



THE LINGUISTIC EXPERIENCES OF BI/MULTI-LINGUAL ACADEMICS AT A UK UNIVERSITYⁱ

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Abstract:

With the internationalisation of higher education in the past decade, there have been dramatic changes in the profiles of staff and students in UK universities. These changes have brought about an increasing trend in research on “international” students and teachers who are speakers of English as an additional language (EAL) especially in TESOL. Nevertheless, there are few studies into the experiences of the academic staff as speakers of EAL who are working at a UK university. Therefore, my doctoral research examined the linguistic, professional and intercultural experiences of fifteen bi/multi-lingual academics from different disciplines in the internationalising contexts of higher education in the UK, and in this paper, I present their language-related experiences and challenges; particularly their perceptions of being an EAL speaker in the past and during their current teaching in the UK. The participants were interviewed with a semi-structured format through a phenomenological research journey which I have undergone as a first-person experience philosophically and which also enabled me to explore the participants’ experience per se from their perspectives methodologically. First, their views on English language learning (ELL) experiences, “native” and “non-native-like” use of English and the positioning of their own language use will be explored through their linguistic background. This will help understand how their attitudes and previous language experiences affect their perceptions of being an EAL speaker and interactions with people. Lastly, expressing their views on ELL experiences, I will elucidate the problems which impacted their use of language and ways of communication with other people, and their teaching among a mixed group of students from different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds like themselves. These people included students, staff and local people, be they ‘English as a first language’ speakers or EAL speakers. Academics’ accounts revealed that their previous experiences of ELL played an important role in the linguistic, socio-cultural,

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psychological, intellectual and academic aspects of their lives. Their lives were affected by the view of English as a matter of gaining prestige and status. The quality of the English language education in the country of origin was another factor affecting their lives. These factors caused some to feel the fear of not being able to learn English and the attrition of the proficiency in the mother tongue. The academics' views (except for Paul) showed that "nativeness" is not an important factor which puts them at a disadvantage while communicating; in contrast, being an EAL speaker may be quite an advantage to establish rapport and empathy with the international students they teach. Further language-related issues were associated with familiarity with colloquial language and vocabulary use, expressing emotion, humour and identity in L2, having different cultural expectations about communication and meaning-making/ being (un)able to read between lines. All in all, this paper accounts for the reasons behind the participants' language performance and provides insights into their experiences and encounters in the early part of their transition to the life and university teaching in the UK.

Keywords: EAL (English as an additional language); linguistic experiences; bi/multi-lingual or "international" academics; "nativeness"

1. Bi/multi-lingual academics in UK Higher Education

Despite the considerable visibility of academics from abroad in UK universities, there has been little in-depth research on the mobility and recruitment of such academics and their impact on the internationalisation of British HE (Kim, 2009: 398; Kim & Locke, 2010: 32). There are some studies about academics from English-speaking countries who are assigned to offshore teaching projects (Dunn & Wallace, 2004; Garson, 2005; Gribble & Ziguas, 2003; Poole & Ewan, 2010). There are also some studies about bi/multi-lingual academics' experiences from different aspects in UK HE (Luxon and Peelo, 2009; Trahar, 2011; Pherali, 2012), Australia (Saltmarsh and Swirski, 2010; Green and Myatt, 2011) and the US (Collins, 2008; Alberts, 2008).

As most research studies so far have approached them as a single group under the label "non-native speakers" (NNs), they lacked any further detailing of the particular conditions and settings of that 'group of speakers' and any distinction of different circumstances and characteristics within the group (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). This label includes a negative particle to claim an identity or better a "non-identity" and does not identify any particular characteristic of this group except for the negation of their native speaker condition (Moussu & Llorca, 2008). Secondly, the identity they claim not to have (i.e., native) is a particularly elusive one, as illustrated in extensive discussions by Paikeday (1985), Rampton (1990), Liu (1999), Brutt-Griffler & Samimy (1999), Davies (1991, 2003), and Faez (2012). Moussu & Llorca (2008: 337) summarise the problems of categorising speakers which were taken-for-granted in the previous research as follows:

“No feature, other than birth within a fairly homogenous linguistic community, has been discovered to support the existence of a ‘native speaker’ identity. Ultimately, what appears to be the most distinguishing feature is simply whether one considers herself a native speaker of a given community and is recognized as such by other speakers in the community. A concept that is so elusive to characterize, and which has been so loosely applied to all speakers who would not meet the rather subjective and discriminatory criteria to belong to the ‘native speaker’ category, is prone to suffer from overgeneralization.”

