

# EFL Teachers' Professional Development: Towards a Counterpart of the English Language Supremacy<sup>1</sup>

Desarrollo Profesional de los Docentes de Inglés:  
Hacia una contraparte de la Supremacía del Idioma Inglés

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## Abstract

This article aims at contributing to the ongoing discussion about the English language Supremacy and its influence in the EFL field. The theoretical discussion presented is retrieved from the literature reviewed in the development of the authors' master thesis, where it was possible to identify that there are ideological, economical, and sociopolitical aspects immersed in the decision to learn and use English, having as a result that EFL teachers' educational decisions and practices have been affected. Thereupon, the main contribution of this reflection article is, then, to explore from a theoretical perspective, a resistance discourse that promotes professional development by understanding and reflecting upon the colonial ideas in which this foreign language teaching has been immersed over the years.

*Key words:* English supremacy, colonial discourse, professional development, NES vs NNEST

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo contribuir en la discusión continua acerca de la supremacía de la lengua inglesa y su influencia en el campo de la enseñanza del Inglés como lengua extranjera. La discusión teórica presentada es tomada

<sup>1</sup> Received: March 31st 2018/ Accepted: October 30th 2018

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de la literatura revisada durante el desarrollo de las tesis de maestría de las autoras, en donde es posible identificar la existencia de aspectos ideológicos, económicos y sociopolíticos inmersos en la decisión de aprender y usar la lengua inglesa que han afectado las prácticas y decisiones de los profesores de Inglés. En este sentido, la contribución principal de este artículo de reflexión es explorar desde una perspectiva teórica, un discurso de resistencia que promueva el desarrollo profesional docente por medio del entendimiento y la reflexión acerca de las ideas coloniales inmersas en la enseñanza de ésta lengua extranjera a lo largo del tiempo.

*Palabras Clave:* Supremacía Inglesa, discurso colonial, desarrollo profesional, NES vs NNEST

### **Resumo**

Este artigo tem como objetivo contribuir na discussão contínua acerca da supremacia da língua inglesa e a sua influência no campo do ensino do inglês como língua estrangeira. A discussão teórica apresentada é tomada da literatura revisada durante o desenvolvimento das teses de mestrado das autoras, donde foi possível identificar que a língua inglesa tem predominado sobre outros idiomas devido a aspectos ideológicos, econômicos e sociopolíticos. Como resultado, a diferenciação feita entre NES / NNEST (Falante de Inglês nativo e não nativo) tem incrementado, afetando as práticas e decisões dos professores de inglês como língua estrangeira (Camargo, 2017; Estacio, 2017). Neste sentido, a contribuição principal deste artigo de reflexão é explorar desde uma perspectiva teórica, um discurso de resistência em termos de Desenvolvimento Profissional Docente para entender, refletir e atuar frente às ideias coloniais imersas no ensino desta língua estrangeira ao longo do tempo.

*Palavras chave:* Aprendizagem invertida, aprendizagem ativa, papel ativo, EFL, percepções

## Introduction

Throughout history, teaching and learning have been assumed as single processes with a beginning and an end (Wenger, 1999). Under this assumption, a linear view of pedagogical approaches and methodologies have been embraced regardless of individuals' realities and experiences (Ayala Zárate & Álvarez, 2005; Fandiño-Parra, 2014; González, 2007; Guerrero, 2008). This view has been reflected mainly in policies, metrics, training programs, and curriculum designs aiming at outlining and controlling the society (Popkewitz, 2000).

In view of the above, language has been a determinant factor in the construction of that “pre-conceived” society, since its dynamic nature-created, understood, shaped, and validated within a community in a specific context by means of interaction- has allowed some nations to take control over others and assure a privileged position in regards to politics, economy, and sociocultural issues (Fairclough, 2003). As a result, English as a foreign language gained the distinction of being a *global language* (Crystal, 2003) and was quickly spread along with certain practices and ideologies-that has not only had a linguistic impact- but also sociocultural implications (Camargo, 2017; Estacio, 2017).

In this sense, language policies adopted by governments from monolingual contexts as Colombia, meant to spread the English language under the premise of allowing non-native speakers (NNES) to have access to a world ruled by globalization where they can communicate and break boundaries of language and culture (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). Yet, the distinction made between *native* and *non-native speakers* has affected not only the attitudes of all the actors involved in English education towards the language, but has had an impact on the teaching and learning language practices around the world (Bhowmik, 2015; Ramanathan, 2013).

These effects can be easily recognized in monolingual countries where the mother tongue and other languages spoken in these countries have been suppressed or displaced by English (Tollefson, 2000; Ryan, 2010) so their citizens can be considered as bilinguals. Notwithstanding, the conception of bilingualism held by countries such as ours, was reduced to the fact of speaking English as it has been stated by different authors (Guerrero, 2008; Usmá, 2009; De Mejía, 2011; Ordoñez, 2011; Escobar, 2013; Sánchez & Obando, 2008). As a consequence, *NNES* in general have faced struggles towards the ownership of the language and the recognition of speaking it, being forced to “hide their intellectual

and communicative capabilities under a bushel” (Kohn, 2011, p. 71) which means that their intellectual capabilities are being disregarded when they decide to use their mother language instead of English.

Moreover, Camargo, (2017) and Pineda (2001) have said EFL teachers' decisions on methodology, curriculum, syllabus and material design have been limited, as their role has been relegated as of trainers since NES are believed to be the source of understanding and capability in terms of EFL educational practices. However, by thinking about the historical and sociocultural implications of certain decisions, EFL teachers are called to resist *colonial* and *hegemonic* discourses so as to transform their educational practices and endorse their professional development (Camargo 2017, Estacio, 2017).

Thereby, in this reflective article, we intend to ponder upon the ideological and social background of the English language to first, understand how it has become into the artifact to trigger sociocultural ideas on its users, and secondly, the effects its supremacy has had in EFL teachers and the way of resisting them.

### **Ideological and Social background of a Hegemonic Language**

As previously stated, considering English as an international language, may have implications in the linguistics field, however, as authors such as Mahboob (2005) have stated, it also has cultural, political and economic implications. Ergo, it has been mostly promoted as the one that allows people to build society and to fetch better economic and academic prospects (Barkhuizen, 2002).

Considering Mignolo (2009), the colonial expansion of the British and American population to different territories around the world in the 18th and 19th centuries had a powerful impact regarding the imposition of the English language in territories where the mother tongue was a different one. To start with, the policies set in the field of education- by the colonial powers- controlled the intellectual production in the English language while dismissing the one given in the vernacular ones (Quijano, 1992). This decision in view of Pennycook (2004), had not only linguistic implications, but it has also caused struggles for dominance against other languages.

Then, around the I World War, it was felt in such a manner that languages were one of the roots of international conflict, that private institutions started to pay for academic exchanges between the US and the countries involved in the war. The intention was to join efforts to devise simplified forms of English and make easier international

understanding (Ninkovich as cited in Phillipson, 1992). Hence, knowledge regarding this language was crucial for studying fields such as science, technology and engineering (White, 1965), and its active use for different social purposes, shaped the discourse in which the *native speaker* is seen as the ideal speaker in the educational sphere (Estacio, 2017).

In this sense, native English speakers (*NES*) -specially from North America and England- gained a privileged position in the language teaching field based on the fact that the language variation they used, was considered as the epitome and the gold standard (Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014). Thereby, they were assumed to be the correct way of speaking and the basis of the language teaching (Davies, 2003).

Moreover, at the end of the World War II, the idea of an ideal variation, mostly diffused by the *British Council*, allowed domination and ideological control as the language was molded for political and ideological plans (Canagarajah, 1999). Similarly, it aimed at publicizing a general understanding of the British culture, which in view of Phillipson (1992), meant nothing but to make foreign speakers anglophiles under the ideal of being accepted in an eminent society by means of using a British English variation- symbol of power and educational status worldwide (Shohamy, 2006).

Because of that, propaganda activities in the *outer circle* countries (Kachru, 1985) were frequently carried out by a body of executives and educational experts belonging to the *British Council*. As a result, this institution started to be treated as the supreme authority in the EFL sphere, a premise that up to now, is considered to be unmistakable. Bearing this in mind, it can be said that the aim of this entity has not only be given in terms of education but also economy, commerce and governmental ones. Whence, teaching and learning English has been seen as a means to commercialize English books, advertise a culture, and embrace a definite accent variation.

From this perspective, a phenomenon called “schizoglossia” appeared among *NNES*. It derived from the notion of not having an accent *as good as* the standard one so, they need to simulate and reach the native-like accent to improve their communication and of course, avoid linguistic misunderstandings (Baker, 2006). This led to the imposed belief of having a standardized language that allows both *NES* and *NNES* to communicate “ideally” (Crystal, 2003).

However, this language standardization grounded on ideological structures aiming at preserving the perfection and purity of the language (Lippi-Green, 2012) has also looked forward reproducing homogeneity

in social behavior (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009). As a result, these *hegemonic* ideas by being experienced as absolute reality, have influenced the thoughts, decisions, and actions of all the actors involved in the language field (Tollefson, 2000). Hence, based on the historical facts previously described, it is possible to see that the predominance of a language variation that exists nowadays, is rooted on different events along the history that have placed the native variation in a privileged position as opposed to the non-native English variations.

### **The NES / NNES Dichotomy: Implications in the EFL field**

Considering the above, there are ideological and social choices immersed when making the decision to learn and use English. Such choice draws upon the *new capitalism notion*, in which an excessive consumerism and competition are the result of an economic system that has had incidence towards the way English language should be taught, learned, and spoken (Fairclough 2003). For instance, methodologies and materials created by NES are used in NNES nations as the perfect recipe to make learners speak the language, but those materials offer not only a linguistic knowledge but also, a socio-cultural lifestyle that NNES want to replicate.

In accordance with Foucault (2005), education is the chief tool to effect power through systems of knowledge. Thus, theories, methodologies, curricula, materials and topics, are used as pillars for molding educational actors' view of the world (Popkewitz, 2000; González & Sierra, 2005). Subsequently, teaching and learning English has been portrayed as the only solution through which citizens from the *outer and expanding circles* (Kachru, 1985) can access to a "qualified" education to then obtain a well-paid job, great opportunities, and of course, a more desirable life, similar to the ones developed nations have (Camargo, 2017).

However, Tollefson (2000) reported that for the citizens who belong to the *inner circle* (Kachru, 1985), the economic value of having English as their mother tongue means inordinate opportunities in education, business and employment (Usma, 2009; Valencia, 2013). On the contrary, the spread of English presents a huge obstacle in the same areas for the ones who have to learn the language since their diverse linguistic varieties are not recognized as legitimate, reason why they have to be constantly evaluated (Kohn, 2011).

In the same line of thought, Lowenberg (as cited in Bhowmik, 2015), asserted that notwithstanding *NES* and *NNES* interactions are

more frequent in international communication nowadays, the ELT field keeps on choosing native variations (American and British) as the main language of teaching, strengthening the idea that NES [regardless of their professional background] will ensure the learning process, as the native accent is a determinant factor to learn the language (Sánchez & Obando, 2008).

This misconception indeed, has had several repercussions on EFL teachers who have always been blamed, questioned, and even replaced (Adriana González, personal communication, June 6, 2015). Likewise, non-native EFL teachers' notion of expertise in terms of curriculum and materials design has got narrowed and minimized because of the existence of beliefs in which native speakers represent a source of knowledge and skillfulness in terms of English language pedagogy (Camargo, 2017).

As a matter of fact, researchers in countries where English has been taught and evaluated under already defined standards have discovered similar findings. For example, Muthanna & Karaman (2011) stated teachers' beliefs concerning EFL Education were dismissed as have scarcity of well-defined standards and philosophy statements. What is more, education policy-makers disregarded the ideas and strategies suggested by teachers' in order to improve the EFL curriculum in Yemen. Alike, Jóhannesson et. al (2000) affirmed teachers' notion of expertise got narrowed as there are pre-defined standards and goals; and Barkhuizen's (2002) study showed that when decisions about educational issues are made, teachers and students' points of view are often ignored, though these last ones have a preference for studying English over the native language since it has been said, would give them better life opportunities.

