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# **Advances and Current Trends in Language Teacher Identity Research**

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## 9 Identity matters

### An ethnography of two Nonnative English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) struggling for legitimate professional participation<sup>1</sup>

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#### Introduction

It is estimated that Nonnative English-speakers far outnumber native English-speakers. Braine (2010, p. x) comments that “about 80% of the English teachers worldwide are non-native speakers of the language.” Although we are not really sure about the exact number, obviously, the number of nonnative English-speaker teachers (NNESTs) has been on the increase. In a professional field such as TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), identity is an intriguing and complex phenomenon (Kumaravadivelu, 2014), especially for NNESTs when they have to face more challenges than their native-speaker counterparts. This is because identity comprises composite factors such as the speakers’ accent, physical features, skin color, cultural patterns of behavior, English proficiency, lived experiences, among other things, which are related to the professional practice as TESOL teachers (Davies, 1991; Davis, 2006; Kubota, 2002). More significantly, a TESOL professional’s identity is closely related to her/his social and academic/professional life on a daily basis, particularly concerning how native-speaker peers and students regard his or her competence and performance *vis-à-vis* the legitimacy of his/her professional practice when “standards of English for English language education” (Holliday, 2008, p. 119) are defined in favor of native English speakers.

Given a globalized world in which we live as professionals, especially in our specific roles as TESOL practitioners or as applied linguists in general terms, it is important for us to recognize the complexity of NNEST identity and examine identity from multiple perspectives. Using an ethnographic case study approach, we outline how two NNESTs struggled (Holliday, 2008) for their professional legitimacy in real time as English speakers from the “Expanding Circle” *vis-à-vis* their “Outer Circle” counterpart, to use Kachru’s (1992) terms. Their peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in the mainstream English-speaking workplace offered them opportunities as well as challenges. We intend to bring to the fore how their use of English was intertwined with their identity construction and how such identity was brought out as a way of embodiment resulting from

spatiality and temporality in becoming and continuing being teachers in a New English context, Singapore. We illustrate how the legitimate, “Expanding-Circle” English users managed to exercise their agency and identity; and how the “Outer-Circle” users lost many opportunities of access to the rich linguistic repertoire that the “Expanding-Circle” users had. Data reported in this study, and collected over a span of 15 years in Singapore as part of an ethnographic study of identity, are presented and discussed in relation to how the NNESTs were othered in daily social and professional routines. These sets of data are presented and interpreted with reference to theoretical perspectives that stress the significance of agency, complexity, embodiment, temporality and spatiality (Ahearn, 2001 Block, 2007; Morgan, 2004; Sekimoto, 2012; Varghese *et al.*, 2005). Morgan (2004) regards “the concept of identity itself not as a fixed and coherent set of traits, but as something complex, often contradictory, and subject to change across time and place” (Morgan, 2004, p. 172). His concept of “teacher identity as pedagogy” aptly captures NNESTs’ ways of negotiating their professional identities in classrooms and beyond. Varghese *et al.* (2005, p. 23) stress “the primacy of agency in identity formation” in similar ways that Duff and Uchida (1997) regard identity as being determined by social, cultural, and political contexts, including, of course, interlocutors, institutional settings, and so on. Sekimoto (2012, p. 1) in particular, problematizes the theoretical assumption of communication-as-symbolic that delimits the way that identity is theorized. She argues that “deconstructing identity requires moving beyond the symbolic construction of social categories, and instead focusing on how a perceptual and embodied subject is constituted through communication.” Her multimodal approach reveals “how perceptual subjectivity and the reflexive body are constituted within, and constitutive of, the symbolic mechanisms of social construction” (p. 2).

### Theoretical framework

We are interested in examining the data from multiple theoretical perspectives, drawing on the works of Duff and Uchida (1997), Ahearn (2001), Holliday (2008), Kubota (2002), Morgan (2004), Varghese *et al.* (2005), and Sekimoto (2012), among others. This is because the topic itself is not only a matter of identity relating to language use; it is also about language learning and teaching and pertains to professionalism in the field of English language education or TESOL as broadly defined.

In discussing language and agency, Ahearn (2001) makes clear that issues related to language and agency are relevant to scholars in the field of anthropology, whose research programs span different subfields. In his understanding, “most anthropologists – whether archaeological, biological, cultural, or linguistic – are concerned, in one form or another, with what people say and do” (p. 109). As a result of all this, language, culture, and society are mutually constituted, and because of this, one of the responsibilities for anthropologists is to find out “how discourse both shapes and is shaped by sociocultural factors and power dynamics” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 111).

