Rethinking the “Native Speaker”/“Nonnative Speaker” Dichotomy

Abstract

The study focuses on the concept of the “native speaker” and the “native”/“nonnative speaker” dichotomy. It recognizes the “native speaker” concept primarily as a political and ideological construct and the “native”/“nonnative speaker” dichotomy mainly as a basis for division and discrimination. The study believes that a strict adherence to “native”/“nonnative speaker” dichotomy as a framework of analysis in linguistics, especially applied linguistics, overlooks certain alternative ways of understanding the speakership of a given language and the possibility of there being covert but more intense forms of language-based division and discrimination. Based on the findings of empirical research conducted at Ohio University in 2011/2012, involving 173 Ohio University undergraduates who considered themselves “native speakers” of English, the study recognizes certain patterns that indicate that the divisions within the “native speaker” category are stronger and more intense than the division between the “native speaker” and “nonnative speaker” categories.

Keywords: *Native speaker, Nonnative speaker, The native speaker/nonnative speaker dichotomy, Accent*

Introduction and Background

The notion of “native speaker” (NS) is one of the fundamental concepts in linguistics, especially in applied linguistics. It could be seen being used as a defining concept, or, at least, being commonly referred to in linguistic explanations in many sub-disciplines of applied linguistics. According to Davies, “Applied linguistics makes constant appeal to the concept of the NS. This appeal is necessary because of the need applied linguistics has for models, norms and goals” (*The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* 1). Although the notion operates as a defining concept in linguistics in general and applied linguistics in particular, a proper definition of the notion is not to be found in the field (Davies; Han; Lee; Train). A close analysis of the notion would show that it is an “elusive enigma” (Lee 152) that is “neither simple nor settled” (Train 47) and that it always “slips away” (Davies, *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* 1). The concept is also “rich in ambiguity” (Davies, *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* 2). In a context where a clear definition of the NS is absent, researchers in the field of linguistics appear to base their understanding of complex linguistic realities that involve the notion in question on the mainstream, commonsensical, and non-technical understandings of the notion, which predominantly project it as a concept defining an almost birth-ascribed status.

The conventional understanding of the notion of the NS projects the notion more as a self-explanatory concept (Lee 152) than as a concept that requires a clear definition. Chomsky (as quoted in Paikeday) reinforces this idea when he says, “everyone is a native speaker of the particular L-s that that person has ‘grown’ in his/her mind/brain. In the real world, that is all there is to say” (58). This statement implies that the meaning of the concept of the NS is so obvious that the question “who is a native speaker?” is a non-question. Charles Ferguson displays a sense of indifference towards the absence of a clear definition of the notion when he argues, “In fact the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should preferably be quietly dropped from the linguist’s set of professional myths” (as quoted in Davies, “The Notion of Native Speaker” 2). Given the importance that linguistics places on objective definitions and scientific modalities, the absence of a clear understanding of this concept, which is of central importance to linguistics as a discipline, and the sense of indifference with which this absence is generally perceived in the field point, in my view, to a fundamental self-contradiction in the field.

The conventional understanding of the notion in question describes a NS as someone who speaks a given language as her/his first/native language (Bloomfield; Doerr, “Investigating ‘Native Speaker Effects’”) and someone who has an innate and complete competence in that language. Davies conveys this idea when he argues:

It is surely a common sense idea, referring to people who have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about ‘their’ language. They are the models we appeal to for the ‘truth’ about the language, they know what the language is (‘Yes, you can say that’) and what the language isn’t (‘No, that’s not English, Japanese, Swahili, ...’). They are the stake-holders of the language, they control its maintenance and shape its direction (“The Notion of Native Speaker” 1).

Pennycook summarizes the conventional understanding when he says that a NS is an “idealized person with a complete and possibly innate competence in the language” (175) while Takato states, “The commonsense notion of ‘native speaker’ assumes natural and complete competence in an individual’s first language or ‘mother tongue’” (83). Carnie’s statement that one should rely on “the knowledge of a native speaker consultant for languages that we don’t speak natively” (12-13) indicates the tendency to view the NSs of a given language as the absolute authority on that language.

Another dominant understanding of the concept in the field recognizes one’s place of birth as *a*, if not *the*, main determiner of her/his NS status. This understanding projects

“native speakerness” as a birth-ascribed status that cannot/does not change. Train, who takes a critical anthro-philological approach to the notion of the NS, discusses the notion from an etymological point of view. He argues, “As the Latin etymon *natives* (from the verb ‘to be born’) suggests, the nativeness of language as something one is born with is closely tied to notions of naturalness and authenticity (...) as well as notions of belonging to a tribe, species, nation, etc. (*natio*)” (47). This description captures the close connection that is generally perceived to exist among the notions of ‘the nativeness of language’, ‘belonging to a tribe, species, nation, etc’, ‘naturalness’, and ‘authenticity’. Williams underscores this understanding when he argues that the term implies “innate, natural, or of a place in which one is born (...) [with a] positive social and political sense, as in native land, native country” (180). Davies argues, “The native speaker is ... one who can lay claim to being a speaker of a language by virtue of place or country of birth” (*The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics* ix). The emergent critical approaches to the notion of the NS go beyond these conventional understandings of the notion. The following statement by Train highlights this significant change of attitudes:

Despite nativist claims to the contrary, the nativeness of language turns out to be more genealogical, in the postmodern sense, than genetic. Nativeness is constructed through complex, historically contingent practices and ideologies embedded in shifting social, linguistic, cultural, and effective contexts. (47-48)

This statement rejects the conventional understanding that the NS is a biologically defined position and views the notion first and foremost as a construct. Kramsch, who looks at the concept from a similar point of view, argues, “Native speakership ... is more than privilege of birth or even education. It is acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and nonnative speakers” (363). Kubota highlights the role that “non-”/“extra-linguistic” factors play in defining the concept when she argues, “the superiority of the native speaker is not based purely on the linguistic attributes of individual speakers” (236). According to Takato (2009), “one’s ‘native speaker’ status can never be fixed, innate, and complete. It can only be fleeting and fluid, or else multiple” (98). Nevertheless, irrespective of these emergent critical perspectives at a conceptual level, understandings of complex linguistic realities within linguistics (mainly in applied linguistics, and also in other branches of the discipline) continue to be largely based on the conventional understanding of the notion.

