



Native-Speakerism in Higher Education Through the Eyes of Non-Japanese NNESTs

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In this duoethnography, we examine the effects of native-speakerism on our professional lives and teaching practices as language teachers who are both non-native English speakers (NNESTs). Data collection took place between December 2021 and December 2022. We kept an online journal for 10 months (more than 12,000 words and 100 comments) and had three Zoom discussions. Our goal was to create discussions on the reconceptualization of ELT in Japan through the transformation of language ideologies from the bottom up (Kubota, 2020). In the present study, we analyzed the data focusing on three themes: job search, work environment, and relationships with students. Our study indicates that despite our marginalized positions in the field, we can still create opportunities for our professional development and students' personal growth. We hope that our research will contribute to the development of ELT in Japan by providing a space for critical reflection and open dialogue.

本研究では、NNEST（いわゆる「英語非母語話者」）である2人の外国語教師のキャリアや教育実践におけるネイティブスピーカー（母語話者）信仰の影響を調査した。データ収集は2021年12月から2022年12月まで行われた。当該NNESTの2人は、10ヶ月間続けたオンライン日記を記録し、12,000語以上の文章と100以上のコメントを残し、Zoomによるディスカッションも3回実施した。本研究の目的は、日本におけるELTの再認識に関する議論を生み出し（Kubota, 2020）、現場においてNNESTが阻害された立場にあっても、専門能力の発展と学生の個人的成長の機会を創出できることを示すことにある。本研究は、批判的な考察

と開かれた対話の場を提供することで、日本におけるELTの発展に貢献し、他分野においても、それぞれの文脈で有意義な議論と変化を生み出す契機になればと願うものである。

The native-speakerism ideology is based on and exploits stereotypes of White Anglo-Saxons from Western English-speaking countries, frequently portraying non-native speakers as inauthentic and unqualified (Holliday, 2005, 2006, 2015). Earlier research has shown that native-speakerist ideologies negatively impact English language learners' (ELLs') confidence to speak the target language and set them apart from “authentic” English speakers. Many learners aspire to speak the English language like its native speakers, but are unable to accomplish this goal because they were not born in an English-speaking country (Matsuda, 2003; Shiroza, 2020). Furthermore, native-speakerist ideologies can have adverse effects on the confidence and career advancement of English teachers. Numerous studies have documented the inequalities between native speakers and non-native speakers in English language teaching (ELT) over the past two decades, but native-speakerism continues to have a significant negative impact on teachers' professional development (Kiczkowiak & Lowe, 2021; Lowe & Kiczkowiak, 2016).

As foreign female NNESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers) in Japan, we have also been affected by native-speakerist bias. Consequently, we believe it is essential to expose the workings of this ideology in practice and provide counterarguments to it from our own unique viewpoints. Our research approach is a longitudinal duoethnographic approach to examine English language education in Japan through a critical examination of native-speakerism (Kubota, 2020). We show that, by creating spaces for English learners to build confidence through ownership of the English language, native-speakerist ideologies can be challenged. It is evident from our study that, despite our marginalized position in the ELT industry, opportunities exist for collaboration and growth both for students and for us.

Our argument further contends that the duoethnographic method is effective for professional development, as it is anticipated that such a method will encourage like-



minded scholars and teachers to critically evaluate the inherent native-speakerist biases in teaching and hiring practices. It will also allow them to reflect on their teacher identities. The duoethnographic method also allows for a deeper exploration of the language classroom and the wider contexts in which teaching and learning take place. It is hoped that this approach will lead to more equitable and inclusive language education practices. Additionally, this method can be used to create a more collaborative and supportive environment for teachers and students (Sawyer & Norris, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

It was not common for initial duoethnographies to include “discrete literature reviews,” but initial introductions sometimes discussed background literature (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 84). As an alternative to traditional literature reviews, relevant previous research and theories were discussed *in conversations* [emphasis added] (Sawyer & Norris, 2016), which is still the case in most duoethnographic studies published to date. Some recent duoethnographies, however, appear to include more extensive discussions of the literature that resemble literature reviews (e.g., several studies in Lawrence & Lowe, 2020; Lowe & Kiczowski, 2016). Our narratives are also supported by a brief literature review of native-speakerism, as it offers a theoretical framework that situates and informs our narratives. We also refer to relevant literature and theoretical concepts in our verbatim data.

