

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE
SPEAKER LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS: A COMPARISON
OF ESL AND SPANISH

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Resum. Les percepcions dels estudiants sobre els professors nadius i no nadius: una comparació entre l'ESL i l'espanyol. La qüestió de la condició de parlant nadiu o no nadiu del professor de segona llengua o llengua estrangera ha estat investigada principalment des de la perspectiva del professor. Algunes evidències anecdòtiques suggereixen que els estudiants fan judicis de valor sobre l'ensenyament que reben depenent de si el professor és o no és parlant nadiu de la llengua que ensenya. La major part dels estudis que s'han fet se centren en estudiants d'anglès com a llengua estrangera o com a segona llengua. Per al present treball es van tenir en compte les dades obtingudes a partir d'un qüestionari que es va repartir entre 55 estudiants universitaris: 31 estudiants aprenien espanyol com a llengua estrangera, mentre que 24 eren estudiants d'ESL. Els resultats qualitius posen en relleu quines són les habilitats que els estudiants consideren pròpies de cada tipus de professor. Els resultats quantitius revelen que la diferència que els estudiants poden percebre entre les habilitats dels professors nadius respecte dels no nadius no és tan gran com es podria esperar basant-nos en certes certs tòpic a propòsit del tema. Els estudiants d'ESL van demostrar una preferència més acusada pels professors nadius, i les seves respostes van diferir de les respostes dels estudiants d'espanyol respecte de l'avaluació dels professors nadius en diversos aspectes. Hi havia una significativa correlació en ambdós grups d'estudiants quant a la preferència i autoidentificació d'un estudiant cap a un professor nadiu i el fet que algun membre de la seva família fos un parlant nadiu de la llengua objecte d'estudi.

Paraules clau: parlant nadiu, parlant no nadiu, professors d'idiomes, percepcions dels estudiants, ESL, espanyol.

Abstract. The question of the native vs. non-native speaker status of second and foreign language instructors has been investigated chiefly from the perspective of the teacher. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students have strong opinions on the

relative qualities of instruction by native and non-native speakers. Most research focuses on students of English as a foreign or second language. This paper reports on data gathered through a questionnaire administered to 55 university students: 31 students of Spanish as FL and 24 students of English as SL. Qualitative results show what strengths students believe each type of instructor has, and quantitative results confirm that any gap students may perceive between the abilities of native and non-native instructors is not so wide as one might expect based on popular notions of the issue. ESL students showed a stronger preference for native-speaker instructors overall, and were at variance with the SFL students' ratings of native-speaker instructors' performance on a number of aspects. There was a significant correlation in both groups between having a family member who is a native speaker of the target language and student preference for and self-identification with a native speaker as instructor.

Key words: native speaker, non-native speaker, language teacher, student perceptions, ESL, Spanish

1. Introduction

Roberts & Harden 1997:22, after offering a cogent set of arguments for the complementary strengths of native and non-native speaker language instructors, conclude:

[...] we reject naïve presuppositions about the relative merits of native-speaker and non-native-speaker teachers, seeing indispensable rôles for both, especially at a moment in history when the aims of language teaching should be above all else intercultural. Ideally, for the foreseeable future, teaching teams should be made up of an appropriate mixture of native and non-native teachers. This will provide for cross-fertilisation between the teachers, and afford the learners linguistic and cultural insights from two different viewpoints.

The points in their essay are very well-taken, and would undoubtedly be accepted by the majority of individuals with training in linguistics. However, such training is far from universal in the language education profession, and, more to the point of the present paper, language students also lack knowledge of basic linguistic principles and are the ones most prone to hold the “naïve presuppositions” Roberts and Harden mention.

Many language educators can offer anecdotal evidence that students perceive a difference in the quality of foreign or second language instruction based on whether or not the instructor is a native speaker. Examples are

shown in (1) - (6), below. The difference is sometimes perceived as positive for the non-native speaker instructor, with students reporting greater ease of comprehension of non-native speech. After the first day in a Spanish Phonetics and Pronunciation course at a large public university in the Midwestern United States, two students opted to transfer into a section taught by a non-native speaker, explaining that they had difficulty understanding the first instructor's "accent". This instructor was a native speaker of Castilian. Another student wrote on the second instructor's evaluation:

- (1) [The instructor's] being a non-native speaker was helpful!

More often, however, the perception of non-native speaker instructors is somewhat negative. In (2) and (3) are comments from other students in the Spanish Phonetics class mentioned above:

- (2) Maybe not the best to be teaching a pronunciation course, as [the instructor's] accent doesn't sound authentic.
- (3) [...] didn't have a good Spanish accent, but still managed to get points across.

In (4), a student in a course on Spanish Morphology and Syntax at the same university wrote:

- (4) Did an alright job, but I think a native speaker should be teaching this course.

Two students in lower-division Spanish language classes at a large public university in California stated:

- (5) I think native speakers are more effective teachers because they just know a lot more about the language — but, [the instructor] did a good job considering the course.
- (6) [The instructor] is great, but native Spanish speakers would help more.

This phenomenon is not limited to students of Spanish. Early in the term of a first semester French class at another public university in California, a student announced her intention to transfer into a different section, because it was taught by a native speaker of French. Before the first day of class students may use instructors' surnames to guess which ones are native speakers of the

target language. At large universities in the U.S. such information may not be available to students prior to the first day of class, since schedules are often published long before courses are assigned to individual instructors. This can lead to a surplus of class roster changes during the first week or two of each term, resulting in inconvenience for students and instructors alike.

Both surnames and racial ethnicity play a role in association with some languages. The preference for Anglo teachers of English in some countries has been cited as an example of racism (Paikeday 1985:33; Dua 1994; Rampton 1995:337–338). Teachers who are members of visible minorities may not be accepted by students. At a private language school in Northern California, English language learners from Korea, Taiwan, China and Japan protested when a Japanese-American man was hired to teach ESL (see also Amin 1997). The students expressed concern that he would “speak English with an accent.” Their fears were allayed after the first class with the new instructor, who happened to be a California native with a certificate in TESOL and significant experience teaching ESL in the more rigorous environment of a local community college.

