Chapter 26: A critical cosmopolitan understanding of English as an international language teacher identity

Introduction

Looking at the identity of teachers of English as an international language needs to be in the light of how English as a world language is as immensely diverse as it is associated with multiple cultural realities. That English is by its nature international makes it unnecessary to label it so. To focus my exploration of this identity, I will relate aspects of my professional trajectory which have brought me into contact with a range of communities of teachers both as colleagues and students and as researchers and academic writers. Cutting across this trajectory at every stage has been a linguistic and cultural politics which I feel has deeply affected the professional lives of all these communities. While brought to explicit attention in the mid-1990s (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992), and my later work on native-speakerism (Holliday, 2005, 2018), I will relate my experience of this politics from the beginning of my career in 1973.

It is an appreciation of the deeper political forces at play within this career history, through a difficult third-space auto-analytical process (Ogden, 2004; Soja, 1996), that helps me to understand the professional identities of the other teachers and student teachers I came into contact with. It is not just teachers making sense of the society and the students in their classes, but teachers making sense of how they are constructing their students and their own professional identities. This focus on the inevitably political nature of teaching English which can so easily disappear between the lines places identity in the realm of a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) where we become conscious of how we fit into the larger scheme of things.

Encountering Orientalist native-speakerism

I therefore begin with 1973 and my early experience of teaching English at the British Council in Tehran, Iran, which I describe in the final chapter of Holliday (2022a). This is located within my wider testing of my non-essentialist theory that the culture shock I experienced in Iran was due to the Orientalist grand narrative which I took with me rather than the foreignness of the culture that I found there. I began to understand how I had been drip-fed this false narrative through stories, cinema, narratives of nation and so on. This Orientalism (Said, 1978) falsely imagines everyone in the so-labelled East to be collectivist, indolent and lacking in self-direction and criticality, **[end of page 411 here]** as they are enslaved by the hierarchies of tradition. This contrasted with a false idealisation of so-labelled Western civilisation as individualist, democratic and free-thinking. This aligns with the

'us'-'them' imagination of 'non-native speakers' and 'native speakers' respectively (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Ironically, while I was struggling to put aside Orientalism in recognising the cosmopolitan modernity in Iranian society, I was unaware that it was creeping into my novice teaching through native-speakerism to feed my desire to be recognised as a professional. As Fairclough (1995: 36) notes, we are 'standardly' unaware of the discourses that govern our beliefs.

Opposing forces of understanding

My professional identity was therefore strung between two forces of understanding. Throughout this chapter, I will risk labelling these forces as a rough template to make sense. I shall refer to a *critical cosmopolitan understanding* of the creative, autonomous, self-directing linguistic, translingual and cultural competences and hybridities that our students and we as teachers bring with us independently of or indeed enhanced by cultural origin. I take the term from the critical cosmopolitan sociology that recognises how these realities are falsely constructed and marginalised by the Orientalist grand narrative (Delanty, 2006; Delanty et al., 2008). I will refer to this marginalising force, which denies these realities, as the *native-speakerist distortion*. I use here Karl Mannheim's (1936: 50) definition of ideology as distortion. I see a relationship here with Lowe's term 'the native speaker frame', which influences how 'English language teaching professionals interpret and understand their experiences' (2020: 57).

This conflict of understandings was well-represented within the circumstances of my early unconscious adoption of native-speakerism in the early 1970s. It was a transition moment when the British Council in Tehran upgraded its 'business' image around new 'London-appointed' so-labelled 'native speaker' teachers. The first distortion was that the Iranian teachers who were my initial reference group, and who I remember to have encouraged a more cosmopolitan view of English, were suddenly downgraded and by default became labelled 'non-native speakers' (Holliday, 2022a: 102).

The distortion was also present in my understanding of a particular artefact that I retained from that time - a student assignment which critiqued my teaching. The student was concerned about how she could not speak in a classroom debate that I organised about the stereotype that 'Iranian women always want to get married' (Holliday, 2022a: 102-104).

My first interpretation of her assignment was dominated by the *native-speakerist distortion*. It framed the classroom debate as a mechanism for 'getting the students to talk' as though they had no prior critical ability, and that her silence in the debate was due to the lack of personal critical voice in her 'collectivist culture' which also 'oppressed women'. There was also a drawing of me teaching which I interpreted as her appreciation of the so-labelled 'native speaker' presence.

