

# NATIVE TEACHERS, NON-NATIVE TEACHERS AND ELF

## Same aims, different approaches?

SILVIA SPERTI  
ROMA TRE UNIVERSITY

**Abstract** – The spread of English used as a lingua franca (ELF) in several multilingual communicative settings and the emergence of World Englishes (WE) have inevitably impacted on the field of English language teaching (ELT) calling into question traditional notions and assumptions and highlighting the need to revisiting teachers’ roles and approaches to the English classroom. In this respect a research study was carried out withing a recent PRIN project which aimed at the exploration of ELF pedagogy in the Italian school contexts. The Roma 3-unit members investigated teachers’ current practices in English language classrooms, with the research objective of enhancing WE and ELF aware teaching to be implemented especially in the training of teachers involved in multilingual learning environments. Two online questionnaires were used in order to gather data from non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) and English Language Assistants (CEL) – i.e. native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), to investigate current ELT practices as well as teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about the current status of English both in Italian high schools and at university level. This paper aims at illustrating the findings of the survey administered to almost 80 NESTs working as language assistants in Italian universities and language centres. A 32-question survey was administered in 2017 to investigate native teachers’ ELF-awareness, attitudes and beliefs, especially, in ELT current routines and concerns, models and lesson planning, material development and assessment criteria. The main results will highlight respondents’ emerging identities as native teachers as well as their positions and views towards ELF-awareness and New Englishes (NE). Implications for the need to go beyond the deep-rooted discriminatory dichotomy ‘NESTs vs. NNESTs’ and for the reconceptualization of the role of ELT for the new societal trends will also be discussed.

**Keywords:** NESTs; NNESTs; ELF-awareness; teacher education; ELT.

## 1. Introduction

The study aims to explore and analyse the findings emerged from a nationwide survey administered online to native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) working in Italian universities (also known as *Collaboratori Esperti Linguistici* or *CEL*) in 2017. More precisely, data presented in the following sections are part of a research study carried out by the PRIN Roma Tre Research Unit, entitled “ELF pedagogy: ELF in teacher education and

teaching materials”. The unit members developed two questionnaires, in order to investigate current practices in English language classrooms, in high schools and at university level. Data emerging from the respondents would provide useful insights for the implementation of a pedagogic approach to a World Englishes (WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) aware teaching, especially in multicultural and multilingual teaching contexts. The two surveys were conceived to gather data from teachers in charge of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Italy to adolescents and young adults. Therefore, the research focus included NESTs since their role and their voices are considered as valid and crucial as NNESTs’ one. The questionnaires reached 198 Italian teachers of English in high schools and 75 language assistants (CEL) working in Italian universities.

The main purpose of the two surveys is to draw attention on English teachers’ knowledge and perception of the current status of English and on the implications of integrating it in their teaching. In spite of the spread of English varieties in both the Outer and in the Expanding Circle, and above all, of ELF and of the use of English as a global language, the tendency in the education policy of several Western and non-Western countries is still to maintain the notion of standard English, as underlined e.g. by Trudgill (1999). Exploring Italian teaching landscapes aimed at confirming or denying this assumption and at identifying current teaching perspectives and teachers’ awareness of new trends and scenarios. Are Italian students, at school first and later on at university, still provided primarily with the traditional model of native English, presented as a standard variety to which learners are prepared to adhere, conforming to the ideal native speakers’ model, and ignoring current learners’ exposure to English as a global means of communication? Findings will try to give one possible response to this complex but crucial question.

## 2. Rationale and research objectives

As mentioned before, in the research rationale the exploration of language teachers’ attitudes, beliefs and practices could not overlook the multidimensional professional framework where Italian teachers of English often cooperate or at least co-habit with native teachers. Observing both samples and weighing their opinions is here assumed as the best way to lead to a reflective approach towards the current status of English, in order to draw out implications in terms of ELF-aware language policy development and teacher education.

It is an undeniable fact that the spread of English as a global language affects the demand of teachers of English all over the world, and that – as a

consequence – the number of non-native English-speaking teachers overwhelms that of NESTs, as underlined by Maum (2002, p. 1):

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), a growing number of teachers are not native speakers of English. Some learned English as children; others learned it as adults. Some learned it prior to coming to the United States; others learned it after their arrival. Some studied English in formal academic settings; others learned it through informal immersion after arriving in this country. Some speak British, Australian, Indian, or other varieties of English; others speak Standard American English.

It is beyond the scope of this article to speculate on the relationship between NESTs and NNESTs but – though a number of studies were carried out worldwide in order to examine students’ and language teachers’ perceptions on NES and NNEST instructors – there are only few studies focusing on the perpetuated dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs.

In this research study, the survey developed for the NESTs was especially based on two main research objectives:

- a) to investigate NS teachers’ awareness of the role of English as the world’s lingua franca;
- b) to explore their current attitudes in ELT pedagogy and methodology with the aim of gathering data for developing ELF-aware language teacher education programs, course-books, materials and syllabus design;
- c) to inquire into divergences in attitudes and perceptions between NESTs and NNESTs.

To fulfil their research objectives, the research unit decided to consider not only Italian teachers’ voices, but also NESTs working in Italy since they are undoubtedly in charge of the same task, teaching English to undergraduates and adults, even if with different roles and methods. Data and findings emerging from the NESTs’ survey are the focus of the present study and will be presented in the following sections, after a rapid discussion of previous research studies on the main issues regarding the nature and roles of English native teachers.

### 3. Theoretical background

The present research study stems from the following theoretical background (from the debate around native-speakerism to the role of NESTs in ELT) as well as from the related issue of the increasing importance of ELF, World Englishes and New Englishes worldwide. In other words, the study aims at inquiring into possible attitudinal convergences – or divergences – between NESTs and NNESTs, in conceptualizing current ELT practices and behaviours, drawing useful insights for revisiting language policy and teacher education. A brief literature review around the long-standing controversy is

needed as well as useful for the correct interpretation of data presented later in the analysis.