Ahearn's construct of agency is useful, as are its counterparts in Block (2007), Holliday (2008), Kubota (2002), Morgan (2004), and Sekimoto (2012). So we subject our data to analyses from the perspective of agency, and how agency contributes to identity construction and deconstruction. Sekimoto (2012, p. 1) posited that "deconstructing identity requires moving beyond the symbolic construction of social categories, and instead focusing on how a perceptual and embodied subject is constituted through communication." In the field of TESOL/applied linguistics or language education in general, we need to re-examine NNEST identity with reference to how NNESTs exercise their agency in professional and social settings, taking stock of their expertise in the subject matter. The way identity is constructed and deconstructed is in fact also typically represented in the way communication takes place. This argument is significant because of the context of globalization and the dynamics of English (Kumaravadivelu, 2014; Zhang and Ben Said, 2014), the latter of which is not only reflected in changes in the lexis, syntactic variations, semantics, and pragmatics in the English language (Rubdy *et al.*, 2012), but also in its affiliations to particular groups of users who claim to be the owners of the variety of English that they use.

We also attempt to use critical race theory in order to have a fresher look at the data as a way of extending our discussion. The native vs. non-native debate in the field of TESOL and applied linguistics is, to a great extent, a topic that would create discomfort, as reminded by Scheurich (1997) and Kubota (2002). In Kubota's (2002, p. 86) words, "the field of L2 education by nature attracts professionals who are willing to work with people across racial boundaries, and thus it is considered to be a 'nice' field, reflecting liberal humanism . . . However, this does not make the field devoid of the responsibility to examine how racism or any other injustices influence its knowledge and practice." Therefore, openly talking about it again in the context of globalization offers us an opportunity to re-examine the liberal humanism approach, where "a liberal pluralist stance takes little account of the power and politics influencing the construction of images of the Self and the Other" in the teaching profession (Kubota, 2002, pp. 86–88). As Scheurich (1997) claims clearly:

When people of color assert that the academy is racist, individual whites in the academy, who do not see themselves as racist, are offended or think that the judgment does not apply to them . . . Neither whites nor people of color seem to understand that there is a clash here between a social group perspective, learned by people of color through the social experience of racism, and an individualized perspective, learned by whites through their racial socialization.

(p. 122)

As is rightly reiterated by Kubota (2002) and Holliday (2008), the social and political construction of knowledge and its implications for L2 teaching and learning is no longer anything really new (see e.g., Canagarajah, 2006; McKay and Wong, 1996; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; see also Morgan, 2004;

Motha, 2006; Park, 2012). The fact that language is a source for the representation of ethnicity as an aspect of the identity of everyone, and that ethnicity is an aspect of sociocultural identity is something that deserves pondering. In the words of Delanty (2003, p. 135):

Identity becomes an issue when the self ceases to be taken for granted . . . because the reference points for the self has become unstuck: The capacity for autonomy is no longer held in check by rigid structures, such as class, gender, national ethnicity . . . identity becomes a problem when the self is constituted in the recognition of difference rather than sameness.

(p. 135)

One logical derivation from the conventional understanding of identity is that our self can be invented in many ways. This relates to the idea that teacher's identity is not a static one, either. Typically, temporality and spatiality are the cutting themes when identity is scrutinized. At different points in their professional lives teachers' identities are constructed by their own practice in conjunction with the professional knowledge and expertise they bring to the workplace and the work they do. Meanwhile, their identities are also constructed by their students through the words students use and the behaviors and actions that embody their attitudes toward their teachers. What is significant about these perspectives in examining the issue of identity is that they echo Holliday's (2008) articulation about the "standards of English" that is used by people in the center to other those in the periphery. Holliday states:

Standards of English for English language teacher education need to consider political as well as linguistic factors. Any definition of such standards on the basis of speakerhood would immediately fall into the trap of native-speakerist discrimination, which is intensified by unspoken associations with "ethnicity" . . . Standards must therefore be convincingly de-Centred, and must allow those who consider themselves Periphery to take Centre-stage. They must be cosmopolitan, non-centred, professional, earned, prestigious and cultured.

