Non-native English speaking postgraduate TESOL students in Australia: Why did they come here?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how non-native English speaking postgraduate TESOL students at a regional Australian university perceive the meaning and value of obtaining a TESOL qualification from a Western native English speaking country. By doing so, this research investigates the way in which the universal predominance of Western native English and the inequality between NESTs and NNESTs, or English linguistic imperialism, are maintained and/or challenged. We conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with eight students from five different non-native English speaking countries who were enrolled in a postgraduate TESOL course. The study revealed that these students were generally aware of the privileged position of Inner Circle English(es) and of NESTs. They highly valued the TESOL qualification obtained in Australia in order to differentiate themselves from other NNESTs in their own country. In this sense, they contribute to the maintenance of English linguistic imperialism. However, some interviewees’ critical reflections on the existing inequalities between different varieties of English and the inequality between NESTs and NNESTs also
indicated their potential to challenge English linguistic imperialism. Drawing on these findings, future directions for teacher training and research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

English is functioning as the most important international language today with the number of L2 English speakers outnumbering L1 English speakers (Graddol, 1999). Many global varieties of English are used in their distinctive cultural, sociological and educational contexts. In such a situation, we can observe two opposing attitudes towards such varieties. On the one hand, there is the belief that the English used in native English speaking countries, such as the US, the UK and Australia, is the ‘best’ and the most superior variety, and that Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) are ‘better’ teachers than Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). On the other hand, proponents of bilingualism and multilingualism look at different varieties of English as equal in status and appreciate the linguistic and cultural diversity that comes with them.

This study aims to investigate where L2 English speaking postgraduate TESOL students are located on this spectrum of opposing attitudes by exploring how they perceive the meaning and value of their own TESOL qualification that they are completing in Australia. Understanding attitudes they have developed prior to and during their study time in a TESOL course at an Australian university is important, because these TESOL students and practitioners, once they are back in their home countries where they teach at various levels in the educational sector, will have great impact on shaping their own students’ attitudes towards different varieties of English. Based on a qualitative interview study, this paper describes eight non-native English speaking postgraduate TESOL students’ perceptions on these matters.

WORLD ENGLISHES

The literature on World Englishes emphasizes the importance of appreciating the diversity of English language varieties used in the world. The term English was pluralised to represent “the functional and
formal variations, divergent socio-linguistic contexts, ranges and varieties of English in creativity, and various types of acculturation in parts of the Western and non-Western world” (Kachru, 1992a, p.2). According to Kachru (1992b), the socio-linguistic contexts of English can be categorised into three circles, namely the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle includes countries such as the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where English is spoken as a native language. The Outer Circle typically represents countries that were former colonies of the Inner Circle countries, where English is generally institutionalised, such as Singapore, India and Sri Lanka. In the Expanding Circle countries, such as China, Germany, Japan, or Saudi Arabia, English is learnt as a foreign language. From a World Englishes perspective, all these different Englishes, which reflect local cultures and languages, should be acknowledged as equal varieties, and the Inner Circle Englishes should not be regarded as the only appropriate models to be acquired. Rather, the emphasis should be placed on the importance of mutual intelligibility (Yano, 2001).

World Englishes are now often regarded as important in classroom language teaching (e.g., Kachru, 1992b; Matsuda, 2002, 2003a), and teaching ideas, such as exposing students to various varieties of English from all three circles, have been proposed (Kachru, 1992b). By gaining wider exposure to varieties of English, students would be able to have more confidence in using their own English for international communication without regarding the English of the Inner Circle as the only acceptable model. Given that a significant number of English teachers are from the Outer or Expanding Circle, greater exposure to World Englishes is also likely to be associated with greater recognition of NNESTs.

ENGLISH LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM

Despite extensive discussion surrounding World Englishes, inequality between Inner Circle Englishes and other varieties of English prevails in many contexts. This inequality has been critically examined as English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992a). The inequality is “asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English
and other languages” (p.47), and has had negative impact on the Outer and Expanding Circle countries economically, politically and culturally.