Holliday (2005) coined the term native-speakerism. It refers to a culturally “superior” model or label or ideology concerning both the English language and pedagogy, emphasizing the Western aspect and native English speakers (NESs) (Holliday, 2005; Lowe, 2020). In addition to linguistic imperialism, various forms of discrimination, such as racism are intertwined with native-speakerism (Holliday, 2015, 2018; Kubota & Lin, 2006). Despite the absence of a common definition of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in the literature, in studies conducted in Japan, this term has largely been used against Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) (Matsuda, 2002; Sutherland, 2012; Yazawa, 2017). The NESTs are typically perceived as role models (especially when it comes to pronunciation, accent, and knowledge about foreign cultures), or as producers of “real English,” accuracy, or authenticity (Matsuda, 2002). However, JTEs with more tenure opportunities tend to be hired for team teaching, providing security and support, and facilitating classroom interaction. They teach grammar and reading rather than speaking and communication (Matsuda, 2002; Sutherland, 2012; Yazawa, 2017). Despite this clear disparity in the literature between NESTs and JTEs in Japan’s higher education sector, NNESTs, like us, remain underresearched.

Participants and Method

We are two multilingual women from the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1992), and we have between 10 (Mahboubeh) and 20 (Natasha) years of experience in Japan. We teach (in) English at two different Japanese universities. We are both married, with children. Natasha earned her master’s and doctoral degrees from American institutions in the United States and Japan, and Mahboubeh earned hers from a Japanese university. We first met at an ELT conference held online in January 2021 and exchanged emails after the conference. Comparing our experiences, we noticed similarities and differences. Our conversation continued via email, and we started following each other on social media.

After learning about each other’s experiences, we thought our voices needed to be added to the research on native-speakerism. Many insightful studies on teacher identity, practices, and native-speakerism have been published in our teaching locus, Japan (Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Lawrence & Lowe, 2020; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019; Nagatomo, 2016; Nagatomo et al., 2020; Stewart, 2020). Our goal has been to add our perspectives—two critical NNESTs’ voices—to the growing body of literature on native-speakerism and teacher identity, because authors thus far have tended to be native English speakers from the Inner Circle and Japanese L1 speakers. Non-Japanese NNEST teachers’ voices are not frequently heard even though they also are, arguably, commonly found on the receiving end of native-speakerist discriminatory practices. We strongly believe it is necessary for non-Japanese NNEST teachers to report on our experiences by ourselves, in other words, to have our stories told and written by us.

Our choice of research method is duoethnography, because it is an approach used in research to help people examine their practice. It is also suitable for inspecting their lived experiences through dialogue, with the purpose of juxtaposing researchers’ life histories and uncovering the differences (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2015, 2016). However, the approach is not too prescriptive but flexible. In fact, some newer studies have extended or even ignored the tenets of duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2016). Thus, as we have also found plenty of similarities between our experiences, we decided not to ignore them but to include them in this paper instead of focusing on differences alone, even though the focus on differences is one of the tenets of the approach (Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

In short, a duoethnography is “a collaborative research methodology” in which researchers “juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris et al., 2012, p. 9). An important point is that this approach is not a quest for “truth.” Instead, researchers focus on how they remember, interpret, co-construct, and make sense of events, their feelings and (re)actions (Norris et al., 2012, p. 20). In the



research process, researchers “use themselves to assist themselves and others in better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p.13), which in our case is native-speakerism. As we are non-Japanese, nonnative English-speaking teachers, we are adding narratives of two more, unique experiences in Japan’s ELT environment.

Our data collection started with a 90-minute video interview, which was followed by regularly sharing our thoughts via a shared Google document where we collaborated, and two subsequent online interviews. Getting to know each other on social media was not a research method, but it influenced the topics we discussed and wrote about. More specifically, in the online journal we wrote about what was happening at work at the time of writing, about our interactions with colleagues and students, and also shared stories about what happened to us in the past. We started the online journal (Google Doc) in February 2022. It has resulted in more than 12,000 words (as of December 2022) of journal entries and more than 100 comments that we gave to each other as reactions to reading the entries.

We analyzed the data from the online journal and meeting minutes and identified emerging themes using thematic analysis. A closer look was then given to three of the themes that seemed to require further exploration: job applications, the work environment, and relationships with students. As we continued the discussion, we focused on these three themes because they have been relevant in earlier literature on native-speakerism (Braine, 2010; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010).

