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Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker Teachers: Beyond the Learners' Gap

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As English has spread worldwide, it has produced a large number of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English and even some assumptions concerning native speakers (NSs) of English. This NS/NNS

dichotomy has made a number of issues in foreign language education. To address the complex relationships between learners and their NS/NNS teachers, we administered questionnaires with 55 teachers and 468 students in Japanese universities. The findings suggest that although NNS teachers feel they can accommodate their students' needs, there is still a preference for NS teachers among students because of the stereotypical images of Westerners. Many of the students' favorable comments about NS teachers mention their native speaker pronunciation and the unfavorable comments about NNS teachers are due to their grammar-centered teaching and inadequate target language abilities. Some NNS teachers wish that students would understand the advantages of NNS teachers and hope that concepts such as World Englishes would spread among the students so that they can nurture genuinely international minds.

英語が世界中に普及するにつれ、膨大な数の非英語母語話者(ノンネイティブ・スピーカー)を生み出す共に、英語母語話者(ネイティブ・スピーカー)に関するある種の前提さえも生み出している。このネイティブ対ノンネイティブ二分法は第二言語教育における多くの問題の原因となっている。英語学習者とネイティブ・ノンネイティブ教師の複雑な関係を解明するため、55人の外国語教員と468人の日本人の大学生にアンケートを行った。アンケートの結果、ノンネイティブ教師は学生の必要に応じた授業ができると感じているが、学生はネイティブ教師に対して典型的な西洋人のイメージを持っていることが分かった。特に発音がネイティブ教師への好感度の要因になってお

り、文法中心の授業と外国語運用能力が日本人教師に対する好感度の低い要因となっている。ノンネイティブ教師からはノンネイティブとして外国語を学ぶ意味をもっと学生に理解してほしい、また多種多様な英語を認める概念が学生の間に広がってほしいという意見が出た。

Introduction

With the globalization of economy and technology, English has spread worldwide and thus has produced a large number of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English and even a belief that native speakers (NSs) of English are ideal communication models. This NS/NNS dichotomy has made a number of issues in second language education. Although the term “native speaker” is an abstraction of arbitrarily selected features of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and a cultural norm (Kramsch, 1998), it is often used as a socially evaluative category implicitly and explicitly. Moreover, the label with “non-native” is used not only to distinguish NSs and NNSs of English but also to indicate the distinction between Japanese and non-Japanese. In the past investigation of the awareness of Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) as to NS/NNS teachers, we have found that there is still a preference for NSs of English among learners, which is typically represented in their appreciation of native speaker pronunciation. On the other hand, there has been observed a gap in EFL classrooms between the supposedly ideal English-only principle and the degree of learners' comprehension and satisfaction.

With such a background, we posed the following research questions for the present study as part of our 5-year project:

1. What do language teachers, in particular female NNS teachers, consider the goals of EFL education in Japanese universities?
2. How do Japanese university students view learning English as a foreign language?
3. How do Japanese university students view NS and NNS teachers and female language teachers?
4. What skills do Japanese university students expect to learn from NS and NNS teachers?

In order to answer these questions, this paper is divided into four sections. First, we will provide the results of the survey we conducted with 55 female language teachers regarding the goals of foreign language education and their roles as female NNS teachers. Second, we will present a quantitative analysis of the results of a survey performed with 468 Japanese university students regarding how they look at learning English as a foreign language. Third, we will present a qualitative analysis of the results of the same student survey. Finally, we will report an analysis of the attitudes of the students toward NS and NNS teachers and what skills they expect to learn from NS and NNS teachers.

NNS female teachers' perspectives on language education

In order to investigate female language teachers' perspectives on the goals of foreign language education at the university level in Japan and their roles as female NNS teachers, we distributed a questionnaire with 55 Japanese female language teachers.¹ 20 of the participants were in their 30s, six were in their 20s, and 29 were in their 40s and 50s. About half of them have spent one or more years abroad. Of the 21 questions in the questionnaire, we will here introduce the responses to two questions, questions

19 and 20, which are particularly related to female language teachers' perspectives on foreign language education in Japan.

To question 19 “What goals of foreign language education do you think are important for students before they graduate from university?” participants could choose multiple answers. Below are the eight most frequently chosen answers:

Table 1. Eight most frequent answers for goals of foreign language education

1. With a dictionary, students can understand the content well. (N = 34)
2. With a dictionary, students can express their opinions and feelings. (N = 31)
3. Can understand the target culture. (N = 31)
4. Acquire pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary as much as possible. (N=23)
5. Can express Japanese culture and history in the target language (N = 22)
6. Get high scores on standardized tests such as TOEIC. (N=17)
7. Acquire practical foreign language skills that can be used after graduation. (N=9)
8. The closer to native speaker norms, the better in pronunciation. (N=7)

As for question 20 “What do you, as a NNS teacher, think is important for foreign language education in Japan?” some teachers gave English skill-related comments.