The discussions that involve the notions of the NS and “native speakerness” invariably recognize two dichotomous groups of ‘linguistic beings’ in relation to any given language: “native speakers” (NSs) and “nonnative speakers” (NNSs). In applied linguistics, especially in the sub-fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the terms NS and NNS are being used to refer to those who have been exposed to a particular language in their childhood and have grown up acquiring that language and those who have learnt/started learning that language at a later stage in life respectively. Although the primary focus of the studies in these fields is to discuss the nature and various aspects of the difference between the two groups in terms of their linguistic skills/behaviour, the conceptualization of the groups as NSs and NNSs elevates any linguistic differences that may exist between the two groups to a level where they appear to be constitutive of a fundamental difference that goes beyond mere linguistic differences.¹ Such an elevation, on the one hand, adds an extra-linguistic dimension to the linguistic differences between the groups, thereby presenting a distorted understanding of those linguistic differences; on the other hand, it creates a context in which the observable linguistic

---

¹ This is due to the political and ideological overtones that the concepts of NS and NNS have acquired. See Pennycook and Phillipson for a detailed understanding of the political and ideological dimensions of these concepts.

differences could be used to consolidate existing stereotypical notions regarding the groups. In that way, the NS/NNS dichotomy provides a strong and fundamental basis for division in society.

This dichotomization projects the NSs and NNSs of a given language as two mutually exclusive groups separated by an impenetrable boundary. While 'NS' qualifies as the unmarked status, 'NNS' gets projected as the marked status and the antithesis of the NS. The affix 'non' in 'NNS' conveys the logical implication that the NNS is what the NS is not. In a context where 'mother tongue', 'first language', 'dominant language', 'home language', and 'competence' are used as the defining concepts of the broader notion of the NS (Davies, "The Notion of Native Speaker"), the NNS, by virtue of the fact that it is the antithesis of the NS, assumes a status that is defined by the absence of those concepts. While the sense of presence that the said defining concepts attach to the NS position projects that position as the norm/centre, the sense of absence associated with the NNS position defines that position as the "non-norm"/periphery. In this sense, even before the terms are applied to different speaker groups, the NS/NNS dichotomy embodies a significant power differential. At the same time, this dichotomy conveys the misconception that each of the two groups is primarily a homogeneous speech community. It creates a space in which the internal differences within each of the two groups could conveniently be overlooked. It overlooks the possibility of there being other forms of language-based division and discrimination.

The present study acknowledges the studies that have been done (Cook; Gluszek and Dovidio; Jenkins; Lee; Lindemann; Rubin; Rubin and Smith) on the concept of the NS with a view to arriving at a more critical and broader understanding of the concept. Although the contribution of these studies towards an alternative understanding of the concept is commendable, their reformist approach to the concept, coupled with their implied assumption that the NS/NNS dichotomy is a fundamentally tenable framework, fails to effectively problematise the dichotomy as a basis for division and discrimination. Furthermore, the implication that these studies in linguistics, which take the initiative to critique the dichotomy, first and foremost accept the dichotomy as a fundamentally tenable framework, in a way, legitimizes the dichotomy, thereby further consolidating it as a basis for division and discrimination. In this sense, the approach that these studies take to the notion of the NS is not only inadequate but also limiting in a fundamental way.

Scope of the Study

The present study questions the validity of the NS/NNS dichotomy as a fundamentally tenable framework. It recognizes the possibility of there being more intense bases for division and discrimination, which a strict focus on/adherence to the NS/NNS dichotomy eclipses, and does so in an apparently legitimizing manner, by distracting society's attention from them. The study is based on the assumption that any serious attempt to expose the discriminatory nature of this dichotomy should aim at deconstructing the notion of the NS rather than trying to reform the dichotomy while treating it as a fundamentally tenable and useful framework.

The present study aims at recognizing a basis for the deconstruction of the notion of the NS through an exploration of the social perceptions among first language speakers of American English regarding the notion.² The specific aim of the study is to examine the role 'accent'³ plays in the evaluations of "native speakerness" by "NSs"⁴ of American English.

---

² American English is increasingly becoming the normative/hegemonic variety of the English language. The choice of first language speakers of American English as the participants of the present study was based on the assumption that the political and ideological dimension of the notion of the NS could best be recognized when it is assessed in relation to a normative/hegemonic variety like American English.

³ Not only is accent the most noticeable feature of one's speech, it is also a marker of her/his identity as a social being (Edwards; Giles and Johnson; Gluszek and Dovidio; Lippi-Green [*English with an Accent*]; Mugglestone). Like the notion of the NS, accent too appears to be a taken-for-granted reality or a self-explanatory notion in linguistics. "In as

The choice of accent as the determining variable in the participants' assessment of "native speakerness" was based on the recognition that accent is the most observable marker of distinction between different forms of fluent English speech.⁵ Based on its findings, the study aims at highlighting the political and ideological dimensions to this seemingly objective linguistic notion.