### **3.1. The debate around native-speakerism**

There has been a great deal of debate about ‘native-speakerism’ and the related area, the ‘myth of the native speaker’. A range of researchers have worked on these aspects (Creese *et al.* 2014; Holliday 2005; Kubota 2009; Leung *et al.* 1997; Park 2008; Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1992; Seidlhofer 1999; Widdowson 1992) and fueled a scientific debate on several issues, from ideological perspectives to the use of terms such as ‘native speaker’, which cannot accurately describe the nature of many English teachers. Indeed, Kramsch (1997, p. 363) completely dismissed the term, defining it:

an imaginary construct - a canonically literate monolingual middle-class member of a largely fictional national community whose citizens share a belief in a common history and a common destiny.

However, NESTs working in institutions in Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle countries are thousands and in every type of educational institution from pre-school contexts to universities. Some studies report that it is often believed that it is preferable for NESTs to have either a British or American accent (Galloway 2013), but preference also extends even to racial aspects of identity (Chen, Cheng 2010). In other words, as claimed by Holliday (2005, 2011), English language teaching and learning is still related to the belief that NESTs represent the Western white culture.

The constant demand for NESTs is still related to what is termed ‘inner circle dominance’ (Kachru 1985), where the Inner Circle represents the traditional countries where English is spoken as first language (i.e. the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand). In language learning, the preference for a NS model of English, specifically American English and British English, and in particular their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, is still prevalent, high status and norm-providing (Hall 2011). Furthermore, testing and materials in ELT remain oriented to a standard model of English (Jenkins 2012) and there ‘appears to be a firm and blind belief that norms and authentic models’ should come from NESTs (No, Park 2008 p.71).

In contrast to the ‘Inner Circle’ countries, in which English is a main language of communication amongst speakers, and ‘Outer Circle’ countries (such as Nigeria, India and the Philippines), in which English has an official function, English in ‘Expanding Circle’ countries (such as Japan, China and Korea) has no official status and there are no colonial links to Britain or the USA (Deterding 2010). In this global linguistic landscape, UK and USA varieties of English continue to dominate the ELT practices (Galloway 2013),

and their testing systems (e.g. IELTS and TOEFL) continue to challenge English language learners with fossilized standard models (Jenkins 2012).

For the past thirty years, an insisting polarity between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) has developed in the Teaching English for Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) dimension – the so-called nativeness dichotomy. Scholars in the field and professionals have explored this discriminatory dimension and this controversial issue has been further problematized and discussed, in terms of professional equality and teaching quality in the TESOL context.

Again, even though Medgyes (2001, p. 429) argued that “the English language is no longer the privilege of native speakers”, there is still a generalized prejudice against NNESTs. Especially in recruitment issues in ELT profession, employers still have a discriminatory bias in favour of NESTs. According to Selinker and Lakshmanan (1992), the monolingual bias is due to persistent beliefs that non-native speakers of English are life-long language learners. As opposed to this idea, Mahboob (2010) argues that NNESTs use and consider language as a functional entity where the proficiency of the speaker is more related to a successful use of the language for communicative purposes, giving space to NNESTs for the interpretation of ELT in new perspectives and shapes.

Maum (2002) underlined that differentiating among teachers according to their status as native or non-native speakers contributes to the dominance of the native speaker in the ELT market and to the discrimination in hiring practices. On the other hand, Phillipson (1992) also explicitly denounced the unequal consequences on ELT deriving from the global supremacy and dominance of English worldwide. Thus, he aimed at investigating “the ways in which English rules, who makes the rules, and what role the English teaching profession plays in promoting the ‘rules’ of English” (Phillipson 1992, p.1). He criticized the unethical treatment of qualified and competent non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) as a result of the ‘native speaker fallacy’, i.e. the prevailing assumption that ‘the ideal teacher of English is a NS’ (Phillipson 1992, p.185).

However, at the basis of the terminological debate, there is the assumption, confirmed by several researchers, that defining native and non-native speakers is problematic (Chang 2007; Liu 2008; Medgyes 1994). Being a monolingual speaker of a language and being born in a particular place does not properly adhere to the idea of the native speaker since many native speakers of a language have a multilingual background and monolinguals may be the exception rather than the norm, or even an idealization (Maum 2002).

The issues briefly outlined in the previous section have dominated the international debate in the area of teaching and learning English until the first

decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jenkins 2000; McKay 2002). The ‘ownership’ of English (Widdowson 1994), for example, is a worldwide phenomenon, no longer the exclusive domain of native speakers, and NNESTs today unquestionably outnumber NESTs (Canagarajah 2005; Crystal 2003; Schneider 2003). Moreover, Seidlhofer (2011) argues the limits of what she defines as the ‘dogma of nativeness’ as well as the idealistic representation of Standard English, pointing out that ELF users, NES or NNESTs, deserve the same rights to determine their own lingua-cultural expression and manipulation of norms and uses according to specific communicative goals and needs.

As for ELT, the need to go beyond the discriminatory dichotomy ‘NESTs vs. NNESTs’ has led to the reconceptualization of the role of English language teaching and learning towards the promotion of enhancement of linguistic diversity and plurilingualism (Cook 2008).

The debate around the idea that NESTs are more qualified English teachers than NNESTs has been triggered in non-English speaking countries for a long period of time. Medgyes (1994, p.25) advanced that NESTs and NNESTs are “two different species”, “they both differ in terms of language proficiency, teaching practice (behavior), and that both NESTs and NNESTs could be equally good teachers in their own terms”.

