

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON NATIVE SPEAKER TEACHERS (And new roles for *collaboratori linguistici*?)

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Abstract – In this paper I examine the profile of the *collaboratori ed esperti linguistici* (formerly *lettori*) in the light of a thirty year old and ongoing debate contrasting the role of native English speaking teachers (NESTs) with that of non-native colleagues (NNESTs), and against a background of rapid change in English language requirements in Italian and European universities. The picture which emerges from the PRIN survey of 75 *CEL* is of a professional category which is largely a product of the ‘communicative revolution’ in language teaching, and which is less wedded to native speaker norms than its NNEST colleagues. I conclude that the traditional distinction between native and non-native teacher is increasingly problematic, and potentially misleading, while there are many possible future roles for *collaboratori linguistici* which transcend the basic requirement of ‘nativespeakerism’.

Keywords: native speaker; *collaboratore linguistico*; Standard English; gatekeeping.

1. NEST or Non NEST: An ongoing debate

The debate on the comparative merits of native and non-native English speaking teachers (NESTs and NNESTs), and whether the former have an innate advantage, began more than three decades ago. This notion has been amply discussed, and consistently refuted, in (among others) Phillipson (1992), Cook (1999), Bhatt (2002), and especially Mahboob (2004, 2005, 2010).

For years, professional ELT organizations such as TESOL, in its 2005 ‘position statement’, and IATEFL, in the plenary address given by Silvana Richardson at its 2016 conference, have called for an end to discriminatory practices by employers seeking to recruit only native speaker teachers, but the practice continues. An extract from a recent (2018) job advertisement on an online TEFL website, which makes no mention of teaching qualifications, seems to imply that the untrained monolingual NEST is best suited to deliver a ‘laid back and relaxed style’, and, as a result, presumably, effortless language learning:

The roles involves [sic] teaching young kids in Asia the basics of the English language [sic] in a laid back and relaxed style¹

For Mahboob (2005), the native speaker fallacy – the notion that the ideal language teacher is a native speaker – is grounded in Chomsky (1965) and the claim that the supreme arbiter about what is, or is not, acceptable in a language is the ‘ideal speaker listener’ in a ‘completely homogeneous speech community’. This is an abstraction, of course, which served Chomsky well in his elaboration of deep structure, generative grammar, and ultimately universal grammar, but which (in the opinion of Mahboob) was adopted uncritically by applied linguists in ‘ideologically loaded’ SLA terminology, such as *fossilization* (Selinker 1972) and, more generally, *deviation* from a native speaker norm (Ellis 1994, p 15). Something of this attitudinal loading is to be found in the 2000 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which frequently compares learner levels against native speaker norms which are, for most second language learners, unattainable. This is best illustrated in the much-quoted description of Level B2 Conversation:

Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.

Significantly, the CEFR contains a scale for ‘Understanding conversation between native speakers’ but no similar scale for ‘Understanding conversation between non-native speakers’, suggesting that the prime reason for learning a foreign language is to understand native speakers and to be able to communicate with them. This is a presupposition enshrined in the rationale of all major English language certifications currently on the market.

In this way, orthodox SLA theory as expounded by Selinker, and the immensely influential classification of levels of proficiency which is the CEFR, reinforced the notion of an unbridgeable divide between native and non-native speakers which in turn contributed to a lack of self-esteem for NNESTs, noted by a number of researchers. Bernat (2009) refers to this as ‘the imposter syndrome’, suggesting that many NNESTs felt that they were teaching under false pretences.

Bernat’s findings were based on non-native teachers working or studying in Australia, but the doubts and inadequacies they experienced are played to in the following advertisement for a summer ‘refresher’ course for

¹ Accessed November 2018, and no longer available at <https://uk.jobrapido.com/jobpreview/543648566>.

English teachers in Italy, seen recently (2019) in the window of a travel agency in Mestre (mainland Venice):

Aggiorna la tua certificazione TEFL con un corso specifico dell'English Language Centre (ELC). I corsi TEFL sono pensati per docenti di inglese non madre lingua che desiderano rinfrescare le proprie competenze didattiche e migliorare l'inglese.²

The announcement reads like a 'two for the price of one' offer, in which the refresher course in methodology will inevitably involve the opportunity to 'improve your English'; the premise being that, whoever you are, and whatever teaching qualifications and experience you may have, as a non-native teacher your English will need 'improving'.³

This deficit model of the NNEST has been countered by arguments stressing the qualities and insights that a non-native teacher can bring to the classroom, such as knowledge of the students' L1 and empathy deriving from awareness of language difficulties which students face. Furthermore, numerous surveys have shown that students do not necessarily prefer to have a native speaker teacher; for a recent overview and survey involving Italian students see Christiansen (2017).

