- ask clarifying questions.

It is this type of collaboration that many studies highlight as essential, and that without the opportunity to practice language and negotiate meaning in pairs or small groups, students' language learning may be hindered. These are fundamental aspects of collaboration in an L2 setting that are not found in Japanese classrooms because core cultural values effectively prohibit such learning behaviours. Indeed, the collaborative interactions that many non-Japanese teachers of English see as vital to language acquisition are perceived by the vast majority of Japanese adults as unacceptable social conduct. Consider the following observations regarding the norms of social interaction in Japan. Japanese communication largely consists of communicating intuitive listening and an understanding of implied meanings. This relies heavily on the listener's inference of the speaker's inner thoughts, real wishes and intentions based on non-verbal information such as facial expressions (Shelley 1993, Takanashi 2004). They are neither expected to request clarification, or to give negative opinions during conversation. If they are asked to do something that they cannot comply with they will try to express the impossibility of the suggestion indirectly. Therefore Japanese people often avoid saying 'No'. If they would like to say 'No', they often use such expressions as: 'Yes…but…' or 'it is difficult…', (Takanashi 2004). To directly refuse, challenge or correct the interlocutor creates a condition of public embarrassment known as 'losing face'. Japanese society is a harmony oriented society. Face saving is a primary principle in communication among Japanese (Gudykunst et al 1988, Onaha 1991). In a high context-culture like Japan, "a direct mode of communicating can be perceived as highly threatening and unsettling to one's face", (Gudykunst et al 1988: p.

87). When one considers Gudykunst's remark it is not surprising that criticism is not well received in Japan and the 'western' notion of a distinction between remarks concerning behaviour or performance (impersonal) and personality (personal) does not exist in Japanese culture. Being correct and accurate is important to Japanese people, which reflects the priority given to correctness (grammaticality) over comprehensibility (natural expression) in Japanese ELA classrooms (Wray 1999, Takanashi 2004). It can be clearly seen, even after a short summary of pertinent cultural characteristics that offering corrections, confirmations, verbal completions and asking questions is not a realistic expectation in the L2 classroom in Japan. Indeed, the basic pre-requisite to all of the above – interruption, is simply 'not the done thing'.

Black (2007) in his research on peer-peer collaboration as a method of linking assessment and instruction in world-wide settings remarks that, at present students are seen working in groups but not as groups. This is a crucial distinction when evaluating whether the kind of collaborative learning that actually facilitates ELA is taking place in Japanese classrooms. Indeed, the casual observer passing a Japanese English language lesson may glance through the window and see students working in pairs and small groups. Although the form may appear appropriate the substance of the interactions taking place does not meet Storch's 2002 definition of collaboration as presented earlier. As Black & Wiliam (2005) observe, the creation of a collaborative classroom culture will require a different change-management strategy depending on national circumstances, and may be very challenging indeed. This is never more true than in the case

of implementing effective ELA interventions in Japanese public schools. Indeed, Goldman (1994: p.7) argues that, "Graeco-Roman and Confucian-Buddhist-based cultural and communicative codes are fundamentally antagonistic, contributing to misperceptions and conflict."

The Social Construction of Knowledge

The practical implementation of the neo-Vygotskian sociocultural approach as defined by such researchers as Lantolf (1996), Lantolf & Thorne (2006) and Storch (2002, 2004) is very challenging, even in potentially receptive cultures. However, there is a preponderance of anecdotal evidence from practitioners and research by academics outside of Japan (Kumaravadivelu 1993, Donato 1988, 1994, Kubota 2004) that support more general Vygotskian understandings of classrooom interaction. When taken together they strongly suggest that ELA is best supported by the use of pairs or small group interactions. As Kumaravadivelu (1993: p.12) says, "...theorists and practitioners alike almost unanimously emphasise communication of one kind or another." Thinking comes along as a necessary element of the communication process. It is for this reason that, "human thought is consummately social: social in its origins, social in its functions, social in its form, social in its applications," (Geertz cited in Bruffee, 1993: p. 114). As Eisner & Peshkin (1990: p.31) observes, "Whether we are talking about unicorns, quarks, infinity, or apples our cognitive life depends on experience." In the microcosm of the classroom and then in the yet smaller collective of the group or dyad this observation is also true. The internalisation of experience arising from social interaction is crucial to a person's understanding

of his or her role as a participant in a post-modern society typified by states of flux, dynamic change and complex uncertainties. The key to understanding the difference between the Vygotskian view (expert/novice interactions), the neo-Vygotskian perspective (peer/peer collaborative interactions) and more the traditional 'reception' views found in Japanese public schools and universities, is that for Vygotskians, knowledge is not what individuals believe but rather what social groups or knowledge communities believe. It is from the neo-Vygotskian approach known to linguists as the 'sociocultural perspective' that this article takes its focus. This widely accepted evolution of the Vygotskian approach has in recent years begun to gradually move toward a wider acceptance of sociocultural perspectives in the field of second language acquisition.

Advocates of the sociocultural approach have an extensive library of Vygotskian (pre 1970s - present) and neo-Vygotskian (late 1980s - present) foundation research from which they may draw. Classroom practice has evolved at a rapid rate since the importance of classroom interaction was widely acknowledged at the 1972 International Communication Association (ICA) convention which focused on interaction and learning. The convention was held in Washington D.C; it would be most surprising that any acknowledgement regarding the value of communication would have taken place in Japan where words are seen as subordinate to actions and are even viewed with suspicion. In high-context cultures like Japan, verbal skills are considered suspect, and confidence is placed in nonverbal aspects of communication (Okabe, 1983). To the Japanese, a person who relies too much on words and logic is ‘verbose, argumentative,

simplistic and sometimes slow' (Shelley 1993: p. 118). Thus, Japanese people are not accustomed to expressing themselves effectively (Takanashi 2004).

In cultures where effective neo-Vygotskian peer-peer interactions may take place the benefits across the entire curriculum have been compellingly expressed (Johnson and Johnson 1996; Fuchs et al 1994; Slavin 1990). Consequently an increasing quantity of teachers in every discipline is structuring their teaching methods to engage their students in communicative tasks, often through grouping their students in small groups or pairs. Johnson and Johnson (1996) using the term 'co-operative learning groups' began to characterise the benefits of peer learning interactions as: a) positive independence, b) individual accountability, c) face-to-face promotive interactions and d) the appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing. In summary, such learning arrangements act as powerful catalysts for higher achievement, more positive relationships among students and greater psychological health. Unfortunately, cooperative learning groups are rarely seen in Japanese classrooms despite accumulating political encouragement from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). If attempted they are highly experimental ELA procedures which take place in a system exclusively geared towards examinations and where rote learning, repetition and drills are preferred learning strategies (Mantero & Iwai 2005, Takanashi 2004). Outside of Japan the emphasis on examination results is an increasingly critiqued policy focus by advocates of formative assessment interventions (Black & Wiliam 1998, Stiggins 2004,

ARG 1999) which exist to establish a culture of collaborative learning in the classroom. It is felt by many researchers and academics that a very serious consequence of the ever more robust focus upon traditional assessment systems is the creation of large numbers of disaffected students, particularly among lower achieving students (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003). This negative impact of current policy has been well documented in such countries as the UK. Both Cambridge University's Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (1999) and the University of London's EPPI-Centre (2002) recognize that students are intimidated by traditional high-stakes tests, show high levels of test anxiety and much prefer other forms of assessment. The pressure to succeed in Japan is generally much greater than in 'western' nations. University entrance exams ("juken" 受験) are very challenging as indicated by frequent references to the "exam hell" ("shiken jigoku" 試験地獄) they bring into the minds of Japanese students. Students who fail the "juken" become "rounin" (浪人). This is a term specifically designed to attach social stigma to the failing of examinations, referring as it does to a samurai stripped of both livery and land.

A Pattern of Poor Performance

The mean paper-based TOEFL scores by those who use Japanese as their native language have remained consistent across time, for example: July 1993 – June 1995: 494; July 1997 – June 1998: 496; July 2004 – June 2005: 495 (ETS website). These may be considered inadequate mean scores for academic purposes as most anglophone universities require a paper-based TOEFL of between 550 and 580 (or computer test score of 213 - 240). The argument that Japanese

students lack the motivation to succeed appears invalid because students of TOEFL are goal-driven students of English who intend to enter anglophone universities – simply put, they want nothing more than to succeed. The second explanation attributed to low attainment; the ability of public school Japanese English teachers (JEts) is only partially convincing because dedicated and expert TOEFL teachers are available at many private institutions and language centres in Japan. However, it is also partially true because English language education in public schools is without question poorly constructed in terms of instruction, curriculum and assessment. Consider the 2002 Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announcement of new targets for English language education, which require JEts to attain at least 550 points on the paper-based TOEFL test. The MEXT target implies that many JEts have not demonstrated the ability to attain even the minimum scores required for entry into many Anglophone universities. The aforementioned MEXT standards provide a good example of the political rhetoric that exists in Japan, which is further illustrated by the following extract from a speech marking the beginning of the 21st century:

"... Japan is at a major turning point---one might even say a critical point. ...all Japanese acquire a working knowledge of English---not as simply a foreign language but as the international lingua franca...knowledge of English as the international lingua franca equips one with a key skill for knowing and accessing the world...In the long term, it may be possible to make English an official second language, but

national debate will be needed...So long as English is effectively the language of international discourse, there is no alternative to familiarizing ourselves with it within Japan. Even if we stop short of making it an official second language, we should give it the status of a second working language..." (Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, 2000).

While such political support has led to government aid for those who wish to learn there appears to be little realistic hope of improvement in terms of performance. Indeed, in taking an international perspective the Japanese government appears to conveniently ignore the limitations of national culture in its deliberations. In Japan, culture inevitably exerts a strong influence upon individual behaviour in public and therefore in public schools. This is best illustrated by the phenomenon known as 'synergy', or the 2+2=5 equation of collective strength. This holds that a culture is greater than the sum of the parts that collectively bring it into existence. This remains true even where individuals exhibit 'culturally deviant' behaviour because they have no choice but to remain unwilling participants (or subjects) within a dominant system of values or otherwise try to escape its influence.

Culture and Classroom Learning Strategies

Many students will learn whatever is necessary to get the grades they desire. Japanese high school students are strongly motivated towards learning in order to pass university entrance examinations (Takanashi 2004). As a direct consequence, English language tests in Japanese

high schools most usually involve memorizing grammatical rules and sequences. Students are encouraged to deploy a learning strategy that focuses exclusively on the retention of facts, which often causes a flurry of activity before English lessons as they try to perfect a particular sentence translation. It is ironic that the inchoate conditions for a collaborative learning strategy occur in the space of several hectic and highly pressurised minutes outside the classroom.

According to Chamot (2005), learning strategies are conscious and goal-driven procedures that can expedite (or complicate) language acquisition. Chamot advances the notion that an investigation into student learning strategies can provide insight into the cognitive, affective and social strategies used by L2 students. Students who struggle to develop effective learning strategies can be taught how to approach their studies in order to become better language learners (Zhang 2003, Chamot 2005). What would happen if this nascent learning strategy no longer existed outside official environs and the 'shadow side' of school life and became a politically supported learning strategy in the Japanese classroom? This is where the rhetoric on educational reform in Japan meets the systemic realities (instruction, curriculum and assessment) of the public school classroom as indicated by the difficulty policy makers have experienced in changing the rhetoric into measurable improvements in performance.

Ill conceived education policy changes could send a country already at the crossroads of demographic and economic transformation into disarray - a particularly alarming prospect in Japan's highly risk

sensitive culture. On the subject of social change and risk, observers of the global 'post-modern era' remark that conventional social institutions now create more risks than they mitigate (Beck 1999). The crisis is largely attributable to policies which advocate the energetic use of methods which no longer meet social needs. It is remarkably difficult to confidently forge a new direction for a national education system within 'post-modern' societies which are typified by cultural fragmentation, states of flux and rapid and turbulent change. Educational change management requires a stable planning horizon; a luxury that Japan does not currently enjoy. Beck's insights have a quite profound meaning in the specific case of Japan; a country that has recently begun to understand that it has taken the deep breath before the plunge into the complex uncertainties of dramatic demographic restructuring. For example, up to 40% of Japan's 744 universities could vanish in the next 10 years (Goodman 2008). A trend of falling birth rates has resulted in the number of 18-year-olds, who provide 90% of all university entrants, falling to 1.3 million in 2007; a fall of more than 700,000 since 1992. Without the prospect of either a baby boom or an immigration influx the figure is expected to fall to 1.18 million by 2012. That would then be an overall decrease of 42.3% over 20 years. Nearly 75% of Japan's universities are private and run four- or two-year courses. They are considered second-class to the country's 87 national universities. This perception puts private universities at a serious competitive disadvantage. Goodman (2008) reveals that 30% of four-year private universities had failed to fill their student quota in 2004, and the figure was 40% for two-year universities. They predict that between 15% and 40% of private universities will go

bankrupt, merge or be taken over by more popular universities within the next decade.