In this sense, Medgyes (1994)’s study on the divergences in teaching behaviours and practices between NESTs and NNESTs gives interesting points for reflection. The table in Figure 1 is the result of a survey he carried out to 325 native and non-native speaking teachers:

NESTs	Non-NESTs
<i>Own Use of English</i>	
Speak better English	Speak poorer English
Use real language	Use "bookish" language
Use English more confidently	Use English less confidently
<i>General Attitude</i>	
Adopt a more flexible approach	Adopt a more guided approach
Are more innovative	Are more cautious
Are less empathetic	Are more empathetic
Attend to perceived needs	Attend to real needs
Have far-fetched expectations	Have realistic expectations
Are more casual	Are stricter
Are less committed	Are more committed
<i>Attitude to teaching the language</i>	
Are less insightful	Are more insightful
<i>Focus on :</i>	
Fluency	Accuracy
Meaning	Form
Language in use	Grammar rules
Oral skills	Printed word
Colloquial registers	Formal registers
Teach items in context	Teach items in isolation
Prefer free activities	Prefer controlled activities
Favor group work/pair work	Favor frontal work
Use a variety of materials	Use single textbook
Tolerate errors	Correct/punish for errors
Set fewer tests	Set more tests
Use no/less L1	Use more L1
Resort to no/less translation	Resort to more translation
Assign less homework	Assign more homework
<i>Attitude to teaching culture</i>	
Supply more cultural information	Supply less cultural information

Figure 1

Perceived differences in teaching behavior between NESTs and NNESTs (Medgyes 2001).

Medgyes (1994) conducted a research on NESTs and NNESTs working in ten countries to validate or contradict his assumptions on their success in teaching English. He found that the two groups had the same chance of being successful teachers of English. His results showed that the only area in which the NNESTs seemed to be less qualified is English language proficiency. Compared to their NEST colleagues who can be good language models for their students, NNESTs can be good learning models, thanks to the considerable experience of learning English as a second or a foreign language. In their life NESTs have adopted language-learning strategies as learners of English and these skills make them more qualified to teach those strategies to other learners.

### 3.2. The role of NESTs in the Italian context

The NEST in Italian universities is generally the mother tongue language teacher who cooperates with the language Professor who (very often) is a non-native speaker. In Italy the general term that has traditionally referred to the L1 Language Assistant is *lettore*<sup>1</sup> or, more precisely, *collaboratore esperto linguistico*, i.e. CEL. In Italy, language assistants may operate in language centres (i.e. CLA) or at university both in Foreign Languages Departments and in other Departments. The NESTs usually have very specific roles: they do not plan the syllabus, but can collaborate with NNESTs in doing it; they can select autonomously the authentic materials to be used in class but not the coursebooks; their relationship with their students is less formal compared to a NNEST teacher or a professor and they can test on students, especially to evaluate their language level and proficiency, and give suggestions for their assessment, yet never without the support and the supervision of the language Professor.

However, bibliographic references on previous studies specifically related to NESTs in Italy are very rare and this confirmed by Balboni (1998) who states that the literature on foreign mother tongue teachers is very poor if not totally absent in Italy. This draws attention on the importance of the research study here presented as well as on its results, in terms of the size of NESTs reached and the quality and value of their response. As underlined by Newbold (2019, p. 66):

Since the inception of the category now known (since 1996) as *collaboratori linguistici* or CEL (*collaboratori ed esperti linguistici*) and formerly known as *lettori*, very little systematic research has been carried out on a nationwide level into their teaching backgrounds, beliefs, and practices.

Therefore the survey and its results, analysed in the following section, are particularly significant, not only because they enabled to compare NESTs and NNESTs voices on ELT in Italy, but also for the contribution to fill in the gap of research investigation into the important role and profile of CEL in Italian universities.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in the Italian dictionary “Il Sabatini Coletti” the *lettore* is: “Insegnante di madre lingua straniera che svolge esercitazioni pratiche di quella lingua in una università” (Mother tongue language teacher who holds practical courses at university level) ([https://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario\\_italiano/L/lettore.shtml](https://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_italiano/L/lettore.shtml)).



## 4. The study

### 4.1. The research design

The survey has been selected as an effective research tool by the unit members with the aim of reaching as many teachers as possible, who could give an extensive feedback on current beliefs, views, perceptions, first of all on the new status of English as a global language and on the current teaching practices in Italian high schools. In the original research design, non-native Italian teachers, and university language assistants (CEL), who are mostly native English speakers, could provide answers and points for further investigation on teachers' practices, as well as new implications for teacher training in a time of change where English is no longer the monolithic 'foreign' language, but it is the result of several linguacultural processes and transfers and it is more and more used as the global 'lingua franca'.

The structure of the questionnaire was designed on the basis of the research criteria that could produce a faithful socio-cultural and professional representation of the sample, i.e. demographics, professional experience, familiarity with ELT notions, ELF-awareness, ELT teaching practices.

In the NEST's questionnaire the research team decided to adapt to the new respondents the same frame and set of questions used for the Italian teachers, with the aim of similarly exploring beliefs, practices and attitudes useful for understanding their perspectives and drawing suggestions to improve educational processes and teacher training courses. By completing the survey, language assistants unveiled their personal beliefs and assumptions, not only on ELT notions and theoretical premises, but also on their self-awareness, on the most challenging aspects of being a native teacher, in terms of professional performance and influence on students' motivation, achievements and even perception. It was thus decided to include in the questionnaire details and further elements that would elicit NESTs' personal thoughts and that would help in the subsequent interpretation of data.

### 4.2. Participants and methodology

The survey was administered online from November 2017 to April 2018. The questionnaire, consisting of 32 questions, reached respondents recruited throughout Italian state and private universities, and University Language Centres (*Centri Linguistici d'Ateneo*). The participants who completed the survey were 75 NESTs (72% female and 28% male).

