Challenging Existing Perspectives of "Ideal" Characteristics of Teachers of English

Marie Yeo
SEAMEO Regional Language Center
Singapore

Roby Marlina
SEAMEO Regional Language Center
Singapore

George M Jacobs
James Cook University
Singapore

Abstract

Addressing their concern about status inequalities among teachers of English, in this viewpoint paper, the authors argue that characteristics related to association with an Inner Circle country, Caucasian appearance, middle and upper class socio-economic status and university education seem to be related to the image of the "ideal" teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). This image, in turn, affects job prospects, salary and recognition by students and peers. By reflecting on their experiences in relation to how well they fit the "ideal", the authors show that the construct is highly flawed and potentially destructive and divisive. To redress the inequities brought about by perceptions of the "ideal" language teacher, strategies pertaining to providing role models, raising awareness, providing tools and techniques for improving proficiency, and discussing status and identity issues are suggested for assigning competence to people who do not fit the idealized image. The article aims to offer a fairly new perspective from the unique experiences of three established language teachers, one from each of Kachru's (1992) circles, and to also raise awareness about the need to accept greater diversity among language teaching professionals.

Keywords: teacher identity, teacher characteristics, teacher employment, NNESTs, non-native teachers of English, assigning competence, narrative enquiry

Introduction

The genesis of this paper was the authors' longstanding disquiet with status inequalities among teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)[1] to use the term "English to Speakers of Other Languages" (ESOL) throughout this article as the terms "EFL" (English as a Foreign Language) and "ESL" (English as a Second Language) are based on 'native' and 'non-native' constructs, which are not only difficult to determine but also geo-politically problematic and outdated from an English as an International Language (EIL) perspective.

---

[1] This term is meant to be inclusive of English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and other contexts in which English is taught to non-mother-tongue users. We have chosen

ESOL teachers' job prospects and salaries and colleagues' and students' initial reactions to them seem to be affected by whether these teachers fit a particular image of the "ideal" ESOL teacher. It should be noted that our use of the word "ideal" is not to be confused with any evaluation of the quality of teachers' work. Furthermore, this image and its component characteristics are only partly based on objective criteria; they are more often than not social constructions (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001). This theme has been dealt with by previous authors (e.g., Ammon, 2000; Canagarajah, 2014; Davies, 2003; Farrell, 2015; Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada & Plo, 2011; Flowerdew, 2001; Medgyes 2001). However, we hope to offer a fairly new perspective by evaluating our own experiences in light of these inequalities.

In the first part of the paper, we argue that there are certain characteristics often linked to the image of the "ideal" ESOL teacher. Informed by the methodological paradigm of narrative inquiry research, we critically reflect upon and narrate our journeys as English language learners and teachers, taking into account these characteristics. As discriminatory practices that use the ideal image of a qualified English teacher as the yardstick continue to affect the lives of many student-teachers and professionals (Kumaravadivelu, 2016), this paper, unlike many others, does not simply intend to narrate the stories of the authors' struggle to 'fit in' or to challenge the ideal image. Instead, in the second part of the paper, after the narratives, we explain the practice of assigning competence (Cohen & Lohan, 1995) and offer modest suggestions on how to promote greater equality among members of our profession. Our suggestions are intended to demonstrate how to systematically and publicly raise the status

of "non-ideal" teachers and other English users.

Characteristics of the 'Ideal' ESOL Teacher

The topic of "the ideal teacher" of ESOL has been dealt with extensively over the years (Canagarajah 1999; Medyges 2001; Moussu & Llurda 2008; Norton & Tang 1997; Phillipson 1992; Timmis 2002). In consideration of the literature on this topic and our professional experiences, we propose the following as characteristics linked to the image of an "ideal" ESOL teacher.

1.   Citizenship of an Inner Circle country or, at least, having lived a significant part of one's life in an Inner Circle country. In relation to the concentric circles model popularized by Kachru (1992), having citizenship of or having lived for some time in an "Inner Circle" country, where English is the native language of most people and where interactions predominantly take place in English, is often the key criterion. Although Kachru's model has come under criticism in recent years (Jenkins, 2007; Park & Wee, 2009), it is still one of the most influential models for describing the spread of English and its speakers. As observed by Park and Wee (2009), the model, to some extent, contributes to the problematic 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' binary, with Inner Circle countries identified with the 'ideal' and Outer and Expanding Circle countries with 'non-ideal'. Outer Circle countries are countries where English is not the mother tongue of most people but is used widely. Expanding Circle countries are those where English is mostly used only for contact with people from other countries.

2.   *Caucasian race.* Although the term "Caucasian" is highly problematic (e.g., Dawkins, 2016; Wolpoff, & Caspari, 1997),

it is commonly used to describe race and ethnicity. In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "Caucasian" refers to "a member of any of the races of people who have pale skin" (p. 233). Since traditionally the majority of the population in Inner Circle countries was Caucasians, the English language is associated with this race, and teachers who are Caucasian or "White people" (Amin, 2013) may be glorified (, 2005; Ling & , 2007; Moussu & Llurda 2008; Mahboob, 2009; Rubin, 1992). In reality, there are Caucasians in many Expanding Circle countries, such as Poland and Russia, who are not native speakers of English. Nevertheless, being Caucasian in appearance continues to be considered one of the "ideal" characteristics (Amin, 2013; Mahboob, 2007).