Such is the background to the PRIN investigation of teacher attitudes (of both NESTs and non-NESTs) in Italy to the rapidly growing phenomenon of ELF which is the subject of this volume. Teachers in secondary education (NNESTs) and in universities (NESTs) were asked to reflect on their own status (as NESTs or NNESTs), to share their opinions on methodological practices, and in so doing to reveal their degree of 'ELF awareness'. In this paper we shall examine the responses of the native speaker *collaboratori linguistici* working in Italian universities, compare them with those of the secondary school teachers, and suggest that the NNEST- NEST divide has been attenuated by the advent of ELF, and in any case is not likely to be useful for many new language teaching contexts already developing in schools and universities.

² Update your TEFL certification with a dedicated course at the English Language Centre (ELDC). Our courses are designed for non mothertongue teachers who wish to refresh their teaching skills and improve their English.

³ The window of a language school in the same town judiciously opts for ambiguity by stating that it has 'insegnanti di lingua inglese', ('English language teachers') with no reference to their 'mother tongue'.

2. Native speakers in Italian university language education: The *collaboratori ed esperti linguistici*

No fewer than 75 *collaboratori ed esperti linguistici* (CEL) responded to the invitation to participate in the survey. This represents a considerable percentage of the total number of CEL currently working in Italy (around 1,000, for all languages taught in universities). As far as we are aware, no similar large scale survey has been carried out with CEL; indeed, there is very little published research on their role as university language teachers. This is probably due in part to the ambiguity of their status in the universities, and an extenuating legal battle about whether or not they should be considered as teaching staff ('personale docente'). Daloiso and Balboni, for example, in their (2012) volume on language teaching in Italian universities, make only brief passing references to CEL.

The category was created in 1994 to replace the existing category of *lettori di madrelingua*, a move which downgraded the role to that of technical/administrative support staff. The ambiguity surrounding the role and function of CEL or *lettori* (the earlier term by which they continue to be known) as language teachers is palpable in the Wikipedia entry for 'lettorato':⁴

Il termine lettore indica le mansioni, gli obblighi, i diritti di questo particolare insegnante e si fonde con la sua figura accademica e giuridica, indicando spesso la durata temporale dell'incarico. I lettori di lingua straniera sono presenti in tutte le università italiane, dove circa il 90% dell'insegnamento linguistico è affidato ai ricercatori di madrelingua

in which the writer creates a sense of vagueness by using the word 'particolare' in the phrase 'questo particolare insegnante', and erroneously uses the term *ricercatori* instead of *lettori*. It does, however, identify the role of 'native speaker' (*madrelingua*), which has continued to be a recruiting prerequisite, whereas teaching qualifications (such as British or American qualifications in TEFL and/or TESOL) may take second place as criteria for recruitment, if at all.

However, *madre lingua* (native speaker) is a problematic concept. In job advertisements for CEL (*bandi di selezione pubblica*) it is typically defined with a circular argument, the key factor being 'naturalness' of expression:

⁴ [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettorato_\(universit%C3%A0\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lettorato_(universit%C3%A0)), accessed 13.01.2020

Sono da considerare di madrelingua i cittadini stranieri o italiani che, per derivazione familiare o vissuto linguistico, abbiano la capacità di esprimersi con naturalezza nella lingua madre di appartenenza.⁵

The difficulty of making judgements in universities about what is, or what is not, someone's 'mother tongue' extends to other recruitment scenarios, such as the decision to waive a language certification requirement on the basis of a 'mother tongue' qualification, adopted by many universities when admitting students to English Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. For example, the fact that a potential student has completed their secondary education in an English medium school, especially if in an English speaking country, may be considered to guarantee competences similar to those of a 'mother tongue' speaker. However, equating the term 'mother tongue' to a level of language competence mapped by the CEFR is at best inappropriate and may lead to wrong choices being made. In the applied linguistics literature, the term L1 is preferred to mother tongue, since it refers less ambiguously to the language with which the speaker is most familiar.