This debate has not been restricted to the teaching of English. Paikeday 1985:30 cites the Modern Language Association’s annual meeting of 1980, where “[s]o-called native speakers of English were apparently questioning the preference of foreign-language departments for hiring ‘native speakers’ rather than American-born instructors” (see also Lederer 1981). This distinction also affects U.S. born native Spanish speakers, as Valdés 2000 notes.

2. Native vs. near-native fluency

Medgyes 2001 surveyed university professors on hypothetical hiring preferences and found an even division between a preference for hiring native vs. non-native speaker instructors. When filling positions in language departments, public institutions in the United States usually advertise for candidates with “native or near-native fluency” in the target language. What is accepted under the rubric of “near-native fluency” varies by both region and institution (Valdés 1998; Koike & Liskin-Gasparro 1999). Gutiérrez-Candelaria 2000 reports that high school teachers of Spanish in certain states possess on average a proficiency level of intermediate-mid on the ACTFL scale. The author has observed ESL classes in adult education programs in California taught by non-native speaker instructors whose speech demonstrated an incomplete control of Standard English morphology, specifically, a lack of third person singular present tense *-s*. A critique of an instructor’s speech on this

basis points to other issues, such as which dialect is chosen for the classroom.¹ Many native, non-standard, varieties of English—AAVE being a case in point—coincide in this aspect with the production of some non-native speakers.²

While public institutions may be reluctant or unable to restrict employment to native speakers, private institutions often insist on native speakers only.³ Private, for-profit schools such as Berlitz hire native speakers exclusively for all of the languages in which they offer lessons. Commercial language-learning software, such as, for example, Rosetta Stone, also advertise the sole use of native speakers. A United States Army recruitment brochure advertising Army linguist training at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California suggests a cause and effect relationship between native speakerhood and superior pedagogical abilities. It states: “Since 90 percent of the instructors are native speakers of the languages they teach, you will train and speak with the best” (Publication no. RPI 215, February 2004).

3. The concept of the native speaker

The notion of the native speaker is as problematic as it is ubiquitous. Paikeday 1985 discusses the disparity between accepted definitions of the term ‘native speaker’ and the reality of many speakers. Cook 2000:195 advocates treating non-native speakers as proficient L2 users, rather than “failed native speakers”. He cites common criteria for defining the native speaker, stating:

The indisputable element in the definition of *native speaker* is that a person is a native speaker of the language learnt first; the other

¹See, for example, García 1975; Villa 1996; Rickford 1999:283–289, 304–319, 329–347; Zéphir 1999; Villa 1996; Martínez 2003.

²In this instance the feature clearly has different causes: the non-native speaker’s deletion of third person *-s* responded to a production error, whereas the AAVE speaker’s deletion follows the rules of that dialect’s grammar. It nevertheless raises the issue of which variety is the “correct” one; despite linguists’ insistence that all dialects are equal, students and teachers continue to adopt a prescriptive stance.

³For example, a position announcement from a private university in California stated: “Native-level fluency in Spanish and near-native fluency in French or Italian desirable.” (Job List of the Modern Language Association, Fall 2004). Some public institutions also express a strong preference, as evidenced in this announcement for a position at a public university in Kentucky: “Native speaker of Spanish [...] preferred, [...] but near-native speaker considered” (Job List of the Modern Language Association, Spring 2003).

characteristics are incidental, describing how well an individual uses the language. Someone who did not learn a language in childhood can never be a native speaker of the language. Later-learned languages can never be native languages, by definition. (Cook 2000:187)

Nevertheless, as Kramersch 1997:359 notes, “[...] today foreign language students are expected to emulate the communicative skills of native speakers”. This may be a reasonable goal, as long as complete dominance of the phonological system is not included in what is understood by the term ‘communicative skills’. Here again, folk linguistic beliefs conflict with empirical knowledge (e.g. Preston 1998). More realistic objectives for language programs may also be in order. A review of curriculum and methodology debates is beyond the scope of this paper, but it bears mentioning that many U.S. universities are currently struggling with the question of whether to aim for producing students who will have a higher degree of fluency after two years of three to five hours per week of classroom study, or who will be prepared to enroll in upper division courses in which they will be required to write academic papers and engage in literary analysis in the target language.

Rampton 1995:340 discusses the difficulties of defining native speakerhood, and proposes a set of criteria with distinctions between competence and sociolinguistic identities. These distinctions include a dichotomy “between ‘expertise’ (skill, proficiency, ability to operate with a language), and ‘allegiance’ (identification with a language, with the values, meanings, and identities that it stands for)”. He divides the concept of allegiance further into inheritance and affiliation (Rampton 1995:342). Definitions current in the field of education require inheritance and expertise for the native speaker; popular definitions sometimes require inheritance only. Under most notions of these qualities, the non-native speaker may acquire expertise and affiliation, but never inheritance.

Cook 1992:583 describes how the current pedagogical paradigm could change, if the objective of language learning were to produce an L2 learner who is not “an imitation native speaker, but a person who can stand between the two languages, using both when appropriate.” He advocates adopting “the successful L2 user rather than the native speaker (NS) as a model for the L2 learner” (Cook 2000:329), emphasizing the value of the non-native speaker teacher as a role model, one who can inspire students by being a personal example of an achievable ideal (Cook 1992;Cook 2000;Cook 2002).

Much of the questioning of the native speaker model, with the exception of Rampton, takes place in the context of ESL/EFL teaching. English

enjoys a privileged position and, therefore, so do those identified as native speakers of English. This raises the issue of World Englishes, in which the so-called native varieties of English, considered to include the macro-dialects of American, British and Australian, are considered superior to varieties in which English is learned as a second or foreign language, such as in Asian and African varieties (e.g. Quirk 1990). Recall the preference for Anglo teachers of English discussed above.

There may be less insistence on the need to reevaluate the validity of the native speaker supremacy construct when the language in question is a minority one, and those who are perceived as its native speakers are members of less hegemonious groups. One criterion on which native speaker teachers have been judged superior to non-native speaker teachers is the ability to impart cultural knowledge (Lederer 1981). Medgyes 1994 (cited in Kershaw 1996:9), discussing EFL, asserts that students “do not necessarily need or want the cultural baggage of the language”. Would this same statement have been made if the language referred to were one other than English?