3.   *Middle and upper class socio-economic status.* Dominant languages are usually associated with powerful economies (Crystal 2003). Consistent with this, income levels in Inner Circle countries have tended to be higher than average. For example, according to the World Development Indicators database (2015), these Inner Circle countries, namely, Australia, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand are ranked 12th, 15th, 22nd, 29th, and 36th out of 217 countries in terms of per capita income. Hence, even those in relatively lower-paying professions, such as teaching, receive per capita incomes above the world averages. This income level allows teachers from Inner Circle countries to travel internationally. Often as "independent academic expatriates" (Yeo, 2012, p. 8), they go in search of career opportunities at language schools and universities abroad. While working overseas, particularly in Expanding Circle countries, they are usually paid wages above the local average, allowing them to enjoy

what would be seen as a middle-class lifestyle, eating in restaurants, having cleaners and domestic helpers, and travelling regularly. Phillipson (1992) noted that the salaries of native English speaking teachers, even unqualified ones, tended to far exceed those of local teachers. Such benefits no doubt serve to perpetuate the perception of the middle to upper class status of these idealized English teachers.

4.   *University education.* In Inner Circle countries, a university degree is often a basic qualification for teaching. Indeed, many ESOL teachers nowadays have graduate degrees. A survey of job advertisements on http://careers.tesol.org/ (accessed 5 December 2016) found that of 10 random job advertisements for positions in China, Japan, and Saudi Arabia, all required at least a four-year Bachelor degree; in seven out of the 10 advertisements, a Masters degree in TESOL or a related field was required. Thus, it appears that from the perspective of these employers, the ideal teacher of English needs to have at least a university degree, though increasingly TESOL training at Masters level is required. This may be because higher education is often associated with the use of the prestigious standard variety of English. It is, therefore, not surprising that language schools prefer teachers with higher degrees, whom they believe are able to model the 'standard' variety of English.

These four characteristics - association with an Inner Circle country, Caucasian appearance, middle and upper class socio-economic status, and university education seem to be related to the image of the "ideal" teacher of ESOL. As will be discussed below, teachers' and other stakeholders' perceptions of how well teachers fit the image can shape

stakeholders' thoughts and actions, sometimes quite detrimentally for those

ESOL teachers who do not conform to the idealized image.

Recollections of the Authors

Questions of diversity and inclusion lie at the heart of narrative inquiry (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014). Specifically, as the paper intends to challenge inequality within diversity by problematizing, in Foucauldian terms, "discursive practice"[i] observed in the authors' journey of becoming ESOL teachers, autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2012) has been used. Informed by this methodological paradigm, each author narrates some critical instances in their teaching journey in an attempt to highlight and challenge existing perspectives about the 'ideal' characteristics of teachers of

ESOL, as well as practices whereby those characteristics have been either consciously or subconsciously regularized as 'ideal traits or attributes' of qualified English teachers. Moreover, unlike quantitative researchers who seek definitive truths that can be generalized to other contexts, narrative inquiry advocates that each inquirer or research participant has a unique story to tell and issues to grapple with, leaving the readers a critical space to ask what is there in the following narratives that are (in)applicable to their own situations (Marlina, forthcoming).

From the "Inner Circle" – George.

George's narrative is based on his education career of about 36 years that began as a backpacker and continued as a graduate student in education and a teacher of ESOL, education and academic writing in Central and North America and then Asia. He has also long been involved in justice issues, within and outside of his teaching, e.g., he helped to found the Social Responsibility group with the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization.[2] Thus, perhaps, it is not surprising that he noticed the justice issues raised in this paper.

When I entered ESOL teaching, I had all of the traits of an ideal ESOL teacher: being a citizen of an Inner Circle country, being Caucasian, coming

from a middle or upper class background and possessing a university education. First, I was born and raised in the United States and was an American citizen from birth, until I became a Singapore citizen in 2014. Second, I am from a middle class family: my parents were both social workers. Finally, when I entered ESOL teaching, I already had a master's degree, and later, I received a doctorate, with a scholarship from the East-West Center, which was funded mostly by the U.S. government and at the time I began my studies, in 1987, gave about 2/3 of its scholarships to U.S. citizens.

Beginning from about age 13, I studied Spanish as a second language. All or most of my Spanish teachers (I am not sure about my first teacher) in secondary, tertiary and non-formal education were native speakers of Spanish, born and raised in Spanish native speaker countries, even though some of them were living in the U.S.

---

[2] The process through which 'dominant' ideological beliefs come into being or are regularized as normative discourses (Foucault, 1974).

