INTRODUCTION

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In the introduction to his forthcoming anthology, “The NNEST Lens,” Mahboob follows Yamuna Kachru (1994) in choosing to see Nonnative English Speaking Teachers as a metaphorical lens that can bring to light new perspectives and original insights on applied linguistics and English teaching. This is so true—in trying to respond to the needs of NNES teacher candidates in 2001 we in the AU TESOL Program reconfigured our practicum structure in ways that benefitted all students (Brady & Gulikers, 2002). In looking into challenges that NNESTs had in teaching pronunciation we found additional evidence of the role that identity plays in modifying one’s pronunciation (Brady, Kim & Taylor, 2004). In 2006 while researching ways to respond to issues with NNEST self esteem we found evidence that caused us to add a new unit to American University TESOL Program’s capstone methodology course (English Language Teaching III) to address self esteem issues that affect all teachers. Finally, an action plan originally developed for NNES teacher candidates was used in the AU TESOL 2007 Summer Intensive Workshop on NNEST issues became an assignment for all students in the aforementioned English Language Teaching III course.

This is not surprising. As Mahboob goes on to note, NNESTs are, almost by definition, multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic. Thus, research on NNEST issues is research on diversity and how we can accommodate it, honor it, and make our ESL/EFL classrooms as well as our professional practice, more inclusive.
This issue of what was to be the “AU TESOL Working Papers” (which has now become the first volume of the “WATESOL NNEST Caucus Annual Review”) grew out of an attempt to become more inclusive. After the 2008 Washington Area TESOL (WATESOL) Association Spring Conference, a group of us who were members of the WATESOL NNEST Caucus gathered for lunch. The discussion turned to how we could be better supportive of current students and new teachers in their professional development. We decided that we were doing a good job supporting NNEST Caucus member’s efforts conference presentation submissions, but that we were not as successful in supporting publication efforts. We tried to brainstorm publications where new practicing teachers could have a reasonable opportunity of being published, but the list was not extensive. I hit upon the notion of seeing if we could dedicate an issue of the “Annual Review” to NNESTs and at some point someone suggested inviting the leaders of the 2007 NNEST AU TESOL Summer Intensive Workshop to contribute to this volume as a way of building a bit more visibility for this special NNEST issue.

For that reason, we are very proud to include as authors in this volume, George Braine, (the founder of the NNEST movement in TESOL in 1996) and Ahmar Mahboob (who along with Braine were two of the leaders for the 2007 American University Summer Intensive Workshop: *NNESTs At Work: Principles and practices for nonnative English speakers professional development*. In the spirit of inclusivity we are also including articles by colleagues at a number of Washington Area TESOL institutions: Jessica Lee who just received her Ed.D. from George Washington University, Sarah Shin Associate Professor and Sunyoung Park, a teacher at Myeong Moon High School in the Kyeonggi Do province of South Korea, and Ali Fuad Selvi, Ph.D., Candidate in the Second Language Education & Culture program at University of
Maryland, College Park. The American University TESOL Program is here well represented by a recent MA in TESOL graduate, Kumiko Akikawa and a current student, Huijin Yan.

Our aim to be more inclusive was prescient because in July 2009, American University made a decision which at least in a limited manner, seemed somewhat exclusive. To accommodate the wishes of the authors it was decided to seek another publication venue. After discussion, it was agreed that the “Working Papers” should be published through the WATESOL NNEST Caucus website. Although some may hold that online publication is not as prestigious as print publication, online resources provided quicker ways to disseminate the information and certainly are in line with trends of the times (consider TESOL’s electronic “TESOL Journal” due to appear in Spring 2010). We hope that this choice of venue will give readers from around the world greater access to these studies, and allow the readers to easily engage in online interactions with the authors.

This introduction is followed by a short piece from George Braine, “NNS English Teachers and Accents,” which shows the broad scope of TESOL research. Here, George reminds us of the curious paradox inherent in the dual notions of “intelligibility” (one can be understood) and “comprehensibility” (one can be understood with ease): these characteristics are determined by the listener not the speaker, so that a native English speaker’s dialect may be unintelligible to a native speaking listener of from another dialectal community while this same listener might find many nonnative English speakers quite comprehensible. So if intelligibility/comprehensibility should be the goal of pronunciation instruction and not accent reduction, why do studies show that so many competent, highly articulate NNESTs seek to be perceived as
having a “native accent” (of some sort)? Shouldn’t we instead be working legitimatize a variety of accents and to develop strategies and techniques for accent tolerance? George suggests some ways to go forward.