Methodology

The research on which the present paper is based was conducted at Ohio University (Athens Campus), USA, in 2011-2012. The study aimed at providing insights into the notion of the NS through an investigation of the social perceptions regarding the notion.⁶ A significant focus of the study was to find out how the NSs of American English rated fluent speech with "normative"/"non-normative" American accents (such as Appalachian English and African American English) and non-American accents associated with "nonnative" speaking contexts such as (Chinese English, Indian English, and Kenyan English). The study used both quantitative data collected using a structured questionnaire deployed online and qualitative data collected using focus group interviews (FGIs). 173 Ohio University undergraduates (114 females and 49 males)⁷ who considered themselves NSs of English participated in the study. This group consisted of 144 (83%) White Americans, 10 (6%) African Americans, 10 (6%) European Americans⁸, 6 (3%) Asian Americans, and 3 (2%) Hispanic/Latino Americans. While 89 participants had had some form of formal training in linguistics, the other 84 had had no such training.

Of the 173 participants, 163 participated in an online survey, which used the structured questionnaire, and the other 10 participated in focus group interviews. In both the online survey and focus group interviews, the participants were presented with six half-a-minute speech samples (audio only), and at the end of each sample, the participants had to answer 12 questions based on that sample. The samples carried "natural-sounding" casual speech⁹ (male voices) and represented the speech of six fluent speakers of English (three American nationals and three non-Americans living in the United States). The samples represented six different accents: Midwestern/"Standard American" English (STA), Appalachian English

---

far as linguists are concerned, accent can only be a fuzzy term" (Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent* 41-42). Lippi-Green defines accent(s) as "loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographic and/or social space" (*English with an Accent* 42). Going by this definition, the present study defines 'accentedness' as the extent to which a person's speech carries the prosodic and segmental features that are markedly associated with and representative of specific geographical and/or social spaces.

⁴ The participants are referred to as NSs only in the popular sense of the word and for the convenience of reference.

⁵ The study recognizes the available literature on the role of accent as an identity marker (Lippi-Green, [*English with an Accent*]; Ryan, Hewstone, and Giles; Riches and Foddy; Dixon and Cocks; Lev-Ari and Keysar; Rubin and Smith; Derwing; Derwing & Rossiter; Jenkins, [*The Phonology of English as an International Language*]; Lindemann; Lippi-Green [*'Accent, Standard Language Ideology*]; Munro and Derwing; Rubin). These studies show how accent functions as an indicator not only of a speaker's language skills, but also of certain "extra-linguistic" aspects of the speaker, such as intelligence, credibility, social status, ethnic status, performance abilities, and even morality. The above studies play an important role in highlighting the possibility of accent functioning as a basis for division and discrimination. However, the fact that a majority of these studies fail to go beyond the framework of the conventional understanding of the NS/NNS dichotomy reduces the validity and importance of their inquiry. The present study is of the view that an exploration of notions like accent as bases for division and discrimination, within a broader framework that accepts the NS/NNS dichotomy as a fundamentally tenable dichotomy, fails to provide thorough insights into the political and ideological character of those notions.

⁶ Given that the concept of the NS is more a social construct than an objective reality based on empirically observable facts, it could best (if not, only) be studied through an investigation of the social perceptions regarding the concept.

⁷ The participants were drawn from the undergraduate courses LING 270 ('Nature of Language' – Fall and Winter 2011/12) and LING 280 ('Language in America' – Winter 2011/12) at Ohio University. Upon my request, those who were willing to participate in the study did so either by taking the online survey or by participating in the FGIs. The data collection took place in the first two weeks of classes of the respective academic quarters.

⁸ The study used the term 'European American' to refer to recent immigrants (or descendents of relatively recent immigrants) from Europe.

⁹ While the Appalachian and African American samples were extracted from recordings available online, the other four samples were recorded live at the Language Resource Centre at Ohio University.

(APP), African American English (AFA), Chinese English (CHN), Indian English (IND), and Kenyan English (KEN).¹⁰ In the online survey and focus group interviews, the samples appeared in the following order: STA, CHN, IND, APP, AFA, and KEN.¹¹

Results and Discussion

First, the participants were asked to recognize the NS/NNS status of the speakers of the speech samples. The participants identified the speakers of STA, APP, and AFA as NSs of English (98.16% in the case of STA and APP, and 91.41% in the case of AFA) and the speakers of CHN, IND, and KEN as NNSs (99.39%, 94.48%, and 95.71% respectively). Given that accent was the most observable marker of difference among the samples in question, the scores show that one's accent functions as an indicator of her/his "native"/"nonnative speakerness."

Second, the participants rated each sample in terms of 'accentedness,' 'fluency,'¹² 'competence,'¹³ 'intelligibility,'¹⁴ 'correctness,'¹⁵ and 'pleasantness'¹⁶ of the sample. In the

---

¹⁰ The study recognizes the inherently heterogeneous nature of the six forms of English that the voice samples represent. It also acknowledges the fact that each form encompasses multiple accents. In the case of each form, the study used an/the accent that is dominantly associated with that form.

¹¹ While the samples did not have any references to any geographical contexts or clearly recognizable social contexts, they varied in terms of content. Any possible "content-effect" generated by this content variation and ordering/sequencing effect generated by the order in which the samples were presented could be seen as methodological limitations of the study. The possibility of any "content-effect" could have been avoided by getting the speakers of the samples to read out the same text; however, given that getting the speakers to read out a scripted text would not have achieved the main aim of obtaining samples that represented "natural"/casual speech, and that having to listen to the same text over and over again could have discouraged the participants from completing the survey, that was not seen as an appropriate option. Steps were taken to make sure that the recordings used for the samples did not carry any references to places or communities associated with the concerned accents. Given that accent-based differences constituted the most marked difference among the six voice samples, these limitations are not believed to have had a major impact on the results.

