Moving Towards Unbiased ELT Teacher Selection: How True Is That ?

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ABSTRACT : *With emergence of the EIL(English as an International Language),most of the researchers claim that it would be better if we moved from the dichotomy of native/non-native teachers towards the continuum of such entities. In other words, theoretically the trend is not to categorize ELT pedagogues according to their nationality but in practice it is almost the opposite still. The recruiters, universities and institutes call for native speakers of the language in their advertisements and announcements. In this article, 83 online advertisements sent to the author's email by an institute in Istanbul were analyzed to see how this bias is still prevalent in the English teaching and employment realm. Surprisingly enough, in majority of the cases,75 out of 83,the very word 'native speaker' was stated in the advert as the main criteria for being eligible as a potential candidate for the mentioned job vacancy. In only 5 cases they had mentioned they would consider the non-native English teachers with proficiency in Turkish language. In the other 3 ads the combination 'near native speaker' was demanded as a significant factor in the selection process. Hence, in the light of such analysis we can observe that there is a wide gap between theory and practice in the field and this paper is a call for more research in this case and more importantly an invitation to fill the gap by being less biased in the recruitment process regarding the native/non-native dichotomy.*

KEY WORDS: *EIL, Teacher Selection, Native-non-native teachers*

I. INTRODUCTION

Once English belonged to the people solely speaking the language but now it no longer belongs to any one kind of people; it is an international language and belongs to everyone who uses it. As EIL expands, bilingual speakers use English on a daily basis within their own countries (McKay, 2002: 49). However, in the recruitment process the hiring managers are still looking for the native speakers although there are many calls for the nondiscriminatory practices in the field. For instance according to NNEST Caucus, we should create a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth (http://nnest. moussu.net/purpose.html). Many scholars in the field consider the discrimination a political one rather than a linguistic one (e.g. Canagarajah, 1999; Edge, 2006; Kubota, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2007; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). Nayar strongly disagrees with the native-nonnative dichotomy stating 'the native-nonnative paradigm and its implicational exclusivity of ownership is not only linguistically unsound and pedagogically irrelevant but also politically pernicious, as at best it is linguistic elitism and at worst it is an instrument of linguistic imperialism' (Nayar, 1994). At times the native-non-native-speaker distinction is discredited (e.g. Jenkins,2000) or treated with ambivalence (Davies,2006) .The other terminology for the native-nonnative might be Center and Periphery. Center and Periphery might be thought of as geographical mainly but Holiday(2005) takes them as ideas rather than geographical entities. That is to say whether to label someone as an insider or outsider to the group. Kumaravadivelu (2006) connects Centered globalization with the self-marginalization of non-native speaker educators, where 'the periphery surrenders its voice and vision to the centre' and 'knowingly or unknowingly' they 'legitimize the characteristics of inferiority attributed to them by the dominating group.

The discrimination issue arises out of competition. Nonnative speakers having to compete for teaching jobs with native speakers who are professionally less well qualified but have the advantage of speaking the language as their L1 (Holliday, 2005; Kamal, 2006; Mora Pablo, 2006; Shao, 2005). This has become more apparent in recent years because of the increasing mobility of non-native speaker educators and the acknowledgement that they do travel outside their traditional home settings to become world educators alongside native speakers(Holliday, 2005; Kubota, 2001). Native speakers with no qualifications and experience are favored over the qualified non-natives who are considered unemployable at all.Braine (1999) emphasizes that 'no issue is more troubling than that of discrimination in employment' but it 'is rarely mentioned in the popular literature in ELT'. The discrimination is mostly felt by the ones who have actually experienced it for real. Braine (1998) offers two main excuses for discrimination against nonnative teachers. First is the most commonly used excuse that English language learners prefer native-speaker teachers.