II. NNEST SELF-PERCEPTION STUDIES

Reflective NNEST self-perception studies go back at least 15 years, but the studies in this volume innovative that they look all look at NNEST backgrounds and experiences as sources of teaching strength.

Jessica Lee’s paper, “Nonnative English Speaking Teachers’ Experiences and their Pedagogy in the ESL Classroom” looks at the backgrounds and experiences that five Washington DC area NNESTs bring to their teaching and finds that they use their NNEST status to inform their methodological approaches in the classroom. They see their multilingualism as an asset and believe that their own experiences as language learning and cross cultural experiences help them not only to anticipate the challenges that their learners will face, but also give them insights into the best approaches for providing instruction. Consequently Lee encourages NNESTs to reflect on their backgrounds and experiences, and to draw upon these experiences in their teaching. Her research suggests, along with other work by others, such as Lia Kamhi-Stein (Kamhi-Stein, et al, 2002), suggest that that the native speaker paradigm perhaps needs to be turned on its head, that in fact, NNESTs may make the best teachers.
The theme is echoed in two studies that I am particularly proud of: Kumiko Akikawa and Huijin Yan both look at their experiences and perceptions of teaching ESL and their respective native languages in the same semester. In “Teaching Pragmatics as an Native and a Nonnnative Speaker,” Akikawa looks at the experience from the standpoint of pragmatics instruction. Anxious about her language proficiency, she at first begins to accept the native speaker fallacy, wondering how anyone who has not grown up in a speech community can teach its pragmatics. However, as she begins to teach Japanese she discovers that pragmatics instruction is still difficult for her because she was not aware of her cultural ideologies and therefore could not provide good explanations for Japanese pragmatic conventions. As she says, “I could provide the ‘‘what’ but not the ‘why.’”

Akikawa finds that to effectively teach interlanguage pragmatics, one must have a foundation in the principles of discourse analysis, and that being multicultural and multilingual actually makes one much more adept at being able to analyze and teach how language is used. She even dares suggest that monolingual native speakers who have limited cross cultural experience may never be as effective as teachers as those who have rich, multilingual, multicultural backgrounds.

Huijin Yan in “Teaching As a Native (Chinese) Speaker and a Nonnative English Speaker: Different Identities, Similar Needs,” makes similar observations, noting that as a native speaker of Chinese, she had complete fluency and deep cultural understanding, but she had never learned the formal structure of Chinese, had no idea about how to teach a tonal language, and found that she was occasionally baffled about why learning the language was so difficult for the
U.S. students in her Chinese class. However in her ESL class, her students confidently accepted her authority on grammar, and as an international teacher, Yan could approach cultural issues from a critical perspective, encouraging all members of her multicultural classroom to share their diverse perspectives on U.S. culture. Yan probes her growth as a teacher through an assessment tool developed by Taylor (2008) to self-estimate one’s professional competence. She finds that she rated herself similarly both in her competence as a teacher of Chinese and English, but that the specific elements of her skills and knowledge that contributed to those ratings differed for the two languages. Yan sees teaching skills and teaching knowledge as much better predicators of classroom success than simply whether one is happens to be teaching their first or another language.

III. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF NNESTs (AND NESTs)