¹² Fluency is seen as one component of oral proficiency (Kormos and Denes 147). The notion has variously been conceptualized as the ability to talk at length without hesitations (Fillmore); the ability to express one's message in a coherent, reasoned, and 'semantically dense' manner (Fillmore); The ability to be creative and imaginative in one's language use (Fillmore); "the communicative acceptability of the speech act" (Sajavaara 62), "the native speaker's ability to produce fluent stretches of discourse" (Pawley and Syder 191); "an impression on the listener's part that the psycholinguistic processes of speech production are functioning easily and efficiently" (Lennon 391); the ability to execute simultaneously the activities of planning and uttering of a speech act (Rehbein 104); and automatic speech production that does not require much attention or effort (Schmidt 358). The present study uses the definition proposed by Lennon (2000), which defines fluency as "the rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid, and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language under the temporal constraints of on-line processing" (26).

¹³ Chomsky broadly defines competence as "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language" (4), and he differentiates it from linguistic performance, which he defines as "the actual use of language in concrete situations" (4). This notion of competence appears to refer to one's intrinsic knowledge of the system of grammar of her/his language on which her/his linguistic performance is based. These definitions carry the implication that competence cannot be observed directly. According to Chomsky's notion of linguistic theory, a person's linguistic performance is an accurate reflection of her/his linguistic competence only in the case of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (3). Given that the possibility of a speaker of any language meeting all the requirements stipulated in this definition of the 'ideal speaker-listener' is extremely low, if not nil, linguistic competence, as defined in theoretical linguistics, remains to be a theoretical position or condition whose existence cannot be directly observed in empirically verifiable ways. The present study, which primarily engages with the social dimensions of the 'native speaker' concept, goes beyond this theoretical position and emphasizes the need to understand linguistic competence in relation to linguistic performance. The present study defines competence as one's knowledge of a language as manifested through her/his performance.

¹⁴ Intelligibility has been defined as "the recognisability of a speech stimulus" (Hawley 2) and "being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation" (Kenworthy 13). The present study also defines intelligibility in terms of the recognisability and 'understandability' of speech by a listener. Focusing on intelligibility assessment, Kenworthy states, "the easiest way to assess the intelligibility of particular speakers is simply to ask someone to listen to them speak and say how difficult or easy they are to understand. Such impressionistic or 'subjective' assessments are both accurate and dependable" (20). The present study used the same method in assessing speech intelligibility.

¹⁵ Correctness is another self-explanatory concept that is being used in the fields of folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology, mainly as a measurement of folk perceptions of different linguistic varieties (Niedzielski and Preston;

case of 'competence,' the participants assessed the samples by selecting one of the five given options ('bad,' 'poor,' 'fair,' 'good,' and 'excellent') while in the case of 'accentedness,' 'intelligibility,' 'correctness,' and 'pleasantness,' they assessed the samples on a five-value scale, 1 being 'no accent at all,' 'not intelligible at all,' 'not correct at all,' and 'very unpleasant,' and 5 being 'a very strong accent,' 'totally intelligible,' 'totally correct,' and 'very pleasant' respectively. As for 'fluency,' the participants responded to the questions "Would you consider this speaker a fluent speaker of English?" with either 'yes' or 'no.' In the analysis stage, the mean score of each sample for fluency was calculated as out of 5 in order to make those scores comparable with the scores for 'accentedness,' 'competence,' 'intelligibility,' 'correctness,' and 'pleasantness.'¹⁷ Table 1 presents the mean scores of each sample in terms of those features.

Table 1

The Mean Scores for Accentedness, Fluency, Competence, Intelligibility, Correctness, and Pleasantness

	STA	CHN	IND	APP	AFA	KEN
Accentedness	1.58	4.31	4.21	4.42	4.21	4.20
Fluency	5.00	2.08	4.20	4.70	4.45	4.00
Competence	4.61	3.23	3.90	3.40	3.03	3.90
Intelligibility	4.34	3.55	3.83	3.36	2.71	4.03
Correctness	4.39	3.29	4.06	3.12	2.68	4.15
Pleasantness	4.28	3.01	3.47	3.03	2.60	3.65

Table 1 indicates a marked difference range between STA and the rest of the samples in terms of 'accentedness.' While the score for STA is between 'a slightly noticeable accent' and a 'fairly noticeable accent,' the scores for the rest of the samples are between 'a quite strong accent' and 'a very strong accent.' Based on these data, it could be argued that English speech with "native" but "nonnormative" accents and English speech with non-American accents that are associated with "nonnative" contexts fall into the same category in terms of accentedness. As far as 'fluency,' 'competence,' 'intelligibility,' 'correctness,' and 'pleasantness' are concerned, the data indicate that the participants have placed STA above all the other samples. Provided that these features are indicators of the quality of a given speech sample, the high mean scores for these features, which are between the values 4 and 5, indicate the general impression among the participants that the form of English that STA represents ("standard" American Midwestern English) is the 'best' form of English. The similar responses that the FGI participants gave confirm this claim.