In our survey, four respondents answered 'no' to the question 'Do you consider yourself to be a native speaker of English?', raising further doubts about the usefulness of the term as a defining quality of the CEL. However, most respondents (77%) believed that 'being a native speaker can contribute to making a successful teacher of English today'. The NNEST secondary school teachers were asked a slightly different question, whether 'having a native-like command of English' could contribute to 'making a successful teacher of English today'. Here the responses were even more in agreement (94%), confirming that for both categories 'native' and 'native like' abilities are directly linked to success in the language classroom.

3. Shifting perspectives on the native speaker accent

Teachers' beliefs about the importance of 'native speakerism', or a native-speaker-like command of the language, may have been reinforced by the stance taken by the CEFR, as we mentioned above, and this seems to be particularly the case with pronunciation. We have already quoted the example of the non-native accent perceived as a potential cause of irritation or amusement in the CEFR scales for communication interaction; the brief descriptions in the phonological scales in the same document reiterate this

⁵ See for example the advertisement for a post of *collaborator ed esperto linguistico* at the University of Rome Sapienza: https://www2.uniroma1.it/organizzazione/amministrazione/ripartizionepersonale/documenti/bandi/lettore_madrelingua_inglese_17-11-09.pdf

perspective by referring to a ‘noticeable foreign accent’ (A2) and underlining the effort of comprehension required by native speakers (A1).

This attempt to describe phonological levels soon began to be seen as problematic, particularly in the context of ELF (Harding 2013; Isaacs, Trofimovich 2012). As a result, the CEFR commissioned a report (Piccardo 2016) which began with the premise that

a new sensibility has been emerging in the applied linguists’ scholarly community when it comes to reevaluating the traditional idea of the ‘native speaker’ as a model or perception of the norm in pronunciation. This is especially visible in English considering the movement towards ‘global Englishes’ or ‘English as a Lingua Franca’, but similar considerations have been applied to all languages. (p 6.)

Piccardo comes up with a new scale, or rather three scales, which make no reference to approximation to a native speaker model, but are based on intelligibility, a criterion already adopted in the rating scales for major examining boards.

The three scales, subsequently adopted in the revised (2018) version of the CEFR, are:

- overall phonological control
- sound articulation
- prosodic features

‘Foreign accents’ are no longer mentioned, (since the term is used in opposition to an implied non-foreign, i.e. ‘native’ speaker) and are replaced by a reference to accents which reflect influence from ‘other language(s)’ the speaker may know, thereby giving a positive, multilingual, slant to the learner’s efforts. In addition, the frequent references to ‘intelligibility’ underline the role of the listener and provide a timely reminder that the co-construction of meaning concerns both speaker and listener; the listener, whether native or non-native speaker, is co-responsible in the establishment of intelligibility; and, from the perspective of ‘collaborative listening’ at least, the monoglot native speaker may be at a disadvantage when compared with his or her multilingual counterpart.

In the rapidly changing background of university language teaching in Europe this shift in perspective is particularly relevant. The Bologna process (1999), through the mutual recognition of qualifications and streamlining of degree courses, has promoted teacher and student mobility on an unprecedented scale. The *lingua franca* of European student mobility is of course English; and English is likely to be the language used by visiting professors, but not their L1. Italian universities have followed their partners in the north of Europe by attracting international students as degree seekers, and consequently offering EMI courses. The English to which students are

exposed to on a daily basis is thus far more likely to be of a non-native speaker variety, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that their English language learning should reflect that need.

How should this new reality impinge on English language programmes in Italian universities, and in particular, on the work of the *collaboratori linguistici*? Large scale investigations (Jenkins 2014; Mollin 2006) suggest that university teaching staff across all disciplines would prefer to maintain a native speaker standard English - in Europe usually British – as a model for academia, but, from the front line, as language teachers, the CEL in the survey are not convinced. Although all of them claim that they normally use a standard variety of English when teaching, most of them (67%) do not think that their target model should be exclusively a British or American standard, while a large majority (86%) think that learners should be exposed to non-native accents as part of the course.⁶

4. NEST perspectives on ‘Standard English’ and the gatekeeping function

The notion of ‘Standard’ is, however, as problematic as that of ‘native speakerism’, if not more so. Trudgill (1999), for example, prefers to define ‘Standard English’ in terms of what it is *not* (not an accent, not a style, not a register). Yet it is one of the terms used in the ELT profession with which the *collaboratori linguistici* feel they are most familiar, (‘very familiar’ for 97%). Only ‘EFL’ – English as a Foreign Language – scored more highly (98% ‘very familiar’) in their responses to the question (Q16), *How familiar are you with these terms?*⁷

The ambiguity surrounding the term, however, emerges when respondents are asked to define it. Some relate it to geographical location, native speakerism, or social status:

- Standard English is the most widely accepted form used in a specific geographic area.
- English spoken by a group of people known as native speakers.
- The English spoken by the educated middle classes.