When I studied to be an ESOL teacher, all of the other students in the program, to the best of my recollection, fit all of the ideal ESOL teacher criteria. The same was true for my first teaching jobs in the U.S. In my first ESOL teaching job in another country, China, I was part of a group of about six American teachers who worked alongside Chinese nationals. The American teachers fit either all or most of the ideal ESOL teacher criteria; one colleague was Hispanic, a group which might not fit the ideal ESOL teacher image. The American teachers' salaries and benefits greatly exceeded those of our Chinese colleagues, who did basically the same work. This pattern of better remuneration packages for 'ideal' ESOL teachers continued when I taught in Thailand, although the difference was much smaller than in China. As I gained more knowledge about ESOL teaching in Expanding Circle countries, such as China and Thailand, I became aware of three tier situations at some ESOL institutions in some Expanding Circle countries, where ideal teachers had the top package, ESOL teachers from Outer Circle countries, e.g., the Philippines, had second level packages, and teachers from the country where the institution was located had the lowest level packages, although they might have had other benefits, e.g., reduced cost of medical care, because of being citizens. Furthermore, I should point out that the remuneration packages I received in China and Thailand would have probably been considered on the low side by the standards of teachers in the U.S.

Furthermore, in my experience, it was not only institutions who discriminated against non-ideal ESOL teachers. Students, too, sometimes expressed preferences for the ideal. One time, while teaching in Singapore in a program for in-service ESOL teachers from around Southeast Asia, I had a visit from a colleague from India who explained that one of the teachers from Vietnam had requested a native speaker as her supervisor. This Indian colleague, who, from my observation, outshone me in terms of knowledge of English language and literature, was not pleased with the situation, but he and I decided to accede to the teacher's request.

I have also experienced the issue of the 'ideal' ESOL teacher in regard to people from Outer and Expanding Circle countries who have asked my advice about entering the ESOL teaching profession. I have warned them about the discrimination they might face. However, it should be pointed out that such discrimination does not always exist. For example, in Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) schools, Singaporean teachers receive the same remuneration packages as teachers from Inner Circle countries. Indeed, it is my experience that there are very few 'ideal' English teachers in MOE schools if we go by the characteristics described.

Similarly, in the 1990s, when I taught language teachers in Singapore, most of my colleagues, including the head of my department, were from Outer Circle countries, with a smaller number from Expanding Circle countries, such as Indonesia and Thailand. This has continued in the rest of my career in Singapore. For example, the colleagues at my current institution with whom I work most closely are from Outer Circle countries.

Sharing equal status in Singapore with colleagues from outside the Inner Circle has been a bit of a relief, as earlier in my career, I was uncomfortable being the beneficiary of discrimination. My view is captured in the maxim, "May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." As to trying to change what I could change, firstly, I tried to support the professional development of my colleagues, e.g., offering assistance with English language development, as well as in professional development activities, such as joint conference presentations and academic publications, in order to enable colleagues to raise their status. Third, I utilized some of the activities described in the final section of this article, in hopes of assigning competence to both teachers and students from "non-ideal" backgrounds.

Furthermore, I appreciated the fact that although my English competence

From the "Outer Circle" – Marie.

Marie's narrative is written with the hindsight of nearly 30 years in the field of language teaching, teacher training, and educational management across a range of geographies. Her experiences have been inextricably linked with the political, socio-economic, and cultural landscapes of the places she has lived and worked in. A prominent theme in her narrative is that of identity crisis and change and Marie's current acceptance of her identity as a transcultural (Caws, 1994) and translingual educator (Pennycook, 2012).

I am a Singaporean of Straits-born Chinese descent, so I belong to an Outer Circle country. I am not Caucasian. Both my parents were educated at English-

was generally superior to that of my Expanding Circle colleagues, their ability in other areas certainly might be, and often was, superior to mine. For instance, without a doubt, their English competence was far superior to my competence in the second languages that I speak and in the students' first language. Thus, I was (I hope) wise enough to humbly play whatever role I could in raising colleagues' and students' language competence towards the day when equal status can be achieved.

The above narrative reflects that George was aware fairly early in his career of the discrimination that existed in regard to ESOL teachers who lacked some of the "ideal" characteristics. He did not do much to change this situation, except provide some help to colleagues in order to raise their status as ESOL teachers and some advocacy for the paradigm of English as an International Language (Marlina, 2014; Matsuda, 2017), not English as the special property of native speakers.

medium mission schools in Singapore so they were able to read, write and speak English well. Because of my parents' education, I grew up speaking English (or perhaps Singlish) as my mother tongue and learnt Malay as a Second Language at school. Although mine was a large working class family with my father as the sole breadwinner, I was able to attend mission schools throughout my primary, secondary, and junior college years. In these schools, not only was English the medium of instruction, but teachers and students generally spoke a standard variety of English well. At home, being the ninth of ten children, I had a great deal of

exposure to English spoken by my parents and siblings.