Preston). Myhill, who investigates the notion of correctness, recognizes three types of linguistic correctness (391-392): textual correctness (the form of correctness based upon the written form of the language); prestige-based correctness (the form of correctness based upon the usage of the speakers of the language who represent the elite and whose behaviour in general constitutes the model for society); and prescriptive correctness (the form of correctness determined by some recognized body of authorities, either an official government institution or a set of people who in one way or another have been informally but generally recognized as such). The sense in which the notion of correctness is used in the present study is similar to what Myhill defines as prestige-based correctness.

¹⁶ The notion of pleasantness can be seen being used as a criterion for assessing folk perceptions of different linguistic varieties in the fields of folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology (Fridland; Fridland, Bartlett, & Kreuz; Knickerbocker and Altariba; Kuiper; Niedzielski and Preston; Preston). Although pleasantness is emerging as a widely used criterion in the assessment of linguistic perceptions, a clear definition as to what pleasantness means is not to be found in the field. This situation shows that the term pleasantness functions mainly as a self-explanatory concept. The understanding of the notion of pleasantness in the present study is based on the definition proposed by Eadie and Doyle according to which pleasantness is "a dimension that relates to how 'pleasant' you find the speaker's voice as a listener" (3017).

¹⁷ The number of participants who said that the speaker was a fluent speaker of English was divided by the total number of participants and multiplied by 5.

Although APP and AFA are in the same category as STA in the sense that the speakers of these samples are Americans whom the participants recognized as NSs of English, they have clearly been rated below STA in the areas of fluency, competence, intelligibility, correctness, and pleasantness. APP and AFA have recorded high scores in the area of fluency (4.70 and 4.45 respectively), which still place them below STA (with a fluency score of 5.00) but clearly above IND, KEN, and CHN (with fluency scores of 4.20, 4.00, and 2.08 respectively). Although APP and AFA have scored relatively high scores in the area of fluency, they have got low scores for the other areas. AFA has recorded the lowest rates in all four areas, and APP has recorded the second lowest in intelligibility and correctness. Although APP's scores for competence and pleasantness rank APP slightly above CHN, APP has been clearly ranked below IND and KEN in those areas. The participants' responses to the question "How do you assess your English in relation to the speaker's English?" in the case of each sample provide further insights into the way the participants ranked the samples. The data presented in Table 2 indicate that the participants have shown a clear tendency to identify their English with the form of English in the STA sample (with 91.41% selecting the option 'His English is more or less similar to my English'). The fact that APP and AFA have recorded only 25.15% and 15.95% respectively for the option 'His English is more or less similar to my English', which are markedly lower than the percentages IND and KEN have recorded for the same option (40.49 and 46.62 respectively) shows that the participants do not identify themselves with the speakers of APP and AFA. At the same time, the fact that APP and AFA have recorded percentages as high as 74.23 and 83.44 respectively for the option 'My English [a.k.a. the participant's] is better than his English [a.k.a. the speaker's English]', which are much higher than 57.67% and 47.85% that IND and KEN have recorded for the same option respectively, indicates the extent to which the participants distance themselves from the speakers of APP and AFA. It also indicates their tendency to view the forms of English represented by APP and AFA as being inferior not only to their own English, but also to the forms of English represented by IND and KEN, which they recognized as NNS forms of English.

Table 2
The Perceived Quality of the Speakers' English in Relation to Respondents' English (%)

Sample	His English is better than mine	His English is more or less similar to my English	My English is better than his English
STA	1.28	91.41	7.36
CHN	0.61	7.98	91.41
IND	1.84	40.49	57.67
APP	0.61	25.15	74.23
AFA	0.61	15.95	83.44
KEN	5.52	46.62	47.85

The data indicate a clear tendency on the part of the participants to distance themselves from the speaker of CHN and view the form of English represented by CHN as inferior to their English. However, the participants have shown a tendency to view the other non-American samples (IND and KEN) in a relatively favourable light. The percentages of 5.52 and 1.84 that KEN and IND have recorded respectively for the option 'His English [a.k.a. the speaker's English] is better than mine,' especially compared to the 1.23% that STA has recorded for the same option, points to a slight tendency to accept the possibility of the forms of English represented by KEN and IND, forms that were predominantly judged to have been produced by 'nonnative' English speakers, as being superior to the participants' English.

The participants' responses to the question "Assuming that this speaker is a teacher of English, would you recommend him as a teacher to a foreigner coming from a non-English speaking country?" also provide further insights into the way the participants ranked the different samples. The data (Table 3) indicate that a percentage as high as 82.21% have responded in the affirmative in the case of the STA speaker. As far as APP and AFA are concerned, a large majority of the participants (90.80% and 93.87% respectively) have said that they would not recommend the speakers as English teachers to a foreigner. The better scores that KEN, IND, and CHN have recorded for this question indicate the participants' preference for "NNSs" over "NSs" of American English with "nonnormative" accents as teachers of English.

Table 3

The Chance of the Participants Recommending the Speakers as English Teachers to a Foreigner from a Non-English Speaking Country

	STA	CHN	IND	APP	AFA	KEN
Yes	82.21%	22.70%	50.31%	9.20%	4.91%	53.99%
No	16.56%	76.69%	49.69%	90.80%	93.87%	44.79%

In the FGIs, 9 of the 10 participants said that they would recommend the STA speaker as a teacher of English. In the case of the CHN, IND, and KEN speakers, the participants had a mixed response. While about half of the participants responded in the affirmative, the rest responded in the negative. In the case of APP and AFA, all the participants responded in the negative without the slightest hesitation. When the question was asked from the participants regarding CHN in one FGI, 2 participants said that they would recommend the speaker as an English teacher, but they would prefer a NS to that speaker. However, when the same question was asked from them regarding the speakers of APP and AFA (speakers whom the participants had judged to be NSs of English) they clearly said that they would not recommend those speakers as English teachers. These apparently contradictory responses indicate their reluctance to recognize those "NSs" of English who speak the language with "nonnormative" accents as an authority on the language, despite their position as "NSs" of the language.