In the sections below, we share our perspectives on several important issues. First, we discuss our experiences with looking for academic work. Following that, we describe our workplaces and the courses we teach. Finally, we discuss how we interact with students and build relationships. We framed our conversation as reflections on our experiences and roles in our workplaces, referring to relevant literature when appropriate. Some of the conversations were recorded via Zoom and transcribed verbatim.

Job Applications, Rejections, and Successes

Mahboubeh: As a non-native English speaker, I have been ineligible for a number of jobs. I sent emails to a few employers who indicated in their job postings they were looking for NES candidates, explaining my background, and did not receive a response. After applying for jobs that did not specifically state they were looking for a NES candidate, one employer contacted me and offered me an interview. While interviewing me, a professor asked me, “So, what are your thoughts on the possibility of a war between Iran and the United States?” The interview consisted almost entirely of questions about Iran

and its political situation, not about my qualifications. They surprisingly offered me a part-time position, and I was compelled to accept it because I had no other options. Despite being disappointed and tired of seeking employment, my experience with a testing service was entirely different. Not only have I not been treated differently, I completed my examiner training while I was eight months pregnant with my second child, and my first speaking examiner job was close to my due date. I have never once felt different. I was then invited to interview for a part-time position at my current workplace a short time later. Upon completing the interview, I worked part-time for a year before applying for a full-time position at the same university. My interview process was similar to everyone else’s, and I was hired.

Natasha: I’ve also seen many such job postings. Applicants need to be L1 English speakers, and, sometimes, L1 Japanese speakers. Unlike you, I’ve actually completely given up applying when I see that wording in the ad about being a NES (for more examples and discussion on job posting see Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010). I just don’t have the energy anymore and feel it’s a waste of time to prepare an application that will most likely be discarded immediately after it’s received. I’m also not eager to talk to someone who will look down on me. I suppose my attitude is the way it is now because of years of disappointment. [...] But things aren’t that great even when you get a job interview. I had a bizarre job interview several years ago for a contract job at a university in Tokyo. The interview was entirely in Japanese. There were about 15 people in the room where the interview took place, all Japanese and only one of them was a woman. That group of people was the search committee, I believe. Only three men asked me questions, but it was just one of them who talked most of the time. What’s funny is that about 90% of the interview was unrelated to the job! For instance, the man asked some rather strange questions—if there was a direct flight from Japan to my home country and if not where I had to transfer! Plus, he wanted me to recommend some sightseeing spots. In a job interview! He was sure my country was *still* a dictatorship and has not become a democracy yet. I never thought it ever was a dictatorship to begin with. Next, he wanted me to confirm that my home country was *still* in the Soviet Union! Seriously? I said no, of course not, because it *never* was in the USSR! He pressed on with more odd and inappropriate questions. He asked me if my whole family was [dead]! He simply assumed it was, which makes his question worse—why ask me about such a traumatic experience in a job interview? I couldn’t believe what was happening to me. I didn’t protest, though. I was desperate for work, and this was a rare opportunity to interview for a full-time, albeit limited-term, university teaching job. It was an endless ordeal that left me shocked,



drained, and upset. The disrespect and disregard for basic humanity almost physically hurt. I felt worse the next day when I was able to somewhat process everything. I'll never forget this experience because it traumatized me, but I've recovered since. I've learned my lesson—next time, I won't be silent. I'll speak up and point out the inappropriateness of the questions.

Work Environment: Courses, Colleagues' Reactions, Support, and Marginalization

Natasha: At almost all places I've worked, ironically, I've been given courses taught by NESs, not by NNES Japanese teachers. As you know, in many universities, Japanese and non-Japanese nationals are assigned different courses and distinct roles (e.g., Fukunaga et al., 2018; Hayes, 2013 have written about this matter). In my experience, in most cases, just like it's been reported in the literature, Japanese NNES teachers would have reading courses and so-called "content courses" whereas foreigners, most frequently NES teachers from dominant English-speaking countries, would teach communicative courses that have "speaking, conversation, or discussion" in the title. Well, in my case, I got communicative courses, too. Plus, I'm sometimes called just "native." Not a "native speaker" or "native English speaker," so I assume that by saying "native" they might just have meant "a foreigner," or some didn't really know or simply forgot I was a NNES just like the Japanese teachers.