Even if Japan were not beset by potentially disastrous demographic challenges an attempt to implement a collaborative learning programme in Japanese public school classrooms would eventually cause a significant change in the daily social and cultural practices in which Japanese individuals participate. This appears to suggest exaggeration until one considers that public schools are crucial as sites where the fundamental values of society are transmitted to young people and reinforced, thus determining the identity of a nation. In general schools are oriented to both the past and the future. In Japan, society remains tightly rationalised around traditional values and so it may be argued that Japanese schools are inherently oriented to the past. Adult members of a society expect that schools will promote national identity and social continuity by encouraging student allegiance to important political, economic, and social values (Landis 2007). To re-design the engines of society – public schools – by using collaborative learning 'technology' runs the risk of undermining national identity and social continuity. The result is the notable avoidance of implementation of constructivist theory, such as the 'social construction of knowledge' (Vygostky 1978) in classrooms in favour of the repeated revision of outdated structuralist approaches to learning. For example, a 2004 paper presented by the Hokkaido University at the Council of Europe's policy forum on 'global approaches to plurilingual educational' suggested seven proposals for the improvement of English language learning. The paper was entitled ‘Foreign Language Education in Japan: A Japanese

Perspective.' The first proposal included the following:

"Cultivating communication abilities through the repetition of activities making use of English: The majority of an English class will be conducted in English and many activities where students can communicate in English will be introduced.
Small-group teaching and the streaming of students according to proficiency in the English classes of junior and senior high schools will be positively adopted." (Hashimoto, 2004)

It is unclear what the presenter meant by 'repetition of activities', however it would be logical to assume that a progressive paper on ELA is referring to a range of regular isomorphic activities rather than the current counter-productive teacher-fronted curriculum of drilling and repetition. Hashimoto's sincere expression regarding reform has in recent years been echoed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). MEXT has made a concerted effort to convey the importance of English to the nation's schools. They address the concerns of Beck and his associates when they state that JEts need to deepen students understanding from a wider perspective, enhance their awareness of being Japanese living in a global community, and cultivate a spirit of international cooperation (MEXT, 2003). Mantero & Iwai 2005 remark that language teaching in a 21st century Japan must "address and foster our students' potential to develop as a global citizen within a local context," (p. 168). At present current practice falls far short of the learning possibilities presented by the sociocultural approach and lessons which implement Vygotskian learning interventions remain

virtually non-existent in Japanese public school classrooms. Mantero and Iwai advocate the sociocultural perspective but can find very little to recommend it as a realistic proposition due to the lack of a compelling body of extant research from inside Japan. They frequently cite the initiatives of MEXT, and remark, 'since the materials made by MEXT have been improved to focus on more communicative abilities, students now have opportunities to learn better English conversational skills,' (Mantero & Iwai: p.170).

However, they are unwilling to contemplate that the change-management rhetoric of MEXT is heavily circumscribed by what is culturally feasible. It is with a sense of inevitability that Mantero and Iwai conclude their article with the admission that Vygotskian approaches (let alone neo-Vygotskian approaches such as the sociocultural persecptive) are not evident in Japanese classrooms because teacher fronted grammar translation methodologies remain overwhelmingly prevalent.

The Sociocultural Perspective: Method and Findings

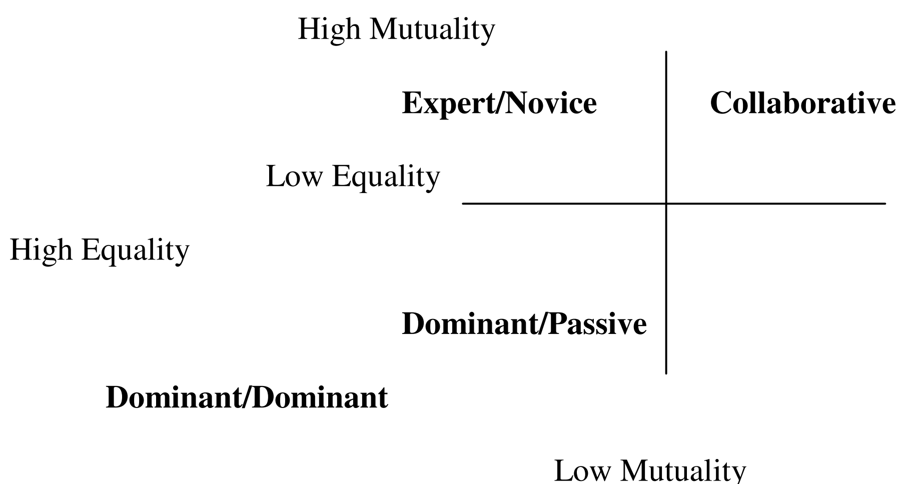
As stated in the opening sections of this article, Neomy Storch's research (2002) has been selected as a rare and robust investigation into how the sociocultural approach creates measurable increases in L2 performance. Storch analysed the dialogues of 10 pairs of ESL learners not only for their linguistic competence and language acquisition, but also according to the social interactions that arose naturally from those interactions. Her study attempted to explore the gap in the extant research on the social context of classroom learning. The purpose of this study was to determine what patterns of social

interaction were exhibited between pairs, the influence that performance of the linguistic task exerts upon pair interaction and the impact of the passage of time upon observable dyadic outputs. In summary therefore the over-arching aim of the study was to analyse whether the differences between types of dyadic interaction result in different outcomes in terms of second language acquisition.

In an attempt to determine how the sociocultural roles affect language learning across a variety of ELA tasks Storch combined the following roles and relationships into a common research framework: expert; novice; collaborative; passive; dominant. These dimensions were created by unifying the concepts of collective scaffolding and the sociocultural dynamics of dyadic interaction already discussed in the preceding sections of this article. In order to realise her research goals Storch analysed the transcripts of students in an academic ESL program. The dialogues were transcribed from tape-recorded interactions during the completion of three tasks. Storch analysed the transcripts by looking for any significant features embedded within homogeneous patterns of interaction between the pairs. From this she identified four patterns of interaction that described the role relationships between the participants: a) collaborative; b) dominant/dominant; c) dominant/passive; d) expert/novice.

Storch blended her framework with the 'theory of equality and mutuality' found in the work of Damon and Phelps (1989). Equality is defined as the level of authority or control over the task. Pairs exhibiting a high level of equality have the ability to take direction

from each other. Mutuality means the extent of engagement between each others contributions. Pairs which exhibit a high level of mutuality share ideas and give reciprocal feedback. The relationships between the different elements of Storch's 'model of dyadic interaction' may be seen below; as one would expect the collaborative quadrant is characterised by both high mutuality and high equality.



Storch found that students who worked collaboratively attained higher grades when compared with pairs who were observed in any other role. Expert/novice relationships also performed well but less so than their collaborative counterparts. This suggests that the existence of high mutuality in peer-peer interactions is more important than a relationship which emphasises high equality. Further if the terms expert/novice and collaborative are understood to refer to cognitive roles and dominant and passive roles exist in the affective domain, then one cannot be surprised that relationships that

emphasize cognition (the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension) achieved higher performance outcomes. The essential pedagogical point arising from Storch's findings is that teachers should be acutely aware of how the different social roles and relationships arising from learning interactions facilitates or frustrates the quality of the learning process and the outcomes of that process.

It is worth noting that the participants in Storch's study were not instructed on a strategy regarding how to work together effectively and the patterns of interaction she observed arose naturally during the course of the learning interaction. Attention to a learning strategy that fosters collaborative learning may be of use in a research design that seeks to gather data on the nature of sociocultural roles/relationships in the Japanese classroom. However, the roles and relationships would then become artificial products arising from partially manufactured interactions. This conjures up the notion of an abstraction of a never ending cycle of training programmes within programmes receding away toward an infinitely distant horizon. Further, should such research inside Japan suggest that the training of Japanese students in collaborative learning strategies is an effective facilitator of language acquisition exactly how would such a 'study skills' programme be incorporated into an already ample curriculum?

The research of Ohta (1995) in Japanese L2 classrooms is remarkable because it remains one of the few regularly cited studies that attempts to take a neo-Vygotskian perspective from inside Japan. Ohta argues for a sociocultural approach on the already well accepted grounds

that engaging students in peer-peer activities rather than deploying a teacher-fronted methodology facilitates language acquisition. Ohta found that peer dyads displayed greater linguistic accuracy than in those tasks fronted by the teacher. She also observed that the expert – novice role alternated between them. Ohta's findings support the proposition that guided pairwork enabled the learners to acquire language by sharing their strengths in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) – a spectrum of achievement only available with support (Vygotsky 1978). While both studies agree that interaction is essential, it is significant that Ohta's study does not meet Storch's specific sociocultural definition of 'collaborative' learning due to the restrictive norms of Japanese culture.

Conclusion

To date, Japanese L2 classrooms have remained resistant to the adoption of Vygotskian practices; including small group discussion, sharing of opinions or group problem solving (Ohta 1995, Mantero & Iwai 2005, Wray 1999). The traditional orientations of Japanese education frustrate the social construction of knowledge consequently an application of the neo-Vygotskian sociocultural approach becomes impossible, although there is anecdotal evidence from students and teachers that suggests Japanese public school students are very capable of working cooperatively. This is due to prevailing culturally derived concerns about examination performance (particularly entrance to university) and general overarching issues of social continuity rooted in the prescriptive nature of social conduct in Japan.

The crisis of ineffective learning interactions in schools in world-

wide settings is expressed by Black & Wiliam (1998: p.1) when they observe, “in terms of systems engineering, present policies in many countries seem to treat the classroom as a black box.” The ‘black box’ is an object for vital criticism because it functions primarily as a receptive system where, “certain inputs from the outside - pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental anxieties, standards, tests with high stakes, and so on - are fed into the box,” (Black and Wiliam 1998: p.1). These concerns are paralleled by Pennycook (2001) who comments that learners are expected to perform the functions that one would expect of a language learning machine. As proponents of the constructivist classroom they are persuasive in voicing their concerns about a system primarily designed to receive and decode external signals with utmost accuracy. This, they argue, reduces the opportunity for, and effectiveness of positive interactions inside the classroom. Indeed, policies which address national, state and local targets and the more vigorous and frequent testing of students’ performance proliferate the weaknesses of current approaches to instruction, assessment and curriculum. The observations of Black & Wiliam and Pennycook are particularly relevant in Japan. It is with these concluding observations in mind that this article ventures the notion that it is the cultural practices of Japan that prevent collaborative learning interactions (interruptions, corrections, confirmations, completions and questions) in Japanese public school classrooms. In doing so, classrooms across the curriculum are limited to revisions of out-dated structuralist approaches to instruction which are no longer appropriate in the 'post-modern era'. Consequently, effective learning (particularly in L2 settings) is frustrated. MEXT (2003) have recently begun to

acknowledge the more crucial issues arising from this culturally determined orientation toward the instruction techniques of the past: That is, continued usage may adversely affect Japan's collective ability to face the uncertainties of a very challenging local and international future.

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Title
Native Speaking English Teachers in Japan: From the Perspective of an Insider

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Biodata
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Abstract

The native non-native dichotomy has become heavily politicised, and the idealistic notion of 'the native speaker', prevalent in the 1960s, has been called into question in recent years. In fact, there is a body of literature that has started to question assumptions based on the 'native speaker myth', and ever-increasing importance has been attached to NNESTs. According to Ferguson, whereas 'linguists…have long given a special place to the native speaker as the only true and reliable source of language data' (Ferguson, 1983: viii, cited in Davies, 199: 431), for many in the modern context of World English(es), 'The native speaker is dead' (Paikeday, 1985).

This article examines the changing role of NESTs in English Language Teaching (ELT) over the last few decades, and adds to the little research that there is on the views of NESTs in the field. Through focus group studies at a Japanese university that employs 51 NESTs, it is concluded that qualified and experienced NESTs should be 'Proud to be a NEST', and it is suggested that the native/non-native distinction is less important than the expert/non-expert distinction. Indeed, while the myth of the native speaker may be dead, the concept of the native speaker "Expert Teacher" has perhaps been born.