The survey was based on a mixed-methods research design. It combines quantitative closed questions and qualitative open-ended questions. The research team decided to include closed questions of different kinds:

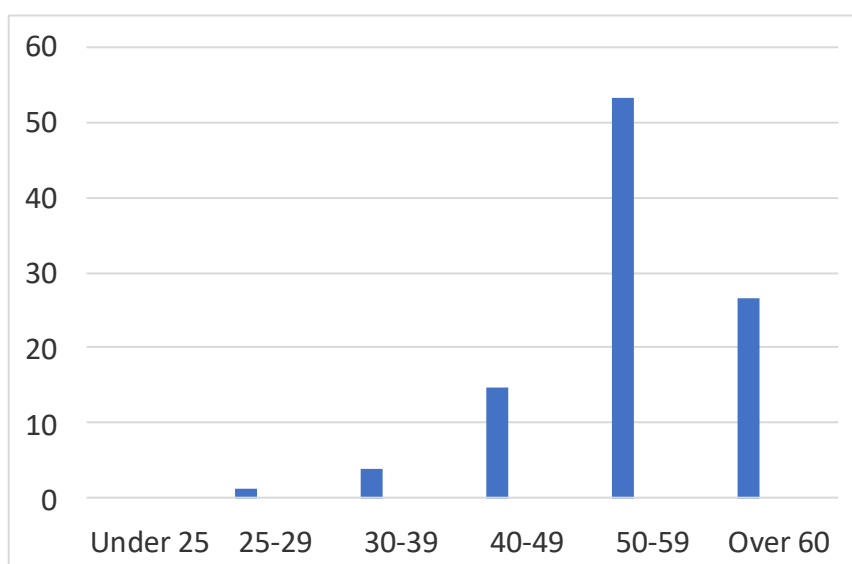
- a) dichotomous questions (e.g. Q13: Do you consider yourself to be a native speaker of English?);
- b) Likert scale multiple choice questions (e.g. Q31: Think about your own teaching context. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about English Language Teaching. Please use the following scale from 0 - (strongly disagree) to 5 - (strongly agree));
- c) Checklist type multiple choice questions (e.g. Q16: How familiar are you with the following terms?).

Open questions (e.g. Q26 If you answered YES, what contexts do you take into consideration?) aimed at further develop the straightforward responses to closed questions. By writing a short paragraph or adding a personal comment, respondents had the chance to better express their views and provide the research team with further material, especially to avoid ambiguity and ambivalence in the interpretative phase.

### 4.3. Findings

#### 4.3.1. The respondents' profile

First questions aimed at defining the respondents' demographic profile. The majority of NESTs were over 50 years of age (as shown in Graph 1) and came from Great Britain:



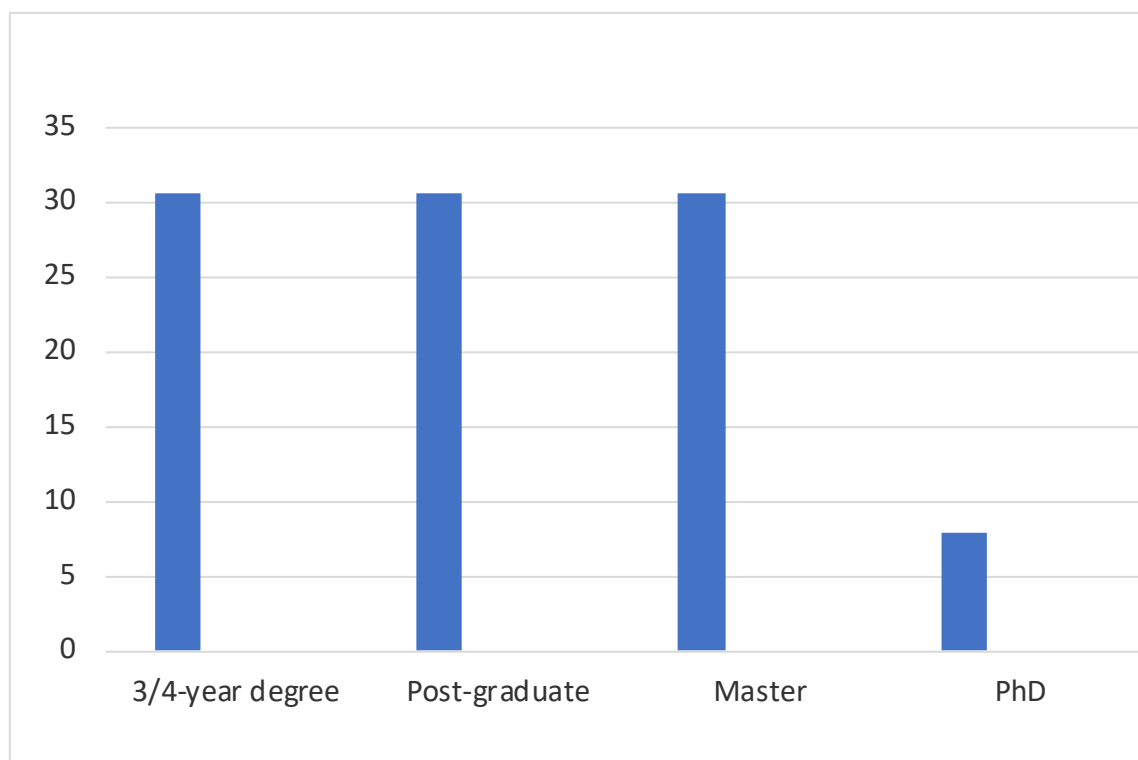
Graph 1  
Q2: How old are you?.

Many of them currently work in several cities in the northern (44%) and central (44%) regions of Italy, less in the South (12%).

*What other language/s do you know? (Q5)*  
*Please indicate your level of proficiency for each language. (Q6)*

Their pluri-linguistic background is quite dynamic: most of them claimed to speak three L2s with a good level of proficiency (B1-B2).

