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Square-headed frogs and world citizens: Attitudes and identities of ESL teacher candidates

in Quebec

Abstract: This study explores the attitudes and identities of future ESL teachers in a four-year

teacher education program in a regional university in Quebec, Canada. We describe the socio-

political context of learning English in Quebec and explain studies describing the position of

non-native speaker teachers of English in various political and geographical contexts, drawing on

Kachru's work on the three concentric circles from a World Englishes perspective. Fifty-four

future teachers responded to an online survey designed to understand their attitudes toward

native-speaker proficiency and their linguistic and cultural identities as future ESL teachers.

Respondents had contradictory attitudes toward their own linguistic proficiency and accents and

the native speaker model, and conflicting desires of retaining their assumed identities and

adopting native speaker identities. Our conclusions indicate the importance of political

discourses in their society and international discourses, such as the native speaker fallacy, which

have complex, conflicting influences on these future teachers.

Square-headed frogs[1] and world citizens: Attitudes and identities of ESL teacher candidates in Quebec

The global spread of English

The linguistic and cultural identities of teachers of English as a second language (ESL) or English as an International language (EIL) are becoming more interesting to researchers as their numbers increase globally. It is estimated that 80% of English language teachers are NNESTs (non-native English-speaking teachers) (Canagarajah, 2005). Because of the unprecedented position of English as a dominant global language in the 21st century, it has become a lingua franca in the domains of research, business, economics, and culture. The global domination of English has been fostered by colonialism, international economics, and mass media (McKay & Bokhort-Heng, 2008). A comprehensive body of literature from the past decade (Braine, 2010; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Moussu & Llurda, 2008) attests to the important social and pedagogical impacts of NNESTs in the global spread of English. Kachru (1985) speaks of *World Englishes* in his seminal work categorizing countries of the world into three concentric circles of Inner, Outer, and Expanding circles. The Inner Circle consists of the countries where English is spoken as a native language such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In the Outer Circle, English serves as a second language in a multilingual society such as in ex-colonized countries (Singapore, India, Philippines). The Expanding Circle is where English is widely learnt and spoken as a foreign language, but does not serve institutional purposes, as in China or Russia. The Inner Circle is said to be *norm-providing,* since the norms of English use are derived from

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[1] Square-headed is an English translation of the rather derogatory term « tête-carré » that French Quebeckers use to refer to the supposedly uptight nature of English people, and frogs is the rather derogatory term used by English Canadians to refer to French Canadians. We believe that this term, used by one of our research participants, symbolizes the awkward position of French Quebecker ESL teachers in Quebec.

these countries. The Outer Circle is *norm-developing*, because they have developed their own varieties of English. The Expanding Circle is *norm-dependent* as they rely on the Inner Circle standards set by native speakers (*Ibid.*, 1985).

This lens helps us to identify some geographical, political, and economic factors which influence the linguistic and cultural identities of NNESTs. One country can fall into more than one circle (Graddol, 1997), so although Canada is in the Inner Circle, Quebec would be characterized as an Outer Circle region. Seven years after his categorization of the three concentric circles, Kachru advocated the study of "the attitudes of learners, teachers and users of English toward their own and other varieties and subvarieties" (Kachru, 1992, p. 360). Teachers' attitudes are connected to their perceptions of their own competence in the language and their identities, which are both heavily dependent on the geographical, political, and linguistic context within which they are teaching. To the best of our knowledge, there is little research done in the area of teachers' and prospective teachers' attitudes in the Outer Circle, as most studies have been carried out in the Expanding and Inner Circle countries. This article explores the attitudes and identities of ESL[2] teacher candidates in a region that has not received much attention in NNEST literature: the French-speaking province of Quebec in Canada.

Socio-political context of English in Quebec

Quebec is the only unilingual French province in the officially bilingual nation of Canada. During the Quiet Revolution in the late 1960's, political power was switched from the

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[2] Although studying English in Quebec could be referred to as EIL since the common language in society is French, we retain the term ESL as it continues to be used in the context of education institutions in Quebec. Perhaps it is retained because English may still be used for certain official, social, or commercial communications within the country of Canada (McArthur, 2001).

anglophone minority to the francophone majority, and instilled legally through the French Language Charter (Bill 101) in 1977. These language laws help to ensure the use of French as the only official language in Quebec, especially in the workplace. While the rest of Canada adopts official bilingualism and a multicultural policy, Quebec endorses interculturalism. Although this policy is very similar to Canadian multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2001), the media, popular, and academic discourse in Quebec promote interculturalism because of its focus on social cohesion (Nugent 2006). A history of political events such as the Quiet Revolution, the Hérouxville affair (Thompson, 2007), and the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008) continue to attest to the quest for a delicate balance between protecting French language and culture and welcoming immigrants (Steinbach, 2010).