1. It seems to me that textbooks selected by NS teachers are quite easy to read because they pick the textbooks to develop students' confidence in speaking the target language. Therefore, it is the role of Japanese teachers to strengthen students' reading ability so they can better understand the content.
2. Students should have chances to practice expressing themselves. However, I am opposed to making English a compulsory course at the elementary school when their mother tongue is not fully acquired yet.
3. (Foreign language classes) should be content-based.
4. Students should use a target language as a tool to express their thoughts and to introduce their own cultures to foreigners.

Some participants expressed their opinions about foreign language education in a much wider perspective:

1. I feel that English language education should be entrusted to NS teachers. I am reconsidering how I should be involved in foreign language education.
2. We have to think about World Englishes. We should examine the notion that English used by whites is the best of all and reconsider what English language the students should acquire. Of course, it is important to keep contact with NS teachers as much as possible.
3. It is important for the society and students to understand the advantages of NNS teachers. At the same time, NNS teachers should improve our own language abilities and better understand the culture of the target language.
4. It would be great if NSs and NNSs can cooperate with each

other in a situation in which both of us are in equal positions. For that matter, it is not good that the payment system and employment conditions are different between NSs and NNSs.

As far as English skills are concerned, 39 NNS participants proposed content-based learning by which students can express their opinions and introduce their own cultures to the world. They also feel NNSs' role in teaching is reading rather than speaking. Some teachers do not seem confident enough in their own abilities and their specific roles in foreign language education.

Some teachers wish that students would understand the advantages of NNS teachers and hope that the concepts such as World Englishes would spread among the students. In common with the female NNS teachers' comments, the researchers were concerned about the imagined NS/NNS dichotomy among learners and conducted a questionnaire with 468 college students in Japan.

Student survey: Quantitative analysis

Development of the instrument

The questionnaire conducted with the students was composed of three sections. The first section was about the students' background information, such as gender, major, year, whether or not they have studied abroad. The second section consisted of 10 questions, and the third section had three open-ended questions. The questions were all asked in Japanese.

We developed the questions based on the results of our previous research and some comments that we received from students on current issues such as world Englishes and NS/NNS issues. The questions were revised several times upon feedback from other teachers. For the questions in the second section, we

used a rating scale with two extremes and two numbers in between and randomized questions into seven patterns to get a spread the variance from question-answer effects so that they do not influence the results in any particular direction. The questionnaire was conducted in class² from September through October 2003 at six universities in the Kanto area. We received responses from 468 students from freshmen to seniors, majoring in a wide range of studies such as literature, religious studies, engineering, fashion design, psychology, management, and tourism. All classes were required English classes in the first and second years except one elective course and two *Sairishu* classes for retakers.

The quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS. Missing values were replaced by the rounded mean values. Alpha for reliability coefficients³ for 10 items was .575.

Participants

174 (38%) participants were females, and 283 (62%) were males. 295 participants (64.6%) were first-year students, 119 (26.0%) were second-year students, 31 (6.8%) were third-year students, and 12 (2.6%) were fourth-year students. Table 2 shows their detailed background information.

Table 2. Background information

Schools (Departments)	N (n=female)	%
1. Private university (engineering, psychology, physics)	55 (17)	11.8
2. Private university (fashion design)	104 (78)	22.2
3. Private university (tourism, welfare)	77 (41)	16.5
4. Private university (management, law, sociology, tourism)	116 (28)	24.8
5. Private university (religious studies, economics)	42 (7)	9.0
6. National university (engineering, social science)	73 (3)	15.8
Total	468 (174)	100.0

Results and discussion

When the students were asked about their experiences studying in English-speaking countries, 93.6% of them answered NO (see Table 3). Therefore, their images of NSs may have been formed by the images created by mass media and various advertisements. Many language schools advertise the advantages of being taught by white NS teachers who have good pronunciation and higher communicative competence. Of those who responded YES, 11 out of 30 students did not give the length of their stay in English-speaking countries. Some

students may have been afraid that if they had mentioned the exact length of their stay they would have been expected to be good English speakers whereas they were not confident in their English abilities.

