Qualifications of Language Teachers and English as an International Language

Akiko Fukumura,
Portland State University

"Female Native English Instructor Wanted." "Native speakers, over 22, with university degrees only." "Need English Conversation Instructors. Must be native speaker of English." These are advertisements for English teachers in the *Daily Yomiuri*, English newspaper in Japan. Among 22 advertisements from nine different language schools that ran from June 1 to June 31, 1992, only one language school did not use the catchy phrase, "native speaker," in its advertisement. Although a few indicated the importance of teaching in an irresolute way, such as "TEFL experience helpful," there was no language school that required a certificate or a M.A. in TESOL directly. In some schools, being a "native speaker" seems to be a crucial condition in the hiring process. Would it be appropriate to evaluate an applicant's aptitude as a teacher based primarily on that person's mother tongue? Is an applicant qualified simply by being a "native speaker"?

The term, "native speaker," is often used but rarely defined (Paikeday, 1985; Edge, 1988). Who will be a "native speaker" is determined by "the accident of birth and growing up (Edge, 1988: 154). Paikeday (1985: 1) defined the "native speaker" as "someone gifted with special and often infallible grammatical insights." As a learner and a teacher of English, I have seen many of those "native speakers" who are unable to explain their "grammatical insights" systematically. They rarely realize that language learners, in most cases, cannot learn a target language as "native speakers" learned their mother tongue and forget how long it took to acquire a level of proficiency. Simply being a "native speaker" is deficient as preparation for being a language teacher. If this is their only qualification, most "native speakers" will never contribute successfully to the English language education of their learners. Edge (1988: 154) says:

> There is no reason for us to support that we select people according to an accident of birth and thereafter rely on their grammatical insights. Conversely, there is no reason not to trust the grammatical insights of someone who has reached an appropriate level of ability in a language whatever the accident of their birth.

Choosing a language teacher based on an "accident of birth" is not only inappropriate but also threatens some professional teachers. Even some "native

speaking" (NS) ESL/EFL teachers may be offended by such a hiring policy if they have some teacher training experience or an excellent educational background, and take their jobs professionally. Moreover, this policy excludes "non-native speaking" (NNS) teachers who possess a high level of proficiency in their second or foreign language.

As a NNS teacher in Japan, I worry that the myth of "NS teacher as an ideal" may give the wrong goal to learners. Although the NS teacher is used as a model, the English that is used in the learner's country is often different from the one in the NS teacher's. Therefore, the learner's goal may also differ from the model's.

English is used on a daily basis not only by NSs but also by NNSs and is no longer the exclusive language of the American, British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander. Chinese-English and Japanese-English are also Englishes. The diffusion of English is statistically supported; English is spoken by seven hundred million people, and only half of them are "native speakers" (Quirk, 1985). Kachru (1985: 29) points out that "the dichotomy of its native and non-native users seems to have become irrelevant." His view of the global diffusion of English is explained in terms of three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle (or extended circle), and the expanding circle. The inner circle refers to the traditional users of English: English speakers in the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The outer circle (or extended circle) refers to the countries in which English is used as one of the linguistic repertoire of bilinguals or multilinguals and has important status in their language policies. For example, India, Nigeria, Singapore, and Zambia belong to the outer circle. The third circle, the expanding circle, represents the rest of the countries where English is used as a foreign language, such as China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and so forth. Kachru (1985: 13) says, "Understanding the function of English in this circle requires a recognition of the fact that English is an international language . . ."

If his theory is widely accepted, and those Englishes in the expanding circle function well in actual international communication, there is no special reason for having a speaker from the inner circle as a model. The English that is used in the expanding circle, such as Japanese English, has come to be recognized as an English.

Let me turn to examples of language learning settings in Japan. Presenting an NS teacher as a model might imprint learners with the inappropriate idea that they need to speak English as a NS teacher does. If English is viewed as an international or universal language, people in the outer circle or in the expanding circle do not have to be taught that only the English in the inner circle is "real". Their Englishes are also real as long as they make themselves understood in cross-cultural settings. Japanese learners do not need to imitate other Englishes, such as American English.