(p. 119)

Various scholars offer definitions of identity, which appear to represent different dimensions. Such plurality in definition makes it impossible to review all definitions. Varghese *et al.* (2005) posit that both "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice" (p. 39) need to be considered in order to explore identity holistically. Therefore, we focus specifically on how language and literacy educators operationalize it for serving the purpose of our work by including "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice," as reflected in the way the participants are described, positioned and othered. Norton and Toohey (2002, p. 116) posit that "contemporary applied linguistic researchers have been drawn to literature that conceives of identity not as static and one-dimensional, but as multiple, changing and a site of

struggle.” In their recent work Norton and Toohey’s (2011) have adopted a post-structuralist approach to identity, which we think is appropriate for us to use in examining language and identity embodied in the NNESTs in our study. Norton and Toohey (2011) have argued that language is always closely knit with the speaker, who often has to go through the “struggle to create meanings” (p. 416). This idea of language as a site of struggle links to the tensions inherent in the NNESTs’ development of identity within conflicting paradigms of who is a legitimate native English speaker (see also Holliday, 2008). Norton and Toohey (2011) also discuss the poststructuralist recognition of the individual variable of access to language participation. This links to NNESTs’ experiences of tension in their identity development where they may feel their identity does not offer them access to the professional recognition they deserve. Because the negotiation of identity does not happen in a vacuum and has much to do with the discourse surrounding it (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Sekimoto, 2012), we examine how such discourses epitomize the NNESTs’ identity.

### **The study**

We took an ethnographic approach to address the research questions by following two NNESTs over a period of 15 years to see how their experiences as teachers affected their way of looking at themselves as well as other English speakers with reference to their professional competence and practice, which are part of their professional identity. As a by-product of this process, the native speakers of Singapore English, a new variety of English that deviates somewhat from that of the British colonial masters, were also portrayed to show how the use of English in conversations became a tool for “struggle” for existence and for demonstration of power imbalance. We attempted to answer the following research questions.

- 1 What are participants’ attitudes toward, perceptions, and situated experiences about, their professional identity?
- 2 What are the individual, contextual, and motivational factors that may have influenced their identity formation or re-formation?

### **Context of the study**

Research on learner or teacher identity has been extensively conducted in “Inner Circle,” English-speaking countries (e.g., Block, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton and Toohey, 2001; Park, 2012; Sekimoto, 2012; Varghese *et al.*, 2005; *inter alia*), and little has been reported about how NNESTs in “Outer Circle” countries (e.g., Singapore, Nigeria, or India) go through the experiences *vis-à-vis* their native-speaking peers or colleagues. The few studies reported in the literature (e.g., Ben Said and Shegar, 2014; Chong and Low, 2009; Trent, 2011) have not really examined professional identities of teachers in interaction between NESTs and NNESTs. For example, Trent (2011) explored how a group of Chinese undergraduate students in a Bachelor of Education program of an English-medium teacher education insti-

tution in Hong Kong experienced challenges in realizing their multiple identities as language learners. It is an insightful study, but the focus is on language learner identities (see also Zhang, 2010). Ben Said and Shegar (2014) have investigated how a Singapore institution constructed beginner teachers' identity, but the English speakers in their study were native speakers of Singapore English and they did not involve any other NESTs or NNESTs in interaction in negotiating their professional identities (see also Chong and Low, 2009). Therefore, we thought it most appropriate a study be conducted in multilingual and multicultural Singapore, a country in Southeast Asia, where English is used predominantly in society and educational institutions. It is a typical "Outer Circle" country, which is a city state of about five million people. There are five major ethnic groups: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian, and European. The Singapore government has adopted a language policy whereby English, Malay, Mandarin Chinese, and Tamil are designated as the four official languages. As a former British colony, Singapore has also continued using English as the dominant language in society, law, governance and education after gaining independence as a republic in 1965. English has been offered in the national curriculum as the First Language and the Mother Tongue of the students offered as the Second Language since the 1970s. The proportion of Primary School year one students speaking English at home was 55 percent. Because of its multilingual nature, English has become the de facto common language for communication among the local population in society.

### *Case participants*

Two case participants in this study were chosen based on the principle of convenient purposive sampling. Barkhuizen (2014) rationalizes that "choosing the most appropriate number of participants ... requires finding the right balance between achieving the research goals, meeting the requirements of the relevant research methodological procedures, and managing constraints set by practical and human circumstances" (p. 5). Given that "trustworthiness" (Creswell, 2013, p. 196) is key to qualitative research and that the sample is so small, it is essential that we provide details on the two focal participants.