Introduction

'In ELT, the native speaker has been sent worldwide to teach, train teachers, and advise' (Phillipson, 1992: 13). Every year native English speaking teachers (NEST) flock to countries such as Japan in search of jobs in the booming English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry. As a result of the extraordinary influence of Chomsky's use of the expression 'native speaker' as the 'ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly' (Kramsch, 1965: 3; Kramsch, 1998), the native speaker ideal has remained a central part of the conventional wisdom of the ELT professions and as with 'many hegemonic practices, there has been a tendency to accept it without question' (Phillipson, 1992: 15). The discussion around non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and native-speaking English teachers (NESTs) has become heavily politicised. Some analysts have seen the issue as the exercise of power and status; some have said that the concept has political and economic benefits for the countries from which

particular languages originated (Phillipson, 1992), and others see it in cultural terms as the imposition of native speaker interaction norms contrary to the students own preferred styles of interaction (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996).

However, the idealistic notion of 'the native speaker', prevalent in the 1960s when great importance was assigned to oral skills in second and foreign language teaching, has been called into question in recent years; indeed some have labelled it a 'myth' (Phillipson, 1992). Starting in the early 1990s (see Mahboob, 2004: 87) a body of literature began to grow which questioned assumptions based on the 'native speaker myth'. Furthermore, there has been ever-increasing importance attached to NNESTs and titles such as 'Proud to be a non-native speaker' (Matsuda, 2003), 'Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on Non-native English-speaking professionals' (Kamhi-Stein, 2004) and 'Voices from the Periphery: Non-Native Teachers and Issues of Credibility' (Thomas, 1999) abound.

However, there is a scarcity of empirical research exploring the differences between NESTS and NNESTs (Cook, 2001; Medgyes, 2001; Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999), and the even smaller quantity on the self-perceptions and self-image of ELT professionals focuses on NNESTs (Llurda and Huguet, 2003; Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Furthermore, little research has been conducted on attitudes (see Braine, 2004: 21-22). Nevertheless, at a time when comments such as 'Native speakers without teaching qualifications are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and

experienced NNESTs, especially outside the United States' (Amin, 1999; Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Rampton, 1996) are accepted without question, there is a clear need for a new direction in the literature; the views of those in the 'centre' need to be heard. No research to date has exclusively examined the views of the NESTs and their reactions to the literature, and there are no titles in the field reading, for example, 'Proud to be a NEST'. In fact, it appears that the merits and the opinions of NESTs have been somewhat pushed to the side.

The purpose of this article is not to compare NNESTs and NESTs, nor to suggest that NESTs are superior, but to examine the changing role of NESTs in English language teaching over the last few decades, and to investigate both their views and their opinions on the matter. It has been said that 'the presence of non-native teachers is 'totally ignored' within TESOL' (Amin, 1999: 93), yet it would seem that it is, in fact, NESTs that have been 'ignored' in the research of the last decade.

The spread of English

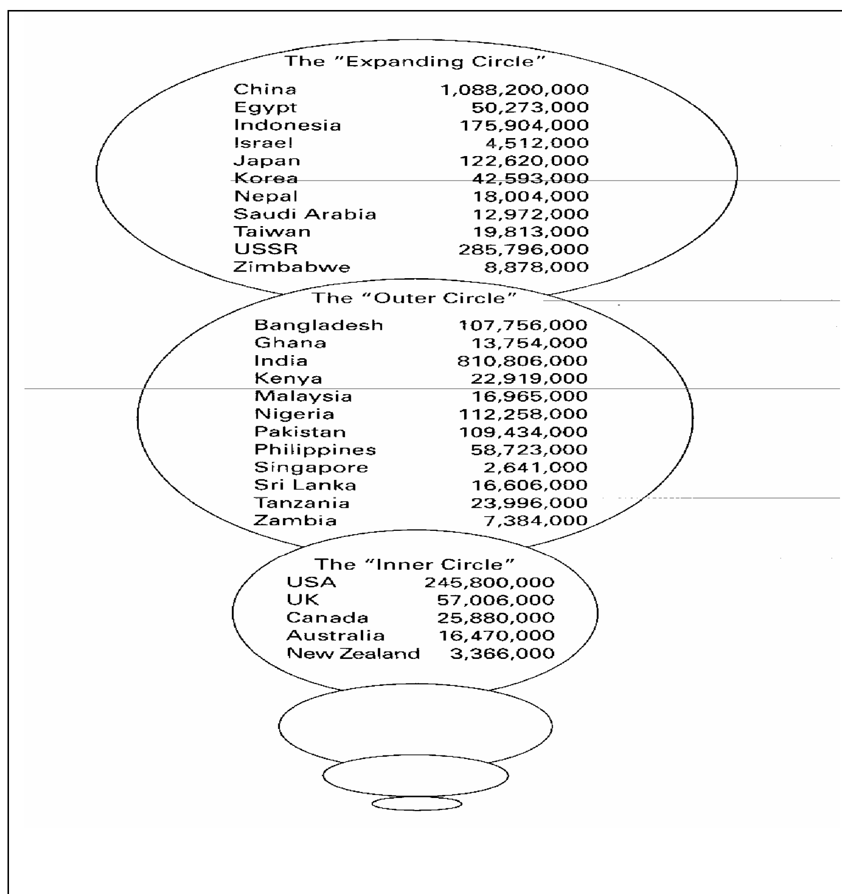
Today, English has become the principal means of communication, among native English speakers (NESs) and non-native English speakers (NNESs), and is used as a lingua franca by speakers from many different linguistic backgrounds. Thus, many governments feel that the acquisition of an English speaking populace has become increasingly important and are consequently encouraging NESTs to come and teach in their countries.

Who are the NESTS?

'Now the question is: who is a native speaker of English? A Briton is. A Hungarian is not. An Australian is. A French national is not. So far, so good. But what about an Indian for whom English was the language of school instruction and has been the language of professional communication ever since? He does not fit snugly into either the native-or non-native-speaker slot' (Medgyes, 1992: 340).

There are problems of common criteria when tracking down a Native English speaker (NES). Unlike Davies (1996), however, we are not interested in defining a NES as such, but in describing who the NESTs are in the language teaching industry. Language planners and institutions are constantly making decisions on who to employ and "lurking behind all such choices is undoubtedly the …dilemma of whether a new model [Singapore English, Pakistani English, etc] outweighs a distant 'historically authentic' model" (e.g. British English) (Davies, 1991: 6). This may also be viewed as a tension between inner circle models and. outer circle models, in Kachru's (1989) model of World Englishes represented in figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes



Source: Kachru (1989).

The majority of NESTs in the EFL industry in Japan are recruited from the Inner circle (Galloway, in press (a); Tang, 1999: 577) to work on The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), a programme set up in 1987 that invites native English speaking Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to work mostly in Japanese schools (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000; The Jet Programme 2003-2004: 1). The preference for this type of English is also

dominant in textbooks (Matsuda, 2003: 495; Yamanaka, 2006). This is justified by students' requests, although research shows that ESL/EFL learners do not in fact have a preference for NESTs, but see strengths in both types of teachers (Ahmar, 2004: 122; Cook, 2000; Mahboob, 2004). Some studies do show, however, preferences for 'Standard' Englishes, and that students have a lack of awareness of different varieties (Benson, 1991; Friedrichs, 2000, cited in Matsuda, 2003: 484; Matsuda, 2003: 487; Toro, 1997, cited in Major et al., 2005: 44). It is also possible that the outer circle models are unfavoured by language institutions (Davies, 1991; Tay, 1982), because NESTs are often hired over teachers who represent outer circle models, despite the fact that English may be their first language or they may be bilingual (Canagarajah, 1999; Mahboob, 2005: 63).

NESTS – Why?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTOR

Full-time, 35 hours/week, 25 contact hours/week….Native British Speaker….TEFL or TESOL diploma and university degree required. 'Speaker of BRITISH ENGLISH (British, Northern Irish New Zealand and Australian people only). IF YOU HAVE A NORTH AMERICAN ACCENT YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO APPLY'. (Braine, 1999:26).

Walelign's (1986: 40, cited in Thomas, 1999: 6) 'Non-Native Speakers Need Not Apply' documented some of the prejudice that NNSs face in the hiring process abroad due to the 'birthright mentality' that anyone who speaks English as native can teach it.

The relative merits of NNESTs and NESTs have been extensively discussed (Boyle, 1997; Cook, 2001; Davies, 1991; Medgyes, 1992; Widdowson, 1994) in recent years. NESTs have been noted to be 'better language models', capable of creating an 'English-rich environment and 'teach the language more than the rules of the language' (Medgyes, 2001: 437). In Mahboob's (2004) US based study, 32 students enrolled in an intensive English programme were asked to provide written responses to a cue that solicited their opinions on NESTs and NNESTs. Results show that students feel both teachers have advantages (Table 1.1). Furthermore, in Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) of 17 TESOL graduate students (with teaching experience) also found that most (88%) of their teachers sadifferences in the teaching of NSTs and NNSTs. Once again(table 1.2), NSTs were seen as more confident English users, but NNSTs were seen to have more awareness of students' needs.However, the students were split on the question of whether NSTs or NNSTs were more successful in their teaching, and 58% chose the 'both' option
The growth of the 'native speaker myth' can also be seen as a result of the Chomskian paradigm (Bhatt, 2002), which has been extensively used in second language acquisition (SLA) research. In the early years, high importance was attached to the NS and being native-like was the ultimate goal of learners (Stern, 1983: 341), and as a result numerous textbooks invariably involve native speakers interacting with native speakers (Cooke, 1999: 189).

Medgyes (1986: 112) also noted the language deficiencies of NNESTs in those early days which shows that he, too, at one point 'fell into the trap of the 'comparative fallacy' (Mahboob, 2004: 77).

In a later paper, he added (Medgyes, 1994: 364) that 'Their deficit is greater if they work in less privileged teaching situations, cut off from NESTS or any native speakers'. It was comments such as these that fed the growth of the NEST in TESOL. The attitudinal loading of terms such as 'first language speaker', 'mother tongue speaker', or 'native speaker' has also translated into a preference for such speakers as language teachers/models in TESOL' (Mahboob, 2004: 77).

Table 1.1 Distribution of Positive and Negative Comments for NESTs and NNESTs

	NESTS		NNESTS	
Categories	Positive Comments (N)	Negative Comments (N)	Positive Comments (N)	Negative Comments (N)
Linguistic factors				
Oral skills	15	0	5	5
Literacy Skills	0	0	3	0
Grammar	0	4	12	0
Vocabulary	8	0	4	0
Culture	6	0	4	1
Teaching Styles				
Ability to answer questions	0	3	4	0
Teaching	0	1	5	0

Methodology				
Personal Factors				
Experience as L2 learner	0	4	15	0
Hard Work	0	0	5	0
Affect	0	0	6	0
Total	29	12	63	6

Source: (Mahboob, 2004: 139).

Table 1.2. Perceived Differences in Between NESTs and NNESTs

NESTs	NNESTs
• Informal, fluent, accurate • Use different techniques, methods, approaches • Flexible • Use conversational English • Knows subtleties of the language • Use authentic English, provide positive feedback • Communication not exam preparation	• Rely on textbooks, materials • Apply difference between L1 & L2 • Use L1 as a medium • Aware of negative transfer, psychological aspects of learning • Sensitive to the needs of students • More efficient • Knows students' background • Exam preparation

Source: Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999: 136).

NESTs – pushed to the periphery?

‘Only non-NESTs can serve as imitable models for the successful learner of English’ (Medgyes, 1992: 346).

‘They (NNESTs) are role models; they are success stories; they are real images of what students can aspire to be’ (Thomas, 1999: 12).

‘The professional license these traveling [Inner Circle/NEST] teachers need in order to qualify as ESL instructors is virtually their identity as native speakers. An ESL teaching job is their birthright’ (Canagarajah, 1999: 82).

Recent years have seen a growing number of influential voices question the notion that native speakers represent the ideal teacher (Mahboob, 2004: 87; Phillipson, 992: 195; Rampton, 1990; Scovel, 1994: 208; Tang, 1997; Tuitama-Roberts and Iwamoto, 2003: 9). Seidlhofer (2000) has gone so far as to call for the abandonment of the traditional native speaker model in light of the rise of World Englishes, and in this she echoes Kramsch (1993: 49) who suggests that it is time to ‘take our cues not from monolingual native speakers….but from the multilingual non-native speakers that constitute the majority of human beings on the planet’. English is increasingly taking on the role of the world’s lingua franca, and ‘non-native-speaker teachers are the ones who are inherently endowed with better expertise in guiding this process’ (Llurda, 2004: 318). Many publications deal with the merits of NNESTs (Braine, 1999; Liu, 1996; Medgyes, 1994; Thomas, 1999) and their role in the profession

has been appraised in such initiatives as the 1991 statement on non-native speakers of English and hiring practices, in which it was argued that English as a Second Language (ESL) employment decisions based on native language proficiency are discriminatory, and the constitution of the Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Caucus in 1998 (Llurda, 2004: 314).