Kramsch 1997:364 argues that acquisition of the target language culture, even when it is a learner’s goal, may be hampered by the native speakers’ attitude toward non-native speakers: “[...] more often than not, insiders do not want outsiders to become one of them (as learners of Japanese have often experienced), and even if given the choice, most language learners would not want to become one of them.” And Cook quotes Byram 1990:87, who “talks of teaching pupils ‘intercultural communicative competence’, which gives them the ability to stand between two cultures, seeing both L1 and L2 cultures in a new light” (Cook 1992:583).

Regardless of what other interest students have in the target language culture, it will be seen below that participants in the present study seemed to value the instructor’s cultural knowledge, insofar as it was considered to equip the instructor with superior sociolinguistic competence.

4. Research on student perceptions of non-native speaker language instructors

The debate over who is a native speaker centers on questions of linguistic proficiency alone versus cultural affiliation, and the issue of native versus non-native speakers as teachers likewise involves popular conceptions of what it means to know a language, the dichotomies of intuitive versus explicit knowledge, and the awareness of learner difficulties versus greater access to idiomatic speech and cultural norms.

Studies of reactions to non-native speakers have focused on what types of errors in their speech are acceptable or unacceptable to native speakers, and what factors in the listeners' backgrounds influence their reception of non-native speech (Galloway 1980; Ludwig 1982; Gynan 1985a; Gynan 1985b; Schairer 1992; Llurda 1995).

On the specific issue of non-native speakers as language teachers, work has been done on differences in native speaker and non-native speaker instructors' methods and classroom behavior (Árva & Medgyes 2000), including their evaluation of non-native speaker students' oral production (Ludwig 1982), their evaluation of written production (Takashima 1987; Kassen 1988; Porte 1999⁴), use of codeswitching (Macaro 2005), discourse strategies (Cots & Díaz 2005), preparation and training (Medgyes 1994, Braine 1999, Liu 2005, Llurda 2005, Derwing & Munro 2005), sensitivity to learner difficulties (McNeill 2005), and self-perceptions (Braine 2005, Llurda & Huguet 2003, Inbar-Lourie 2005, Rajagopalan 2005).⁵

The literature available on student perceptions of non-native speakers as language instructors also concentrates on ESL and EFL (Benke & Medgyes 2005, Pacek 2005, Lasagabaster & Sierra 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra 2005). Lasagabaster and Sierra surveyed EFL students in the Basque Country, Spain. They noted a preference for native speaker teachers in the areas of teaching vocabulary, pronunciation and culture, and a preference for non-native speakers in teaching grammar and learning strategies.

5. Research questions

The present study investigated university students' perceptions of language teachers' effectiveness based on whether or not the teachers are native speakers or non-native speakers. A native speaker is an individual who is a proficient user of a language which for him or her was or has been the language of instruction from elementary school onward and/or the language consistently used at home by the speaker with at least one family member. A non-native speaker is an individual who is a proficient user of a language which for him or her was not or has not been the language of instruction from elementary school onward nor the language consistently used at home by the speaker with at least one family member.

⁴See Porte 1999 for a good bibliography of studies comparing native and non-native speaker EFL instructors' evaluation of student writing.

⁵For an excellent review of theses and dissertations on non-native English teachers, see Braine 2005.

The foregoing are working definitions used by the author. Survey respondents were not expected to have exact information on the linguistic histories of their teachers. Nevertheless, the author was confident that students would be able to categorize past and present instructors and their own family members by native speaker status, despite the potential circularity of the definition of a native speaker as discussed above.

The research questions are as follows. First, what strengths do students believe native and non-native speakers, respectively, have as instructors? Second, are there any correlations between student perceptions and the student's target language? Third, are there any correlations between student perceptions and the presence of a native speaker of the target language in the student's family?

In regard to the first research question, information about students' beliefs concerning how their language teacher's native speaker status affects quality of instruction is useful to language educators. First, it gives us a more systematic look at what these beliefs actually are. It may help us 'educate the client', or raise students' linguistic awareness, when they express beliefs that are not supported by linguistic or pedagogic research. For example, when students say that a native speaker know more about their language, we might ask students to explain a certain feature of their own L1 or to delineate dialect differences. Such an exercise would demonstrate how a native speaker may have less conscious knowledge of the nuances of his or her L1.

Students who express concerns about the pronunciation of non-native speaker instructors could be counseled to take advantage of the non-native speaker's slower speech, and encouraged to see this as one more reason not to limit their TL exposure to inside the classroom. This is in line with current pedagogic theory, which promotes learner-centered instruction and a concomitant student ownership of the learning process.

In regard to the second research question, this investigation compares ESL students and students of Spanish, thus incorporating the variable of whether the language is being studied as a second or foreign one. Despite the considerable presence of Spanish in the city in which this research was conducted, this language is not commonly used –nor need it be used– outside the classroom by students taking college Spanish courses. In contrast, the ESL students are forced to use English in many facets of their daily life, both on and off campus.

The third research question, regarding what effect the presence of a native speaker of the target language in the student's family might have on the student's perceptions, was considered relevant in light of the ever increas-

ing population of heritage speakers in all language classrooms in the United States.

6. Methodology

The survey was administered in the Spring 2005 term to intermediate and advanced students of ESL and Spanish at a four year college in the U.S. It was considered desirable for all of the participants to have had some experience with language courses, and it was necessary for the ESL students to be at a level which would permit them to read and respond to survey items in English. The ESL students were speakers of several different first languages, such as Russian, Spanish, Chinese, and Gujarati; the Spanish cohort included L1 speakers of English, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Finnish, and other languages.