The recognition of varieties of English, or World Englishes, will demand that language learners and teachers shift their gears to set more realistic goals. Lester (1978: 13-14) criticizes the goal of speaking like a "native," as totally unrealistic. He lists implications of an international language, such as "a clear separation between ideal goals and real goals," "more reasonable expectations to the learners," and "less emphasis on native-like pronunciation." These implications would mean, for example, neither students nor NNS teachers will have to confront great difficulty in mastering phonological differences.

Some people may worry about the corruption of English due to the recognition of English as an International Language. They may feel the need of a "core" English that protects the language from corruption or from losing its identity. Quirk (1985, 1990), for example, strongly insists on the need for "standard" English. Although he recognizes the variety of Englishes as a fact, he points out a failure to make clear "which aspects of English were to be regarded as susceptible of standardization (1985: 3)." He warns of a danger of exporting an airy contempt for standards to EFL and ESL countries, saying:

> It is neither liberal nor liberating to permit learners to settle for lower standards than the best, and it is a travesty of liberalism to tolerate low standards which will lock the least fortunate into the least rewarding careers (1990: 9).

We may need to draw a line, as Quirk said, that determines how much freedom and flexibility are acceptable in language learning classrooms. For example, some flexibility in the phonology of the language is acceptable. Variations from the syntactic and semantic aspects of a language are quite another thing.

However, if "standard" English is acknowledged as Quirk proposes, such acknowledgement would deny the notion of "English as an International Language." Kachru (1985) argues that the traditional notions of standardization or methods do not apply to English in the current situation any more. As long as "standard" English exists, the invisible walls between the inner, outer, and expanding circle will remain. As Quirk himself points out, if a half of English speakers are not "native speakers," only about a half will have the prestige of being in a mainstream group that speaks "standard" English. Promoting "standard" English may result in the rejection of many, and more importantly, it may cause ethnocentrism that inhibits the integration of the three circles.

The recognition of English as an International Language demands change not only in goals or approaches in language learning classrooms but also in the level of professionalism of its teachers. If the goal of being able to speak as an "native speaker" is removed, the need for the NS teacher as a model will no longer exist. I do

not mean by this that NS teachers are not necessary. They will still maintain an important role in language learning classrooms, but they do not need to be models for learners anymore. Their role is to assist NNS teachers. Edge (1988: 155) says, "the role of the foreign native speaker [NS] . . . is to partner and support the native teacher [NNS] in his or her communication."

The notion of English as an International Language will give the NNS teachers of English, who tend to be viewed as a next best alternative in the hiring process, a more stable status. Under the myth of "NS teacher as an ideal," NNS teachers have not been offered a chance equal to that of NS teachers in the hiring processes. Forhan (1992: 3) says, "such a restriction [in the hiring process] suggests that nonnative speakers can never achieve excellence in English language proficiency." It is important to make learners notice that NNS teachers' English is a world English which enables them to fully communicate with other English speakers.

Although it is true that NNS teachers usually suffer from lack of NS proficiency, it is not realistic to exclude them from teaching positions for two reasons. First, learners' goals are various. Not every learner's primary goal is to be able to speak as "native speakers." Some study for exams, and some study for travel or business. Second, not every learner wants to learn English from NS teachers. When I was teaching at a language school in Japan, one student said, "Don't speak to me in English. I don't understand English, and that's why I come here." Two high school students who were very shy could not speak even a word in the NS teacher's class though their English grades at school were A's. In the situation described above, for those learners who had high affective filters, NNS teachers were better than NS teachers for lowering anxiety and encouraging self-confidence. Whether NS or NNS teachers are better for learners depends on the learner's age or needs. Although NS teachers may be effective when learners are young and have low anxiety, NNS teachers may be better for learners who are adolescents or older and have high anxiety.