Mahboubeh: My past part-time jobs have been similar to yours. In most cases, I was hired as a native English teacher as opposed to a Japanese teacher and I mostly taught English communication, seminars, and academic writing. A fellow Japanese teacher complained once that even after 15 years of teaching English, and despite her boss's requests, she was still assigned to teach reading classes even after asking to teach English communication and seminar classes multiple times (Matsuda, 2002; Sutherland, 2012; Yazawa, 2017).

Natasha: At my current workplace, where I'm employed full-time, things are somewhat different from my other, past workplaces. I still teach some elective communicative courses, but I also have content courses, such as English teaching methods, research writing, and SLA. I get to pick the textbooks for most of my classes this year, even for the elective communicative courses such as speaking skills. I love this freedom to choose materials and topics, and I feel the employer who allows this trusts the teachers. Now, I get to teach topics such as the diversity of English speakers, and intercultural

communication. I also cover English as a Lingua Franca in research writing courses for 2nd- and 3rd-year English majors. But what's especially different from, I guess, all the other universities I've taught at is that I can teach some content courses bilingually! I can choose books and other materials in either English or Japanese. Or I have a textbook in English, with some supplemental materials in Japanese, and, in some assignments, students choose in which language they will write. This way of translanguaging (Conteh, 2018) makes me most comfortable in the classroom and makes me feel as part of it all and invested (Norton Peirce, 1995) in education.

Mahboubeh: In my current position, I work as a full-time associate lecturer within a coordinated program that requires teamwork and a shared office. There is a lot of support and a friendly atmosphere here, and I attribute that mostly to my supportive boss. Upon starting my current job, I felt very different, because everyone was native English speakers and I worked in a male-dominated environment. I was unable to have small talk with my colleagues, because of my lack of understanding of the topics they discussed. I was concerned about disclosing my background to my students. Getting through my fears as a non-native instructor was made possible by my supportive boss and colleagues. While the current protests in Iran are going on, I have heard from my boss and colleagues repeatedly that they are thinking of me and asking about my family. My boss or colleagues have also asked me about Iranian traditions or how to say greetings in Farsi (the language of Iran). Eventually, as a result of this supportive and welcoming environment, I began sharing more of my Iranian identity with my students. I have felt heard and included in an environment where my non-native identity has been a barrier in my mind for so many years due to the discrimination I have suffered for it.

Teacher Identity and Relationships with Students

Mahboubeh: Norton (2018, p. 1) stated that:

when English teachers, whether native or non-native, interact with students, they are also negotiating who they are and how they relate to the world at a given time and place. For example, qualified non-native English teachers in Uganda, Brazil, or Bangladesh might be considered highly valued "legitimate" English teachers in each of these contexts. However, if the teachers were to move to a country in which, for example, their variety of English, accent, race, or nationality were not valued, their legitimacy as both speakers and teachers of English might be compromised, and they would likely undergo profound shifts of identity.



I went through a similar shift of identity. When I began teaching part-time, I was less open about my non-native, Iranian identity than I am now. In the first class, I used to briefly mention my background, but some students forget that by the end of the semester. Once a student stated in the course evaluation: “When I see people use phrases like “raining cats and dogs” like our teacher, I am so impressed and think oh! She is a native speaker!”. As a result of comments such as these, I was hesitant to share more of my thoughts about different varieties of English with my students. After teaching for three years, I am quite open about my background and explain it in detail to my students. I have received comments such as “Oh wow!” I’d like to speak like you in the future”. ELT is still an extremely conservative industry in terms of hiring practices, and non-native teachers are not accepted solely because English is not their native language. However, I believe in practice, students as stakeholders in higher education from the bottom up may be ready to explore different varieties of English. I have observed that this has helped my students feel like they can own their English language and have become more confident in their ability to speak and communicate in English. The majority of my students, whether they consider me a native or a non-native speaker, have been open to accepting various forms of English, but they have not had the opportunity to learn about it at school.