As for their education, as shown in Graph 2, 30 per cent of the respondents had completed a post-graduate course or a master's degree in English Studies or other disciplines (e.g. history, humanities, economics, and political science). As for ELT, most of them had obtained further qualifications, such as PGCE, Italian teaching certification, BA, CELTA, DELTA, TESOL, TEFL,<sup>2</sup> and 83 per cent had attended at least one English language pre- or in-service teacher-education course:



Graph 2

Q7: What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?.

<sup>2</sup> Among the impressive variety of online, blended or face-to-face courses quoted: PGCE - Postgraduate Certificate in Education; TEFL - Teaching English as a Foreign Language; TESOL - Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages; CELTA - Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults; Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults.

Respondents were then asked:

*What type of institution(s) have you worked for so far? (Q10)*  
*How long have you taught English? (Q11)*

Eighty-four per cent of the respondents have been working in state or private universities, as well as CLAs (69%) and high schools. 28 per cent of them have worked in universities for less than ten years, 30 per cent for less than twenty years, and 41 per cent of them for more than twenty years.

Over 60 per cent had had other previous working experience as language teachers in different private and state institutions such as banks, hospitals, companies, public institutions, and above all private language schools.

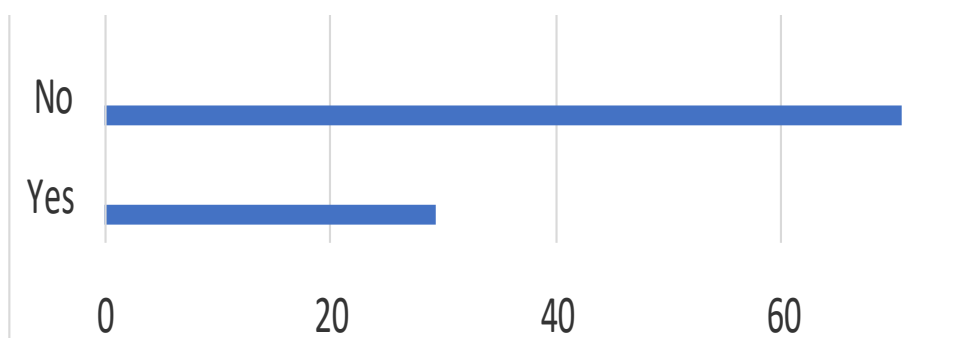
After these demographic background questions, the survey focused on the respondents' attitudes and experiences concerning ELT, ELF and teaching practice.

#### 4.3.2. ELF in ELT: Attitudes and beliefs

NESTs were asked:

*Do you consider yourself to be a native speaker of English? (Q 13).*

The majority of them answered 'yes' (95%). However, the following questions concerning ELF-awareness revealed interesting attitudes towards the issue: when asked about the use of a standard variety of English in their teaching experience, all of them (100%) claimed that they usually employ a standard variety of English during their lessons. On the other hand, when asked whether they also use a non-standard variety of English in class, 30 per cent of the respondents answered 'yes', as shown in Graph 3, and more precisely World Englishes (88%):



Graph 3

Q15: Do you ever use a non standard variety of English when you speak in class?.

In their comments, teachers claimed that they do not include non-native varieties in their teaching content because:

- (i) their students' objectives and wishes are to learn SE and work in a native context;
- (ii) non-standard materials are incomprehensible, uninteresting or useless, if not counterproductive;
- (iii) International English examination boards do not tend to incorporate NNES variations of English in their exam:

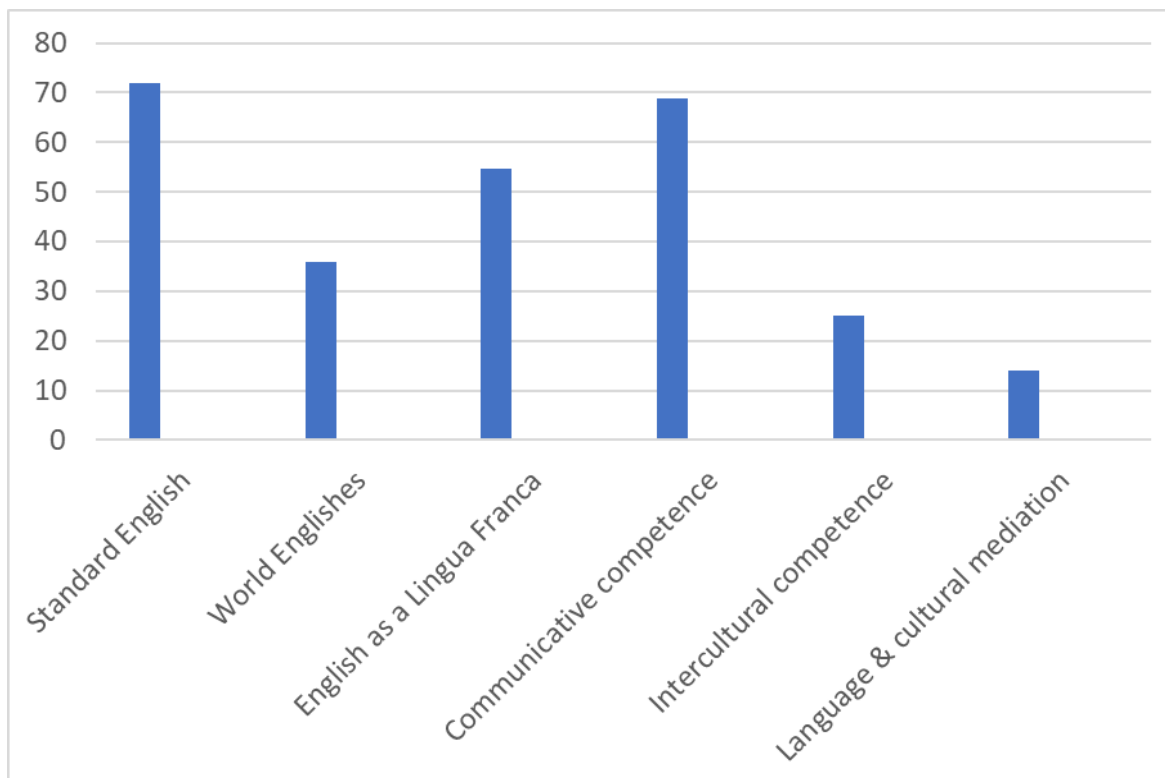
“I am a mother tongue speaker. The definition is a cultural discrimination. I consider Indian English as valid a form as Yorkshire or Alabama”.