The *critical cosmopolitan understanding* now tells me, quite differently, that she is concerned about apparent sexism in the debate topic and is framing her silence within a worldwide male domination in which I was implicated. This is evident because of the overall power of her critique in which she compares the quality of teaching with courses offered

by the American cultural centre and reports how the other students talk about their educational experience. She and the students she mentions appear worldly, educated and discerning. She expresses an acute awareness of the cultural complexities around her. I do not believe that she was unusual. She was a student of engineering with plans to travel abroad; but her assignment represents well to me the cosmopolitan modernity that I learnt to recognise in the Iranian society around me, in which my acquaintances **[end of page 412 here]** read international fiction and engaged more than I did with politically and culturally critical television, cinema, fine art and theatre which they inherited from previous generations (Honarbin-Holliday, 2009; Kamali, 2019).

The *native-speakerist distortion* blatantly disregarded this understanding. Aligning my professional identity with the new London-appointed teachers, who could produce lesson plans with efficient structures for 'teaching how to learn', made me very quickly forget how the Iranian teachers, who had hitherto been my reference group, had encouraged a critical cultural ownership of English. Also ignored was a resistance to the way that English was being introduced in Iran, connected with the coming Iranian Revolution. This was evident at the 1978 English for Special Purposes conference in Isfahan, where the Iranian university English specialists who opened the conference chose to speak in Farsi to an international audience.

A significant aspect of the differences between these conflicting viewpoints is that the *native-speakerist distortion* represents a quite dramatic and completely baseless claim to knowledge of learning. It survives because it satisfies the professional need for modernist efficiency in an environment where English language teaching outside the state sector has lacked traditional subject knowledge (Bernstein, 1971; Holliday, 1994). A newly technologised knowledge of so-labelled 'native speaker' linguistic and cultural skills was therefore very attractive. It enabled me, with unshakeable confidence, to put down a student ten years older than me who stood up in class and asked me to explain grammar by telling him that 'we' do not learn like that (Holliday, 2005: 56, 2022a: 101). I saw a parallel of this prejudice in Western oil company engineers who looked down on their Iranian colleagues because they 'only know the theory'.

Student power in large university classes

What began to pull me away from native-speakerism was another part of my professional trajectory - my experience of large classes in Syrian and Egyptian universities in the 1980s. The power of the critical cosmopolitan reality I saw there was such that it pushed aside my by-then very secure native-speakerist positionality.

The *native-speakerist distortion* was such that, with a recent masters degree I was advising Syrian and Egyptian colleagues who had PhDs in English linguistics or literature from British or American universities. That they had had to go to the West to get these degrees reflects another aspect of English linguistic imperialism which is beyond the scope of this chapter. I was thought to be equipped with an 'active' learning skills approach that could overturn 'teacher-centredness' in university lectures where the students were thought to

be 'passive' listeners, exacerbated by the size of the classes which often ranged from 200 to 500 students.

The opposing *critical cosmopolitan understanding* was supported by my recently learnt ethnographic classroom observation that enabled the putting aside of preconceptions of how teaching should be done (Allwright, 1988). Hence, my first observation of a class at Damascus University in 1980, sitting at the side so that I could see what the students at the back of the class were doing, enabled me to see they were by no means 'passive'. From their faces, their body language and their scribbling of notes, I saw overwhelming evidence of the critical, individualised, self-directed, 'active' engagement. I also witnessed this phenomenon of overwhelming student presence in many observed lectures in 18 Egyptian universities that I visited (Holliday, 1992). While impossible to generalise about two differently and diversely complex countries, this was simply enough to put aside the Orientalist, native-speakerist grand narrative that said that such behaviour was not encouraged by 'non-Western' cultures, and indeed the communicative approach, which I will come to below. **[end of page 413 here]**