To the best of my knowledge, apart from the studies focusing on the “non-nativeness” of the university staff specifically in TESOL (Bang, 2011; Han, 2008; Holland, 2008; Lee, 2009), an interdisciplinary perspective with an attempt to explore and critically engage with linguistic, professional and intercultural experiences of academics speaking English as an additional language (EAL) from different departments in higher education has not been considered in any studies. I feel the need to go beyond this reductionist labelling (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Braine, 1999, 2004, 2010; Canagarajah, 1999; Davies, 1991, 2003, 2006; Faez, 2011, 2012; Holliday, 2005, 2008; Inbar-Lourie, 2005; Kubota, 2002; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992, 1994; Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Selvi, 2011; Shakouri & Shakouri, 2014) and take considerable discussion about the necessity of the use of terms with caution into account. In this respect, I find using bi/multi-lingual or EAL speakers as the appropriate terms to use. I believe these terms are inclusive and comprehensive enough to acknowledge that it is not a deficiency but an asset to be able to speak it as an additional language. Therefore, while problematising the concept of “nativeness” and linguistic and cultural otherisation, I have explored the linguistic, professional and intercultural experiences of ‘international’ academics from different disciplines of higher education in my Ed.D thesis. Within the scope of this paper are their language-related experiences and challenges; particularly their perceptions of being an EAL speaker in the past and during their current teaching in the UK.

2. Research Questions

In keeping with the aim of exploring the participants’ perspectives about being academics who are speakers of EAL through their linguistic experiences and challenges, the following research question has been addressed in the present study: “What are the academics’ language experiences and attitudes towards “non-native-like” language use as bi/multi-lingual speakers?”

Under the heading of language, further categories are identified as follows:

- Linguistic background;
- Attitudes to “(non)native-like” language use;
- Further concerns about language performance.

3. Methodology

The aim of the study was to explore “international” academics’ language-related experiences and attitudes towards the “(non)native-like” language use as bi/multi-lingual speakers. With this aim, I have undergone a phenomenological research journey as a first-person experience, through which I pondered on the philosophical underpinnings of my study – ontology and epistemology. This was in the sense of European “philosophical” phenomenology (Crotty, 1998; Giorgi, 2000; Barkway, 2001), while exploring my own understanding of the research phenomenon itself as the *object* of my experience. As I explained my choice of methodology in Kani (2017: 48):

“Methodologically, my research is in line with the “new” phenomenological tradition from the North American context, which came to be applied to the study of other people’s experience, and which is reported in the third person. As the new version of phenomenology is suited to my research questions, it has guided my methodological choice.”

As Barkway (2001), Giorgi (2000) and Dowling (2007) noted, the choice between types of phenomenology needs ultimately to be based on the nature of the questions being addressed.

3.1 The Context of the Study

Being one of the well-established universities in the UK, the university in this study is responding to the internationalisation process driven largely by the marketisation discourse that has come to prevail in HE over the past couple of decades (De Vita & Case, 2003: 384-5). As stated in Kani (2017: 48):

“The academics who teach in various disciplines with different years of experience in their field at this university were chosen according to a common point of selection criterion: speaking English as a second or an additional language. The reason why I focused on international staff in different disciplines is that the challenges that international teachers as speakers of EAL face in intercultural contexts may not be exclusive to one field, but common to all disciplines at internationalising universities.”

3.2 Participants

Fifteen academics who are speakers of EAL at an intercultural UK university were interviewed with a semi-structured format. The participants shared their stories and experiences of the phenomenon “being an ‘international’ academic/lecturer”, which contributed to the development of a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges they underwent in terms of language, academia and interculturality. As I gave the details of their profiles in Kani, (2017: 48):

“They mostly had teaching experience both in their country of origin and in the UK, and from a wide range of disciplines, including both hard and soft sciences such as Computer Science, Engineering, Education, Business Studies, Languages, Politics, Law, Sociology. They were from various countries in Western, Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Southern Asia and the Far East. The participants included four women and eleven men.”

