

“I Didn't Get Jobs Because of the Way I Spoke, and Because of Where I Came from”: How English ‘Native Speaker’ Teachers’ Accents Affect Their Employment Opportunities

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Abstract

This article highlights the interrelationship between native-speakerism and langlism, where both concepts entail discriminatory recruitment practices against a large cohort of teachers. Given its greater concern with the accents of English teachers than with their status as ‘native’ speakers of English and their teaching competence, langlism negatively affects many English language teachers because of their ‘non-standard accents.’ In order to tackle the issue in more depth, a focus-group interview was conducted with seven English language teachers who were hired on the basis that they were ‘native speakers.’ The findings show that langlism affects not only ‘non-native speaker’ teachers of English but also pertains to ‘native speaker’ teachers who do not have the accent required by recruiters. The study concludes that native-speakerism has more discriminatory implications and that these go beyond the conventional ‘native’ versus ‘non-native’ speaker dichotomy by reaching into a teacher’s accent, regardless of his or her ‘native’ status.

Keywords: native-speakerism, langlism, accents, English teachers, discrimination, non-native speakers

1. Introduction

1.1 Who is a ‘Native Speaker’?

The dichotomy between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ speakers has been a subject of considerable debate within TESOL scholarship for decades. Individuals from countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada are typically classified as ‘native speakers’ of English, whereas those from other regions are designated as ‘non-native speakers’ (Crystal, 2006). Nevertheless, despite numerous attempts to define the characteristics of a ‘native speaker,’ (e.g., Braine, 2010; Canagarajah, 2002; Graddol, 2006; Holliday, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2017; Kumaravadivelu, 2012, 2016; Mahboob, 2010; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2015), no universally accepted definition has been established. Some scholars have linked the concept to ethnicity (Holliday, 2015, 2017; Mahboob, 2010; Rajagopalan, 2005), wherein ‘whiteness’ is often considered the norm (Braine, 2010; Holliday, 2017; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Ruecker, 2011). Others (e.g., Ali, 2009; Alqahtani, 2021; Tatar & Yildiz, 2010; Anchimbe, 2006; Davies, 2003) have emphasized the role of place of birth in determining ‘native’ status. Additionally, others (e.g., Alenazi, 2012; Alqahtani, 2021; Romney, 2010) have considered nationality the primary determinant, whereas accent has been highlighted as a key defining factor in several studies (e.g., Alqahtani, 2021; Ashraf, 2016; Braine, 2010; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). The wide range of criteria used to define ‘native speakers’ further underscores the lack of consensus on the term. Rather than reflecting an objective linguistic classification, the concept appears to be oversimplified, inconsistently applied, and shaped by the perspectives of those who define it. Consequently, in alignment with Holliday (2005), this paper employs quotation marks around the terms ‘native speaker/s’ and ‘non-native speaker/s’ to acknowledge that these labels do not denote objectively distinct linguistic categories but rather reflect prevalent discursive constructions.

1.2 Discrimination against ‘Non-Native Speaker’ Teachers

That said, the distinction between ‘native speakers’ and ‘non-native speakers’ goes beyond a matter of scholarly debates to have far-reaching implications, particularly for individuals who are categorized as ‘non-native speakers.’ Holliday (2015) contends that one of the most significant ramifications is the systematic discrimination against ‘non-native’ speakers in employment practices within English language teaching institutions (see also Alqahtani, 2024; 2022; Braine, 2010; Canagarajah, 2002; Graddol, 2006; Holliday, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2017; Kumaravadivelu, 2012, 2016; Mahboob, 2010; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Rudolph et al., 2015; Benattabou, 2020). Empirical studies indicate that many English language schools prioritize ‘native speaker’ status as a prerequisite for hiring (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob & Golden, 2013; Selvi, 2010), despite the absence of linguistic evidence substantiating the validity of such a criterion (Holliday, 2005, 2017). Consequently, ‘non-native’ English language teachers often encounter significant professional disadvantages. They are frequently subjected to heightened employment requirements, including the need for advanced academic credentials and extensive

teaching experience—qualifications that are not typically demanded of their ‘native-speaker’ counterparts (Ruecker, 2011). Furthermore, research indicates that even when employed, ‘non-native’ speaker teachers tend to receive lower payment in comparison to ‘native’ speaker teachers, exacerbating existing inequalities within the field of English language education (Alqahtani, 2022; Griffith, 2015; Jung, 2014; Saengngoen, 2014).

