I.V. Luksha, E.N. Solovova. Pros and Cons for Using non/native English Speaking Teachers

It is necessary to distinguish between Native- and Nonnative-English-speaking teachers but at the same time teaching credentials should be required of all English teachers, regardless of their native language. This would shift the emphasis in hiring from who the job candidates are (i.e., native or nonnative speakers of English) to what they are (i.e., qualified English teachers) and allow for more democratic employment practices. Especially taking into account that this situation is a norm in American practice where even a PhD may be denied the position of an elementary school teacher if he had not passed a special professional exam for teachers designed for that type of school. This should be taken into consideration in Russia as well. The problem is that almost anybody, from the USA or England are believed to be natural teachers. Pedagogy seems not to matter.

There exists a created myth that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker. Someone who can talk about odd British sayings, what Americans eat for breakfast, differences between UK regional accents; things a native speaker will know instinctively, things a non-native speaker may not.

There is no doubt that native speakers of a language have a feel for its nuances, are comfortable using its idiomatic expressions, and speak it fluently. However, people do not become qualified to teach English merely because it is their mother tongue. There are many ways in which nonnative teachers are at an advantage in teaching English.

Phillipson [1, pp. 23-30] considers non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) to be potential- ly the ideal ESL teachers because they have gone through the process of acquiring English as an additional language. They have first-hand experience in learning and using a second language, and their personal experience has made them sensitive to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students. Many NNESTs, especially those who have the same first language as their students, have developed a keen awareness of the differences between English and their students’ mother tongue. This sensitivity gives them the ability to anticipate their students’ linguistic problems. Teachers who share the same language and cultural background as their students have an advantage: they display an acute sensitivity to their students’ needs and are better able to develop an effective curriculum and pedagogy.

Native speakers are found to agree more with the superiority of the native speaking teacher and to have more confidence in using the English language and teaching about culture. Conversely, non-native speaking teachers report to having better relations with their students and to feeling more confident in using the local language to facilitate teaching.

The issue of accent can also be the cause of giving preference to native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Teachers with nonnative accents are perceived as less qualified and less effective and are compared unfavorably with their native-English-speaking colleagues.

This study is aimed to answer a number of questions:

– Are native speaker teachers automatically the best teachers of a language?
– Just because you speak a language naturally, does that mean you can teach it?
– Or does the process of learning a language to a high level of fluency make non-native speaker teachers far better equipped to teach that language?

The research was made in the Internet to help find the answers to the above-listed questions. An ambiguous statement was brought to a vote whether native speakers make the best teachers. There were suggested five variants to state a point of view. The respondents decided whether they were completely or partly agree/disagree or they didn’t have any opinion. The following table shows the results of the vote:

PROS AND CONS FOR USING NON/NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS

* Tomsk State Pedagogical University
** Moscow State University
Native speakers make the best teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>I totally agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>I agree somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>I disagree somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>I totally disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total votes: 540

29% of the respondents partly agreed that native speakers make the best teachers, but at the same time 28% of the participants disagreed with this statement. The results of this study demonstrate the ineffectiveness of teacher classification according to the single criterion of birth. There are good and bad teachers, both native and non-native, and to lump all of them together on the grounds of what their native language is, oversimplifies a complex issue; it’s just one of many factors involved.

This debate can not be discussed only in terms of native/non-native, but trained versus untrained as well. In our practice we often talk about native English speaking teachers without mentioning the fact that they are not trained to teach. Unfortunately, the EFL world is often filled with people whose only teaching qualification is that they know the English language. This is clearly not enough. A well-trained, well-educated teacher will always be the best, whatever his/her native language may be. A non-native who has gone through teacher training and has a good command of English is better than a native who has no idea of how to teach, or even any idea of how the language functions, and just speaks English as his own language. Teaching is a different job than speaking.

English is a big business now. So to attract students, a foreign face is usually more important than a qualified teacher.