Our job is not to control student learning

This student power to me indicates that the identity of the teacher is not as someone who somehow controls learning but who responds to what is already there amongst the students. This was resonant at the time with Widdowson's (1984, pp. 189-200) use of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to make the point that teachers cannot control what their students learn. Despite Prospero's teaching, Caliban learns what he likes. This also inspired my later writing about the inevitable mismatch between the teacher's planned lesson and each of the lessons of all the students (Holliday, 1994: 143), and also Widdowson's (1987) observations about how the social interaction between students might be a bigger factor in how they respond to classroom life than the teacher's planned transaction of teaching and learning. This acknowledges the huge probability that there will be productive learning going on out of sight of the teacher. The classic example is Canagarajah's (1999: 90) description of how Sri Lankan secondary school students write their own agendas into the margins of their Western textbooks. Unseen and not valued by the teacher, and not in line with the 'native speaker' examples on the page, these represent the traditional, religious, media and political lives they bring with them. Within a literature that reports how students from other diverse non-Western locations competently make their own sense and find their ways to master English (Norton, 1997), there is also the understanding that established educational structures might actually marginalise these abilities and push them to secret sites or 'safe houses' of resistance (Canagarajah, 2004: 119-200).

This was very different from the *native-speakerist distortion* of how classroom interactions ought to take place for the purpose of 'getting' so-labelled 'non-native speaker' students to interact in a way that was thought not to be compatible with 'their cultures'.

Doing the expected native-speakerist job versus keeping dignity intact

My growing *critical cosmopolitan understanding* dramatically changed how I approached a training course I did for Qatari secondary school inspectors in the mid-1990s. I was made aware that one of the political reasons for this course was to provide an opportunity for the inspectors to interact with each other. Remembering Widdowson's distinction cited above, that I could relate to a social rather than just a transactional purpose, at the beginning of the first session I stated that a major aim was to get through the programme with everybody's dignity intact. There seemed to be a sense of relief around the room. One of the inspectors then asked if I could therefore dispense with whatever plan I had and tell them about what I was interested in.

I did continue with material relevant to school inspectors, but I felt that there was an opening for me to take the courage to build the content around their existing experience and professionalism. Indeed, I became just a catalyst for a more authentic process of discussion and sharing. Indeed, this was not so different to how academics in British universities feel about training courses set up by university management, probably with imported, technicalised content which does not connect with the existing knowledge and experience of the participants.

This worked well until, towards the end of the programme, the *native-speakerist distortion* returned when we were visited by a senior teacher from the British funding agency who wished to show off the programme to her line manager. The inspectors were in the middle of doing group tasks for which, recognising their significant professional experience, I had suggested they should organise themselves. The British visitor interrupted and proceeded to stand in front of the group in full teacherly fashion and begin to organise them into groups of her own design. It was clearly part of her agenda to show that 'we British' were in full possession of the native-speakerist methodology to show the 'other culture' how to work together. I remember stepping away and letting her get on with this, waiting until she had gone - her neoliberal agenda probably fulfilled. **[end of page 414 here]**

Believing in what students bring to the classroom

It is important here to think again about what was really going on when the school inspectors were working together on course projects. A *critical cosmopolitan understanding* often requires piecing together what might seem to be unconnected instances. To help me make sense I recall observing an American lecturer using three separate rooms as a resource to allow his Egyptian university students to get on with their project work without being present to monitor their performance. This seemed to be a celebration of the self-directed creativity that the *native-speakerist distortion* does not recognise. However, when juxtaposed with another event, a deeper understanding begins to emerge.

I still have a photograph of Egyptian university students, in a class of more than 200, working in, again, self-organised pairs and small groups to analyse a text that I had given them. I had used this photograph in my doctoral thesis as evidence that they were able to do this. On later reflection, however (Holliday, 2010: 23), after looking again and again at the photograph, I had failed to register what several of the students, as well as several of

my Egyptian colleagues, had told me - that, of course, they were able to work in groups, and often did so, on their study groups, in their own time outside class. They said that what they were missing out on was the theory.

The power of the *native-speakerist distortion* is such that it took me almost 30 years to work out that there were more layers of *critical cosmopolitan understanding* that I had not yet fathomed. Reflecting again on the Qatari school inspectors - the programme was not for me to teach them in any way how to work together and solve professional problems. It was instead, perhaps, an opportunity for them to find a space for community reflection away from their normal work-a-day routines. Just like all of us, such opportunities also bring delicate balances of freedom and guidance to make us feel motivated.

What this might therefore mean is that English teacher identity is not about being the designer of learning but instead the person who enables spaces where students can engage in ways meaningful to them, but given sufficient *critical cosmopolitan understanding* of what students bring with them. This relates to what I consider to be the original conceptualisation of the communicative approach to language teaching, that teachers need to 'communicate' with the existing communicative experience that the students *bring* to the classroom (Breen and Candlin, 1980) and to utilise 'learning opportunities *created* by' students and activating their existing 'intuitive heuristics', or models for making sense of the world (Kumaravadivelu, 1993: 13-14, my emphasis).

This is I believe a strong commitment of belief in who students are. Therefore, when the Qatari school inspector, above, invited me to talk about what I was interested in, I believed that she was an 'author of knowledge', as described by Baraldi et al (2023: 152) as a factor in personal agency. In other words, she possessed the full authority to decide what was or was not of value in the proposed content of the course.

Facilitation and natural hybridity

Believing in what students bring with them was the starting point for the CHILD-UP research project concerning primary and middle school children with migration backgrounds in seven European countries. Finding, negotiating and continuing their personal cultural trajectories (Holliday, 2019) were considered a major resource in their 'hybrid integration' in their new countries of residence (Baraldi et al., 2023).

A particular significance of hybrid integration is that its precise nature is unclear, dependent on the individual trajectory of the person concerned. The role of the teacher is therefore to be open to whatever this might be - facilitating rather than engineering its nature. This resonates **[end of page 415 here]** with a trend in English teaching to be less concerned with controlling learning styles than with providing resources sufficiently rich and broad to enable students to find what suits whatever they bring to the experience. An example is Lin and Cheung's (2014) account of how students in a low-resourced secondary school in Hong Kong build on the multiple, hybrid literacies they bring with them to engage with a wide range of print, visual and multimodal texts from world pop music.

The notion of hybrid integration is based on a particular reading of Homi Bhabha (1994),

and also Stuart Hall (1991, 1996) and Aníbal Quijano (2007) among others, where hybridity is the natural state that can speak against how colonialism and nationalism have separated us into modernist cultural boxes. This also fits with the translingual normality described by Li Wei (2018) and Canagarajah (2022) and the natural hybridity of English (Saraceni, 2015; Schneider, 2016). Perhaps indicative of this hybridity, little mention was made in the CHILD-UP research of the difference between teaching English and other languages.

A demonstration of the open, searching mode of facilitation within the CHILD-UP project, which continues to reveal a *critical cosmopolitan understanding* was how unexpected new modes of the children's agency were discovered during online sessions during COVID as they interacted through the use of chat (Amadasi and Baraldi, 2022). This resonates with other reports of increased evidence of student agency during COVID when there was less teacher control, including their use of other languages as a resource (Can and Silman-Karanfil, 2021) and finding new, shared understandings about the nature of writing (Hilliker and Yol, 2021). Resonating with the point made above about restrictive educational structures, these new realisations were sometimes supported by 'radical organisational and structural changes' forced by COVID (Abdel Latif, 2021: 20). The point about restrictive educational structures within the CHILD-UP project is also made by Damery et al (2023).

An implication here for English teachers is that they need to search for and recognise their own hybrid identities and the multiple cultural resources they bring to the classroom along with the struggles that they may have with structure so that they can recognise this in their students.

The impact of structures

Thinking about problems with structures then takes me back to a piece of research I carried out based on video material of Japanese secondary school students in a classroom setting (Holliday, 2002, 2005: 88-91). I came across it by accident and saw something that provided unexpected evidence to overturn the common *native-speakerist distortion* that I already believed falsely claims that East Asian students are silent because of their collectivist culture.

The video showed the students seated in pairs behind ranks of desks. This was actually very similar to the classroom layout found in British secondary schools with pairs of children sitting behind rows of desks. It was noticeable that while the teaching style seemed relatively teacher-fronted, in that the teacher was nominating particular students to answer his questions, the students were consulting with each other to help the nominated student to answer the questions. A Japanese teacher I interviewed about the video said that this was the 'personal talk' that was acknowledged by the students as the place where they 'support' each other to answer the teacher's questions, but was often not approved of by the teachers (2002: 15).

This observation then helped me to understand why a student from Hong Kong told me that he was quiet in my British classroom because there was too much teacher scrutiny regarding everything he did and said (Holliday, 2005: 90-91, 2016: 274). I therefore began

to realise that **[end of page 416 here]** the reason for student silence had to do with the political structuring of U-shaped classrooms where indeed everything students say and do is observed. I had a class of students from Hong Kong at the time, all of whom had been 'silent' during 'normal' classes. When I moved the furniture away from the U-shape, in tutorials in my office, when the students were doing project work in their own space and on school attachments, and when I did not 'require' that they talk, they were not 'silent'. When I later saw the same students in a large phonology lecture at their university in Hong Kong, it was very much like the lectures I had seen in Syria and Egypt, referred to above, and, indeed, British university sociology lectures I had seen. They had sufficient personal space, away from the gaze of the lecturer to be themselves and make personal sense of the content and the whole event. It is significant that such resonances can be found across national and cultural boundaries, thus working against an essentialist context-sensitive approach.

High-scrutiny, high-control 'native speaker' teaching

A useful way into further *critical cosmopolitan understanding* of what students bring to the classroom once limiting structures are put aside is recalling Bernstein's (1971: 64) statement that the lecture with the students listening in silence is where there can be true, creative freedom of thought amongst the students, whereas teacher-designed group tasks can be a form of teacher control that inhibits freedom of thought. I can attest to this from my own memory of the multitude of thinking going through my own mind as a student in a lecture, even without writing anything down. Even where, or perhaps especially where the lecturer made little attempt to connect with me, my thinking in opposition to how I was being treated led to rich new ideas.

Regarding teacher-designed classroom activities, in Holliday (2005: 75) I describe the feeling of my mind gradually being controlled towards particular thinking outcomes when asked to take part in group work in a conference event. There is also Anderson's study of British teachers in ostensibly 'communicative' classrooms exercising huge control over 'the lesson structure, content, the way the tasks were taught, when each task was taught, the classroom interaction for each task, as well as the teaching materials used: the what, how, when and with whom of the teaching' (2003: 201).

Whose 'communicative' and 'critical thinking'?

The phrase 'ostensibly communicative' helps to make sense of the rejection of 'Centre ELT' as reported by teachers from the global South in Padwad and Smith (2023: 72), where they state that they do not want the 'communicative approach, task-based teaching, critical thinking, learner-centredness … where native speakers continue to be seen as experts'.

There seems to be a strange conundrum here. I am arguing that the *native-speakerist distortion* is brought about by an Othering Orientalist grand narrative that does not recognise the criticality, creativity, cosmopolitan modernity, communicative, linguistic and cultural competence that students bring with them. Therefore, should it not be appreciated when educational approaches such as 'communicative', 'task-based', 'critical thinking',

'learner-centredness' and a range of others, such as 'CLIL', 'arts-based', 'digital', 'CBT' and so on, promote all of these unrecognised student attributes. The answer is 'no' if the purveyors of these approaches claim monopoly over them. So, 'I don't want your … because I already have my own'. In other words, there is a grave suspicion that these 'new approaches' ignore the possibility that teachers and students outside the West already possess the communicative and critical abilities that they claim to be enabling. **[end of page 417 here]**

This profound objection is well-expressed in the following statement from a Syrian teacher, who I worked with at Damascus University, but never realised that she felt this way:

> Sometimes I feel as if I represent the West in the classroom and as if I were telling my students that our methods of learning and thinking are not good and should be replaced by those of the West … un-paid soldiers of the West. This made me very nervous. I should pay attention to what I say in the classroom. (Barmada, 1994: 175, citing interview)

Similar was the complaint from Taiwanese Kuo (2006) that white Centre academics had no right to suggest that she should teach her students simplified English 'as a lingua franca' when her students could make their own decisions.