1.3 How Native-Speakerism Affects Both ‘Native’ and ‘Non-Native’ Speaker Teachers

Holliday (2005) conceptualizes such discriminatory practices against ‘non-native’ speaker teachers as ‘native-speakerism’, a construct that encapsulates an asymmetrical power dynamic between the politically and economically dominant ‘Centre’—comprising predominantly Western nations—and the historically marginalized ‘Periphery’ (p. 2). According to Holliday (2005), native-speakerism perpetuates the perception that ‘native-speaker’ teachers embody an idealized ‘Western culture,’ which is erroneously positioned as the standard for both the English language and its pedagogical methodologies (p. 6). This ideological construct engenders pervasive stereotypes of ‘non-native’ teachers, who are frequently depicted as passive, subservient, lacking confidence, and resistant to innovation (Holliday, 2005, p. 19).

However, Alqahtani (2024) argues that native-speakerism entails wider discriminatory practices that go beyond the conventional ‘native’ versus ‘non-native speaker’ teacher debate. He argues that native-speakerism may also negatively impact ‘native speaker’ teachers. He points out that the ‘native speaker’ teacher brand is a nuanced façade for whiteness where white-skinned teachers have a clear advantage when applying for jobs as English teachers compared to their non-white counterparts, regardless of their ‘native’ or ‘non-native’ categorization. In fact, his study reveals that in some countries, white applicants who come from ‘non-native’ and even non-English-speaking areas such as Eastern Europe and Russia were employed as English teachers, whilst those who come from ‘native speaker’ countries such as South Africa—but have darker skin—were denied employment because they did not look like ‘native speakers.’ Therefore, the racist, discriminatory implications of native-speakerism go beyond the ‘native’ versus ‘non-native’ dichotomy to impact even those who are considered ‘native speakers.’

2. Problem statement

The intention of this study is, therefore, to expand the discussion on the negative impact of native-speakerism on ‘native speaker’ teachers by approaching it from a different angle: that of a teacher’s accent. While the concept of a ‘standard’ British accent is based on the pronunciation prevalent in southern England, ‘native speaker’ English language teachers from the UK, and other areas around the world where English is the first language, do not all speak with this accent. Rather, those who speak English exhibit a wide variety of accents which differ widely from one another and from the ‘standard’ form.

While Received Pronunciation (RP) is often seen as the ‘standard’ English accent, only 10% of the British population actually speaks with this accent (Kleshnina & Andreeva, 2021), meaning that a further 90% of those from the UK speak with a range of quite different accents to RP. Similarly, the American accent is a loose term that is used to refer to the General American pronunciation (GenAm), despite the fact that it is not the form used by everyone in the USA.

Therefore, in order to address the implications of ‘native speaker’ teachers’ accents on their employment opportunities, this paper starts with a review of the literature on the impact of accents on speakers’ pronunciation of English. The paper then moves to discussing the findings by a group of ‘native speaker’ teachers who reported instances that involved discriminatory practices because of their accents.