“I don't have the opportunity. These Englishes are absent in the coursebooks I use”

“I have to prepare B1 & B2 level students in a university setting for graduate exams in English”.

“Modern textbooks do at times contain examples, if only ‘transatlantic English’”

Teachers were then asked to choose, from a list of well-known terms in ELT, the most familiar ones. The terms listed were: Standard English (SE), World Englishes (WE), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Communicative competence, Intercultural competence, and Language & Cultural Mediation (see Graph 4):



Graph 4

Q16: How familiar are you with the following terms?.

Most of the teachers reported being familiar with ‘Standard English’ (72%), ‘Communicative Competence’ (69%), and interestingly, ‘English as a lingua franca’ (55%). In addition, they were asked to find a fitting definition for the selected terms. Among others, words used to define ELF confirmed the prevailing familiarity with the key-concepts of ‘mutual intelligibility’, ‘cross-cultural communication’ and ‘accommodation strategies’; their comments about ELF included:

“English used as a language for communication between non-native (and native) speakers around the world”;

“The majority of language transactions are undertaken by NNS; ELF is the resultant language used”;

“Such as when Japanese jet pilot talks to Italian air traffic controller in English, even though neither is a native speaker”;

“English as a Lingua Franca is a term used for English used for communicative purposes by native English”;

“Use of English for everyday/business communication by speakers of different languages. Focus on communication rather than grammatical accuracy”;

“ELF is the version of English spoken or used to communicate between all speakers of English and represents”.

“Communicative efficiency is more important than accuracy. Cross-linguistic influences that do not impede communication are well-tolerated”.

The awareness of and the attention to the current debate on ‘ELF in ELT’ also emerged:

“Debate still rages about whether it is a separate language form or not, and whether or not it should be taught as such”.

Another set of questions was devoted to their perception of the professional profile of English Language Teachers. Respondents were asked what competences, skills or qualities they thought can contribute to making a successful English teacher today. In a list of 13 options the highest rated were:

- To be able to adapt teaching plans, activities and materials according to learner needs & context of use (100%);
- To engage students and develop a good rapport with them (99%);
- To collaborate with colleagues (83%);
- To integrate the use of digital technology in English language teaching (ELT) (78%);
- To select materials from the Web & use authentic audio/video materials including texts in non-standard English (78%);
- To regularly attend teacher education courses/seminars (71%);
- To encourage learners to use social media and to bring samples of authentic English into the classroom (69%);
- To regularly watch TV series and films in English at home (69%);
- To be a native speaker of English (63%).

#### 4.3.3. *ELT: Practices and perspectives*

One of the key questions in the survey concerned teachers’ perception of their own teaching contexts:

*Think about your own teaching context. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about English Language Teaching.  
(Q31)*

Respondents replied by showing a clear-cut opinion about each issue, since questions required a 5-point Likert-scale<sup>3</sup> answer and most of the teachers

<sup>3</sup> The 5-point Likert scale has been chosen for the present survey in order to cover degrees and nuances of opinion that may reveal respondents’ significant positioning and help define feedback and responses in detail.

positioned themselves on the extreme response categories (namely ‘not at all’ or ‘strongly agree’). More specifically, the majority of them agreed that:

- Language learners’ communicative competence should include their ability to negotiate meaning with both native and non-native interlocutors (88%);
- The students’ L1 and sociocultural identity are resources that can enrich English language teaching/learning (83%);
- Native language teachers of English should avoid using authentic materials which contain non-standard forms of English (81%);
- English language learners prefer to have native speakers of English as their teachers (79%);
- English language learners should also be exposed to varieties of English including English spoken by non-native speakers (79%);
- Native teachers of English should aim at promoting a “successful user of English” model for their learners (77%);
- English language assessment criteria should include learners’ use of communicative and mediation strategies (74%).

ELF-awareness was further measured by means of an explicit question:

*Do you ever mention today’s use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in your lessons?  
(Q25)*

83 per cent of respondents claimed that they mention today’s use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in their lessons. Therefore, they were asked to define the ELF contexts they take into consideration and most of them referred to the specialized discourse of business, advertising and tourism; other respondents stressed the importance of international and cross-cultural interactions in academic and professional settings, and of learners’ intercultural competence.

Some respondents defined ELF contexts useful and effective mentioning ELF in order to present deviations from Standard English phonetics and phonology and non-native speakers’ accommodation strategies:

“I teach business English at university level so often have to make students aware of the fact that they will be using English with other non-native speakers”.

“Advertising in particular, internet, tourism and travel”.

“There is a lot of input, we are surrounded by English as LF - menus, manuals, settings, brand names”.

“Holidays and contact with international students.”

“In a global context -in every sphere from commerce, to education to tourism”.



*Do you regularly use a course-book in your lessons? (Q28)*

Respondents were also asked about the use of a course-book and the features that guide them in their choice. 83 per cent of them replied that they use a course-book during their lessons. Apart from those who admitted that the course-book is not a free-choice option, others select the course-book according to the balance it offers between skills, topics and (only rarely) the presentations of varieties of English or different cultures. Seventeen per cent of respondents prefer (or are free) to use online materials and authentic resources which are not available in traditional course-books.

#### **4.4. Discussion**

As already underlined, the survey administered to NESTs or *collaboratori linguistici* was planned and constructed to investigate on their current working experience and to ultimately compare their responses with those given by Italian teachers about teaching practices and ELF-awareness. The opportunity to hear two voices and to analyse the findings that resulted from them, provided the research unit with a useful setting for a further comparative analysis between NESTs' and NNESTs' responses.