Objections from students may be even harder to hear. Some of my own masters and PhD students began to find how their students in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Taiwan and Hong Kong were alienated by established, 'ostensibly communicative' teaching styles and practised their creative, critical and autonomous learning elsewhere or unnoticed by their teachers (Holliday, 2005: 94, 97, citing Chang, and Tong; Kamal, 2015; Yamchi, 2015). Similar to my experience in university lectures above, these researchers find out about this hidden learning behaviour by watching from the back or side of the classroom, following the students outside the classroom, and somehow asking the questions in interviews that prompt the students to take the courage to reveal what they might not have believed their teachers were interested in. Similarly, Gong and Holliday (2013) report that primary and secondary school students, even in rural locations, in China rejected the 'native speaker' content of their 'communicative' textbooks and wanted instead bigger ideas that would really engage their intellects. Ghahremani-Ghajar and Mirhosseini (2010) also complain about how a long-standing Western trope of tightly guiding learning has invaded the entire primary school education system in Iran, denying the existing, traditional intellectual abilities of children.

Deeper subtleties of classroom power

Perhaps, therefore, the teacher-learner-centred dichotomy is not so much about whether or not it is a lecture or class with the teacher at the front doing most of the talking, but, instead more to do with whether what the students might be thinking and perhaps therefore deciding is important to learn is genuinely being thought about in the setting up of the event. The content of even a continuous lecture therefore becomes 'student centred' if it is

delivered with the student's existing intelligence, agency, creativity, self-direction and the quality of their experience in mind (Jacob, 1996).

Classroom power is therefore not to do with who speaks the most in the classroom. This is a gross *native-speakerist distortion*. A *critical cosmopolitan understanding* instead shows us that it is where and in what way there is deep engagement with the minds of the students, and how the native-speakerist narrative that the students do not have minds without 'native speaker' curating is therefore put aside. This is by no means an easy matter. It must be implicit in the identity of English teachers that we continue to struggle, thinking again and again, about how to do our work.

The micro-political positioning that needs to take place to escape from *native-speakerist distortion* is immensely complex. My early understanding of the importance of small cultural analysis emerged from this sort of difficult sense-making. In Holliday (1999) I explore how university teachers in a curriculum project in India needed constantly to struggle against the business-oriented corporate culture of the British funding agency and an 'ELT management and evaluation' culture **[end of page 418 here]** located in another élite Indian university that both seemed not to recognise and indeed to marginalise their existing pedagogic expertise. The political marketisation of education, as described by Fairclough (2006), a neoliberal bureaucratisation of quality (Collins, 2018) and *native-speakerist distortion* are highly complex. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of teacher identity, in the face of so many pressures, determining that students are only learning when imbibing a particular idealised and therefore describable image of so-labelled 'native speaker' language and culture, by means of idealised and therefore describable 'active' and 'critical' forms of speaking and classroom involvement does lend itself to the neoliberal need to state measurable indicators of progress.

There is therefore a powerful coming together of the *native-speakerist distortion* and neoliberalism in so much of the professionalism of English teaching. It was there in my early seduction at the beginning of my career in Iran described above. The desire for straight answers regarding how teaching and learning should take place continues to be fed by easy segmentations of methods that can be easily labelled and technicalised. The research that encourages the *native-speakerist distortion* also indicates a set of neoliberal academic and professional discourses that perhaps inadvertently support it. This is, however, I feel part of a bigger picture where a particular type of certainty is hugely seductive because of the beleaguered nature of the English teaching profession whether struggling in a private sector, state sector or university marketplace. The now common practice of discursively fixing precise methods of teaching with acronyms adds to this seduction.

Not in any way to be celebrated, is its entry into popular discourse, evidenced by students and their parents believing that the best teachers are so-labelled 'native speakers'. Connected with this is the still commonly held false notion that learning English means learning its culture. Resisting this might be harder than feeling confident in possessing firm knowledge of a presumed 'native speaker' English that 'represents its culture'.

Types of teacher research

This neoliberal desire for easily technicalised knowledge indeed encourages a research style that colludes with the *native-speakerist distortion*. This has the following highly restrictive features:

• More positivist methods that measure and compare
• Focus on pre-defined teacher and learner identities, attributes and trajectories often associated with so-labelled Western forms of training
• Focus on communities of practice and socio-cultural theory as tight systems for learner behaviour
• Focus on 'lacks' that are somehow attributed to the inadequacy of 'non-Western' systems
• Discouragement of more interpretive and critical writing styles.