3. Literature review

3.1 Linguistic Discrimination (Langlism)

One of the areas of discrimination where native-speakerism is clearly manifested is the discrimination based on a speaker’s accent. In tackling this area, Lachini (2024) coins the term “langlism” (taken from the words *language* and *racism*). He defines the term as “a form of racism rooted in colonization, class divisions, and power structures. Colonialism entrenched language hierarchies, elevating colonizers’ languages while demeaning indigenous languages as unrefined” (p. 1). Lachini argues that, similar to racism, a speaker’s accent may negatively influence the way they are perceived and, therefore, treated by others. According to Lachini (2024),

“langlism” disproportionately impacts non-native speakers of English, reinforcing systemic biases in education, workplaces, and society. Rooted in colonialism and linguistic imperialism, langlism privileges standard accents like Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) while marginalizing non-native English varieties and regional dialects. Non-native speakers face barriers to social mobility and professional advancement due to accent biases, often perceived as less competent or professional despite their expertise. (p. 1)

Thus, similar to native-speakerism, langlism is a prejudiced ideology that negatively discriminates against ‘non-native’ speakers and limits their job opportunities. The next section discusses this form of discrimination and its impact.

3.2 The Impact of Langlism on Job Opportunities for Individuals with ‘Non-Standard’ English Accents

Lachini’s (2024) concept of langlism whereby many speakers are discriminated against because of their accent is apparent in the literature. In particular, ‘non-native speakers’ who speak with what is perceived to be a ‘non-standard’ English accent often receive less favorable social, experiential, and professional evaluations than their ‘native speaker’ counterparts. Additionally, they are frequently perceived as less trustworthy, credible, effective, and competent (Baquiran & Nicoladis, 2020; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Ramjattan, 2021; Tel ó et al.,

2022). These negative perceptions usually affect recruiters' decisions when it comes to offering job opportunities (Ertorer et al., 2020; Näre & Cleland Silva, 2021; Roessel et al., 2019), and they particularly impact those who come from racial and ethnic minorities (Ramjattan, 2022a). In fact, discrimination based on a speaker's accent may start at the initial and screening stages before language teachers even start their work (Ertorer et al., 2020; Roessel et al., 2019). As a result, fearing that their accent will negatively impact their chances of being hired (Harrison, 2014), many 'non-native speakers' go through training that aims to help them to minimise their accent so that it more closely aligns with industry standards (Thomson, 2014). British and American accents are favored as the target accents that speakers should copy in order to modify their accents (Oculares & Trakulkasemsuk, 2025), even though eliminating traces of an individual's linguistic background is often unsuccessful (Lee et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the expectation that 'non-native speakers' should modify their accents remains prevalent among recruiters (Chan, 2019; Ramjattan, 2022b; Tel ó et al., 2023).

3.3 *Langlism in the Field of English Language Teaching*

Similar to most sectors, the field of English language teaching has been affected by langlism and, therefore, many 'non-native speaker' teachers have been discriminated against when it comes to employment opportunities. Recruiters base their biased decisions on the claim that 'non-native speaker' teachers do not have "clear accents" (Alqahtani, 2021, p. 132). Although every speaker's accent is unique and a part of his or her identity (Ashraf, 2016; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Nejari et al., 2024), 'non-native speaker' teachers—because of their accents—are perceived as less competent than their 'native speaker' peers (Davari & Nourzadeh, 2024), leading to a "deep sense of inferiority" (Braine, 2010, p. 29). For example, Dubien (2024, p. 63) reports that one English teacher from Belarus living in Canada gets asked by people "where are you originally from?" because of his accent, regardless of his fluency and the linguistic skills that he possesses. Furthermore, Smerdiagina (2024) argues that accent discrimination goes beyond the human level and also pertains to AI systems. In her study, she tested the performances of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) systems, particularly Google's Gboard (Android), Apple's keyboard (iOS), and Whisper by Open AI to test for any potential biases against 'non-native' speakers. Her findings show that the ASR systems rated the participants with American and British accents more highly than it rated those from other backgrounds such as African, Asiana, and Latino speakers of English. Findings such as those above show the interrelationship between langlism and native-speakerism, whereby 'native speaker' teachers are favored over their 'non-native speaker' counterparts simply on the basis of their accents.