Table 3. Years of studying in English-speaking countries

Responses	N	%
NO	438	93.6
YES (length not indicated)	11	2.4
2 weeks-2 months	16	3.4
1-2 years	2	0.4
more than 2 years	1	0.2
Total	468	100.0

As shown in Table 4, approximately 50% responded they feel proud and happy when they speak English with a NS of English. 84% responded, “strongly agree” or “agree” to question 6 that learners should imitate native speaker pronunciation as much as possible. In our previous study⁴, some Japanese teachers expressed their dissatisfaction that NSs’ pronunciation and grammar are always considered best and NSs have enjoyed an advantage and a status over NNSs in foreign language teaching. Our results show that students do indeed enjoy talking with NSs although students’ communicative competence may stay on an elementary level.

Table 4. Results of the questionnaire

Questions	Rating			
	<i>not at all</i>			<i>very much</i>
	1	2	3	4
1. Do you feel proud when you speak English with a NS of English?	17	143	174	72
	17%	31%	37%	15%
2. Do you feel happy when you speak English with a NS of English?	46	133	167	122
	10%	28%	6%	26%
3. Do you feel embarrassed when you speak English with a NNS of English?	154	154	120	40
	33%	33%	26%	9%
4. Do you feel embarrassed when a Japanese points out your mistakes?	124	163	120	61
	27%	35%	26%	13%
5. Do you feel embarrassed when a NS points out your mistakes?	183	155	97	33
	39%	33%	21%	7%
6. Do you agree that learners should imitate NS pronunciation as much as possible?	13	61	171	223
	3%	13%	37%	48%
7. Do you agree that elementary school children should be taught English more in public schools?	28	63	140	237
	6%	14%	30%	51%
8. Do you agree that Japan should start teaching content subjects such as math or science in English in public elementary schools?	230	145	53	40
	49%	31%	11%	9%
9. Do you agree that English should become the second official language in Japan?	150	128	111	79
	32%	27%	24%	17%
10. Do you feel that anyone who is born in an English-speaking country can be good at English naturally and easily?	28	72	140	228
	6%	15%	30%	49%

N=468

As for question 7 “Do you agree that elementary school children should be taught English more in public schools?” almost 80% agreed or strongly agreed. However, in regard to teaching content subjects such as math or social science in English in public elementary school in question 8, the result showed the opposite of question 7; about 80% strongly disagreed or disagreed.

In this section, we have presented a quantitative analysis of the results of the student questionnaire. In the following section, we will see how the students responded in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

Student survey: Qualitative analysis

In this section, we will present the results of the open-ended questions regarding how Japanese university students view NSs of English, NNS language teachers, and female language teachers.

Survey questions

There were three open-ended questions in the questionnaire:

1. What do you think is a native speaker of English? Please define a native speaker of English by manner of speaking and appearance.
2. What image do you have of a language teacher who is not a native speaker of English?
3. What image do you have of a female language teacher?

Results

Q1. Native speakers of English

To the first question regarding NSs of English, many participants cited stereotyped features of Westerners, such as blue eyes, blond hair, long nose, and white skin. A number of participants responded that NSs are tall, enthusiastic, and confident, and use a lot of gestures when they talk. Other participants responded NSs are cheerful and humorous. There were also some responses that NSs are *kakkoii* (=cool). On the other hand, some participants did not necessarily take these features of NSs positively. For example, there were some responses that NSs' tall and confident appearance, loud voices, and big gestures are intimidating.

As for the way of speaking, many participants responded that a NS of English is a person who was born and grew up in an English speaking country and speaks English naturally and fluently with good pronunciation. Some responses referred to a variety of accents NSs have. Others remarked that NSs are expressive and assertive in terms of language and opinion and teach students in an amusing way. Some participants appreciated such differences in the way of thinking and talking and cultural differences. On the other hand, there were some responses that NSs' natural and fluent English sounds too fast and is difficult to understand.

Q2. NNS teachers

The second question asked about the images the participants of NNS language teachers have. Most of the participants expressed this as Japanese except one participant who had had an Indian teacher in a beautiful sari at high school. Many participants noted NNS teachers have studied English hard

or have studied English in English-speaking countries. Some participants admired NNS teachers speaking both Japanese and English. On the other hand, other participants were suspicious of NNS teachers' communicative competence in English. There were some responses that NNS teachers have Japanese way of thinking, and probably different from those of NS teachers.

As for teaching, many participants pointed out NNS teachers are grammar-centered and have some problems in pronunciation, or at least their pronunciation is different from native speaker pronunciation. Some participants responded that NNS teachers are accessible and reliable because they can speak both Japanese and English and know how to learn English as a foreign language. Other students made opposite comments that NNS teachers do not teach practical, useful English and are unreliable because of their inadequate English competence. These images of NNS teachers are thought to come from not only the participants' university English teachers but also their junior and senior high school English teachers.