What Phillipson (1992) calls the 'native speaker fallacy' is clearly being questioned. Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) TESOL graduate students, for example, in evaluating their own self-image as ELT professionals, rejected the issue of native or non-native for qualifications. Furthermore, Medgyes (1992: 343) found that two thirds of his 60 respondents, although they would prefer to employ NESTs, if hard pressed would choose qualified NNESTs rather than a native without EFL qualifications; while one third stated that native/non-native would not be a consideration and nobody answered that they would employ a native without qualifications. In this demythologizing of the native speaker, three clear aspects emerge:

1. Unrealistic expectations of near-native proficiency
2. The sometimes questionable nature of NESTs' qualifications
3. The cultural differences between the NESTs and the host country/students.

Expectations of near native proficiency

The issue of expecting near-native proficiency has been much discussed in the last two decades (Cooke, 1999: 195; Firth and Wagner, 1997; Kramsch, 1993: 9; Medgyes, 1992: 346; Modiano, 2001: 340; Smith, 1983; Tollefson, 1995). Kachru (1992: 358) suggests that the concept 'native speaker' is not always a valid yardstick for the global uses of English, and that many local models have been institutionalized in specific countries. Cooke (1999: 195) also adds that L2 users should be treated as people in their own right, not as deficient native speakers. Firth and Wagner (1997) have called the native speaker myth 'a skewed perspective' that undoubtedly has negative effects on the creativity and confidence of NNESTs, thus hindering their SLA; and Tollefson (1995) states that this imbalance in socio-linguistic power results in a life-long apprenticeship for the L2 speaker.

Furthermore, the growth in recognition of World Englishes and the changing role of English has also resulted in a reassessment of student goals (Llurda, 2004: 314), and as Smith (1983) states, an assumption that nonnative English speakers learn English in order to communicate with native English speakers and learn about their culture does not reflect the reality of the English language these days.

The questionable nature of NEST's qualifications

NESTs' qualifications have also come under scrutiny in recent years. Phillipson (1992: 15) suggests that 'many of the products of the British education system recruited into ELT apparently do not know much about their language' and previous studies (Browne and Evans:

18; Conel, 2003; Crooks, 2003:3; Galloway (a), in press; Helgeson, 1991: 8; McConnell 2000: 57; Shishin, 1999: 47) have shown that NESTs are often underqualified. Phillipson (1992: 15) states that their 'qualifications' are judged by the ability to demonstrate fluent, idiomatically appropriate language, in appreciating the cultural connotations of the language, and in assessing whether a given language form is acceptably correct or not (Phillipson, 1992: 13), skills which are neither impervious to teacher training nor beyond acquisition by well-trained non-natives.

In addition, the merits of NNESTs have been well documented in recent years (Auerback, 1993; D-Annunzio, 1991; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992, 2001; Philipson, 1992; Tang, 1997: 578). These include qualifications, English learning experience, knowledge of students' L1 and cultural backgrounds, etc (Medgyes, 1992: 340, 2001: 437). Tang (1997: 578) found that students viewed the shared mother tongue as a useful instructional tool in teacher-student interaction, although just as NNESTs can be trained in idiomatic expressions, etc, NESTs too are able to learn the students' L1.

Cultural Differences

Phillipson (1992: 194) challenges 'the native speaker fallacy' on the basis that the spread of English and the focus on native norms of usage and culture reflect a new 'Linguistic Imperialism'. He argues that the motivations bringing the post-colonial spread of English are economic, political and cultural. Other sociolinguists have also raised the issues of culture and identity in regards to language standards (Crystal, 1985) and argue that the issue of being native is not simply

a linguistic one, 'but is rooted in economic, political and cultural issues' (Mahboob, 2004: 79).

Cooke (1988) and Judd (1983) draw attention to the threat that the postcolonial spread of English poses to indigenous languages, which Day (1980; 1985) calls 'linguistic genocide,' and the role it plays as a gatekeeper to the better jobs in many societies. In addition, Kubota (1998: 298) fears that by learning English, particularly from NESTs, students' attitudes towards the world will change; while Pennycook (1994: 295) adds that it is not possible 'just to teach the language', but one has to make decisions on whose knowledge and cultures should be given credence, and what classroom practices to adopt. Saville-Troike (cited in Kramsch, 1993: 45) questions how far NESTs should teach foreign forms of discourse and insist on their production in class, and concludes that these 'ambassadors' (Llurda, 2004: 319) should raise awareness of sociolinguistic rules, but that it should ultimately be left to the learners to decide whether to adopt them or not. Teaching practices reflect a 'foreignness, as many NESTs are likely to come from very different cultures from their students (Miller, 1995: 33), and Phillipson (1992: 16) suggests that it is 'highly dubious how far British and American expertise is exportable to contexts with different cultural, linguistic, and pedagogic universes'.

The study

Opinions of NESTs have, therefore changed significantly over the years, yet there has been no research to date on the viewpoints of NESTs themselves and their attitudes towards their changing roles.

The present study is therefore, an attempt to investigate the opinions of a selection of NESTs and their self-image as ELT professionals, and examine whether NESTs too are 'Proud to be a NEST'. Several topics worthy of investigation have been identified in the literature:

1. The merits of being a NEST.
2. The identity of a NEST and student preferences.
3. NESTs as models of the language.
4. NESTs as role models.
5. NESTs and Culture.
6. The knowledge and experience of NESTs.

Methodology

Focus groups were used for data collection to enable the researcher to take a less directive and dominating role. As Krueger (1998: 11) suggests, various types of surveys and even face-to- face interviews assume that individuals really know how they feel and that people form opinions in isolation. However, before forming their own viewpoints people need to listen to others' opinions, and their opinions may shift in the course of a discussion (Krueger, 1998: 11).

The subjects

The study was conducted in January 2006 at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), a small private university in Japan with approximately 3000 students belonging to six departments, English, Chinese, Spanish, Korean, international communication, and languages and cultures. KUIS employs 51 foreign members of staff in the English Language Institute (ELI) to teach English, and all are responsible for writing their own materials and participate in several

research committees. They are all required to have teaching experience and a Masters Degree in TESOL, Applied Linguistics or a related field, and most have experience teaching in Japan. Additionally, they come from a variety of countries including America, Canada, The UK, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, and Korea, and thus the university was chosen not only for its large number of staff, but because of their diverse backgrounds and qualifications. In addition, this university emphasizes the three 'I's of interdependence, individualization and interaction, and promotes a communicative curriculum that enforces an English-only policy within the classes and the department itself, and assesses students on their in-class participation to promote the use of English in class.

For the purposes of this study, participants were divided into groups by nationality to ease the flow of discussion. The fifteen participants were grouped as follows:
The United Kingdom: Four participants
Australia/New Zealand: Five participants
The United States of America: Five participants

Procedure

While six is the ideal number for focus groups (Krueger, 1998: 14), groups were designed to be small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions. The topics were carefully predetermined and sequenced, and sufficient background information about the purpose of the study was provided in order to minimize tacit assumptions

(Appendix 1). Questions were based on Krueger's (1998: 54) five-category framework: opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions (2-5 questions) and ending questions. This also follows Morgan's (1997: 41) 'funnel approach', from free discussion to more structured topics, enabling participants to become familiar with the topic and to listen to others before discussing key topics. The prompts were reviewed by researchers with experience in conducting focus groups, and by a sample of the target audience. A pilot study was also conducted within the university amongst bilingual teachers and teachers from smaller countries, including Scotland and Ireland, and revisions were made as necessary. Groups were given one hour and thirty minutes to participate in the discussion.

Research Limitations

While focus groups often work best when participants do not know each other (Morgan, 1997, Krueger, 1998) or at least have had minimal contact, the participants in this study were work colleagues, which may have had an influence on the results since it is possible that they may have been responding more to past experiences, events, or discussions than to the immediate topic of concern. Familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure, which is also true of the close relationship between the moderator and the participants (Krueger, 1998: 19). Again, as a member of staff at this university, it is possible that the researcher may also have influenced comments. On the other hand, 'Focus groups are best conducted with participants who are similar to each other' (Krueger, 1998: 14) as people reveal more to people who are similar to them, and thus with work colleagues arranged by

nationality, it is possible that they may be able to have a freer discussion.

Results

Each of the video tapes and MD recordings were transcribed by NES foreign exchange students within the university.

Teacher backgrounds and views on teaching in Japan

As table 1.3 shows, all of the teachers are qualified; ten have additional qualifications and have a breadth of teaching experience both inside and outside of Japan.

Table 1.3 The subjects: Qualifications and Teaching Experience

First degree	**Masters Degree TESOL**	**Additional Qualifications**	**Experience elsewhere**	**Experience in Japan**
1	1	Masters in Translation	Teaching Italian, French and German in the States.	0
1	1	Masters in Theology	Teaching English in American High schools.	JET
1	1		Teaching Japanese in the USA	JET

1	1		Teaching English in a university in the USA and Thailand for four years	
1	1			Similar programme to JET.
0	1	Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults	Teaching English in Thailand for nine years.	
	1	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA)	Teaching English in Italy	Shane English Conversation school.
1	1	CELTA	Teaching English in China and Australia.	JET
1	0	Masters in Coastal Management	Teaching Geography in English high	A programme similar to

		and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).	school.	JET.
1	1	CELTA		Japan
1	1	Diploma in multimedia	Teaching English in Thailand, Korea, and Australia.	Japan
1	1		Teaching English in Brazil	Japan
1	1	Graduate diploma of language teaching and a CELTA	Teaching English in Australia and France	Thee months in a Japanese university (Westgate Programme).
1	1 completing now	Postgraduate diploma in Second Language Teaching		Japan
1	1		Teaching English in Singapore and Mexico	Japan

When discussing general views towards English in Japan and the ESL industry, it is clear from the transcripts that most think the Japanese are enthusiastic about learning English, although there was some speculation on whether this enthusiasm stems more from the 'fashionable' nature of English in Japan than a desire to improve their skills. In addition to being viewed as a 'hobby', the NESTs' also believed that English was a method of career advancement for their students, and there was some concern that students' instrumental motivation is much higher than their integrative motivation due to these social pressures to acquire English.

The merits of being a NEST

Many teachers made an important distinction between qualified and unqualified NESTs, something the previous literature has failed to do. As one teacher commented, 'We have teachers here who are excellent teachers, who started out at Eikaiwas, and obviously take it seriously. Then we have people like… someone looking for a job in an Eikaiwa ..He's not afraid to talk to people, he's not afraid to look at the textbook and eh! He looks good in a suit, well, whether he's gonna get a job, or take it seriously, I dunno…English speakers NESTs…. Are they beneficial or not? They are if they're good teachers and, if they're not, then they're not.' Referring to their own Japanese language learning experience, Another participant also suggested that nativeness does not equate with being a good teacher,: 'I find it frustrating when they can't explain something to me.'

Table 1.4 The Benefits of being a NEST

The Benefits of being a NEST
• NESs can create interest in the language • NESs attract students to language schools and universities – they look good! • Authentic English speakers • Cultural knowledge • Lack knowledge of Japanese language • Good model of English • Teaching methods – Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Nevertheless, the majority of teachers reported that the very presence of a NEST is beneficial due to the fact that they make the language 'real' and create an interest in studying English to communicate with foreigners. As one participant commented:

'Having the chance to meet someone from somewhere else, I think it can be quite inspiring for a lot of people and …. if I just remember, the first time when I was a little kid and I met someone from another country, how kind of odd it was by that and all the different things I learned from them and ….mmm.. in Japan of course, it's a bit harder to do that I think than obviously in America…..so I think there's a lot of benefits that comes in that way as well…our students here at Kanda and you ask them y'know, why did you become interested in English? Why do you carry on with English?... a lot will talk about their ALT or somebody they met in another country………I think it's

making them think about something else, so I think those are maybe more apparent benefits I think than even the language sometimes.'

Another commented on his interest in Japanese resulting from an encounter with a Japanese person. The inability to speak Japanese was also reported as a potential benefit by one group, due to the fact that it creates a motivation among students to speak 'standard' English as opposed to Japanese English.