3.4 *Does Langlism Affect 'Native Speaker' Teachers?*

Having discussed the negative impact of langlism on individuals' job opportunities, it is clear that langlism has left individuals with 'non-standard' accents of English in a place of disadvantage because of the way they speak. However, most of the body of research that discussed the impact of langlism in the language teaching field has done so in terms of the conventional 'native speaker' versus 'non-native speaker' teacher debate. It has focused on the non-English accents that influenced English language teachers' use of English. Expanding on Alqahtani (2024)—where racism rather than a mere 'native' versus 'non-native' speaker distinction was the discriminatory factor in recruiting English language teachers—the discussion in this study extends the concept of langlism to teachers who do not speak with what are considered to be 'standard' varieties of English such as the RP and GenAm varieties, despite the fact that they may otherwise be viewed as and also recruited on the basis that they are 'native speakers' of English.

Therefore, in order to explore langlism in terms of English language teachers' regional accents, this study poses the following research questions:

- 1- To what extent does langlism affect 'native speaker' teachers?
- 2- What are the implications of not having 'standard' varieties of English for 'native speaker' teachers?

4. Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, the researchers conducted an explanatory focus group interview with seven teachers of English who had worked in different countries around the globe and who were recruited because of their 'native speaker' teacher status. This approach was chosen for its effectiveness in data gathering, particularly when exploring the level of consensus on a given topic (Morgan, 1993). Three of the study participants come from South Africa, one from the USA, one from the Republic of Ireland, and two from the United Kingdom. The participants were assigned pseudonyms that have no direct or indirect connection to their real identities. However, the nationality and the accent category of each participant are highlighted in order to give insights into their accents. It is important to note that the 'accent category' here refers to how the participants described their own accents rather than the researchers making an assumption about them.

Name	Gender	Nationality	Accent category
Tina	Female	South Africa	South African
Elena	Female	South Africa	South African
Kelly	Female	South Africa	South African
Corrie	Female	United States	General American
Brian	Male	Republic of Ireland	Irish
Peter	Male	United Kingdom	Yorkshire
Paul	Male	United Kingdom	Geordie

The participants' profile

4.1 The Participant Recruitment Process

First, an email was sent to the recruiter at one state university in Saudi Arabia responsible for hiring English language instructors, outlining the research objectives and requesting assistance in identifying interested instructors to participate in the study. As a result of this approach, seven teachers showed interest in participating. However, as most were on holiday in their home countries, conducting in-person interviews was not feasible. Consequently, the researchers decided to conduct a focus group interview via Zoom, a widely used video conferencing platform that offers a cost-effective and convenient alternative to face-to-face interviews (Gray et al., 2020). Given the circumstances, Zoom seemed the most suitable method for facilitating discussion of the research inquiries. The one-time focus group lasted for approximately one hour.

Focus groups are widely acknowledged as useful tools for collecting qualitative data and gaining deep insights into various topics within social sciences research (Kitzinger, 1995; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). A major advantage of focus groups is their ability to provide researchers with real-time assessments of participants' reactions and emotions, yielding immediate and valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions. This method also improves the understanding of participants' responses to the questions. Generally, focus groups serve as a powerful approach for obtaining detailed and refined insights across different professional contexts.

During the focus group interview, the researchers acted primarily as facilitators, allowing for unobtrusive note-taking while the discussion unfolded. This setting encouraged in-depth conversations, capturing the teachers' views in their own words and uncovering insights that may not have surfaced in one-on-one interviews. Furthermore, the group dynamic enabled participants to expand on each other's responses, enriching the discussion and enhancing the depth of data collected.

In order to ensure the integrity of the collected data, the interview questions were carefully crafted to give participants the freedom to express their honest opinions. The questions were open-ended, clear, and designed to stimulate meaningful discussion rather than to allow for simple yes/no answers. The reliability of the responses stemmed from the diverse range of possible answers, as the participant group was both homogeneous (in terms of occupation and native language) and heterogeneous (in terms of the participants' accents). Additionally, all participants were equally qualified to contribute to the discussion. Reliability was further reinforced by the study's well-structured objectives and the final review of the transcript by the participants.