The survey consisted of three sections (see Appendix A). In Section I, respondents used a five point Likert scale to indicate their agreement with twenty statements regarding native and non-native speaker instructors' effectiveness in various areas, from 'strongly agree' (= 5) to 'strongly disagree' (= 1). Mirror statements—in which the same statement is given twice, once to describe native speakers and once to describe non-native speakers—were avoided, as too many of these make the experience of filling out a questionnaire monotonous, leading to careless or inaccurate responses (Dörnyei 2003:35).⁶ However, there were a few uses of this type of statement on the questionnaires.

Section II solicited demographic information and Section III asked respondents to write comments on their answers to Section I.

The total sample was 55 students: 24 students of ESL and 31 students of Spanish, ranging in age from 18 to 65, with a mean age of 25. There were 23 men and 32 women. Sixteen percent of the participants (N=9) reported having a family member who was a native speaker of the target language. Seventy-five percent (N=41) had had experience with both native and non-native speaker language instructors, while 16% (N=9) had had experience with non-native speakers only and 9% (N=5) had had experience with native speakers only.

⁶During piloting of instruments for the present investigation, some respondents gave identical responses to mirror statements, i.e. rating native and non-native speakers the same, even when such a rating was at variance with the respondent's comments in a different section of the questionnaire.

7. Results

The mean results for the Likert scales in Section I of the questionnaires are given in Appendix B. Significant correlations are summarized in Table 1; the most salient results are discussed below.

7.1. NATIVE SPEAKER STATUS VS. ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

General preference for a native speaker instructor, as elicited in the statement “In general, I would prefer to have a [target language] teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]” was high for both groups, but it was highest for the ESL students, with a mean of 4.04 versus 3.65 for the Spanish students. Having a family member who was a native speaker of the target language correlated positively with an overall preference for a native speaker instructor (sig. .021; $p < 0.05$). Nevertheless, both groups also indicated agreement with the statement that an instructor’s academic qualifications are more important than native speaker status, at 3.96 and 3.87, respectively, for the ESL and Spanish groups. However, respondents who had a native speaker of the target language as a family member were significantly less likely to agree with this statement (sig. .041; $p < 0.05$).

7.2. IDENTIFICATION WITH AND EASE OF SPEAKING TO NATIVE OR NON-NATIVE SPEAKER

In response to the statements “I can identify more with a teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]” versus “I can identify more with a teacher who is a non-native speaker of [the target language]”, the ESL group expressed a significantly stronger affinity with native speaker instructors, with means of 3.3 versus 2.9 (sig. .038; $p < 0.05$). For students of Spanish it was the reverse, with a mean of 2.7 for identification with native speaker, and 3.2 for non-native speaker instructors. For both groups, there was a significant correlation between having a family member who was native speaker of the target language and self-identification with a native speaker instructor (sig. .009; $p < 0.01$). Having had a non-native speaker instructor was a negative factor; respondents with this experience were significantly less likely to agree with the statement “I can identify more with a teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]” (sig. .034; $p < 0.05$).

Both groups favored native over non-native speakers in regard to their personal comfort in speaking to the instructor. The ESL group again was

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1				p<0.05			
2			p<0.05 negative		p<0.05 negative		
3	p<0.05		p<0.05 negative				
4							p<0.05 negative
5	p<0.05						
6	p<0.01			p<0.05		p<0.01	
7	p<0.01		p<0.01 negative	p<0.01			
8	p<0.01						
9				p<0.05 negative			
10	p<0.01						
11		p<0.01					
12				p<0.05 negative			

Independent variables:

A. ESL is target language. B. Spanish is target language. C. Experience of having had non-native speaker instructor. D. Having a family member who is a native speaker of the target language. E. Language learning experience limited to the current target language. F. Number of years studying the target language. G. Age of student

Dependent variables (student's attitude toward):

1. General preference for native speaker instructor. 2. Greater comfort speaking to native speaker instructor. 3. Identify more with native speaker instructor. 4. Native speaker instructor better at teaching culture. 5. Non-native speaker instructor better at teaching grammar. 6. Non-native speaker instructor better at teaching spelling. 7. Native speaker instructor's speech easier to understand. 8. Native speaker instructor better at teaching pronunciation. 9. Perception that native speaker instructors grade harder. 10. Exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. 11. Use of students' L1 to explain grammar and give test instructions. 12. Instructor's academic qualifications more important than native speakerhood.

Table 1: Summary of significant correlations

more in agreement with the statement “I feel more comfortable speaking to a teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]”, than was the Spanish group, with respective means of 3.5 and 3.1. Additionally, the gap between the means for the latter statement and its parallel, “I feel more comfortable speaking to a teacher who is a non-native speaker of [the target language]” was also wider for the ESL group, at 3.5 vs. 2.4, compared to the Spanish group at 3.1 vs. 2.7. However, there were two significant negative correlations to agreement with the statement “I feel more comfortable speaking to a teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]”. The strongest factor was, as above, having had the experience of having a non-native speaker instructor (sig. .012; $p < 0.05$), followed by a lack of experience learning another second or foreign language in addition to the respondent’s current target language (sig. .041; $p < 0.05$). This would seem to indicate that the broader a student’s experiences were with regard to how many languages studied and experience with both native and non-native speaker instructors, the less likely he or she would be to feel comfortable or identify exclusively with a native speaker teacher.

7.3. NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS AND CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

The statement “I can learn more about the cultures of [target language]-speaking countries from a teacher who is a native speaker”, elicited agreement from both ESL and Spanish students, with respective means of 3.75 and 3.68. There was a negative correlation with the respondent’s age (sig. 0.33; $p < 0.05$); i.e. the younger the student the less he or she was apt to agree that a native speaker teacher would be superior in the teaching of culture.

Respondents’ comments on this issue are shown in (7) – (11):

- (7) I believe that native Spanish-speaking instructors have the added advantage of knowing Spanish culture, since they were born into it, so it would be easier for them to relate to what they’re teaching, whereas non-native Spanish-speaking instructors don’t have that firsthand knowledge for themselves. (2.1)⁷
- (8) I do feel that it is more likely that a native speaker would be able to portray the Spanish culture and the ways of their people, as they have been exposed their whole lives to the language. (2.2)

⁷The first number in parentheses following informants’ comments indicates that student’s target language: 1 for ESL, 2 for Spanish. The second number is an arbitrary subject code.