'Authenticity' was also noted as an important factor, although the participants noted that this may, in fact, be more of a benefit for institutions as opposed to NESTs themselves. Three participants described themselves as 'token white people' and as 'draw cards' to enable their employing schools to compete with other institutions and attract students. Comparisons were made by one teacher who studied French and German in Australia. All of her teachers were NESTs and were 'respected for this' because students would have been shocked if a NNEST had turned up in their class. The NESTs in this study, however, appeared to view the quality of nativeness negatively, and one participant said that it was mere 'tokenism' to attract students rather than offering any perceived language benefit: 'it's all tokens, its got nothing to do with results'. This was also regarded as the reason for the large salaries given to NESTs, and the high demand for their services that led to these large salaries. The participants, however, did not view their role as superior to their NNEST counterparts, and when one participant asked another if he would choose a NEST over a NNEST, he replied that 'as a teacher' he would 'go with the best qualified, because I know how frustrating it

is asking someone, like any Japanese person or Korean or whatever, saying "Why is this?" or "Why is that?" [and] they don't know.'

On the other hand, the importance of culture was also noted, and in this context many comments revealed that in contrast to their remarks about token "authenticity", the majority did indeed feel that NESTs are beneficial when teaching the culture of the English language. Comments included:

- 'Only a NEST can teach 'culture';
- 'There are connections between language and culture of course, right, I mean anybody can teach language but being taught by a NEST, of course it will help, you can learn about language and culture at the same time';
- 'If I wanted to speak Russian, I would much rather speak to a Russian person, because as well as learning the language, I can find out about.. .y'know…sort of…references, like humour, things like which only a native speaker knows, or it could be a non native speaker who's lived in the country for so long that they understand it, that's the important thing'.

A significant number of the participants also commented on the quality of the models of the language that NESTs can provide. Comments included:

- 'This is important in a country such as Japan where we don't have so many efficient speakers. There are a few but a lot of teachers I know barely even have conversational English. I think it is a good benefit';

- 'There's also the perfect model of language that we can demonstrate in terms of correct vocabulary choice, correct grammar, pronunciation, etc…that's one of the benefits, we can explain about our own countries, and to an extent, most of us can explain about the grammar and the meaning of vocabulary.'

Pronunciation was also mentioned here, and one participant suggested (saying 'I think most people will agree'), that 'perhaps through being taught by a NEST [students] get a better model of language'.

Several teachers also discussed communicative teaching methods: 'perhaps non-native speakers teach English in this country, they're using a completely different method, so perhaps if you're being taught by a non-native English speaker, with immersion 95% of the time, …. [then] the immersion benefit will be quite large'. This refers to the fact that the university where this research was conducted requires that all classes be conducted in English and both students and NESTs are not permitted to speak English in class.

In addition to all of these benefits of being a NEST, the prompt also generated discussion of the potential benefits of being a NNEST in each group, which have been recorded in table 1.5.

Table 1.5: The benefits of being a NNEST
• Has been an English learner • Teaching experience • The ability to explain grammar in students' L1 • role model

Commenting on his experiences as a novice teacher in Brazil, one of the participants stated 'So… um… in terms of benefits to students, which was the other part of this…. definitely in those early years the Brazilian students would have had the benefit of working with their Brazilian teachers rather than working with me'. Another added that students in KUIS often state that they enjoy their one class a week with a NNEST, who is a 'good model for them as learners………[and that they can] learn so much from him in terms of strategies; learning strategies and language speaking'.

The identity of a NEST and student preferences.

Many participants discussed students' preferences for certain varieties of English; the British group discussed preferences for British English and the New Zealand/Australian group discussed preferences for American English. It was also suggested that certain language schools advertise those certain varieties to entice students who want to learn 'the Queen's English', for example, or those interested in British music etc, suggesting that students do have preferences. Most agreed that preferences were related to cultural interests and stereotypes of the polite and friendly 'Englishman', for

example, as opposed to any actual perceived linguistic benefits. It was also suggested that hierarchies have been set up within the inner circle, and 'If Australia or New Zealand was the most powerful country in the world they would certainly want Kiwi English'. Skin colour was also reported to play an important role, and the majority agreed that image is very important in Japan.

'I think perhaps on the negative side in Japan, a lot has to do with appearances, right, you look like..you look the part, so people think you are. When people think of an English speaker in Japan, and there's English speakers all round the world, right, but they have a very clear idea of some kind of white person and there's a demand for native English teachers who fit the particular model. That's the main reason why there are so many English speaking teachers. That's why people get by … they look the part.'

Reports were given of a Singaporean colleague who had negative experiences because of his 'Asian appearance' despite the fact that 'His English was… better than mine', and another candidate who was refused a job because he was not what the institution perceived to be a 'Westerner', although he was American-born and the best candidate. This was again reported to be an institutional problem, stemming from the need to succeed in a very competitive industry.

Nevertheless, every group agreed that their institution should employ NESTs from a wide variety of Englishes, to improve students' skills in understanding a variety of spoken accents, and to improve their cultural awareness in preparation for a globalised world where

English is used as a lingua franca by more non-native speakers than native speakers of English. There was also agreement that lack of such exposure may also serve to entrench the stereotypical view that English belongs to America or Britain, as well as perpetuate comprehension difficulties. Comments included:

- 'In their lives certainly anybody who goes into business or anybody who is using English in a work situation is probably going to end up communicating with far more non-native English speakers in English, than they will actual native English speakers, and……. in order to be able to understand a variety of accents and a variety of, y'know, of different varieties of English, its really important to get the exposure to………They're going to have to speak with their Chinese counterparts… in English'

Achieving near native proficiency

This was one area where the prompt was perhaps misleading, and participants seemed troubled over what exactly near-native proficiency involved. Despite this, however most were in agreement that while this may be necessary for some students who want to enter certain professions, overall, it is not a necessary requirement and is perhaps impossible. Most don't expect this from their students and as one teacher stated,

'Less than 1 % of people studying a language reach near native proficiency and I certainly don't expect my students to achieve it. I think that we're here to…help students along the path of learning a language. If you see this path as from A-Z, we are gonna to take them

maybe from G-R, hopefully and…I wouldn't expect any of them to achieve a near native proficiency because….. they just can't do it, no matter how much they listen.'

Reasons cited for this impossibility included cultural differences between the languages, the modest nature of the Japanese, and the lack of exposure in Japan which makes it difficult for students to fully understand English 'banter and jokes', although the latter was disputed by one teacher who believed that a motivated and interested student who immersed themselves enough should be able to understand cultural jokes etc. A distinction was made in two groups between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings, the former being a more restrictive environment for achieving near-native proficiency, due to the lack of NESs, particulary in Japan, yet the latter perhaps requiring it more, due to the increased likihood of using English with NESs. It was also suggested that it might be possible in terms of writing research papers, although this was not discussed at any great length.

NESTs as language learners

As mentioned previously, the inability to speak Japanese was noted as a benefit of being a NEST. On the other hand, language experience was reported as beneficial to allow NESTs to be familiar with the 'processes of studying' and the possible 'frustrations' students may have, and to pass on any 'strategies or tips for learning a language', although it was added that 'it doesn't necessarily make them better teachers, but I think it helps them with patience'. Other teachers agreed that it shouldn't be required but should be more of an 'added

bonus', and that just because a teacher was not a successful language learner doesn't mean he/she can't be a successful language teacher. It was also stated that while knowing a language can be helpful, using the students' L1 in the classroom is not desirable.

NESTs and Culture

Most participants were in agreement that NESTs inherently and unavoidably 'impose' their culture on Japanese students, and that language and culture are essentially intertwined; but this was not universally viewed as necessarily negative. Two commented on their own experience as language learners in America, and one on feeling 'lucky' to have been able to take on ' that kind of cultural thing, but I don't think it diminished my own language, my own culture.' Another noted that her teaching methods are immediately culturally different to what students are used to, and therefore in a sense 'you can't do anything else cos unless you are completely able to adopt Japanese culture you cant get up and teach a class in a Japanese cultural way. You can only teach it in a western cultural way.' An example was given of students' silence when she asks the class a question, something she dislikes and wants them 'to respond in a western way because that's, that's how I, that's my culture.' This led to a discussion of teaching approaches and the cultural appropriateness of certain methods. Many stated that while Japanese classrooms may be culturally different, in the real world it is often not possible to remain silent when asked a question, nor confer with your classmates, and therefore 'while it may be imposing certain values on students, it is merely teaching English for use in a variety of different situations'. It is a 'disservice if we leave out the cultural

aspects of the language' and students need to learn how to 'act and speak appropriately in certain situations'. It was, however pointed out that it should be 'up to the students if they want to adopt that model outside the classroom or not….. just let them know that that's what we do, we don't have to insist. We give them the model and let them take the choice.' Comparisons were made again with ESL and EFL settings.

Teaching methodology

Many participants commented on reports from students that the NNESTs at their university teach in a very similar way to Junior and Senior High school teachers in Japan, and thus they are given 'two different cultural models' at the same time which 'must be quite confusing for them going from one class with a Japanese teacher, sitting there, listening to what's said for one and a half hours, then coming into an English class where they're expected to get up , be Genki and talk to everyone, give their opinion, etc.' It was suggested on several occasions that 'It is a westernised model that's being imposed really, because if they refuse to communicate then their grades will suffer – if they don't participate with people, if they try to stick to a model that served them well for the first 18 years of their life, they're going to have huge troubles in our classrooms'. Many also expressed concern about measuring students' in-class participation, although this could be because the prompt directly mentioned this. One teacher defended CLT, suggesting that part of his job is to teach language in the 'hope that they'll be able to speak it…so I don't think it's so much a cultural thing as a teaching skill.. you've practiced, you can learn it, you can do it'.

In addition, most participants reported that they were aware of Japanese culture through living in the country itself, and many also felt that they were aware of students' backgrounds. However, many stated that it was difficult to generalize students' needs, and pointed out that individual needs are likely to differ significantly. One teacher commented that perhaps the students' need at Kanda is to 'get away from that Japanese, y'know, kind of pressure system, just to sort of be a bit freer….I certainly get that impression from feedback…such a chance to be able to speak out – to speak- say what they want to' .

Knowledge and Experience

Table 1.6 lists a number of qualities that NESTs think students look for. Many noted that teachers and students have very different views and one, for instance, noted that while she thinks 'grammar and expertise are important, students perhaps feel that patience, kindness and things like that are important.' Another commented on having overheard students remark on their NEST's 'patience' and 'kindness', and suggested that this is perhaps more important to students than a teacher's ability to teach. Physical appearance was also noted as a desirable quality, and one jokily commented that 'husband potential' might be what students look for in their male teachers, with 'blonde hair and blue eyes' as added bonuses. There was some debate over whether students look for a lively motivator, or a more quiet teacher, but there was general consensus that a teacher should motivate the students as a whole.

Table 1.6 **What qualities do students look for in a NEST?**
Approachability
Kindness
Physical appearance
Motivator
Clarity of explanation
Enthusiastic
Wants to teach, enjoys teaching
Entertainer/performer
Patience

Every group discussed the role of 'entertainer', and it was suggested that students may not perhaps seek any qualifications in their NEST: 'very few of the students I've met over here are really seriously interested in finding qualified, y'know, really highly qualified… qualified native speaker teachers'. On the other hand, the opposite was reported to be the case in Australia, where ESL students learning academic English desire highly qualified NESTs. The more serious students, those investing more time and money, were reported to be more concerned with teacher qualifications as 'maybe they've been through the system and have started to consider whether or not their teacher is qualified'.

On the other hand, the qualifications and abilities that the participants feel should be demanded by institutions in table 1.7 are quite different. While there was some initial confusion over what institutions the prompt was referring to, most teachers stated that

qualifications should be job specific. An example was given of a university in Houston where NESs were only needed to act as conversation buddies, and were not required to have real qualifications as such; while another noted that he was surprised at how much is expected of a NEST wanting to work in a Japanese university.

Table 1.7

What qualifications and abilities should institutions demand of their NEST's?
Teaching qualification Ability to motivate Knowledge of learners' individual needs and differences. Ability to teach Learner-specific qualification e.g. CELTA for adults.

Every group agreed that the NESTs working in conversation schools throughout Japan lacked appropriate training or experience, and there were numerous comments that they were recruited for their ability to speak English as opposed to their ability to teach. One referred to them as 'Kids who graduated from university and showed up here and they got put in these rooms with people and expected to teach English…..The silly thing is, y'know, that they could get so much more out of actually going to a class that was taught by a Japanese person, who was an expert in trained teaching'. It was concluded that 'places in Japan should require their teachers to be far, highly, far more highly qualified than they are at the moment…………The

ALTs that are out there at the moment, I mean the JET program in my opinion is just a joke.'

A need for more 'quality control' was reported, and several reasons were suggested for the recruitment of large numbers of seriously underqualified NESTs in many types of schools and language schools. These included the fact that a 'recent graduate can be hired for the minimum wage'; the shortage of qualified NESTs to meet the demand for teachers; and the possibility that certain places do not want qualified teachers, who may 'rock the boat', and are only seeking somebody who is going to go into class and pronounce words out of a textbook for the students to 'copy parrot fashion'. Thus, it was suggested that what is at issue is not just individual teachers, but the system as a whole. The possibility was also suggested of training NNESTs , to 'utilise the elites that they have'.