In this sense, first of all, an introductory demographic remark needs to be made: the two samples were quite different since Italian teachers outnumbered the English ones (198 vs. 75), they are considerably younger (47% under 49) and have taught English for less time than the NS respondents (42% less than 10 years). NESTs are undoubtedly experienced teachers and are in control of their teaching environment.

*How familiar are you with the following terms?*

As for the familiarity with ELT notions, NEST respondents sided with the Italian teachers for the selection of the three most familiar terms: the majority of NNESTs chose 'Standard English', 'Communicative Competence', and 'English as a lingua franca', as well.

ELF is mostly defined as the spoken variation of English used to connect speakers and users from different L1 backgrounds. All in all, the prevailing trend for Italian teachers in defining ELF appears more unidirectional and homogeneous than in the NEST survey.

*Please indicate which competences, skills or qualities you think can contribute to making a successful English teacher today:*

Italian teachers claimed that:

- (i) regularly attending teacher education courses/seminars (83% of them attended pre- or in-service courses);
- (ii) engaging students and developing a good rapport with them;
- (iii) being able to adapt teaching plans, activities and materials according to learner needs and context of use; and
- (iv) selecting materials from the Web and using authentic audio/video materials including texts in non-standard English are the most important aspects to be taken into account.

This is consistent with the NEST responses, except that Italian teachers are more sensitive towards (i) the advantages of professional development and the potential for authentic materials in ELT (79% of select and employ materials from the web and social media, including non-Standard English, and encourage students to watch TV series and films in English at home, vs. 69% of *collaboratori linguistici*); and (ii) the importance of preparing students for international English Language certificates (71% of NNESTs agree or strongly agree on that point, vs. 62% of NESTs). In contrast, NESTs consider more important the collaboration with colleagues of other subjects (8.3% vs. 64%) and the reference to CEFR descriptors in planning their teaching activities (64% vs. 51%).

*Think about your own teaching context. Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about English Language Teaching:*

as for the teaching context (s. Q31), NNESTs strongly believe that (i) English language learners should be exposed to English spoken by non-native speakers, and that (ii) language learners should be able to negotiate meaning with both native and non-native interlocutors. Hence, Italian teachers seem to consider plurilingualism and intercultural competence as an asset in language education.

*Do you regularly use a course-book in your lessons?*

As for course-books, NNESTs claim that the balance among the skills and the supporting video/audio materials are the most influential criteria in their choice. Similarly to what has been seen with NESTs, only 11 per cent of the Italian respondents maintained that they do not use a course-book but a personal syllabus consisting of activities, simulations, games, authentic texts downloaded from the internet, audiovisual materials, edited by both teachers and students, following a “situational approach”.

In conclusion, both groups of respondents revealed a good familiarity with concepts and notions related to their daily professional routines. The open-ended questions further confirmed attitudes and perspectives consolidated by experience and practice. Teachers’ personal views on

achievements and self-awareness, and different understandings of their role as (successful) teachers emerged from both sides.

NESTs' unequivocal positioning towards native-speakerism (Q13 and Q21.1)<sup>4</sup> and standard model of English (Q14) seems only apparently contradicting the preference for authenticity represented also by non-standard English (s. Q21.5, Q21.10 and Q21.11).<sup>5</sup> What impresses more than previous responses is the 100% of agreement (Q21.7) on the necessity teachers have:

*to be able to adapt teaching plans, activities and materials according to learner needs & context of use.*

This is most probably due to native teachers' perception of authenticity seen in genuine materials and in teaching programs rather than in the authentic use of English. Some explicit and clear responses, hence, revealed NESTs' willingness and openness to consider new varieties and uses of English in their teaching as well as their awareness of the potential of their students, who are daily exposed to English language for communicative purposes.

To conclude, most responses, from both sides, clearly indicate that teachers in high schools and at university are already aware of the new socio-cultural globalized scenarios and the effects they inevitably have on ELT and its models. Data confirmed that traditional notions and assumptions are already experiencing a reviewing process. At the same time the new multilingual and globalized communicative dimensions reflect the need to overcome the controversial dichotomy between NESTs and NNESTs (cf. § 3) towards a revisiting of their respective roles and a cooperative endeavour in language education.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of the findings derived from the language assistants working in Italy has confirmed the need for a shift in perspective and in considering traditional assumptions and notions in ELT, in order to develop new paths for the training of teachers able to cope with the latest innovations in communicative dynamics as well as in interpersonal contacts.

<sup>4</sup> Q13: Do you consider yourself to be a native speaker of English? And Q21: Please indicate which competences, skills or qualities you think can contribute to making a successful English teacher today: 21.1. To be a native speaker of English.

<sup>5</sup> Q21: Please indicate which competences, skills or qualities you think can contribute to making a successful English teacher today: 21.5. To encourage learners to use social media and to bring samples of authentic English into the classroom; 21.10. To select materials from the Web & use authentic audio/video materials including texts in non-standard English; 21.11 To be open to including varieties of English besides Standard English in the syllabus.

The outline of the NESTs which emerges from the survey is thus one of experienced instructors who are aware of the importance of emerging multilingual and multicultural landscapes. They are also conscious of the spread of New Englishes and ELF but are still faithful to traditional beliefs on native-speakerism and learners' perceptions.

What explicitly emerged is the need for a reappraisal of the role of the native speaker teacher, meant as a language assistant, in his/her traditional gatekeeping function. As argued by Newbold (2019), with the multilingual and multicultural evolution of classrooms, at school and at university, the function of NESTs may be relocated towards the promotion of initiatives useful for ELF communication, or in the training of students for study periods abroad, or in the active assistance to lecturers in English language and translation courses, or in the fostering of international institutional contacts and cooperative project design. In this sense, the concept of 'being a native speaker' is completely revalued and called to action: NESTs may become language facilitators for NNEs because they are successful users of English in an international context, in addition to being experienced teachers.