But most conceive of it as an artifact of the classroom, usually embracing pronunciation, as well as grammar and lexis:

⁶ The percentage of NNESTs who agreed with the same statement was even higher, at 94%.

⁷ The terms to choose between were: Standard English, World Englishes, ELF, EIL, ENL, ESL, EFL, Communicative competence, Intercultural Competence, Language and Cultural Mediation.

- English as taught in schools in countries where the main language is English.
- What you find in the text books.
- The most widely accepted correct form of English in terms of spelling, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.
- A widely used and understood variety of English taken as a standard for teaching: varies according to teacher's background, will not usually include regional, dialectal or very colloquial forms.

However, even if, as we have seen, 100% of the CEL claim that they use a standard form of the language in the classroom, the relationship they have with Standard English is clearly ambivalent. They appear to be less wedded to native speaker norms than the secondary school teachers, 67% of whom think that 'non-native English teachers should adopt Standard English as their target model.' In the CEL survey, the percentage drops to 33% of respondents who believe that 'native teachers of English should adopt only British or American standard English as their target model', and in partial corroboration of this, 29% of the CEL claim that they 'sometimes use a non-standard variety of English when speaking in class', although it is not clear how they do this: by changing their accents? by using non-standard lexis or syntax, perhaps from a regional dialect they are familiar with? However they interpreted this question, *using* a variety suggests that teachers offer students a model, by personally identifying with a form of the language and adopting a persona, rather than simply by drawing students' attention to non-standard forms, for example in a recorded text.

The message that standard English, and its perceived related characteristic of 'correctness', should not be the be all and end all of their language courses is driven home in further attitude questions, in which they agree that native teachers of English should:

- encourage students to experiment with new language forms to communicate meaning (88%)
- aim at promoting a 'successful user of English' model for their learners (88%)
- expose learners to varieties of English including English spoken by nonnative speakers (86%)

Paradoxically then, although the CEL see a close relationship between native speakerism, a standard form of the language, and correctness – and also, as we have seen, believe that being a native speaker is both a positive attribute for a language teacher and the preferred model for language learners - they do not see themselves as gatekeepers of the standard, whose role is to correct student errors in class. 59% did not agree with the statement that 'teachers should correct learners' errors in class' – rather more than their NNEST

counterparts (44%) who were faced with the same question.

Why should this be so? An explanation may lie in their professional background and qualifications. All of them have a relevant postgraduate teaching qualification, most of them having completed an initial training course in EFL or ESOL, including 26% with a CELTA or DELTA, and 15% with an MA. This is a significant detail, given that a professional teaching qualification, unlike the native speaker requirement, may not be specified in the *bando* or job advertisement. But more significant still is their average age: eighty per cent of respondents were, at the time of the survey, fifty years old or above. They will have done their initial training in the UK during the heady years of the eighties and nineties, on the crest of a communicative wave, when the focus for trainee teachers shifted (at least hypothetically) from structural accuracy to ‘purposeful use’ (Howatt, Smith 2014), and the grammatical syllabi in course books were remapped in terms of ‘functions’.

In this context teachers become facilitators of interaction, and promoters of communicative success, rather than guardians of a standard, or standards. It is a context which predates widespread awareness of the phenomenon of ELF but resonates with it in its approach to communication, especially, as we shall see, in the context of assessment. But it is also inextricably linked with native speakerism, as Mahboob (2010, p. 2) hints when he points out that, from a NNEST perspective:

The problem with the communicative approach is not that teachers in EFL contexts (ie NNESTs) can’t use it (because of their language proficiency) but that the approach was not developed in or for EFL contexts’.

Mahboob is right; the approach was developed in the UK and designed for NNS – NS communication. The emphasis on non-transparent language, such as idioms, and non-core phonology (in Jenkins’ (2000) classification), such as stress timing and in particular the use of the unstressed vowel schwa, are unlikely to have much space in a putative ELF course, but rather seem targeted towards a native-speaker ideal. What’s more, it first surfaced in UK language schools – a boom business in the 1970s and 1980s – which featured small classes, optimal learning conditions, and a focus on oral skills. For *collaboratori linguistici* working in Italian universities, class sizes and working conditions are likely to be very different, and a ‘communicative approach’ hard to implement.