The best model for the learner may well be the NNS teacher who has reached a satisfactory level of language proficiency and has the same background as the learners (Edge, 1988; Phillipson, 1992). The best English teacher I ever had was a NNS teacher who spoke both languages fluently and could explain the differences between the two languages and cultures precisely. She knew why and where a certain error occurred and what had to be done to help learners. She never spoke Japanese in class, so I had believed that she was a NS teacher. When I heard her fluent Japanese outside the classroom, I came to believe that someday I would be able to speak as she did. That was much stronger encouragement than any of the NS teachers had given me before. As my experience illustrates, presenting NNS teachers as models will offer a more realistic goal and encourage them to learn. Phillipson (1992: 15) says,

It is arguable, as a general principle, that non-native teachers may, in fact, be better qualified than native speakers, if they have gone through the complex process of acquiring English as a second or foreign language, have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners, a detailed awareness of how mother tongue and target language differ and what is difficult for learners, and first-hand experience of using a second or foreign language.

The conditions that Phillipson lists should be the qualifications for all language teachers, whatever their "accident of birth."

Up to this point, I have discussed the myth of "NS teachers as an ideal," the implications of English as an International Language, and the potential contributions that NNS teachers can make. Turning now to the issue of the qualifications for hiring, it should be clear that being a "native speaker" is irrelevant. Qualifications for teachers of English as an International Language should be based on linguistic knowledge of the target language, knowledge of second language acquisition, familiarity with the learners' culture and language, successful experience as a language learner and user, and advanced training as an educator. Phillipson (1992: 14) says, "Teachers, whatever popular adages say, are made rather than born, many of them doubtless self-made, whether they are natives or non-natives."

In 1991, the Executive Board of TESOL issued its "Statement on Nonnative Speakers of English and Hiring Practice," offering "recognition and support to the well-qualified professionals throughout the world who are teachers of English to speakers of other languages" (Forhan, 1992: 3). Regarding this statement, TESOL will no longer advertise any job announcement that recruits the "native speaker of English," says Forhan (1992). This statement will have a great effect on setting professional NNS teachers of English free from the myth of "NS as an ideal." However, it does not explain what it means by the "well-qualified professional." So far, there has been no universal standard for hiring in the TESOL profession. TESOL programs throughout the world vary in the length and in the number and type of required classes. To certify the teachers who take their job seriously and have a background in TESOL, I think there is a need for an official identification that shows what kind of TESOL training or teacher training they have. Clayton (1990) and Yau (1991) suggest establishing a universally recognized license or credential which qualifies teachers and which is necessary for admission into the teaching profession.

I would like this "license" of language teachers to include TESOL training as mandatory, though I realize that having a TESOL certificate or a MA does not always equate with being a "good teacher." Some training in intercultural communication and a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language should be required in addition to TESOL training for those who apply for teaching positions overseas.

Teaching a language requires more than just a linguistic knowledge or proficiency in a language. Changes in both the hiring process and the goals of ESL/EFL classes regarding English as an International Language will go a long way towards increasing the professionalism of our practitioners and establishing TESOL as a true profession in the eyes of our teacher colleagues and the wider community in which we work.

References

Clayton, T. (1990). Real and unreal teachers. *English Today*, 23, 27-31.

Edge, J. (1988). Natives, speakers, and models. *JALT Journal*, 9, 153-157.

Forhan, L. E. (1992). Nonnative speakers of English and hiring practices. *TESOL Placement Bulletin*, 2, 1-3.

Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kachru, B. B. (1986). *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models of Non-native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lester, M. (1978). International English and language variation. In ELT Documents, *English as an International Language* (pp. 6-14). British Council, London: English-Teaching Information Centre.

Paikeday, T. M. (1985). *The Native Speaker is Dead!* Toronto: Paikeday Publishing, Inc.

Phillipson, R. (1992). ELT: The native speaker's burden? *ELT Journal*, 46, 12-18.

Quirk, R. (1985). The English language in a global context. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quirk, R. (1990). Language varieties and standard language. *English Today*, 21, 3-10.

Yau, M. & Weissmann, B. (1991). Real and unreal, native and nonnative. *English Today*, 26, 44-49.

About the Author

Akiko Fukumura taught EFL/ESP for one and a half years in private school in Japan. She is now pursuing graduate studies in TESL at Portland State University. She is interested in communicative approaches to language teaching and in the study and development of World Englishes.