1998 was the year before my own very first CATESOL, so I feel like, while I wasn’t there at that particular event, I’m part of that generation. And only a short time later, I started paying attention to the interest section, because it had indeed been a concern I had from my very first days as a language teacher. That was in the wild west days, for me at least, working at cram schools in Taiwan. I showed up there, fresh out of college and with few prospects, during the recession of the early 90s, having heard from friends that you could find work teaching English. And I did, immediately, a full-time position in a small language school that included good paid training. During that training I was assigned to observe other teachers and be mentored by them, and I saw some very good ones indeed. And the best ones happened to be local teachers who were women; I learned more from them about being flexible in teaching and in being creative and many other aspects of the profession than I have from almost anyone else.

Then, a year or so into that job, I found out how much those teachers got paid, compared to me even when I started. It was something like half my salary. And it seemed profoundly unfair that I could just show up with no prior experience and be making twice what the experienced, excellent local teachers made. And so much was tied into that dynamic, issues of language background, of course, but also questions about race and gender. A lot of foreigners were teaching English in Taiwan, badly, by virtue of their being white.

So these topics resonated with me when I started learning more about the NNEST interest group in TESOL and NNLEI in CATESOL. And there’s been so much work in these 20 years. Exactly my own first year in CATESOL, 1999, of course, George Braine had that groundbreaking volume (Braine, 1999), which was the first book that mentioned NNESTs by name in that manner. 2004 saw Lia’s book (Kamhi-Stein, 2004), which remains an important foundation. And since then, several more volumes dedicated to NNEST studies (e.g. Braine, 2010; Mahboob, 2010. And the sub-topics and sub-fields within NNEST studies have proliferated. The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching came out just about 11 months ago now, and just looking at all the entries within the NNEST section, the headings cover so much ground on so many concerns that are concerns not just for NNESTs, honestly, but for all teachers, and for humanity in general. Teacher qualifications and professionalism and education. Native speakerism and race and ethnicity. Gender and NNESTs. Linguistic imperialism. Monolingual bias. World Englishes and English as an International Language. And the recent issue of TESOL Quarterly (Vol. 52.4) has one article about negotiating miscommunication between people speaking English as a Lingua Franca, and one article about teaching English as a non-imperial language, two topics highly relevant to non-native speakers.

And beyond that literature, NNEST research is expanding into the concerns of non-native speakers in other fields of teaching. If I may self-cite, for example, in collaboration with Todd Ruecker and Mariya Tseptsura, we had a piece come out this past summer in the journal College Composition and Communication (Ruecker, Frazier, & Tseptsura, 2018) in which we surveyed and interviewed a range of non-native speakers teaching regular first-year composition (not ESL). That’s a growing population of instructors, for a variety of reasons – a lot of them are international teaching assistants in Ph.D. programs. In that study, we found a fair bit of teaching...
confidence among that group of teachers, which we hope is representative. We also included a series of recommendations for the hiring and training of non-native speakers in first-year composition programs, and we hope the field of L1 composition pays closer attention to that population in the future. Todd and Mariya are now compiling a book on that topic, hoping for greater visibility of those issues in the field of composition studies.

It would also be good for those of us within the field of NNEST studies to identify other relevant audiences. Luciana’s body of work (which is gigantic) is largely within secondary ed, which is an area that people like me in higher ed really should pay more attention to. (I don’t enough.) Another important constituency is the general public. When it comes to matters of discrimination against non-native English speaker teachers, one of the forces at work is “the will of our customers” – a lot of times, low-information people wanting to learn English will simply say, “obviously I want a native speaker to teach me.” And institutions often bow to those pressures. So raising awareness among language learners themselves and the general public is a good idea.

And when we do so, I personally think it’s worth studying ways of framing that rhetoric so that it is educative rather than accusatory or even maligning. Discrimination and other unpleasant behavior often happens simply out of ignorance, rather than people actually intending to be mean or exclusive. As an example, in my university department, we have an agreement that when we receive discriminatory job ads, we refuse to post them, and we contact the institutions with explanations about why, sending them the position statements by TESOL and CATESOL (“CATESOL position paper,” 2013; “Position statement,” 2006). Almost always – I’d say 90% of the time – they change the ads, and often they thank us for the information that they’d never given much thought to.

Another challenging area we still need to discuss, although we have a lot already, is the question of what terminology to use. Reading Adrian Holliday’s (2018) entry in the TESOL encyclopedia, he makes the good case for how we need to rethink terminology and avoid using terms like the falsely dichotomous “native” vs. “non-native” and “NNEST” vs. “NEST.” And that’s a worthwhile challenge, even if it means using more cumbersome but more explanatory terms, like “teachers with complex language backgrounds” or something like that. But the challenge is highlighted by the fact that Holliday’s own entry is within a section of the encyclopedia with the kind of title that he wants us to avoid. So, not so simple. There’s more work to be done. Let’s keep doing it.

As a professor and an advisor to MA TESOL students for over 13 years now, let me tell you about one of the more common conversations I have. It happens when students are preparing for their final semester, their practicum, their comprehensive exam, and their graduation, and I ask them if anything has firmed up for them in regards to their future teaching plans. Some of the non-native speakers are international students who are returning to their countries. But many of those international students want to stay; they’ve enjoyed studying and living in California and would just like to have more time here. And those students invariably say something like, “I’d really like to find work here. But I don’t think I can be hired, because I’m a non-native speaker.”

So if I may conclude here, on a vision of a better future, it is this: in the future, I don’t want to have that conversation anymore. In the future, I’d like it to be very clear to non-native speakers from the start that, if they are good teachers, they can work anywhere, and live anywhere, and be good models of teaching and learning, anywhere. Thank you.
References


*CATESOL position paper opposing discrimination against non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and teachers with “non-standard” varieties of English* (2013). CATESOL.