Student perception studies have also become common and in the last few years have provided an every growing body of evidence that once students get to know teachers, they stop do pay attention to whether they are native or nonnative speaking teachers, and concentrate inside on their personal characteristics and teaching attributes (e.g., Lasagabster & Sierra (2005), Pacek (2005), and Moussu (2002). Of the student perception studies in this volume, one is unique because of the instructor role (as writing tutors in U.S. universities) and the other because it is based on a discourse analysis of student comments about NEST and NNEST instructors, rather than simply reporting student reactions to instructors of different language backgrounds.
In the first, “She immediately understood what I was trying to say: Student Perception of NNESTs as Writing Tutors” Sunyoung Park and Sarah Shin investigate the attitudes of Korean international students at U.S. universities towards their native English speaking and Korean nonnative English speaking writing tutors in one on one writing conferences. The research was based on the attitudes of four Korean students at a U.S. university who worked with four tutors, two native speakers of Korean and two native English speakers educated in the U.S. Park and Shin feel that their results indicate that NNESTs who share an L1 with their students can be as effective, indeed possibly even more effective than NESTs in helping English Language Learners improve their writing. They go on to say that students who only worked with NESTs felt that tutor comments were too general and did not adequately respond to questions about grammar and rhetoric, whereas those students who worked with NNEST Korean tutors were able to switch to Korean to negotiate the meaning of the tutor’s comments and that this greatly enhanced their understanding of the writing process.

Caroline Lipovsky and Ahmar Mahboob in “Students’ Appraisals of their Native and Nonnative English Speaking Teachers,” make the argument that while many surveys have been done of attitudes expressed by English Language Learners about their native and nonnative English speaking language teachers, few to none have actually evaluated the language of those comments to determine what the discourse of the written student evaluations reveals about the attitudes and stances of the learners towards their instructors. Based on a study of 10 Japanese high school students attending an intensive orientation program in the U.S., Lipovsky and Mahboob use an Appraisal Framework to analyze the feelings, judgments, and evaluations that the respondents’ language choices reveal. They attempt to analyze the learners’ words to
determine their attitudes towards their NEST and NNEST teachers in the areas of Linguistic Competence, Oral Skills, Competence in the Learners’ L1, Literacy Skills, Grammar, Vocabulary, Culture, Teaching Methodology, Personal Factors, Empathy towards Students, Tenacity, NNESTs as Role Models, and Enjoyment. The study tended to confirm suppositions made by others (e.g., Benke & Medgyes (2005), Cheung (2002), and Mahboob (2003)) that students perceived NESTs and NNESTs as having complementary skills (e.g., NESTs were usually praised for oral skills, whereas NNESTs, not at times praised for their oral skills were more consistently praised for their teaching of literacy skills, grammar, and making clear how these skills are independent of linguistic skills). NNESTs were also praised for their teaching methodologies, empathy towards students, and their tenacity in mastering English (which made them positive role models). The study seems to suggest that once again, English Language Learners do not prefer to be taught by either NNESTs or NESTs—rather it is the knowledge and teaching expertise the instructor possesses.

Part IV: ADVOCACY ISSUES

While almost all of the previous studies in this volume have demonstrated progress that NNESTs have made in being accepted as professionals and how this progress maybe be changing attitudes towards NNESTs, Ali Fuad Selvi’s study, “All Teachers Are Equal, But Some Teachers Are More Equal than Others: Trend Analysis of Job Advertisements in English Language Teaching,” is a cautionary tale that reminds us of how far we have yet to go. Analyzing position announcements from the “TESOL Placement Bulletin” and the “International Employment” section on “Dave’s ESL Café,” Selvi establishes convincingly that the “native
speaker fallacy” and discrimination against NNESTs is still widespread, especially in EFL settings. In fact Selvi finds a surprising amount of secondary and event tertiary discrimination (that is, in addition to requiring native or “near native” English competency, position announcements will also specify the applicants’ countries of origin or request degrees from specific (“inner circle”--Krachu, 1985) countries. Selvi also demonstrates convincingly, how little concern these position announcements generally pay to the value of teaching experience—implying that in English Language Teaching experience doesn’t really count, but that one’s native language, one’s country of origin and the country in which one matriculated in (regardless of major) are the actual sources of instructional effectiveness.

Selvi awakes us all to the fact that even in our supposed “post-racial” world, discrimination is far from over. Professional associations and academic institutions need to stand more strongly against NNEST discrimination.

It has been an honor to be the editor of this annual review. While this is a diverse anthology that does not contain any major studies; every study in this collection represents an expansion of the NNEST research field and every one, breaks new ground—often with innovative research methods that can be used and adapted by others. As the WATESOL NNEST Caucus celebrates its fifth anniversary, its members can be proud of this significant contribution to NNEST research, in addition to all the other worthy achievements which their commitment to the WATESOL NNEST Caucus has made possible.

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References