I did a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Colorado in the United States and graduated summa cum laude in Political Science, with a major in English and a minor in Writing. While in Colorado, my interest in teaching English was piqued, so, I volunteered in the University Writing Center, where I helped American and international students with their writing. It was quite surprisingly for some Americans to be tutored by someone who was not Caucasian and they often commented that my English was very good! As a naïve and idealistic college student, at no time did it occur to me that my race or nationality would become an impediment if I chose to pursue the teaching of English as a profession. As a graduate of an American university with a major in English and minor in Writing, I found it easy to get a job teaching English upon my return to Singapore. This was probably helped by my "faux American accent", which I had acquired overseas. I moved to Australia to pursue graduate studies and eventually got a job teaching English in an Australian university. Being the only non-Caucasian teacher of English was challenging, as students would sometimes express their preference for being taught by a "real Australian". To be accepted by my colleagues and students, I developed a strong Australian accent and identity and tried as far as possible to distance myself from my Singaporean roots. A critical incident occurred when I was nominated to be trained as an examiner for an international language test. As I had indicated my nationality as "Singaporean" on my application,

questions were raised about my English proficiency level. Such instances prompted me to recreate my identity; not only did I eventually become an Australian citizen, but I also changed my appearance and accent, rejecting my Asian-ness and embracing my Australian-ness.

In the 1990s, I taught English and trained teachers in China, Cambodia, and Vietnam, countries in which "native speakers" were preferred as teachers of English. Hence, it was important for me to maintain my Australian identity. However, I often felt that I did not really belong. In many ways, I exhibited features of "Adult Third Culture Kids" (ATCKS). A term popularized by Pollock and Van Reken (2001), ATCKs tend to lack cultural identity and rootedness. They are in a sense "cultural chameleons", able to live in many worlds but belonging to none. It was only when I returned to Singapore many years later that I began to rediscover my Singaporean identity.

*Because I did not meet the criterion of being "Caucasian" nor had I been born in an Inner Circle country, I felt a great deal of pressure to acquire graduate qualifications as a way to bolster my identity as a teacher. I felt that as a non-Caucasian teacher of English, I had to work harder and be better qualified than my Caucasian peers. I went on to complete several graduate qualifications, including a graduate diploma, masters, graduate certificate, and doctorate, notably, **all** from universities in Inner Circle Countries.*

In my more recent roles in educational management, I've struggled with my principles, as I've sometimes

been forced to employ "only native speakers" or "Caucasians" because of institutional demands. Now, as a teacher trainer working primarily with non-native speaker teachers of English, it has become my mission to help them to feel proud of their identity and to use their first language as a resource. I am also committed to creating a level playing field for teachers based on what they can do and not on who they are.

Through the above narrative, we can see how perceptions of the "ideal" ESOL teacher have had a significant impact on

.

From the Expanding Circle – Roby.

The following is a short autobiography-ical narrative of Roby's journey to become and to be legitimately recognized as an ideal ESOL teacher, and his encounters with situations where his credentials as an 'English' teacher were questioned. Although there would be several 'scenes' in which he narrated his 'success' in becoming an English teacher, they are not intended to be read and constructed as a 'victory' narrative (Lather, 1994, cited in Parr, 2010, p. 52) in which he was positioned as the "hero of [his own] tale" (Parr, 2010, p. 52). Rather, they are meant to foreground unspoken problematic discourses of TESOL professionalism, and to prompt critical reflections on the ideology of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005) underlying those scenes. This narrative also aims to allow readers to grapple with and vicariously experience a sweet-and-bitter journey of an Inner-Circle educated teacher of English from an Expanding Circle country, teaching in an Inner-Circle country. Although the following narrative may sound like 'an old story', it is in the spirit of narrative inquiry that the author intends to "generate ideas to make us think again

Marie's personal and professional life to the extent of relinquishing her identity. While this may seem extreme, when viewed against the backdrop of being a non-Caucasian teacher of English in Australia in the late 1980s, it may be easier to understand the extent to which not fitting the image of the "ideal" language teacher can have an impact on the professional identity and career development of teachers of English from Outer Circle countries, particularly those working in Inner Circle countries

about what is going on in the world" (Holliday, 2010, pp. 101-102).

I was born in one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse cities in Indonesia, Medan, in North Sumatra. Ethnically, I am a third-generation Chinese Indonesian. As a Chinese-Indonesian born in Medan, I predominantly spoke Chinese Creole (with Bahasa Indonesia as the superstrate language; and Hokkien–a Chinese dialect spoken in China's Fujian province–and Mandarin as the substrate languages) at home, and Bahasa Indonesia at school. Being born in an Expanding Circle country where English was a foreign language, English was only used in English lessons at schools and private language institutions.

When I was a teenager, my parents decided to send me to Australia to further my studies. Due to the limited use of Bahasa Indonesia in most of the daily communicative exchanges I engaged in during my stay in Australia, my proficiency in the language gradually deteriorated, and English became my predominant language. Peer pressure that I experienced in an Australian high

school drove me to change the way I spoke English. My attempts to speak English were often teased when I first arrived in Australia. I was the object of derision and laughter. My Australian-born peer group poked fun at my 'Asian ching-chong style' of speaking English. There were times when my teachers just smiled out of politeness when they could not comprehend what I was saying. As a teenager who feared 'not looking cool', I decided to learn to speak English 'perfectly' and listened carefully to the way my Australian-born best friend spoke English. I insisted that he take every opportunity to 'correct' the way I spoke, so that I could sound like him and other Australian classmates. Upon completion of my secondary schooling in Melbourne, a statement that I was an Indonesian was met with disbelief as I did not 'have an accent'!