Prior to their arrival in Singapore, the two NNEST participants, one male, Allan, and the other female, Jane, both in their early 30s, had similar educational and teaching experiences in their home country, China. Both of them graduated in the 1980s from Chinese universities with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language and Literature or English Education and earned postgraduate qualifications in the 1990s from universities in similar disciplines in China. They had been teachers at secondary schools and then universities in China for over 10 years. They then were granted the Joint Scholarship by the Singapore Ministry of Education and the Chinese Ministry of Education to pursue a one-year Postgraduate Diploma in English Language Teaching (PGDELT) at a university in Singapore as full-time students. Such a scholarship was especially created for Chinese university teachers of English to upgrade their knowledge about and skills in teaching English to students in China. They both returned to China to resume their teaching as English lecturers upon

completion of the fulltime PGDELTA program. After one year in China, they then returned to Singapore for higher degree studies and earned their Master's and PhD Degrees in English Applied Linguistics respectively. Soon afterwards they got job offers to teach English at a Singapore university. Both of them were praised by their own lecturers and peers and were rated as good speakers and writers of English for academic and professional communication. Both Jane and Allan became interested in their own NNEST identity at the time when they and their classmates first arrived in Singapore, having realized that the Singapore English accent was so much different from the British and American accents they were most familiar with. Data collection started two weeks upon Allan's first arrival in Singapore in 1995 and continued until December 2010. Despite their status change from teachers to students, they did not think that they were really students because they were regarded by their lecturers as colleagues due to their rich teaching experiences. Even their classmates addressed one another "Teacher Li," "Teacher Wu," and so on, which is a typical Chinese practice in the teaching profession. So their identity appeared to be a teacher in principle despite them taking a professional development course for enhancing their professional knowledge.

Given the diversity of ethnic groups in China, boasting of nearly 13 billion people of 56 nationalities spread across 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four municipalities (directly under the jurisdiction of the central government), the official national language, Mandarin Chinese, was the first language for these two participants. It has to be mentioned that many other non-Mandarin languages were spoken and used as official working languages in different provinces or autonomous regions and foreign languages were offered as a school subject in the national curriculum.

For a clearer presentation of the identity issue under investigation in this study, we would like to give native speakers of Singapore English some prominence so that their utterances can be used in conjunction with what the NNEST participants said and felt in the process of communication to bring to the fore how identity was co-constructed through discourses. Such participants included a range of speakers of Singapore English, whose educational backgrounds varied slightly. Most of the Singaporean speakers were university graduates and only a few of them were secondary school leavers, who had gone through their school and university education in the medium of English either in Singapore, Malaysia, or the UK. All of them spoke Singapore English fluently, and the variety of English they spoke was along a continuum ranging from basilect and mesolect to acrolect (Platt and Weber, 1980).

### **Data**

We collected data using informal journal entries and researcher field notes as and when an interactional opportunity arose, as practiced in ethnography. In order not to avoid making the interaction artificial, our journal entries and field notes were either written records on the spot or immediate recalls. There was no recording of any of the speech events. We collected a total of about 30 such episodes, from which we used the typical qualitative data analysis method of sifting the data to

look for patterns (Creswell, 2013). The running themes reported below emerged from our constant comparison of the existing data sets.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 1) posit that ethnography “involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.” Johnson’s (2000) definition captures almost the same ideas as those in Hammersley and Atkinson’s. Ethnography is thus “a descriptive account of social life and culture in a particular social system based on detailed observations of what people actually do . . . The emic perspective is usually the main focus of ethnography” (p. 111) because it offers an insider perspective on the issue in question. We present our data following this approach so that the pervasive phenomenon can be better understood. As will become clear below, as participants-observers, our emic perspective would enable us to look into the way that members of a given culture perceived the world as well as how other members in the community talked about and did things.

