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Researching Discourses of Culture and Native-speakerism

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This chapter explores the research methodology employed in a study of how a small group of 32 teachers and students of English in a university department in Mexico construct culture, and how such constructions feed the ideology of native-speakerism. The study was carried out by Armenta (2014), who will be referred to as the researcher throughout. The investigation included 24 student participants, 16 women and eight men. The teachers' group comprised one American, one Canadian and two British nationals, along with four Mexican teachers. The construction of culture was found to be a complex process in which teachers and students struggled in negotiating diverse sources of knowledge, from the personal (parents and upbringing) to professional, and/or public discourses, including those current in ELT. Rather than reporting the whole study, this chapter will take examples from the data collection and analysis.

The ideology of native-speakerism is deeply embedded in a wide range of ELT professional thinking and activity, as well as in popular perception, and is at the same time often not recognised as an ideology (Holliday & Aboshiha 2009; Kumaravadivelu 2012). It is underpinned by naïve discourses of English and culture. Therefore, when researching how students and teachers construct culture they are likely to refer to 'native speaker' language as a taken-for-granted part of a cultural content that needs to be learnt with English. We therefore argue that postmodern, constructivist research methods are necessary to get to the bottom of the influence of the ideology through the application of creative interventions by means of the use of critical incidents. As a result of this, the participants began to reveal how images of 'native speaker' teachers and 'non-native speaker' students were created.

The reason for focusing on the methodology rather than the findings is that arriving at these findings was far from a straightforward process.