Do students view you differently to their past ALTs or language school NEST?

This prompt was included to elicit opinions from those participants with previous experience in Japan, and since most students at the university had an ALT in their school days. It was also intended to prompt discussion around the distinction between qualified and unqualified NESTs. Many teachers commented on the similarities in the way their roles are portrayed to students, particularly during the first few weeks of term when teachers throw parties for students, which 'is basically like this show that's put on by the teachers', and which one participant believes to be a way of showing students that English at KUIS is similar to high school. Comments were made on

the more 'serious' nature of second year English education at the university, which is 'much more focused compared to Freshman teachers' who are often 'performing half the time'. In fact, many commented that 'the entertainer bit is maybe bigger than any other part of what our role is here really' and that some of their colleagues are angered by the unprofessional nature of their position, similar in many ways to that of ALTs.

However, a few teachers did comment that students may view them more as professionals because of their qualifications, and it was decided that university lecturers inherently gain more respect in Japan with the ability to take charge of their own class and allocate grades, a responsibility that language school teachers and assistants do not have. Comments were also made on student reports to the effect that their NNEST counterparts had remarked on the lack of seriousness of the ELI as a whole; and thus, as one participant suggested, 'So I think perhaps that's not only because of the transition from, y'know, high school to here, but maybe there is something to do with internal politics as well'. This led to another comparison of NESTs and NNESTs in another group, and the difference in the focus of the classes, the former being more active and the latter being more grammar orientated. Two participants also mentioned that due to their backgrounds, students at KUIS may feel that their NNEST classes are more valuable, although less fun, and another commented that he would be interested in student's opinions of the Portuguese teachers or the Vietnamese teachers 'because they are one in their own office, running y'know their own courses or classes', unlike members of the ELI at KUIS who share an office with two other teachers.

Discussion

General reflections by respondents on English in Japan reveal that the Japanese have a generally low level of communicative ability, which relates to their mainly instrumental motivation to pass tests and the lack of opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. As Yoshida (2003: 290) notes, 'Foreign residents amount to just 1.3% of the Japanese population.' On the other hand, the need for Japanese students to study English to participate in the global village also reflects Modiano's (2001: 341) comments that 'Individuals who desire or need to participate in the international movement will be rendered incapable of doing so without learning English'.

Why do we have NESTs?

It is interesting that while many of the participants commented on 'nativeness' as not equalling an ability to teach a language, the very presence of a NEST was noted as one of their benefits (Table 1). This importance of creating an interest in the language may be related to the fact that Japan is generally considered to be a monolingual, monocultural nation (Yoshida, 2003: 290), or as McConel (2000: x) puts it, a 'closed society', and that having the chance to meet foreigners gives students a realization that they can be understood outside their own culture, which in turn may increase motivation. NESTs, therefore, may have very different roles to play in more multicultural societies than Japan, for example those with more English-speaking residents and tourists, and further investigation is required of the role of NESTs in these settings. Nevertheless, the participants clearly see a real benefit here, in the Japanese context,

and perhaps ALTs should be given more credit than they have previously been accorded (Galloway(a and b), in press).

The token 'nativeness' reported by each group was also fascinating, due to the fact that they themselves didn't necessarily see it as personally beneficial. Indeed, it appears to have been noted as more of a 'draw card' for the institutions who employ native speakers in the belief that this is what students desire (Ahmar and Mahboob, 2004; Medgyes, 1991; Cook, 2000), which is the case in Australia, as one participant noted. Thus, it seems that in some countries, such as Japan, the Chomskian native-speaker paradigm (Bhatt, 2002) is still very much alive and is perhaps one of the reasons why young NESTs are recruited every year, enticed by 'large salaries'.

Many of the participants also noted the ability to teach culture as a benefit of the NESTs, and comments such as 'only a NEST can teach 'culture', and 'you can learn about language and culture at the same time' reflect Phillipson's (1992: 13) comments and many of the participants in this study still see part of their job as teaching students about their cultures as well as their language. As Kramsch (1993: 9) notes, 'language use is indissociable from the creation and transmission of culture', and thus as one participant noted, as 'foreign' teachers they automatically teach culture in their classes. In addition, as table 1.3 shows, many of the NESTs in this study have teaching experience outside of Japan, and in teaching other languages, which may explain the cultural benefit that they are perceived as bringing. However, it would be interesting to hear their comments on NNESTs educated abroad or with extensive travel

experience. As one participant noted, if a NNES is fully immersed in the language and the culture then it is possible to learn things like 'humour and jokes', which reflects Phillipson's (1992: 14) earlier comment that virtues such as fluency, idiomatically appropriate language, cultural connotations, etc., are not 'something that well trained non-natives cannot acquire'.

The potential benefit of NESTs' communicative teaching methods and use of English invite comparisons with NNESTs, who use more traditional methods of instruction. ALTs have been noted to increase student use of English, and Taguchi (2002: 5) found that in Oral Communication (OC) classes 40% of the lesson time was spent speaking in English, although this increased to 80-100% in Team Teaching (TT) classes. Sakui (2004: 158) also noted that classes given by Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) in the study, consisted of teacher-fronted grammar lessons, although OC classes with an ALT included much more English and the use of communicative activities, coinciding with Medgye's (2001: 437) belief that NESTs create more of an 'English-rich environment'. However, as Sakui (2004) : 156) notes, due to the considerable influence of entrance examinations in Japan, Japanese teachers are forced to 'wear two hats': that is, while they recognise the importance of CLT, it is not always possible in reality. This also relates to Galloway`s (b) (In press) observational findings that ALTs did not necessarily encourage the JTE to use English, but that this depended on the teacher. Furthermore, comments on the importance of English exposure and usage may also be related to the monolingual nature of Japan, and again results may be different in a more multilingual, multicultural

setting. As Strevens (1980, cited in Pennycook, 1994: 306) notes, NEST models may be more appropriate in EFL areas and local models in ESL areas.

There may be more weight given to the ‘good model of language’ provided by NESTs, which includes ‘vocabulary choice, correct grammar, pronunciation, etc.’, in a country that lacks ‘efficient speakers’. Comments on the low proficiency levels of JTEs have been well documented (Connel, 2003; Hughe, 1999: 562; McConell, 2000: 216; Medgyes, 1986: 112; Shishin, 1999: 46), while others like Llurda (2004: 319) and the NESTs in Galloway’s (a) (in press) study disagree. It is also questionable, however, whether this perceived lack of proficiency stems more from a low self image created by their own English education in ‘rote memorization and grammatical expertise’ (McConelll, 1996: 451), or the fact that by 2004 the Japanese government had employed over 6000 young NES graduates to work in Japanese schools throughout the country to teach ‘oral skills’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000; The Jet Programme 2003-2004: 1). In short, there is a possibility that the employment of young unqualified NESs is serving to lower the self image of qualified and experienced NNESTs and diminish their confidence in their ability to speak the language. This may also be one of the reasons why students in both Ahmar’s (2004: 122) and Samimy and Brutt-Griffler’s (1999) study reported that NESTs are good at teaching oral skills (Table 1.1 and 1.2) and those in Mahboob’s (2004: 436) study stated that NNESTs pronunciation is not perfect .

These attitudes are interesting due to the fact that all participants agreed that achieving near-native proficiency is impossible, perhaps stemming from their image of their NNES counterparts. In fact, in discussing various benefits of NNESTs, pronunciation was not mentioned, and perhaps the participants are 'still anchored in the old native speaker dominated framework in which British or American norms have to be followed and native speakers are considered the ideal teachers ' (Llurda, 2004: 319).On the other hand, NNESTs were not disqualified in terms of grammar and it was noted as a benefit. Nevertheless, the fact that the participants noted the ability to do this in students' L1 as valuable is interesting since Japanese was not seen as essential for NESTs, but a mere 'added bonus'. One teacher actually mentioned that her lack of Japanese was beneficial, as a useful way of encouraging her students to communicate with her in English. This is interesting since student attitudinal surveys have often reported the NNESTs ability to speak the students' L1 as a benefit (Samimy and Brutt-Griffler, 1999; Tang 91997: 578). JTEs in Galloway's (a)(in press) study also stated that ALTs should study Japanese.

However, foreign language experience was noted as being helpful and as table 1.3 shows, one of the NESTs in this study actually has experience teaching several other languages, and the various teaching backgrounds may also suggest that others speak several other languages. This is interesting considering that students in Ahmar's(2004: 122) study (table 1.1) gave NESTs negative comments for grammar and experience as an L2 learner, yet they rated their NNESTs positively in these areas, although this may have

been directed to the student's L2. It must be realized that NESTs, too, can act as potential role models for students as examples of good language learners. The distinction should be made between NESs who are 'monolingual speakers of English' (Kramsch, 1999: 34) and those with foreign language experience as well as qualifications.

Teaching experience was also noted as a potential advantage of NNESTs, although since this directly relates to age, it may actually reflect the fact that most of the NNESTs in this institution and throughout Japan are significantly older than the majority of NESTs. As the following advertisements in figure 2 shows, the majority of positions for NESTs in Japan have age restrictions, including KUIS.

Figure 2: A selection of Job Advertisements

ENGLISH TEACHER FOR KIDS AND ADULTS.
Full-time…. Teach children's classes………BA,
International/Japanese driver's license and 'ages 18-35' required.
Teaching experience, basic Japanese speaking ability, and interest in traditional Japanese culture/life preferred….. '

NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS.
Solo teaching at junior high school……..'less than 35 years of age upon application,'…

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (LECTURERS).
Full-time…. 5,000,000yen/year (including two bonus payments in September and March)………… MA (or internationally recognized equivalent) in TESL/TEFL (or closely related field) required.

Coursework in Speech or Debating, and experience teaching English (particularly at post-secondary level), and skill in sporting, dramatic, musical or other leisure areas preferred. 'Preference given to applicants below 35 years of age.'

Source: from Ohayo Sensei, http://www.linguistic-funland.com/ohayo-sensei.txt

NESTs – what should we expect?

Discussions revealed that students are clearly perceived to see their NESTs as more of a 'language model', an 'entertainer', and a motivator as opposed to a 'teacher'. Unlike studies reported in the relevant literature, however, no participants mentioned variety of English or pronunciation, an often stated preference of students in their NEST. In fact, table 1.6 reveals an apparently low self-image, which many participants blamed on their institution for over-emphasising the similarities between them and students' previous ALTs at freshman parties, etc. As 'entertainers' they do feel that they are treated as professionals, although this may also be related to reports that their non-native counterparts have commented on the unserious nature of their classes. While the views of NNESTs were not researched, it appears that in this institution in particular, there is a clear need for better communication between departments since some NESTs in this study appear to have equally negative views of some of their Japanese colleagues' classes. It should be also be noted, however that no data was given on the number of students or NNESTs making such claims, and no clear conclusions can be drawn. As one participant in this study suggested, it would also be interesting

to investigate students' views on the native Vietnamese and Portuguese teachers, etc., within the university.

A very important distinction was made between qualified and unqualified NESTs, something that only Phillipson (1992: 194) briefly mentioned when he stated 'they are at a disadvantage when trying to explain specific questions about their native language unless they have received training to do so' (Phillipson, 1992: 194). The comment by the teacher who had worked in Brazil, for example, who commented on the NNESTs being more beneficial 'in those early years', may have been referring to his lack of experience at the time. In fact, every teacher agreed that the NESTs working in conversation schools throughout Japan lacked appropriate training or experience, and there were numerous comments on the fact that many are recruited just because they can speak English rather than their ability to teach. Comments such as, ' I mean the jet program in my opinion is just a joke' reveal a need for more 'quality control', and as table 1.8 shows, many of the NESTs working as ALTs are under qualified.

Table 1.8: Characteristics of Assistant Language Teachers, 1991

	TEFL CERTIFICATION	
Country	Yes	No
US	73	851
U.K	38	292
Australia	17	56
New Zealand	9	80
Canada	61	247

Ireland	7	20
France	0	4
Germany	1	1
Total	206	1,551
Total (%)	11.7	88.3

Source: McConell (2000: 59)

The participants were also able to give many reasons for the employment of these teachers, showing that they see this as a problem with the whole system. These included money, supply and demand, and the possibility that institutions don't actually want qualified teachers, which may be why the ALTs in Galloway's (a) (In press) study did not feel that they were regarded as important members of staff, and why classroom observations (Galloway (b), undersubmission) revealed an under-use of ALTs. The desire to cut costs has resulted in an abundance of underqualified NESTs in Japan, particularly those working as ALTs, which serves to fuel attacks on NESTs. As one participant suggested, ' it is not just a matter of questioning the individuals, but of questioning the system as a whole', and it was suggested that Japan should train and utilize the Japanese 'elites' it has 'to become really proficient speakers and users of English who can teach other people how to use it'. Many have argued that the term 'native speaker' is problematic (Cook, 1999; Mahboob, 2004; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990), but there is also apparent a clear need to differentiate teachers on the basis of their 'expertise' (Mahboob, 2004: 80) as more and more people recognize that the 'ideal teacher' is no longer a category reserved for

NESTs (Medgyes, 2001: 440), like those in Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) and Medgye's (1992: 343) studies.