To protect the participants’ anonymity, I asked them to use preferred pseudonyms during the study, and to write them on the consent forms at the beginning of the interviews.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were selected for several reasons: First, they are effective in gathering information in a sensitive, flexible and, if required, delicate manner (Mills, 2001). Second, they enable the researcher to make richer and more accurate inferences than close-ended tools of data collection (Pajares, 1992). Third, they are useful for capturing the personal perspectives of interviewees. In this sense, they are *“a valuable way of gaining a description of actions and events especially for events that took place in the past or ones to which you cannot gain observational access”* (Maxwell, 1996: 76). Among the many means of data gathering for the analysis of lived experience -- of which phenomenological study is an obvious type -- van Manen (1997) also favours the interviewing of individuals when gathering their reflective recollections. Therefore, the semi-structured individual interview, as the main tool to gather information, served to explore the EAL speaking academics’ perspectives, understandings and experiences in an in-depth and confidential manner.

3.4 Procedures

As tools for reflexivity on the research process, I utilised the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research (2011) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics and conduct (2009). During my main interviews (after the pilot study) over a period of approximately nine weeks, I drew upon the general interview guide approach which provided a framework which covered the topics and issues in a more systematic and comprehensive way than in the informal conversational interview. I also utilized parts of the standardised open-ended interview which provided a set of predetermined questions. On the one hand, I was mindful to remain conversational and situational in order to increase my participants’ interest and willingness to participate. On the other hand, I was making use of a succinct set of open-ended questions determined in advance. This compensated for the weakness of the general interview guide approach in that it may inadvertently omit the important and salient topics (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, my interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, which gave the participants ample room to discuss the topic. To this end, I utilised some predetermined, guided questions on which I could build more questions during the interview (Erlandson et al., 1993). For example, I

prepared an outline of topics and issues prior to the interview. For example, as a warm-up question at the beginning of the interview, I said “*Tell me anything about yourself beginning from your birth and educational years till today*”. The key themes involved a timeline of their lives with a focus on, but not limited to, their linguistic, intercultural and professional experiences.

After opening the interview with the general question about their background, I remained fairly conversational and informal, similar to the informational conversation interview. Through the accounts of their educational and professional years, I pointed out certain moments where they made important decisions such as their transition to the UK and, where appropriate and relevant, I asked my open-ended questions within the stream of the conversation. These questions facilitated organization and helped with post-interview analysis. However, I adhered to them with flexibility in terms of their sequence and in line with the naturalness of creating questions and answers.

In designing these interviews, I also drew keenly on the principles of narrative research to deeply engage with the individual academic’s interaction with the workplace and their interpretation of their own experience. Loftus and Higgs (2010: 377) argue that phenomenology and narrative research can be combined to allow research to engage with the individual’s subjective experience and explore the relationships between individuals and their practice environment.

3.5 Explicitation of the data

Hycner (as cited in Groenewald, 2004) warns researchers that the term “analysis” usually means a “breaking into parts” and hence often a loss of the whole phenomenon, and that this has dangerous implications for phenomenology. Instead, Hycner uses “explicitation”, which implies an “*investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole*” (ibid.), as a way of transforming data through interpretation. I, therefore, used this term by taking on the holistic sense it carries and followed the guidelines that Hycner (as cited in ibid.) suggested for the explicitation process, which has five “steps” or phases:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
2. Delineating units of meaning.
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
4. Summarising each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

In the following section, I will discuss the research findings regarding the international academics’ experiences and perceptions in their role as a teacher in the different higher education departments, along with their challenges and concerns as speakers of EAL.

4. Findings

The present study gives important evidence about how the participants view the concept of “non-native English speakers (NNES)” and how they perceive themselves in intercultural encounters as an EAL speaker. In this sense, it will provide insights into their positioning of the self in the intercultural teaching context of being a UK university lecturer. First, their views on English language learning (ELL) experiences and in parallel to that the use of their mother tongue will be explored through their linguistic background. This will help understand how their attitudes and previous language experiences affect their perceptions of being an EAL speaker and interactions with people. This will be followed by a discussion of their attitudes towards “(non)native-like” language use and their views on the NES-NNES distinction, which also reveals how they see their own positions as “international” teachers who are speakers of EAL. Lastly, expressing their views on ELL experiences, I will elucidate the problems which impacted their use of language and ways of communication with other people, and their teaching among a mixed group of students from different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds like themselves. These people included students, staff and local people, be they English as a first language speakers or EAL speakers.