Q3. Female language teachers

The third question was about the image the participants of female language teachers have. Many participants responded that female language teachers are enthusiastic, cheerful, intelligent, and capable, and have a strong will. Most of the participants have thought of NNSs, Japanese in particular, to this question and made similar responses to those to the second question, that is, females teachers have studied English hard or have studied English in English-speaking countries. Interestingly, remarks about female teachers such as "international" contrast with the remarks about the Japanese way of thinking of NNS teachers in question 2. There were some responses that referred to the fashionable clothes that

female teachers wear. Some female participants responded that female language teachers are *kakkoi* and they wanted to be like their female teachers. These very positive responses may have been compliments to us because the questionnaire was conducted in the researchers' classes. Even so, we would be happy if we could be role models as women for our students.

With regard to female language teachers' teaching, some participants responded that female teachers teach kindly by paying attention to students' understanding. On the other hand, some participants responded that female teachers are strict. There were some responses that referred to the good pronunciation of female teachers, which was not found in the responses to question 2. On the whole, the images of female language teachers seem to be between that of the images of NS and NNS teachers.

In this section we have provided a qualitative summary of the results of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. In the next section, we will examine how Japanese university students view NS and NNS teachers, using a different instrument with different participants.

The attitudes of the students toward NS and NNS of English teachers

In the final section of this paper, we will show the findings of another survey, which is to analyze the attitude of the students toward NSs of English and NNSs (=Japanese) and what skills they expect to learn from NS and NNS teachers.

Data collection

The data for this survey was elicited from the questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The survey was conducted during the Spring semester in 2003 in the Kanto area at two private universities. At University A, we obtained responses from 109 students who are all freshmen majoring in Cultural Communication and Business. At University B, 35 liberal arts major first-year students responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions that were adapted from research by Watanabe and Reagan.⁵ At University A, the questionnaire was also given to 16 NS teachers and 16 NNS (Japanese) teachers to investigate how the teachers think about the students' attitudes and expectations toward NS and NNS teachers. As for the follow-up study, ten students at University A were interviewed for further comments.

Results of the questionnaire

Q1. What are the advantages of having native speakers as teachers?

	University A	University B
(a) I can learn speaking.	45.9%	42.9%
(b) I can listen to NS pronunciation.	45.0%	57.1%
(c) I can improve listening.	35.8%	51.4%
(d) I can learn about another culture.	20.2%	20.0%

Q2. What are the disadvantages of having native speakers as teachers?

	University A	University B
(a) I cannot express myself well in English.	48.6%	42.9%
(b) I have difficulty in understanding/communication.	35.8%	34.3%
(c) I have difficulty because of cultural differences.	10.1%	5.7%
(d) Different pronunciation depending on nationality is a problem.	13.8%	2.0%

Q3. What are the advantages of having Japanese teachers?

	University A	University B
(a) I have the same cultural background.	13.8%	28.6%
(b) I can get useful advice.	44.0%	25.7%
(c) I can speak Japanese if necessary.	48.6%	34.3%
(d) I feel less anxious.	9.2%	31.4%

Q4. What are the disadvantages of having Japanese teachers?

	University A	University B
(a) I tend to speak Japanese.	31.2%	2.9%
(b) I cannot hear NS pronunciation.	33.0%	34.3%
(c) I cannot experience communication with a NS.	23.9%	42.9%
(d) The same culture is a problem.	7.3%	8.6%

Q5. What skills do you expect to learn from NN and NNS teachers?

	NS	NS	NNS	NNS
	Univ.A	Univ.B	Univ.A	Univ.B
(a) Speaking	57.8%	68.9%	30.7%	31.4%
(b) Pronunciation	33.0%	48.6%	12.8%	11.4%
(c) Listening	19.3%	22.9%	54.1%	68.6%
(d) Reading	47.7%	45.9%	20.2%	17.1%
(e) Vocabulary	18.3%	11.4%	34.9%	31.4%

Q6. Is it important to have both Japanese and native speakers of English as teachers?

	University A	University B
(a) Yes, having both NS and NNS teachers is important.	86.2%	74.3%
(b) No, having NNS teachers only is OK.	2.8%	14.3%
(c) No, having Japanese teachers only is OK.	11.0%	0.0%

Q7. How much should Japanese teachers use Japanese in class?