The focus group questions revolved around the interviewees' definitions of a 'native speaker,' their perspectives on the 'native speaker' requirement for English teaching positions, and their experiences or observations of discrimination against teachers flagged as 'non-native speakers.' Primarily, the questions did not explicitly address English teachers' accents as a primary discussion topic. However, as this theme surfaced repeatedly throughout the conversation, it could not be overlooked and so became integral to the study's data analysis.

4.2 Data Analysis

As the study data was collected through a focus group interview, thematic content analysis (Cresswell & Poth, 2016) was considered to be an appropriate method for analyzing the transcript. The researchers, therefore, chose Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of thematic analysis: familiarisation, initiating codes, developing larger themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and finally writing up and presenting the themes. In the first step, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data by reading through the transcript data multiple times. Furthermore, as we transcribed the data ourselves rather than relying on any speech-to-text or automatic speech recognition software, this approach offered an effective way to reach the ultimate familiarization necessary for data analysis (Kvale, 2007). Secondly, we generated initial codes that appeared to be of importance, since they recurred regularly throughout the focus-group interview. This initial coding produced two larger themes. We labelled these 'the accent brand' and 'arbitrary practices' in the fifth step. We then reviewed the themes again to ensure their coherence before finally writing up the data analysis.

We employed deductive coding because, as Byrne (2021) points out, "[d]ata analysed and coded deductively can often provide a less rich description of the overall dataset, instead focusing on providing a detailed analysis of a particular aspect of the dataset interpreted through a particular theoretical lens" (p. 1397). In order to home in on the negative effect of langlism on 'native speaker' teachers' opportunities in the job market, langlism was used as the theoretical framework through which to identify areas of hardship that 'native-speakers' endure. As a result, it was possible to detect not only that their accent was a source of a struggle for many 'native speaker' teachers but also to establish a gap in the scholarly research.

After the focus group data had been transcribed and analyzed, it was shared with each participant for review to confirm that the findings accurately represented their perspectives. Following the collection of individual feedback, a follow-up discussion was held with all participants via Zoom to further validate the results.

5. Findings

The findings of this study reveal that although the participants were recruited on the basis that they were 'native speaker' teachers, they were still impacted by langlism in two major ways. First, they were required by English school recruiters to modify their accents and adopt a British or American accent because that was the 'brand' that was being sold to clients. Secondly, when they were unable to meet the requirement to modify their accents, participants faced arbitrary recruitment practices whereby they were denied jobs as English language teachers, regardless of their qualifications. The two main findings on 'the accent brand' and 'arbitrary practices' that emerged from the interviews are first presented in the next section and then discussed in greater detail.

5.1 The Accent Brand

Tina, from South Africa, talked about her experience of teaching in Korea:

If you say I'm from the UK or I'm from America, I'm from Canada or South Africa, perhaps, it just seems better as a brand, I would say... I know in Korea, they prefer the American accent. It's the aesthetic of it, and the fact that you're a brand

Her fellow South African, Kelly, raised a similar point but also pointed out that she was required to adjust her accent:

... when I started working there [in Korea], I was actually told and instructed by.... I was working for a private language school, where we draw on that idea of being a brand and then selling education. I was pretty much required to put on a fake accent to teach.

Elena, a fellow South African, confirmed this finding and stated:

I was also told to drop the South African accent in Korea, initially. It's the "hog ones" [greedy] that we used to work for. There, you are a brand.

The remarks above show how many recruiters around the world demand that English language teachers adopt certain accents because they view such accents as 'brands' that sell to potential customers.

5.2 Arbitrary Practices

When teachers fail to modify their accents to adhere to the 'accent brand' required by recruiters, they are faced with arbitrary recruitment practices. Some of the study participants reported that they had witnessed, or even personally experienced, such arbitrary practices when they failed to adopt the American and British accents favored by their recruiters. For example, Corrie, a female teacher from the USA who speaks with what sounds like a General American pronunciation pointed out:

When I was teaching in South Korea, there was sort of an outrage one year where, all of a sudden, Irish teachers were not allowed to teach English anymore. The government had decided that they were incomprehensible, and they were not allowed to teach; they weren't hiring any Irish speakers. And then the Scottish speakers, we're thinking, "Are we next? Are we incomprehensible as well?"... even if it's an English-speaking country, for example, like Ireland where everyone speaks English and everyone is a native speaker, [where] no one speaks [English] a second language, really, all of a sudden, they weren't hired or chosen because of their accents. This is ridiculous in some regard.