## *Analysis*

### *Participant attitudes toward professional identity*

The conversation below (Excerpt 1) took place in the living room of an apartment Allan and his three other classmates shared. As is evident, S1, a Singapore English speaker, did not approve of the way Allan spoke, as, in her view, Allan sounded too American because of his strong American accent. She herself did not realize that her way of speaking, which was full of local colloquial features, was too much localized and nativized to be understood correctly by the newcomer. In fact, Allan maintained that the way he spoke was “always the way I speak as a teacher.” Allan’s intention to establish himself as a competent English-speaking professional based on his interpretation of “good” English did not succeed, as it were. Nonetheless, the experience he had in his first encounter with native speakers of Singaporean English might have left a deep impression on him vis-à-vis his professional self, as, in his understanding, speaking his variety of English was how he preferred to be regarded as a teacher.

#### **Excerpt 1**

S1: . . . Hm, you speak English like an American. Are you from the States?

Allan: Thank you. But actually I don’t speak typical American English, as I am from China.

S1: Oh, then why you speak like that *ah*?

Allan: What do you mean?

S1: It sound a bit odd. As Chinese, you must speak like Chinese *mah*.

Allan: Oh, but that's been the way I speak all the time as an English teacher.

S1: but that is a bit strange *lor*.

(August 27, 1995, Polytechnic Staff Apartments)

As in Excerpt 1, the conversation in Excerpt 2 is equally interesting. As is evident, Jane tried to sound like a local in order to be granted the identity of a competent speaker of Singapore English in order to effectively teach the courses expected of her. This is fairly important given that as a teacher of English, her mastery of Singapore English would have significant implications for her continuing success in establishing and strengthening her rapport with her students for further winning their confidence in her as a competent teacher and speaker of English.

### Excerpt 2

Jane: The *tei* (tea) today is quite diluted, too watery and milky. I cannot really feel the taste of tea at all. D can raise the price to sell better tea.

S2: *Aiya*, it's ok *lah*; in fact, R already mentioned it to D. R said nicely that D could raise the price for tea so that we can have real tea. But after that D got unhappy and pulled a long face when he saw R next time.

Jane: No wonder D did not say anything when I asked him to charge more for my tea because I asked for a cup of stronger tea. His wife also appeared to be quite cold the next day when I went to buy my tea at lunch time.

(April 12, 2006, Unicanteen)

### *Struggle for legitimate participation as identity re-formation*

In Excerpt 3, Allan made an effort to speak Singapore colloquial English to express his aspiration to be integrated in the local community as well as to engage in legitimate participation in the profession as an English teacher. His use of those typical Singapore colloquial English pragmatic particles such as *lah*, *lor*, *meh* and *ah* is indicative of his competence as a speaker of this localized variety. Surprisingly, S2 as a Singaporean, born and bred in Singapore, declined Allan's attempt.

### Excerpt 3

Allan: Hey, S3, could I ask you if I used these particles correctly? In my transcription of several segments of recordings of my research project, certain parts were very unclear because they were muffled by the student noise and the fans in the classroom.

S2: Sure. Oh, this is not. You see *ah*, although you are a new Singaporean now, you have not learned them *leh*. You still speak like a China person and behave like them, *hoh*.

Allan: Really? I thought my accent has changed a lot sub-consciously. When I was in China, English professors and colleagues there said that I spoke like a Singaporean. I felt quite bad about it. I'd like to maintain my Chinese accent, meanwhile I also wanted to code switch between the two varieties, because I thought I am quite good at using Singlish now.

(February 24, 2008, Unioffice)

### *Othering and being othered*

Othering others so that the other is prevented from full participation appears to be a common practice, which is also displayed in Excerpt 4. Allan and S3's dialogue on a hot political topic of the time created another opportunity for S3 to other Allan, who was immediately associated with the country he came from (China) and his country fellows, who were "loud" and "different" and would "spoil" Singapore culture. By implication, teachers of such a background were not capable of practicing their profession, as their culture would erode Singapore culture. In order to participate in the profession, conformity is expected, as clearly shown in the native speaker of Singapore English. Such exclusive discourse as well as the way the NEST showed her sympathy toward the NEST by asking a clarification question on the meaning of the word "enclaves" that she used, is equally interesting. Not only was the NNEST not capable of teaching but also unable to use English competently.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Allan: Do you read the newspapers these days? There have been a lot of discussions about the new immigrants in Singapore, particularly the new citizens, and how they can be integrated into Singapore society. The Minister Mentor, Mr Goh Chok Tong, has talked about it, too.