Nonetheless, the common ground uniting a communicative approach and ELF awareness seems apparent in response to Q11, ‘Language learners’ communicative competence should include the ability to negotiate meaning with NS and NNS interlocutors’ (95%), as it does in their belief that ‘developing communicative strategies is more important than learning correct grammar’ (Q8, 88%). The gatekeeping function, for which perhaps they were

intended when they were selected as native speakers, is conspicuous by its absence in this part of the survey.

5. The need to rethink testing

One of the principal functions of the *collaboratori linguistici*, related to the notion of ‘gatekeeping’, is assessment. It is also one of the most time-consuming – perhaps more than it is for the secondary school teachers. This has always been the case, given the number of exam sessions in the academic year, and the number of students enrolled in English language courses. In recent years, however, the assessment function has been extended in many universities to the monitoring of students’ levels on the CEFR for matriculation or exit purposes. Although some students – around twenty percent - may have external certification, the majority have recourse to the services of university language centres, which have become *de facto* test centres operating throughout the year.

In the University of Venice Ca’ Foscari, for example, the CEL are responsible for writing items and administering tests at level B1 for entry to all undergraduate courses, and at level B2 to exit undergraduate courses, or, for those students arriving without proof of level, to matriculate for a second level (‘laurea magistrale’) course. Tests (of grammar, lexis, reading and listening) are typically objective, using multiple choice items. The B2 test also has a speaking component, in which a CEL animates and assesses a discussion between four test takers. With a pass rate of around 50% for the B2 test, and for students having to retake the test maybe several times before they are able to graduate, it can become an increasingly high stakes assessment.

The test thus has an evident gatekeeping function based on a standard description of the language, which the CEL are required to approve and administer, but which may not be relevant to test purpose– which, for the majority of students not enrolled in language departments, is to predict their ability to successfully complete their course, in an (academic) ELF environment. Listening to and interacting with non-native speakers do not feature in the test. Yet listening to visiting academics, and interacting with students on mobility, are two of the most obvious examples of the use of English as a lingua franca which are a consequence of the policy of internationalization now being pursued by many Italian universities. In this context, without any real attempt having been made to identify the kind of language use domain in which students in Italian universities will be required to operate, the tests currently on offer may have only a very limited predictive value.

It is beyond the scope of this article to speculate on the form more

‘ELF aware’ university entrance (or exit) tests might take⁸, but the gatekeeping function of *collaboratori linguistici* is not likely to be part of the specifications. The CEL in our survey, as might be expected given their communicative backgrounds, are themselves skeptical of tests which are based on a construct which is related to a standard. Sixty percent disagreed with the statement:

Q 31.13 When it comes to assessment, teachers should only refer to British or AM standard

Unsurprisingly, given their relationship with standard English which we discussed above, the non-native teachers are more reluctant to abandon a standard, with only 48% thinking the same way as the CEL. For the other assessment-related statement in the survey, however:

Q31.15 Assessment criteria should include use of communicative and mediation strategies

there was overwhelming agreement in both groups (NEST/CEL 86%, NNEST/school teachers 95%), a clear indication that, in both secondary and tertiary education contexts in Italy today, teachers feel the need to assess those skills – or capabilities, to use the term pioneered by Seidlhofer and Widdowson (2017) – which are a fundamental feature of ELF interaction. How this is to be done is by no means clear, but it indicates a shared awareness of assessment needs to reflect new domains of language use for English. As well as pointing to new prospects for CEL in assessment contexts, it implies a range of underlying new needs for English in Italian universities, and consequently new roles for *collaboratori linguistici*, most of which appear to be unrelated to their status as native speakers.

6. Changing needs for English, new roles for *collaboratori linguistici*?

The term *collaboratore ed esperto linguistico* was ushered in to replace that of *lettore* at the height of the legal battle over status and salary of mother tongue language teachers working in the universities. At the time – in the 1990s - it seemed at best unwieldy, and at worst hypocritical and ambiguous; the term was coined in an attempt to avoid making any reference to a teaching role in the job title or description. Unlike other professional roles

⁸ For what a B1 entrance test to Italian universities might look like when based on an exhaustive needs analysis, see Newbold 2015.

which came into being about the same time, such as that of the transparently named *mediatore culturale* (cultural mediator), and which met real new needs in a changing world, the job remained the same: the CEL were, and are, language teachers working in university language centres, or in tandem with academic staff (professors and researchers) in university departments.