Driven by my passion in learning/teaching languages, I pursued and successfully completed under-graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral study in Applied Linguistics/TESOL. On top of this, I also completed a pre-service TESOL teacher education program, which certified me to teach ESOL in Australia. Thanks to my Australian accent and the expensive credentials for which my parents and I had paid with struggle, it was not difficult to get recruited to work as an ESOL teacher in Australia. Whilst completing my doctoral study, I was recruited to lecture in the program of Applied Linguistics at a local university. However, this was certainly not a happy ending, as I encountered the following incidents in social and professional contexts that had detrimental effects on my self-esteem as an 'English' teacher/lecturer.

*The first incident was my experience at one of the airports in Australia in which I was prompted to observe a view that an ideal English teacher/lecturer in an Inner-Circle country should hold a certain passport and be of a certain nationality. As all travelers are required to state their occupation in an incoming/outgoing passenger card, my answer to that question, i.e., lecturer, was met with disbelief. The passport control officer thought that I was a lecturer of mathematics, engineering, or accounting because apparently, in her words, "**you guys** are very good at those calculating subjects". Words failed her when I told her I taught Applied Linguistics (English) at a local university. She asked me in a high pitched squeaky voice: "How is it possible for an Indonesian passport holder to teach English here?" Words also failed me, and I walked away with perforated self-esteem.*

The second incident was when I had to introduce myself to my Applied Linguistics students at the beginning of a new semester, I was often met with disbelief, surprise, and eventually a remark that could be interpreted as discriminatory. Some students approached me after class and said: "You don't look like your name. We expected a Caucasian or Spanish/Latino looking person". Others, who were surprised the moment I spoke, asked if I was a 'real Aussie', which one of them later explained by saying that I, "sound like one but don't look like one". Though I was taken aback and hurt, I could only respond with a smile. There was a point where I thought this comment would only be made by students. So, it came as a shock when I learned that such discourse

was also found in the conversations among a certain group of academics. What is worse is that they were academics from the same department, who complained about having too many 'Asians scholars' in the department, and cautioned the head to not turn the department into 'an Asian ghetto'. Echoing Kubota's (2002) observation of "racism in a 'nice' field like TESOL" (p. 84), I was appalled at the fact that, despite the educational qualifications one has struggled to obtain as well as the English language proficiency one has worked hard to master, a qualified and ideal ESOL teacher seems to be required to have a certain 'look' or 'name', and to belong to a certain race.

Roby's engagement in writing this narrative has allowed him to uncover how racialization, a neglected area of research in NEST/NNESTs literature (Kubota, 2009), has formed a major part of his struggle to be a legitimate ESOL teacher. Confirming observations from various scholars, such as Kubota (2009) and Kubota and Lin (2006), Roby's narrative to a large extent indicates that the acquisition of the language of power (i.e., English) and attainment of various authorized licenses to teach that language of power are not sufficient in order for someone like Roby to complete the journey of becoming an English teacher. Racialized discourses have powerfully 'colored' and are likely to continue 'coloring' his journey, prompting him to constantly grapple with the discourses throughout his profession.

The above recollections of teachers of English from Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle countries in relation to the four "ideal" characteristics show how inaccurate it is to pigeon-hole teachers on the basis of physical appearance, country of

birth, socio-economic status, or educational background. Furthermore, the narratives suggest that accepting, adhering to, or promoting a particular image of the "ideal" ESOL teacher may be detrimental to **all** teachers. Even those like George, who have all of the traits, may feel "uncomfortable being the beneficiary of discrimination". Furthermore, teachers such as Marie and Roby, who are obviously not Caucasian and not from Inner Circle countries, may feel a need to compensate by pursuing education in Inner Circle countries. Such an endeavor requires a significant investment, which may not be affordable for many, hence creating a distinction and division between "overseas-educated" and "locally-educated" teachers of English, implicitly discriminating between the "haves" and the "have nots". Marie and Roby also tried to gain acceptance by changing their accents, which entailed some degree of loss of identity, in exchange for the status of being considered a legitimate teacher of English. Medgyes (2001) noted that attaining native proficiency in English may lead to "a loss of native identity in one's L1 - a price many would find far too great to pay", as Marie found in later years. For those like Roby, the battle continues as one has to deal with racialized discourses that may be detrimental to one's self-esteem as English teacher.

The call to redress the inequitable status among language teaching professionals based on "who they are" rather than "how they teach" has been and continues to be championed surprisingly not just by those who do not fit the image of the "ideal" ESOL teacher but by many who do. Most recently, Freeman (2017) and Richards (2017) have challenged traditional notions that associate general language proficiency (including native proficiency) with the

ability to teach effectively and have proposed fairer conceptualizations of language in use and for specific purposes by which to assess teachers' language proficiency. Like these scholars, we too would like to promote more inclusive and fairer constructs to raise the status of ESOL professionals who have traditionally been discriminated against.

