Who is a Native Speaker Anyway? World Englishes and the so-called Nonnative Language Educator

Priyanvada Abeywickrama, San Francisco State University
Stefan Frazier, San José State University
Ayaka Ihara, American Language Institute, SFSU
Scott Phillabaum, San José State University

CATESOL 2017 | Santa Clara, CA
October 21, 2017
What is a global language?

• A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country.

• To achieve the status of a global language, the language has to be taken up by other countries around the world.
What is a global language?

- A language can be made the official language of a country.
- A language can be made a priority language, even with no official status.
How did English become a global language?

• A language does not become a global language because of its intrinsic properties: Good grammar, large vocabulary, great literature, culture or religion.

• “A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people – especially their military power.” (Crystal, 2012, p. 7).

• But, it takes economic power to maintain and expand it.
The spread of English

- **The first diaspora**
  - United States
  - Canada
  - The Caribbean
  - Australia & New Zealand

- **The second diaspora**
  - South Asia
  - Africa
  - Southeast Asia & the Pacific
A family tree representation (based on a model by Peter Strevens) of the way English has spread around the world, showing the influence of the two main branches of American and British English.
English use in the world today

- English has reached the stage where it is used as first-language, second-language, foreign-language, and lingua franca.

- About a quarter of the world’s population is already fluent or competent in English, and this figure is steadily growing: It is now around 1.5 billion people.

- No other language can match this growth!
Models of the English-speaking world

- **Kachru (1985):** Views the spread of English as three concentric circles
  - Inner circle
  - Outer / extended circle
  - Expanding circle
Expanding circle

Outer circle

Inner circle
e.g. USA,
UK
320–380 million
e.g. India,
Singapore
300–500 million
e.g. China,
Russia
500–1,000 million
Models of the English-speaking world

- **Graddol (2006)**: The Kachru circle is outdated
- We need a new circle based on **proficiencies** in English, not on:
  - Native/non-native status
  - How/where English is learned or used
3.3 Representing the community of English speakers as including a wide range of proficiencies.
Models of the English-speaking world

• Graddol (2006) argues that the imperialist discourse keeps native speakers at center-stage.

• This is undeserved and unwarranted.
Mahboob's (2014) Language Variation Framework
What is Standard English?

- Standard English is “... a particular dialect of English, being the only non-localized dialect, of global currency without significant variation, universally accepted as the appropriate educational target in teaching English; which may be spoken with an unrestricted choice of accent” (Strevens, 1983, p. 2) (Italics added)
What is Standard English?

- Strevens (1983) distinguishes between *dialect* and *accent*.
- Different dialects have differences of grammar and vocabulary.
- Different accents have differences of pronunciation.
- Every user of English uses one dialect or another, and one accent or another.
Implications

- This means that socially favored or “standard” varieties constitute dialects every bit as much as those varieties spoken by socially disfavored groups whose language differences are socially stigmatized.
The emergence of “New Englishes"

• The emergence of new varieties of English in different territories results in “New Englishes.”

• Who “owns” English?

• Salman Rushdie: “The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago.”

• In the future, the only possible concept of ownership regarding English will be a global one.
McArthur’s (1998) Circle of World Englishes
Problems with the native/nonnative dichotomy

• Is order of acquisition the most important criterion for language proficiency?

• It promotes English of the ethnic Anglophone speaker as the reference point.

• It ignores that English may be spoken regularly in the home and for business purposes in both the expanding and outer circle.
Problems with the native/nonnative dichotomy

- It theorizes a unidirectional power relationship: “Native” speakers affect “nonnative” speakers but not the other way around.
- It encourages a simplistic view of what constitutes error.
- It can cause negative perceptions of and among “nonnative” speakers, teachers, and researchers.
“How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgment. They are irrelevant. The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language, particularly, one might add, to a nation disposed to dwell on the past, is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status. It is a matter of considerable pride for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining freehold. Other people actually own it.”

–Henry Widdowson (1993)
Why continue using terms like native and nonnative?

- What counts as a “native speaker” in this era of global English use?
- How does this relate to our own personal use of terms like Nonnative English Speaking Teacher (NNEST) and Nonnative Language Educator (NNLE)?
- What motivates us to continue using these terms?
- What about our individual stories often prompts us to self-identify as native or nonnative?
- What are the specific limitations and what is the usefulness of continued use of these terms?