NESTs – who are they and who do students want?

Many teachers, therefore, discussed students' preferences for certain varieties of English. These preferences have resulted in the employment of certain types of teachers for certain institutions. Hierarchies have clearly been set up within the Inner Circle, and this also extends to racial preferences, as in Japan a teacher has to 'fit the particular model'. The negative experiences of participants' Asian and Singaporean colleagues support previous claims that outer circle varieties are problematic for institutions (Davies, 1991; Tay, 1982). Japan has evidently established its own ideal or model of a 'native speaker', and the increasingly competitive industry is serving to strengthen this stereotype, in which appearance has become more important than expertise. Rampton (1990) states that the concept of a native speaker includes three overlapping aspects: language expertise, language affiliation, and language inheritance. It would seem, however, that in Japan language expertise has been replaced with 'Native-looking Appearance'. However, student opinions towards different varieties of English are varied, and institutions need to conduct more in-depth needs analyses (Ahmar, 2000: 122; Benson, 1991; Cook, 2000; Friedrich, 2000; Mahboob, 2004; Matsuda, 2003: 484; Toro, 1997). Furthermore, as the participants in this study noted, students, especially today, require exposure to different varieties of English in order to communicate with other NNSs around the world (Matsuda, 2003: 495; Smith, 1983) and to attenuate the stereotypical view that English belongs to the West — the corollary of reports that

they do not think English ‘belongs’ internationally (Matsuda, 2003: 487; Friedrichs, 2000, cited in Matsuda, 2003: 484). However, unfortunately only comments about different inner circle varieties were elicited, and none of the participants discussed the possibility of employing NNESTs from around the world. This may have been because the prompt was rather ambiguous, reading ‘Should institutions such as KANDA strive to employ a wide variety of NEST’s that represent Englishes from all over the world?’

Culture and compatibility

Phillipson (1992: 16) once questioned how far British and American expertise could be transported to other cultures. Most recognised that their teaching methodology might be unfamiliar to students, who may find it difficult to see the value in the two different approaches they are faced with; but one participant noted that CLT is a teaching skill rather than a cultural imposition, in that his main purpose is to teach students how to communicate (Kachru and Smith, 1995:1; Kubota, 2002: 26). Most teachers agreed that as language teachers, NESTs inherently and unavoidably ‘impose’ their culture on Japanese students, , reflecting Pennycook’s (1994: 295) remarks that it is not possible just to teach the language. However, the participants did not view this negatively, unlike Kubota (1998: 298), and discussions prompted various reports of positive experiences as language learners learning from NESTs, similar to those in Ahmar’s (2004: 122) study (Table 1.1).

Many participants discussed the ‘silent’ Japanese student, who as Miller (1995: 34) states, never interrupts the teacher to ask a question

and during discussion times may even keep their opinion to themselves. Such factors, coupled with the fact that Japanese students tend to refrain from speaking out may lead to orderly turn-taking in the classroom as opposed to floor competition, which may pose problems not only for CLT as a whole, but for this institution in particular, which measures students' in-class participation as part of their final grade. University students in Miller's (1995: 43) study stated that they wanted their teacher to understand about Japanese culture or ways of communicating, and students in Samimy and Brutt-Griffler's (1999) study also praised their NNEST for knowing their backgrounds, and being sensitive to their needs. However, the participants in this study were confident that as a result of living in Japan they were familiar with students' cultural needs and backgrounds, and that perhaps students enjoyed the NEST's methods because of the opportunity they afforded to 'get away' from Japanese culture, including the chance to 'speak out – to speak - say what they want to'. A context-specific investigation of student needs is clearly required.

Participants also saw their cultural input as beneficial. As one mentioned, 'in the real world this (staying silent) is not possible, and therefore students should become familiar with answering questions on the spot', justifying their approach with the argument that the socio-cultural aspect of the language is an inherent part of learning a language and that teachers should be trying to promote this. However, while acting as 'ambassadors' of their countries (Llurda, 2004: 319), participants did mention that it should be up to the students whether they adopt these social interactions or not, a

position also suggested by Saville-Troike (in Kramsch, 1993: 42). Once more, comparisons were made between EFL and ESL settings, and it is clear that the role of the NEST should be investigated in greater depth in both settings.

Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed account of the views of one group of qualified NESTs, a category of teacher often ignored in the literature. While the 'native speaker' may be 'dead', as we move towards English as an International Language and recognise the importance of NNESTs of English, we should not forget the important contribution of appropriately qualified and experienced NESTs. Table 1.4 and 1.5 show that the NESTs in this study clearly see their role as beneficial in many ways, reflecting the previous literature; while table 1.3 shows that they are more than qualified, and have not been recruited solely on the basis of their ability to speak English. In fact, with their foreign language experience, it should also be accepted that they too can be regarded as good language learner models, albeit not in English. They believe that their presence and their adoption of CLT brings many benefits for students, and that they have the advantage of being better able to teach the 'culture' of the language and provide a 'good model of English' in a country where foreigners are scarce. It is, unclear, however how much of this can be attributed to the monolingual, monocultural nature of the setting.

A number of issues clearly remain unresolved, including how far NESTs should be teaching the socio-cultural norms of their language,

whether they do indeed possess a superior ability to provide a 'good model', and whether they should learn the students L1. Ahmar (2004: 122) suggests 'NNESTs experience of having studied the language themselves is perceived as their strongest characteristic by students,' and an investigation into student needs and desires is required. Participants' comments on culture also suggest that they are perhaps still very much of the era Phillipson (1992: 13) describes, where 'language teaching was indistinguishable from culture teaching'. Nevertheless, these 'ambassadors' did state that the adoption or otherwise of these norms should be the students' decision, and they also recognised the need to expose students to other varieties of English and cultures, evidently aware of the changing role of English. The alleged low proficiency of their non-native counterparts may also be questioned , perhaps not so much real as a belief arising from a low self image and lack of self confidence, itself resulting from the employment of so many NESTs to do something they are perceived to be inferior at. This, however, was not directly investigated in the present study. The 'native speaker myth' has been adopted strongly in Japan: the country is 'still anchored in the old native speaker dominated framework...and native speakers are considered the ideal teachers' (Llurda, 2004: 319). This also makes it difficult to compare the teaching methods and styles of any two teachers or groups of teachers when they are often each employed to do very different things.

This paper does not call for a continued comparison, but a re-evaluation of the roles of native speakers in TESOL. The participants in this study view their token 'nativeness' negatively and see a need

for more quality control. The term 'native speaker' is problematic (Cook, 1999; Mahboob, 2004; Paikeday, 1985; Rampton, 1990), and there is a need to differentiate on 'expertise' (Mahboob, 2004: 80). Perhaps 'The Native Speaker is Dead' (Paikeday, 1985) and the 'Expert Teacher' has been born, and students must be educated to look beyond 'blonde hair and blue eyes' and the ability to 'entertain', to demand qualified and experienced 'experts'. A vicious circle has been created, where the increasing demand to study English has resulted in the employment of large numbers of 'minimum-wage'unqualified NESs, reinforcing the stereotype (among those ordinary members of the public who think "if it's government policy, it must be right") that students must learn from native speakers if they are to improve their proficiency, as opposed to learning from real language teachers who know how to teach language.

Thus, while language researchers and educators may be losing interest in the native/non-native dichotomy, attention should be turned towards the native-expert/native-speaker dichotomy, as well as to the role of the NEST in both ESL and EFL settings, and in other settings more multicultural and multilingual than Japan. Not only is the role of these teachers important, but students' needs in the English language context should also be investigated in order to examine whether a native speaker, qualified or not, is really want they desire or, in fact, need.

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Appendix One:

Once again thank you all very much for participating in this focus group.
First of all I would like you to read the following summary:

Every year native English speakers (NES) flock to Japan in search of jobs in the booming English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry. Despite the abundance of Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs), there has been no research to date on their opinions concerning the topics that surround them and their changing role in ELT. The literature is full of discussions on 'who' can be classified as a native speaking English teacher, whether we represent an achievable model for our students, the possible westernisation of our students, teaching methodology, and teaching knowledge and experience.

The present study is a preliminary look at your views on a variety of issues surrounding NEST's in Japan.

Rules:

Before we begin let me share some ground rules. The session will be tape recorded and videoed because I don't want to miss any of your comments. If several of you are talking at the same time, the tape will get garbled and I will miss your comments, so please be aware of this during the discussion. This session will last for approximately one hour. I will give you a series of quotes and issues I would like you to discuss, and while there will be nobody to direct the conversation, I trust that you will move on when appropriate. You may think that some topics are a little vague, but they are deliberately so to ensure that you can express your opinion freely.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTIONS

-PLEASE DON'T EXCEED 10 MINUTES

Please introduce yourself to the other group members by explaining your qualifications and give a brief history of your teaching experience.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: ENGLISH IN JAPAN

The Japanese are said to be highly enthusiastic about learning English and an estimated 3,000 billion yen (worth about 30 billion dollars) is spent on English language instruction in Japan every year (Koike and Tanaka, 1995: 19).

Please discuss the following:

Please discuss your opinions of TEFL in Japan, perhaps in comparison to other places you have taught.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: NATIVE SPEAKING ENGLISH TEACHERS (NEST's)

Research suggests that Japanese students enjoy being taught by NEST's and that team teaching often increases the opportunities for CLT. Furthermore, since Japan is a relatively 'closed society' with an increasing need to communicate across the globe, NEST's give students a chance to meet foreigners and use English.

Please discuss the following:

What are your views on NEST's in Japan and are there any benefits for students?

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: WHO IS A NEST?

There are problems of common criteria in defining a NEST It has also been suggested that higher-level students should be exposed to different varieties of English, but lower level students should only be exposed to more standardised forms, such as American or British English.

Please discuss the following:

Is English viewed as an international language in Japan and at KANDA or do students show preferences for certain varieties?

Should institutions such as KANDA strive to employ a wide variety of NEST's that represent Englishes from all over the world?

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: ACHIEVABLE MODELS

The issue of expecting near-native proficiency has been heavily discussed in the literature and Medgyes (1992: 346) has indicated that nonnative teachers may serve as better models of a successful learner of English because they have already reached a good level.

Please discuss the following:

What are your opinions on expecting students to achieve near-native proficiency?

As teachers of a foreign language should NEST's be required to speak a foreign language?

TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION: CULTURAL IMPACTS

Kubota (1998: 298) fears that by learning English, particularly from NEST's that students' attitudes towards the world will change, as NESTS impose their values upon students, and other cultures and languages diminish in the process.

Please discuss the following:

When teaching in both EFL and ESL contexts, to what extent should NEST's require their students to adopt the culture of Western English, e.g. by requesting that they don't bow in class or confer with their partners before answering a question?

TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION: METHODOLOGY

Phillipson (1992: 16) suggests that it is 'highly dubious how far British and American expertise is exportable to contexts with different cultural, linguistic, and pedagogic universes'.

Please discuss the following:

In what ways do NEST's and students' views towards classroom interaction differ, and how do your students feel about having their in-class participation measured as part of their final grade?

Are NEST's culturally aware of their students' needs and backgrounds?

TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION: KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

In his survey of recruiting policies, Medgyes (1992: 343) found, that two thirds of the 60 respondents would prefer to employ NEST's, but if hard pressed would choose qualified non-native English speakers rather than a native speaker without EFL qualifications. A further one third stated that the native/non-native issue would not be a consideration and nobody answered that they would employ a native without qualifications.

Please discuss the following:

What qualities do students look for in a NEST?

What qualifications and abilities should institutions demand of their NEST's?

Do students view you differently to their past ALT's/language school NEST?

Does anybody have any final points they would like to add?

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE DISCUSSION!

Title

Language across the Curriculum and Empowering Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students: A language Integrated Approach in Teaching Content Area Classes

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Biodata

I have been teaching ESL for the last ten years now. I have taught in Jordan, Saduai Arabia, and UAE. I am currently working at the Center of English as a Second Language at Dubai University where I teach academic reading, writing, ESP, and intensive English courses. I have an MA in English Literature from Baroda University in India. My research interests include second language acquisition, vocabulary development and the influence of first language on second language proficiency.