4.1 Linguistic background

Academics’ accounts revealed that their previous experiences of ELL played an important role in the linguistic, socio-cultural, psychological, intellectual and academic aspects of their lives. Their lives were affected by the view of English as a matter of gaining prestige and status. The quality of the English language education in the country of origin was another factor affecting their lives. These factors caused some to feel the fear of not being able to learn English and the attrition of the proficiency in the mother tongue.

For Samir, who was from a former British colony, ELL was a matter of gaining prestige and status in the “home” country. He offered the following observation about his family, society and his ELL experiences:

“It is an official language; rather, we can say mostly educated people and people who have had higher education would know English. Considering my background I was born in a big city, and I had a middle class family. My mother was a lecturer etc. I should have known English better, but I don’t because my parents thought that the children should be sent to local language school because it is blah blah.”

He chalked his parents’ preference of not sending him to an English-medium school up to political and social ideas of that time which, he found, was “a mistake”. As he went to a vernacular language school, which he thought was “absolutely useless”, he said that he still did not have a good grasp of English and that if he had gone to an English medium school, it would have been better. In his local community, he

recounted that there was only one more person who was not going to the English medium school, and that was his older sister. Thus, he started ELL at the age of eleven with a grammar-based system. He said that he was always afraid of not being able to learn English, which most people doing his career do not speak as their mother tongue. He added that it is the language of colonial powers, and that the rich and the affluent or privileged can speak English, while the people who cannot speak English have a lower social status. *“That’s why people are afraid of English”*, he concluded, and stated that he shared a general feeling echoed by most people in his country:

“You are the poor guy or you get identified as somebody who is not that smart and not that affluent not that respectable, but if you are afraid of something, when you are trying to learn something and you are afraid of not being able to learn, then you are not going to be able to learn it. Then it just kills your ability to learn and the way it is perceived is also the way it is taught. Also it is ingrained in the teachers in the other students in society that one has to be able to speak in English if you want to be part of a social circle then it becomes a kind of very important criteria, and it tests you all the time so it becomes very difficult to learn the subject, learn the language especially and so then I was always afraid as 95-97% of the population is in my country.”

After he did his ten years of schooling, he finished his A-levels, Bachelors and Masters all in English-medium schools. However, even then he said he could barely ask a question, and not really communicate much. He did not have many friends with whom he would have to speak in English. After finishing his master’s degree, he started teaching, and this is actually when he believed he learnt how to speak in English. His level of language proficiency affected the way he taught and communicated with his students, who had all sorts of accents around the world, as he reveals in the next section 4.2.

Samir went on to explain that because of the status of English in his home country, the extent of language proficiency affected the strata of the people in the society, and this led to the fear of not being able to learn English, and consequently having a lower status in the society. Koz and Saroj, who were also from former British colonies like Samir, also referred to how English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in schools affected their ELL. Koz said that EMI was a factor behind *“how he could speak English well, maybe with an accent”*. For Saroj, who had similar conditions as Koz’s with reference to getting education through EMI in a colonised country, there was a relation between intellectual development and language use. As he stated: *“When you go to the university, people talk in English, and English determines their thinking and affects their intelligence”*. Ray (2013: 53-4) seemed to support what Saroj said when he stated, *“Your language is the mirror of your brain, and language patterns determine your thinking”*. Like Samir, Saroj also mentioned that well-educated people are the people who are supposed to learn English and that this perpetuates the spread of English among the same class of people, while also giving English the status as the language of science.

Learning English was seen as a matter of gaining prestige and status in the “home” countries. For the participants who all went to English-medium schools, Koz, Saroj and Samir (after ten years of schooling during his A-levels, bachelor’s and master’s). This resulted in the fear of not being able to learn English and the feeling of insecurity and inferiority. They revealed how their ELL experiences affected their psychological state, because the knowledge of English was seen as an important advantage in the world of scientific and intellectual developments. Furthermore, Saroj also mentioned that these developments in the spread of English meant that their intellectual lives were shaped by English as well. The effects of these fears and psychological pressures on them about “*not being able to learn it and being labelled as a pauper or a second-class citizen or a less intelligent person*” continue even until today, when their previous experiences have still affected their proficiency in their mother tongue and their way of thinking in L1.

