THE STATUS OF NON-NATIVE SPEAKER IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

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Abstract – This paper examines the complex concept of native and non-native speaker, a dichotomy which is central to studies of language acquisition, and inevitably informs almost all of language teaching and assessment. The non-native speaker has often been side-lined in linguistic theory. In areas such as applied and sociolinguistics, it has often been dismissed as a poor imitation of a native speaker. However, in the specific area of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), it has been argued that the contribution of the non-native speaker is more relevant than that of the native speaker (Kachru 1985; Seidlhofer 2005, 2011). In this paper, we will examine the concepts of native and non-native speakers and pose the question of how far the concept of native speaker is appropriate or useful in the era of English as a global lingua franca used among predominately non-native speakers. We will first look at its place in general linguistic theory (Chomsky 1965/1968/1981; Pinker 1994). Then, by analysing the processes of first and second language acquisition (Selinker 1972; Krashen 1982; Krashen and Terrell 1983), we will identify the differences between native and non-native speakers. Next, we will discuss the arguments that have been made against elevating the native speaker to the status of sole legitimate point of reference for language teaching and assessment (Cook 1999; Graddol 2007; Rinvolucri 2001). After this, we will examine the contributions that non-native speakers can play in the evolution of language: the way that specific languages (in this case English) – popularly perceived as the property and heritage of native speakers – can be seen to have been shaped not only by native speakers but also by the contribution, direct and indirect, of non-native speakers (Brutt-Griffler 2002; McWhorter 2007; Christiansen 2021). Finally, we will argue that the native – non-native speaker distinction is not useful in the context of ELF, it being a variation of English which manifests itself differently on each occasion depending on the linguistic competence of the speakers and their respective linguacultural backgrounds. Rather, we argue, one should talk about a third category, that of the *highly proficient user* (as identified by Graddol 2007), to describe all those speakers, native or non-native of English, who have reached an advanced level in those linguistic, communicative competences that are required to perform effectively specifically within ELF.

Keywords: native speaker; non-native speaker; ELF; language teaching; language assessment.

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the concept of the native speaker (NS) and debate whether it can be considered a useful or important concept within the context of studies into ELF. The idea of nativeness and the condition of being a native speaker is central to so many approaches and studies of languages be they theoretical (e.g. Chomsky's concept of Universal Grammar) or applied (e.g. in language teaching and assessment, and in pedagogical grammars).

To tackle this issue, we will turn first of all to the concept of NS, contrasting it with that of the non-native speaker (NNS) (§2). In §3, we will look at the ways that the concept of NS has been employed within language teaching and assessment, especially its status as a model, which in traditional approaches learners are expected to emulate. In §4, we will discuss the concerns of those who oppose the centrality of the NS and argue instead that, in ELF contexts at least, the highly proficient and plurilingual NNS may be a more practical and relevant model than the NS, especially if the latter is monolingual and has little experience outside NS-NS discourse.

Section 5 explores the contribution that NNS can be shown to have had in the evolution of English going back to its very origins in the Early Middle Ages. This sets a precedent, so-to-speak, for the NNS playing a comparably important role in the future.

Finally, in §6, we will argue that, given the fact that ELF is not a fixed *variety* of English as such but rather as a set of fluid context-specific *variations*, one should focus on what Graddol (2007) called the *highly proficient user*. This term describes all those speakers, native or non-native of English, who have reached an advanced level in the specific linguistic and communicative competences that are necessary to perform effectively using ELF.

2. Native and non-native speakers

At the very centre of studies into the origins of language, its evolution, and the way that it is *acquired* (as opposed to *learnt*) by individuals lies the concept of the NS: a speaker who has spoken the language more or less all of their life and who has an intuitive and effortless command of it and its nuances, having picked it up naturally (i.e. even without formal instruction) during their infant years together with, almost inevitably, a familiarity with at least one of the cultures and one set of social conventions associated with it.

One of the first formal definitions within the field of linguistics of the concept of NS – also popularly known as mother tongue (speaker), or, in language acquisition, as a first language (L1) speaker – dates back to Bloomfield (1933, p. 43):

> The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language.

The ability to process and produce language (in the abstract sense) is part of a human's biology and, according to Pinker (1994, p. 18), analogous with a spider's instinctive ability to build webs. However, the way that a native language (L1) is acquired by the subject during early infancy is different from the way that a second or foreign language (L2) is acquired in later life.

To appreciate this, it is necessary to understand at least some of the key points of Chomsky's assertion that language is instinctive, acquired in a specific period of a child's development, and, most importantly, that the cognitive devices or faculties that enable this are not available (or at least not to the same degree) for languages other than those to which the child is exposed at a very young age. In the twentieth century, prior to Chomsky, especially after the advent of behaviourism in psychology,[1] it had been argued that language constituted just another form of behaviour learnt through stimulus and response. Consequently, it was held that children learned a language through imitation and explicit instruction of the kind offered by formal education. Such a view is in line with the centuries-old philosophical idea of empiricism, according to which, all knowledge stems ultimately from sensory experience.

Chomsky (1966) takes issue with this empiricist approach, offering an alternative which he at that time dubbed *Cartesian linguistics*. The central feature of this is that the general features of grammatical structure reflect certain fundamental properties of the mind, and are common to all languages.[2] He argues that language is far too complex a

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[1] See for instance, Watson 1924; Skinner 1953.

[2] This view has been eloquently explained by Pinker (1994: 18): "[Instinct] conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs. Web-spinning was not invented by some unsung spider genius and does not depend on having had the right education or on

phenomenon to be the product of human invention or taught by instruction. In particular, he highlights three specific facts about language and its acquisition by children that the empiricist approach overlooks.

The first of these is the so-called *poverty of stimulus* (Chomsky 1980): the fact that the speed at which children acquire language, at a similar rate regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, or of the L1 being acquired,[3] seems to bear little relation to the amount, or quality, of language that they are exposed to. For example, parents often use simplified codes such as *parentese* when talking to children. In any case, in the early years of infancy, there is just not the opportunity to hear and learn by heart all the possible structures of a language. It would consequently take very much longer than the typical 5-7 years that it takes an average child to become fluent. In fact, as Pinker details (1994, pp. 146-147), even very young children may produce specific structures, such as *rat eater*, *mud eater* versus *mice eater*,[4] that are entirely new to them – and illustrate the fundamental productive or creative quality of language (another aspect that belies the empiricist approach) – yet still adhere to complex phrase structure rules that one would believe were far beyond the mental capacity of any child to induce from any amount of stimulus.

This also dovetails with the second of Chomsky's observations, namely that even young children are able to generate original language of the *mud eater* kind. This shows an awareness of general and sometimes complex grammar rules that it is unlikely that they have encountered before, or have the mental ability to have learnt from instruction and then apply for themselves. Revealingly, children sometimes over-apply abstract rules, producing structures which, while at one level are "incorrect", show a deeper awareness of such abstract things as syntax and morphology, for example: "he teared the paper and then he sticked it"; "there are two mouses in the cage." If children were merely imitating what they had heard more proficient users produce then such structures should be very infrequent when instead they are a typical feature of young people's language. Furthermore, children may initially produce a feature correctly (e.g. *tore*) and later, once they have internalised a general rule, may start overextending it and begin making mistakes (e.g. *teared*), which makes it appear at least that they are regressing rather than progressing. Again, this does not look like somebody learning something in a behaviourist stimulus / response fashion.