By contrast, the research style that enables a *critical cosmopolitan understanding* tends to have the following enabling features:

• More creative decolonising, deCentred, postmodern and constructivist methods to find unstated, unrecognised realities
• Interrogates discourses and grand narratives that underpin established categories
• Encourages looking around and beginning with the small, which is importantly perceived by Stuart Hall (1991: 35) as noticing the details which contest such discourses and grand narratives
• Struggles to find how researchers can position themselves to see the unexpected, as in the examples cited earlier in the chapter **[end of page 419 here]**
• Employs writing styles that rigorously capture nuanced, intersubjective realities. Here there is an awareness that research texts 'are not matters of neutral report' but are themselves instrumental, in their particular use of voice and style in how 'reality is constructed' (Atkinson, 1990: 2).

There are however difficult twists in the uptake of this more creative research style. On the one hand, I have found that student teachers have taken to it well, especially where they have themselves experienced personal struggles with *native-speakerist distortion*. On the other hand, the pervasiveness of *native-speakerist distortion* along with neoliberal pressures either in their careers or in how they have been previously taught, there is considerable disbelief in the validity of research styles that require more creativity and researcher voice. When I have encouraged student researchers from all backgrounds to display more researcher voice in writing about their positionality, some have asked with disbelief 'is that allowed?'. Some of my doctoral research students (Oukraf, 2022; Sadoudi, 2022; Souleh, 2022) have needed to search hard for methods that enable them to recognise and put aside the *native-speakerist distortion*, 'to suspend our taken-for-granted assumptions about how "facts" and "realities" come to be represented' (Atkinson, 1990: 9). The more

creative research that supports a *critical cosmopolitan understanding* therefore requires courageous questioning of these certainties and an awareness of the discoursal forces that govern the *native-speakerist distortion*.

Looking at language with refreshed eyes

I see this courageous questioning to be implicit in what Li Wei (2018: 19) refers to as the translingual instinct - the ability to see how language crosses imagined boundaries and 'enables a resolution of the differences, discrepancies, inconsistencies, and ambiguities'. While he attributes this to bilingual people, once seeing and then struggling with the implications and ambivalences of a *critical cosmopolitan understanding*, even a monolingual person such as me can also begin to acquire this sort of awareness. Indeed, what he refers to as a third space (2018: 25), citing Soja (1996), which takes one into an often uncomfortable, total reassessment of established structures, is where I also had to go in my developing awareness of the *native-speakerist distortion* (Holliday, 2022a: 15, 2022b) as referred to above.

A recent more personal realisation of this was while sitting in a British hospital outpatients department. By now knowing that I needed to avoid, at all costs, the *native-speakerist distortion* of who was so-labelled 'British', who was a so-labelled 'native speaker', took me straight to a third space where I began to see that I was witnessing a varicultural diversity moulded by complex, uncertain and negotiated intersections of subculture, regional dialect, age, occupation, professional status, discoursal reference groups and so on. Spending more time and developing ethnographic methods in response to emerging realities, I would learn more and more but would at the same need to deal with the fact that being able to pin anything down would become increasingly impossible. All of the factors of probable difference listed above might become impossible to apply - as a perfectly valid research outcome. The only two bits of certainty possible in this developing *critical cosmopolitan understanding*, are that the *native-speakerist distortion* is so successful in its invasiveness that it will, in one way or another, to lesser or greater degrees, occupy the minds of people present when they confront each other in this diversity, with notions of superiority or deficiency regarding language use - as noted by Ferri and Magne (2021) among others.

This translingual instinct can also bring small but I think significant changes in one's teaching, even, as a so-labelled monolingual without much knowledge of other languages present. **[end of page 420 here]** This relates to a recent brief experience of speaking to a group of Ukrainians about intercultural awareness. Designated as having 'intermediate English', there was some question about whether they would know 'essentialism', 'grand narratives', 'dominant discourses' and 'Orientalism'. However, because of their recent experience of war and invasion, as soon as they searched for translations and meanings on the internet, Ukrainian words and phrases were voiced around the room and it became clear that they got the concepts faster than my British undergraduate students. At the same time, once it became evident that a number of my 'British undergraduate students' had multilingual backgrounds, there quickly emerged another resource for finding meaning.