The contribution that NESTs may also give in the development of courses and teacher education programs, in course-books, teaching materials, curriculum design and, of course, in assessment practices, gives new vital power to their nature and potential, often undermined by the label of 'native-speakerism'. And as established in the research objectives, new roles for both NESTs and NNEs may be considered in the contribution they may have in the revisiting process of education policy and teacher training in the age of ELF, social media and ICTs to which learners are constantly exposed, especially as language users in their out-of-class experiences.

In this respect, further investigation might aim at involving students in the exploration of attitudes and beliefs. Learners' perceptions of teaching models and practices they are offered, as well as their biases or prejudices towards NES and NNEs instructors, would give interesting and essential evidence and suggestions. A successful and balanced reflective process, besides taking into account insights coming from teachers, should not ignore the other side of the second language educational process, that of learners and the amount of inputs it could provide.

**Bionote:** Silvia Sperti holds a Ph.D. in English Linguistics applied to Intercultural Communication from the University of Salento (Italy). She is an Adjunct Lecturer in English Language and Translation and an Intercultural Language Mediator. Her research interests and publications focus on the investigation of phonopragmatic and socio-cultural dimensions of intercultural communication in specialized discourse and language mediation, with special attention to ELF variations and World Englishes in cross-cultural interactions, migration contexts and language teaching.

**Author's address:** [silvia.sperti@uniroma3.it](mailto:silvia.sperti@uniroma3.it)

## References

- Balboni P. 1998, *Un profilo professionale per il docente di madrelingua straniera nelle università italiane*, in Semplici S. (ed.), *Formazione e ruolo del lettore di lingua*, Università per Stranieri, Siena.
- Canagarajah A.S. 2005, *Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Chang T.S. 2007, *Assumptions about foreignness in English learning*, Tamkang University, Taiwan.
- Chen W.C. and Cheng Y. 2010, *A case study on foreign English teachers' challenges*, in "System" 38 [1], pp. 41-49.
- Cook V. 2008, *Second language learning and language teaching*, Hodder Education, London.
- Creese A., Blackledge A. and Takhi J.K. 2014, *The ideal 'native speaker' teacher: Negotiating authenticity and legitimacy in the language classroom*, in "The Modern Language Journal" 98 [4], pp. 937-951.
- Crystal D. 2003, *English as a global language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Deterding D. 2010, *ELF-based Pronunciation Teaching in China*, in "Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics" 33 [6], pp. 3-15.
- Galloway N. 2013, *Global Englishes and English Language Teaching (ELT) – Bridging the gap between theory and practice in a Japanese context*, in "System" 41 [3], pp. 786-803.
- Hall G. 2011, *Exploring English Language Teaching: Language in Action*, Routledge, Oxon.
- Holliday A. 2005, *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Holliday A. 2011, *Intercultural Communication and Ideology*, Sage, London.
- Jenkins J. 2000, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Jenkins J. 2012, *English as a Lingua Franca from the classroom to the classroom*, in "ELT Journal" 66 [4], pp. 486-494.
- Kachru B. 1985, *Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle*, in Quirke R. and Widdowson H.G. (eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 11-30.
- Kramsch C. 1997, *The privilege of the non-native speaker*, in "PMLA" 112 [3], pp. 359-369.
- Kubota R. 2009, *The politics of cultural difference in second language education*, in "Critical Inquiry in Language Studies" 1 [1], pp. 21-39.
- Leung C., Harris R. and Rampton B. 1997, *The idealised native speaker, reified ethnicities, and classroom realities*, in "TESOL Quarterly" 31 [3], pp. 543-560.
- Liu L. 2008, *Co-teaching between native and non-native English teachers: An exploration of co-teaching models and strategies in the Chinese primary school context*, in "Reflection on English Language teaching" 7 [2], pp. 103-118.
- Mahboob A. 2010, *The NNEST lens*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Maum R. 2002, *Nonnative English-speaking teachers in the English teaching profession*, in "Eric Digest", pp. 1-7.

- Mckay S.L. 2002, *Teaching English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Medgyes P. 1994, *The non-native teacher*, Heuber Verlag, Ismaning.
- Medgyes P. 2001, *When the teacher is a non-native speaker*, in “Teaching pronunciation”, pp. 429-442.
- Newbold D. 2019, *Collaboratori linguistici – current roles, possible futures?*, in “RILA, Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica applicata” 1, pp. 66-74.
- No K-S. and Park K-J. 2008, *Some Thoughts on the Native Speaker of English*, in “Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics” 12 [2], pp. 71-92.
- Park J-K. 2008, *EPIK and NEST-NNEST collaboration in Korea revisited*, in “English Language and Literature Teaching” 14 [4], pp. 141-160.
- Pennycook A. 1994, *The cultural politics of English as an international language*, Longman, London.
- Phillipson R. 1992, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Schneider E. 2003, *The Dynamics of New Englishes: From Identity Construction to Dialect Birth*, in “Language” 79 [2], pp. 233-281.
- Seidlhofer B. 1999, *Double standards: teacher education in the Expanding Circle*, in “World Englishes” 18 [2], pp. 233-245.
- Seidlhofer B. 2011, *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Selinker L. and Lakshmanan U. 1992, *Language and fossilization*, in Gass S. and Selinker S. (eds.), *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 197-216.
- Trudgill, P. 1999. *Standard English; What it isn't*, in Bex, T and Watts, R. J. (eds.) *Standard English: The Widening Debate*, Routledge, London, pp. 117-128.
- Widdowson H.G. 1992, *ELT and EL Teachers: matters arising*, in “ELT Journal” 46 [4], pp. 333-339.
- Widdowson H.G. 1994, *The Ownership of English*, in “TESOL Quarterly” 28 [2], pp. 377-389.