The study also attempted to see if the participants would associate the forms of English represented by the different speech samples with different professions. The participants were asked to select three professions (from a list of given professions) which they thought the speaker would fit in without his English being an issue. The data presented in Table 4 show certain patterns in their participant responses. The most striking pattern could be seen with regard to the option of 'Janitor'. Of 163 participants, 140 (86%) and 138 (85%) selected 'Janitor' for APP and AFA respectively. While 52 (32%) selected 'Janitor' for CHN, only 16 (10%), 26 (16%), and 16 (10%) selected that option for STA, IND, and KEN respectively. While all FGI participants chose this option for APP and AFA, some of them supplemented their choice with statements like "I hate to do this, but this is the bitter truth." Interestingly, only 2 of the 10 participants selected this option for the non-American samples, and no one chose it for STA.

Table 4*The Professions that the Speakers Would Fit in without Their English Being an Issue*

	STA	CHN	IND	APP	AFA	KEN
Teacher	104	45	74	26	16	98
Radio/TV Broadcaster	71	5	6	27	20	11
Receptionist	51	23	50	27	41	18
Lab Assistant	47	106	83	36	38	84
IT Professional	46	79	65	17	39	71
Janitor	16	52	26	140	134	16
Doctor	39	55	66	3	5	74
Banker	48	31	39	23	13	35

An entirely different pattern could be observed in relation to the option of 'Doctor'. While 39 (24%), 55 (34%), 66 (40%), and 74 (45%) participants selected 'Doctor' for STA, CHN, IND, and KEN respectively, only 3 (2%) and 5 (3%) selected that option for APP and AFA respectively. Roughly similar patterns could be recognized for the professions of 'Banker' and 'Teacher.' An interesting pattern could be seen in relation to the option of 'Radio/TV Broadcaster'. While 71 (44%) participants selected this option for STA, 27 (17%) and 20 (12%) selected the option for APP and AFA respectively. Only 11 (7%), 6 (4%), and 5 (3%) selected the same option for KEN, IND, and CHN respectively. In a context where APP and AFA had predominantly been seen as less favourable compared not only to STA but also to the three non-American samples, the preference that the participants have shown for APP and AFA over the non-American samples in relation to the option of 'Radio/TV Broadcaster' is interesting. As 3 FGI participants stated, this preference for American forms of English speech over non-American forms of English speech could probably be based on the participants' desire to hear 'familiar' voices on the radio and television.

The results indicate a clear preference for STA on the part of the participants. The results also point to their assumption that the form of English that STA represents (relatively "accent neutral," "standard" American Midwestern English) is the 'best' form of English. As far as the rest of the samples are concerned, the results indicate a clear preference for the non-American samples associated with "nonnative" English-speaking contexts over the American "NS" samples that are marked for "nonnormative" accents.

These results indicate the participants' underlying assumption that a "proper" NS of English is not just any NS, but a NS who speaks a particular form of English in a particular way. Although they recognize the speakers from the United States who speak English with "nonnormative" accents as NSs of English, those speakers, in their view, are inferior to the speakers who speak the language with accents that are close to "standard American English" speech. This situation points not only to the inherent heterogeneity of the NS category, but also to the clear accent-based stratification within that category. The fact that the "nonnormative" accents have been rated lower than the non-American accents in many respects points to the intensity of this stratification.

Conclusion¹⁸

The participants' tendency to recognize the speakers with American accents as NSs and the speakers with non-American accents as NNSs on the one hand and view those who speak English with "nonnormative" accents as inferior to the one who speaks the language with a "normative" accent on the other hand point to the inherent complexities/tensions that the notion of the NS embodies. This situation points to two simultaneous standardization processes.¹⁹ While the tendency to label American speakers and non-American speakers as "NSs" and "NNSs" respectively indicates one standardization process (standardization on the basis of the first language and non-first language distinction), the tendency to rank American accents as superior or inferior indicates another standardization process (standardization based on an internal hierarchy within the "NS" category). The study shows that the linguistic identity of those "NSs" who speak the language with a "nonnormative" accent is defined more by the accentedness of their speech than by their "NS" status. In a context where the linguistic identities of the "NSs" with a "normative" American accent and "NNSs" with non-American accents are simply recognized as "NSs" and "NNSs" respectively, the fact that the identity of those "NSs" with American yet "nonnormative" accents are largely defined by the accentedness of their speech indicates an undefined "special" position that the simultaneous operation of the two standardization processes have assigned them. The fact that the NS/NNS dichotomy fails to accommodate this "special" position renders the "NSs" who speak the language with "nonnormative" accents 'spaceless' in the discourse centred around the NS/NNS dichotomy.

The inferior position that the "nonnormative" American accents and their speakers have earned, not only compared to the "normative" American accent and its speaker, but also compared to the non-American accents associated with "nonnative" English-speaking contexts and their speakers, challenges the sense/appearance of homogeneity that the label 'NS' creates. The vastness of the disparity between "NSs'" perceptions of "normative" and "nonnormative" accents of American English and their clear tendency to rate "nonnormative" American accents lower than non-American accents associated with "nonnative" English-speaking contexts points to the need for frameworks of analysis that go beyond the traditional NS concept and the NS/NNS dichotomy.