Thinking of my experience with the hospital outpatients above, noting the huge varicultural variety of English within Britain, and the multiple discourses we all need to master as we move through the small cultural mélange in each of our cultural trajectories (Lankshear et al., 1997), perhaps all of us need to appreciate how we are actually multilingual. Here, the notions of the translingual and Risager's (2022) linguaculture, which places language identity as transcending national identity at the level of discourse, make it clear that the relation between English and culture is small and discoursal.

My first personal awareness of this hybridity came when interviewing a research participant with a co-researcher, both of whom were using English as a second, third or fourth languages (Amadasi and Holliday, 2017: 257). This put my own so-labelled 'native speaker' English into the minority. I then needed to think very carefully about what was more 'correct' or perhaps intelligible and why. This is especially the case with the more nuanced writing required by more critical research. Significantly, though, difficulties with the appropriate writing of personal voice and the subtle development of argument apply to all my students regardless of linguistic background.

Identities and native-speakerism

Throughout this chapter about English teacher identity, I have positioned my argument around the so-labelled native-non-native-speaker divide. This puts me in difficulty because I have argued elsewhere that this does not actually exist but is the socially constructed product of *native-speakerist distortion*. There are clear positions elsewhere in the literature about this. Llurda and Calvet-Terré (2022) argue that while native-speakerism is not necessarily Orientalist, there is discrimination against the real category of non-native speaker teachers, whose roles therefore need to be recognised as equal to the real category of native speakers.

While I cannot agree with the reality of so-labelled 'native speakers' and 'non-native speakers' as real groups of people, I can appreciate that the *native-speakerist distortion* constructs a powerful discourse of inequality which positions teachers against each other. Here I follow Kumaravadivelu (2016) who argues that so-labelled 'non-native speakers' teachers reside in a real subaltern position. He, however, makes the point that to expand their voice, they need to 'untangle themselves from the colonial matrix of power, method and discourse' through 'delinking' and 'epistemic break' (78-80, citing Mignolo, and Foucault). He suggests that they should therefore stop carrying out research to compare themselves with so-labelled 'native speaker' teachers (81). Indeed, in my view, such a comparison anywhere is created by the *native-speakerist distortion* and, therefore, only with imagined attributes. While not using and perhaps not subscribing to the term 'subaltern', Selvi et al. (2022) on the other hand employ autoethnography to confront the ideological forces within a 'trajectory of criticality … in approaching a myriad of issues' connected with the positionality implicit in so-labelled 'non-nativeness' (208). **[end of page 421 here]**

Are we all LX users of English?

Throughout this chapter, I have been tempted to employ Dewaele and Saito's (2022) 'LX users of English'. It is, I think, successful as a 'positive psychology' alternative to the 'non-native speaker' label which can escape from deficit connotations, can relate to all types of proficiency, and does not necessarily prioritise speaking. Returning, however, to my above-described experience with the huge English language variety in the British hospital outpatients that ran across all the different types of people, I felt myself an LX user of English. The reason I mention this is that my intention throughout this chapter has been to propose that core to all our identities as teachers of English as an always international language is the uncertainties that prevent the easy use of labels as well as the labels that are thrust upon us for the often political purpose of division and ideology. Li Wei (2018: 19) reminds us or perhaps makes us think for the first time, that the very boundaries between so-labelled languages are idealised and political. My reason for referring to my trajectory is to indicate that I need to find an identity beyond 'native speaker' if I am going to be true to the work that I need to do - to then understand that I and all my colleagues and student teachers, and our students, are all far more than established labels try to lead us to falsely imagine. I have no intention to speak on behalf of so-labelled 'non-native speakers'; but I do imagine to be meaningful Canagarajah's (2022: 31) statement that working 'creatively with multiple languages to construct community' enabled 'strategies to resist'.

Finally, a note on my refusal to use acronyms. Just having to spell out each time in full 'native-speakerist distortion', and to laboriously always write 'so-labelled' before every appearance of a contested term, makes me think again and again about what they actually mean. **[end of page 422 here]**

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