Brian, an Irish participant supports Corrie's remark regarding arbitrary and discriminatory recruitment practices against Irish and Scottish speakers of English. This time, however, these practices were taking place in China.

Even, your accent can inhibit you from getting jobs. I know there's a lot of schools in China that only want American and Canadian teachers, because their accents are much more clear, and they don't hire people from Ireland or England or Scotland, because they think they have heavy accents and they're not going to The students won't be able to understand them, so even if you are a native speaker, you can still find yourself not being able to get employment in certain places in the world, because of a preference for accent.

Peter, who comes from Yorkshire in the UK, elaborated on Brian's remark. Drawing from his own experience, he added:

Well, I had that kind of experience when I was younger. I know, when I was younger, when I was a young lad in the 1980s, going down to London, I didn't get jobs because of the way I spoke, and because of where I came from. Definitely. I didn't have the correct [accent].... I spoke with a heavy accent back then, obviously, to a degree, but I was still comprehensible, but they didn't ... I didn't fit into what was expected of the language. (Peter, from Yorkshire)

Although Peter's remarks refer to an experience that took place in the 1980s and that it could be fairly argued that things have changed since then, another participant, Paul (from Newcastle) echoed Peter's story, pointing out:

Yeah. That can happen within a culture itself. I mean, Brian [the Irish participant] can speak volumes about that, and so can I. I come from the north of England, from Newcastle. I speak with a Geordie accent. People tell me I don't speak English properly, and I'm sure Brian could tell you stories galore about being Irish, you don't speak English properly. It happens to lots of people in England, that you need to go and re-educate yourself how to speak a language. I think, yeah, there's huge prejudice on where you come from, both regional and international.

The excerpts from the participants above demonstrate how even 'native speaker' teachers could face arbitrary employment practices when they spoke with their regional accents and did not adhere to their employers' preferences for speaking with a more 'standard' accent such as an American or British accent.

6. Discussion

When it comes to the 'accent brand', the idea that a particular accent is a brand that sells is prevalent in the literature. Laroche et al. (2021) argue that "the use of foreign languages or accents can evoke consumers' associations that are transferred to the advertised product, thus creating a positive image of the brand and product" (p. 1209). Moreover, Lwin and Wee (1999) found that accents such as American and British accents were more effective than Asian-sounding English accents in advertising campaigns. For instance, in Singapore, consumers

find foreign products that are advertised in a British accent more credible compared to the same product advertised in a Singaporean-English accent (Lalwani et al., 2005). Bennett and Loken (2008) goes on to argue that consumers usually tend to believe that products advertised in a British accent are perceived as having higher quality and sophistication (see also Puzakova et al., 2015).

The preference for a British accent (i.e., RP) dates back decades. For example, Skinner (1990) argues that it is the standard form of English in the United Kingdom and largely accepted by learners as a pedagogical model (Kachru, 1981). Morales et al. (2012) further argues that “Based on historical, social, political, and commercial influences, in non-British contexts such as the United States or Australia, BRP [British Received Pronunciation] is an overarching English-language standard” (p. 34). For all of these reasons, those who had recruited the participants were keener on advertising their product, which was English language teaching, in a British (or even American) rather than a South African accent in order to sell a brand that would seem appealing to their paying clients.

As a result, the participants remarked that their recruiters demanded that they change their South African accents in order to appeal to their customers. Such requirements have been reported elsewhere in the literature. For example, Chan (2019) interviewed a group of professionals, teachers, and students in Hong Kong and investigated their perceptions on the issue. Chan (2019) reports that many recruiters demand their employees have American or British accents. What is even more concerning is the idea that there are training programs designed for individuals whose accents are not perceived as favorable by recruiters (Thomson, 2014). The costs of these programs are striking and range from \$25 per hour to more than \$10,000 for a full package that lasts for several weeks (Thomson, 2014, p. 171).