S3: Yah, but it is simply too much talk. But I am also concerned about it. You see so many foreigners in Singapore now, who behave differently, talking so loudly. Our Singapore culture will be spoilt because they have brought with them their own cultures with them and live in their own enclaves. Do you know the word "enclaves" or not?

(October 18, 2009, S3's office)

### *Reaffirming professional identity*

As NNESTs, Allan and Jane had to prove in front of their colleagues and students that they were competent professionals hired by the university to do the jobs they well deserved. Indeed, they were awarded an employment opportunity, but meanwhile the discursive construction of their identity as incompetent professionals is worthy of mention. Situations like the one in Excerpt 5 surfaced explicitly on some occasions. Instead of feeling upset or disappointed, Allan's motivation to explain to the female student patiently in that particular educational

context was to show her that NNESTs were able to do their jobs equally well, if not better than their native Singapore English speaking lecturers. Evidently, the Singaporean, who was also a school teacher taking the Masters course as a part-time student, was naively frank and did not have any awareness that her own language was loaded with prejudice against “other” speakers of English, who were NNESTs. Such individual, contextual, and motivational factors for the NNEST to prove her worth as a qualified speaker and teacher of English appeared to have proven to be useful. The affordances such an opportunity offered to the Singapore English speaker might help her re-examine her own identity as a teacher regarding professionalism and competence in English language teaching.

### Excerpt 5

Student: Dr X, I did not know that you were not born in Singapore. I thought, you know, you were born here. So I signed up for your course, because before I came to your course, I was auditing another module. After I signed up for your course, I heard from my friend that MAE888 will be taught by a Chinese lecturer. I thought, oh my, I am going to have another Chinese lecturer! I thought that you will have a strong accent, and I now marvel how you have achieved such a high level of proficiency!

Allan: Thank you for your frank observation. In fact, there are more people who have become very successful professors of English although it is not their native or first language.

January 19, 2010 (Tutorial Room 29)

### *Competing norms for NNESTs and native Singapore English speakers*

NNESTs and native Singapore English speakers do not share the same view with regard to what is standard English in professional practice or social settings. While NNEST Jane and Allan referred to American or British because they were NNESTs, who learned English with reference to either American or British English as their pronunciation model, S4 did not think so, probably because S4 had already developed a distinctive Singaporean identity by virtue of a unique Singaporean accent she had when speaking English, as indicated in Excerpt 6.

### Excerpt 6

S4: I am now teaching a Master of Educational Management and Administration class.

Jane: That’s very good. The External Programs Office trusts you, so you have chances of making extra money.

S4: Actually *ah*, I don’t want to earn the extra money, the China participants’ English is so poor. I am teaching the very basics and they are so unappreciative of my conscientious teaching.

Allan: Maybe your accent is not what they are familiar with.

S4: Come on. I speak standard English, *what*. I can pronounce “th” and other sounds, *what*.

Allan: Yeah, but students from China always prefer either American or British pronunciation and intonation.

S4: But . . .

(November 17, 2007, Unioffice)

### Discussion and conclusion

Identity talk is closely related to issues of subjectivity and discursive construction through various discourses and discourse structures. Gee (2008, p. 142) clearly argues that “a Discourse is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize.” Indeed, the data presented above to some extent support his view. Although Allan and Jane were highly motivated to integrate in the workplace through the medium of English, as evidenced in their efforts to use Singapore English, their efforts to use Singapore English for bonding and other professional purposes were not given legitimate recognition by their Singaporean interlocutors. The competing norms within the interactional structure between the NNESTs and native speakers of Singapore English is some kind of interesting phenomenon. The NNESTs thought that being able to speak English beautifully from a prosodic point of view was significant, but native Singapore English speakers did not become aware of this. S3’s way of exercising her power as a native Singapore English speaker represents a perspective she held with regard to “Discourse,” that of “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group” (p. 2). Such perspective-taking leads to the complexity of identity.

In various situations, the complexity of identity was illustrated through the embodiment of action and use of words that are typically Singaporean such as *la*, *leh*, *lor*, *meh*, *hoh*, and *mah*. Understandably, identity is not essentialist or fixed; instead it “must be conceptualized as complex, multifaceted, and socially-constructed through the process of situated interpretation” (Davis, 2006, p. 4). Our limited data suggest that Allan’s and Jane’s identities are sometimes fluid and mobile. Identity work that has gained some momentum in recent years has been generally categorized into ethnic identity, race identity, national identity, migrant identity, gender identity, social class identity, and language identity, among others. But our study explored NNESTs’ professional identity with reference to how their identity was deconstructed and co-constructed through the various discourses. It may be argued that Singapore English speakers are also Chinese or Asian, so there is no ethnic or race identity involved at all. In our view, ethnic and race identity is not only about skin color – it permeates in ways that particular cultures are understood, presented and represented. So in light of this argument,

S1's, S2's, S3's, and S4's comments might not be only skin-deep. The way they subjected the NNESTs was inevitably intended to portray native-speaker supremacy.