Nevertheless, we should not deny the possibility of using native speakers in the teaching practice as advisers to nonnative English teachers. Native speakers have the advantage of completely internalized structures and syntax, as well as slang, buzzwords, vocabulary that is in constant use. Some native speakers are indispensable in teaching pronunciation that is in use, correct vowel sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation. The English of nonnative speaking teachers is excellent in some regards but often not in pronunciation, vocabulary or cultural references. Students need to learn these English components from the purest, most natural sources. Non-native speakers cannot know all of the elements native teachers do. Ideally, students need to learn from both native male and female teachers with accentless voices who have studied intensive English grammar.

For beginners, presumably a non-native teacher with appropriate education in EFL seems to be better than a native one because he knows the language of his students; he is more likely to solve most of the problems faced by students. On the other hand, a native teacher would be much more suitable for advance-level students since s/he seemingly has more knowledge and experience over the language and culture being taught.

Many students nowadays don’t want and don’t need perfect grammar and perfect understanding of the rules of English but do need to make themselves understood and gain confidence in speaking with native speakers. English speaking clubs are of a great help to those who want to improve English in terms of speaking. Such clubs are hosted by native speakers and it can be successful only on condition that a native speaker is a host, leader of the discussion or any other activities held at the club meetings.

Teachers of English have been accustomed to teaching English by telling students the uses of new words, expressions and grammar points, and by asking students to recite or memorize something, so a native speaker as a guest at a class can bring something new and interesting into the process of teaching.

In business English we all need to review our jargon and keep up to date with trends in the fast developing language of the office, and sometimes it is rather difficult without a native speaker.

However, many native English speakers are successful teachers of English. The reasons for their success may be summarized as follows:

1. A native English speaker himself is foreign, new and different and thus interesting in every way to the student.
2. S/he is the best model set for the students to learn the language s/he speaks and the culture s/he comes from.
3. S/he gives the students a natural language environment as well as a chance to talk with a native speaker, which gives them a feeling of achievement.
4. S/he can talk about his/her country, his/her life and everything that is new and interesting. So the students are interested in what he/she talks about.
5. S/he is good at teaching, which is both a science and an art.
6. S/he is able to notice those useless, less-than-effective things in the textbook. Instead, they would talk about something useful, everyday affairs or current news, through which the students feel that they have acquired the ability to talk about them too.

What comprises a good teacher? Both native and non-native English speaking teachers have certain intrinsic advantages and disadvantages but it depends on the personality and their abilities.

A good teacher is one who: knows the subject; is willing to share the knowledge; loves the job; is always ready for the unexpected; has plenty of patience. A more detailed analysis should be conducted in order to
evaluate a teacher. We need to take into consideration the following items:
- Language Proficiency: the teacher’s ability to understand, speak, read and write English; accuracy in pronunciation; knowledge of foreign customs, culture and cross-cultural communication; linguistics and the essence of language acquisition; and his/her ability to initiate, to sustain, and to close basic communicative tasks in an appropriate way.
- Teaching Effectiveness: the teacher’s ability to prepare a lesson plan focusing on the teaching aim and to work towards the aim with certain teaching strategies.
- Presentation of Foreign Culture: the teacher should bear an open attitude towards foreign culture, share with students how foreign culture differs from his/her own.
- Classroom Management: the teacher’s ability to be clear in the classroom and to change modes of presentation and types of questions. The teacher is also supposed to be able to engage students in the learning process, to provide opportunities for feedback and to use group and individual activities.
- Psychological Elements and Personality: the teacher should have patience, confidence, imagination, enthusiasm, humor and creativity. S/he should be friendly, sympathetic and on good terms with the students, and have an affirmative attitude towards the students and encourage them if necessary.
- Nationality is not an issue. A good teacher must share with students how foreign culture differs from his/her own.

If not, there might be some misunderstandings and some lackness on the students part. The pedagogical preparation and an appropriate approach to the teaching-learning process is what determines whether a teacher is good or not regardless of being or not being a native speaker.

At some universities, native and nonnative English speaking teachers collaborate with each other, focusing on and sharing their particular strengths. By sharing their strengths and insights from their various linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, the teachers find that they benefit as individuals and grow professionally. Universities should develop innovative curricula in teacher training programs. Collaborative efforts between native- and nonnative-English-speaking teachers help to recognize their position as equal partners in the field of English language teaching.

References