- (9) What really got me *excited* about Spanish were cultural activities and I think native speakers are more adept in this area—it is more personal. (2.5)
- (10) I prefer to have a native Spanish speaking teacher because, I can learn more about the culture and customs. (2.20)
- (11) [...] the native English teacher knows more American culture than the non-native teacher. (1.8)

Familiarity with idiomatic uses of a language is a particular manifestation of cultural knowledge, and respondents made explicit mention of this, as seen in (12) and (13):

- (12) I would prefer a native Spanish speaking teacher because they know first hand colloquialisms or slangs [...] (2.19)
- (13) I do think that sometimes native Spanish speakers [...] know more everyday usage of the language. (2.30)

Finally, echoing remarks by Roberts & Harden 1997:22, quoted above, two respondents mentioned the complementarity of native and non-native speaker teachers' perspectives on language and culture:

- (14) Although in some cases a native speaker may have provided more insight and information about the Spanish culture, the perspective of the non-native speaker offered its own unique picture as well. It was not necessarily easier—or harder—to relate to a non-native speaker. A more important aspect was the difference in perspective that each teacher—whether native or non-native—provided, without which it may have been difficult to fully appreciate the language and background culture. (2.28)
- (15) Both non-native and native Spanish speaking professors are advantageous to non-native Spanish speaking students. You receive a variety of accents, vocabulary and levels of experience. (2.31)

7.4. PRONUNCIATION AND AURAL COMPREHENSION

The ESL students were significantly (sig. .003; $p < 0.01$) more in agreement with the statement that native speakers of the target language are better at

teaching pronunciation, with respective means of 4.33 and 3.55 for the ESL and Spanish groups. The Spanish students found the speech of non-native speaker instructors easier to understand than that of native speaker instructors, with means of 3.06 and 2.55, while for ESL students it was the reverse, with 3.50 in favor of the ease of comprehension of the speech of native speakers and only 2.88 for non-native speakers. Again, the difference between the ESL and Spanish groups was significant, with ESL students more apt to agree with the statement "I can understand more of the English spoken by teachers who are native speakers of English" (sig. 0.001 ; $p < 0.01$). Having had experience with a non-native speaker instructor was also a factor once more, with a negative correlation between this and agreement with the statement "I can understand more of [the target language] spoken by teachers who are native speakers of [the target language]" (sig. .005; $p < 0.01$). In other words, having had a non-native speaker teacher seems to have a negative effect, if not on the student's actual ability to understand the speech of a native speaker teacher, at least on the student's confidence in his or her capacity to do so. In their comments concerning pronunciation, some respondents mentioned accent, which in some cases was believed to be less authentic even if it were not an absolute impediment to student comprehension:

- (16) I do think that sometimes native Spanish speakers have better pronunciation. (2.30)
- (17) I think native English speaker has a better pronunciation and it is easier to learn his accent. (1.1)
- (18) To pronounce in a right way I need native speaker. (1.4)
- (19) I agree that an ESL teacher should be American because, we learn to speak the language correctly and with the accent they use. (1.16)
- (20) Native speaker can improve the pronunciation of the student. (1.24)
- (21) Non-native people speak something, maybe their English is not good (I mean the pronunciation), it is hard for students to understand. (1.23)
- (22) Native can speak better English. They are easier to understand than a non-native speaker of English for ESL student. (1.24)
- (23) As far as accents, beyond basic language classes, they don't really matter as long as they don't interfere with the students' understanding of the class material. (2.3)

- (24) I don't think a native professor is better than a non-native. I feel that the non-natives professors although may have an accent know the materials very well and speak properly. (2.4)

In contrast to the ESL student who maintained that native speakers are easier to understand than non-natives, two respondents praised non-native speakers' rate of speech:

- (25) In general, I prefer having a Spanish teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish because it is easier to understand them than teachers who are native speakers of Spanish. Native Spanish-speaking teachers talk rapidly while their counterparts talk less rapidly, giving a chance for what they're saying to be digested. (2.1)
- (26) These [non-native speaker] professors, I found, spoke slower, pronounced their words clearly [...] (2.31)

7.5. EFFECTIVENESS AT TEACHING GRAMMAR AND SPECIFIC SKILLS

The ESL students had significantly (sig. .026; $p < 0.05$) more confidence in non-native speaker instructors' ability to teach grammar, coming closer to agreement with the statement "A teacher who is a non-native speaker of [the target language] can help me more with grammar" than the Spanish group, with respective means of 3.38 and 2.77. The ESL group was also significantly (sig. .004; $p < 0.01$) more likely than the Spanish group to believe that non-native speakers could help more with spelling, with means of 3.25 and 2.42, respectively. Interestingly, respondents from both groups who had a family member who was a native speaker of the target language were also significantly more likely to believe that non-native speakers could help more with spelling (sig. .018; $p < 0.05$), as were those who had spent more years studying the target language (sig. .000; $p < 0.01$).

Respondents' comments expressed the opinion that grammar and reading can be taught by non-native speakers, but that native speakers are essential to teach oral skills. Three questionnaires were returned with remarks pertaining explicitly to this issue:

- (27) Non-natives are enveloped in learning a grammatically correct and proper language while natives speak the language the way you would actually hear it in another country. To read literature therefore, I might prefer a non-native whereas to travel, a native speaker might be more helpful. (2.2)

- (28) Grammar, however, has always been easier to learn from non-native speakers—put in terms that I understand, easier to make comparisons to English grammar. [...] I think though that I defer to English with non-native speakers, knowing I have the option. (2.5)
- (29) I prefer to have an ESL teacher who is a native speaker of English. If I want to know only about Grammar or Reading, I don't have to have a native speaker. (1.4)

7.6. ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES

Both groups leaned toward agreement with the statement that teachers who are non-native speakers of the target language are better at understanding students' difficulties, with means of 3.48 and 3.71 for the Spanish and ESL students, respectively. There were ten comments that made explicit mention of this, with only one comment at variance with the positive view of this aspect of non-native speaker teachers. Following are some examples:

- (30) The non-native professors can relate to me because they know about the struggle that we non-native students have to go through. (2.4)
- (31) Non-native Spanish speakers understand the problems that students who are learning face. Therefore they are better able to explain and identify problems. (2.15)
- (32) Non-native teachers of Spanish seem to be more compassionate with students because they know the struggle students have. (2.25)
- (33) [...] a non-native teacher of Spanish could provide some hints that may have helped them learn a language. (2.29)
- (34) Non-native teachers may understand better if I will make a certain mistakes in grammar, because he/she came through the same problems I have. (1.1)
- (35) I believe if the E.S.L. teacher is not a native English speaker he/she knew how's like to be in E.S.L. class, how difficult it's to learn another new language. Therefore I believe a non-native English speaker is better to understand our difficulties. (1.18)

7.7. USE OF L1 IN THE CLASSROOM

The two groups diverged on the issue of the use of L1 in the classroom. Students of Spanish disagreed (mean: 2.10) with the statement that Spanish teachers should not use English at all in the classroom, while ESL students were significantly (sig. .000; $p < 0.01$) more in agreement (mean 3.71) with the parallel statement that ESL teachers should not use the students' native language at all in the classroom. In concordance with this, ESL students disagreed (mean 2.5) with the statement that ESL teachers should use the students' native language to explain grammar and to give instructions on exams, while Spanish students, with a mean of 3.45, were significantly closer to agreement on the same issue (sig. .002; $p < 0.01$).

There were three comments in explicit support of exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, coming from one ESL student and two Spanish students. Interestingly, one of the latter identified himself as a former ESL student:

- (36) I learned English as a second language in U.S. In that class, nobody (teachers) spoke my mother language. At the first, it was hard to understand other English language. But if teacher use only English during the class, students learn faster. So, I want professor in the Spanish class speak only Spanish in the class. (2.22)
- (37) It is possible to learn Spanish when the teacher only speaks in Spanish. I believe it is better for the students to pick up the language because it forces the students to actually listen and speak in Spanish instead of always relying on English. (2.23)
- (38) I like my teacher can speak English to me instead of my native language because I don't rely on my native language. I will learn English faster. (1.6)

There were five comments from respondents who were not in favor of the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, expressing the opinion that it is desirable for the instructor to be proficient in the students' common language, for classroom use:

- (39) I believe that English should be used in the classroom to explain instructions or specific subject material for everyone to grasp a better understanding of the subject matter being presented. (2.1)

- (40) It helps if they speak English sometimes because then I know for sure what I am doing. The only thing that is a problem sometimes is if the teacher had a strong or difficult accent or if they speak very little or no English. (2.14)
- (41) I think native Spanish teachers are good because they force students to practice speaking the language. At the same time, they tend to be so pompous about the language that they even want to explain grammar and such in Spanish which puts students at a disadvantage. (2.26)
- (42) I prefer to have a professor whose native language is not Spanish, because they can always go back and forth between languages to correct us when needed. (2.27)
- (43) I don't agree that Spanish teachers should only use Spanish in the classroom. A teacher could explain something in English to help me understand it better [...]. (2.29)

7.8. GRADING PRACTICES OF NATIVE VS. NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

Some studies have reported a greater tolerance for errors on the part of native speaker teachers (Ludwig 1982; Takashima 1987; Kassen 1988; Porte 1999). In the present study, respondents with a family member who is a native speaker of the target language were significantly less apt to agree with the statement “[Target language] teachers who are native speakers of [the target language] grade harder” (sig. .019; $p < 0.05$). There was little difference between the two groups overall. Nor was there much difference between their responses to the aforementioned statement—a mean of 2.83 for the ESL students and 2.58 for the Spanish group—and to the statement “[Target language] teachers who are non-native speakers of [the target language] grade easier”, with means of 2.63 and 2.45 for ESL and Spanish, respectively.

7.9. NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHER BASED ON LEVEL OF INSTRUCTION

The appropriateness of native versus non-native speaker instructors for different levels of language courses, from beginning to advanced, has been discussed by other scholars. Roberts & Harden 1997 maintain that an advanced learner may reach a point at which he or she will have nothing more to learn

from a non-native speaker, insofar as the student's abilities and knowledge will be on par with those of the teacher.

More advanced students who filled out a pilot questionnaire for the present study gave different preferences according to level. One respondent stated that at the beginning levels the instructor's native or non-native status was unimportant, but that at the advanced level native speakers were more helpful. Another respondent wrote: "Non-native, but fluent [double underline] speakers should make a good beginner teacher of a language. In an advanced level course, a native speaker may be more preferable" (Callahan, unpublished data). Neither of these informants gave reasons for this opinion, but Roberts & Harden 1997 suggest that there may indeed be a case for assigning tasks to non-native and native speaker instructors according to the students' level (see also Takashima 1987). Roberts & Harden 1997:10 contend that once the student's skill level begins to approximate that of the non-native speaker instructor, target language use between student and teacher becomes superfluous:

The picture, however, changes dramatically when it comes to the more advanced stages of the learning process, i.e. when the learner has acquired sufficient proficiency to render any surrogate communication with a surrogate counterpart unnecessary or even counterproductive; a stage at which the learner's level is approximating to that of the non-native teacher and both might as well communicate in their mother tongue.

It should be noted that the proficiency level described above by Roberts and Harden is more advanced than that attained by many university students in the United States during their undergraduate tenure.