In this globalized world English is changing, and in many ways, the changes are at multiple levels. The changes are not only reflected in its lexis, syntactic variations, semantics, and pragmatics, but also in its affiliations to particular groups of users who claim to be the owners of the variety of English that they use, especially in relation to wider international communication among its speakers regardless of their country of origin. The tension between the NNESTs and native Singapore English speakers appears to be tenuous, too, because each of them may want to push forward an agenda to their advantage. Nonetheless, the NNESTs did not always gain it. Incidentally and interestingly, speakers of Singapore English themselves are also peripheral/marginal to the "Inner Circle" varieties of English. As commonly read in the local media, their claim for legitimacy is also debunked by another "other" (both the locals through the "Speak good English movement" and other purist advocates) as well as by outsiders, white NESTs. These native speakers of Singapore English actually perpetuated colonialism themselves without any clear realization.

It is now common sense that English itself must be conceptualized not as a monolithic linguistic entity with one "standard" form, but as a highly complex linguistic construct with spoken and written forms, and a wide range of dialectal variation (prosodic, phonological, lexical, morpho/syntactic, pragmatic, discursal). Therefore, both the NNESTs and native Singapore speakers of English should recognize the linguistic resources each of them possess. Unfortunately, the native speakers of Singapore English in our study did not appear to appreciate the "multi-competencies" (Cook, 2005) of the NNESTs.

Canagarajah (2006, p. 202) argues that "defining one's identity based on membership in diverse communities of practice provides considerable flexibility for individuals to enjoy multiple identities in a contextually relevant manner in shifting relationships." Our data suggest that to conceptualize language as a "resource" (Davis, 2006, p. 10) emphasizes the agency and subjectivity of the individual speaker (although S1, S2, and S3 might not be aware of this at all). Given the sociocultural constraints of a particular context, the NNESTs were not simply acting as a "social automaton," but rather to some extent "creatively reaffirming social organization through purposive deployment of language . . . and crossing" (Rampton, 1995, p. 34) to become legitimate members of the discourse community as language teaching professionals. Native-speakerism was a feature present in the native Singapore English speakers' discourses. Holliday (2009, p. 120) states, "As with all ideologies, in native-speakerism there is a *surface sense*, where the subscribers project the beliefs of the ideology as matters of fact, and a *hidden sense*, which is usually revealed as prejudicial by those who critique the ideology." We hold that this is an important concept in understanding the issue under discussion in relation to NNEST identity.

In the field of applied linguistics/language teaching/TESOL, we need to scrutinize NNEST identity with reference to how NNESTs exercise their agency in professional and social settings, taking stock of their expertise in the subject

matter in order to claim ownership of English as a way of proclaiming their identity. This view can be arguably presented in the context of globalization, and the dynamics of English, which are not only reflected in changes in its lexis, syntactic variations, semantics, and pragmatics, but also in its affiliations to particular groups of users who claim to be the owners of the variety of English that they use.

By presenting how NNESTs are “Othered” and subjected to conditions not favorable to their professional career and daily life on the basis of country of origin rather than linguistic and professional expertise, we attempted to showcase the importance of reciprocity in communication, respect for linguistic human rights of English users (May, 1999), and cultural understanding among English speakers, with particular reference to a New English in Asia. Widening the linguistic repertoire of New English speakers is equally necessary (see Zhang, 2004, 2010). As Canagarajah (2006) argues, excluding NNESTs from the NEST benefits is largely perpetuated by expanding and outer-circle institutions. This seems to be corroborated by the data we have presented.

## Note

- 1 Earlier versions of this chapter were presented at The 47th International TESOL Convention, March 20–23, 2012, Dallas, TX, USA, and The 16th Conference of the International Study Association of Teachers and Teaching, July 2–5, 2013, University of Gent, Gent, Belgium.

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