Discussion

Assigning Competence

In this section of the paper, the authors discuss several theories related to status, expectations, and competence to provide background on how the status of "non-ideal" teachers of ESOL can be raised and to provide a theoretical basis for the recommended strategies to assign competence which are discussed later. Cohen and Lotan (1995) explored status differences among students in heterogeneous classrooms. Status, they found, becomes especially important when students from different ethnic groups face different expectations for academic success. Cohen and Lotan based their analysis and their subsequent interventions on Expectation States Theory (Berger, Wagner, & Zelditch, 1985). This theory comes from sociology and posits that status is a generalized construct with individuals having or lacking power in accordance with their status, regardless of each person's own characteristics. Thus, people are judged based on the perceived status of their group, not on their actual qualities. In the same way, within the narratives of the three teachers, it can be seen that although Marie and Roby were as qualified as George in terms of academic qualifications and experience, they were often judged by their students on the basis of physical appearance and accent, something George never encountered.

Furthermore, expectations can become self-fulfilling. This was found to be the case in a well-known study in which the researchers' appeared to illustrate what they called the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal, 1973; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The researchers told primary school teachers that certain students were "intellectual bloomers", when, in fact, there was no evidence for this. However, students given the status of intellectual bloomers tended to outperform their peers perhaps because of the way that their teachers interacted with them. Feldman and Prohaska (1979) conducted a pair of similar experiments at tertiary level, except this time, instead of teachers' images of students, the researchers manipulated students' images of teachers. In the first experiment, researchers seemed to be able to impact student attitudes and performance based on what the researchers told the students about their teacher. Even though the teacher was the same for all the students, one group was told he was a very good teacher, while the other group was told that he was not a good teacher. In the second experiment, students acting on instructions from the researchers were able to change teachers' behaviours and performance by reacting positively or negatively in class, i.e., teachers responded to how their students seemed to view them.

These studies suggest that students' perceptions and, in some cases, expectations for their teachers to have "a certain 'look' or 'name', and to belong to a certain race" can negatively impact the way they behave towards their teacher which, in turn, can impact the teacher's performance. Hence, teachers who do not fit the "ideal" may feel inadequate and try to compensate by obtaining more paper qualifications, as cited

in Marie's narrative. They may even try to recreate their professional identities (Richards 2015) to fit the social context, evidenced in the narratives of Marie and Roby.

The question of how to raise the status of teachers of English who are deemed not to possess the necessary "ideal" characteristics can partially be answered by Dembo and McAuliffe's (1987) study, which looked at the impact of students' perceived status differences on interactions among students. In their study, the researchers used a fake test to convince students that some of them were better than others at problem-solving. Next, they gave students a problem-solving task. The researchers found that those to whom superior problem-solving status had been falsely assigned dominated the student-student task interaction, had more influence, and were more likely to be seen as leaders.

Taken together, the studies above, mainly from the field of sociology, have shown that status can be raised by using specific strategies to assign competence.

Assigning Competence to 'Non-Ideal' Language Users

Using the work of Cohen and Lotan (1995) as a foundation, the following section presents strategies for assigning competence to English language learners and teachers who do not match the idealized characteristics discussed above. Broadly, these strategies fall into these four

Role Models

1. Inviting guest speakers who are non-native speakers to come to class in person (Metrejean, Pittman, & Zarzeski, 2002) or via video conferencing tools such as SKYPE.

2. Highlighting prominent non-native speakers in the public eye, e.g., athletes, actors, scientists, and politicians. Students can be shown videos of them speaking English, read transcripts of their talks, or read what they have written.

3. Talking to students about language teachers who are second language speakers of the languages they teach.

4. Drawing attention to the English competence of those who were not proficient in English as children but who now are. For instance, there are many examples of immigrants who have settled in Inner Circle countries such as the United categories: providing role models of highly proficient non-native speakers using English effectively; raising awareness about the imperfections of language use by native speakers; providing tools and techniques to improve language proficiency; and discussing status and identity issues. States or Australia. While some first generation immigrants had difficulties with English, subsequent generations are often as proficient or even more proficient than members of families who have resided in the country for many generations.

5. Including in lessons short texts by people identified as not having all the ideal characteristics. For instance, Saslow & Ascher (2012, p. 112) include photos of three young adults, from India, Nigeria and Canada, talking about life in their countries in texts of about 80 words. Audio versions of the texts can be part of the coursebooks. These people seem to be young adults, not university students, e.g., one talks about his children. Two pages earlier, the same coursebook has photos of seven internationally-prominent people, with each photo accompanied by a text of about 20 words. Three of the people are from non-

native speaking countries: Ghana, India and

Language Awareness

    6. Noticing variations in English even among native speakers, such as regional and contextual variations, e.g., the differences between a formal business letter and an informal text message. The point made here is that there are many ways of using English well.

    7. Noticing errors by native speakers. These can be in writing or in speaking. An example of a written error, in this case a spelling error, can be found in Dawkins (2016, p. iv), a book published by Oxford University Press, a prominent publisher:

Tools and techniques to improve language proficiency

    8. Increasing awareness of technology tools such as translation software, corpora, voice-to-text applications and digital resources. As such software continues to improve, both teachers and students need to learn how to maximize their use of these affordances, thereby allowing them to continue to develop their second language competence.