How a common L1 might hinder a student's learning from a non-native speaker instructor is mentioned by Roberts & Harden 1997:7: "There is more 'naturalness' for learners about speaking to them in their own language than in speaking to non-native-speaker teachers in a language foreign to both parties". A participant in the pilot study also alluded to this issue, stating: "I feel more of a priority to learn to communicate with this [native speaker] professor in their native language [...]" (Callahan, unpublished data). Finally, it is also mentioned by a respondent in the present study, cited above and reproduced here:

(44) I think though that I defer to English with non-native speakers, knowing I have the option. (2.5)

Lasagabaster & Sierra 2002:134 incorporated the issue of instruction level into their questionnaire of EFL students in Spain, finding an increased preference for native speaker teachers at higher levels. This question was not explicitly posed in the present study; however, two of the participants addressed the issue of native versus non-native speakers for different levels in their comments. In general, the comments indicate a preference—or at least a tolerance—for non-native speakers at the beginning levels, and for native speakers at the higher levels. One respondent summed up the strengths and weaknesses for each type of instructor:

- (45) Being a good ESL teacher is not a matter of native or non-native speaker of English. It is the matter of experiences. However there are many things that native and non-native better than the other. Native can speak better English. They are easier to understand than a non-native speaker of English for ESL student. Non-native can understand students needs; spelling and grammar are the major point they teach in a ESL class; while most native speaker do not teach grammar, because it is natural to them they believe it do not have to be taught. One of the major problem that ESL student have is grammar, it must be taught before ESL student can master English. I believe that the best way for an ESL student to learn English is that: first taught by non-native speakers, because that ESL student need to learn the rules of English; this is what it need for the basic understanding of the language. Then secondly taught by native speaker. Native speaker can improve the pronunciation of the student. This is the best way base on my experience as an ESL student. (1.24)

8. Conclusions

The first research question, regarding the strengths students believe native and non-native speaker language teachers have, can be discussed in general terms, before moving to consider the second question, the effect of the student's target language on those beliefs. While there was agreement between the two cohorts on some points, there were differences in degree. In general terms, native speaker instructors were rated as better at teaching pronunciation and cultural knowledge. Non-native speakers were considered to be better at teaching grammar and at understanding students' difficulties learning the language.

Correlations with the target language were most salient for the ESL group.

The ESL students rated non-native speakers higher on the ability to teach grammar. They were more in favor of exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. They expressed greater ease of understanding the target language when spoken by native speaker teachers, and expressed stronger affirmation of native speakers' superiority at teaching pronunciation. This could be reflective of two factors. The worldwide situation of ESL/EFL instruction, in which 80% of teachers are non-native speakers of English (Canagarajah 1999), could mean that the non-native speaker teachers with which these ESL students have had contact in their countries of origin are less likely to have had exposure to the English varieties to which the students are now being exposed, in the U.S. Hence, for these students, the non-native models of the target language to which they have been exposed may not compare favorably to the numerous native ones available to them. In addition, the fact that these students are studying their target language as a second language, in a country where it is the dominant one, means that they have multiple opportunities to hear it from a variety of sources outside the classroom.

In contrast, the non-native speaker teachers with which the Spanish cohort has had contact, notwithstanding the above-mentioned observations of Gutiérrez-Candelaria 2000, may have had more opportunities to acquire a native-like accent than the previous language teachers of the other cohort, both by living in a Spanish-speaking country and by having interactions with native Spanish speakers in the U.S., particularly in the area in which this research was conducted.

The effect of having had a non-native speaker language instructor, which was not an initial research question, manifested itself in a less wholesale preference for native speaker teachers, although it did not alter the overall preference for same. A negative correlation emerged between experience with a non-native speaker teacher and agreement with three statements: the one regarding self-identification with a native speaker instructor, the one about feeling more comfortable speaking to a native speaker instructor, and the one about understanding more of the target language when spoken by a native speaker teacher.

The third and final research concerned the effect of having a family member who was a native speaker of the target language on the student's perceptions of native and non-native speaker teachers. Respondents who had a native speaker in their family expressed more self-identification with and more overall preference for native speaker instructors. They considered native speakerhood more important than academic qualifications. Having a native

speaker in one's family also correlated with more confidence in non-native speaker instructors' ability to teach spelling, and with less of a perception that native speaker instructors grade harder.

A greater preference for and stronger self-identification with native speaker teachers is not surprising for students who have intimate contact with native speakers of the target language within their own family. Respondents' lower confidence in native speaker instructors' ability to help them with spelling may stem from the circumstances of these participants' family members. Family members who are native speakers of Spanish may have had limited opportunities to develop writing skills in that language. The family members mentioned who are native speakers of English were still children, the immigrant ESL students' younger relatives who had been born in the United States.

To conclude, then, the present study as well as previous ones show that language students express an overall preference for native speaker teachers. This need not conflict with Cook's recommendation of the proficient L2 user as a more appropriate goal to which language learners should aspire. Although the non-native speaker teacher more directly models the successful L2 user than does the native speaker, students are capable of making this discrimination on their own. They can profit from native speaker instructors' intuitive competence even if they cannot reproduce their performance. Nor should non-native speaker instructors despair of ever reaching equality with their native-speaking peers. As this study has shown, students are able to perceive and appreciate the different strengths that characterize each type of teacher. Language learners are ultimately better served by having exposure to a variety of speaker models.

Appendix A: The questionnaires

ESL Questionnaire

I. This section has statements about **native versus non-native speakers of English as teachers of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL)**. Please mark whether you **agree** or **disagree** with these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible, and please answer all of the questions. Read each statement carefully, and then answer with ONE of the following:

- SA** = Strongly Agree (Circle **SA**)
- A** = Agree (Circle **A**)
- NAND** = Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Circle **NAND**)
- D** = Disagree (Circle **D**)
- SD** = Strongly Disagree (Circle **SD**)

1. In general, I would prefer to have an ESL teacher who is a native speaker of English.
2. That the teacher be a native speaker of English matters more to me than his or her academic qualifications.
3. I feel more comfortable speaking English to a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.

4. I feel more comfortable speaking English to a teacher who is a native speaker of English.
5. I can identify better with a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.
6. I can identify better with a teacher who is a native speaker of English.
7. I can learn more about the cultures of English-speaking countries from a teacher who is a native speaker of English.
8. I can improve my reading more with a teacher who is a non-native speaker of English.
9. I can learn more vocabulary from a teacher who is a native speaker of English.
10. A teacher who is a non-native speaker of English can help me more with grammar.
11. A teacher who is a non-native speaker of English can help me more with spelling.
12. ESL teachers who are non-native speakers of English are better at understanding students' difficulties.
13. I can understand more of the English spoken by teachers who are non-native speakers of English.
14. I can understand more of the English spoken by teachers who are native speakers of English.
15. ESL teachers who are native speakers of English are better at teaching pronunciation.
16. ESL teachers who are non-native speakers of English grade easier.
17. ESL teachers who are native speakers of English grade harder.
18. ESL teachers should not use the students' native language at all in the classroom.
19. ESL teachers should use the students' native language to explain grammar and to give instructions on exams.
20. A teacher's academic qualifications matter more to me than whether or not he or she is a native speaker of English.