Abstract

The English language is continuing to establish itself as a global lingua franca in a period of unprecedented globalization. In the past twenty-five years or so educational systems worldwide have shown an increasing interest in the adoption of English as a medium of instruction. Teaching through a second language has been successful in certain educational environments like India. On the other hand, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in other places like Arabia is directly linked to educational exclusion and failure. A

methodological approach "Content and Language Integrated Learning" emerged in Europe in 1995. The period 2000-2006 has seen a swift adoption of this educational approach across Europe, at all levels of education. In the Middle East the failure to achieve satisfactory educational outcomes when teaching through English is commonplace. This failure is compounded by stakeholders seeing barriers to learning in terms of language, as opposed to learning needs, cognition and methodologies. This paper is an attempt to show that by integrating language and subject teaching, various forms of educational success can be achieved where classrooms comprise learners with diverse levels of linguistic competence.

Key words: ELP students, English as a medium of instruction, content area classes, integrated learning

Introduction:

The adoption of English as a medium of instruction in many higher educational institutes in the Middle East in general and the UAE in particular has led to many Limited English Proficient (LEP) students to drop out of their colleges because they could not cope with the stress posed by learning two things at the same time, namely language and conceptional knowledge. The bilingual system adopted by these institutes has miserably failed to consider critical facts about these students such as the educational program that the students have been in, which is a heavily Arabic program, the literacy skills the students possess in their primary language, and the students' attitude toward reading and writing in general, and English in particular. Such students have suffered negative labelling relating to their developing

knowledge of English. They have been classified as "weak readers and writers" by their content area instructors and, sometimes because LEP students cannot cope with the stress they face when learning through the medium of a second language, as one instructor put it, " they develop extreme attitudes toward the instructor and the knowledge s/he represents". Consequently, first year students in many UAE universities and colleges are often at risk of educational failure, or early drop-out due to limited English language skills or weak academic skills. The needs of these students often surpass the resources of ESL or bilingual programs. In searching for solutions, research suggests that language-sensitive methodology within an integrated curriculum is the key to help LEP students succeed in their academic life. Integrated learning is thus viewed as a modern form of educational delivery designed to equip the learners with knowledge and skills suitable for the global age (Marsh, 2006). The traditional profile of the teacher as a "lone-rider" doing his or her subject in isolation from others is clearly no longer acceptable. Therefore, this paper will give practical strategies to show how content area instructors can integrate language and content to help LEP students succeed in their content area classes. From the content perspective this is referred to as education through construction, rather than instruction, and from the language view, using languages to learn and learning to use languages (Marsh, 2006).

Misconceptions about language learners:

Before discussing how content area instructors can help their LEP students, it is important to discuss some major misconceptions about

second language learners. Understanding the process of learning a second language can help avoid these faulty assumptions.

1. An LEP student who appears to speak well is a fluent in English:
An LEP student who can converse comfortably in English (i.e, social language) is not necessarily fluent in writing academic English. Oral language skills often precede reading and writing skills. Gaining academic fluency takes time and exposure to the language in many different contexts.

2. An LEP student who appears to speak English well is able to read and write at the same level:
A LEP student may converse comfortably in English, but not be able to read and write at the same level. Collier (1995) indicates that it can take up to five years of English language instruction before a LEP student will be able to read and write proficiently in English (i.e., academic language). Achieving academic fluency is a long, gradual process that is strengthened by effective instructional strategies.

3. A LEP student who is silent in the class doesn't understand anything:
A LEP student who doesn't participate in class discussion is still acquiring an understanding of the English language and its grammatical structure. During this silent period, LEP students are attending to and internalizing the vocabulary and common patterns and structure of the English language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

To sum up, LEP students are normal students. They can engage, disengage, be committed to, or alienated from learning. They can acquire knowledge to different degrees, reject it, or refuse to participate. Like all students, their behavior of course depends on the social and learning environment as well as on what the individual learners bring to the learning situation.

Pedagogical strategies to integrate language and content area teaching:

When content and language are incorporated into the curriculum, language takes its position at the center of the whole educational enterprise. All teachers should realize the responsibility they take for nurturing its development in the classroom. This is because successful learning depends on the amount, quality and richness of input. For LEP students, content area classes can be particularly challenging for a variety of reasons. While LEP students are learning English, they must also learn the unique concepts and issues of their content areas. Content area instructors must understand that content knowledge consists of three components: linguistic knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and procedural knowledge. Keeping in mind these three major principles of teaching a content area class, let us look at what instructors can do to create language sensitive plans to help empower their LEP students:

1. Clearly define language and content objectives

Science and social studies text books present information in expository discourse. The structures of these texts are complex and cognitively demanding with little contextual information (Crandall,

1987). For example science textbooks use many passive voice structures and cause and effect constructions. Many science textbooks assume a certain amount of background knowledge when presenting new topics of study. LEP students need to become aware of certain words that may have specialized meanings in different content areas. For example, LEP students need to realize that the term "branches" has different meanings in science and social studies and that "tree" and "plane" have unique meanings in mathematics.

In their lesson plans instructors teaching bilingual learners should incorporate not only high level content objectives but also ESL standards.

Examples:

(a) Ask students to record short conversations about science experiments using short phrases and pictures before using sentences and then paragraphs for lab reports.

(b) Make sure that key vocabulary is introduced, written, repeated, and highlighted for students to see.

(c) Teach strategies to reinforce vocabulary learning.

- Word walls: keep a running list of the new vocabulary on a word wall. Such visual cues can help students with word recognition, automaticity, decoding, and spelling.

-Student-made dictionaries: have students establish their own dictionaries in sections of their note-books. Students can write definitions, draw pictures, and diagrams, give examples, write in sentences or translate to their first language. Such practices influence independent learning and can motivate LEP students to take charge of their own learning (Brown, 2001).

-Class-room library: Establish an informal system where students can access fiction and non-fiction books easily for outside reading. Reading books related to their content areas is a natural way to reinforce vocabulary and concepts.

2. Supplementary Materials

Graphs, models, hand-on materials, and visual aids help LEP learners make sense of what they are reading. LEP students may not have extensive exposure to expository writing, which commonly demands higher level thinking skills. Many social studies textbooks, in addition to assuming previous conceptional knowledge, also assume understanding of embedded clauses, reduced clauses as modifiers, and complex passive voice forms and past perfect tenses.

Examples:

(a) Dense text can be graphically depicted, outlined, or rewritten in more understandable language.

(b) As students' proficiency in English improves, they may work on understanding the text together in pairs or small groups. This practice allows students to take more responsibility for their own learning while the teacher supports their interactions with one another and with the text.

3. Scaffolding

Scaffolding means that instructors begin instructing at a level that encourages students to succeed, providing the right amount of support to move students from their current level of understanding to a higher level of understanding. LEP students must develop the conceptual knowledge of each content area. This learning is best

accomplished when the teacher finds ways to build on previous knowledge. For example, many LEP students come with some background information in mathematics and science. However, they may not be able to articulate the mathematical process in English. In such cases, the LEP student does not need to relearn the concept, but must learn the English words to talk about the concept. To help LEP students succeed in content areas, teachers need to connect previous knowledge and experience to new concepts.

Examples:

(a) Verbal prompting such as asking questions or elaborating on students' responses

(b) Provide students with an outline of the material or with other such academic support

(c) The instructor gradually removes the scaffolding as students progress and function independently.

4. Interaction

Some LEP students are not familiar with collaborative activities and active learning which are commonly used in U.S. classrooms. In many schools, in the UAE for example, the classroom instruction occurs in the form of a lecture, copying from the board, or rote-learning. Students are not considered active participants in the learning process. Classwork is generally completed silently and independently. When designing lessons teachers of LEP students need to consider the following issues:

- Vary instructional grouping (individual, pair work, small group work, and whole class instructions) often throughout a

lesson. This gives all students an opportunity to work in a way that is most comfortable to them.

- Introduce collaborative work individually to LEP students. First let LEP students work in pairs, and then introduce small group activities to them. It can be overwhelming and intimidating for a LEP student to speak in a group, especially with excellent English speakers.
- Consider gender as well as the ethnic, racial, and religious background of LEP students when designing collaborative groups. Many students have never been in mixed gender classes and/or may feel uncomfortable working with some ethnic groups.
- Consider grouping LEP students with good English speakers. Listening to and talking to a fluent speaker helps LEP students internalize the structure of the English language.

Bilingual classes will provide frequent opportunities for interaction and discussions between the teacher and the students, as well as among students.

Examples:

(a) The teacher constantly provides sufficient wait time for students to respond and encourages elaborated comments about lesson concepts.

(b) Students are taught and given opportunities to practice skills for clarifying or negotiating meaning, confirming information, persuading, disagreeing, and the like.

5. Meaningful activities

In bilingual classes, instructors provide students with hands-on experiences that correspond to the subject area and level of proficiency.

Examples:

(a) While the activities contain knowledge and concepts, they should also include opportunities for reading, writing, listening and speaking. One strategy for assessing LEP students' comprehension is to use some form of a "Story Chain" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Review a chapter in a content-area class by having the whole class contribute their understanding of facts. Use a transparency on the overhead or chart paper to document their responses. Ask "what happens first? Then what happens?' and write the key words in logical order. Ask students to write a summary using the key words. Have students work in pairs. Walk around the classroom and take notes on the progress of the students.

(b) Portfolios: Have students maintain a folder of their written work. The teacher and the student should decide together what pieces will enter the final portfolio. Remind students to date their work since the portfolio can be used to illustrate progress. Portfolio work is a way for students to see their growth as learners.

Conclusion:

Students learning through the medium of a second language, English for example, face the dual challenge of mastering English and acquiring academic skills and knowledge necessary for a sound education and productive adult life.

Effective instruction when dealing with students using English as a medium of instruction should aim to facilitate mastery of academic content and promote development of the second language. A number of principles from both English as a second language and bilingual education research have contributed to the theoretical rationale of this approach in education. Research has shown that language acquisition is enhanced by meaningful use of, and interaction in the second language. Indeed we see clear evidence of the point made by Genesee (1994) that direct content instruction separate from language instructions is less effective.

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Title **Talking in Two Languages**

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Talking in Two Languages begins with a summary of some Theories of Order about the spoken word: that is, **Talk** in two languages. The book provides a fresh perspective about the use of language in countries where there are two dominant languages.

In the second chapter, the author discusses Grammatical Order. Using the Models of Kinyarwanda-French Language Alternation and codeswitching, the author then explores Interactional Order in **Talk** in two languages using Identity-Related Accounts. This chapter is followed by a discussion of Organisational Explanation and Direct Speech Reporting. Applying Language Alternation Studies, the author then states his Summary and Conclusion

Talking in Two Languages observes the phenomena of language alternation from a different perspective. Gafaranga provides many examples using the native language of Rwanda, Kinyarwanda and the second language of Rwanda, French. Kinyarwancais appears to be a common practice but it is not a

disorderly one. Quite the contrary, language alternation is an orderly use of two languages and has been studied by Gafaranga. The book is not exploring new theory but does provide a fresh perspective at the use of language in countries where there are two dominant languages. The author identifies main approaches to language alternation and also demonstrates ideas, concepts and methods that support specific issues of order in "talk in two languages." New terminology abounds in the book and reinforces the legitimacy of talking in two languages, for example, t he term "bilinguals' vernacular" is a phrase that explains the utterances of Kinyarwanda-French speakers.

Gafaranga's examples of Kinyarwancais, the combination of Kinyarwanda, and French, spoken together in the same utterance cast a new lens on languages and their relationship to one another. Migrating his study to a larger picture, language alternation, as presented by the author, invites linguists to take another look at additional interlanguage events in Spanglish (Spanish and English) and Singlish (Chinese and English). The book is organized to support the deliberate use of French words in Kinyerwanda and Kinyerwanda in French by addressing class agreement as Kinyarwandan nouns agree with French verbs and adjectives and French nouns agree with Kinyarwandan verbs and adjectives. The placement of proper grammar structures as one language honors the grammatical rules of the other is discussed at length in chapters three and four. It is code-switching but purposive behaviors.

For whom is this book intended? Certainly, linguists, and anyone who has an interest and some theoretical knowledge of linguistics will discover gems of interest from several perspectives.

The reader may find it interesting to read about the views of monolingual speakers on the use of both languages. (hint, they believe it is not deliberate use of language). Fans of socio-linguistics will enjoy chapter three and the additional discussion on language and class perceptions. Finally, those of us who love languages will enjoy the opportunity to read the transcriptions of Kinyarwancais.
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About the reviewer

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