	University A	University B
(a) Never	1.8%	48.6%
(b) Mostly no	14.7%	40.0%
(c) Sometimes	54.1%	11.4%
(d) Most of the time	18.3%	0.0%

Results of the interview

In the next section, we present some of the comments elicited from the follow-up interviews of the students concerning the advantages and disadvantages of having NS and NNS teachers.

Advantages of NSs

- Listening to 'real' English in class is something very exciting.
- I can put myself in a situation where I can speak only English studying with native speakers.

Disadvantages of NSs

- I find it difficult to understand the strong accent of some native speakers. I know we should get used to the different pronunciation, but for beginners, understanding the English recorded for class materials is hard enough!
- Trying to understand what a teacher is saying is hard enough, so I become very nervous when I'm asked a question.

Advantages of Japanese teachers

- Being able to speak Japanese is very important for me inside and outside of the classroom.
- I think I miss a lot of important information when a teacher is speaking only English.

Disadvantages of Japanese teachers

- I can't stand the bad pronunciation of some non-native speakers'.
- I don't make effort to speak English, because I find it a bit odd to speak English with Japanese people.

Other comments

- Some teachers both native speakers and Japanese look down on Japanese students, just because we cannot speak English! That attitude makes me really angry.

Questions for the teachers

The following two questions were asked to both NS and NNS teachers to obtain information on how the teachers perceive the students' expectation toward NSs and NNSs. The findings are as follows:

Q1. What advantages and disadvantages do you expect to find with having a native speaker of English as a teacher?

Advantages of NSs	n	Disadvantages of NSs	n
Communication with a NS	7	Linguistic difficulties	10
Experience of different culture	5	Cultural differences	3
Not being able to speak Japanese	4	Affective factors	3

N=16

Q2. What advantages and disadvantages do you expect to find with having a Japanese as a teacher?

Advantages of NNSs	n	Disadvantages of NNSs	n
Same L1	7	Same L1	6
Good role model	5	NNS pronunciation	4
Giving useful advice	4	Being a NNS	4
Same cultural background	2		

N=16

In this survey, the expectations for NS teachers and Japanese teachers were clearly shown in the findings. Speaking and pronunciation are perceived by the students as being both advantages and disadvantages of having NS teachers. The students expect to learn oral communication skills from NSs. On the other hand, sharing the same culture and L1 can be the main advantage and also the main disadvantage of having NNSs as English teachers.

Discussion and future directions

Many of us who have engaged in foreign language teaching may have realized that teaching involves more than effective methods and materials but we need to be aware of the assumptions underlying foreign language learning. Now, English seems to be spreading in the world as fast as the Internet and has produced a very large number of NNSs of English⁶ and thus NNS teachers. Phillipson (1992) and Kachuru (1985), among many others, have raised questions about the conventional NS/NNS dichotomy and who can play ideal communication models for their students.

Our findings suggest that although NNS teachers feel they can accommodate students' needs, there is still a preference for NS teachers among students based on the stereotypical images of NSs. Many of the students' favorable comments about NS teachers attribute to their native speaker pronunciation and the unfavorable comments about NNS teachers refer to their grammar-centered teaching and inadequate target language abilities.

This study also shows that both students and teachers are not sure what kind of roles NNS teachers can play when the emphasis has shifted from literature-based to communication-based instruction. Some NNS teachers wish that students

would understand the advantages of NNS teachers. We think it important to make clear NNS teachers' roles because if it is challenged, then we have to question the purpose of English learning for all NNSs. We also think it important to spread the concept of world Englishes because our students need to be exposed to not only the English spoken as the first language, typically in the USA and UK, but various Englishes to nurture genuinely international minds.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

¹ The details of the questionnaire were shown in the Proceedings of Temple University Japan Applied Linguistics Colloquium 2003.

² Before the questionnaire was conducted, students were explained that their identities would not be revealed and that they could write any comments freely. Although the data were collected from the students in the authors' classes, we feel that the sample population drawn from various majors and various types of schools well represents the population of Japanese college students.

³ Although we randomized the questions in the questionnaire into seven patterns, alpha for reliability was moderate. The small number of question items relating to different issues may explain this.

⁴ See Sugino, T., Sekigawa, Y., & Okayama, Y. (2003). An investigation of the current state and future roles of non-native

female language professionals in Japan. *Temple University Japan Applied Linguistics Colloquium 2003*, 95-106. Temple University Japan.

⁵ Watanabe, A. & Regan R. presented at IATEFL, 2002.

⁶ English is now spoken by two billion people. Of the two billion, 350 million speak it in Asia as their first or official languages.

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