Natasha: I’m not always open about my identity at first in some classes. Not *anymore*, I mean. I’ve stopped talking about my speakerhood status. I admit I sometimes feel I’m still torn. When I first started teaching, I was not at all open about my NNEST status. However, after learning about World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca, Global English (I studied under Professor Aya Matsuda and Professor Sandra McKay in my master’s and doctoral programs), I became more confident and, in turn, *completely* open about my speakerhood status. However, after several years, I simply got tired. I stopped talking about my status, because I thought it wasn’t that important or even relevant. Maybe I just got lazy. Or maybe I still worry I’ll have to prove myself... I mean, I just don’t want that to be the focus. I only respond if someone brings it up, like if a student asks me. But there are some unresolved issues that might stem from my not mentioning my NNEST status from the start. For instance, this semester, I asked my students to turn in their self-introductions and explain why they were taking my courses. In my SLA course, a *content* course, one student wrote that it was an added bonus that the course was taught by a “native speaker.” [...] Apparently, she took it for granted that I was a native *English* speaker. After reading what the student wrote, I added a comment, “Why is that important?” in her Google document. I wonder if she’ll be disappointed when she finds out I’m not a NES! Also, I was

a bit disappointed that the student thought I was valuable to her specifically because of my assumed speakerhood. I just don’t see how it should matter. Plus, she clearly doesn’t even notice I am *not* a NES, so how valuable is that status actually? Or even my NNEST status, for that matter? Also, several students in this same course wrote that speaking was their weakest skill in English, so they’re taking my course “to practice *eikaiwa*.” But, this, again, is a course on SLA, which I explained and which is clear from the syllabus. In the first class meeting, I emphasized that the course focused on language learning *theories*. I teach it bilingually. So why expect *eikaiwa*? I wonder if students would expect that from a Japanese teacher who teaches SLA theories. On the other hand, I’ve had some positive experiences, too. For instance, some students have said they were inspired by me because I was an example for them of someone who learned English later in her life, not from her early childhood, and managed to use it professionally.

In this paper, we chose to incorporate references to relevant literature in our stories instead of having a separate discussion section. We took this liberty following the suggestion that researchers may adapt the method to their research contexts and needs. In addition, instead of providing a definitive conclusion or leading the reader to specific conclusions top-down, we invite them to engage in interpreting our narratives to an extent by themselves.

Takeaway: An Opportunity for Reflection and Transformation

In this paper, we explored how native-speakerism affects the professional lives and teaching practices of two female language educators who are both NNESTs. These narratives contribute two unique perspectives on native-speakerism because, as we have stated above, not many NNESTs present and publish on their overseas ELT experiences in Asia. In particular, NNEST teachers do not seem to have published much about teaching (in) English in Japan, unless they are paired up with NES co-researchers. The current paper, on the other hand, contributes to the literature on native-speakerism by adding our stories of working as non-Japanese female NNESTs in the Japanese academe. It should also be noted that in recent years, NNESTs have been discussed as being on the receiving end of native-speakerist discrimination (e.g., Houghton & Rivers, 2013; Rivers & Ross, 2013), and we agree that this is unfortunate, extremely problematic, and needs to change. Native-speakerism is harmful to NNESTs in Japan, but it has been as harmful, if not more, to the two of us as NNESTs as well, because it has strongly and negatively affected our academic careers.



By transforming language ideologies from the bottom up (Kubota, 2020), our goal is to stimulate discussions on how to reconceptualize ELT in Japan. The present study shows that, despite our marginalized positions in the field and the difficulty of finding a job as NNETs, we are able to create opportunities for our professional development, students' personal growth, and the ownership of English. Our limited space permits us to share only some stories and aspects of how native-speakerism has impacted our actions and careers. However, there are many other matters we have uncovered and others that we are willing to explore in greater depth. In the future, we intend to continue investigating these issues and to present and publish our findings.

Finally, by sharing our experiences, we believe we can raise awareness and encourage more discussions regarding the detrimental impact of native-speakerism. We also encourage the readers to reflect on the presence of native-speakerist ideologies in their work environment and engage in discussions on transformative actions they might be able to take. These discussions will hopefully lead to creating a dialogue on native-speakerism and to a greater degree of equity and inclusivity for all teachers and learners.

Bio Data

Natasha Hashimoto is an associate professor at Tokyo Woman's Christian University. She earned her master's degree in human rights and her doctorate in education, with a concentration in applied linguistics. Her teaching and research interests include human rights issues in TESOL, metacognitive strategies, fairness in assessment, multilingualism, and intercultural communication.

Mahboubeh Rakhshandehroo received her PhD in Human Sciences (Critical Studies in Transformative Education) from Osaka University. She is currently an Associate Lecturer of English at Kwansei Gakuin University. She is also the ICLHE East Asia leadership team coordinator. Her research interests include English-Medium Instruction (EMI) support, English native speakerism, multiculturalism, and COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning).

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