The distinct linguistic and cultural identity that Quebec has struggled to preserve is understandably threatened by the dominance of English in North America and the rest of the world. The *Conseil Supérieur de la langue française* (CSLF), a group which counsels the government ministry responsible for the application of the *Charte de la langue française* on matters regarding French language in Quebec, is concerned with linguistic practices in Quebec, such as students' choice of the language of their post-secondary education (CSLF, 2011). More and more allophones (people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English) are choosing French language post-secondary education, since they have had no choice but to complete their primary and secondary schooling in French due to the Bill 101 language laws implemented since 1977. Despite this growing choice of French language higher education, the CSLF recommends that the government take measures to increase the number of graduates from English secondary schools who choose French language post-secondary institutions (CSLF, 2011). This

recommendation indicates that even though the choice of French education by allophones is increasing, the CSLF still sees the use of English as a threat to the position of French as the common language in Quebec.

This uneasy relationship with the use of English in Quebec continues to manifest itself in educational policies such as the controversial decision to ban languages other than French in the largest school board in Montreal (Gervais, 2012) and the decision of making intensive English immersion programs compulsory in the last year of all primary schools in Quebec which was overturned by the new provincial government (The Canadian Press, 2013). According to a public opinion poll, 31% of Quebec citizens believed that this planned policy posed a threat to the preservation of the French language in Quebec (Castonguay, 2011). This opinion poll also gives an indication of the level of public resistance to the current mandatory study of English as a second language in public schools in Quebec, although only one hour per week is required in primary schools and 2.5 hours per week in secondary schools (Wilson & Riches, 2011). In a study on policy development of the recent addition of ESL to the first two years of primary school in Quebec, Fallon and Rublik (2011) found that public discourses protecting the French language were powerful enough to influence curriculum development of these first two years of ESL, as narratives protecting the French language and culture caused a "focus more on positive attitudes toward ESL rather than on developing proficiency" (p. 101), so that the original policy goal of functional bilingualism was hindered by the need for young francophones to "preserve and improve their own language while protecting and nurturing the francophone character of their society" (p. 102). Such public discourses make it difficult for ESL teachers to motivate their students in a sociopolitical context harboring resistance. The problem of motivating students to speak English, one of the greatest challenges of ESL teachers in Quebec (Fallon & Rublik,

2011), may stem, at least in part, from the influences of these public discourses which cause some parents and students to view the English language as a threat to their social and cultural identity. Another reason explaining students' reluctance to speak English may be the lack of opportunities to practice English in areas outside of the metropolitan center of Montreal.

In the context of Quebec, it is important to acknowledge political aspects of the social and cultural identities of students and their teachers. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) propose a framework which differentiates between three types of identities: "*imposed identities* (which are not negotiable in a particular time and place), *assumed identities* (which are accepted and not negotiated), and *negotiable identities"* (p. 21). As will be discussed in the analysis, our data demonstrates how imposed and assumed identities can operate in the contexts of NNESTs. Giampapa (2004) also explores how second language identities are negotiated within political spaces. Heller (2012, p. 30) considers the individual and collective positioning in identity development, noting that "the discourse of francophone nationalism gets constituted in a shifting political economic field". Her ethnographic work with francophone minorities in English Canada highlights the important links between language and identity that also affect our research participants.

A *World Englishes* perspective on NNESTs

Although native English-speaking teachers (NESTS) are still sought after (Ozturk & Atay, 2010; Selvi, 2010) as they are widely held to be the best teachers when the goal of ESL teaching is acknowledged as adhering to native speaker varieties (Quirk, 1990), their supremacy has been contested for decades. Phillipson (1992) exposed the native speaker fallacy, arguing against the assumption that native speakers are the ideal teachers of English. Canagarajah (1999) probed this

fallacy from a sociopolitical perspective, demonstrating linguistic and pedagogical arguments against the superiority of NESTs, and calling for alternative terminology for the *native speaker*, as "Chomsky's native speaker of a homogeneous speech community no longer exists in our hybrid postcolonial age" (p. 80). Despite these well-supported arguments, the native speaker fallacy lives on (Harmer, 1991; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002). This may be because of its political and economic advantages for those from dominant linguistic communities (Canagarajah, 1999). Although the issue of pronunciation is essential to the native speaker fallacy, Jenkins (2007) points out that English is a global language because of its use as a lingua franca between non-native speakers, thus diminishing the relevance of native-speaker pronunciation.

These arguments against the historic dominance of the ideal NESTs bring us to the question of who is a native speaker (NS). Davies (2003) proposes three ways to determine a native speaker: high linguistic proficiency, whether they self-identify as a NS, and whether they are accepted as a NS by the NS community. Although these categories make it impossible to define a NS with certainty, Davies proposes that it is more a matter of confidence and identity since we can define a NNS (non-native speaker) as one who does not identify or is not identified as a NS. In a study on the identities of ESL teacher candidates in an English province in Canada, Faez (2011) uses a sociocultural lens to theorize linguistic identities as socially constructed in context, and proposes six new categories to replace the NS vs. NNS dichotomy which misrepresented teacher candidates with plurilinguistic multiple identities in her study. While categorizing teachers as NS or NNS has long been contested, the labels of NEST and NNEST continue to be employed in the World Englishes literature in order to discuss the ever-present struggles of NNESTs.

Some studies outline the advantages and disadvantages of NNESTs internationally. In a pioneer study in this field, Medgyes (1994) used the term *linguistic deficits* to describe the challenges of NNESTs in vocabulary, oral fluency and pronunciation, concluding that although no amount of hard work could ensure native-like proficiency, they do have advantages over NESTs in predicting student difficulties and estimating students' potential. More specifically, McNeil (2005) found that NNESTs had an advantage in predicting lexical difficulties in texts for their students. In addition to these pedagogical advantages, Ma's (2012) study with NNESTs in Hong Kong reveals advantages regarding knowledge of learner's sociocultural backgrounds and knowledge of the teaching context, including the schools, curriculum, and exam system. Despite this pedagogical expertise, Ma recommends that teacher education programs for NNESTs should promote increased cultural knowledge and English proficiency, especially in pronunciation, in order to improve their sense of confidence. A lack of confidence in NNESTs is also mentioned by Braine (2010), and Moussu (2006) found that NNESTs in the United States were less confident than NESTs because of their foreign accents and limited knowledge of American culture. Brazilian NNESTs (Rajagopalan, 2005) also described their feelings of inadequacy, and felt ill-prepared and lacking linguistic competence compared to their NEST colleagues.

Other studies focus on the perspectives and attitudes of students toward their NS or NNS teachers. Kelch and Santana-Williamson (2002) found that students could correctly identify native speakers in only 45% of their recordings, yet students' perceptions of their teachers' accents strongly affected students' attitudes toward their teachers, and those teachers perceived to be native speakers were judged to have higher levels of education. In a U.S. study involving 112 NNESTs and 1,313 NESTs, some students found that NNESTs could answer questions better, gave more homework, and tended to teach grammar and vocabulary in isolation, and they found

that NESTs gave more group work activities and used more of a variety of resources (Mahboob, 2004). Twenty students in China found NESTs to have linguistic and cultural competence and new methodological insights, yet these students felt that their NESTs needed other qualities to be competent in the context of China, such as more sensitivity to students' linguistic problems and learning styles and to the local school system (Rao, 2010). Secondary school students in Japan and Korea (Kassai, Lee & Kim, 2011) also found that NESTs had more linguistic and cultural competence in the target language culture, greater ability to teach oral skills and vocabulary, and were better models for pronunciation, yet the authors caution that students' perceptions may depend on contextual and personal particularities of classes and teachers, and generalized or assumed strengths and weaknesses of NNESTs should be avoided. In a study comparing students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs in 22 intensive English programs in the U.S., Moussu (2010) also concludes that using the ambiguous notions of NS vs. NNS is not adequate to describe students' attitudes toward the language and teaching competencies of their teachers, because linguistic background of the teacher is only one variable among other important variables such as teacher-contact time, students' first languages and proficiency levels, and students' changing attitudes over time. Here again the literature points to problems with the dichotomous categorization of NS and NNS teachers , yet the label of NNEST remains a very real constraint for those who self-identify or are identified by others as NNESTs.

The disadvantages of the NNEST label are exemplified in a study on Turkish teachers of English, as Ozturk and Atay (2010) found negative effects of the NNS syndrome prevalent among these teachers who feel inferior and inadequate compared to their NS colleagues. Their unequal treatment in the job market, including less pay and benefits despite more training, proves a persistent commercial preference for NESTs. In his study on hiring practices in English

language teaching institutions, Selvi (2010) documented that being a native speaker was more important than relevant education background and sufficient teaching experience, as many program administrators firmly believe in the native speaker fallacy and often hire only NESTs. Institutions continue to advertise for NESTs (Clark & Paran, 2007) because of their appeal to students (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005), proving that there is still a wide social acceptance of the ideal native speaker model despite academic evidence to the contrary (Ozturk & Atay, 2010).

Aside from the desirability of changing the persistent commercial preference for NESTs in international contexts, Saffort and Kelly (2010) indicate the need for changes in institutional language practices in Britain. These authors argue that the invisible linguistic and cultural capital of multilingual student teachers should be recognized and appreciated, but their study shows how multilingual students are subordinated and disempowered in current discourses of monolingual teacher education institutions (*Ibid.*). In another study on teacher education programs, Ilieva (2010) observes the ways in which student teachers react to and adopt authoritative program discourses in the process of developing their professional identities. While this study indicates some agentive power of NNESTs, they are unfortunately not free of institutional discourses promoting the linguistic and cultural supremacy of NESTs. Thus a brief survey of current World Englishes literature reveals the persistence of the native speaker fallacy and its pervasive effects on the perceptions and identities of NNESTs internationally.

To the best of our knowledge, no research has been done from a World Englishes perspective on identities and attitudes of ESL teachers in Quebec. Considering the current global spread of English, and the fact that public discourses in Quebec promote the perception of English as a threat to the maintenance of French language and culture, understanding attitudes toward English is very important in Quebec. These attitudes of ESL teachers were explored in

the study reported here. As NNS teachers' attitudes toward the language are closely linked with their perceptions of their own sociolinguistic competence and their social and cultural identities, we explored future teachers' attitudes and identities. Our survey aimed to find out how NNEST candidates perceive their own linguistic and communicative proficiency, accents, and mastery of idiomatic language; what importance they place on native-like proficiency for themselves and their future students; how they see their roles as teachers of sociocultural aspects of English language; and how they describe their own social and cultural identities. Although our findings corroborate the problems of the dichotomous categorization of NS vs. NNS in the literature, we do agree with Davies (2003) that the identity of NNS is very real for those who self-identify or are identified by others as NNS, and that this label carries disadvantages in terms of self-confidence (Braine, 2010), student perceptions (Kassai et al., 2011) and job market opportunities (Selvi, 2010).

Survey study methodology

The research participants in this study are enrolled in a four year teacher education program at a university situated in a medium-sized city in a region of Quebec which is predominantly francophone, as opposed to the more plurilinguistic context of the metropolitan city of Montreal. It is important to note that many of these students come from more remote regions of Quebec, where the use of English is even less common, and where they will return for their teaching careers. This teacher education program prepares them to be ESL teachers at primary or secondary schools, and involves student teaching practice in each year of the program.

Our survey was designed to obtain an overview of these teacher candidates' attitudes toward NS proficiency and their linguistic and cultural identities as future ESL teachers. An

introductory part of the questionnaire briefly explains the aim of the study and requests honest personal opinions. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. There were a total of 28 questions, most offering a choice of 4 responses, and there were six open-ended questions with spaces to write explanations and examples. The first part of the questionnaire asked for personal information, and participants completed a self-evaluation of their linguistic and communicative competence in English in the second section. The third part explored their linguistic and cultural identities, and the fourth part probed their objectives in their future teaching practice. The questionnaire itself was created on-line with the *Survey Monkey* tool and then was emailed to 115 students who had completed one or more years of the program. It was important to retain the anonymity of the respondents, as many students are uncomfortable revealing their honest opinions and attitudes, particularly regarding their own proficiency levels, especially because the principal researcher is a professor in their program. There were 54 responses - a response rate of almost 50 % and of these, 47 completed the survey. As the survey was completed during the summer holidays when many students are away, the response rate was satisfactory to the researchers. The data were analyzed quantitatively in a series of bar graphs and pie charts. After presenting the main findings, we will analyze and interpret the data.

It is important to note two interrelated methodological limitations of this study. In the selection of participants, it was hoped that the students who chose to respond to this survey would be a roughly representative random sampling of all the students in the program, but an unexpected 18% of respondents described themselves as native speakers of English (or of both French and English), so the data is far from representative of the predominantly NNS student population in the program. Another limitation is the subjective and imprecise nature of self-reported levels of linguistic proficiency. Finally, our findings cannot be generalized as a true

picture of the situation among preservice NNS teachers in Quebec due to the relatively small scale of the study, although they are representative of the region in which the study was completed.

Personal information

As the student population in this program is nearly 100% francophone, it is surprising to note that six respondents identified both French and English as their mother tongue, and four respondents were English mother tongue. There was therefore an unexpected and extremely high response level among students who self-reported as native speakers of English, comprising 18% of all respondents. In keeping with the general student population in the program, respondents were 68% female, and their average age was 22 years. Students who had completed their fourth year of the program were overrepresented, comprising almost 40% of respondents, while the other 60% were equally divided among students who had completed one, two or three years.

Self-reported linguistic competence

In response to the question "What is your current level of English?", 31 % of respondents chose *native-like*, 33% self-reported as *proficient*, 23% were *advanced*, and 13% *upper-intermediate*. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a language learner can achieve six levels of proficiency, with the higher levels corresponding to upper intermediate (B2), Advanced or Effective Operational Proficiency (C1), and Mastery or proficiency (C2) (Council of Europe, 2001). As 18% of respondents claimed English as a mother tongue, only 13% of the NNS respondents self-reported a native-like level of English. When asked how they

feel about their level of English in general and in relation to their future teaching career, participants presented quite positive attitudes towards their own levels of English.

> *I believe my english is native like and i was told by my sypervisor during my practicum that it was very refreshing to have someone who can master the language this well. (*R1)[3]

> *I believe my speaking is excellent and that I would still have to work a little bit on my writing even though it's pretty good.* (R28)

> *Confident, higher than needed in primary and secondary schools in Québec.* (R37)

Despite the general satisfaction with their levels of English, there were some negative attitudes. Some expressed the hope of improving their English. Surprisingly, despite the widespread desire for a native-like accent, only one person mentioned wanting to improve their pronunciation. However, all respondents unsatisfied with their level of English pointed out their weak points, such as writing, fluency, and idiomatic expressions. One student mentioned that the program lacks sufficient exposure to the English language to prepare future teachers:

> *I feel confident about my level of English and I think I am ready to teach it without being ashame of my skills. I have lots to share about the culture and the language. I think I have a good background of the language to be an English teacher. Did the program help me in building my mastery ? A little bit, but I find the exposure to English very little especially for those who start the program with a small bagage of the language.* (R13)

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[3] Response numbers indicate the response to one question, but as not all 54 participants responded to each question, these numbers do not necessarily identify the same respondents in different quotes. We have not altered spelling or grammatical mistakes in participants' responses.

Nevertheless, no one actually said that their level of English was not good enough for teaching. It is important to mention here that there is no entry test to enter this program, and although students expect to improve their proficiency in English during this program, there are no second language learning courses in the program as the program is designed to train teachers and not to learn English as a second language.

Attitudes toward accents

94% of the respondents are happy with their accent. They are not very critical about their accent, and seem to be quite relaxed about the way they sound. Only 6% of respondents expressed a certain level of dissatisfaction with their accents. *"Having a native-like pronounciation would improve my self-confident. I feel embarassed when I struggle with some words"* (R11). Yet when asked if they would like to acquire native-like pronunciation, 55% say yes, 35% say they already have, and only 10 % would not like to. The two respondents who do not desire a native-like pronunciation explain that people can understand them anyway, and that "*an accent is an important cultural aspect*" (R28). Further inconsistencies are revealed in the data from this section, as 35% report feeling inferior when they speak with a native speaker of English. Also, 73% agree or strongly agree that it is much easier to understand native speakers than NNS, and 55% agree that native speakers are the ultimate model of language acquisition. These apparent discrepancies in respondents' attitudes about their NNS accents will be discussed in our analysis.

Cultural identity and role as ESL teachers

Participants' attitudes toward accents are closely related to their perceptions of their own cultural identities and how they see their role as future teachers of ESL in the francophone province of

Quebec in Canada. To identify their cultural identity, 41% of respondents chose *Quebecker*, 16% identify as *French Canadian*, 16% selected *Canadian*, and 28% responded *Other*, qualifying this response with terms such as *all of the above, it depends*, *square-headed frog*, or *world citizen*. Several explained that they describe their cultural identity differently depending on where they are or with whom they are speaking. In order to ascertain positive or negative perceptions of their linguistic and cultural identities as NNESTs, we asked about the advantages of being a NNEST. 79% (37 out of 47) of respondents see advantages of being a NNEST, such as the shared experience of learning the language between NNESTs and their students:

You have a better understanding of the learner (R3)

I can share my own experience of how I learned the language with my students, I know which are the most difficult elements of the language and I can easily foresee the students' mistakes. (R6)

You understand what your students are going through (R12)

Although 82% of respondents were not native speakers of English, their perceptions of their future professional roles reveal the importance of being a positive model for future students, including demonstrating a native-like accent. 90 % of respondents wish to have native-like pronunciation, because "*an English teacher should have a native-like pronunciation*" (R5), "*it sounds more professionnal"* (R25), or "*I think you're more persuasive when you have a native-like pronunciation*" (R20). The general tendency was also to encourage their own students to acquire native-like pronunciation, with 77% of respondents stating this goal in their future teaching career. The same percentage of respondents would definitely like their students to conform to native-speaker norms in grammar. Only 21% feel that it is not necessary to sound like a native speaker to be a successful communicator.

These future teachers perceive their roles as models for students, including being purveyors of sociocultural aspects of English, as 90% would teach English idioms, local Quebec English slang that has been heavily influenced by the French language (McArthur, 1998), and the cultural heritage of English speaking countries. However, many acknowledge the difficulty of this part of teaching because they did not grow up in an English context.

> *I think in Quebec we have a lack of culture-teaching according to the English*
> *language. I think I still have to learn different English expressions that are currently*
> *used in the English community in order to have a native-like level. I will have to*
> *perfect that knowledge before teaching in class, because it is my responsability to*
> *know more than well-enough the subject that I will teach in order to be an good*
> *interpreter of the English culture and language. (R6)*

These respondents perceived the disadvantages of their cultural identities as NNESTs in their lack of cultural baggage and experience, as well as the advantages of their position of being able to relate to their students' language learning process and likely errors. Along with these positive and negative aspects of NNS identities, these future teachers' attitudes toward their own competencies and the importance of native-like proficiency were complex and full of contradictions that become apparent as we interpret our survey data.

Interpretation and analysis

Two of the most important contradictions in the survey data concern the teacher candidates' perceptions of their own linguistic competency. Although the data of this study are not comprehensive enough to demonstrate proof, we believe that many of the participants judge their own linguistic competence as being much higher than objective measures indicate. It would be

interesting to compare respondents' self-reported levels with their scores on the Test of English

for Language Teachers (TELT), which is a test created by a second language evaluation

specialist at this university specifically to test oral and written competencies of future ESL

teachers. Students must pass this test by the third year of the program, but we cannot compare

individual's scores with their responses from this survey data as the respondents remain

anonymous. We do know that over a third of all students fail the speaking tasks of the TELT on

their first and second attempts, and about 20% fail the writing tasks on their first two attempts.

Students need a good level of linguistic proficiency to pass the TELT, but most who pass are still

far from "functional nativeness" (Kachru, 1998, cited in Bolton 2009, p. 293) in either grammar

or pronunciation. If our survey respondents were a more representative selection of all students

in the program, we could state that they largely overestimate their proficiency levels, but with

18% of respondents being native speakers, this claim is slightly less certain.

However, it is safe to say that a large percentage of these respondents are claiming to be

more proficient than their test scores indicate, as 33% self-report native-like proficiency. Perhaps

the expectations and standards of the level of proficiency necessary to teach ESL in Quebec is

different among these teacher candidates than that which is required in the program, as

respondents often stated that their proficiency level was good enough to teach.

> *I hav nothing to complain about my level of English. My level of English is*
>
> *enough developed to teach English. (R11)*
>
> *My level of English is high enough to teach at primary and secondary level;*
>
> *however, I am always pushing my boundaries to go further and possibly teach*
>
> *at higher levels. (R10)*

While a third of the respondents reporting native-like proficiency seems exaggerated, the same percentage report native-like pronunciation, and another 60% state the desire to have NS pronunciation, leaving only 10% who do not express the wish for NS pronunciation. Yet in an earlier question, 94% claim that they are happy with their accent in English. This is the second significant contradiction linked to participants' perceptions of their own linguistic competency apparent in our survey data. It is difficult to understand how almost all of these teacher candidates could be happy with their accent in English while wanting to attain NS pronunciation.

A series of further questions, such as whether they feel inferior to NS colleagues or whether they feel the same communicating with NS and NNS of English, indicate their discomfort, sense of inadequacy, and even humiliation regarding their NNS speech.

I have to admit that you feel simply as a non native Perfect English

Speaker. It is not in self esteem, but just not feeling as perfect in teh language

as the native person you adress. (R2)

I have the impression that they judge my way of speaking, and that they do

not gave me as much attention as I would like to have when I speak. (R3)

Although these statements could be referring to grammatical errors as well as pronunciation, they give us the impression that the respondents' satisfaction with their accents and levels of proficiency is diminished when faced with native speakers. It is relevant to note that only 28% of the respondents claimed to communicate with native speakers on a daily basis. Can we explain the discrepancies between their stated satisfaction with their accent and their desire for a NS accent with the variance of who they are communicating with or comparing themselves with? Or is it a more complex shift and change in perceptions and desires that cannot be simplified into a

simple categorical answer? For example, the following quote indicates how one could be satisfied with their current level, while at the same time have the desire to improve:

Good enough, could learn more about everything. I am always learning. Would

like to be Native-like, it is a work in progress. (R27)

There were also contradictions apparent in respondents' perceptions of their own accent and cultural identity. Similar contradictory attitudes were found by Jenkins' (2007) research into teachers' English as a lingua franca (ELF) identity. Her participants had very mixed feelings about expressing their L1 identity in their L2 English; they would rather be mistaken for native speakers in their roles as teachers, but when asked directly, still expressed sentimental attachment to their nationality. Jenkins employs Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) term *negotiable identities* to describe what her participants were going through. "Negotiable identities" are all identity options which are contested and resisted by individuals and groups (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p.21). For Jenkins (2007) it is evident that her participants were at the transition point between the old English as a foreign language (EFL) and the new ELF, and they "were finding its potential impact on their identities as teachers unsettling and ambiguous" (p. 230). Adapting Jenkins' (2007) approach to our data, we can see that our respondents fit better into Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) identity framework of *imposed* and *assumed* identities. The responses clearly indicate that many NNESTs would like to acquire a native-like pronunciation, but it is evident that they are aware of the consequences. If they had a native-like accent in English, their assumed identity of being a French native speaker in Quebec would not be apparent, and they would sacrifice their advantageous position of being members of the majority language culture of their society in order to be seen more favorably by their native speaker colleagues and supposedly by their students. Judging from the respondents' answers,

they are not yet prepared to run the risk of losing their assumed identity. However, the majority seemed to struggle with the imposed identities forced on them. In their personal opinions, the respondents might disagree with the idea that English teachers must sound native or be native, but they are unable to refuse the constraints of imposed identities put on them by the test requirements, international teaching community, and the media.

While these two studies share some similarities, Jenkins' (2007) participants seem to be more threatened to reveal their L1 identity, because it might reduce their chances of success in their teaching careers in Expanding Circle countries. Our study, by contrast, documented that the majority of NNESTs do not believe that having a nonnative accent can jeopardize their employability. This is because almost all of the students in our study are aiming to teach ESL in French public schools in Quebec, where a French accent is not a deterrent but in fact an asset, as administrators prefer to hire francophones rather than anglophones who may not be fluent enough in French to work well within the school context or in communication with parents[4]. In other words, despite the fact that nonnative identities were somewhat imposed on them, they have comfortably accommodated them into the linguistic reality of Quebec. These conflicting desires and goals were well summarized by one of the participants:

> *"Usually, people know that I'm French, but I don't want to loose my cultural*
>
> *identity, but I would appreciate to acquire a native-like pronunciation even*
>
> *though this is not my priority."* (R22)

The survey data indicate unrealistic goals of NS pronunciation for the respondents themselves and their students. The results of this study are, therefore, in line with Derwing's (2003) conclusions that the overwhelming majority of adult ESL learners in Canada considered

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[4] Although this is difficult to document officially, our work with graduating teachers and supervising student teachers in the local school context had led us to this conclusion.

speaking with perfectly native pronunciation to be a desirable goal (p. 384). Instead of setting realistic goals, such as comfortable intelligibility (Jenkins, 2002; Scovel, 1988), both teachers and students strive for something which they are unlikely to achieve – the elimination of a foreign accent. It might sound disheartening, but Derwing (2003) indicates that there is no study documenting a link between pronunciation instruction and the loss of a nonnative accent, because it is well established that if a second language is acquired after puberty, perfect pronunciation is hard or even impossible to achieve (Scovel, 1988; 2000). The fact that these teachers have set unrealistic goals for themselves is not surprising in light of the persistent native speaker fallacy which continues to influence second language teaching institutions (Quirk, 1990; Selvi, 2010) and public discourses (Canagarajah, 1999). The social factors we discussed earlier can have a considerable impact on teachers' preferences, such as the commercial preference for NESTs in language institutions (Clark & Paran, 2007), and a universal acceptance of the native speaker model (Harmer, 1991), especially by students (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002). Also, the university program requirements to pass the TELT, a test that measures them against NS standards in grammar and pronunciation, makes mastering the target language up to a certain level a necessary requisite for their career goals. These externally imposed expectations might have influenced participants' responses concerning their assumed and imposed identities.

Another interesting finding is that these pre-service teachers would still like to teach sociocultural aspects of the language. This might be the result of the respondents' personal experiences of discomfort with anglophone Canadians when they felt inadequate speaking to a native speaker. Perhaps they believe that sociolinguistic knowledge would help their future students to become, if they wish, part of an anglophone society without feeling inferior in any aspect. Also, we can conclude that they perceive the English language as still linked to the

culture of a particular group of native speakers, although this contradicts the main thesis of the

contemporary World Englishes conception of teaching English language as a means of

communication with the world (Jenkins 2000; Kirkpatrick 2007; Widdowson, 1994).

Nevertheless, respondents reported uneasiness with the prospect of teaching sociocultural aspects

of English, such as English-speaking society's norms of communicative behavior, because they

do not have the necessary background or experience, or because they do not feel adequate to do

so because of their assumed identity as French Quebeckers.

Discussion

Generally, our findings are similar to other studies on teachers' attitudes about native speaker

norms. In a study on 600 teachers and students from 45 countries, looking at attitudes towards

pronunciation, standard grammar, and informal grammar, Timmis (2002) documented the

general tendency for both groups to aspire to native speaker norms. However, there was a clear

difference between students' and teachers' responses, as teachers appeared to be more relaxed

about native-speaker norms, and they "seem to be moving away from them faster than the

students are" (*Ibid*., p. 248). Adolphs' (2005) longitudinal study on Asian students in a pre-

sessional English course at Nottingham University (UK) also found that native speaker norms

were still desired, but over time the participants had become more strategic about the variety of

English they wanted to learn: Standard English without any regional accent (in their case the

Nottingham accent of local native speakers). The students all indicated a better international

intelligibility of the standard BBC variety of English. In keeping with these studies, we found no

evidence of native speaker norms becoming irrelevant in teachers' learning experience. As in

Adolph's study, most of our respondents stated the advantage of greater intelligibility of a NS

model. Although they seem to be more positive about being nonnative in general, our respondents still reported the necessity of conforming to the NS standard in their teaching, except for pronunciation in some cases.

Participants of our study expressed a more relaxed attitude towards their L1 accent in English than the teachers in Jenkins' 2007 study, who held an unquestioned certainty that NS English (British or American) was the most desirable and most appropriate kind of English. The responses to Jenkins' questionnaire reveal striking similarities to our results in terms of beliefs about and biases towards NS and against NNS English accents. Contrary to Jenkins' results, 94% of our respondents are happy with their accent and 60% are happy with their level of English. In Jenkins' study only approximately half of the teachers were very or reasonably positive about their nonnative accents. Notwithstanding their explicit positive attitudes about their nonnative accents expressed openly, Jenkins points out that their implicit attitudes were detectable through the use of prosodic features "such as pauses, low key, rising pitch,... laughter, and of the word 'quite'" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 211). Thus they were actually much less positive than they had initially appeared, and she suggested that in reality her respondents had reservations about their NNS accent. A plausible reason why our respondents were more positive about their accent is their location in a linguistic environment where their native language is their society's common language and has more political and social status than English. Jenkins' (2007) participants were NNESTs in the Expanding Circle where native teachers are still in a privileged position.

The conflicting desires to maintain L1 accents or to acquire NS accents expressed by teacher candidates in our study were especially apparent when they were asked explicitly if they wanted to acquire a native-like accent. Some prospective teachers were very categorical about the issue of accent, stating decisively that English teachers should have NS pronunciation and

that it sounds more professional. However, some of the respondents retained attachment to their L1 accent, yet still expressed a desire to acquire a native-like accent at some point in their teaching career. Although 94% of participants stated that they were satisfied with their accents, in further questions most of them stated the goal of acquiring a NS accent. In Jenkins' study, we also see changing desires among NNS teachers. When asked how they would feel if they were mistaken for a native speaker of English, "those who had been positive about their accent nevertheless expressed a strong desire for a NS English accent' (Jenkins, 2007, p.212).

Although we do see comparable attitudes toward the NS model in these studies on teachers from Expanding Circle countries, our participants' higher levels of satisfaction with their NNS accents is perhaps due to their unique political situation in an Outer Circle context within an Inner Circle country. We have not found other studies dealing with teachers' attitudes towards their own English in the Outer circle. Perhaps a real movement to de-emphasize NS norms can start in contexts like Quebec, where many teachers are not prepared to sacrifice their identities in order to teach English, because of their strong national identity in a political and linguistic context where their native language has more political and social status than English. In this sense ours is an unprecedented study, as our findings do not follow the well-established pattern of Expanding Circle nonnative teachers who are more critical about their own accents.

Conclusion

In our exploration of the attitudes and identities of some teacher candidates in Quebec, it is not surprising that we found so many contradictory ideas regarding linguistic competence, accent, and their roles as future ESL teachers. Our participants are responding to conflicting broader discourses; although we see evidence of the influence of the native speaker fallacy all over the

world, these future teachers are situated in a society where the protection of French language and culture is an even more important discourse. They are preparing for the difficult role of being representatives of English language and culture for their students in this Outer Circle context, while still retaining their mother tongue French Quebecker assumed political and social identities. The protectionist social and political discourses of their society are quite powerful, and often not very positive toward English language and culture. In the school milieu in most regions of Quebec where they will teach, they will face their future students' (and their parents') resistance to learning English, and thus the major challenge of motivating students to be more positive toward English language and culture. The unique position of Quebec as an Outer Circle region situated within the Inner Circle country of Canada creates a complex combination of conflicting attitudes and identities on a personal level and as a group member of their society.

The contradictory desires and objectives of these teacher candidates must be understood within the broader context of conflicting political and social discourses of their society. Although data from our study and others we have described here reveal the inadequacy of the NS/NNS dichotomy, we continue to refer to the imposed identity of NNEST for the majority of the participants in this study whose native language is not English, as our study reveals that they are identified by themselves and by others as NNS, which implies real constraints and challenges as illustrated in our data. Aside from their assumed and imposed identities, they describe various negotiated identities depending on personal factors and changing contexts. While our findings make a unique contribution to the literature on NNEST attitudes and identities, this input is limited due to the size and scope of the study. Further studies would be necessary to understand the attitudes of more future ESL teachers in different contexts in Quebec. Even more importantly, in-depth data from personal interviews would help researchers gain deeper insights

into attitudes and identities among English teachers in Outer Circle countries. In the case of the Outer Circle context of Quebec, where English Canadians may be derogatorily referred to as *tête-carrée* (square heads), within the Inner Circle of Canada, where French Canadians are sometimes negatively labeled *frogs*, perhaps a square-headed frog is the ideal identity for an ESL teacher candidate.

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