Native-speakerism: A Thorn in the Side of ELT

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Abstract

Native-speakerism, as Kumaravadivelu (2016, p. 82) famously noted, is a subject where "seldom in the annals of an academic discipline have so many toiled for so long and achieved so little". There have been several suggestions for the reverse of this trend but none of them appear to have penetrated the mainstream industry. This article aims to reflect on this phenomenon by analysing the study of attitudes towards native-speakerism among students in Portugal and the UK with a particular emphasis on attitudes towards NS and NNS accents including features such as accuracy which included an evaluation of the students' own accents in English and their goals for learning English in terms of acquisition/non-acquisition of a particular variety of English and attitudes towards English as a lingua franca. Overall, it was found that native-speakerism is widespread amongst students learning English, which corroborates other studies on this topic. Nevertheless, students in this study appear to show an interest in learning more about English varieties and World Englishes even though they are drawn to and hold the dominant standard - UK and American varieties - as the benchmark of acceptability and aspiration. By arguing that the frequently proposed measures cannot tackle native-speakerism on a truly global scale, this paper is meant to contribute to the body of research on native-speakerism and at the same time take a critical approach towards the perspectives of eliminating native-speakerism.

Keywords: native speaker; non-native speaker; native-speakerism; English as a lingua franca; authenticity; linguistic imperialism; English language teaching; student attitudes

Native-speakerism: A thorn in the side of ELT

One might question the novelty of writing about native-speakerism – a topic which has been investigated for the last three decades (Liu, 2021) and generated over 350 academic publications in the field of ELT (Kamhi-Stein, 2016). Much has been written about the political and colonial sources of native-speakerism and the linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), and the popularisation and prestige of the Anglophone culture as the "property" of "native speakers" (Modiano, 2009), which are strong contributors to the attraction of "native speaker" (NS) varieties due to the cultural and economic capital they are meant to provide. The purpose of this paper is to examine and critique the existing discussion, focussing on the issues surrounding the nature of native-speakerism and the various means of addressing it in the classroom. A study on student attitudes towards native-speakerism was conducted and will be used to illustrate and deconstruct these issues. Following a literature review and the methodology section, this paper will present outcomes of the study which will then be discussed in the context of the issues examined and with comparison to the existing studies on student and teacher attitudes towards native-speakerism.
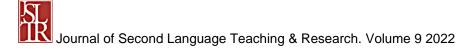
Literature Review

Native-speakerism is a pervasive ideology, according to which so-called "native-speakers" (NSs) are superior to "non-native speakers" (NNSs). This term was coined by Holliday (2006) and includes not only the superiority of the language used by NSs but the "Western/Anglophone culture" and the Western teaching methodology. Since the comprehensive overview of native-speakerism has already been given a multitude of times, this literature review will instead focus on illustrating how the very theories, which attempt to explain the sources of native-speakerism and the factors contributing to its pervasive nature, are the key to explaining why any effort to tackle the problem has not brought the desired outcome worldwide.

The Issue of Authenticity

One of the most important factors explaining the persistent nature of native-speakerism is the idea of authenticity. The word "authentic" has been part of the ELT vocabulary for a long time and so has the issue of authenticity. It is safe to say that individuals seem to gravitate towards authentic experiences and notions, whether naturally or through social conditioning. "Authentic" can be defined as "known to be real and what somebody claims it is and not a copy" or "true and accurate" by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary (n.d.). It is "used either in the strong sense of being "of undisputed origin or authorship", or in a weaker sense of being "faithful to an original" or a "reliable, accurate representation" (Varga & Guignon, 2020, para. 1). The opposite of this word being "fake" or "sham", it is easy to see how authenticity is a quality to aspire to. In the context of ELT authenticity is often mentioned with regards to teaching materials and texts (Pinner, 2016) meaning materials containing "real world" spoken or written language and discourse rather than artificially constructed for educational purposes. This may sound valid but is, in fact, controversial as the authentic language used in these materials mostly originates from "inner-circle" countries (Kachru, 1985) which perpetuates the idea of the ownership of the authentic language by these countries and leads to "poverty of language" (MacDonald et al., 2006, p. 254) considering the higher number of NNSs compared to NSs.

This idea of ownership of the language seems logical as it is rather easy to draw the connection between the place where the language appears to have originated from and authenticity since, as it was mentioned, this term is closely associated with the notion of "origin" or "authorship" in the collective mind. Another node in this network of associated meanings is the word "native" whose etymology can be traced back to the Latin word "nasci" meaning "to be born" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Since the word "native" takes such meanings as "inborn", "innate", "natural", "belonging to a particular place by birth" and "belonging to or associated with one by birth" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), the strong connection between the ideas of "authenticity" and "nativeness" becomes apparent due to their common association with the idea of "origin". It is consistent then that such a connection has been exploited by the ELT industry because it has been difficult to dispute that the only source of the genuine language is the NSs of that language.