The findings of the study indicate that the forms of division that exist within the "NS" category, especially those involving "standard"/"nonstandard speakers," are stronger than those that exist between the two categories ("NSs" and "NNSs").²⁰ However, due to the fact that the primary focus is on the NS/NNS dichotomy, these intense forms of division and discrimination within the "NS" category are largely overlooked. This situation points to the need for more critical approaches (like Kramsch; Kubota; Pennycook; Takato; Train) to the study of the concept, especially those approaches that recognize the concept as a construct. The present study believes that attempts to re-form/"reform" the NS concept or the NS/NNS dichotomy, while treating them as fundamentally tenable frameworks, fail to be effective as they fail to acknowledge and address issues related to division and

---

¹⁸ The study does not project its findings to be representative of the opinions and perceptions of all NSs of American English regarding the notion of 'native speakerness', nor does it consider itself to be exhaustive of all possible dimensions of the notion in question. The study, however, considers itself to have explored the notion in a substantial manner and pointed to certain dominant ways in which the notion is perceived in the United States. Given the facts that 'native speakerness' is more a social construct than an objective reality based on empirically observable fact and that the best (if not, only) way in which such a social construct could be explored is through an investigation of the social perceptions of the construct, the study considers its findings and the claims that are made on the basis of those findings to be valid and contributing towards a broader understanding of the notion of 'native speaker'.

¹⁹ See Doerr ("Uncovering Another 'Native Speaker Myth'") for a detailed understanding of these simultaneous standardization processes.

²⁰ The fact that the study does not explore the divisions/stratification within the "NNS" category does not in any sense indicate an assumption on the part of the study that "NNSs" are a homogenous entity. The study recognizes the inherently heterogeneous nature of the "NNS" category; nevertheless, it does not explore that category as such an exploration is outside the scope of the present study.

discrimination at an intra-group level in a substantial manner. Therefore, the study emphasizes the need for more research that recognizes the notion of the NS first and foremost as a basis for division and discrimination and aims at deconstructing this notion. Such a deconstruction would automatically invalidate the NS/NNS dichotomy.

References

- Bloomfield, L. *Language*. New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1933. Print.
- Carnie, A. *Syntax: A Generative Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Chomsky, N. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1965. Print.
- Cook, V. "Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching." *TESOL Quarterly* 33.2 (1999): 183-209. Web. 10 Aug. 2011.
- Davies, A. *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991. Print.
- Davies, A. *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003. Print.
- Derwing, T. M. "What Do ESL Students Say about Their Accents?" *Canadian Modern Language Review* 59 (2003): 547-566. Web. 10 Aug. 2011.
- Derwing, T. M. and M. J. Rossiter. "ESL Learners' Perceptions of Their Pronunciation Needs and Strategies." *System* 30 (2002): 155-166. Web. 15 June 2011.
- Dixon, J. N. and B. M. R. Cocks. "Accent of Guilt? Effects of Regional Accent, Race, and Criminal Type on Attributions of Guilt." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 21.2 (2002): 162-168. Web. 12 Aug. 2011.
- Doerr, N. M. "Investigating 'Native Speaker Effects': Toward a New Model of Analyzing 'Native Speaker' Ideologies." *The Native Speaker Concept: Ethnographic Investigations of Native Speaker Effects*. Ed. N. M. Doerr. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009. 15-46. Print.
- Doerr, N. M. "Uncovering Another 'Native Speaker Myth': Juxtaposing Standardization Processes in First and Second Languages of English-as-a-Second-Language Learners. *The Native Speaker Concept: Ethnographic Investigations of Native Speaker Effects*. Ed. N. M. Doerr. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009. 185-208. Print.
- Eadie, T. L. and P. C. Doyle. "Direct Magnitude Estimation and Interval Scaling of Pleasantness and Severity in Dysphonic and Normal Speakers." *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*. 112.6 (2002): 3014-3021. Web. 20 Aug. 2011.
- Edwards, J. "Refining Our Understanding of Language Attitudes." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. 18 (1999): 101-110. Web. 26 June 2011.
- Fillmore, C. J. "On Fluency." *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behaviour*. Eds. D. Kempler and W. S. Y. Wang. New York: Academic Press, 1979. 85-102. Print.
- Fridland, V., K. Bartlett, and R. Kreuz. "Making Sense of Variation: Pleasantness and Education Ratings of Southern Vowel Variants." *American Speech*. 80.4 (2005): 366-387. Web. 5 Nov. 2011.
- Fridland, V. "Regional Differences in Perceiving Vowel Tokens on Southernness, Education, and Pleasantness Ratings." *Language Variation and Change*. 20 (2008): 67-83. Web. 25 Aug. 2011.
- Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker. *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Giles, H. and P. Johnson. "Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory: A Social Psychological Approach to Language Maintenance." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. 68 (1987): 69-99. Web. 18 July 2011.
- Gluszek, A. and J. F. Dovidio. "Speaking with a Nonnative Accent: Perceptions of Bias, Communication Difficulties, and Belonging in the United States." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. 29.2 (2010): 224-234. Web. 22 Feb. 2011.