Firstly, the current situation brings economic benefits to Inner Circle countries, while other countries are disadvantaged, particularly because English teaching is a key industry for Inner Circle countries. For example, according to the British Council’s corporate plan 2011-2015, English teaching activities and the administration of British exams are expected to earn an annual income of over 500 million pounds by 2014 (British Council, 2011). Hence, the promotion of English through materials such as books, textbooks and dictionaries has potential economic, cultural and political benefits (Phillipson, 2009). In addition, higher education for international students provides a steady income for the Inner Circle countries (e.g., Graddol, 2006; Phillipson, 1992a). International students studying in the Inner Circle account for 53 percent of all the international students in the world, and over one third of all international students study in the US and the UK (Graddol, 2006). The reason for such high figures is not only that prestigious universities are often located in such countries, but also that they aim to learn and/or improve their English (Graddol, 2006). And while non-native English speakers are spending time, money and effort to learn English (Grin, 2004), and English speaking countries are making financial profits, at the same time, the US, for instance, can save 16 billion dollars per year through not needing to invest time and effort in foreign language teaching (Grin, 2004).

English has also been used for political purposes as, historically, English language teaching played a significant role in colonial policy. Provision of education in English was used to spread British language and culture, and to maintain the status quo. For others, limited education in English was provided to enhance colonial rule (Pennycook, 1998). Benesh (1993) reminds us that today also “all forms of ESL instruction are ideological whether or not educators are conscious of the political implications of their instructional choices” (p.705). Success in learning Inner Circle English determines the social status of non-native speakers (Phillipson, 1996). For example, it is often the case that non-native English speakers are required to have a very high level of English proficiency for scientific communication and academic purposes (e.g., Ammon, 2006; Flowerdew, 2000), and non-Anglophone
researchers are often disadvantaged. In other words, English proficiency based on Inner Circle English norms regulates the access to the mainstream academic world and other forms of international communication.

The rapid spread of English has brought European and Anglo-American culture to non-native English speaking countries, and this dominance can lead to less cultural and linguistic diversity. Globalisation is often promoted in non-English speaking countries, but the term globalisation tends to be associated exclusively with Inner Circle countries as well as whiteness, and “learning a foreign language” often simply means “learning English” (Kubota, 2002). In such a situation, ethnic and linguistic diversity is likely to be ignored (Kubota & Mckay, 2009), and users of varieties of English other than Inner Circle English may be disrespected because their English is regarded as deficient rather than just different (Matsuda, 2002).

**THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM ON NNESTS**

As the main downside of the global spread of English, linguistic imperialism has also reinforced the inequality between NESTs and NNESTs. NESTs are often preferred to NNESTs as English teachers, and NNESTs are still regarded as less important than their native counterparts. Employers reportedly unfairly prefer NESTs to NNESTs (Clark & Paran, 2007). Inner Circle varieties of English, especially American and British English, are regarded as the model to be acquired (Kubota, 2002). Employers assume that students want to be taught by a NEST rather than by a NNESS (Cook, 2000), and many students, in fact, prefer to be taught by NESTs (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002). Phillipson (1992a) coined the term ‘the native speaker fallacy’ (p.195) to refer to the situation in which NESTs are automatically regarded as better qualified teachers than NNESTs, regardless of their possible lack of knowledge of metalanguage and pedagogical skills.

This misconception prevails and continues to be socially accepted despite evidence (Phillipson, 1992a) that identifies advantages associated with NNESTs. Medgyes (1992) argues that NNESTs can share their L1 with learners, present a good model of a successful English learner, teach learning strategies and English grammar more
effectively, and understand learners’ difficulties and problems well. At the same time, NESTs also have their own strengths, such as language competence (Medgyes, 1992). When Árva and Medgyes (2000) compared the performances of NESTs and NNESTs, they found each of these groups contributed to different aspects of language teaching. Given the strengths of both groups, team teaching between NESTs and NNESTs is often encouraged in EFL contexts (e.g., Tajino & Tajino, 2000). However, despite the above research evidence of NNESTs’ competence in English teaching, they are often still in a weaker position than their NEST counterparts.

In light of the above-mentioned studies on English linguistic imperialism, we argue that the non-native English speaking postgraduate TESOL students’ choice of going to an Inner Circle English country like Australia to obtain a TESOL qualification can be regarded as a key factor that can maintain or challenge the inequality between English and other languages or between native English and non-native English. If these students who are/will be English teachers and/or trainers in their countries, come to Australia because of their belief in the superiority of Inner Circle Englishes and NESTs, thus attempting to empower themselves by using the influence of the Inner Circle, they maintain and perpetuate traditional ideas of English linguistic imperialism. However, if these students critically reflect on the downside of the worldwide spread of English and the inequality between NESTs and NNESTs, they may be able to contribute to challenging the privileged position of Inner Circle Englishes and their speakers. Therefore, this study is important in its attempt to understand the value that non-native English speaking TESOL students see in a TESOL qualification obtained in an Inner Circle country. Amin (2004) and Liu (1999) focused on self-reflection by NNESTs in the Inner Circle and investigated how the value of Western native-speaker English is maintained. However, these studies did not include non-native English speaking TESOL students as participants. Indeed, only a limited amount of research has focused on such students’ perceptions. These studies explored non-native English speaking TESOL students’ anxiety towards being NNESTs (Brinton, 2004; Brinton & Holten, 1989), and how they perceive the differences between NESTs and NNESTs (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). This study adds to the
existing literature by exploring such students’ perceptions of the meaning and value of obtaining a TESOL qualification from a Western native English speaking country like Australia.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants**

The participants in this study were eight adult non-native English speaking students from five different non-Western countries enrolled in a TESOL course at postgraduate level at a regional university in Australia. Of the eight participants, three were from China, two from Vietnam, and one from each of Bhutan, Korea and Saudi Arabia.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Mother tongue</th>
<th>Time teaching English</th>
<th>Time started to learn English</th>
<th>Time in TESOL course (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Sichuanese</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2 year</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Bhutanese</td>
<td>Dzongkha</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Saudi Arabian</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five participants were females and the other three were males, and all in their early 20s to early 40s. The participants had learnt English at
school and university, completed their first university degree in their countries, and had at least some English language teaching experience. The TESOL course at the university at which they were studying covers the concepts of World Englishes and linguistic diversity in a sociolinguistic unit that all the students had taken. Table 1 summarizes the participants’ background information.

All participants, with one possible exception (B1), were from the Expanding Circle. B reported that in Bhutan almost all subjects are taught in English from primary school onwards, and people often code-switch between English and their national language, Dzongkha, in everyday conversation. Even though Kachru (1992b) described the Outer Circle countries as former colonies of Inner Circle countries, we categorise Bhutan as an Outer Circle country because its sociolinguistic context is distinctively different from those in the Expanding Circle.

Procedure, data collection and analysis

After obtaining ethics approval for this study and piloting the interview guide (see Appendix A), we recruited eight non-native English speaking students from the TESOL course at the university by employing a convenience sampling strategy. The data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were held in a quiet room in the library of the university, and each interview lasted between 50 and 80 minutes. We audio recorded the interviews with the participants’ permission and later transcribed them verbatim for analysis.

The data were analysed following the rigorous procedures of the thematic analysis, described by King and Horrockes (2010). We generated major themes by coding the transcripts, and as a result, two overarching themes emerged, firstly, the supremacy of a TESOL qualification obtained in an Inner Circle country, and, secondly, the supremacy of NESTs.

1 The initial is the first letter of the participant’s country of origin (for instance, B stands for Bhutan).
RESULTS

Results of the interviews are presented according to the two themes generated from the interview data. Each theme consists of three subthemes, namely social perceptions, English skills and pedagogy. Quotations\(^2\) from the interviews illustrate the themes and sub-themes.

**The supremacy of a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle**

The first theme generated from the interview data is the supremacy of a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle. All eight participants seemed to greatly value a TESOL qualification obtained from an Inner Circle country.

*Social perceptions*

Seven participants (C1, C2, C3, V1, V2, K, S) agreed that the TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle is highly recognised in their respective countries. They emphasized the important role of such a TESOL qualification for job opportunities. C3 critically described the current situation in China, where a teacher with a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle was highly valued:

*When I go back to China, my sister will ask me to open an early childhood English institute, as we are likely to be able to earn quite a lot of money. In such a situation, I do not need to have a very good command of English. I just need a qualification from overseas.*

\((C3/080612/106)\)^3

In the corporation in Saudi Arabia where S works, a teacher with a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle would certainly be

\(^2\) These have been edited when necessary in order to facilitate reader understanding. In doing so, careful attention was paid not to change the meaning they conveyed.

\(^3\) Since we had three participants from China, we added a number behind the initial letter to distinguish between them (followed by the date we conducted the interview and the turn number).
promoted, and it was obligatory for S to come to one of the Inner Circle countries in order to qualify for the scholarship he was awarded.

Six participants (C1, C2, C3, V2, K, S) also referred to the social perceptions of a TESOL qualification of the people around them. They all agreed that teachers with a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle would have authority and be highly appreciated. S made a striking statement when he said that if he had obtained a TESOL qualification from an Outer Circle country, such as Singapore or India, it would not be valued at all in Saudi Arabia, and that his friends would have made fun of the English pronunciation that he might have picked up in these countries. When K admitted that in Korea a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle was regarded as a much better qualification than one obtained from the Outer or Expanding Circle, she regrettably described it as “the real situation” (K/050612/96) in Korea today.

B did not talk much about the social perceptions of the TESOL qualification obtained from Australia, probably because he and his classmates from Bhutan were the first TESOL students on scholarships from Bhutan. However, he mentioned that although India used to be a popular destination for study abroad, B inferred Bhutanese would now rather go to Inner Circle countries because of their respect for native English. It had also been his ambition to come to an Inner Circle country to do his degree.

*English skills*

For all eight participants, the improvement of their English skills was found to be a very important motivation to undertake the TESOL course in Australia. Of the various English skills, six participants (B, C1, C2, C3, V1, V2, S) focused on improving their pronunciation.

For S, it was very important to acquire a native-like pronunciation as used in the Inner Circle and thus to eliminate his Arabic accent as much as possible. This would allow him to maintain his pride as an English teacher:

*When I go back to my country and meet my friends who have been to the US or the UK to obtain degrees in engineering or anything other than English teaching, I will have to be able to speak English fluently,*
especially as an English teacher. It’s a shame on me to speak English with foreign accent, such as Indian accent or whatever. (S/270612/168)

Similar to K, C1 expressed his strong preference of acquiring an accent from an Inner Circle country:

*The pronunciation of the Inner Circle Englishes has the best sounds which are most natural and most beautiful, whereas Indian English has a strange accent.... Even though accents in British English and American English are different, both of them still sound very beautiful.* (C1/170612/108)

He further added that Malaysian English and Singaporean English both sound strange to him, and that it is also essential for students to acquire the pronunciation used in the Inner Circle particularly for academic purposes. C2, too, found it very important to acquire an Inner Circle pronunciation, as it would allow her to be regarded as a professional English teacher by her students. Being able to speak English with an Inner Circle pronunciation could contribute to developing her confidence as a teacher.

Apart from pronunciation, the same six participants were also very keen to improve their speaking skills in a more general sense. In this context, V1 expressed her sense of inferiority towards NESTs. C1, C2, C3, K and S made comments about the importance of improving their English in general.

*Pedagogy*

One interesting point related to the pedagogical subtheme is that the five female participants put emphasis on the importance of being able to teach the culture(s) of Inner Circle countries (C2, C3, V1, K) and/or for them to develop a good knowledge of these cultures (C3, V1, V2). This is probably because most of them associated a language with the culture of a particular country/countries. C2 was very keen to teach cultures of Inner Circle countries in her class after going back to China. She believed that her students would become more interested in the English language if they learnt more about the cultures of Inner Circle countries. V2 focused on the importance of learning cultures of the
Inner Circle countries in order to deepen her knowledge of the English language:

*I and many students studying English or TESOL in Vietnam really want to obtain certificates or degrees from native English speaking countries. This is because, for me, a language is not only a language. When we study a new language, we need to study its culture and attitudes of people producing that language. That is why Vietnamese people want to study in native English speaking countries.* (V2/110612/108)

Unlike other participants, C3 did not link English with the cultures of specific Inner Circle countries but with Western culture in general: “Chinese people prefer the Western cultures” (C3/080612/140). She did not choose, for instance, Singapore to obtain a TESOL qualification because of the lack of opportunities to learn about Western cultures there, as well as because of what she perceived as a strong Singaporean English accent. In this context it is also noteworthy that four participants (C1, C3, V1, K) highly valued English teaching methodologies learnt in the TESOL course.

**The supremacy of NESTs**

The second theme that emerged from the interview data is the supremacy of NESTs. All the participants appeared to be aware that NESTs are generally in a privileged position compared to NNESTs. This theme again holds the same three subthemes, social perceptions, English skills, and pedagogy.

*Social perceptions*

All eight participants discussed the importance of social perceptions of NESTs compared with NNESTs. Due to the socially accepted native-speaker norm, employers, learners and parents tend to prefer NESTs. C2, V1, V2 and K pointed out that there are a large number of NESTs employed in their countries, and S told us that the two main colleges of S’s corporation in Saudi Arabia employ only NESTs. K described the reason for this phenomenon:

*The reason why NESTs are advantaged in terms of employment opportunities is that employers in Korea believe teachers from native*
English speaking countries are more important than ones from non-native English speaking countries. (K/050612/100)

All three Chinese participants also mentioned that their government or schools were actively inviting NESTs to their country. C3 criticised the tendency that NESTs without TESOL qualifications are often preferred to qualified NNESTs:

*Although it is unfair for some NNESTs, universities often employ even unqualified NESTs... This is because employers do not know anything about English teaching, and believe students’ English proficiency will improve as long as they interact with native speakers.*  
(C3/80612/168)

Three participants (B, C3, V2) mentioned learners’ as well as their parents’ preference for NESTs in Bhutan, China and Vietnam. According to B, there were many parents who believed NESTs were better teachers than NNESTs. For instance, an English language school in Bhutan employing many NESTs had become very popular among educated or rich parents. He speculated about the reason for this tendency:

*I think it is because... more and more Bhutanese are... beginning to like the native Western values and ideologies. Maybe they feel like the quality of schools employing Western teachers and offering Western values and ideas is better.*  
(B/160612/286)

Two participants (C2, S) strongly preferred NESTs themselves. C1, C3, V2, and K also talked about the social perceptions of NNESTs from outside their countries, such as a NNEST from Malaysia in China, and emphasised yet again that NESTs would still be preferred by employers, learners and/or parents.

*English skills*

Seven participants (C1, C2, C3, V1, V2, K, S) were very conscious about NESTs’ superiority in terms of English skills, and the most prominent point here was again pronunciation, which they all mentioned. C1, V1 and V2 compared themselves with NESTs and felt a sense of inferiority towards them:
Our disadvantage is... we do not sound natural compared to NESTs. Even though... we are trying to pronounce English very carefully, we still do not sound natural. (C1/170612/254)

Unlike C1, V1 and V2, C2 and S criticised NNESTs' for not being able to pronounce English well, and described their pronunciation as a “mistake” (S/270612/258) and “wrong” (C2/26/12/96), while at the same time expressing their respect for NESTs’ pronunciation. C3 and K were again very critical about the current situation in China and Korea where people were eager to learn the English pronunciation of Inner Circle countries and looked down on those from Outer or Expanding Circle countries.

In addition to pronunciation, three other points were identified as NEST advantages, namely their speaking skills (C3, V2, S, K), innate grammatical knowledge (C1, V2, S), and ability to communicate in English with learners (V1, S). Although B did not talk about NEST superiority in English skills specifically, he believed that it was important for him, as an English teacher, to converse with native speakers to improve his English proficiency, especially his pronunciation. Whenever he worked with a group of peers in his classes, he attempted to work with native speakers for the sake of his English - even though non-native speakers sometimes had better ideas! He believed that he could ‘learn’ English only from native speakers, maybe because he knew that he had already had a very good command of English.

Pedagogy

NESTs’ knowledge about cultures of the Inner Circle countries was considered to be an advantage of NESTs by C3, V1, V2 and K. As mentioned above, S, V2 and W strongly associated English language with the cultures of Inner Circle countries. Therefore, NESTs’ familiarity with Inner Circle cultures can play a key role when teaching about cultures to their students and at the same time developing their understanding of the English language. C2 argued NESTs' biggest advantage was their ability to teach about Western cultures so that learners could become more interested in studying English, and understand content of lessons better. V1 also agreed that the NESTs’ advantage was their knowledge of culture and seemed to associate the
English language with cultures of Inner Circle countries. It was of concern to her that the English textbooks used in Vietnam now included chapters about Vietnamese culture and history. She wanted them to include more about Western cultures instead, even though, when talking about the downsides of the worldwide spread of English to Vietnam, she also expressed concern about her students’ indifference to Vietnamese culture and history.

Participants also mentioned NESTs’ advantages with regard to pedagogical skills. C1, C2 and V1 believed English teaching methods employed by NESTs to be very effective. Particularly C2 had strongly negative views of NNESTs’ ways of teaching:

NNESTs’ teaching style is always the same…. They stand behind the desks, stay back and use only whiteboards. They only read sentences in textbooks…. They do not care about students’ feelings. They just talk talk talk and teach teach teach…. for 45 minutes without asking any question to their students. (C2/260612/290)

In contrast, she had very positive views of NESTs’ teaching methods:

NESTs’ teaching methods are very active. NESTs can engage students in the class by conducting communicative activities and using interesting materials like radios and pictures, in the class…. They like to do things for their students. In addition, NESTs set only a few aims in one lesson so that students can enjoy attending it. (C2/260612/290)

Similar to C2, S denied any of the advantages of NNESTs:

I am completely against that [that there might be advantages]. Again, especially in my country, we have NESTs. We have to have NESTs, but we do not have to have NNESTs. (S/270612/252)

To sum up, for these TESOL students, the value placed on obtaining a TESOL qualification from a Western native English speaking country is very high. For them its supremacy - compared to a TESOL qualification obtained in an Outer or Expanding Circle country - means that they will be able to positively distinguish themselves from other NNESTs. The participants are also fully aware of the NESTs’ privileged position over NNESTs due to the prevailing belief in the authority of
Inner Circle countries’ English in English language teaching. We argue that these non-native TESOL students attempt to empower themselves by obtaining a TESOL degree in the Inner Circle, as it will allow them to be in a closer position to the preferred NESTs.

DISCUSSION

In this section we discuss the participants’ belief in the supremacy of a TESOL qualification obtained in an Inner Circle country and the supremacy of NESTs in light of the literature of English linguistic imperialism. We consider whether their beliefs tend to maintain or challenge the universal predominance of Western native-speaker English and the inequality NESTs and NNESTs.

The subtheme ‘social perceptions’ showed that all participants were well aware that NESTs were more likely to be employed and preferred by learners and/or their parents. Such situations have been critically studied in the literature on English linguistic imperialism. NESTs are arguably given more job opportunities than NNESTs (Clark & Paran, 2007), which is likely to be related to general beliefs that NESTs’ English is the most appropriate model (e.g., Friedrich, 2000). This recent study confirms these previous findings and shows that even though the necessity of NESTs receiving teacher education has been argued (Phillipson, 1992b), employers still often employ unqualified native speakers, as C3 mentioned when talking about China.

When talking about the importance of English skills, remarkably, seven participants (B, C1, C2, C3, V1, V2, S) mentioned the importance of Inner Circle and NESTs’ pronunciation, thus reproducing the privileged position of Inner Circle Englishes and NESTs. All participants, except for B, stated that NESTs had better pronunciation, and all agreed that one of the reasons for selecting Australia to commence the TESOL course was to improve their pronunciation. Not only learners, but also some NNESTs are keen to acquire Inner Circle pronunciation to present themselves as native speakers (Sifakins & Sougari, 2005), and this study provides further evidence of this trend. Even though in today’s globalised world the importance of mutual intelligibility among speakers rather than acquiring native-like pronunciation and accent has been stressed (Derwing & Munro, 2005;
Jenkins, 2000), Outer and Expanding Circle pronunciation is still often stigmatised regardless of its intelligibility (Levis, 2005).

It was interesting that all five female participants mentioned the importance of knowing about Western Inner Circle cultures for teaching purposes. We consider this as another potential factor that reinforces the predominance of Inner Circle English. These participants, except for C3, who looked at this situation somewhat critically, strongly linked a particular language with a particular culture. They believed it is essential for English teachers to have sufficient knowledge of the English language, as well as of the cultures of Inner Circle countries. This would enable themselves and, consequently, their students, to be proficient in English in a true sense. Based on these statements, there is a risk here that these five participants will provide their own students with misconceived ideas such as that English is merely associated with “‘Anglo-Saxon’ Caucasians with a limited region of the world” (Nault, 2006, p.317), and could lead to devaluing cultures of non-native English speaking countries (Phillipson, 1992a). This is in clear contrast to today’s reality. There is clearly a need for more emphasis on the importance of introducing not only cultures of the Inner Circle, but also those of the Outer and Expanding Circle in order to promote learners’ as well as teachers’ awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity (Mckay, 2000; Nault, 2006).

Based on the main themes and subthemes that emerged from our data, we conclude that the particular TESOL students in this research will, at least to some extent, contribute to English linguistic imperialism after going back to their respective countries. At the same time, however, most participants showed a significant potential to challenge the universal predominance of Western native English and the inequality between NESTs and NNESTs. Except for S and C2, who had a strong preference for NESTs and Inner Circle English, the other participants questioned the privileged position of Inner Circle English and referred to World Englishes, while at the same time, they also had admiration for or felt inferiority towards Inner Circle English. They seemed to be struggling with the tension between these two opposing views. The degree to which the participants emphasized the importance of World Englishes varied depending on the individuals. C1, V1 and V2 were generally very keen to learn and teach Inner Circle
English, especially in terms of pronunciation and speaking skills, and appeared to feel a sense of inferiority towards NESTs. However, C1 stated that learners at the intermediate level could freely choose which varieties of English they would like to learn and use, and V1 talked about her intention to integrate Outer Circle Englishes into listening activities in her class. V2 was also very happy to include different varieties of English in her lesson depending on students’ needs, and to invite NNESTs from the Outer and Expanding Circles to Vietnam, which is also recommended in the World Englishes literature (Matsuda, 2003b). All these participants also identified NNESTs’ advantages in the understanding of metalanguage.

Although K strongly linked English to the cultures of Inner Circle countries, and C3 was attempting to learn Inner Circle English and culture despite her critical views on them, they also strongly emphasised the importance of World Englishes. C3 claimed that teachers should be able to tell their students that neither American nor British English are the most appropriate model to imitate, and that there were many varieties of English in the world. She then added the importance of including World Englishes in teacher education. K, as a teacher, also would like to tell her students that all Englishes are varieties in their own right, and Korean students should not feel embarrassed to speak English with Korean accent.

B from the Outer Circle was very proud of the Bhutanese variety of English that, he explained to us, maintains some characteristics of Dzongkha in pronunciation, morphology, and syntax. He believed it would be a recognised form of English of the world in the near future. He also respected all varieties of English, and had encouraged his own students to do so as well. In addition, presumably because of his own very good command of English, he strongly argued that NNESTs did not have any disadvantage and NESTs and NNESTs could indeed offer the same things to learners. At the same time, it had been B’s ambition to come to an Inner Circle country to do his degree, and he wished to interact with native speakers as much as possible to improve his pronunciation and to acquire a high level of English proficiency. These six participants’ views show a tension between their acceptance of the supremacy of Inner Circle English and NESTS on the one hand, and their wish to challenge some of these concepts on the other. They
referred to and, to varying extent, embraced the concepts of diversity and World Englishes thus showing their potential to challenge English linguistic imperialism. At the same time all eight participants know that the value of their TESOL qualification obtained in Australia is high because of prevailing beliefs about the supremacy of Inner Circle English and NESTs.

To conclude, we would argue that the phenomenon observed in the present study can be seen as self-marginalization (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), where students not only unquestioningly admit the superiority of Inner Circle English and NESTs but also accept their inferiority to their native counterparts. Self-marginalization, furthermore, accelerates the process of marginalization, through which Inner Circle countries retain their power and authority over other countries, and consequently reinforces the inequality between the Inner Circle countries and other countries (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for TESOL courses to equip their students with critical views towards the power of Inner Circle English to challenge its current superiority.

For this purpose, we suggest a range of teaching ideas. To begin with, it is very important to make students aware of the wide variety of Englishes and the concept of World Englishes (e.g., Matsuda, 2003a). TESOL courses also need to cover the idea that there is no clear boundary between native and non-native English speakers, and between one variety of English and another. That is, all users of English, both native and non-native English speakers, are responsible for successful communication, and need to learn to cooperate with each other to convey their meanings in English (Kubota, 2001). It is essential to address these issues not only with non-native English speaking students, but also with native English speaking students (Kubota, 2001), and to teach both native and non-native English speaking students and teachers the importance of the collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs, as well as of respecting their different strengths and weaknesses (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2004; de Oliveira & Richardson, 2004). In addition, it would be worthwhile to increase the opportunities to discuss issues related to the dominance of Inner Circle English and NESTs/NNESTs at a deeper level in TESOL courses, in order to raise awareness of students and for them to be encouraged to
critically evaluate the current situation. To this end, TESOL courses should actively cover some elements of critical applied linguistics, particularly those related to the predominance of Inner Circle English. At the same time, it would be effective to let TESOL students reflect on their purposes for learning and teaching English. They could consider whether they and their students’ aims are to become like native speakers in the Inner Circle, or alternatively, to acquire their own ‘voice’ (Pennycook, 1997). In today’s global world, knowing about such concepts and issues is as essential as knowing about teaching methods or grammar and might contribute to creating a better working environment both for NESTs and NNESTs in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the tension that TESOL students experience when undertaking a TESOL qualification in Australia. The eight participants in this study were well aware of NESTs’ prestigious position compared to NNESTs. The value of their own TESOL qualification, obtained in the Inner Circle, will empower them to be closer to the NESTs’ position, thus setting them apart from other NNESTs without such a valuable TESOL qualification. Given that these participants seemed to be relying on the significant power of the Inner Circle in English teaching, we argued that they thus contributed to perpetuating the dominance of Inner Circle English. At the same time, however, six participants also questioned the current situation, having realised the importance of introducing World Englishes in their own teaching when they go back home. This evidences these TESOL practitioners’ potential to challenge English linguistic imperialism and change the future directions of English teaching.

It is important to note that although this exploratory study shed light on a little investigated area, four main limitations can be identified. Firstly, given the relatively small sample size, it is questionable to what degree the research findings obtained from this study could be generalised. Therefore, it seems worthwhile for a future study to take a quantitative approach and to include a larger number of participants. It is also important to note that all the participants in this study might have shared similar characteristics, in terms of limited exposure to wider varieties of English at an Australian university in a
rural setting. It might be interesting to replicate this study at an urban university, where students are more likely to have encountered a wider range of varieties of Englishes. Secondly, even though non-native English speaking TESOL students' potential to both maintain and challenge English linguistic imperialism was observed, this study did not investigate either how participants' views of Western native English might change over time or how they might communicate such values to their students after they return to their own countries. A future longitudinal study could collect data from participants both while they are in Australia, and after they return to their respective countries. Thirdly, since participants in this study were from five different countries and there were only one to three participants from each country, it was difficult to specifically investigate the particular situation in each country or the similarities and differences between the five countries. A future study might focus on a particular country in order to take into consideration the complex interplay between participants' perceptions and other aspects, such as the educational system and culture. For example, further research could include how a TESOL qualification obtained from the Inner Circle is valued in their country at the policy level, or incentives that NNESTs receive from their government and/or institutes. Finally, all the participants in this study are TESOL students in the Inner Circle, and this study did not include non-native English speaking TESOL students doing TESOL courses in their own countries. Thus, it could be important for future research to also include such students, and to examine how they value their qualifications.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

Background

1. What is your English learning experience?
2. What is your English teaching experience?
3. How is English taught in your country (e.g., as a compulsory subject, as a medium of instruction, by native speaking teachers)?

English in the society and English education in your country

4. What is the status of English (as a subject) in your country, and why?
5. Does English play a key role for students’ career?
6. Are there any advantages/disadvantages of the worldwide spread of English for your country, and what are they?

Values of a TESOL qualification

1. Are English teachers expected to obtain a TESOL qualification, and why?
2. Where are English teachers expected to obtain a TESOL qualification, and why?
3. Are any TESOL courses at the postgraduate level available in your country?
4. Does a TESOL qualification affect English teachers’ chance of promotion (e.g., salary, position etc)?
5. How are English teachers who hold a TESOL qualification obtained from a university in a Western native English speaking country, in a country other than Western native English speaking countries, or in your country perceived by colleagues, and why?
6. Why did you come to Australia for a TESOL qualification?
7. What are the advantages/disadvantages to obtain a TESOL qualification from a Western native English speaking country?
8. Have you considered going to a country other than Western native English speaking countries to obtain a TESOL qualification?

9. What would be the advantages/disadvantages to go to a country other than Western native English speaking country to obtain a TESOL qualification?

**World Englishes**

10. What variety of English is used in English classes in your country (e.g., American, British, your own variety of English)?

11. How do you teach that particular variety of English?

12. Are there advantages/disadvantages of teaching that particular variety of English, and what are they?

**Being a non-native English speaking teacher**

13. What do you think native/non-native English speaking teachers can offer in a classroom?

14. What do you think are advantages/disadvantages of NNESTs?

15. If you are aware of issues related to World Englishes and/or NESTs and NNESTs, how and where did you develop such ideas?