

Critical Review of :
Nonnative-English-Speaking Professionals in TESOL
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The article "Nonnative-English-Speaking Professionals in TESOL" by Jun Liu (Spring 1999, TESOL QUARTELY) gives readers very helpful tips to understand what is essential and crucial in terms of teaching professionalism in TESOL. In this article, Jun Liu analyzes the qualities of nonnative-English-speaking professionals through various aspects such as their English learning backgrounds, proficiency, and social identities. He also touches on several phases of problems such as how nonnative-English-speaking professionals categorize and label themselves and how they are discriminated against during the hiring process. In order to gather data, the author conducted e-mail and face-to-face interviews with seven non-native-English-speaking professionals in TESOL for over 16 months. Referring to the gathered data and to McKay (1996) and Crandall's (1992) viewpoints on literacy, he concludes that TESOL professionals should focus more on the qualifications of the individual rather than focus on whether the individual is a native speaker (NS) or nonnative speaker (NNS). In other words, it is more important whether or not, the individual has adequate training to teach students. He also refers to the complexity of the definition of NS and NNS of English and suggests the necessity of follow-up studies of different language settings to examine other professional labels.

Liu uses a very convincing and persuasive method to help the readers understand his view on the complexity involved in an NS-NNS dichotomy. He generally develops his theory in the form of questions and answers, which makes it clear how to lead to the conclusion part. In introductory part, he presents five specific research questions. Three of the five questions ask what the rationale and criteria for classifying NSs and NNSs are from sociolinguistic, sociopolitical, linguistic and pedagogical viewpoints. Although these questions are rational, it might be a little difficult to support the author's conclusion because of the sample size. One weakness of this study lays in the recruitment of participants. If different settings such as K2 besides ESL teachers in the universities would be considered, the author could have provided the result a little differently. The demographics of the participants are summarized on the list and the author refers to the detailed information about their career experiences, first exposure to English and so on, objectively and respectively. However, it seems that the author focuses on only the elite professionals. Although each of the seven interviewees tells an interesting story

and choosing an odd number guarantees achieving a majority viewpoint, a group of only seven people seems to be too small a sample size to furnish a valid result. The seven participants' definition of a nonnative-English-speaking professional in TESOL varies. Three of them seem to have difficulty defining themselves as NNS of English, but the other four don't have any difficulties defining themselves as NNS of English. On the contrary, they seem to be proud of being NNS of English. Their comments in the next chapter on the precedence and the competence in a language explain the reason for that. This is a very interesting and critical part of this research. However, the author relies on e-mails as the main means of communication, which is convenient but at the same time, the issues and questions that might rise from the face-to-face conversation would be ignored. In this sense, more than 30 minute interviews several times for each participant would be necessary to furnish a result.

The author itemized the participants' opinions and offered his insightful views on cultural affiliation, environmental matters and the label "NNS of English". The seven interviewees' perceptions, especially on cultural affiliation were satisfactory enough for the readers to appreciate the complex questions the author gave in the introductory part. One of the interesting comments on affiliation was about "dual identities" by Ms. DK. According to Liu, "She made a distinction between speaking a native language and being a NS of a language." (p.94) In other words, "She views herself as an NS of both Danish and English." (p.94) This deep perception opens up the possibility to have multiple identities. It is a fundamental and important key when we think about the NNS-NS issue, especially psychologically.

As for the environmental matters, the author refers to competence, which is also difficult to define since this is partly a psychological factor. The author presents the participants' perception of their competence. Mr. C views himself to be incompetent about the language used in a kitchen, which is very interesting because he is considered to be a NS by others. Ms. I, whose parents are Italian but, whose exposure to English was greater than her exposure to Italian, has a problem with identifying herself as a NS or a NNS. Another crucial factor is the environmental difference such as how much an individual is exposed to English. Then, how do the participants feel about being labeled as a NS or a NNS? The author refers to this issue in the next chapter. Three of the participants seem to be comfortable with the way people classify them as a NNS. The author, however, raises a valid point: "Will such individuals be forever categorized as NNSs of English regardless of their English proficiency?" (p.96) He also states that it is not fair to discriminate against people by giving the label of a NNS of English just because of their unique pronunciation. He points out very crucial and vital views, referring to the examples of participants' experiences. This is a good point, especially taking the fact of the globalization of English into consideration. And here again, he brings out this issue in the form of a question so that the readers become more actively involved in the learning process.

In further chapters, the author tries to find the answer to the remaining two questions of the introductory part of this article. They are about the relevance of power relations such as

ethnicity and about the problems or disadvantages NNSs of English have to face in the hiring process. It is impressive that his insight into ethnicity reaches to the level of the concept of political correctness. For example, he mentions, "If people can be NSs of many languages, then the NS-NNS dichotomy is limited in scope and perhaps 'politically incorrect.'" (p. 97) This is also a good point but at the same time, he doesn't give further explanation about it. Perhaps he considers this is out of the sphere of the labels NS-NNS. The author also refers to the participants' concerns about discrimination. He provides an interesting example of Ms. DK. She is very proud of being a NNS, but she herself wants to be identified as a NS by her future employers because of her fluency in English. As openings in the TESOL job market become fewer, applicants try to emphasize their qualities as a NS. The author doesn't refer to political correctness in this chapter, but this kind of disadvantage or discrimination can be considered to be related to political correctness.

The author concludes a discussion of the sources of success in terms of teaching in ESL with a very meaningful sentence: "What matters is the teacher's professionalism." (p.100) Needless to say, it shows the key point of this research and this idea is reemphasized in the author's conclusion, with the recommendation that further studies into the complexities of the NNS TESOL professional label be conducted. Such studies will surely be welcomed by those we usually consider to be NNS TESOL professionals, who are most likely to suffer any negative consequences caused by viewing language capability as an NS-NNS dichotomy. In addition, more case studies in different settings such as what qualified and trained nonnative English speaking professionals can contribute in meaningful ways to the field of English language education (Matsuda, 1999) should be explored.

Reference

- Liu, J. (1999). Nonnative-English-Speaking Professionals in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33 (1), 85-102
- Matsuda, P. (1999). Teacher development through NS/NNS collaboration. *TESOL Matters*, 9 (6), 1, 10