But today the term seems well chosen as a potential blanket category to cover a range of specialist roles which could contribute usefully to the process of internationalisation in Italian universities, and which would reflect different ways in which English has become the *lingua franca* of the academic community, in Italy as elsewhere. In this concluding section we propose just some of these possible future roles, all of which require specific, specialist, competences, all of which correspond to real needs in today's post Bologna Process universities and their attempts to attract international degree seekers and promote mobility among their own staff and students.

What follows are a few examples of possible job descriptions, tentative and incomplete, which could fit the title of *esperto linguistico* ('language expert'), not necessarily mother tongue, and not necessarily with a teaching role, in tomorrow's universities.

Experts in testing and assessment

The introduction of entrance (B1) and exit (B2) level English language requirements has put considerable strain on university language centres, which deploy CEL and other human resources to develop and implement tests. External certification is a useful alternative, but it comes at a cost, and most universities offer in-house tests as an alternative. However, valid and reliable tests are not easy to produce; test developers and item writers need to be trained. Of the CEL in our survey, many of them have experience of preparing students for certification, or have attended training courses in language testing; at least three have worked as examiners for Cambridge Assessment. These CEL all appear to have professional profiles which would be appropriate for a post as expert in testing.

Advisors for EMI lecturers

Internationalisation has led to the introduction of courses delivered through the medium of English (EMI) at both undergraduate and graduate level. But many lecturers have no experience of lecturing in English, may not feel confident in using English, and need support (see for example Guarda and Helm (2017) who recount a project in lecturer support at the University of Padova). In some universities in Germany the academic support figure already exists institutionally; it is a role which requires sensitivity and a sound background in applied linguistics, ranging from phonology to discourse analysis. Here, mother tongue status seems irrelevant.

Cultural informants in language departments

In contrast, foreign language departments are likely to continue to require mother tongue assistants for teaching requirements, to provide models for

pronunciation, and to be a source of cultural information. The expert knowledge that the traditional language assistant has is that of being a cultural insider, with the insights (but perhaps also limited perspectives) that this implies. As we have seen, he or she is also likely to be used for gatekeeper functions.

Teachers of academic writing

Pressure to publish in English dominates academic life in Europe; English language publications are usually more prestigious, and a wider readership is guaranteed. Around 80 per cent of articles in the Scopus database are published in English, and any young researcher who wishes to make a career in academia, especially in scientific disciplines, needs to publish in English. This implies the acquisition of writing skills. Many universities offer academic writing courses, where the focus may be native speaker norms, but where transparency and lack of ambiguity are paramount. Teachers of academic writing are likely themselves to have an academic background, and many of the CEL in our survey fit this description. But native speaker status in itself may be less useful than the experience of having successfully published, in English, as a non-native writer.

Creators of online materials

As universities compete with each other for international students, so the need to showcase their courses increases. In recent years, the quality of university websites has improved enormously, as have their webpages in English, at least in their graphics and visual appeal. But as Jenkins (2014) points out, the preference is still to attempt to imitate UK or US websites in the language by using native speaker writers, and with them, culture-bound references to UK or US lifestyles – rather than finding their own voice to communicate with an international audience in a context of English *lingua franca*.

Facilitators of international interaction

With more than 10 million students having participated in the Erasmus programme since its inception, mobility has become a major priority for universities, promoting the exchange of knowledge, but also, and equally importantly, ideals of friendship and tolerance. Most Erasmus students on mobility (and those who stay at home, but who wish to interact with international students) will need to be able to use English as a *lingua franca*. To prepare them for the experience non-native language teachers (perhaps former Erasmus students themselves), aware of the strategies needed for successful interaction, are likely to have more useful insights than (monoglot) native speaker teachers.

The above brief outlines are not meant to be exhaustive, nor are they meant to undervalue the contribution currently being made by CEL to university life in Italy today. However, the sheer variety of these roles, linked to globalization and the rapid development of technology, testify to the *de facto* establishment of English as a *lingua franca*. All of them, except that of the cultural informant, could be taken by qualified non-native speakers. But the

opposition NEST-NNEST is of limited significance in this rapidly developing context; in most cases the job description, and the qualification for the job, will transcend any prerequisite of ‘nativespeakerism’. The survey which this report is based on shows that CEL working in universities, like their counterparts working in secondary schools, are well aware of the shift in focus for English teachers which ELF has entailed. Perhaps the time has come for universities to acknowledge that their institutional needs for English language teaching – and for the English language itself - have changed drastically since the turn of the millennium.

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