II. This section is about your personal background. Please answer all of the questions.

1. Your age: ___ 2. Your sex: ___ Female ___ Male
 3. What is your native language? _____
 4. Have you ever studied another language besides English?
 ___ No ___ Yes: (language) _____
 5. How long have you lived in an English-speaking country?
 For (number) _____ years, beginning when I was (number) ___ years old.
 Have you lived in another English-speaking country besides the U.S.?
 ___ No ___ Yes: (country) _____
 - For (number) _____ years, beginning when I was (number) ___ years old.
 6. Have you ever had a native speaker of English as an ESL teacher? ___ No ___ Yes
 7. Have you ever had a non-native speaker of English as an ESL teacher? ___ No ___ Yes
 8. How long have you been studying or how long did you study the English language?
 For (number) _____ years, beginning when I was (number) ___ years old.
 9. Is anyone in your family a native speaker of English? ___ No ___ Yes
- (Please circle all that apply): Grandparent(s) / Mother / Father /
 Brother(s) and/or Sister(s) / Other relative: _____

III. Please write something about why you chose the responses you did for the statements in Section I.

Spanish Questionnaire

I. This section has statements about **native versus non-native speakers of Spanish as teachers of Spanish**. Please mark whether you **agree** or **disagree** with these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible, and please answer all of the questions. Read each statement carefully, and then answer with ONE of the following:

- SA** = Strongly Agree (Circle **SA**)
A = Agree (Circle **A**)
NAND = Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Circle **NAND**)
D = Disagree (Circle **D**)
SD = Strongly Disagree (Circle **SD**)

1. In general, I would prefer to have a Spanish teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish.
2. That the teacher be a native speaker of Spanish matters more to me than his or her academic qualifications.
3. I feel more comfortable speaking Spanish to a teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish.
4. I feel more comfortable speaking Spanish to a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish.
5. I can identify better with a teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish.
6. I can identify better with a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish.

7. I can learn more about the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries from a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish.
8. I can improve my reading more with a teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish.
9. I can learn more vocabulary from a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish.
10. A teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish can help me more with grammar.
11. A teacher who is a non-native speaker of Spanish can help me more with spelling and accent marks.
12. Teachers who are non-native speakers of Spanish are better at understanding students' difficulties.
13. I can understand more of the Spanish spoken by teachers who are non-native speakers of Spanish.
14. I can understand more of the Spanish spoken by teachers who are native speakers of Spanish.
15. Spanish teachers who are native speakers of Spanish are better at teaching pronunciation.
16. Spanish teachers who are non-native speakers of Spanish grade easier.
17. Spanish teachers who are native speakers of Spanish grade harder.
18. Spanish teachers should not use English at all in the classroom.
19. Spanish teachers should use English to explain grammar and to give instructions on exams.
20. A teacher's academic qualifications matter more to me than whether or not he or she is a native speaker of Spanish.

II. This section is about your personal background. Please answer all of the questions.

1. Your age: ____ 2. Your sex: ____ Female ____ Male
3. What is your native language? _____
4. Have you ever studied another language besides Spanish?
 ____ No ____ Yes: (language) _____
5. Have you ever lived in an Spanish-speaking country?
 ____ No ____ Yes: (country) _____
 For (number) _____ years, beginning when I was (number) ____ years old.
6. Have you ever had a native speaker of Spanish as a Spanish teacher? ____ No ____ Yes
7. Have you ever had a non-native speaker of Spanish as a Spanish teacher? ____ No ____ Yes
8. How long have you been studying or how long did you study the Spanish language?
 For (number) _____ years, beginning when I was (number) ____ years old.
9. Is anyone in your family a native speaker of Spanish? ____ No ____ Yes
 (Please circle all that apply): Grandparent(s) / Mother / Father /
 Brother(s) and/or Sister(s) / Other relative: _____

III. Please write something about why you chose the responses you did for the statements in Section I.

Appendix B: Responses to Section I

ESL Questionnaire

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	24	2	5	4.04	1.197
2.	24	1	4	2.46	1.103
3.	24	1	4	2.42	.929
4.	24	2	5	3.50	.885
5.	24	1	5	2.88	.947
6.	24	2	5	3.29	.955
7.	24	2	5	3.75	.897
8.	24	1	5	2.58	.929
9.	24	1	5	3.63	1.135
10.	24	2	5	3.38	.970
11.	24	1	5	3.25	1.152
12.	24	1	5	3.71	.955
13.	24	1	5	2.88	1.076
14.	24	1	5	3.50	.933
15.	24	2	5	4.33	.868
16.	24	1	5	2.63	.924
17.	24	2	5	2.83	.963
18.	24	1	5	3.71	1.459
19.	24	1	4	2.50	.978
20.	24	2	5	3.96	.908

Spanish Questionnaire

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	31	1	5	3.65	1.226
2.	31	1	5	2.29	1.071
3.	31	1	5	2.71	1.039
4.	31	1	5	3.10	1.106
5.	31	1	5	3.19	1.250
6.	31	1	5	2.71	1.039
7.	31	2	5	3.68	1.077
8.	31	1	4	2.32	.791
9.	31	1	5	3.55	1.234
10.	31	1	4	2.77	.956
11.	31	1	5	2.42	.886
12.	31	1	5	3.48	1.235
13.	31	1	5	3.06	1.181
14.	31	1	5	2.55	.961
15.	31	1	5	3.55	.995
16.	31	1	5	2.45	.925
17.	31	1	5	2.58	.992
18.	31	1	5	2.10	1.274
19.	31	1	5	3.45	1.121
20.	31	2	5	3.87	.957

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