    9. Promoting positivity. Using language, even a first language, can be anxiety provoking, e.g., one of the authors of this article used to have a stuttering problem in both first and second languages. Additionally, the particular difficulties of

Status and Identity

    10. Understanding and practising critical sociolinguistics. In the spirit of a critical approach to knowledge and learning (Crookes, 2013), students and teachers need to discuss and debate the inequality at the heart of this article. A critical approach may also include attempting to change the status quo, as has been done by the Nonnative English

Jordan.

"but the theory does not necessarily *preict* (sic) this". An example of a speaking error comes from Barack Obama (2010), who, in addition to being president of the U.S. for eight years, was also editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. In his State of the Union address, Obama stated: "Each of these institutions are (sic) full of honorable men and women doing important work that helps our country prosper." The subject "each" should agree with the verb "is".

second language learning anxiety are well-documented (Dewaele & Ip, 2013; Woodrow, 2006). The field of Positive Psychology offers many useful suggestions, e.g., Fredrickson (2009a) reported that a preponderance of positive statements tends to lead to enhanced outcomes. Her suggested ratio of positive to negative statements is 3 to 1 (Fredrickson, 2009b). Thus, if students and teachers are to achieve a high level of language competence, according to Fredrickson's 3 to 1 ratio, they need to be told about what they have done well and about their errors and weaknesses.

Speakers in TESOL interest group of the TESOL organisation.[3]

    11. Encouraging critical and reflective writing (such as narratives or journals) on encountered problematic discourses that may threaten one's linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, and professional identity.

---

[3]   http://www.tesol.org/connect/interest-sections/nonnative-english-speakers-in-tesol

As "the interaction between nationalities, culture, and language speakers is the basis of ELT profession" (Baxter, 2003, p.19), encountering problematic discourses related to one's nationality, culture, or language is likely to be inevitable. Thus, as supported by Ellis (2016) and Saleh et al. (2014), to deal with these discourses and the struggles experienced in dealing with such discourses, teachers need to encourage themselves, their peers, and their students to engage in critical reflection on experiences and to '(re) tell' them in a form of a critical autobiographical narrative.

Conclusion

Addressing their concern about status inequalities among teachers of English, in this viewpoint paper, the authors have suggested that there are certain characteristics inaccurately associated with being an "ideal" teacher of English and these, in turn, affect job prospects, salary, and recognition by students and peers. By reflecting on their experiences in language teaching in relation to how well they fit the "ideal", the authors attempted to demonstrate that the construct is highly flawed and potentially destructive and divisive. To redress the inequities brought about by perceptions of the "ideal" language teacher, ideas for specific actions have been provided. It is hoped that this article will not only offer a fairly new perspective from the unique experiences of three established language teachers, but will also raise awareness about the need for our profession to celebrate the different strengths that each language teacher brings to teaching.

Marie Yeo has worked in the field of English teaching, educational management and teacher education for the past 30 years in Australia, China and throughout Southeast Asia. She is currently a Language Specialist at SEAMEO RELC, where she trains educators from all over Asia. Her current areas of interest are Assessment for Learning, Blended Learning, and Learner Engagement. Dr Yeo is Editor-in-Chief of the RELC Journal.

Roby Marlina is a language specialist at SEAMEO-RELC, Singapore. His works have appeared in various international journals including *International Journal of Educational Research, World Englishes, Multilingual Education*, and *Asian EFL Journal.* He is the main editor of the book, *The Pedagogy of English as an International Language: Perspectives from Scholars, Teachers, and Students* (Springer International Publishing).

George M. Jacobs has written widely on such topics as cooperative learning, extensive reading, environmental education, and humane education. He teaches Writing at James Cook University, Singapore. He is a member of the board of the Extensive Reading Foundation, the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, Vegetarian Society (Singapore), and the International Ecolinguistics Association.

References

Amin, N. (2013). Minority women teachers of ESL: Negotiating white English. In G. (Ed.), *Non-native educators in English language teaching* (pp. 93-104). New York, NY: Routledge.

Baxter, A. (2003). The reproduction of a professional culture through teacher education for ELT. Unpublished PhD thesis. Department of Language Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University College.

Berger, J. B., Wagner, D. G., & Zelditch, M., Jr. (1985). Introduction: Expectation States Theory: Review and assessment. In J. Berger, & M. Zelditch, Jr. (Eds.), *Status, rewards, and influence* (pp. 1-72). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brutt-Griffler, J., & Samimy, K. K. (2001). Transcending the nativeness para-digm. *World Englishes, 20*(1), 99-106. doi:10.1111/1467-971x.00199

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Canagarajah, S. (2014). In search of a new paradigm for teaching English as an international language. *TESOL Journal, 5*(4), 767-785.

Caws, P. (1994). Identity: Cultural, transcultural, and multicultural. In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A critical reader* (pp. 371-387). Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell.

Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (1995). Producing equal-status interaction in the heterogeneous classroom. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(1), 99-120.

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2012). Narrative inquiry. In A. A. Trainor & E. Graue (Eds.), *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (pp. 166–179). New York, NY: Routledge.

Crookes, G. V. (2013). *Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Crystal, D. (2003) English as a global language. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, A. (2003). *The native speaker: Myth and reality*. Clevedon, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.