This is hardly a phenomenon of only the English language, despite the vast body of literature written exclusively about this language. Among the scarce sources written in English about this
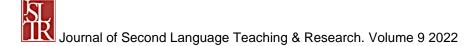
issue in other languages is the study of Korean learners' attitudes towards Choseonjok, or Korean-Chinese people (Lee, 2021) which revealed bias against this ethnic group perceived as less competent in Chinese than the native Chinese thus rendering them allegedly unqualified to be Chinese language teachers. In another study (Kipp-Ferguson, 2013) based in Canada an overall preference for NS teachers of French among parents was found.

Another consequence and manifestation of this belief is the expectation of a NS to have a Caucasian complexion since English-speaking original inhabitants of the "inner circle" countries are seen to be the white majority. This has led to the widely reported practice of recruiters and students expressing a preference towards an "idealised" version of a NS – a white Western-looking teacher (Ruecker & Ives, 2014) and discrimination on this basis (Lowe & Pinner, 2016), prompting some ELT researchers to seek further theorization of the concept of the NS through the race theory lens. Ruecker (2011) points to how the concept of "whiteness as property" (introduced by Harris in 1993) explains the legal grounds on which the racist recruitment policies at a government level legitimize discrimination against NNSs of English. These racist practices carried out at the highest level perpetuate the legitimacy of whiteness as being the inherent attribute of an "ideal" English teacher. This shows how authenticity is such a complex term apparently determined by one's place of origin which includes not only the linguistic and cultural capital but the skin colour and appearance in general.

There have been multiple attempts in the literature to redefine authenticity. Pinner (2016) attempts to promote authenticity as a more dynamic notion and as something that is more personalized and situated in the classroom. Similarly, Coupland (2003) suggests that authenticity is a concept to be negotiated as part of local communicative practices. Along the same lines is the study by Ramezanzadeh and Rezaei (2019) which attempts to reconceptualize authenticity as something to be fostered in students in order to empower them and promote their authentic voices through critical classroom discourse. These examples show that the common way to deal with the entrenched version of authenticity suggested by the literature is through localised classroom practices where a teacher would embark upon a critical dialogue with the students in a bid to shift the centre of authenticity from NSs to individuals performing communicative acts in their local contexts. Even though there is some evidence that authenticity can be successfully negotiated in a classroom, it is questionable to what extent this might become mainstream practice.

Industry Endorsement
The entrenched notion of authenticity has been magnified and capitalised on by the ELT industry. It is quite telling that, despite the vast amount of research into the controversies of the authenticity of the NS, the industry still endorses the traditional definition: according to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (n.d.), a NS is "someone who has spoken a particular language since they were a baby, rather than having learned it as a child or adult". It is understandable that dictionary definitions must be concise and clear and cannot include long explanations of various controversies. However, it is possible to word a definition in a hedged way to demonstrate that something is a belief rather than a fact. Cambridge, as one of the key

players in the ELT industry, has an incentive to endorse the status quo in terms of the widespread belief in the ownership of English by the inner circle countries. Also, none of the major dictionaries - Oxford, Collins, Longman, Macmillan or Pearson – dispute this understanding of a NS, which means that, when learners consult these dictionaries, they see no contradictions, whilst the definition of native-speakerism is notably absent from dictionaries.

The existence of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe has also contributed to the idealisation of a NS. Even though the latest version (Council of Europe, 2020) has removed references to the word "NS" from the level descriptors and added new sections dedicated to plurilingual and pluricultural competence with the admittance of the rejection of the idealised NS models, there is still controversy around the level descriptors. There are discussions about whether CEFR's C2 (the highest level) is the level of the NS which can be easily observed by a Google search on this subject. Some scholars, for example, Davies (2013), claim that the C2 level is the level of the idealised NS. However, officially, according to the Council of Europe (2020, p.37), C2 "has no relation whatsoever with what is sometimes referred to as the performance of an idealised 'native speaker', or a 'well-educated native speaker' or a 'near native speaker'. Such concepts were not taken as a point of reference during the development of the levels or the descriptors". Despite it being clearly elucidated, there is still noticeable ambiguity as to whether the NS level is achievable, leaving it open to interpretation. Interestingly, the C2 level demands a very high level of language precision and skill and, yet, implies that this is not enough to be considered a NS. For example, in terms of the features of spoken language, C2 is characterised by "consistent grammatical control", "great flexibility reformulating ideas", and being able to "express themselves spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow" (p.183). A C2 language user is also somehow considered to have mastered such communication skills as being able to "interact with ease picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly" as well as "interweave their contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making, etc." (p.183). If it is implied that an average NS is capable of being even a better communicator exceeding these descriptors, it is no surprise that learners and NNS teachers of English alike are prone to developing an inferiority complex towards even an average NS.

Whilst the descriptors above may be controversial, the descriptor related to phonology seems clearly native-speakerist as the C2 level features "the full range of phonological features in the target language with a high level of control – including prosodic features such as word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation – so that the finer points of their message are clear and precise" (Council of Europe, 2020, p.183). Firstly, the question is – "clear" to whom? The answer seems to be – the NS since "the full range of phonological features" may not be necessary for the understanding between NNSs, as argued by the proponents of English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2000). Secondly, the descriptor continues stating (Council of Europe, 2020, p.183) that at C2 "intelligibility is not affected in any way by features of accent that may be retained from other language(s)", which is, again, a native-speakerist view potentially marginalising the World Englishes for retaining their legitimate features of accent.
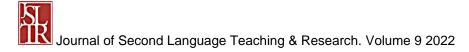
There have been numerous attempts to challenge the status quo of the ELT industry. Research into and the teaching of ELF mentioned earlier instead of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has gained some ground. The proponents of ELF posit this approach as countering native-speakerism in that it rejects the necessity for adherence to NS norms in a globalised context of communication carried out primarily between speakers of English as their second or foreign language (Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2005). It is questionable whether such an approach is effective since, on a global scale, there are still no changes in the perception of the language learning goals. For example, the international English language examinations such as IELTS, owned by Cambridge English, British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia, still serve as the gatekeeping measurement of the accordance to the NS level. This is explicitly stated in the band descriptors: for instance, the highest band (band 9) for speaking presupposes the use of "a full range of [grammatical] structures naturally and appropriately" (IELTS, n.d.) which goes against the ELF idea of teaching selected grammatical features claimed to be shared by NNSs communicating internationally (Seidlhofer, 2004). The candidate is also supposed to produce "consistently accurate structures apart from "slips" characteristic of native speaker speech" (IELTS, n.d.) – this explicitly measures the highest level against a NS and does not appear to "allow" slips characteristic of the many regional varieties of English. The centrality of the NS has also been observed in the standards prescribed by TOEFL (Passoni, 2017) which is another internationally recognised examination.

Another way to confront native-speakerism from within the industry has been explicitly raising awareness of the issue among students as part of the curriculum. This was the premise of the study conducted by the authors, the context and methods of which will be covered in the next section.

Context and Aims of the Study

There have been numerous studies into learner and teacher attitudes towards native-speakerism in various contexts. Some of them have also attempted awareness-raising interventions with the aim to challenge student perceptions. It is this motivation that led to the creation of a project, which was first conceived as an awareness-raising exercise and later extended to allow for formal research to take place. As there are many contexts in ELT remaining underexplored, the opportunity presented itself to investigate student attitudes in two contexts simultaneously – in Portugal and the UK, where the two researchers currently reside and teach. It seems particularly pertinent to compare student attitudes in the EU and the UK in the post-Brexit era and considering the rise of the rhetoric about Euro-English (Alhasani & Stojković, 2021).

The students who participated in the project, which served as a basis for the present study, represent two contexts. The students at the University of Coimbra (Portugal) were on an elective General English course offered at the Language Centre of this university. Most of these students were at the time studying on either Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate programmes with the minority being professionals but still affiliated with the university. The students at the

University of Leeds (UK) were all Arabic ethnicity from various countries in the Middle East. They were all undertaking a pre-sessional in English for Academic Purposes Programme for Postgraduate Researchers – a requirement before they commenced their doctorate studies at Leeds.

The project itself had the aims of raising awareness of the issues surrounding native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism; developing teamwork, speaking, listening, criticality, and research skills; plus, intercultural awareness and familiarity with each other's contexts. The activities included readings on native-speakerism, discussion/debate, and conducting and presenting empirical research.

The aims of the research conducted with the students were:
- to investigate the attitudes towards native-speakerism among adult learners of English at the University of Coimbra and University of Leeds
- to compare these attitudes among students in Portugal and the UK

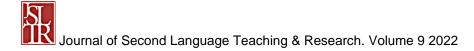The specific aspects of native-speakerism under study were:
- attitudes towards NS and NNS accents (including the features of pronunciation, lexis, and grammar)
- evaluation of own accents in English and their goals in learning English in terms of acquisition/non-acquisition of a particular variety of English (including the knowledge of "culture")
- attitudes towards English as a lingua franca

Methodology

Data Collection

The research instruments utilised were mixed method approaches - both quantitative and qualitative. Primarily, as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) articulate, this was to draw on the strengths and minimise the limitations each approach brings. Triangulation of data sources also offers a rich understanding of the phenomena and multiple perspectives are a primary focus by which qualitative research is measured (Searle, 2003).

The concepts of native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism were introduced to the students involved in this class project through selective readings, seminar, and subsequent discussions with cross-border partners. Interviews were conducted with the researchers' students and a questionnaire was deployed to collect the views of these students as well as other students studying English at both universities to obtain a wider range of views from a larger number of students because the groups taught by the researchers were relatively small. The interview participants (two from each site) were chosen at random, primarily, among those who volunteered to be available on the days when the interviews were arranged. Furthermore, it was decided that students would interview each other as part of this project (with this data included into the research study, with the students' informed consent) – the rationale being the development of the skills as part of this project (see above) and also developing students'

agency. From the researchers' perspective, it seemed beneficial to use student-collected data from their interviews as it may prompt the interview participants to be more open to their peers than the researchers who were also their tutors.

The questionnaire utilised a four-point Likert scale consisting of 20 statements (see Appendix 1) with the added space for optional comments from the participants. This Likert scale did not include the neutral option to prevent the participants from resorting to it due to social desirability bias or lack of willingness to commit a cognitive effort, as the research by Krosnick et al. (2002) and Johns (2005) suggests. Five sets of multi-item scales were in-built into the questionnaire to increase the reliability of the results (Dornyei, 2007). The questionnaire aimed to investigate learner attitudes, experiences, opinions and beliefs. The statements could be divided into seven themes with themes 1-3 and 6-7 containing the multi-item scales: 1) learner definitions of a NS, 2) attitudes towards their own accents, 3) preferences towards listening to particular accents, 4) beliefs regarding English teaching materials, and 5) beliefs towards the knowledge of the "English culture", 6) grammar rules, and 7) idioms/cultural references.

With regards to the interviews conducted by the researchers, these consisted of eight questions (see Appendix 2) covering the themes similar to those in the questionnaire: learner definition of a NS and beliefs regarding the ownership of English, preferences towards listening to particular accents, beliefs regarding effective communication, the knowledge of grammar rules and idioms/cultural references, and opinions on the relevance of NS accents in Portugal/the UK. These were semi-structured interviews aimed to take between 40 and 60 minutes each. The interviews conducted by the students followed the same themes, but the exact questions were produced by them using suggested questions. Students had been instructed on how to create effective interview questions and how to conduct interviews professionally bearing in mind the ethical considerations. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using the Otter.ai software. To mitigate the software's limitations, the transcripts were checked in tandem with the audio by the researchers independently to ensure accuracy and amendments were made to reflect the interviewees' representations (Maxwell, 2013; Leonard, 2018). Subsequently, NVivo, qualitative data management software tool, was utilised to organise and support the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire which had been placed into Google Forms yielded 135 responses with 73 responses from students in Portugal and 62 in the UK. Table 1 below represents student demographic information – nationality, L1, English language level, and age, as stated by the students themselves in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Student demographic information

Sample	n	Nationality		L1		English language level		Age
University of Coimbra	73	Portugal (PT)	50	Portuguese (PT)	65	Advanced	36	20s – 36
		Brazil	13	French	2	Intermediate	24	30s – 16
		Dual PT & Brazil	3	PT & French	1	Upper-Intermediate	13	40s – 14
		Spain	2	Tetum	1			50s – 4
		Equador	1	Spanish (SP)	1			60s - 3
		East Timor	1	SP & Galician	1			
		Dual PT & Canada	1	Catalan	1			
		Dual PT & French	1	Russian	1			
		Russia	1					
University of Leeds	62	China	37	Chinese	39	IELTS 5.5/ 6.0/ 6.5	47	20s – 51
		Saudi Arabia	9	(Mandarin		IELTS 7.0/ 7.5/ 8.0	13	30s – 8
		Spain	4	& Cantonese)		IELTS 4.0/ 4.5/ 5.0	2	<20 - 3
		Switzerland	2	Arabic	14			
		France	1	Spanish	4			
		Turkey	1	French	4			
		US	1	Turkish	1			
		Taiwan	1					
		Hong Kong	1					
		Oman	1					
		Kuwait	1					
		Iraq	1					
		Mauritania	1					
		Bahrain	1					

As the form had been designed to separate responses from the two countries to facilitate comparison, two sets of data were generated, represented in pie charts showing percentages. The responses to each statement produced by the two groups were compared using these percentages. The responses "Agree" and "Strongly agree" were considered as one, the same applying for "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree". Where percentages were similar between Portugal and Leeds, the mean was calculated by adding up the percentages representing the two groups and dividing by two, the outcome of which was rounded up/down and specified in the analysis. SPSS software was used to generate the Alpha coefficient for the multi-item scales. The multi-item scales with lower than acceptable internal consistency (<0.6) were discarded unless it was possible to remove one item to improve the consistency; however, the responses themselves were not discarded but subjected to the analysis of the roots of the contradictions with the help of the qualitative data, the outcome of which was subsequently included into the discussion of the findings. The correlation, albeit contradictory, between the items in such scales was still found when considered in conjunction with the interview responses and compared to the findings from the similar studies.

Four transcripts were produced as a result of the interviews conducted by the researchers and twenty-one interview transcripts were provided by the students. The qualitative data was initially transcribed and exported as Word documents into NVivo for coding and analysing independently by the two researchers and subsequently checked and discussed. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyse the data because of its flexible nature as a research tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Clarke & Braun, 2016). The dataset from

each site was analysed individually and then comparatively across both sites with the emphasis on the primary emergent themes such as "NS" and "NNS", "native-speakerism", "linguistic imperialism", and "accuracy". Participant responses were drawn together and mapped for an overview of the general themes which drew data from different participants to avoid viewing the interviews as singular entities (Leonard, 2018). The themes were then linked and renamed in some instances.

Notwithstanding its drawbacks and limitations, a grounded theory framework (Chapman et al. 2015) which offers a structured and systematic process of analysis and enables themes to arise from the data with an inductive approach to analysis appeared to be the most appropriate for understanding the diverse and potentially unexpected perspectives, experiences, behaviours and motives and views that emerged; additionally, it was appropriate for enabling the participants' voices to be heard.
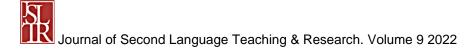
Findings and Analysis

Native-speakerism

One of the key findings the data indicates is the participants' tendencies towards native-speakerism. This is in-line with the attributes that promote native-speakerism such as the aspiration being the NS accent and the expectation of following the NS grammar rules assiduously (Lowe, 2020).

Overwhelmingly, the quantitative data shows the acquisition of a NS accent – the accent of the inner-circle countries - appears to be the idealised accent to acquire. Eighty percent (mean) of the participants wished they spoke with a more "native-like" accent, the most desirable being the American or the British accents with 76% (mean) stating that the standard British or American accent sounds better than their own accent. This suggests that native- speakerism with respect to accent is deeply rooted in the participants' psyche, particularly as this is contrary to their views that they are generally happy with their accents which reflect their identity – 61% (mean) of the participants stated that they like their accent as it is part of their identity and 86% (mean) indicated that they do not care about sounding like a "native". Interestingly, 43% (mean) noted that they were ashamed that their accent does not sound "native" enough with 57% (mean) disagreeing with statement 3: *I am ashamed of my accent as it does not sound "native" enough*. The tensions here seem to indicate that the standard the participants measure their accent against is rooted in the belief that the most acceptable accent needs to be either an American or a British accent.

This native-speakerism view is demonstrated in the qualitative data. The interviews with four participants are equally contradictory with responses such as "American accent is preferable", "accent is not important", "difficult to attain 'native speaker' like accent", "not important to imitate 'native speaker' accents", "fairly satisfied with my own accent", "not very satisfied with my accent", "standard English model of English is the best choice" and "British accent is cosy and more polite". The qualitative data also indicates the most desirable accents are either the American or the British. The American accent is prominent because of the pervasiveness of

American culture on social media platforms, in films and music. "I said American accent…because of movies. We are influenced from these movies – 90-95% are American movies – they use English American accent not British accent.". Similarly, the ubiquity of British English is through linguistic imperialism and course book and NS tutor influence (Phillipson, 1997). This is further amplified by one of the participants of an Arabic ethnicity: "Everything is in English. The first language…we have four banks working in English…now also in schools in my country. English seems to be the first language, not the second language...English is now needed for everything…linguistic imperialism".

With respect to accent the participant further expanded that a NS accent is very much aligned with prestige, power, influence, education, mobility of knowledge, authority and credibility - "it [accent] is important in our culture and my community". This is particularly in evidence with respect to students who have completed their higher education abroad in countries such as the US or the UK: "in our country, in the Middle East when you speak with a "native speaker" accent it opens for you a lot of doors that you can enter." This indicates that native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism are deeply ingrained not only in the participant's psyche but also the geographical region's psyche that has a history of coloniality and linguistic imperialism.

Another trope of native-speakerism - the attention to accuracy, particular grammar as set by NSs - is very much in evidence in the data. Standard English is problematic to define (Jenkins, 2007) but scholars largely agree that the term usually indicates grammar utilised by educated NSs. The notion of authentic language which generally refers to standard English is closely connected to reinforce native-speakerism (Lowe & Pinner, 2016). Furthermore, Crystal (2003) highlights that standard English is not a variety spoken by the majority but a minority, therefore, it does not reflect the whole of English. Nevertheless, the quantitative data revealed that 52% (mean) of the participants agreed with statement 6: *Correct grammar is the grammar "native speakers" use*. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of participants (mean=91%) agreed with statement 2: *As learners of English, we should learn to use the grammatical rules established by "native speakers"*. Conversely, one participant in the qualitative data indicated that "grammar rules are important but not essential to understand the message". However, another voiced that "grammar rules improve communication skills…without good grammar it is difficult for some to understand" aligning to the quantitative findings. Nevertheless, the overall response was that the importance of accuracy with respect to grammar depended on the informality or formality of the situation e.g., in formal education accuracy was deemed essential.

Overall, the participants appeared to value intelligibility and clarity rather than grammatical accuracy which is an encouraging sign that they are not completely wedded to the native-speakerist view of accuracy.

Tension between Native-speakerism Ingrained Beliefs and Social Justice
An interesting finding emerged as a result of the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data: a contradiction within students' views regarding the importance of a NS accent. The contradictions observed were revealed to be rather consistent. Firstly, this contradiction was

prominent when students were asked about their attitudes towards their own accents. Student responses to the multi-item scales utilised in the questionnaire reveal that the clear majority of students both in Portugal and the UK feel self-critical towards their accents and would like to speak with a more NS-like accent. However, during the interviews most of the students (both those interviewed by the researchers and students themselves) claimed that it is not important for them to speak like NSs. The same contradiction was observed with regards to the question about listening to accents: while in the interview students claimed it was not important for them to listen to NS speech, the questionnaire revealed the opposite. There was also notable contradiction in some students during the interviews: at the same time as saying they are not trying to imitate NS accents as it is part of their identity, the same students would contend that they (students) should imitate their (NSs') pronunciation and grammar because it is *their* language. Social desirability bias might have played a role in shaping these contradictions: while it did not play a big role in the anonymous questionnaire where students felt perhaps freer to express their true feelings about their L2 accents, in the interviews they might have felt it was more socially acceptable to show confidence in their own accents as it could be seen as an expression of a more independent, non-conformist, and open-minded stance. It might have also been intensified by the project they were involved in as they might have felt they needed to demonstrate some alignment with social justice ideas due to the awareness-raising goals of this project.

Simultaneously, the questionnaire revealed an inverse relationship: if in the interviews students tended to show more confidence in their own accents but displayed more native-speakerist attitudes when referring to other students or abstract ideas, in the questionnaire students revealed native-speakerist ideas with regards to their own accents, whereas they were more lenient towards others' accents and showed more adherence to social justice when faced with abstract issues. These paradoxes may be attributed to the contradictory nature of beliefs (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). This is not the first empirical study to reveal such contradictions. For example, the study by Episcopo (2009) demonstrated very similar results in their questionnaire: while being more self-critical towards their own accents, students showed more lenience towards others' accents. However, native-speakerist tendencies were also revealed in that study when students judged others' accents more critically when they were asked to rate them, going against their self-proclaimed beliefs about the non-importance of NS accent in others. Similar contradictory answers were exemplified by Kiczkowiak (2018): it was found that, while it was considered permissible by students to have a foreign accent as an abstract idea, they, nonetheless, thought that learners should still try to reduce their foreign accents. All this might indicate the complexity of students' belief systems simultaneously influenced by the ingrained native-speakerist attitudes and beliefs that social justice should prevail.

Even when there is no apparent contradiction in the participants' responses, there might still be a hidden, or implied, paradox. An example of this is the problematic nature of the notion of "clarity" and the related notions of "intelligibility" and "being understood". Students either alluded to or openly expressed the idea that clarity and being understood by others is more important than sounding like a NS. Both learners in Portugal and the UK strongly supported questionnaire

statement 12: *I do not care about sounding like a "native" – what matters is that my pronunciation should be clear to others*, thus contradicting the multi-item scales discussed above. Most students in the interviews emphasized this attitude as well when referring to themselves. However, one of the students from the UK raised an insightful point in the optional comment section in the questionnaire: "I think there is a paradox between 'sound clear' and 'sound like a native' since a clear pronunciation is defined by native speakers.". This echoes the earlier discussion of the issue of clarity and who defines it and against which standard, which is prominently argued by ELF. Thus, the implied paradox in students' emphasis on clarity is that they are likely referring to clarity as defined and accepted from the position of a NS from an inner-circle country against their established linguistic model. Therefore, even though the students seem to be professing open-minded views towards their own accents, they are, in fact, unknowingly, endorsing a NS standard of English.

"Native Speaker"
Lowe (2020) asserts the term NS is problematic as the general common-sense understanding of NS is "insufficient and incomplete" (p. 22). He adds that the label is associated with assumptions of "proper standards of English, to proper models of English and to proper norms of English" (p. 23) and linked to various social, political, historical and ideological influences that it is not possible to view the term objectively. Therefore, it is not surprising the data has also identified a varied understanding of the concept NS with respect to English. For example, 60% (mean) of the participants in the survey agreed with statement 8: *I feel that the term "native speaker" is vague – anyone can become a "native speaker" of the language if they are highly competent and fluent in that language*. This ties into the theories put forward by Leonard (2018) in her study where she discusses the phenomenon of becoming a NS. She highlights that the concept of a NS is not static but dynamic and rhizomatic – an assemblage of "becoming". An optimistic view that one can aspire to if one felt the need to become a NS. It could also be argued that this statement is rather abstract and expresses an egalitarian viewpoint and most participants were probably more inclined to respond in this way to a belief in social justice or perhaps even social desirability bias. In the qualitative data, one participant articulated that "I don't see myself as a 'native speaker' but with work and effort, maybe one day" – confirming the belief that with one's exertions one can *become* a NS.

However, a significant number (mean=62%) agreed with statement 13: *No matter how fluent and competent in English I may become in the future, I will never be a "native speaker"*. This opposite view by the same participants denotes the conflict between the notion that one can become a NS but equally no matter the effort and energy expended to become a NS, they will never be a NS. This is in concert with Leonard (2018) as she theorises being a NS is something that cannot be changed – it is static. This statement is specific to the participant's personal situation, and it highlights the dichotomy between "being" and "becoming" a NS.

Over half of the students, in their interviews with each other, showed that they favoured the traditional definition – "someone who was born in the country", "learnt the language as a child", "learnt it as their first language". Slightly less than half gave more complex definitions such as:

"someone who is fluent", "someone who speaks without mistakes", "can have a conversation on any topic", "knows the language deeply", "can fully understand other people speaking the language", "able to understand all accents", "having a good pronunciation", "perfectly uses the grammar rules" and "can speak naturally without thinking". In addition to this, there was also a view that it must be someone "who understands everything in the language" and "who speaks perfectly". It could be argued these definitions suggest native-speakerist views, indicating students generally have a native-speakerism outlook. However, there is much to unpack in the terminology that is used by the students with respect to terms such as "without mistakes", "any topic", "fully understand", "all accents", "good" and "perfectly". They raise questions according to whose standards and what criteria or metrics are in operation to provide evaluations. These findings demonstrate that the concept of a NS is viewed in many ways and in the main attached to these understandings is the ideology of native-speakerism.

Views on Ownership of English and Teaching Materials
Contradictory views continued to emerge with regards to questions surrounding learner views on the ownership of English. Statement 20 of the questionnaire, *English equally belongs to all speakers of this language, "native" and "non-native" alike,* received overwhelming support from students in Portugal and the UK – both 84%. A significant number of students in the UK even expressed strong agreement (39%) with this statement. However, qualitative data showed completely different attitudes: most students referred to the rules set by NSs in inner-circle countries as a model to follow, thus showing their belief in the superiority of the standard varieties. The examples of this include the following words from two different students: "We have to follow them, because we can't learn the language if we didn't follow them." and "if we want to learn English, I think we should try to study their grammar, how they speak, how they construct their sentences, writing, etc, because it's their language." The word "their" is very telling here. More than one student used this word, which shows that some students do not see English as belonging to all its speakers. One student could not imagine NNSs developing new varieties of English outside the already established ones. Referring to the inner-circle countries - "[I]t's where the language born I think" – is what this student said when asked about having to learn the rules of the particular inner-circle variety, thus pointing to the issue of authenticity discussed in the literature review. The same tendency was observed when students were asked about the importance of learning about the Western-Anglophone culture: "you should understand and learn about their culture too, because it makes it simple to understand some things they say and how they speak and actions". Again, the use of the pronoun "they" indicates the perceived division between "them" (NSs) and learners (NNSs). The idea about the importance of learning about the Anglophone culture has been widely endorsed, not always explicitly, by the ELT industry (Fang & Ren, 2018; Yoo, 2014) through mainstream course books produced and disseminated around the world by the publishers in the inner-circle countries. This external influence may explain why students in this study, albeit widely supporting the shared ownership of English by all its speakers on the one hand, still transmit the ideas that position NNSs as passive receivers of the rules and cultural norms and knowledge to be learnt.
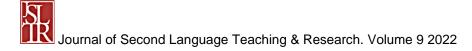
Native-speakerist tendencies were evident also in the context of student reflections on teaching materials. While the majority in both Portugal and the UK agree with the questionnaire statement 1: *Accents of all people who speak English (both as their first language and second/third language) should be represented in the lesson materials*, the qualitative data appears to clarify that this openness to the diversity of Englishes is related to awareness-raising activities whereas students seem to still prefer to be taught one (standard) variety. The reason for this, according to the students who were specifically asked about this, was that it is convenient to have one model to follow to ensure understandability. This could be unproblematic if this model was a neutral one which is not associated with any particular (dominant) country – a model such as ELF. These findings may point to the necessity to raise students' awareness of not only the World Englishes, the effectiveness of which was demonstrated by some practitioners such as Schreiber (2019) and Boonsuk et al. (2021) but the specificities of ELF and lingua franca core to show students a viable model of English to be taught as an alternative to the Standard British and General American.

Conclusion

Native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism appear to have a tight grip on all aspects of ELT not to be loosened easily unless the whole industry consciously makes an effort or are compelled to decolonise, in the widest sense, their practices. As the above research shows, raising awareness of native-speakerism in the classroom does have a positive effect in that learners realise the exploitative nature of the ELT industry and the systemic discrimination of all but the standard varieties of English in many contexts. Therefore, incorporating activities, for example, such as those proposed by Kiczkowiak (2017), can help challenge learners' biases and inform their choices. It is also helpful to include listening materials making use of NNS accents which has been found to remove some of the bias towards such accents through exposure and, thus, better awareness of their characteristics and understanding of the message conveyed by the speakers (Boduch-Grabka & Lev-Ari, 2021). However, it is questionable to what extent this can make a lasting impact on the industry at large.

Making serious changes on a global scale requires cooperation from the very institutions which strive to maintain the status quo. There is a surfeit of extremely pertinent ideas about how to transform English teaching materials and coursebooks to make them more decentralised and inclusive of various accents and cultures – for example, those suggested by Kiczkowiak (2020). These suggestions commonly include a transition to teaching ELF as opposed to EFL which has serious implications for teaching and creating materials. However, mainstream coursebooks may also be held to ransom by the limitations of the standards expected from students by international examinations such as IELTS, the completion of which is a common goal for many learners worldwide. The coursebooks are merely the reflection of what the industry offers to students who wish to evidence their level of English in various professional and immigration contexts. Moreover, there still does not exist to date a popular mainstream ELF course book which is not surprising considering such a course book would need to serve a limited local context to stay true to its principles. This means the burden of creating ELF materials still lies on

teachers who probably feel the pressure to meet learners' requirements in terms of preparing them for international examinations.

It is also questionable whether the widespread calls to cancel the words "NS" and "NNS" (Cook, 1999; Dewaele, 2017; Prodromou, 2006; Rampton, 1990) and replace them with other terms can eventually erase these notions from individuals' minds. Even though it is probably true that the continuous research into the differences between NS and NNS teachers contemplating their perceived advantages and disadvantages should stop (Kumaravadivelu, 2016) as it serves nothing but emphasise the divide between them, it requires more empirical research to show that discontinuing to use these words and encouraging students to do so as well has any lasting impact. It can be reiterated that, with the continued industry endorsement of native-speakerism, any changes are likely to remain on the periphery. It is the industry itself with its large institutions such as Cambridge English which need to decolonise and decentralise their practices and policies. They need to accept the diverse nature of the modern English language (which belongs to no one geographic site) and democratise the processes which govern all the aspects of the development of the ELT industry.

Limitations

With respect to quantitative data, it was not possible to compare responses from students who had exposure to awareness-raising activities (the class project) and who did not have such exposure - due to anonymity of responses (although it was not the aim of this research to measure the effect of awareness-raising) but could be an idea for further research.

Regarding researchers' qualitative data (researcher interviews), the interview sample was very small (two participants from each site) and the diversity of the participants were not a consideration (Leeds participants were both Arabic ethnicity; Coimbra participants were a Portuguese and a Brazilian national). It could also be argued that certain biases could be in play e.g., social desirability – be more "open minded" in their responses with e.g. regional and different varieties of accents – and that some responses could have been investigated further e.g., unpack terminology but time constraints did not allow this.

With respect to students' qualitative data (student interviews), there probably was some social desirability bias too - this might be another explanation for some of the paradoxes. Perhaps students, being aware of the researcher positionality and now more aware of the native-speakerism problem, were trying to provide more socially acceptable responses to avoid sounding native-speakerist. One also needs to be mindful that these were student-conducted interviews – inexperienced interviewers who do not pursue some interesting points or ask for clarification. Some of the interviews were very brief; some contained leading or double-barrel questions. In other words, student interviewing skills and their own knowledge of the topic and ability to ask pertinent follow-up questions might have affected the quality of the data. Moreover, students exposed to the class project may have felt they needed to demonstrate that the project had had an effect on them and changed their perception. However, the question still remains to what extent their real attitudes and beliefs changed.

Biodata

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Read the sentences and state to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements.

1) Accents of all people who speak English (both as their first language and second/third language) should be represented in the lesson materials.
2) As learners of English, we should learn to use the grammatical rules established by native speakers.
3) I am ashamed of my accent as it does not sound "native" enough.
4) I am more interested in listening to lectures/speeches/podcasts given by "native speakers" than "non-native speakers".
5) I do not care about the accent of the speaker when I listen to them.
6) Correct grammar is the grammar "native speakers" use.
7) I do not need to know all the English idioms to be considered a native speaker.
8) I feel that the term "native speaker" is vague – anyone can become a "native speaker" of the language if they are highly competent and fluent in that language.
9) I like my accent because it is part of my identity.
10) I would like my English teacher to help me speak with a more "native-like" accent.
11) It is more useful for a learner of English to listen to speeches/lecturers given by a "native speaker" than a "non-native speaker".
12) I do not care about sounding like a "native" – what matters is that my pronunciation should be clear to others.
13) No matter how fluent and competent in English I may become in the future, I will never be a "native speaker".
14) I wish I spoke with a more "native-like" accent.
15) There is no such thing as the "English culture" because English is a global language these days.
16) To be a "native speaker" of English is not only to know the language but also the "English culture".
17) Standard British or American accent sounds better to me than my own accent.
18) To be considered a native speaker, I need to know all the idioms and cultural references.
19) Effective communication (even with "errors") is more important than the strict following of the rules from English course books.
20) English equally belongs to all speakers of this language, "native" and "non-native" alike.

Appendix 2: Interview questions

- How would you define a "native speaker" of English?
- When I say "native-speaker" accent, which accent (or accents) come to mind?

Follow-up: to what extent are you trying to imitate any of these accents?

- When you are deciding which lecture/video to listen to/watch, do you choose one with a "native speaker" or a "non-native speaker" talking?

Follow-up: why?

- Which accent do you think people in Portugal/ UK should speak: British, American, any other?

Or: to what extent is it important which accent people speak with?

- How important is it to you to learn all the idioms and cultural references for spoken and written communication?
- How important is it to you to follow all the grammatical rules you have learnt in communication?
- Who does English belong to?
- Has the project changed your views on native-speakerism and how?