Therefore, as can be seen from the participants’ remarks and the discussion above, it appears that even though the participants are ‘native speakers’ and had been recruited on that basis, they were affected by *langlism*. They were required to modify their accents in order to meet the ‘accent brand’ that was required by the recruiters, even if doing so entailed denying their identities of which accent is a part (Ashraf, 2016; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Nejari et al., 2024), or even having to endure financial hardship by enrolling in accent modification programs. Thus, the discriminatory implications of *langlism* do not impact ‘non-native speaker’ teachers alone. Rather, they also pertain to ‘native speaker’ teachers who do not meet the ‘brand accent’ required by recruiters.

Furthermore, when ‘native speaker’ teachers fail to adopt the accent required by their recruiters, they encounter arbitrary employment practices such as not having equal job opportunities with their ‘native speaker’ counterparts who do speak with a ‘standard’ accent. Moreover, it appears that such employment practices were not carried out by greedy and selfish employers (or the “hog ones” as one of the participants called them) only. Rather, official authorities, for example the English Program in Korea (EPIK) which was initiated by the Korean government itself, have also engaged in such practices. Jeon (2009) points out:

The English Program in Korea (EPIK) is an example of Korea’s active response to the globalization process through which Korea not only accommodates external demands but also strategically pursues national interests through equipping its citizens with a command of English. EPIK, affiliated with the Korean Ministry of Education, was established in 1995 in order to hire native speakers of English as teachers, with the mandate to improve the English-speaking abilities of students and teachers in Korea and to reform English teaching methodologies. (p. 231)

The EPIK’s policy of hiring ‘native speaker’ teachers resulted in the recruitment of 22,000 ‘native speaker’ teachers in Korea by 2008 (Dawe, 2014). However, (as noted earlier by Corrie) the Korean decision to exclude English teachers with an Irish accent—which left their Scottish peers also questioning their positions—shows that restrictions on what exactly constitutes a ‘native speaker’ and the inclusion of elements such as the teachers’ spoken English accent could also be imposed at the official level. As this example demonstrates, English language teachers with the ‘wrong’ accent can face unequal opportunities despite fitting within the ‘native teacher’ speaker category more generally.

The prejudicial view of English spoken with an Irish accent is not a new phenomenon. Matsuura et al. (1999) investigated a group of Japanese English learners’ perceptions of English spoken with an Irish accent and realised that the learners struggled with comprehension. Even those learners whose comprehension was better still did not favor the Irish accent. For the same reason, a failure to understand English accents other than RP or GenAm accents was a concern for English teachers who speak with a Scottish accent, as illustrated in Brian’s comment above.

Additionally, even teachers from the UK such as Peter who comes from Yorkshire and speaks with a Yorkshire accent can have difficulty in securing a job as an English language teacher within the UK because of the strong preference that some English teacher recruiters have for the RP accent. Here, Beal (2008) argues that some pronunciation features such as H-dropping that are common in Yorkshire are stigmatized and viewed as a working-class feature. Wood (2019) argues that although speakers with a Yorkshire accent are perceived as friendly, resilient, and hardworking, they are more likely to be stereotyped as having “a lower level of education and to be working class” (p. 182). Jackson (2023) explains that “The social history of Yorkshire has arguably accounted for resulting social evaluations of Yorkshire speakers as being of lower status and prestige” (p. 1861). Observations such as these may partly account for why a strong bias against the Yorkshire accent influences recruiters.