Dawkins, R. (2016). *The selfish gene* (40th anniversary ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Dembo, M., & McAuliffe, T. (1987). Effects of perceived ability and grade status on social interaction and influence in cooperative groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*, 415-442.

Dewaele, J. M., & Ip, T. S. (2013). The link between foreign language classroom anxiety, second language tolerance of ambiguity and self-rated English proficiency among Chinese learners. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 3*(1), 47-66. DOI 10.14746/ssllt.2013.3.1.3

Feldman, R. S., & Prohaska, T. (1979). The student as Pygmalion: Effect of student expectation on the teacher. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*(4), 485-493.

Farrell, T. (2015) It's not who you are! It's how you teach! Critical competence is associated with effective teaching. *RELC Journal, 46*(1), 79-88.

Ferguson, G., Pérez Llantada, C., & Plo, R. (2011). English as an international language of scientific publication: A

study of attitudes. *World Englishes*, *30*(1), 41-59.

Flowerdew, J. (2001). Attitudes of journal editors to nonnative speaker contributions. *TESOL Quarterly, 35*, 121–150.

Foucault, M. (1974). The Archaeology of Knowledge. London: Tavistock Publications.

Fredrickson, B.L (2009a). Positivity: Groundbreaking research reveals how to embrace the hidden strength of positive emotions, overcome negativity, and thrive. New York, NY: Crown Archetype.

Frederickson, B. L. (2009b). Positivity: Top-notch research reveals the 3 to 1 ratio that will change your life. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Freeman, D. (2017). The case for teachers' classroom English proficiency. *RELC Journal*, *48*(1), 31-52.

Holliday, A. (2010). Analysing qualitative data. In B. Paltridge & A.Phakiti (Eds.), *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics* (pp. 98-110). London, United Kingdom: Continuum.

Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Kachru, B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Kubota, R. (2002). The author responds: (Un)Raveling racism in a nice field like TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, *36*(1), 84-92.

Kubota, R. (2009). Rethinking the superiority of the native speaker: Toward a relational understanding of power. In N. M. Doerr (Ed.), *The native speaker concept: Ethnographic*

investigations of native speaker effects (pp. 233-247). Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter.

Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (2006). Race and TESOL: Introduction to concepts and theories. *TESOL Quarterly*, *40*(3) 471-493. DOI: 10.2307/40264540

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2016). The decolonial option in English teaching: Can the subaltern act? *TESOL Quarterly, 50*(1), 66-85. DOI: 10.1002/tesq.202

Ling, C. Y., & , G. (2007). The attitudes of university students towards non-native speakers English teachers in Hong Kong. *RELC Journal*, *38*(3), 257-277.

Mahboob, A. (2009). English as an Islamic language: A case study of Pakistani English. *World Englishes*, *28*(2), 175-189.

Marlina, R. (forthcoming). *Teaching English as an International Language: Implementing, reviewing, and re-envisioning World Englishes in language education*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Marlina, R. (2014). The pedagogy of English as an international language (EIL): More reflections and dialogues. In R. Marlina & R. A. Giri (Eds.), *The pedagogy of English as an International Language* (pp. 1-19). Dordrecht, Germany: Springer International Publishing.

Matsuda, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Preparing teachers to teach English as an international language*. Bristol, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.

Medgyes, P (2001) When the teacher Is a non-native speaker. In Celce-Murcia (Ed.), T*eaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 429-442). Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Metrejean, C., Pittman, J., & Zarzeski, M. T. (2002). Guest speakers: reflections

on the role of accountants in the classroom. Accounting Education, 11(4), 347-364.

Moussu, L., & Llurda, E. (2008). Non-native English-speaking English language teachers: History and research. *Language Teaching*, *41*(03), 315-348.

Obama, B. (2010, January 27). *Remarks by the president in State of the Union address*. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-state-union-address

Park, J. S. Y., & Wee, L. (2009). The three circles redux: A market–theoretic perspective on World English-es. *Applied Linguistics*, *30*(3), 389-406.

Parr, G. B. (2010). *Inquiry-based professional learning: Speaking back to*

Saleh, M., Menon, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2014). Autobiographical narrative inquiry: Tellings and retell-ings. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *7*(2), 271-282.

Saslow, J., & Ascher, A. (2012). *Summit: English for today's world* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC Journal*, *37*(3), 308-328.

World Bank (2015) *World Development Indicators database*. Retrieved from http://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/release-world-development-indicators015

Yeo, M. A. (2012). *Career decision-making: A case study of independent academic expatriates* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester).

standards-based reforms. Brisbane, Australia: Post Pressed.

Pennycook, A. (2012). What might translingual education look like? *Babel*, *47*(1), 4-13.

Phillipson, R. (1992). ELT: The native speaker's burden? *ELT Journal*, *46*(1), 12-18.

Pollock, D. C., & E., V. R. (2009). *Third culture kids*. London, United Kingdom: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Richards, J. C. (2015). *Key issues in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C. (2017). Teaching English through English: Proficiency, pedagogy and performance. *RELC Journal*, *48*(1), 7-30.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom. *The Urban Review*, *3*(1), 16-20.

---

[i] The process through which 'dominant' ideological beliefs come into being or are regularized as normative discourses (Foucault, 1974).