Another frequently cited reason for not hiring NNS English teachers is the complex legal process that employers must go through in order to recruit foreigners.Not only the geographical boundaries but also the way a teacher looks influences the process of recruitment. that is to say some recruiters might reject an applicant simply by checking the photograph and labeling them as colored in terms of skin color or non-Western (Kubota *et al*.,2005) . According to Red-Baer (1995, in Sahin, 2005) 'an inexperienced Caucasian will be chosen over a much better qualified foreigner' because English teachers are more often than not selected 'by their looks than their qualifications'. Conversely, for many NNS English teachers, qualifications, ability, and experience are of little help in the job market (Braine, 1998). These perceived notions about the 'generalized Other' are so strong that many times candidates that seem to belong to the 'Other' camp are disqualified much before the interview stage. This can be terribly frustrating for an entire group of people who are 'denied what they have been trained to do' (Braine, 1998). Raddaoui cites an actual job advertisement in his article that blatantly announces the requirement for 'native English speakers with western faces and neutral accent' (Raddaoui, 2005: 120). At times, even sounding like a native speaker is not sufficient and the appearance and passport origin of the instructor is of great significant to the hiring staff. If not a NS ,the applicants prove their proficiency by obtaining a high score in IELTS examination. This happens in cases when the job applicant gets a chance for being interviewed. There are cases where the cultural and racial prejudice attached to the label place people in the non-native speaker group when they have no linguistic reason to be there. These cases suggest that not simply being a non-native speaker, but being called a non-native speaker is itself a form of discrimination.

A significant work is done by Ali(2009) in the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) Countries regarding the discrimination faced by the outer circle teachers in those regions. She announces that whether it is a precondition of the local authorities or a wish of the outsourced management, English teachers from the Outer and Expanding Circles3 have never filled teaching positions in well-established private schools, colleges and universities in the GCC (Ali,2009). This is the case despite TESOL's vehement opposition to discrimination in hiring practices (Braine, 1999: xvi; TESOL Member Resolution Against Discrimination on the Grounds of Nationality, 1999). One of the major goals of TESOL's NNEST (Non-native English Speakers in TESOL) caucus is 'to create a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth' (Braine, 1998). She also maintains that from the interviews and survey that teachers from the Outer Circle face discrimination in the hiring process of English teachers in the GCC while students, who are also stakeholders, cannot always differentiate clearly between a native and a non-native English teacher (Ali,2009).

After highlighting the direct discrimination between native-nonnative groups, now the recruiters are attempting to alter the language by mentioning near-native or native-like vocabularies in the ads. Mahboob notices a similar trend as well stating 'the discriminatory discourse in job ads has shifted from requiring native speaker to requiring candidates from a list of specified inner circle countries; interestingly, these are all White Anglo-English dominated countries. This change in the lexicon is a thin veil that attempts to hide the racial and L1-based discrimination in the field.(Mahboob, 2007).All this introduction and review of the related literature led the researcher to analyze a series of advertisements sent to her via email from an institute located in Istanbul which is responsible for training international English teachers. The main idea came to my mind after carefully studying Ali(2009)'s work.

II.   METHODOLOGY

To carry out this research the job advertisements were scrutinized thoroughly for the words such as 'native speaker' or 'only native speaker' or 'near-native speaker'. The adverts were sent to the researcher throughout one year. 83 ads were analyzed to carry out this research.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Surprisingly enough, the majority of the recruiters asked for the native speakers solely. They emphasized this either in bold format or repeated it to make sure that only native teachers applied for the position. In 75 out of 83,the very word 'native speaker' was stated in the advert as the main criteria for being eligible as a potential candidate for the mentioned job vacancy. In only 5 cases they had mentioned they would consider the non-native English teachers with proficiency in Turkish language. In the other 3 ads the combination 'near-native speaker' was demanded as a significant factor in the selection process. The researcher as a non-native applied for most of the positions but didn't even get a response. Only in three cases, a reply was sent and the hiring managers didn't offer an interview as soon as they realized the applicant wasn't located in Turkey.This research is another confirmation to prove the discrimination in the ELT realm against NNTs. This discrimination is still prevalent despite all the calls to treat all the pedagogues of the field equally and offer jobs to all the candidates who have been trained to do so.

IV.   CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

We believe that NNESTs need to position themselves in their contexts, contest social inequity, and express their 'voice' to gain empowerment and promote change in their own realities. This transformation demands a 'conscientization' so that individuals become aware of their contextual realities and the actions that alienate them (Chácon & Girardot, 2006, citing Freire) .Mahboob (2007) believes that several concrete steps can be taken by teachers from the Outer Circle to create a more professional and nondiscriminatory atmosphere in English language teaching. He suggests that non-native teachers should become familiar with literature on World Englishes and that they should question the native-speaker-as-model in SLA research. Of course these can be beneficial provided that the teacher gets a chance to have an interview and not judged by the foreign-looking names and photos.

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