Chomsky's final point is that children appear to construct their language using phrase structure rules (sentence trees), thus showing that they are not so much imitating but instinctively applying complex principles and rules, certainly beyond their mental abilities to comprehend and consciously apply.[5]

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having an aptitude for architecture or the construction trades. Rather, spiders spin spider webs because they have spider brains, which give them the urge to spin and the competence to succeed."

[3] Around the world, children acquire widely different L1s not only going through predictable and analogous stages but also at similar rates. There may, however, be some language-specific differences in the acquisition of certain components – see for example, Bleses et al. (2008).

[4] Pinker is reporting the research of Gordon (1986) here. Pinker (1994, p. 147) comments: "Gordon's mice-eater experiment shows that in morphology children automatically distinguish between roots stored in the mental dictionary and inflected words created by a rule." Christiansen (2021) observes that Gordon's experiment fails, nonetheless, to explain why the forms *toothpaste* and *toothbrush* are possible but ?*teethpaste* and ?*teethbrush* are marked.

[5] Again, Pinker provides a clear explanation of this complex idea in a 2012 lecture produced for the "Floating University" YouTube channel: "Well, Chomsky argues, if you were actually to look at the kind of language that all of us hear, it's actually quite rare to hear a sentence like, 'Is the man who is tall in the room?' The kind of input that would logically inform you that the word-by-word rule is wrong and the

The mechanism by which children can acquire their L1 was called originally by Chomsky (1965/1968) the *language acquisition device* (LAD). This is an inbuilt cognitive mechanism "hard-wired" into the baby's brain, so to speak. It enables the child not just to process language in the abstract sense but also to allow them to analyse a limited amount of input from a specific language, and to convert it into a mental model of that same language. This model can then be used to generate structures. Later, Chomsky (1981) subsumed LAD into the concept of *universal grammar*, which is a set of structural rules governing all levels of language (e.g. phonology, grammar, syntax, lexis, morphology) shared by all human languages by dint of the fact that they have all evolved from a single source that dates back to the ancestors of humankind living in a small group in the same locality, and passed on to their descendants via genetic transfer. According to this theory, what is being passed on from generation to generation is not the specific language (e.g. English, Chinese, Spanish) but the basic concepts and mental frameworks of universal grammar which provide the key for unlocking the meaning of whichever language constitutes the input that the child is exposed to.

In line with the theories and research of psychologists like Piaget and Vygotsky, first language acquisition (FLA) is subordinate to cognitive development; children learn firstly about the world by interacting with it. This provides a cognitive and experiential framework onto which language can then be mapped, as it is acquired. Various stages have been observed in a typical child's language development. These are described in various ways depending on precise model. Below (Fig. 1), we give those categorised by Saxon (2017: 39) relating to a typical child's first five years:

0 months	• preference for own mother's voice • can distinguish different speech sounds (phonemes) • can distinguish own language from a foreign language
4 months	• can recognize own name • sensitive to the serial order of words in sentences
7 months	• early babbling • can understand first words (e.g. mummy)
12 months	• jargoning: babbling with the stress and intonation of actual speech • produces first word
18 months	• understand about 50 words • produce two-word utterances
24 months	• multi-word utterances with basic grammatical features
60 months	• 6000-word vocabulary and grammar: can produce and understand complex sentences • acquiring literacy

Figure 1
Stages of Child Language Acquisition and Development (after Saxon 2017, p. 39).[6]

structure dependent rule is right. Nonetheless, we all grow up into adults who unconsciously use the structure dependent rule rather than the word-by-word rule. Moreover, children don't make errors like, 'is the man who tall is in the room,' as soon as they begin to form complex questions, they use the structure dependent rule. And that, Chomsky argues, is evidence that structure dependent rules are part of the definition of universal grammar that children are born with." Transcript available at (https://bigthink.com/videos/how-we-speak-reveals-how-we-think-with-steven-pinker/).

[6] This is an adaptation of his Table 1.2 which also includes columns on other related areas of child development in the first five years: perceptuo-motor; cognitive; and social.

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), one can also identify specific predicable stages. Krashen and Terrell (1983) identify five consecutive stages which they say all L2 learners go through (namely: preproduction or "silent period"; early production; speech emergence; intermediate fluency; and advanced fluency). However, unlike FLA, the speed at which learners progress through these stages (and how many they actually complete) is not predicable; it depends on many environmental (not biological) factors, for example, level of formal education, family background, and quality and quantity of exposure.

At the level of morpheme, Krashen formulates a "natural order hypothesis"[7] which is the second of his five hypotheses about SLA (1982, p. 12):

> Dulay and Burt (1974, 1975) reported that children acquiring English as a second language also show a "natural order" for grammatical morphemes, regardless of their first language. The child second language order of acquisition was different from the first language order, but different groups of second language acquirers showed striking similarities.

The studies that Krashen cites looked only at English morpheme acquisition, which, limits both their scope and their generalizability. Furthermore, there is evidence that L1 does have an effect on the "natural order". Gass and Selinker (2008, pp. 131-135) provide a comprehensive criticism of the natural order hypothesis including the methodology of the studies that purport to support it, concluding that the morpheme order of language acquisition depends on a variety of factors (e.g. perceptual saliency; L1 influence; relative semantic complexity; syntactic complexity; or input frequency), which still need to be weighted by research to determine which takes precedence or has the biggest effect.

The link between L1 language and wider cognitive development outlined in Fig. 1 has led to the *critical period hypothesis* (Chomsky 1965): the posited existence of an optimal age range for FLA, namely the period up to puberty and declining afterwards.[8] The critical period has been studied in detail by Lenneberg (1967, p. 158), who concludes:

> Between the ages of two and three years language emerges by an interaction of maturation and self-programmed learning. Between the ages of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition continues to be good […] After puberty, the ability for self-organization and adjustment to the physiological demands of verbal behavior quickly declines. The brain behaves as if it had become set in its ways and primary, basic, skills not acquired by that time usually remain deficient for life.

More recent research has indicated that the process of lateralisation – whereby the various language functions are concentrated in the dominant brain hemisphere for language (usually the left) – is complete well before puberty (i.e. around the age of five): see Krashen (1973, p. 65). Notwithstanding this, there is a lot of research that confirms that age does have a significant effect on the ability to learn a language. For example, Johnson and Newport (1989) conducted a study comparing the language proficiency of 46 L1 Korean and L1 Chinese migrants who had been living in the USA between three and 26

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[7] E.g. "[…] the progressive marker *ing* (as in 'He is play*ing* baseball'.) and the plural marker /s/ ('two dog*s*') were among the first morphemes acquired, while the third person singular marker /s/ (as in 'He live*s* in New York') and the possessive /s/ ('John'*s* hat') were typically acquired much later," (Krashen 1982, p. 12).

[8] Analogous critical periods would seem to exist in other species for acquisition of other faculties; see for example, the research (which regrettably involved vivisection) on the effects of visual deprivation on neural activity in the cat visual cortex by David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel, who were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1981 – see Saxon (2017, pp. 86-88).

years at the time of testing. The subjects were given an English grammar test, the results of which were "linearly related to age of arrival up to puberty; after puberty, performance was highly variable and unrelated to age of arrival. The age effect also appeared on every grammatical structure tested."[9]

The most obvious area, even to a non-expert, where there are differences between FLA and SLA are that, only in the latter, does the possibly exist for there to be interference from another language (the learner's L1). This is because the FLA learner knows no other language yet and has nothing to compare the L1 to (unless they are a simultaneous bilingual: a child acquiring two different L1s at the same time). However, such influence is not as significant as one might assume. It used to be thought that it was a determinant factor preventing L2 learners from mastering their chosen target language, and was one of the theoretical pillars of *direct methods* of teaching, whereby use of the learner's L2 was discouraged.[10]

This view was challenged by scholars like Corder (1967) and famously Selinker (1972). In empirical studies, they found that L2 learners do not travel along a simple path from relying on building an approximation of the L2 on the framework provided by their L1, only gradually moving away from that and constructing something more closely resembling the L2 in both forms and underlying structure. Their conclusion is that the L2 learner creates their own idiolect, a replica of the L2, but which is not dependent on their L1, and, most importantly, constitutes a separate linguistic system both from their L1 and the L2 (or target language). This, they call interlanguage. There are then similarities with FLA in that interlanguage seems to be a manifestation of an underlying system that is separate both from the actual language being acquired (the L2) and from the language already acquired (the L1). An obvious candidate for such a system is UG (universal grammar).

This begs the question of why L2 learners do not typically reach mastery in their target language, as children do in their L1. One answer that Selinker gives lies in *fossilization*, when the development of the interlanguage stalls before becoming an accurate replica of the L2. Selinker (1972) identifies the cause of this being the fact that older L2 learners (those beyond puberty) tend to employ general cognitive processes (their "latent psychological structure") rather than their inbuilt UG ("latent language structure"). These cognitive processes, unavailable to infants, disrupt the older L2 learner's interlanguage and leads ultimately to stagnation in the acquisition process. Fossilization consists of five cognitive processes, namely: L1 transfer; overgeneralization of target language rules; transfer of training; strategies of communication; and strategies of learning.

To put it simply, adults find it much harder than infants to learn a language precisely because the latter's minds are less complex and the UG is working at its full capacity and can set to work on a cognitive system that is pristine and still under construction. Making a comparison with a computer, we could say that the UG indeed is part of the brain's operating system, and as this is being configured for the first time (after the baby is born), this allows the child's L1 to be downloaded in installments from the environment that the child is born into (i.e. the linguistic input it is exposed to) and slowly be integrated into the rest of the cognitive framework of the mind (see fig. 1). The UG

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[9] Johnson and Newport (1989, p. 60).

[10] See for example Lado (1957). He and many others in this period assume that it is perfectly possible to predict the types of difficulties a given learner will encounter, and the types of errors that they will make, merely by conducting a contrastive analysis of their L1 with the L2.

however is designed largely for single use, and is thus not subject to updates.[11] Beyond the critical period, it gradually loses functionality, perhaps because it has become increasingly incompatible with the rest of the operating system, which has been growing and becoming more sophisticated since initial set up. Any L2 that one may acquire later on in life is therefore installed as a patch, often awkwardly, via an only partially functioning UG, and onto a far more complex operating system than the L1 had to contend with. On top of this, while the infant does not yet have the ability to reflect upon and question what they are doing, a teenager or adult does; the conscious and subconscious parts of their minds may also, so to speak, create bugs that interfere with the operation of the by now out-of-date UG, forcing it to constantly crash.

In more technical terms, Krashen (1973) makes a distinction between *acquisition*, a subconscious process, and *learning*, a conscious one. Of the two, acquisition is the more important in SLA (as it is in FLA). This is because it is acquired rather than learned competence that is responsible for generating language. It thus ultimately accounts for language fluency. By contrast, competence gained through learning, the *monitor,* has the secondary role of modifying this language generated through acquisition.

In FLA, there is no monitor, as infants do not have the cognitive resources to formulate or to take on board abstract theories about the language, let alone apply them. Later on, once in formal education, they may receive instruction in the national or received standard of their L1, but this will only constitute a veneer on what they have already acquired naturally, and will only be used in certain social contexts and discourse domains. In some cases, the child may actually acquire a non-standard variety of a language (e.g. "Geordie", "Mancunian", "Brummie", "Multicultural London English" etc. in England) very different from the national standard (e.g. British English), and may never completely master the latter. In such cases, it could legitimately be argued that the standard, although officially the language of the country in which the child is born, is in effect an L2, and their acquisition of it is closer to SLA than FLA, the non-standard variety being their true L1.[12]

Krashen[13] maintains that learned competence and acquired competence develop in very different ways. Language learning occurs through the conscious study of rules, patterns, and conventions, often under the instruction of a teacher or expert. Language acquisition, by contrast, develops exclusively through exposure to what Krashen calls "comprehensible input": language that is both understandable and meaningful to the learner. In effect, by concentrating on meaning, the learner (or "acquirer" one should perhaps say) subconsciously acquires form – very similarly to the way in which infants

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[11] Pinker (1994, pp. 294-295), also using a technological analogy, explains why the UG is subject to a critical period: "Now note that learning a language—as opposed to *using* a language—is perfectly useful as a one-shot skill. Once the details of the local language have been acquired from the surrounding adults, any further ability to learn (aside from vocabulary) is superfluous. It is like borrowing a floppy disk drive to load a new computer with the software you will need, or borrowing a turntable to copy your old collection of LP's onto tape; once you are done, the machines can be returned. So language-acquisition circuitry is not needed once it has been used; it should be dismantled if keeping it around incurs any costs. And it probably does incur costs. Metabolically, the brain is a pig. It consumes a fifth of the body's oxygen and similarly large portions of its calories and phospholipids. Greedy neural tissue lying around beyond its point of usefulness is a good candidate for the recycling bin. James Hurford, the world's only computational evolutionary linguist, has put these kinds of assumptions into a computer simulation of evolving humans, and finds that a critical period for language acquisition centered in early childhood is the inevitable outcome."

[12] For a discussion of the status of standards in English see Christiansen (2018a).

[13] See Krashen (1981/1982), Krashen and Terrell (1983).

acquire their L1 in FLA. In an obvious parallel with Vygotsky's concept of *scaffolding* and *zone of proximal development*,[14] ideally, input should be just a little more challenging than the input that the learner is currently comfortable with (in Krashen's terminology, i+1).

Considerations regarding comprehensible input seem not to be an issue with L1 learners, largely because the innate UG provides an alternative mechanism for analysing and internalising the language which infants are exposed to.

The process of learning may indirectly play an important part in acquisition. If learners can successfully monitor their own language production, they can in effect produce their own comprehensible grammatically correct structures, which in turn become part of the input that they themselves are subjected to, together with those produced by other speakers, and that enables acquisition to take place. Acquisition, however, will not take place at all unless it is permitted by the learner's "affective filter", a metaphor for the collection of emotional responses identified by Krashen (e.g. levels of motivation, self-confidence, or anxiety) that impede or facilitate comprehension of meaning. Again, the affective filter does not seem to play any part in FLA. The child's emotional responses to the language, if indeed they have any, are irrelevant: they take to acquiring their L1, uncritically, in the same way that they take to acquiring the ability to stand up and walk, without reflecting on why, for example, they should do so, whether they could do something else instead, or whether they are acquiring the skill fast enough.

3. Nativism: native speakers as models in language teaching and assessment

Undoubtedly, it is in their outcomes that one finds the most obvious differences between FLA and SLA. With FLA, all learners reach levels of what could be described as full proficiency, being fluent and able to express themselves in almost any situation (bearing in mind that everybody, whoever eloquent, may, for whatever reason, occasionally find themselves "at a loss for words")[15] – the few exceptions would be those who suffer from some kind of cognitive disorder such as aphasia.

On the other hand, not all SLA learners reach a comparatively high level. Indeed, even those who have studied together in the same class, with the same teacher, doing the same exercises, may emerge with widely different levels. Only a small minority of L2 learners ever reach the advanced levels that may be compared, albeit loosely, to that of the NSs (see §6 where we introduce the concept of HPU). This, according to Selinker (1972) is because of fossilization (see §2). The existence of various levels of competence for SLA learners creates the need for scales like the *Common European Framework of Reference*

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[14] See Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991).

[15] Some native speakers may however be viewed as are more "eloquent" or "expressive" than others. These are traits that are not entirely linguistic in essence, being related to such diverse factors as personality, intelligence, education and cultural background. Others may display a better command of grammar and vocabulary. Typically, this is due to the fact that they are L1 speakers of the standard. Those who speak non-standard varieties that diverge widely from the standard may, as we venture above, be regarded as L2 speakers of the standard. From a sociological point of view, prejudice is often directed at such speakers because of the popular misconception that they have a low linguistic competence (and/or a low IQ). Numerous sociolinguistic studies have however shown that non-standard varieties can be equally as effective as any standard at expressing even abstract and complex ideas – see for example Labov (1969).

for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR),[16] and ultimately the demand for certification so that L2 learners may demonstrate their level. In the job market, this has become almost an obligation. By contrast for the L1, such documentation is rarely required[17]

It is realisation of the fact that NS and NNS are fundamentally different states and cannot be compared with each other that has led the CEFR to adopt the approach of defining levels, not by comparison to a model of an idealised NS, but by so-called "Can Do" statements which are designed to measure actual performance rather than presumed competence. The fact that the NS is not the intended model is stated unequivocally in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2020, p. 37):

> Level C2, whilst it has been termed 'Mastery', is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include: convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices; has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning; backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

As regards scales of linguistic competence, such as the CEFR, it is pertinent to note that the position of the NS on them, and whether it belongs there at all, is unclear, an important point which is often missed. One might lazily assume that such scales can be applied to NSs, their natural place lying at the top (i.e. above C2 on the CEFR). Such a view may be forgiven in the context of traditional second and foreign language teaching where the NS, or an idealised version of the same, is often routinely held up as the model for learners to copy. To adopt such a view would be to hold it that a NNS can rise up through the levels (e.g. A1, A2, B1 etc. on the CEFR), eventually, if they make the effort (and have the aptitude, opportunity and the resources), reaching "native speaker level", i.e. in effect "becoming a NS". As Cook notes (1999, p. 185), from a scientific point of view, the notion of a NNS being transformed into a NS is mistaken, not least because Bloomfield's definition (cited in §2) would exclude such a thing:[18]

> Being a native speaker in this [Bloomfield's] sense is an unalterable historic fact; you cannot change your native language any more than you can change who brought you up. This

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[16] Council of Europe (2001).

[17] In formal education, there are of course exams which test students' L1s, and these exams are typically high prestige and occupy a central part of the curriculum. However, these usually focus on the standard variety (not necessarily the students' L1 if they use a non-standard variety). Furthermore, they may also test other matters related to language, but not strictly speaking linguistic in nature: for example, knowledge of literature and literary works. Such exams may also test general literacy, which, although related to one of the main mediums of language (writing), is not in itself a natural linguistic phenomenon but instead a human invention. Universal grammar provides no assistance with such things as spelling, punctuation, or composition. As Darwin says: "[…] man has an instinctive tendency to speak, as we see in the babble of our young children; whilst no child has an instinctive tendency to brew, bake, or write." (Darwin 1871, Chapter III) – see Christiansen (2021, p. 8).

[18] In our experience, the fact that a NNS may not actually become a NS is something that may be conveniently "forgotten" in some specific contexts: it is not uncommon to find in calls for applications for teaching contracts that being a "native speaker" is one of requisites for applicants. Notwithstanding this, the selection committee sometimes accepts applications from those who declare themselves to be NSs purely because they have a C1 or C2 level. Probably, in such contexts, the absence of suitable bona fide NS applicants may encourage such relaxation of the requisites.

definition is echoed in modern sources such as the *Oxford Companion to the English Language* (McArthur 1992) and the corpus-based *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary* (1995).

In fact, even if it were possible for a NNS to become a NS, the NS still may leave a lot to be desired as a model for L2 learners.

Christiansen (2018a), points out that models based on any particular variety – and a standard is just another variety (albeit one which carries prestige) – are limited in their use. Indeed, except in the cases of languages spoken by small compact communities (e.g. Manx on the Isle of Man), when one refers to the NSs of a given language, one is in reality referring to a group of heterogeneous people who will speak many different varieties, both regional and social (e.g. class, age, professional). Consequently, in reality, there exists no single immutable "NS model" and this, as Seidlhofer (2011) underlines, is a major problem with the so-called "nativeness principle" in language teaching (seeing NSs as models for NNS learners – see Levis 2005). This is blatantly obvious in the case of international languages such as English, Spanish or Arabic which, due to their having been spread historically over wide areas, come in numerous varieties which show notable differences even at the level of national standards. Consequently, the traditional NS model does not constitute a fixed point of reference by which a learner can plot their course up through the levels of linguistic competence.

These conceptual considerations apart, in the real world, a NNS rarely reaches a level where they may be taken, by a NS at least, to be a genuine NS (a fact that such things as *acculturation* may also explain).[19] This points once more to the fact that there are fundamental differences between the NS and NNS.

That said, it would be a mistake to typify the NS as necessarily a more competent language user than the NNS. Or that NSs, because of the way that they have acquired the language in the first place (see §2), can be regarded as flawless language users. Indeed, as any linguist or teacher can confirm, NSs are typically far from immune to making errors in their L1 (not least the standard version: the target variety of most language courses).[20] Indeed, some NNSs may actually perform better linguistically in certain contexts than some NSs, precisely because they have learned how to do them in the process of SLA (for example if they have been studying an L2 specifically for further study in formal education). This is foreseen by the CEFR, which states (Council of Europe 2001, p. 249), speaking about the ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) framework:

> **ALTE Level 5 (Good User):** the capacity to deal with material which is academic or cognitively demanding, and to use language to good effect, at a level of performance which may in certain respects be more advanced than that of an average native speaker.

The NS and NNS then have a complex relationship which is indicative that the one is not a poor imitation of the other. Rather, they are two fundamentally different conditions by dint of the fact that they have come about through radically different processes, and for

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[19] Namely, assimilation into the target culture. See Schumann (1978, p. 34): "Second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation, and the degree to which the learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the target language."

[20] Chomsky (1965) is aware of this and famously distinguishes between *competence* (knowledge, abstract ability) and *performance* (actual use of language). As a theoretician, he concentrates on the former (because he wants pure data, uncontaminated by such things as lapses, false starts, and slips of the tongues), while those of other approaches based on observation of authentic language used in real contexts (such as sociolinguistics and discourse or conversation analysis), have concentrated on the latter.

different reasons (the former as an integral part of the infant's general cognitive development, the latter to answer a social need in later life, or because of an educational or professional obligation).

4. How relevant is the concept of Native Speaker in the context of English as a Lingua Franca?

It has long been normal practice for scholars of theoretical linguistics and in particular linguistic competence (see §3) to focus, like Chomsky, exclusively on the behaviour of and language produced by the NS. This used to also be the case for many studies of linguistic performance, with the result that only the NS was considered worthy of attention and the NNS was largely ignored, as Coulmas (1981, p. 5)[21] laments:

> He [the NS] is the one who can legitimately supply data, and his language is what grammatical analyses are meant to account for. Thus nativeness is the only universally accepted criterion for authenticity.

The NNS has traditionally only been studied in the context of SLA or in some aspects of social linguistics, e.g. studies into Creoles. In recent years, in the increasingly important field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), the role of the NNS has come to be reappraised, and the NS is no longer seen as the only worthy model for language use or object of study.

In applied linguistics (above all the teaching of English to Speakers of Other languages) too, recent years have seen a shift in attitudes. The so-called *nativeness principle* (see §3), though still popular among experts and stakeholders, has been, in many specific contexts, if not openly challenged, quietly replaced or supplemented by approaches that recognise the need to prepare learners for discourse not only with L1 Speakers of English but also with other NNSs of English.[22] The situation is especially true of ELF because this is a specific domain of language use where the majority of the participants are NNS, not NS.

In a study specifically into this point, Christiansen (2017), shows that, in an analysis of L2 learners of English's reactions to different statements, although most respondents express agreement with the idea of wanting to speak like a NS of English, the majority of the other opinions that they approve of are more consistent with an "ELF-oriented" approach to English language learning: "ELF-oriented" meaning that their priorities lie not in assimilating themselves with the NS community (as learners would in a traditional approach), but rather in the more functional goal of being able to communicate effectively with other NNSs of English from around the world (not just NSs of English).

Also of relevance among his findings are that learners were not enthusiastic about hiding their origins or identity while speaking English – something which contradicts their stated desire to speak like a NS, or the traditional objective of assimilation. Christiansen concludes (2017, p. 75):

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[21] Cited in Seidlhofer (2011, p. 32).
[22] This is usually abbreviated to NES, but to avoid too many different abbreviations, especially when we speak of NSs of other languages, we adopt this formula.

> What appears to have happened in this survey is that most respondents consciously pay lip service to the *nativeness principle* while unconsciously setting themselves goals and harbouring attitudes and that are more coherent in an ELF-oriented mind-set

Christiansen (2018b, 2019) conducted two further studies that entailed having subjects assess recordings of speakers identified, sometimes incorrectly and sometimes correctly, either as NSs of English or NNSs. The scores of those who thought they were assessing NSs of English were compared with those who thought the speakers were NNSs of English. In each of the two studies a further parameter was added. In the first one (Christiansen 2018b), the speakers, like the subjects all female, were either also identified as being celebrities (e.g. the singers Adele or Shakira) or ordinary people, again sometimes incorrectly. In the second (Christiansen 2019), apart from the NS / NNS distinction, speakers were described as being of various professions or social statuses, and expressed views on various subjects. Some of these opinions were deliberately crafted to be either appealing or unappealing to the typical respondent (a young university student). In this way, it was assumed that respondents would find it easier to feel affinity with some of the speakers rather than others (e.g. a young female actor talking about her passion for her work, a human rights lawyer talking about universal human rights as opposed to a right-wing politician expressing the opinion that the government does too much to help young people and that young people should look after themselves). In both these studies, it emerged clearly that marks given by respondents were not only influenced by whether they thought that the speaker was a NS of English or not, but also as to whether they were told that the speaker was a celebrity or not, and also as to whether they could feel affinity with the person or not.

The marks awarded by respondents are of course an indication of the subjects' attitudes to the different types of speakers, NS / NNS, celebrity / non-celebrity, and those with whom they can find a degree of affinity or not. The fact that the marks that respondents award are influenced by not just whether they think the speaker is a NS or not, shows according to Christiansen (2018b, 2019) that ELF users may use not only NSs as models but also potentially other NNs, in particular those they admire in some way: for example celebrities or those they can feel affinity towards. There is the potential then that in ELF contexts the models will not be NSs alone but NNSs who other members of this unique collection of speakers (avoiding the term speech community as such)[23] see as worthy of emulation.

The idea that the distinction between NS of English and NNS is not the main divide between ELF users also informs Graddol's (2007, p. 110) revisit of Kachru's famous "three circles of English" model (1985). Kachru divides English speakers into three groups: an *inner circle* of L1 speakers surrounded by two distinct circles of L2 speakers. The circle closest to the centre is dubbed the *outer circle* and consists of second language speakers; and the one on the edge is called the *expanding circle* and is made up of foreign language speakers.

By contrast, Graddol (2007) places "highly proficient users" at the centre of his circle, not specifically NSs (we will return to these users in §5). The outer circles are numerous (not just two) each encompassing groups of progressively less proficient ones. While Graddol's representation can be seen as a revision of Kachru, it is very much in

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[23] Normally the term speech community refers to a stable and fixed group of people defined by the fact that they share a particular language or variety. ELF typically occurs in communication between members of different speech communities, and thus ELF users do not constitute a fixed group.

harmony with the latter's shift in position regarding the usefulness of the NS / NNS distinction (2005, p. 210):

> […] it is obvious that the cross-cultural and localized functions of Englishes have now made the dichotomy of native versus non-native theoretically and functionally questionable.

Another reason to seek to diminish the importance attached to whether a given speaker of English is a NS or not is that, in the almost exclusive focus on the NS of traditional linguistics, the role and status of the NNS tends to be eclipsed and ignored. Apart from giving an incomplete picture of the kind of discourse taking place in specifically ELF contexts, such a prejudice may blind researchers to some facts about the English language in general (Seidlhofer 2005, pp. 339-340):

> Despite being welcomed by some and deplored by others, it cannot be denied that English functions as a global lingua franca. However, what has so far tended to be denied is that, as a consequence of its international use, English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers. This has led to a somewhat paradoxical situation: on the one hand, for the majority of its users, English is a foreign language, and the vast majority of verbal exchanges in English do not involve any native speakers of the language at all. On the other hand, there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage.

Examples of the ways that NNS of English can be seen to be shaping the way English is used even by NSs, at least in ELF contexts, are given by, for example, Mollin (2006) and Forche (2012). In particular, they point out that such circumstances in which NSs may, consciously or not, adopt some forms originally used by NNSs, such as "Last October I had the *possibility* to attend a workshop" (Forche 2012, p. 468). Perhaps, here the NS is in effect accommodating their own output to that of the wider group, or alternatively, they may perhaps be using such non-standard forms as manifestation of their sense of belonging to a group of ELF users.

Such data is at present scant beyond the anecdotal but one only has to look at the history of English to see many cases where NNSs of English have been the catalysts for numerous linguistic changes, both at the level of individual lexical items, or aspects of pronunciation, to the wider level of underlying structures, the effects of which permeate throughout the language. In the next section (§5) will discuss this point.

5. The role of NNSs in the evolution of the English language. A historical precedent for the future?

When one examines the history of English, and other languages, it often apparent that various linguistic changes can be traced to the contribution of NNSs, a fact often ignored, perhaps because in a traditional mind-set, it is only that of the NS that is supposed to count.

One famous theory about the evolution of English is Bailey and Maroldt's (1977) *Middle English Creole Hypothesis*. According to this, the major changes that English apparently underwent after the Norman Conquest are the result of the fact that Old English in its "pure" traditional form largely fell into disuse with the collapse of Anglo-Saxon society after the disaster of 1066. According to this analysis, Middle English is not a direct descendant of Old English but rather, a remnant or reconstruction on the part of a group of users who were effectively L2 speakers; in effect a Creole that grew up among the English

who were mixing elements of their heritage language (some variety of Old English) with Anglo-Norman French. The details of Bailey and Maroldt's account have since been questioned and their hypothesis rejected, but it can be seen as significant because it actually places the NNS (not the NS) at the heart of fundamental linguistic change. Whether they intended it or not, this is a focus that other scholars have picked up and built more robust theories around.

In particular, recently scholars have highlighted the way that such phenomena as *macroacquisition* or *social second language acquisition*[24] may be seen to influence the evolution of languages, acting as the spur for long-lasting and highly significant changes that may influence the language to its very core. The sociolinguist and creole scholar, McWhorter (2007) uses the term *non-native acquisition* for this process. He makes the insightful observation that the languages today which have relatively "simple" grammars[25] are precisely those which have also spread most successfully beyond their original speech communities – e.g. English, Mandarin Chinese, Persian (Farsi), Colloquial Arabic, and Malay. For McWhorter, grammatical simplicity and dispersion are *correlated*: not merely *coincidental*. The link between the two, he reasons, lies in the fact that in situations where groups of adults acquire a given language simultaneously (as in contexts of invasion and subjugation of a population) as L2 learners, they will typically fail to grasp all the intricacies of the target language, and will consequently develop an unorthodox way of speaking the language, which may be heavily infused with their common L1.

Over time, especially if there are relatively few NSs among the population (as in contexts of where the invaders and colonisers are relatively few), this communal "interlanguage" – of the kind that an individual develops during SLA (see §2) – may solidify into a non-standard variety which, similar to the way in which it was widely assumed that pidgins would transform into creoles,[26] in turn may be passed onto successive generations in a process of FLA in the form of "comprehensible input" (see §2).

Such a thing, so posits Christiansen (2021), has happened on numerous occasions and at key stages in the evolution of English, and may account for some of its highly peculiar syntax. In fact, modern genetic studies have shown that the various waves of invasions that the British-Irish Isles were subjected to (e.g. Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Norse people, Normans) in no case constituted large numbers of settlers replacing the previously established population. On each occasion, it was a question of relatively few arrivals subjugating the much larger population of natives.[27] An amalgam of the various West Germanic dialects of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (if one is to believe the standard narrative – see Christiansen 2021), Old English was essentially picked up by the far more

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[24] The way that a speech community may become multilingual with all members acquiring the same second language at the same time as a result of, for example, invasion, occupation, colonisation, or in the recent case of English, globalisation (Brutt-Griffler 2002).

[25] McWhorter (2007, p. 33) adopts three specific measures of complexity: *overspecification* (the degree to which languages must express semantic distinctions); *structural elaboration* (the number of distinct rules for the generation of surface forms), and *irregularity* (the degree to which grammars are "festooned with irregularity and suppletion").

[26] It used to be widely held that creoles constituted more evolved forms of pidgins. However, according to Mufwene (2002), the geographical distribution of pidgins and creoles around the world indicates instead that pidgins and creoles emerge in very different contexts of language contact. He concludes that pidgins are the result of contact that is periodic or seasonal, as in the case of trade; and creoles evolve where the contact is permanent and sustained, as in the case of settlement plantation colonisation.

[27] See Sykes (2006); Oppenheimer (2007).

numerous Britons (who largely stayed *in situ* – according to archaeological, genetic evidence and the surviving documentation), who presumably had been speaking some variety of Brythonic Celtic and perhaps some Latin. Similarly, in the Danelaw, the Norse settlers would have been a minority, and the Norse language which made its way into the dialects of these areas would have been that picked by the same population whose ancestors had previously acquired English after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. In each case, the fact that this subjugated majority were at least in the first generations, NNS acquiring the language *en masse*, would have had a major effect on the evolution of the new language in these areas.

As regards the various Anglo-Saxon dialects and their evolution into Old English once arrived in Britain, the fact that the new arrivals will have been predominantly males, especially in the early stages of occupation and subjugation, may have led to a situation where in many families the father figure was a NS of Old English and the mother figure a NNS.

In a study of population genetics using data from all over the world, Forster and Renfrew (2011) find that there is a strong correlation between languages and Y-chromosomes. Something which they dub the "father-tongue hypothesis." While the conquering father's language may in such contexts have determined the language that the family spoke (at least in his presence), the mother or other members of the household, those from the subjugated group, may have determined the *way* that it was spoken. Consequently, a hybrid Celtic Anglo-Saxon (something close to the *Brittonic English* described by Tristram 2004) spoken by Britons (mainly females one would suppose, these being the people most commonly charged with childcare at this time) who had learnt Anglo-Saxon as an L2 may have been the first, and thus most important, kind of Anglo-Saxon input that second and successive generations of British Anglo-Saxon infants came to be exposed to.

To give just one example of how such macroaquisition may have played a central part in shaping the English language as we know it today, we can cite the so-called Celtic Hypothesis.[28] This argues that the influence on English of Brythonic Celtic languages such as Welsh or Cornish have been underestimated by mainstream accounts of the history of English, mainly because so few words from such languages survive in contemporary English. Instead it can be countered, that not only may there indeed be traces of Celtic words in many dialects of English throughout the Middle Ages and even in modern times, but also that certain aspects of English grammar and syntax appear to have Celtic, rather than Germanic, origins.

McWhorter (2008) identifies two prominent features of English that are not found in any other Germanic language, dialect, or even slang of the same. The first is the progressive form (i.e. "I am singing" versus "I sing");[29] the second is the verb 'do' used as a supplementary auxiliary: what McWhorter 2008 terms *periphrastic do* (e.g. I *do* not like, *do* you like?).[30] Both of these can be found also in written texts in Old Welsh and Old Cornish, and also Old Breton (another Brythonic Celtic language spoken across the channel in Brittany), *before* it appears in English. Even if the historical record is not immense for the periods in question, it would seem too much of coincidence for two such

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[28] See Preußler (1938), Tolkien (1963), Poussa (1990), Hickey (2012): Filppula *et al.* (2002).

[29] E.g. from Welsh: "Mae Mair yn canu" (is Mary in singing) (McWhorter 2008, p. 8).

[30] E.g. from Cornish: "Mi a wra cara" (I at do love =I love); "Gwra cara?" (Do-you love ?); "Ni wrigav vi dha welas" (I did not see you) – McWhorter (2011, p. 263).

rare features to have evolved separately and independently in languages whose speech communities overlapped for long periods.

That such distinctive and key features of English can be traced to the direct influence of NNSs proves that NSs are not as central to language evolution as traditionalists assume. Therefore, in the case of English, the fact that NNSs now outnumber NSs may well mean that, when they come to make predictions for the future, researchers would do well not only to concentrate on the language use and behaviour of NSs but also to examine carefully the kind of changes being put into motion by NNSs.

6. Enter the Highly Proficient User (HPU)

The way that we have so far described the conditions of NS and NNS is based on the premise that they are two separate categories, a case of being one or the other, never anything in between. In fact. Looking at the practical issues involved when one tries to decide whether a given individual is a NS or NNS leads one to the realisation that in fact there may exist many grey areas that many of the theories and approaches discussed in §2 fail to consider

Cook (1999, pp. 185-186) is critical of the whole concept of NS, pointing to the absence of a clear definition, in effect questioning the very need for its existence:

> First the implications of the term *native speaker* need to be spelled out. The keynote is struck in what Davies (1991) claims to be its first recorded use: 'The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language' (Bloomfield, 1933, p. 43). In other words you are a native speaker of the first language (L1) that you learnt in childhood, called by Davies (1996, p. 156) the 'bio-developmental definition'. Being a native speaker in this sense is an unalterable historic fact; you cannot change your native language any more than you can change who brought you up. This definition is echoed in modern sources such as the *Oxford Companion to the English Language* (McArthur, 1992a) and the corpus-based *Collins COBUILD*
> *English Dictionary* (1995).
>   This core meaning of *native speaker* is often supplemented by detailing the characteristics that native speakers share apart from their birth. Stern (1983) lists: (i) subconscious knowledge of rules, (ii) intuitive grasp of meanings, (iii) ability to communicate within social settings, (iv) range of language skills, and (v) creativity of language use. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) adds (vi) identification with a language community. Davies (1996) adds (vii) ability to produce fluent discourse, (viii) knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the "standard" form of the language, and (ix) ability "to interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker".
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>   Some of these characteristics are in a sense obvious: native speakers are not necessarily aware of their knowledge in a formal sense (i and ii), but nor could they explain how they ride a bicycle. Some are debatable: many native speakers are unaware how their speech differs from the status form (viii), shown for example in the growing use of non-standard *between you and I* for *between you and me* even in professional speakers such as news-readers. Many native speakers are far from fluent in speech (vii), some having to communicate via alternative means, such as Stephen Hawking and Helen Keller. Some native speakers function poorly in social settings (iii). In the Chomskyan sense of creativity, any novel sentence uttered or comprehended

is creative (v); a computer can create 'new' sentences, for instance the speech program that answers telephone directory enquiries with every possible telephone number. In a general literary sense, creativity belongs to a small percentage of native speakers, such as poets, rap singers and so on. The ability to interpret (ix) is only possessed by native speakers with a second language and not necessarily by all of them. Native speakers are free to disassociate themselves completely from their L1 community politically or socially (vi) without giving up their native speaker status, whether Karl Marx in London, James Joyce in Zurich or Albert Einstein in Princeton.

These characteristics are then not only variable but also in a sense accidental; lack of any of them would not disqualify a person from being a native speaker. A monk sworn to silence is still a native speaker. Many are also shared by non-native speakers almost regardless of their level of proficiency in the language: non-native speakers show a rapidly developing awareness of gender-linked pronunciation (Adamson & Regan, 1991) and of the status of regional accents (Dailey-O'Cain, 1998); what level of L2 English did it take for Marcel Duchamps to create 'surrealistic aphorisms' such as *My niece is cold because my knees are cold* (Sanquillet & Peterson, 1978, p.111)?

Cook is undoubtedly a bit exaggerated in some of her criticism, no doubt partly for rhetorical effect. For one thing, it is rather simplistic to associate linguistic creativity exclusively with literature as she appears to do. For Chomsky, it is a constituent feature of language as it allows the syntactic system to produce, by means of a strictly limited set of rules, an infinite number of structures (also through embedding and recurrence). Furthermore, while it is true that artificial intelligence can now replicate this facet of language fairly convincingly, the question of whether the texts that it produces can be considered language "proper" (i.e. analogous to that produced by humans) still causes disagreement among philosophers.[31]

Secondly it is pedantic to query whether people, like Helen Keller, Stephen Hawking or a Trappist monk can be classed as NSs on the basis that they are neither fluent or actually produce any linguistic output (at least not in a conventional sense). Whether someone actually "speaks" fluently or not, or not at all, does not disqualify them from being a NS, or indeed a NNS. The term *speaker* indicates that someone has the *competence* to process and use the language (e.g. in the case of Helen Keller or Stephen Hawkings by non-vocal means such as sign language or via a voice synthesiser on a computer, in that of the monk, to listen to mass, or to pray silently), irrespective of whether they actually use their own vocal organs to do so fluently, or whether they decide not to.

These points aside, Cook nonetheless shows the fact that there are indeed many cases where neither the definition for NS nor NNS perfectly applies to a specific person. This indicates perhaps that the two categories are not mutually exclusive but lie on the same continuum: a situation of "more or less NS/NNS" rather than "either NS … or NNS".

Such a change in perspective on the concepts of NS and NNS is perhaps sensible considering that one is dealing with individual human beings whose circumstances and life stories may differ widely from those general trends about which theorists make general observations. For example, while language acquisition is largely biological and genetically determined, there is some difference in precise time scales (and the same thing is true of things like puberty). Non-hereditary factors such as diet, health, social context during childhood, may also affect outcomes (much as environmental factors can influence adult

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[31] See for just one example, the mathematician and computer scientist, Alan Turing (1950) and his famous Turing Test that included an "imitation game." John Searle (1980) issued a riposte to this in his "Chinese room" thought experiment.

height and weight). Consequently, there is abundant opportunity for the neat line drawn by theorists between FLA and SLA to become blurred. In individual cases, the process of acquisition of a given language may display features of both FLA and SLA, and thus fall unequivocally into neither category and necessitate the creation of a third classification (covering the potentially wide space between the two ideals of NS and NNS) that one may here provisionally call *hybrid native speaker* (HNS).

However, the whole dichotomy between native and non-native, albeit valid from a theoretical point of view, may be irrelevant from a practical point of view in the context of ELF. Indeed, as a contact language used mainly by speakers of other languages (i.e. NNSs), ELF is by nature a transient and fluid variation of English, not a durable fixed variety. It is thus in any case a manifestation of language where the concepts of NS and NNS lose importance. No one is a NS as such in such a context where people are using English mainly for instrumental purposes. One can only be a NS of a language learnt by means of FLA, and a first language cannot by definition be a lingua franca. In this sense, every ELF user, whether a NS of English or not is a NNS of ELF. It is in view of this point that one sees the usefulness of Graddol's (2007) concept of highly proficient user (which we shall abbreviate as HPU), which we introduced in §4. This is a figure that may stand alongside plurilingual NSs as the most proficient communicators in ELF contexts by dint of both of their high degrees of competence in some variety of English (whether standard or non-standard) and their shared ability to accommodate and translanguage (see §5).

The HPU group would also include hybrid native speakers, i.e. those people who have acquired mastery in the language (i.e. some variety, whether standard or non-standard) not strictly as an L1, but both through formal instruction (a feature of SLA) and through having learnt and to use the language at a very early age, perhaps pre-school, that is within the critical period (see §2), which is of course is a feature of FLA. Such a combination may be common in situations where English is a second, as opposed to a foreign language, that is, in countries (mostly ex-British colonies or ex-US territories) like India, Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, and the Philippines, where English is still used in many official and bureaucratic contexts, but where people use other local languages at home with their family or in their local community. Some such speakers may be classifiable as NS of English as they are simultaneous bilinguals, having acquired it together with one (or more) local languages at the same time. Others may have acquired, or started acquiring, their L1 before they were exposed to English, in which case they would be described as consecutive (or sequential) bilinguals, and not strictly speaking as NS of English[32] or even perhaps as HNS, the difference between the NS, HNS and NNS thus being a matter a degree.

Where precisely one would draw the line between a simultaneous and consecutive bilingual is in effect the same problem as we have posed regarding NS and HNS, and HNS and NNS, and likewise is perhaps best to treat the two categories of NS and NNS as extremes on a continuum. With the advent of the internet and the globalisation of popular culture and entertainment, the phenomena of HNS is not restricted to ex-colonial contexts. Increasingly, children across the world, encouraged by ambitious parents, are learning English at ever younger ages. Furthermore, children today tend to be digital natives (natural / proficient users of technology from young ages) and this fact opens up a plethora of opportunities for exposure to languages, especially English, unavailable to previous generations. Such children may of their own account be regularly accessing material in

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[32] See Baker and Wright (2021).

English on the internet or TV for their own entertainment, remembering also that today TVs, smartphones and other devices are often used by tired or busy parents (themselves increasingly digital natives) as forms of "baby-sitting".[33]

This is especially true for those children in whose L1 there is not much internet or multimedia content (or in which "trending" cultural products are for whatever reason not translated).[34] In such cases, English (or other language) is a second not a foreign language, and the users may, like their counterparts in the ex-colonies, also achieve a level of high functionality (Graddol 2007).

In ELF contexts at least, HPUs (be they NS, NNS or HNS) have an advantage over those NSs who are familiar mainly with NS-NS discourse (and who thus would not necessarily fall within the category of HPU as regards ELF). This is because of HPUs' greater expertise in two key communicative skills: the ability to *accommodate* and to *translanguage*. These both become more relevant in the context of ELF because of the fact that this is not simply another fixed variety of English like, for example, Received Standard English, Brooklynese, Liverpudlian, or Nigerian Pigdin English. Instead, it consists in a set of *variations* which are transitory, fluid and *ad hoc*, depending on such factors as: the context of situation; what the language is being used for; and who the participants are.[35] Because of its ephemeral nature, it is very difficult to apply the concept of culture to ELF, something which has traditionally been seen as inseparable from language, and another area where the NS has conventionally been regarded as having an advantage over the NNS (see §2).

In such a context, there is no single fixed point of reference regarding norms or usage, and participants may be of varying levels of competence and from widely diverse linguacultural backgrounds. A monolingual NS of English whose experience is limited to NS-to-NS discourse, may lack the necessary communicative skills (e.g. accommodation strategies)[36] to navigate discourse and negotiate meaning in such an unfamiliar and unpredictable speech event. A plurilingual[37] HPU, whether NS or NNS of English or increasingly a HNS one, will find themselves better equipped to deal with such a situation, because they will, by dint of being able to communicate in different languages, be more familiar with such situations.

Furthermore, a plurilingual HPU speaker will be able to translanguage.[38] This involves the speaker treating the sum of their linguistic competence across the repertoire of the languages that they speak as a common resource that may be searched and selected from when communicating and expressing themselves. This enables them to use their competence in different languages to communicate more effectively especially when interacting with speakers whose competence in the given language is not as high as their

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[33] We are tempted to call such users "Digital Native Speakers" but such a term may cause confusion as it has already been used to refer to digital devices, such as Amazon's *Alexa* or Apple's *Siri*, that some are arguing may be used to help learners acquire new languages by acting as a substitute for the traditional native speaker interlocutor.

[34] This phenomenon mirrors what happens to children in more traditional multilingual or diglossic contexts (Ferguson 1959) who, speaking a dialect or non-standard variety at home (which is un- or under-represented in media), will be exposed to cultural products in the national language or standard variety on TV and other media.

[35] Widdowson (2015, p. 362) who defines *variation* as "the variable use of English as inter-community communication, as communication across communities."

[36] See *Speech Accommodation Theory*, Giles and Smith (1979)

[37] The CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, pp. 4-5) defines *plurilingualism* as the ability to communicate, even simultaneously, in two or more languages, and within different cultural contexts.

[38] See García (2009), Li (2018), García and Li (2014)

own. The ability to transfer linguistic resources from different languages has in the past been labelled as "interference", and was often identified as the major cause behind the learners' errors (see our comments about interlanguage in §2). Today, the tables are being turned, and plurilingualism is rightly coming to be seen as valuable resource. By contrast, monolingualism is being increasingly seen as a handicap: in the words of Roberts *et al.* (2018, p. 116): "Monolingualism is the illiteracy of the twenty-first century"

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we have seen that there is a real difference between NS and NNS, something which can be attributed to the demonstrably different ways that they have acquired the language in question (see §2). When it comes to linguistic competence (see §3), we have seen that, while NSs (the products of FLA) can normally be relied upon to reach higher levels than NNSs (the products of SLA), levels of linguistic competence used as assessment scales in language teaching and testing apply only to NNSs, not to NSs, whose performance cannot be measured by the same means. This fact is often overlooked by educators, and language teaching has often treated the NS as something than can and should be emulated by the NNS.

    Nativism, the idea that the NS represents the way that a language should be spoken has been carried over in all areas of linguistics and has led to the state of affairs where the performance and contribution of NNSs to discourse has been discounted in theoretical linguistics (see for example Chomsky, §2). As we show, however, there is ample historical evidence to indicate that the input of NNSs can have lasting effects on language. In the case of English, we show how *macroacquisition* or *social second language acquisition* (mass SLA on the part of whole communities of adults at roughly the same time) may well have been the catalyst for the evolution of some the most distinctive features of English, namely *periphrastic do* and the progressive form. That NNSs may have played instrumental parts in such drastic and permanent changes in the nature of English is a clear sign, we have argued that the fact that NNSs outnumber NSs could well mean that once again it may be their contribution that proves determinant in the future shape of the language.

    As regards the specific case of ELF – by its nature a set of fluid and ephemeral variations of English not a durable fixed variety – the distinction between NS and NNS becomes less significant. Here the issue of proficiency in specifically in the kind of discourse where ELF is used comes to the fore. The HPU of ELF may thus be a NS, NNS or HNS (hybrid native speaker). The last is a growing category that we identify in this paper. Such speakers exist due to the fact that in many contexts English functions as a second language which users may acquire at an early age, in or just after the critical period (see §2), both through natural acquisition and through formal instruction in such a way that they are on the borderline between being a simultaneous (in which case they would be NS) and consecutive bilingual (which would make them a NNS).

    Furthermore, putting aside such niceties, one can summarise the situation simply without the need to resort to new categories, by stating that no one is a NS in an ELF context. One can only be a NS of a language learnt by means of FLA, and a first language cannot by definition be a lingua franca precisely because one needs a relatively stable and fixed variety to serve as input on which the universal grammar can be set to work. Every ELF user then is a NNS. Consequently, the only appropriate way to categorise different speakers is by their level of proficiency in that particular kind of discourse not how they

have acquired the language (by FLA or SLA) in the first place.

In the traditional mind-set, it is common to associate languages with countries, for example British English with the UK, *le français de France* with France, or Japanese with Japan. Countries have citizens or nationals (usually natives and/or inhabitants): people who have a right to live there, are subject to the state's laws and protection, and, in a liberal democracy, at least, have a say in how the place is governed. A lingua franca cannot be associated with specific countries; it is rather a place where people from different lands meet and mix, albeit only temporarily. Rather than a specific location, it makes one think of any of the myriad busy international airports scattered around the globe. These do not have permanent or stable populations, and, though often being bigger than small cities, have no residents of their own. If languages can be compared to countries, ELF then is like an airport; it is a place that all its users are just "passing through": nobody is a citizen, everybody is just a visitor or someone who commutes to work there. For the majority of its users, the airport is just a stage on a journey. Consequently, like an airport, ELF does not "belong" to any single set of users in a social or cultural sense, and every one of them is of equal status. Furthermore, like passengers in an airport, none of the ELF users are permanent residents of the ELF discourse community either; they are all just going about their business on their way to their separate final destinations.

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