As seen, these discourses and practices have voided teachers' role as designers, managers and evaluators of curricula and materials (Camargo, 2017). Besides, local research into bilingualism and foreign languages pedagogy is overshadowed (De Mejía, 2004). Likewise, it has had a great influence on the way English is being taught in educational institutions (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009; p. 137).

Hence, the EFL professional development term under this perspective, has been limited to the conceptions of teacher-training programs in which the emphasis is on reviewing and memorizing approaches, methodologies or theories that others had developed at the time of increasing teachers' proficiency in the foreign language (González, 2009; Guerrero, 2008).

Indeed, most - if not all- of the updating/training programs are offered by foreign entities and *NES*, who as previously mentioned, are chosen over EFL teachers for their “proper” pronunciation, perpetuating the conception of neutrality given to the native variation (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009) and validating the notion that there is one way of teaching notwithstanding of contexts, realities and learners. As a result, EFL educational actors are subjected to learn and teach this language while being positioned as followers (Camargo, 2017).

### Developing the Supremacy Counterpart

Although the linguistic imperialism and dominance of the English language has lasted and affected diverse aspects, there is a desire to combat it. The thesis of a counterpart to the supremacy of English as a means to resist hegemony has in fact emerged from many places around the world and has sought balancing the theory-practice dichotomy and encouraging educators to continue growing both professional and individually by means of reflecting and sharing upon educational theories and practices (Díaz-Maggioli, 2012).

Paradoxically, as Phillipson (1992) states, not only EFL teacher-researchers have been part of the protesting group, but also some scholars from the *core* and *periphery circles* (Kachru, 1985). Graddol (2006) for example, forecasted in his study the end on the foreign language teaching grounded on native speaking models by bearing in mind the current quantity of non-native speakers using the language for academic and non-academic purposes. Alike, Kohn (2011) stated the domination perpetuated by economically and socially empowered countries is crumbling as *NNES* have astonishingly increased in numbers.

In monolingual contexts, Camargo (2017) for instance, evidenced how EFL and self-contained teachers become main characters in the education process by *questioning, reflecting, and visioning*, an outcome supported by Nielsen, Triggs, Clarke & Collins' (2010) who asserted *peer dialogue* generates new alternatives to think about the teaching practices and their work with their peers and got self-empowered.

Similarly, Estacio's (2017) study, evidenced that some educational institutions are taking into account the real needs of language learners by including the use of non- standard variations and intercultural contact situations, as they are acknowledging the intelligibility of the language rather than the native standard (Levis, 2005). In such a way, they can implement more realistic pedagogical approaches in which the

language is seen in real situations that may happen in actual interactions where *NNES-NES* exchanges are commonplace.

Thence, pedagogical aspects such as curriculum, teaching practices, and educational standards can be modified through reflection and bearing in mind the real world of English communication (Shusterman, 2000). Hitherto, it seems the world will eventually overcome the comparison between native and non-native speakers' norms and accents by taking into account the geographical characteristics and by giving priority to the relevance and intelligibility in the language as advocated by Seidlhofer (2011).

## Conclusions

Taking into account the theoretical discussion held in this reflective article, it seems essential for the educational field to comprehend the political, economic, and historical background of the English language to reflect upon the implications of those decisions in the EFL practices. Considering the arguments presented in this article, it can be asserted that the supremacy of the English language has being mostly linked to economic commodities, favoring this language over others.

What is more, the endless differentiation made between *NES* and *NNES* linguistic variation, has had serious implications in terms of teachers' professional development since it has been mainly understood as to formal education programs instead of pedagogical spaces of sharing and discussing initiatives concerning the teaching-learning the language.

Nevertheless, it was shown educators that can resist these discourses of *homogenization* and *colonialism* by reflecting, understanding, and being involved in the creation of curricula, methodologies and educational guidelines that draw upon the real world of English communication notwithstanding the native or non-native speakers' labels.

Bearing this in mind, this reflective paper not only calls attention to the need of making EFL teachers aware of the discourses and practices behind the teaching-learning English process, but it also highlights the acts of resistance that have emerged in the ELT and EFL fields for de-privatizing our pedagogical practices.

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