Similar to the Yorkshire accent, the Geordie accent, (spoken by Paul) and found mainly in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne area in the northeast of England, is stigmatized as a working-class accent (Atar & Erdem, 2020; Taylor, 2021). It is a variety of English that shares similarities with the Scottish accent because of the proximity of both regions (Beal, 2009). Therefore, it is possible to surmise that Geordie speakers

may endure arbitrary recruitment practices similar to those experienced by their British peers from Yorkshire or Scotland and which are based on the way they speak. Baratta (2017) also finds accent bias. He reports the experiences of 32 qualified British trainees who were undergoing the initial teacher training program in order to be qualified as teachers at state schools in the UK. He states that the trainees came from various parts of the north of England and were highly qualified. Nevertheless, their mentors required them to modify their accents because they sounded “unprofessional” (Baratta, 2017, p. 421). Therefore, from the findings and discussions above, it seems that whenever ‘native speaker’ teachers failed to modify their accents to meet the accent requirement of their recruiters, they could be faced with arbitrary recruitment practices, regardless of their ‘native speaker’ status.

7. Conclusion

This study has highlighted an often unacknowledged and underresearched element of native-speakerism that can affect ‘native speaker’ teachers in the form of langlism (the term which Lacini (2024) coined to capture the concept of linguistic racism). Although this study’s participants were recruited on the basis that they were ‘native speaker’ teachers, they had all witnessed—or personally experienced—unreasonable requirements from their recruiters to modify their accents. Those who failed to do so were excluded from job opportunities as English teachers.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the study. First, native-speakerism comes in different shapes and forms that go beyond the conventional ‘native’ versus ‘non-native’ speaker distinction. Native-speakerism can act as a cover to mask deeper factors such as racism and prejudice, where ‘native speaker’ teachers are favored—or not favored—based on their skin colour, or, as in the case of this study, native-speakerism can be manifested in the form of langlism. In this case, the teacher’s skin colour was not the defining factor for their ‘native speaker’ status but rather their accents. Therefore, if a teacher does not speak a Received Pronunciation or a General American Pronunciation variety of English, they may be excluded from job opportunities which are open to those with the ‘right’ accent.

The second conclusion relates to the danger of native-speakerism because this form of discrimination can pertain to ‘native speaker’ teachers, and, in this case, it can introduce further limitations on who qualifies as a ‘native speaker’ in a very arbitrary, and unprofessional, manner. In this case, the hiring process of English language teachers becomes even more discriminatory, since the category of the ‘native speaker’ teacher has become smaller and more exclusive. Therefore, more measures should be taken to secure the rights of disadvantaged ‘native speaker’ teachers who speak with regional accents that are not privileged, as is the case of RP and Gen Am, and which do not hold the same appeal for their employers.

In brief, the findings and subsequent discussion offered here point to a need for this small-scale, exploratory study to be expanded further.

8. Limitations

While this study provides new insights into the implications of native-speakerism and its discriminatory practices when it comes to the hiring process for English language teachers, its sample remains small. Seven participants may not be a sufficient number to reach more conclusive results and, therefore, may limit the transferability of the study. Transferability refers to the extent of which the findings of a study can be generalised and, therefore, applied to other contexts. The small number of the participants may present a challenge for researchers, partitioners and decision-makers to determine whether the results are applicable to other contexts. Therefore, although the insights are meaningful, they may represent individual experiences rather than wider practices, making it difficult to draw conclusions or develop policies and recommendations.

Furthermore, the small sample may affect the depth of the results. While qualitative research is not concerned with statistical generalisability, a larger sample can enrich the data by revealing patterns, contradictions, or nuances that are less likely to occur in smaller groups. As a result, the small number of the participants may lead to an underrepresentation of other voices and reduce the overall vigour and strength of the study’s conclusions.

Moreover, although it could be argued that a major limitation of the study is that the participants were currently employed by just one single university and, therefore, the context is limited, the contexts of their insights on the topic come from various places of employment around the world. They still provided insights from previous experiences they had encountered elsewhere. Nevertheless, more research is needed on the implications of native-speakerism in areas that go beyond the conventional ‘native’ versus ‘non-native’ speaker distinctions.

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Authors’ contributions

Dr. Muneer Hezam Alqahtani is the first author, and he was responsible for the data collection, data analysis and reporting the findings. Dr. Nasser Fahad Al-Dosari is the second author, and he was responsible for reviewing the body of literature, the research design and proofreading the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript

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