- Han, Z. "To Be a Native Speaker Means Not to Be a Nonnative Speaker." *Second Language Research*. 20.2 (2004): 166-187. Web. 18 Dec. 2011.
- Hawley, M. E. Introduction. *Speech Intelligibility and Speaker Recognition*. Ed. M. E. Hawley. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., 1977. 1-11. Print.
- Jenkins, J. *The Phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Jenkins, J. "Implementing an International Approach to English Pronunciation: The Role of Teacher Attitudes and Identity." *TESOL Quarterly*. 39.3 (2005): 535-543. Web. 8 May 2010.
- Kenworthy, J. *Teaching English Pronunciation*. London: Longman, 1987. Print.
- Knickerbocker, H. and J. Altariba. "Bilingualism and the Impact of Emotion: The Role of Experience, Memory, and Sociolinguistic Factors." *Language and Bilingual Cognition*. Eds. V. Cook and B. Bassetti. New York: Psychology Press, 2011. 453-478. Print.
- Kormos, J. and M. Denes. "Exploring Measures and Perceptions of Fluency in the Speech of Second Language Learners." *System*. 32 (2004): 145-164. Web. 9 Aug. 2011.
- Kramsch, C. "The Privilege of the Nonnative Speaker." *PMLA*. 112.2 (1997): 359-369. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.
- Kubota, R. "Rethinking the Superiority of the Native Speaker: Toward a Relational Understanding of Power." *The Native Speaker Concept: Ethnographic Investigations of Native Speaker Effects*. Ed. N. M. Doerr. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009. 233-247. Print.
- Kuiper, L. "Perception Is Reality: Parisian and Provençal Perceptions of Regional Varieties of French." *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 9.1 (2005): 28-52. Web. 14. July 2011.
- Lee, J. J. "The Native Speaker: An Achievable Model?" *Asian EFL Journal*. 7.2 (2005): 152-163. Web. 25 May 2011.
- Lennon, P. "Investigating Fluency in EFL: A Quantitative Approach." *Language Learning* 40 (1990): 387-412. Web. 17 Aug. 2011.
- Lev-Ari, S. and B. Keysar. "Why Don't We Believe Non-Native Speakers? The Influence of Accent on Credibility." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 46 (2010): 1093-1096. Web. 6 Jan. 2012.
- Lindemann, S. "Listening with an Attitude: A Model of Native Speaker Comprehension of Non-Native Speakers in the United States." *Language in Society*. 31 (2002): 419-441. Web. 24 Oct. 2011.
- Lippi-Green, R. "Accent, Standard Language Ideology, and Discriminatory Pretext in the Courts." *Language in Society*. 23 (1994): 163-198. Web. 28 July, 2010.
- Lippi-Green, R. *English with an Accent*. London: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Mugglestone, L. *'Talking Proper': The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.
- Munro, M. J. and T. M. Derwing. "Processing Time, Accent, and Comprehensibility in the Perception of Native and Foreign-Accented Speech." *Language and Speech*. 38 (1995): 289-306. Web. 12 May 2011.
- Myhill, J. "A Parameterized View of the Concept of 'Correctness.'" *Multilingua* 23 (2004): 389-416. Web. 16 Aug. 2011.
- Niedzielski, N. and D. R. Preston. *Folk Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000. Print.
- Paikeday, T. M. *The Native Speaker Is Dead*. Toronto & New York: Paikeday Publishing Inc, 1985. Print.
- Pawley, A. and F. H. Syder. "Two Puzzles for Linguistic Theory: Nativelike Selection and Nativelike Fluency." *Language and Communication*. Eds. J. C. Richards and R. W. Schmidt. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1983. 317-331. Print.
- Pennycook, A. *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. London: Longman, 1994. Print.
- Phillipson, R. *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.

- Preston, D. R. *Perceptual Dialectology: Non-Linguists' Views of Aerial Linguistics*. Dordrecht: Holland, Foris, 1989. Print.
- Preston, D. R. "Folk dialectology." *American Dialect Research*. Ed. D. R. Preston. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1993. 333-378. Print.
- Preston, D. R. "Where the Worst English Is Spoken." *Focus on the USA*. Ed. E. W. Schneider. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1996. 297-360. Print.
- Rehbein, J. "On Fluency in Second Language Speech." *Psycholinguistic Models of Production*. Eds. H. W. Dechert and M. Raupach. Norwood: Ablex, 1987. 97-105. Print.
- Riches, P. and M. Foddy. "Ethnic Accent as a Status Cue." *Social Psychology Quarterly*. 52.3 (1989): 197-206. Web. 22 May 2011.
- Rubin, D. L. "Nonlanguage Factors Affecting Undergraduates' Judgments of Nonnative English-Speaking Teaching Assistants." *Research in Higher Education*. 33 (1992): 511-531. Web. 23 Feb. 2011.
- Rubin, D. L. and K. A. Smith. "Effects of Accent, Ethnicity, and Lecture Topic on Undergraduates' Perceptions of Nonnative English Speaking Teaching Assistants." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 14 (1990): 337-353. Web. 23 Feb. 2011.
- Ryan, E. B., M. Hewstone, and H. Giles. "Language and Intergroup Attitudes." *Attitudinal Judgment*. Ed. J. Eiser. New York: Springer, 1984. 135-160. Print.
- Sajavaara, K. "Second Language Speech Production: Factors Affecting Fluency." *Psycholinguistic Models of Production*. Eds. H. W. Dechert and M. Raupach. Norwood: Ablex, 1987. 45-65. Print.
- Schmidt, R. "Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Second Language Fluency." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 14 (1992): 357-385. Print.
- Takato, M. "'Native Speaker' Status on Border-Crossing: The Okinawan Nikkei Diaspora, National Language, and Heterogeneity." *The Native Speaker Concept: Ethnographic Investigations of Native Speaker Effects*. Ed. N. M. Doerr. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009. 83-100. Print.
- Train, R. "Toward a 'Natural' History of the Native (Standard) Speaker." *The Native Speaker Concept: Ethnographic Investigations of Native Speaker Effects*. Ed. N. M. Doerr. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009. 47-82. Print.
- Williams, R. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York and London: Fontana and Croom Helm, 1976. Print.

Nandaka Maduranga Kalugampitiya, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka