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Parents' attitudes towards native and non-native speakers as potential teachers of their children

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Abstract

The native speaker idealisation is an ingrained fallacy in the ELT profession which contributes to the undervaluation of NNESTs. Several studies have focused on the attitudes of students, stakeholders and teachers themselves, but the parents' perspective has been ignored in previous research. The aim of this paper is to analyse parents' attitudes and preferences towards native and non-native speakers as potential teachers of their children. To achieve such aim, a set of semi-structured interviews have been conducted with six different parents of school children. The results show that parents lean towards native teachers in schools as they believe they might help them *perfect* their language. As for their alleged main advantages, NESTs are valued for their *natural learning of the language* and the teaching of culture, whereas NNESTs are favoured for the use of L1 and proximity. Apart from that, although children would prefer NNESTs, parents opt for NESTs in high-level courses and for NNESTs in lower levels. Overall, parents appear to perpetuate discrimination against NNESTs.

Key words: NESTs, NNESTs, parents, native-speakerism, L1, L2, discrimination.

Resum

La idealització del parlant nadiu és una fal·làcia que encara està molt present a l'ensenyament de l'anglès i contribueix a infravalorar els professors no nadius. Diversos estudis s'han centrat en les actituds dels estudiants, els agents implicats en l'educació i fins i tot dels mateixos professors, però la perspectiva dels pares no s'ha investigat prou. L'objectiu d'aquest treball és analitzar la ideologia i les preferències dels pares cap als potencials professors nadius i no nadius dels seus fills. Per tal d'aconseguir-ho, s'ha realitzat una sèrie d'entrevistes semiestructurades a sis pares d'alumnes en edat escolar. Els resultats mostren que els pares prefereixen els professors nadius a les escoles, ja que creuen que poden ajudar-los a *perfeccionar* la seva llengua. A més, valoren els nadius pel seu *aprenentatge natural de la llengua* i l'ensenyament de la cultura, mentre que opten pels no nadius per l'ús de la L1 i la proximitat amb l'alumne. A part d'això, tot i que els nens prefereixen els no nadius, els pares es decanten pels nadius als cursos de nivell alt, i pels no nadius als més baixos. En general, els pares d'aquest estudi contribueixen a la perpetuació de pràctiques discriminatòries contra els no nadius.

Paraules clau: NESTs, NNESTs, pares, nativisme, L1, L2, discriminació.

Resumen

La idealización del hablante nativo es una falacia que está aún muy presente en la enseñanza del inglés y contribuye a infravalorar a los profesores no nativos. Varios estudios se han centrado en las

actitudes de los estudiantes, de los agentes implicados en la educación y de los mismos profesores, pero la perspectiva de los padres no se ha investigado lo suficiente. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar la ideología y las preferencias de los padres hacia los potenciales profesores nativos y no nativos de sus hijos. Para conseguirlo, se ha realizado una serie de entrevistas semiestructuradas a seis padres de alumnos en edad escolar. Los resultados muestran que los padres prefieren a los profesores nativos en escuelas ya que creen que pueden ayudarlos a *perfeccionar* su lengua. Además, valoran a los nativos por su *aprendizaje natural de la lengua* y la enseñanza de la cultura, mientras que optan por los no nativos por el uso de la L1 y la cercanía con el alumno. Aparte, aunque los niños prefieren a los no nativos, los padres se decantan por los nativos en cursos de nivel alto y por los no nativos en los bajos. En general, los padres de este estudio contribuyen a la perpetuación de prácticas discriminatorias contra los no nativos.

Palabras clave: NESTs, NNESTs, padres, nativismo, L1, L2, discriminación.

1. Introduction

It has been commonly assumed for a long time that the objective of learning a second language is to attain a native-like proficiency. In particular, the teaching of English, which is nowadays regarded as a means of international communication, has often been influenced by the idealisation of the native speaker. Consequently, birthplace has sometimes become a required feature for the hiring of language teachers (Clark and Paran, 2007), thus priming native-speaking teachers and discriminating non-native ones. This might be justified under the false principle of heralding native proficiency as *pure* and *real*, labelled by Rajagopalan (2005) as the *native speaker myth* and by Phillipson (1992) as *the native speaker fallacy*.

Previous research has focused on the discrimination perpetuated by different groups, such as administrators, students, as well as the teachers themselves. Different scholars have claimed that, by placing native teachers on top as role models, non-natives are constantly questioned, judged and unfairly compared to their native counterparts (Higgins, 2003; Llurda, 2009; Mahboob, 2009; Kiczkowiak, 2015). These ideas have led to the conceptualisation of non-native teachers as second-class professionals, whose ideal referent is no other than the *elite* native teacher, thus cloaking their strengths (Widdowson, 2003). Given the fact that English is being marketed around the world because of its status, parents, who are crucial decision-makers in their children's education (Lorenzo et al., 2010), often uphold the native speaker fallacy by requiring native teachers for their children. Therefore, they also seem to be perpetuators of these conceptions. Nonetheless, as it will be seen below, the literature review presents an important gap in this aspect.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the attitudes and discourses of parents with regard to the native or non-native status of their children's teachers. This paper is divided into four sections. The first one offers an overview of the findings of previous studies on the field by focusing on the students', the administrators' and the parents' viewpoint. The following section is devoted to the methodology, where the participants and the instrument are described. Afterwards, the following episode deals with the analysis of the results obtained, and finally, some concluding remarks are made.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The established supremacy of the native speaker

The field of second language learning and teaching has always been influenced by the figure of the native speaker, who has been proclaimed as the ideal model with the highest level of language competence. Traditionally, the common belief was to assume that the native speaker did not make any mistakes when speaking, could use idiomatic expressions, and transmitted cultural knowledge of the corresponding language.

In 1985, Paikeday questioned the idealisation of the native speaker, thus asserting that “the native speaker only exists in some linguists’ imagination” (Paikeday, 1985: 12). With this claim, he questioned the assumption that birth-place and chronology of language learning determined one’s linguistic competence. In fact, Davies (2003) mentioned that some L2 learners could be as linguistically competent as native speakers. In this way, both authors challenged the native speaker idealisation and claimed that it is an artificial construct, rather than a reality. Similarly, Phillipson (1992) reflected upon some fallacies in L2 learning. In the *native speaker fallacy*, he questioned the presupposed intrinsic quality of native speakers that qualified them as better teachers than the non-native. In the early-start fallacy and the maximum exposure fallacy, he declined the false assumptions that in order to achieve a proficient command in an L2, a student should be exposed to the language from a very early age and for a great number of hours.

As for the case of English, Kachru (1985) was the pioneer in reflecting about the fact that English was not only spoken in the countries where it was an L1, but also in a great number of different contexts. Therefore, he greatly contributed to understanding English as a vehicle of international communication. His work inspired the currently widely used concepts of EIL (English as an International language) and ELF (English as a Lingua Franca).

In his three-circle model of World Englishes, Kachru included all the countries of the world, classifying them according to the role of English in each of them. First, countries like the United States and England, where English is used as an L1, were positioned in the *Inner Circle*. The second diaspora of English, created by the territorial expansion of the British Empire, was placed in the *Outer Circle*. It was formed by the countries where English is not an L1, but it is often official together with other local languages and widely used for domestic purposes, especially in education and law, like India or South Africa. Finally, the *Expanding Circle* was composed by all the countries where English is not official or regularly used for the aforementioned purposes, but is learnt as a means of making international communication possible. Kachru’s theory prompted a change in the perception around

the native speaker, due to the legitimization of non-native speakers, who constitute the majority of English speakers in the world (Modiano, 1999). Furthermore, Modiano (1999) suggested the idea that intelligibility was an essential aspect to validate the speakers of English as an international language. He claimed that some English native speakers might be less intelligible than others whose L1 is not English, and who, following Dewaele's (2018) formulation, are LX English speakers.

Llurda (2009) claimed that non-native speakers are trapped in a limiting construct created as the back side of the native speaker construct. Moreover, Moussu and Llurda (2008) argued that native and non-native speakers are simply societal constructs that have been developed due to the generalisation of some perceived differences in terms of competence and language experience. They discussed discrimination experienced by non-native speakers and stated that stereotypes regarding accent and race play a crucial role in discriminating non-native speakers. For example, if a speaker's accent is different from the generally accepted ones, the tendency is to categorise this person as non-native and label them as less-legitimate speakers. In the same line of thought, Higgins (2003) assumed that these discriminatory practices come from the concept of *English custody*, with England and the United States owning the most accepted varieties and having historical and sociocultural links to the language.

By way of overcoming the limits imposed by the idealization of native speaker in English language teaching, Seidlhofer (2004) reflected upon the fact that English is the most spoken language around the globe, with more non-native than native speakers because of its international status as medium of communication. For that, she defended the need of tackling the study of this emerging language, its uses, and the learning focalised in this perspective. Along the same lines, Llurda (2004) supported the idea that it is in the best interest of non-native English teachers to promote EIL as an empowering idea. Rudolph et al. (2015) and Canagarajah (2006) took a post-structuralist perspective and emphasized the importance of adapting the uses of English as a lingua franca to each particular context as a means to overcome externally imposed alienation.

2.2. The teaching profession and non-native speakers

Non-native English-speaking teachers of a second language (NNESTs) have always been overshadowed by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). Phillipson (1992) suggested that the fact that non-native teachers had to endure the same learning process as students was a benefit, as they could be more empathic towards students. They had been exposed to the same mistakes, so they could foresee them, and employ learning strategies better based on their educational background.

Holliday (2006) coined the term *native speakerism*, which describes the generalised assumption of native speakers as ideal models and their preference in language teaching, justified because of their *evident* linguistic authority. This ideology is much present in the teaching profession and is characterised by thinking that native speakers represent the Western culture and are naturally endowed to teach English.

Lippi-Green (1997) observed that, in the US, accents that are different from the ones accepted as standard were discriminated. This negative perception of non-mainstream accents has been transferred to the teaching field, and teachers with a different accent are negatively perceived by students. Furthermore, Brady and Gulikers (2004) also stated that many NNESTs are often put into question regarding language, as they are sometimes thought of having poor linguistic abilities that impede the students' learning process. For example, Clark and Paran (2007) concluded that students seemed to prefer native teachers rather than non-native ones, and non-native teachers were not considered for some job positions. Nevertheless, the results in Llorca (2005) showed that practicum supervisors in North-American TESOL programmes sustain that NNESTs have a wider language knowledge. Therefore, they know how to explain language better and anticipate errors. Despite these claims, they still recommended NNESTs to teach the lowest levels.

Amin (2004) highlighted that all speakers make errors, but that NNESTs were constantly judged and linked to the idea that they were lacking linguistic expertise. Oppositely, NESTs could actually make mistakes occasionally because it was assumed that they were perfect connoisseurs of the language, and that their mistakes were just slips of the tongue. Canagarajah (2005) expressed that NNESTs competence is always interrogated when they make mistakes, unlike NESTs. In order to break with these limiting beliefs, Selvi (2014) claimed that it is indeed crucial to promote and institutionalise multilingualism, multiethnicity and multiculturalism. Apart from that, the sociolinguistic and educational English framework should be reassessed and renegotiated by taking into account the role of English as an international language (Llorca, 2004).

2.3. The strengths of being a NNEST

Even though NNESTs have been widely discriminated due to the native speaker fallacy, a great number of scholars have highlighted their advantages. Reves and Medgyes (1994) proposed six positive characteristics that non-native teachers possessed. Since these teachers have been exposed to the same learning process as their students, NNESTs are perceived as good role models. Due to this process, they are also able to teach language learning strategies, which they had previously used in order to learn the language effectively. Moreover, they can predict and understand the difficulties and

needs that students may have. Finally, they can also use their first language in class in order to establish cross-linguistic relations between languages.

Phillipson (1992) argued that the majority of NNESTs have learnt English as a second language when they were already adults. Therefore, they were more prepared to teach an L2 to other adults, than those that learnt it in their childhood as an L1. Lee (2000) stated that non-native English speakers could be more sympathetic towards the difficulties that students may have, understand the possible experience of feeling outside of the L1 community as well as comprehend their cultural shock. He also claimed that NNESTs were actually admired by their students because they were role models who motivated them to learn. This is because they could observe successful results in a person who has of their same condition. In other words, they are vivid evidence on how far students could arrive concerning L2 learning (Cook, 2005).

In relation to the learning process, McNeill (2005) investigated NESTs and NNESTs in Hong Kong and determined that NNESTs were better at anticipating the easy and difficult words for students, with whom they shared Cantonese as an L1. Barratt and Kontra's (2000) results showed that native teachers could also demotivate students because they were scarcely capable of making comparisons between their L1 and English. They were not either able to understand the students' language difficulties. However, this claim has been criticised because it classifies native speakers as monolingual, and some NESTs are also competent in their students' L1.

Nemtchinova (2005) analysed the close relationship between students and non-native teachers. This study evidenced that NNESTs could understand the needs of students, and the teacher-student rapport was tranquil and easy. They also provided positive feedback and fair evaluations to students. Moreover, even if these teachers did not belong to English-speaking countries, they had enough cultural and linguistic knowledge to be able to adapt to any context. On the other hand, Maum (2003) underlined the importance of intercultural connections in language teaching. NNESTs possessed the L1 and L2 cultural knowledge, and were able to make cross-cultural comparisons to convey the concepts more appropriately.

As for the strengths of NNESTs, the students participating in Mahboob's (2003) study acknowledged that NNESTs had a wider command of the English grammar and a strict methodology, which demanded them to work hard. The doubts were solved in a more appropriate way by non-native than by native teachers. They were also more efficient in teaching them how to write. Barratt and Kontra (2000) remarked the positive and entertaining attitudes that NNESTs had towards implementing new teaching practices and approaches. Conversely, some negative comments that NESTs received were

the lack of pedagogical and professional preparation, the poor teaching styles, lack of organisation, local culture and education, and problems with accent, because they hindered the learning process. Therefore, it appears that NNESTs may be more prepared to deal with students' potential problems.

Some scholars such as Canagarajah (1999) have considered the notion of the native speaker as obsolete, because native speakers of one or more language are difficult to categorise in this globalised world. Nonetheless, the idealisation of the native speaker is still ingrained in society, and the difference between native and non-native teachers is still one of the main reasons why these discriminatory practices are still carried out, such as the hiring preference towards NESTs.

Finally, NNESTs should benefit from the role of English as a global lingua franca. If English is a language used at an international scale by speakers from all over the world, students may find it less challenging to communicate and teachers may be relieved from the pressure of being compared to native speakers (Llurda, 2004).

2.4. Attitudes towards NNESTs

Several studies have focused on the beliefs of different groups of people towards the figure of the non-native teacher. I will give an overview of attitudes by the three groups of people who, apart from teachers themselves, are more directly involved in language education: students, school administrators and parents.

2.4.1. NNESTs from the students' viewpoint

The fact that English has become the international means of communication has made many people interested in learning it. The majority of teachers are non-native, but they are discriminated in this world where the native speaker fallacy is still widely present.

In the last 20 years, many studies have focused on analysing the students' perceptions towards NESTs and NNESTs. Mahboob (2009) found that students credited NESTs' with better pronunciation, fluency, listening, and a wider range of vocabulary together with a deeper knowledge of the culture. On the other hand, students thought that NNESTs could empathise with the problems encountered by students when learning English as an L2, provide a good exam preparation, and efficient learning strategies. Mahboob (2003) also discovered that native speakers were admired because of their oral skills, but they were actually criticised for their poor knowledge of grammar, and lack of experience as learners of English as an L2. They were not able to answer the students' questions, and their teaching methodology was sometimes criticised. Conversely, NNESTs were valued for following a stricter methodology with grammar, answering the questions properly, and making students work

hard. Cheung's study (2002) also drew the same conclusions, but added that NNESTs shared the same cultural background as students to make cross-cultural connections that fostered their learning. They also held stricter expectations on students.

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) asked 17 NNS graduate students in TESOL in the United States, and found out that 90% of the participants could perceive the difference between NESTs and NNESTs. Apart from that, they also claimed that NNESTs relied too much on textbooks and used L1 as a medium of instruction, but knew the students' background. In addition, Moussu (2002) showed that Korean and Chinese students had negative attitudes towards their NNESTs because they used the L1. However, when a teacher who was assumed to be native used the L1, no judgement was made. They also claimed that NNESTs had poor oral skills and lack of knowledge about the English culture.

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) administered a survey to 76 undergraduate students in the Basque country, and found out that they preferred NESTs as their level rose because they were not using the L1, and employed a different methodology. Derivry-Plard's (2016) results also demonstrated a preference towards NESTs by students because of greater linguistic competence, better pronunciation and better grammar, although they also alleged that it depended on one's pedagogical skills rather than birth-place. As for the grammatical command, Benke and Medgyes (2005) found out that students considered NNESTs more demanding and traditional in the classroom than the native ones, since they were thought to be more outgoing, casual and talkative.

As for pronunciation, Butler (2007) claimed that the Korean students participating in the study who evaluated different accents assessed the American variety as the most fluent, correct, and appropriate. In the same line of thought, Manara (2014) found out that NNESTs teaching outside their home country were rejected because students discredited their authenticity as representatives of good English models due to their accent.

Despite these studies, which clearly indicated negative perceptions towards NNESTs, there are some papers that highlight students' admiration towards NNESTs. For example, Barratt and Kontra (2000) proved that students were discouraged by NESTs because they were not able to make useful comparisons, and they were more understanding towards learning difficulties presented by students. Similarly, Diniz de Figueiredo (2011) highlighted the importance of increased approximation between students and NNESTs, which was the source of respect and trust. Apart from that, multilingualism was valued by students because it enhanced the creation of metalinguistic strategies. They were also better learner models because of their multicompetence. Liang (2002) claimed that

students believed that accented teachers were not a hindrance for their learning, but actually interesting, qualified and professional.

In summary, the students' preferences concerning native and non-native teachers vary according to each individual and factors such as age, level and emotional connection. Some might prefer native speakers, others value proximity and relatedness of NNESTs, and others do not care about their birthplace condition but prioritize their teaching abilities.

2.4.2. NNESTs: from the administrators' viewpoint

The native speaker idealisation has also affected NNESTs' job options. Hiring practices favour NESTs over NNESTs, as nativeness is often considered an essential requirement (Mahboob et al., 2004). Consequently, NESTs possess a higher market value than NNESTs (Aneja, 2014). Many discriminatory practices are still going on because of this idealisation of the native speaker. For instance, Clark and Paran (2007) investigated employability of NESTs in the UK, and discovered that the native condition was indeed crucial in the hiring process, favouring those belonging to the Inner Circle. Kamhi-Stein (2016) reported that South Korean employers offered lower-level classes to NNESTs because of their ethnicity and their physical aspect, different from the stereotyped native speaker. Comparably, Geluso (2013) analysed teachers in the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme, and he found out that 90% could be classified as belonging to the Inner Circle. Wang and Lin (2013) analysed discrimination towards NNESTs in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, and how native-speakerism was promoted and perpetuated in those countries. They claimed that the majority of English teachers belonged to Anglophone countries. Their qualifications and experiences were not that important, but their remuneration was significantly higher than those from Japan. Therefore, this construct of the native speaker could also develop into a financial discrimination against NNESTs by spreading the message that *nativeness* is more important than professionalism.

Even though the hiring process should ideally focus on professional qualifications and disregard L1, ethnicity or country of origin (Mahboob & Golden, 2013), there is an increasing marketing strategy built around the idealized notion of the *perfect* English native teacher. Some studies have analysed job advertisements on websites for recruitment. In the case of Selvi (2010), the main finding was that the majority of advertisements mentioned nativeness as a requirement for the job. Mahboob and Golden (2013) found that out of the 77 job ads investigated, half asked for a particular nationality, and three-quarters for native speakers. Similarly, Kiczkowiak (2015) detected that three quarters of the job ads he examined required the candidate to be a native speaker, even if this condition went

against EU regulations. Thus, we may conclude that the native speaker fallacy is still quite present in the minds of administrators, and hiring discriminatory practices are still carried out, which in turn contribute to keep the fallacy alive.

2.4.3. NNESTs: From the parents' viewpoint

Not only do students and administrators perpetuate the false idealisation of the native speaker, but parents also contribute it. They are the ones who make decisions on what type of teacher would be the most convenient for their children. However, very few studies have focused on the parents' role as decision-makers for their children's education.

Kiczekowiak (2020), who analysed recruiters' attitudes when hiring teachers found out that parents were actually regulating the demands. He spotted complaints when the teacher was not native. In fact, they had an idealisation of what a native teacher looked like, and they mentioned that the private companies did not want the *wrong type of foreign*. Conversely, Diniz de Figueiredo's (2011) results show that parents were contented to know that a non-native English speaker was teaching their children, because of being a role model for them. However, a teacher in the same study mentioned that he was not going to use his own accent in class, but one of the accepted because parents could complain. Kamhi-Stein (2016) claimed that NNESTs were often questioned by parents and administrators. This might be due to the fact that non-native students and their parents do not recognize NNESTs as authentic representatives of the English language and culture, despite their professionalism (Greis, 1984).

Colmenero and Lasagabaster (2020) administered a survey to 355 EFL students, 101 parents and 51 teachers to investigate how ingrained native speakerism was. In fact, parents did not prefer NNESTs at any stage, but they rejected them more as the level of their children increased. They also claimed that NESTs could slightly provide more assessment and support to learners than NNESTs due to their abilities to solve problems and bring new ways to learn more effectively. NESTs were also perceived to provide more learning opportunities to their children. Contrariwise, NNESTs were seen as less capable compared to native teachers because of their *limited* and *non-advanced* English levels.

In the same study, parents showed to prefer NNESTs for listening and grammar, but NESTs for writing, reading and speaking. They also believed that NESTs could be better at teaching pronunciation and grammar as well as making students more fluent. Conversely, NNESTs were seen as good examples on how to learn English and originators of fewer language difficulties, being it the source of a successful result in their ESL learning. They also originated positive attitudes towards English, their speakers and their culture, and they could motivate students effectively. Despite these

assertions, they also asserted that NESTs were superior and more successful when making students learn about English history, culture and traditions.

The same authors (Colmenero and Lasagabaster, 2022) further investigated parents and found some results that differ from the ones reported above. Parents believed that professionalism, language skills, implication, aptitude, dedication and empathy depended on the individual above the native or non-native condition. However, they also claimed that the parents' reports influenced the marketing practices of extracurricular English classes, and this manipulated the hiring process and the conceptions of NESTs and NNESTs.

It has been clearly argued in this section that parents do actually play a role in the decision of having a NEST or a NNEST for their children, and evidence is initially pointing to the fact that they do contribute to the perpetuation of native speakerism and the native speaker fallacy. However, there is still a gap in research that needs to be filled, as not many studies have investigated on it, and I intend to address it here.

3. Research questions

The objective of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the preferences of parents in curricular and extracurricular lessons regarding native and non-native teachers?
- RQ2: How do these preferences vary depending on students' age and level?
- RQ3: What are the strengths and weaknesses that parents attach to native and non-native teachers?

This study departs from the hypothesis that parents do prefer native teachers over non-native because they have been exposed to the discourse that NESTs might be better prepared to help them *perfect* their language. They may think that this is because they have learnt the language *naturally*, and their way of communicating is *pure* and *real*, which in turn is a consequence of the idealisation of the native speaker in the English-teaching market.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Six parents with children aged from 7 to 13 attending extracurricular English lessons at private language schools were interviewed in a period of two weeks in March 2023. They were selected on the basis of including a range of different socio-economic backgrounds, ages of their children and

types of school (i.e., public or private). Apart from that, Interviewee 4 and 5 have been exposed to English lessons carried out by NESTs in three different courses by distinct teachers. Two of them resulted to be negative, and the other one positive. Table 1 provides some key information for each of the 6 participants, the age of their children, the place where their children go to school, and whether it is private or public.

Table 1. Table of participants.

INTERVIEWEE	CHILDREN'S AGE	SCHOOL
I1	11, 11	Tortosa, Public
I2	9	Lleida, Private
I3	11, 9	Lleida, Private
I4	12, 9	Lleida, Public
I5	13	Lleida, Private
I6	7	Hospitalet de l'Infant, Public

4.2. Instrument

The most adequate instrument which adjusted and accomplished the purpose of the study was a 30-minute semi-structured interview, as it allowed participants to express themselves openly when talking about their preference towards their children's English teachers (see appendix). Even if the main structure of the interview view was planned, the conversation could adapt to their topics of interest and address the research questions of the present study in a rather open and loose manner. The interviews were organised into two main sections.

The first block was introductory, including questions about their children's age, the school attended and their choice of private or public school. Afterwards, the topic tackled was English learning, as some of the questions dealt with the importance of it in general and in comparison to other subjects, as well as its goals, and the starting age of exposure to English instruction.

The subsequent questions dealt with their ideologies regarding the English instruction received by their children both at school and in the language school. Some of the topics addressed were the methodology and materials employed in class as well as the parents' level of satisfaction about the two places. Another issue was the degree of contentment with the English teachers regardless of their birth-place, thus analysing positive or negative aspects of their pedagogical skills. Concerning language schools, I was also interested in asking when children should start learning English, as some native-speakerist discourses also hold the idea that the younger, the better, as children would be able

to achieve a *bilingual command* of English if they are exposed from an early age. Other aspects debated were why they decided to bring their children to extracurricular lessons as well as the importance of it, comparing their qualities to the ones who do not receive them.

The second block focused on dealing with native and non-native teachers, and the parents' preferences. In this section, they were directly inquired about the teachers' native or non-native condition in the school and in the language school, as well as their satisfaction with it. Some ideas that appeared were related to presupposed changes in case their children had teachers with different characteristics.

Moreover, they were also asked about the strengths of both groups. More specifically, some of the questions posed were regarding the instruction of English culture, pronunciation and accent, together with speaking. These were inspired by the results provided by Mahboob (2009), who claimed that participants praised NESTs because of being more efficient at teaching these previous aspects. In the same line of thought, some other matters were related to the native teacher's academic basis and their pedagogical qualities, which have sometimes been overvalued because of learning the language as an L1, being it the reason why they are presupposed to be teaching the highest levels.

Finally, some points made were related to their children's preferences with NESTs and NNESTs, the possible estimated benefit of sporadic exposure to native teachers, the need of adjusting to the standards of the countries where English is an L1, and the use of the students' L1 in class. These requests were posed so as to observe if parents prevailed the monolingual approach linked to the idea of the native speaker.

5. Analysis of the results

This analysis has been organised according to themes, some of which were planned when designing the interview, but some others were selected according to the content of the questions and the answers delivered. The following analysis is divided into two parts with subsections. The first is entitled *the importance of learning English and its approach*, where aspects such as the parents' choice regarding private or public schools, their expectations about ESL learning, and their views on English taught in curricular and extracurricular lessons are dealt with. The second section is called *NESTs vs NNESTs*, and it copes with parents' opinions about the English teachers of their children in schools and language schools, the strengths and weaknesses of NNESTs and NESTs, such as the teaching of culture, pronunciation and speaking, and preferences about NESTs and NNESTs regarding age and level. Moreover, they were enquired about the benefit of exposing students to NESTs, the use of L1, and their opinion about ELF.

5.1. The importance of learning English and its approach

5.1.1. Parents' decisions about private or public schools

The interview started with a question about the type of school attended by their children, either public or private. Half of the interviewees brought them to public schools and the other half to private ones. The main reason for choosing a private school was to avoid high percentages of migrants in class, whereas those who opted for public schools did so for economic reasons. Two of the interviewees believed that the education received in private schools was of higher prestige because teachers had to demonstrate their validity in order not to be fired, and the content taught is of higher level.

Extract 1, I5¹: *Hi ha molta diferència de la privada a la pública. Van a un nivell molt més avançat que a la pública. Els professors no tenen una plaça assignada, així que han de treballar molt.*

It has been widely assumed that, given the fact that parents have to pay a lot of money for their children's education in private schools, quality is guaranteed. However, it does not need to be the case, given the fact that teachers in public schools have to demonstrate their validity by taking an exam called *oposicions*, whereas in private schools, teachers are just hired without having to demonstrate their capabilities.

5.1.2. Parents expectations regarding ESL learning

The following questions tackled the significance of learning English. All parents agreed on the fact that English is used internationally, and it allows its speakers to be able to communicate at a global scale. They also mentioned that it is a tool which enables them to open their horizons in terms of job opportunities, exposure to entertainment and acquiring knowledge about different cultures, thus placing English as one of the most important subjects instructed in school.

Extract 2, I4: *L'objectiu d'aprendre anglès és obrir oportunitats i portes. No sé que faran els meus fills, però segur que l'anglès els hi facilita les coses. És la base de tot com a idioma vehicular.*

Related to what has been mentioned before, the reason why they emphasised the noteworthiness of learning English is their own lack of access to its instruction. They found themselves powerless when going abroad for not being linguistically competent enough, and they did not want their children to reproduce it. One of these parents even claimed it to be so crucial that that she regrets not having the figure of the native speaker in her family to practice.

¹ "I" stands for "interviewee", as shown in table 1. They have been numbered following the order in which the interviews were carried out to keep their anonymity.

Extract 3, I5: *Tan debò m'haguessin ensenyat l'anglès de petita, o hagués tingut un pare bilingüe. M'hagués agradat tenir un familiar nadiu per poder parlar anglès.*

Even if the topic of native and non-native speakers had not yet been introduced in the interview, I5 decided to highlight the importance of the native speaker as the perfect model who can teach English. In fact, the choice of the word *petita* contributes to the idea that the earlier, the better, and the fact that a native speaker can teach her the language in a more natural way. However, this belief is just contributing to the native speaker fallacy and the early-start fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), thus perpetuating the praising of native speakers and their superiority to non-natives, and the need of exposing young-aged children to English to make them really proficient.

In the same line, as for the starting age of exposure to English instruction, four of the interviewees claimed that the sooner, the better. In fact, these children started extracurricular lessons when they were around 3 years old, except for one who was 18 months, and another who was 7. They emphasised the importance of imposing a routine on children so that they acquire the language *naturally*, as if it were an L1.

Extract 4, I2: *Jo? Des que neixen! S'habituen i la fan llengua materna.*

Extract 5, I3: *Los niños son como esponjas. Es importante desde bien pequeños exponerlos al inglés. Es una manera de que tengan un hábito y una costumbre de que es obligatorio.*

As mentioned before, these parents want their children to be really proficient in English, so the more exposure to its instruction, the more linguistically competent their children will be. However, this is just contributing to the maximum-exposure fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), because quantity is not the only requirement when learning, but also adequacy of the input. Moreover, they would like their children to speak English at an early age. As a result, some language schools sell the idea of starting teaching children at a very young age so that they can learn English *naturally* as another L1. However, the amount of exposure and opportunities will never be the same as in their L1. In fact, there are two parents who supported the idea that children should learn it when they have a certain command on reading and writing in the L1.

Extract 6, I4: *Doncs jo crec que a primària, no sé. Quan comencen a saber llegir una mica i escriure. Crec que abans no és necessari.*

Even if this claim is still perpetuating the early-start fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) because children start reading at the age of 5, she is at least postponing it until they have acquired a certain knowledge of the L1. In summary, the findings of this section prove that parents want their children to be really

proficient as soon as possible because it is an international language, being the reason why they expose children of a very early age to English and a great number of hours.

5.1.3. Parents views on English in curricular and extracurricular lessons

Most parents in this study seemed to have some doubts about changes in the education system, and they demonstrated it either through body language and facial expressions, or directly commenting on it. Two of them explained their decision of bringing their children to schools with traditional methods based on the teacher's explanation of concepts and the use of coursebooks.

Extract 7, I2: *Per mi tradicional és: professor, pissarra, llibre, deures i exàmens. El meu nen és diferent, i si el porto a una escola on no hi ha normes o són molt flexibles, acabaré tenint un salvatge. Amb una escola tradicional, sé el què el nen estudia i els requisits que es volen.*

I2 is stating in this passage that the use of unconventional methodologies is perceived by parents as lack of learning and strictness, maybe because they believe that the methodology of their times was the most efficient. However, being strict does not need to be a requirement when teaching, but it should consist of making students learn. These new approaches have demonstrated that, if students are instructed on how to look for information and learn by their own means, results are more successful. Given the appearance of the Internet, students can have many resources available, and as a consequence, the goal of teaching has changed. Moreover, learning does not need to be boring and tough for students, but they need to enjoy the process and be motivated. In line with this thought, two parents understand education as the provision of tools so that learners can learn by themselves. Three of them reported the establishment of project-based learning in their schools, although they gave the impression of being a bit reluctant.

Extract 8, I3: *Ahora se han modernizado un poquito, con proyectos, más ordenador, más fichas, menos libros. [...] Pero nosotros queríamos un colegio tradicional porque no hay institutos modernos, no había continuidad. [...] No me desagrada porque el niño tiene más tiempo libre, va más contento y está más motivado, pero hacen menos cosas y me preocupa porque les costará coger un libro.*

Another controversial topic is the amount of time of exposure to English. All participants avowed that it is insufficient in schools, being that the reason why their children are attending private lessons at a language school. In fact, there are many in Catalonia because of the belief that English in schools is not well taught. Therefore, a great number of parents bring their children to complimentary hours of English for the purpose of improving their level. The participants in this study alleged that if it were not for these supplementary lessons, their children would have a *low level*. To change this situation in schools, they suggested that their children should be exposed to more hours of English,

including the teaching of the language per se, but also subjects with English as the medium of instruction.

Extract 9, I1: *No estic gens content. En tema d'anglès donen molt poques hores, i s'haurien d'afegir-hi més. Tenen un nivell molt baix, no practiquen prou, no tenen prou exposició. Per exemple, podrien posar assignatures en anglès completament.*

This finding might be related to Phillipson's (1992) maximum exposure fallacy, by means of which he argues against the idea that the more English is taught, the better. Quantity is important when learning a second language, although it is not the only factor to be taken into consideration, as it may be irrelevant if the input is not appropriate and comprehensible.

As explained before, parents bring their children to extracurricular lessons as they observed weaknesses in the school education. They all appeared to be satisfied with the methodology in private language schools because of its benefits: fostering self-confidence, acquiring a greater knowledge and competence, making it present in their lives and receiving a more person-centred instruction.

Extract 10, I3: *Siempre tienen un deber, y el inglés no se olvida [...] En el cole no lo fomentan lo suficiente [...] por eso los traigo, para que vayan más adelantados.*

Extract 11, I6: *A una classe amb tants alumnes, la professora no es pot centrar tant. A una acadèmia estan més per tu perquè el número d'alumnes és més baix... És més individualitzat.*

The use of *duty* by I3 in extract 10 emphasises the need of parents to make sure that their children learn English because of its emergence as an international language. Therefore, these supplementary classes are a way to obligate them to learn it and comprehend its importance and value in the future. However, the reality in most language schools are extra lessons of higher level with a traditional methodology. The result obtained is basically doubling the hours of exposure to English using the same method.

5.2. NESTs vs NNESTs

5.2.1. English teachers in schools and private language schools

All parents in this study were satisfied with the teachers of their children and their methodology as they kept students interested, and adapted to the different levels in class. However, this changes when they are asked about the degree of satisfaction regarding the place of origin of these teachers. Four affirmed that their children should be exposed to a native teacher in school because they have a *better pronunciation* and *another type of methodology*. Apart from that, they valued the aspect of not being able to use the students' L1 and enhance speaking in class.

Extract 12, I3: *Estoy contenta en general con la forma en la que enseña, pero no en que sea no nativo. Podría serlo porque creo que tienen mejor pronunciación. Me gustaría incluso que no supiese hablar ni el español ni el catalán para que no lo utilicen.*

Extract 13, I5: *Home, m'agradaria que fos nadiua perquè tenen un plus de... No ho sé... És que aquesta amiga irlandesa és professora i clar, és diferent. Al cole els hi donaria un altre enfocament, la forma d'ensenyar, clar, és que no seria a cop de regle. També s'ha de practicar com es parla [...] i un nadiu ho fomentaria això, tindria una visió diferent de com ensenyar.*

This monolingual approach of native speakers mentioned in extract 12 has proven to contain its drawbacks, because cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons can't be made in order to assure learning (Reves and Medgyes, 1994). Apart from that, there is this common belief that NESTs have a more didactic and dynamic methodology because they have learnt English as an L1, whereas non-natives are stricter and rely more on grammar (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2003). However, this is a very essentialist idea, as being born in one place does not provide the tools to be an excellent teacher. Instead, it depends on the abilities of the individual. In this line, two participants emphasised the importance of possessing appropriate pedagogical skills regardless of their birthplace. Nevertheless, one of them explained that her child is still 9 years old, and that is the reason why a native teacher is not yet required at this level:

Extract 14, I2: *Si la professora és nadiua o no, en aquestes edats no importa, no busco que se li ensenyi el millor del món ara. El que importa és el tarannà, i que sàpiga portar-los, i parlar-los al 99% en anglès, deixar l'idioma nadiu a casa.*

Again, this finding demonstrates how native-speakerism is very much ingrained in people's minds. I2 claims that a native speaker could *teach the best content of the world*. Therefore, even if she argues that she does not care about birthplace and values the abilities of the teacher, she is still praising NESTs at a higher position and conceiving NNESTs as second-class professionals who are not able to *teach the best in the world*.

Surprisingly, the preferences in private language schools change from the aforementioned. They all appeared to be satisfied with the current teachers of their children, but two would prefer NESTs because their children could enter an English-only atmosphere and obtain better results. Moreover, their motivation would be enhanced and they would be exposed to a *different* pronunciation. One parent stated that she likes native teachers because they are vivid examples of the conversations that they might hold in non-educational settings.

Extract 15, I1: *Només en entrar, l'home ja parlava en anglès i ells també. Estava molt content amb aquest professor perquè ells anaven contents i amb ganes. Sabien parlar molt bé, i a l'escola anaven sobrats.*

Extract 16, I3: *Seguramente su pronunciación es diferente, pero tiene que ver que puede encontrarse con nativos fuera de la escuela.*

I1 claimed that the accent of the native speaker was *different* but he actually implied that it was of better quality, because afterwards, he claims that his children spoke *very well*. In fact, they were only 5 when they were exposed to that teacher, so their level could not be really proficient, but my assumption is that their pronunciation would have been closer to a native one. Therefore, he is contributing to the idea that just because of having a native accent, people are more competent. Apart from that, in extract 15, I3 claimed that their children will find native speakers outside educational settings in real-life conversations. However, this assertion contradicts the fact that English has become an international language, and there is a more significant number of non-native speakers than native ones (Seidlhofer, 2004). Nevertheless, they are sometimes forgotten and not counted as *real* speakers.

The other four parents expressed their satisfaction with non-native teachers in private language schools for several reasons. Since their children are young, they feel more at ease with non-native speakers because they are more empathic. Moreover, the concepts explained in class are sometimes difficult to understand, especially concerning grammar, and the L1 appears to be useful to make sure they succeed in comprehending. The students' satisfaction, motivation, well-being and tranquillity triggered by NNESTs were also valued. They gave importance to the fact that their children's NNESTs make them pay attention in class and get involved in activities, thus avoiding them conceive English as an obligation but rather as a stimulating activity.

Extract 17, I2: *Se sent reforçat i valorat [...]. Amb el temari que tenen, no vull encara un professor nadiu. Si a un nen li costa la diferencia entre present simple i present continuous, i li estàs explicant mil vegades, i al final li has d'explicar en català, si és nadiu, tenim un problema.*

Extract 18, I4: *Van contents [...]. No vull que se'ls hi faci costa amunt, que pensen que és avorrit o monòton. [...] Per mi és més agradable que sigui algú proper, que se sentin acompanyats. Si per ser nadiu perdem això, no hem guanyat res.*

In fact, these excerpts summarise the main strengths of NNESTs, all of them justified because of their experience as L2 learners, which shows to be beneficial when comprehending the problems of the students and teaching more appropriately. Although they both preferred NNESTs, I2 argued that

because her child is 9 years old. Consequently, this reflects the belief that NNESTs should be teaching low levels and young ages (Llurda, 2005) because using the L1 may be tolerated at early stages but it would later have negative consequences in their learning.

In general, parents prefer native teachers in school because they must get their main English knowledge from there, and NESTs are the ideal to reach, which actually perpetuates the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992). Contrarily, in extracurricular language schools, parents do not strictly require native teachers because the children's attendance there is merely complimentary.

5.2.2. Strengths and weaknesses of NNESTs and NESTs

The parents in this study were directly inquired about the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs. Concerning the advantages of NESTs, parents declared that they make students feel nervous and think that they will not be understood, which is paradoxically considered an advantage because this forces students to make more effort. Moreover, they believed NESTs are more skilful than NNESTs at teaching English because they have allegedly learnt it naturally. One parent even stated that if they have studied a degree in English, their academic basis is more solid. In extract 19, I2 defended that native teachers find teaching English less challenging than NNESTs. Apart from that, they are able to teach *native levels* because of their condition. Moreover, they claimed that non-native teachers find it hard to achieve such a high-proficient level.

Extract 19, I2: *Els nadius tenen més facilitat quan expliquen una cosa. Ser nadiu et donarà la capacitat de poder ensenyar un proficiency, que és un nivell nadiu. És complicat que una persona no nadiua aconseguixi un nivell nadiu.*

According to these parents, being born in a specific place means learning the language as an L1 and having a great competence, which assures that that person disposes of great teaching skills that make them able to be in charge of the highest levels. However, they appeared to not pay heed to the fact that NNESTs are more prepared to do so, because they have learnt English as an L2 and can provide the strategies that they used, and more information to the learners about the language (Reves and Medgyes, 1994).

As for the reported NESTs weaknesses, some parents seemed to object to the idea of having native teachers in low levels because they do not share the students' L1. Nonetheless, some others argued that this was a hindrance at all levels. In addition, they maintained that the fact that English was their L1 did not guarantee them to be ideal teachers, as they might not be used to teaching grammar and structure

Extract 20, I5: *El que jo sàpiga castellà no vol dir que jo pugui ensenyar fora. També s'ha de tenir estructura, saber que s'ha de donar, la parla, la gramàtica.*

The fact of having a mother tongue does not provide the skills to be a good teacher, but it depends on personal aspects, training and studies. Furthermore, because of lack of experience as English L2 learners, NESTs are commonly criticised for their insufficient grammar knowledge, which is actually necessary when learning it as an L2 (Mahboob, 2009). In fact, native speakers do not learn grammar and structure as non-native learners do, thus making them make extra efforts to explain it adequately.

On the other hand, parents seemed to agree on the main advantage of non-native teachers: sharing the L1 with their students. Although one parent was against using the L1 in class, the others valued this aspect, especially with children, so that teachers can make sure their understanding is accomplished. Furthermore, one parent stated that NNESTs can provide some tricks they used when learning and transmit concepts in a more comprehensible way.

Extract 21, I4: *Els meus grans pensen que és millor que no sigui nadiu perquè els dona els trucs que va utilitzar per aprendre determinades construccions o paraules. Tenen clar que aprenen d'una persona que ja ha après això i ho transmet millor.*

This finding is in line with the strengths described by Reves and Medgyes (1994) who emphasized that NNESTs's experience as L2 learners is advantageous for their students because they could provide more information about the language and give them the tricks they used when learning. Apart from that, using the L1 in class can be effective to make cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons to make sure students get a deeper understanding of the language by drawing parallelisms to their mother tongue.

Despite the advantage of using the L1 in class, the main weakness that parents noted is that NNESTs find it challenging to achieve a native-like command of the language. In addition, since they do not speak it in their daily lives and conversations, they might find it challenging to maintain this level.

Extract 22, I2: *És complicat que una persona no nadiua aconseguixi un C2. Però el més complicat es mantenir-lo, perquè no el parles cada dia.*

NNESTs are constantly discriminated just because of the fact that they were not born in a country where English is the L1. In fact, Canagarajah (2005) declared that non-native teachers are constantly interrogated regarding their linguistic competence, as NESTs are assumed to possess a greater linguistic proficiency (Derivry-Plard, 2016). Therefore, NNESTs are relegated to second-class professionals, who will never have the command of a native speaker. However, even though the goal of an L2 speaker is not to become a native speaker (Cook, 2007), some studies have even concluded

that non-native speakers can indeed achieve native-like levels, being the distinction between native and non-native speakers difficult to spot in terms of proficiency (e.g., Birdsong, 1992).

5.2.3. NESTs and the teaching of culture, pronunciation and speaking

Previous studies found that NESTs advantages were in teaching culture, pronunciation and speaking (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020; Mahboob, 2009). The participants in this study were also asked about that. Four agreed on NESTs having superior skills when teaching culture, as it is part of their identity and their habits. As a matter of fact, I5 supported that a non-native teacher has only studied it, and the explanation might be just a simulation of reality because of having a different cultural background (see extract 23).

Extract 23, I5: *És com si tu ensenyas que és una paella. Ho faràs millor perquè ho portes a la sang. Com a no nadiu, pots saber els costums perquè ho has estudiat, no perquè ho has viscut. Ho expliques com una pel·lícula.*

Similar results were found by Mahboob (2009), as his participants praised NESTs for their deep knowledge of culture, which was at the same time pointed as a NNEST's weakness. However, English has become an international language, and culture is much more complex than the dichotomy between British and American. Moreover, being born in a place does not mean being connoisseur of all the cultures of a country, but native teachers are conceived as the vivid representation of the English language and the Western culture (Greis, 1984). Hence, NNESTs are relegated to second-class professionals although they might be well-educated and well-travelled people with plenty of international experiences. In the same line, there are two parents who stated that it is not that NESTs are better, but they just provide their own viewpoint on their lived experiences. Moreover, they highlight NNESTs can also know a lot about culture.

Extract 24, I4: *Que sigui d'un lloc o d'un altre pot tenir la seva gràcia, o anècdotes del país, que sàpiga transmetre una mica més la cultura anglesa. Però hi ha persones d'aquí que saben molt d'aquest tema [...]. Un nadiu ho explicaria sense comparar-ho, i el no nadiu comparant-ho.*

When discussing about pronunciation, the parents in this study seemed to be evenly divided in terms of opinion. Three argued that NESTs are preferable because the native accent, being British or North-American, is *different*. In fact, the connotation of this adjective was positive, because he emphasised that the girl *spoke really well* after having been exposed to that teacher (see extract 25). This result might be explained because the native accent is commonly believed to be an aspect which demonstrates *great linguistic command*.

Extract 25, I6: *Això sí, és molt diferent. Tots escrivim igual, però l'accent és diferent. No és el mateix l'accent d'aquí que l'americà o el britànic. Sé d'una noia que va aprendre d'un professor d'Estats Units, i clar, l'accent és molt diferent, parla molt bé.*

Nevertheless, the other three participants argued that intelligibility is more important than having a certain accent. They mentioned that native teachers just teach one specific accent, which is not of higher or lower quality than any other. In fact, they pointed at the multiculturalism emerged due to the process of internationalisation of English, and accepted accents, not placing any at a higher level.

Extract 26, I1: *Si una persona d'aquí ja té el nivell d'anglès suficient com per parlar i que l'entenguin, és indiferent que tingui un accent d'aquí o de fora, els dos són bons.*

Pronunciation has always been a controversial issue because some accented teachers have been rejected and categorised as non-native, with its negative connotations (Liang, 2002). However, parents in this study align with the importance of embracing ELF to avoid perpetuating discrimination against NNESTs and claim them to be legitimate English speakers, which is step towards the acceptance of these collective.

Concerning the teaching and promotion of speaking, parents generally believed that both native and non-native teachers are equally qualified. Only two avowed that NESTs might be more efficient as they have a wider knowledge of vocabulary, thus providing students with more possibilities. Apart from that, they are able to detect repetitions and offer solutions more rapidly. Another idea was that since English is their L1, they can more successfully encourage its use.

Extract 27, I2: *Et poden donar més sinònims, més possibilitats amb l'idioma. [...] Els nadius ho detecten més ràpidament. Els seus pensaments son en anglès.*

Despite these assertions, the other four stated that this does not depend on birthplace, but on the teacher's ability, on being talkative and on encouraging conversation among students. Definitely, these abilities are not guaranteed by birthplace. However, it depends on personality and willingness to deal with speaking in class.

5.2.4. Choosing a NEST or a NNEST

The parents participating in this study were asked to hypothetically choose the ideal instructor for their children, according to different situations: first they had to imagine what their children would select and second what their own choice would be, considering age and level of their children. Three parents believed that their children would prefer non-native teachers because they shared the same L1 and they would be more comfortable with NNESTs (see extract 28). Conversely, the other three

did not seem to care about the birthplace of the teacher, as they valued their abilities above their native/non-native condition (see extract 29).

Extract 28, I3: *Ellos preferían un no nativo por el hecho de que igual lo ven más cercano, como ellos. Siempre saben que pueden decirle ‘no lo entiendo’, y hablar en su idioma. Se sentirían más cómodos por cercanía y parentesco.*

Extract 29, I4: *Ells se sentirien més còmodes amb un professor amb bones habilitats més que amb si és nadiu o no nadiu.*

In fact, some students seem to prefer NNESTs because of the shared learning experience and their empathy with their learners' difficulties (Lee, 2000). Despite this, parents believed that they would be more relaxed, something which is assumed not to be linked with learning. Instead, they might think that NNESTs would make the learning process easier, whereas NESTs would be more demanding, and consequently, students would learn more.

Regarding the parents' preferences, changes can be seen in their opinion regarding age and level. Only one parent preferred native speakers when their children are young and their level is low because they would acquire a native pronunciation and culture would be easily acknowledged. Another parent did not seem to prefer any, as she alleged the importance of connecting with children, making them active and participatory in class, and the teacher's capabilities. However, the other four seemed to opt for non-native teachers because of the L1, their accent, making concepts understandable and avoiding the risk of having mental blocks, especially in grammar.

Extract 30, I6: *Un no nadiu, perquè la meva filla és nascuda aquí i és més fàcil que entengui una persona d'aquí. Un nadiu li parlarà molt directe i molt en anglès, i fins i tot, no entendrà a ma filla parlant català i es bloquejarà.*

Nevertheless, when they are older, three parents opted for native speakers to perfect their language and become *super English speakers* (see extract 31). One even pointed out that they need the native teacher to obtain another accent and acquire rapidity when speaking (see extract 32). On the other hand, the other three did not appear to care about the birthplace of the teachers as long as they have experience, abilities and willingness.

Extract 31, I6: *Un nadiu per perfeccionar. Si ja se sap molt d'anglès, fins arribar al 10, falta saber costums d'Anglaterra, i un nadiu pot perfilar l'alumne com un súper parlant d'anglès.*

Extract 32, I2: *Quan són grans llavors ja parlem, és diferent, necessiten el nadiu per poder tenir un altre tipus d'accent i rapidesa.*

Extract 33, I5: *És que a mi i al meu fill ens és igual. Mentre mantingui al meu fill interessat, ensenyi bé, tingui ganes, experiència i bones habilitats, si és nadiu o no ens és igual.*

Since native speakers are assumed to have a perfect command of the language because it is their L1, they are seen as vivid examples of perfect speakers who do not make mistakes and use the language *naturally*. Because of that, they are preferred at the highest levels because they might help students perfect their language. However, the others just reject this native-speakerist discourses and give priority to one's abilities, because in the end, being born in one place is not a condition which guarantees quality in teaching a language.

5.2.5. Exposure to NESTs

The two parents (I4 and I5) who were at some point instructed by native speakers were asked about their experience and opinion. One parent had two experiences with native teachers in two different courses, one being negative and the other positive. The former had to do with lack of effort, feedback, synonyms and explanations, while in the latter the NEST was praised for the contrary. The other parent also had a negative experience in a course with a native teacher as she did not understand anything in class and the teacher did not clarify it.

Extract 34, I2: *És que no s'esforçava gens, vaja. No rebíem feedback, ens donava sinònims que ni enteníem, ens ho explicava i al final de les frases baixava el to. La majoria va abandonar.*

NESTs are often criticised for their lack of pedagogical skills and poor teaching styles, which actually leads to students' lack of success (Barratt and Kontra, 2000). Maybe, this type of teachers also sustain the claim that, since they have learnt the language naturally, they are perfectly equipped to teach, without having to get informed on pedagogical methodologies. In fact, these two parents, who had experienced having a NEST, are the ones with the softest native-speakerist positions. Conversely, those who more strongly praise native speakers, do so without prior practical experience and we may assume it is a direct consequence of the widespread idealisation of the native teacher as role model and ideal competent speaker (Phillipson, 1992).

Interestingly, when asked whether they would support exposing their children to sporadic lessons by native speakers, the four who did not receive instruction by native speakers (I1, I2, I3 and I6) assumed it to be positive whereas these two did not agree. I3 even gives the example of their children, who had attended English summer camps in Catalonia with native teachers, although the students spoke Catalan with their friends, and claimed that this exposure made them feel nervous and make extra efforts to be understood, thus fostering their rapid learning. Apart from that, she reports that his child actually improved because they know how to translate songs and their pronunciation *became better*.

Extract 35, I3: *De hecho, mis hijos van a un campamento de inglés y sus profesores son nativos, aunque con los compañeros hablan catalán. [...] Después hablan inglés mejor. Ellos saben traducir lo que dicen las canciones, y la pronunciación también mejora. Se les quita la vergüenza.*

5.2.6. L1 in class

Half of the parents in this study gave the impression to be reluctant to the use of the L1 in an English class, but the other three accept it. The ones in disagreement stated that teachers should employ synonyms, drawings, explanations or even actions to make them grasp a concept. Otherwise, they supported the claim that speaking English only is the fastest way to learn.

Extract 36, I2: *Si tu a un nen li dius 'sit down' i després fas l'acció, el nen ho aprèn. En canvi, si ho tradueixes no, estan associant que un soroll vol dir 'seu'. No és el que es vol.*

Related to that, Colmenero and Lasagabaster (2020) found out that parents preferred native speakers as their children's level rose because they could not use their L1. However, employing a monolingual approach is not the most efficient way to learn a second language, because parallelisms between the two need to be made in order to obtain successful results. Apart from that, using the L1 seems to be linked to having poor English knowledge, which in fact is contradictory because it indeed helps learners to make comparisons between languages.

Conversely, the ones that did not object to employing the L1 in class say that it is useful in case students have doubts, to avoid lack of understanding, clarify and help. More specifically, one stated that translation is necessary at all levels to comprehend concepts as well as to compare among languages.

Extract 37, I5: *Com més anglès es parli a la classe millor, però igual en alguns moments necessites el català per si hi ha alguna dificultat a qualsevol nivell per aclarir i ajudar. Necessites traduir per quedar-te amb els conceptes perquè sinó no tens amb que comparar-ho.*

5.2.7. ELF and accents

When discussing about accents, all parents seemed to agree to the fact that each individual should be using their own accent and not try to mimic any. In fact, they all highlighted the importance of making communication possible as the ultimate goal of learning a language (Seidlhofer, 2004). In fact, one remarked that languages are in constant evolution and accents are constantly emerging. They genuinely supported that the most crucial aspect is following the appropriate vocabulary and grammar, thus holding a position towards maintaining the purest form of the English language.

Extract 38, I5: *Mentre parlis anglès, t'entenguin i et puguis comunicar és igual. La gent que no som de parla anglesa se'ns nota perquè no pronunciem igual per molt que tinguis domini de l'idioma, però mentre segueixis la gramàtica i el vocabulari correcte... L'idioma canvia.*

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, although many attempts have been made to deconstruct the idealisation of the native speaker (Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Davies, 2003), this paper has demonstrated that the native speaker fallacy is still very much ingrained in Catalan parents' ideology. The parents in this study highlight the significance of learning English, for its status as the main international vehicle of communication (Seidlhofer, 2004), serving as a useful tool to open new doors for different future purposes. Therefore, they claim English instruction to be crucial, and take their children to private extracurricular English lessons at an early age and for several hours. In schools, parents predominantly position themselves in favour of NESTs, as they consider that these teachers have a *purser* pronunciation, a *different* methodology and no access to the students' L1. However, in language schools, parents do not show a clear preference for any of the two. It is concluded that a possible explanation of this divergence may be found in the fact that regular schools offer compulsory education whereas enrolment in language schools is complimentary.

Parents outline some perceived strengths of NESTs. Among them, we may highlight: *having a different methodology, having English as their L1 and forcing students to make more effort*. Conversely, NNESTs were valued for using the L1 to make cross-linguistic comparisons and assure understanding, providing learning strategies, and being sensitive to students, specially at young stages. However, their perceived main weakness was *lack of native-like competence*. The parents in this study were also asked about some of the presumed strengths of NESTs found in previous studies (Colmenero & Lasagabaster, 2020; Mahboob, 2009). The majority agreed in stating that they can teach culture more effectively because of their experience, whereas NNESTs explain it as a mere interpretation of reality. As for pronunciation, there was no consensus, because some declared that NESTs' pronunciation is *purser*, whereas the others validate all different accents (Higgins, 2003). Finally, they did not position themselves when discussing who is better at teaching speaking because they place the abilities of the teacher above place of birth.

Parents' views differed depending on students' age and level. When they are young, NNESTs are favoured because they may speak in a more comprehensible accent and use the L1. However, when they grow older and their level becomes higher, half of them opt for NESTs to perfect their language and obtain another type of accent as well as faster speaking, whereas the others do not choose any and just emphasise the effectiveness of the teacher's abilities. However, most of them agreed to

expose their children to sporadic lessons taught by NESTs to add *higher quality knowledge*, except for I4 and I5, who precisely were those who had been taught by native speakers themselves. Lastly, they seemed to be a bit reluctant to the use of the L1 in class, as they think that synonyms, drawings and explanations in English should be employed first.

Nonetheless, a limitation to this study needs to be taken into account. First, only six participants have taken part in this paper. Although a qualitative study like this does not require a great number of participants, a larger and more diverse pool could have helped draw more general conclusions about parents' ideological stances with regard to NESTs and NNESTs. Despite this, some issues that need to be further addressed in the future have been raised. One of the most important is the significance of recognising ELF as the driving force in English language teaching and the need to change the currently dominant native-speakerist ideology among parents to accept and value non-native teachers.

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8. Appendix

Semi-structured interview

Bloc introductori

- Edat dels fills
- Escola
- Per què escola pública? / Per què escola privada?

ESL learning:

- Per què creus que és important que s'apregui anglès? / Quin creus que és l'objectiu d'aprendre anglès? (habilitats)
- Com d'important penses que és aprendre anglès en relació a altres matèries?
- Quan penses que s'hauria de començar a aprendre anglès? (edat)

English in schools and private schools:

- Quina metodologia utilitzen a l'escola? Quins materials?
 - o Estàs satisfet amb aquesta forma d'ensenyar?
- El portes a alguna acadèmia? Per què?
 - o A quina acadèmia el portes / l'has portat? Per què?
 - o Des de quina edat els portes? Per què?
 - o Per què creus que és important portar al teu fill a l'acadèmia?
 - Quines qualitats creus que pot tenir per sobre dels alumnes que no van a una acadèmia?

Parlem sobre els professors nadius / no nadius

- El professor de l'escola:
 - o Estàs content/a amb el professor/a d'anglès del teu fill?
 - Quin és l'aspecte que més valores del professor del teu fill? I els que menys?
 - o És nadiu o no nadiu? Estàs satisfet amb aquesta condició? És a dir t'agradaria que fos (el contrari)?
 - Creus que canviaria alguna cosa si fos nadiu/ no nadiu?
- El professor de l'acadèmia:
 - o Estàs satisfet amb el professor d'anglès del teu fill a l'acadèmia? Per què? (i la seva metodologia)
 - o És nadiu o no nadiu? Estàs satisfet amb aquesta condició?

- Creus que canviaria alguna cosa si fos nadiu/ no nadiu?
- Preferiries que el professor de l'acadèmia fos nadiu? Per què?

Strengths and weaknesses:

- Quins avantatges creus que tenen els professors nadius per sobre dels no nadius? / desavantatge (viceversa)
- Creus que els professors nadius poden ensenyar millor la cultura dels països? Per què?
- Creus que els professors nadius poden ensenyar millor la pronunciació de l'anglès?
 - (Creus que els nadius tenen millor accent que els no nadius?)
 - Tots els nadius iguals? O algun tipus més que algun altre?
- Creus que els professors nadius poden ensenyar millor a fer conversa que els no nadius?

Educational background:

- N'has conegut algun de nadiu?
- Creus que els parlants nadius ensenyen diferent? / Has trobat alguna cosa que els parlants nadius tinguin que no tinguin els no nadius? I viceversa?
- Creus que els professors nadius tenen una base acadèmica més forta que els no nadius? > estan més preparats?
- Creus que els professors nadius tenen més experiència per ensenyar que els no nadius?

Age and level: NESTs or NNESTs?

- Quan són petits i no tenen gaire nivell, què creus que és més beneficiós per l'alumne, un professor nadiu, o un no nadiu? Per què?
- Quan són més grans i ja tenen un nivell mitjà-avançat, què creus que és més beneficiós per l'alumne, un professor nadiu, o un no nadiu? Per què?

Exposure to native speakers:

- Creus que seria beneficiós que els alumnes estiguessin exposats en algun moment als nadius? (És a dir, en moments curts com conferències, xarrades, classes curtes...)
- Amb qui creus que aprendria més, amb un nadiu, o amb un no nadiu?

Students' preference:

- Com creus que es sentiria més còmode el teu fill a classe, amb un professor nadiu, o amb un no nadiu? Per què?
- Què creus que preferiria el teu fill, un professor nadiu, o un no nadiu?

ELF and accents:

- Creus que el fet que l'anglès és una llengua parlada a nivell internacional per gent de molts països amb molts accents fa que sigui més acceptable parlar-lo amb l'accent de cadascú?
 - o Que si fos una llengua parlada en un país o amb un model concret?

L1:

- Creus que s'ha d'utilitzar la llengua materna a classe? O sols anglès? Per què?
 - o A tots els nivells? Baix-mitjà-alt