The special status attributed to English also affected their socio-cultural and academic lives because it caused attrition in the proficiency of their mother tongue. For example, Saroj described how he travelled to an English-speaking country in his childhood, and after returning to his own country as an adolescent, he could only pass exams in his mother tongue by getting private courses about his own language. Later he went to EMI schools through all his education life and, due to the status of English among the society, he said “*over time it got more and more English*” among family members, and he came to a stage where he could just speak a few words and phrases in his mother tongue. He said that he liked to talk to his mother in his mother tongue now, as much as he could. This was a source of regret that he alluded to in his accounts when I asked him if he found learning subjects in English easier than learning in his mother tongue:

“I don’t even know. Probably not- no because I learnt everything in English- Geography, History, Physics, Chemistry Biology etc. It was the first medium. I learnt J (his own mother tongue) as a second language, and I was never that good at it, and then we went to England when I was quite young for 4 years, and then I further forgot J language. The only real language I know is English, so, is that good?”

After my email contact asking him to clarify the quote from his interview, during which he seemed thoughtful and unsure, he agreed with my interpretation that he was not sure about whether he found learning subjects in English easier or whether learning them in his mother tongue would have made a difference, because he did not have the choice to study in both languages and see the difference. The point was not about the language, but about the obligation of learning it as the first medium or the maximum exposure to English. He meant that if it had been another language, then his learning would have been in that language, complementing to his previous quote about the fact that language affects your thinking and intelligence. He further mentioned during the interview that having grown up with all the native languages as the mishmash of colours, he ended up with speaking none of them properly, or as proper as English. He

did not have the right to education in his mother tongue as he was obliged to learn, use and live with English as a postcolonial language. This led him to shape his academic and daily life in English in accordance with the importance attributed to this language from the society. Exemplifying the attrition of his mother tongue from his linguistic experiences, he talked about the other side of the coin where the pragmatic spread of English results in the decay of native languages:

“It helps in practical world, but clearly it is leading to decay in native languages. However, native languages are great. They are also continuing because they are really old, historical, strong and spectacular with 50-60 million people speaking it just like German or French you know by a lot of people.”

Supporting Saroj’s point about the effect of the maximum exposure to English on the mother tongue, another lecturer, Anna, who has been living in the UK for a long time, also made reference to the attrition in her mother tongue. She started her academic career in the UK and she had some concerns about using her mother tongue in academic contexts where it is used rather than English:

“Now I’m really concerned when I give presentation in D (her language) if I go to a D conference where they expect to be fluent in D, but I’m not that fluent anymore because especially I don’t use my academic D so that’s probably more becoming a concern with time here than in D context. I’m here for years. How things work, how people relate to each other, working relationships, academic processes you know I have worked as an academic in the UK- that’s where I am home as an academic (Italics indicate emphasised speech).”

It can be concluded from her words that whatever the language she built her career in is, it is that language that makes her feel like at home in academia, and this language is English, rather than her mother tongue. Therefore, the attrition in her mother tongue in academic contexts, even if not in daily life, makes a difference in her sense of attachment and belonging to a specific context regarding her profession. Speaking, acting and thinking by means of English is so strong that she thought being good at a language means being at home. Since she had her son, she has started to speak D (her mother tongue) now at home, which made her think more about the language because she switched and worked more on that. She said that she knew she dreamt in English and considered English as her main language now. Also, as she only read and wrote in English for publications, she thought she would find it a real struggle to publish in D because her academic thinking was English, and since she switched and only spoke D at home, it felt like a translation act both ways. Even if she could still speak D in daily life well in contrast to Saroj, she could feel the constraints of the lack of academic terminology and knowledge in her mother tongue in her academic career, which also shows the language she based her intellectual development on was English. It can be concluded from both Saroj’s and Anna’s accounts that as the language one

speaks and one's thought system are related to each other, the boundaries of intellectual capacity is affected from the conceptual frameworks within that language which also builds on the new developments in the cognitive, social and cultural life.

Julia, Sylvia, Anna, Paul, Joe and Omar made reference to the quality of language education which affected their educational lives in different directions and their teaching lives afterwards. Julia, Anna and Sylvia were content with the language teaching, while Paul was not so content and went to a private English school in England because he realised that he would not be able to talk properly in English. Making a critique of her own context in terms of the status of English, Julia suggested her nationals are quite keen to show off their English language ability, even if it is not always that good.

It was obvious that the status of English and the quality of language education at home affected their performance in communication with people in the UK. The poor language education system that Joe experienced, and the exceptionally well-planned language education that Omar received were influential in their transition to the UK, as well as on their intercultural experiences at their work places and daily lives. There was a clear emphasis in the accounts of ELL which affected their linguistic background and led some of them (Joe, Paul) to seek ways to improve English through their own efforts. Samir, Joe, Paul, Ali, Lim and Silvan were obviously more disadvantaged than the rest as they had to struggle with the language barrier due to the education systems in their home countries, and overcame this barrier through taking extra language courses or by throwing themselves into real life situations while they worked as academics. Similar to Koz, Samir and Saroj, the others also showed how English was perceived as a language that is accepted as important to learn in their countries.

More details about how they approach the use of English as an "international" language will be provided in the next section, which reveals their attitudes to native and non-native-like use of English and the positioning of their own language use.

4.2 Attitudes to "(non)native-like" language use

The academics' views on the dichotomy of "native/non-native English speakers" -- which puts native teachers at a more advantageous position -- and their awareness of the use of English at an international level (World Englishes) were explored in an attempt to indicate how they position themselves as bi/multi-lingual speakers of English. Therefore, international academics revealed their views of English used by "non-native speakers"; in other words, their attitudes towards the influence of "(non-)nativeness" on the use of English (for example; whether they regarded (non)native-like English accent as a(n) (dis)advantage, how they approached the process of getting used to accent differences and how they perceived (non-)native language teachers as a learner of English) and, lastly, their perceptions about the position of English as an international language.

The first point of view about the use of English as an additional language was related to their views regarding accents; for example, whether they see accent as "normal" or even as an advantage among "NNEs". Secondly, the focus was on

whether accent is an obstacle for communication and intelligibility or not in their teaching lives. Therefore, the former point deals with their beliefs and assumptions, whereas the latter is about their actual practice and performance. In this sense, their perceptions on speaking English with an accent and their actual performance will be clarified below.

Academics who made it obvious in their ELL experiences that it was a matter of prestige to be able to speak English well, had different views of speaking with or without an accent as an indicator of “(non-)nativeness”. Namely, Koz, Samir and Saroj, who were from a sociocultural and political context which regarded English language proficiency as having a high status in the post-colonial society, were proud of being able to speak English well. This was the case no matter how painful the process of learning may have been for Samir and caused Saroj to fall behind in speaking his own mother tongue which is the local language of his home country. First, Samir was critically aware of the pressures that were produced in people’s lives from the psychological and social aspects as an insider of the same system, and he saw his accent as a variety among many and an advantage to be able to understand and associate himself with his students or people from different backgrounds. However, he still found it difficult to get used to different accents in his class and to sound sufficiently intelligible with his own accent to his students despite his communication with people having different accents back in his home country as understood from his words:

“We always had a house, with people from various social strata, various religions and the rich and the poor of various kinds so, it is probably easier for me to mix, but still it is not that easy then you come over here and you have a class half full of Chinese. You know first you have got to accept that you have an accent right?”

During the stream of conversation, while the topic was not about accents, Koz emphasised his accent as something which would be better if he does not have it on the top of his good level of proficiency as he said: *“I could speak English well, maybe with an accent”*. It seems the assumption that “nativeness” should be the ideal level and accent to be achieved still lingers on in their minds, as revealed from Samir’s and Koz’s accounts. However, having a good grasp of the language also outweighed having a native-like accent. Even if Samir found “non-nativeness” as an advantage in terms of having a sense of relatedness with students in the intercultural context of the university, he experienced the difficulty of sounding sufficiently intelligible and the process of getting used to the accents of other students.

Lim also recounted his experiences related to communication with international people and asserted that having a native-like accent is not enough to be able to communicate if a person has never been exposed to different accents and varieties of English use. In this sense he claimed that speakers of EAL are at an advantage more so than the monolingual speakers of English:

“For foreigners I think it’s much easier to understand each other internationally. Once I went to a research institute in Japan and during my doctorate level in M we all had international professors and visitors accompanying them for a few days. We had no problems to understand each other in Japan, but the first day I arrived in England the secretary came to me to do something. It was very embarrassing- I could fully understand what she said but she had problems to understand what I’m saying. Later on I realised while communicating with international students or NNEs people, they all think, guessing, paying particular attention to what you’re thinking and follow your lead. But NNEs never think it. They just listen. If the pronunciation is very different to them they just use their ears and follow the sound but don’t look at you and follow what you are saying.”

He mentioned a strategy he used in teaching both international and British students to make up for any chances of gaps in communication due to his accent:

“If there are more international students, teaching is easier. If they are all English, just remind them to think to follow rather than just listen. Before every module starts, I tell them “Listen hard and stop me when necessary” because of my accent.”

After working in different districts within the UK, Anna was also aware of language differences, and she talked about her observations concerning different accents in the UK:

“Irish accent is clear and easy for D people (like herself) unless you come from the countryside. However, British accent just sounds quite artificial compared to the accent of international students. The intonation going up and down all the time - can you pass me the butter please? (imitating). Nobody really talks like the queen or the ‘proper’ British English today. International students don’t speak British English. They slightly have a tendency to do an American accent- it is a neutralised way of speaking in English that all the others can understand, and you get an ear for the Spanish, French and Italian strong accent- all the different ways of how people pronounce English- this kind of international experience really teaches you to be able to listen to a wide range of versions of Englishes and try to find a common language amongst that- if you live in the country, you have to get used to localism and that can be much more challenging because there is no book that tells you about it. No way that you can read up on it. There is much higher English in City K than in City Z with a working class, so class is very strong in the UK, and you can hear that in the language.”

Like Lim, she highlighted the importance of getting used to different uses of English both within and outside the UK, and regarded this experience really as being important for communication rather than having a native-like standard British accent. She also shared her thoughts about her pronunciation:

"I think twice when I pronounce something I know. Even though I mispronounce things and students know I mispronounce them, they know what I mean. If I need a very specific word, it doesn't come to me, I do think. It actually happens in your language as well."

Joe and Saroj also supported Anna's views in the sense that having a non-native-like accent is natural and that communication is important. When Joe first came to the UK, pronunciation and listening were really hard for him. He always taught English students, so he thought that his English was okay now after many years of teaching in the UK. He always asked them if they were not sure because when he said something and wanted a response, he sometimes did not know how to spell and he just used the strategy of *"Ok I am a foreigner so I am allowed to make mistakes, so just ask me"* and he said: *"They don't mind."*

Sylvia also changed her attitude towards her use of English and gained confidence after being one of a few people who had an A grade in a very intensive teaching certificate programme, though at the beginning she was really worried if she would be good enough because she was the only non-native speaker in the group. She felt she had something to offer as she could understand those learners from a similar language and cultural background like herself. She even suggested that her accent could be singled out as advantageous in such an international place, as she related:

"Are they a problem to make mistakes and to be a non-native English speaker (NNES)? We haven't felt this as a problem in the classroom and sometimes being NNESs, some people find it easier to understand than a native speaker because I don't have a local- well I have my own accent of course in my English but- this is what sometimes seems to be the case that NNESs find it easier to understand other NNES rather than English people, who I suppose might use more idioms and contractions and speak less clear and faster."

Another lecturer, Bobo, who regarded "non-nativeness" "as an extra thing to take into account" until having a good level of proficiency, also put more emphasis on language proficiency and good expression, accepting different accents as natural while stating his experience of language use as an EAL speaker: *"Of course you may come across all sorts of accents. That is another issue if you are able to say the things that you want to say in another language."* He used to teach in English as well in A (his home country) in the last few years. Then he picked up some pace when he was a student in the university and reached "a kind of normal level" in his words when he was in the UK, so he did not have language concerns.

Whereas Ali emphasised intelligibility and the appropriate use of language according to the needs of the students rather than "nativeness", and found ways to express himself as clearly as possible while improving his listening comprehension, for Paul, "nativeness" on behalf of the language teacher was very important. He said his preference was "of course" English speakers, meaning speakers of English as a first language or at least someone who does not speak his mother tongue as he thought the classroom language should be only English and even he said: *"for that you need to be*

forced to speak in English and you should avoid Gs (his nationals) at that moment". Samir, looking from a different perspective from Paul's, leaned towards a "native" speaker as a language learner, but his criterion was not related to the "nativeness". Rather, he explained that from his ELL experience, he preferred native teachers as he saw they emphasised fluency over accuracy in their evaluation of the proficiency of students in the class, in contrast to NNESTs who emphasised correction over fluency in their classrooms. Therefore, like Ali, he highlighted the characteristics of the teacher, such as teaching styles or pedagogical preferences rather than "nativeness".

Sylvia said she really welcomed the way that Englishes in plural are being conceptualised increasingly by accepting that there are different ways of talking. As she mentioned:

"There is not one way of using English, and considering that there are more people who use it as a non-native language or who use it as an official language which may be their second language to their mother language."

The academics' views (except for Paul) show that "nativeness" is not an important factor which puts them at a disadvantage while communicating; in contrast, being an EAL speaker may be quite an advantage to establish rapport and empathy with the international students they teach. This is obvious reflected in the accounts of Samir, Sylvia, Ali, Koz, Lim, Anna, Bobo and Sara, who all gave importance to the intelligibility, communication, clear expression, a good level of proficiency, fluency, effective teaching and the accommodation of student needs over "nativeness", "native-like" accent or correctness. When it comes to their views on the position of English, as a reflection of their role in the use of English as an international language, some of them (Joe, Julia, Sylvia, Yusuf and Saroj) offered their observations regarding how, on the one hand, English is owned by the people in the world as a result of strategic planning or economic reasons, while leading to the loss of other languages, on the other hand. Sylvia, Sara and Samir mentioned how they thought that the international community speaks English well or sufficiently well to be able to communicate, and they welcomed the way that Englishes in plural are conceptualised and questioned the idea of "*one type of correct or standard English*". Joe, Anna, Julia, and Saroj gave examples of how English became a dominant and economically the most important language from their home countries and affected the language of the science, film, music and advertisement industries, and they also accepted English as an obligation to learn for practical purposes. Saroj and Anna had concerns about the attrition of their mother tongues, while Yusuf viewed it as "*a well-deserved and natural situation*" for the inner-circle English-speaking countries due to their strategic planning and economy.

4.3 Further concerns about language performance

Academics had further concerns about their language performance which impacted their communication with students, colleagues and local people. These issues were associated with familiarity with colloquial language and vocabulary use, expressing

emotion, humour and identity in L2, having different cultural expectations about communication and meaning-making/ being (un)able to read between lines.

Regarding the use of colloquial language among students, Paul and Ali felt that there was a barrier in their informal conversation with students. Anna told an anecdote about a gap of communication when she was less confident with her language proficiency in her initial years of teaching:

“When I was a PhD student in X University, I started to teach British students on the undergraduate level. In that class we had a lot of students from countryside and farmer boys, and their slangs were just incredible, and I know I had to ask three times to get what he was talking about and I just really didn’t know, and then I have just made up what I thought he said, but it wasn’t, so that was quite embarrassing in this sense. That example sticks to my mind.”

The second issue was related to expressing emotion, humour and identity in L2. Moving beyond the classroom atmosphere, some academics shared their reservations about using the subtleties of the English language to communicate emotion and humour, as Sylvia identified with the following issues:

“I can always do serious conversations because my English is quite good, but I can’t do fun in English. To joke with English people is really really difficult or in a shop if somebody makes a laugh to say something witty back I still can’t do it, sometimes I just: “Hehehe and walk (role-playing her situation when she pretends to have understood the joke and joins others’ laughing)”. Then maybe half an hour later.. so that’s the thing I felt and then I’m still having quite a lot about this fun because I can’t do this kind of and this is what makes life really nice if you can have a quick humour in encounters with people whom you don’t know.”

She added some more observations about having different cultural expectations about communication, and she expressed what she found as different from her lifestyle and ways of communication in Y (her home country), and how these differences affected her feelings in the process of communication:

“I think it is about just getting used to a different system, different ways of doing things, different foods and shops. Even if I don’t come from a long away and we share a lot of things, when I meet someone in Y (her country), we always shake hands with somebody’s hand. Here sometimes I’d like to shake their hands and then I think I know they don’t do it here so I don’t. These are very small things and not a problem but sometimes somehow you feel like it’s not complete like that.”

The other thing Sylvia was not so sure about was that she could not read what was going on in the street if she walked in a street, heard some noises and looked around to know what was going on exactly:

"I think I know whether it is dangerous or not or maybe not exactly, but I think I know whether it is "oh not dangerous or dangerous I need to run", but here sometimes I really don't know. Are they going to beat up someone or are they going to call somebody else for help or are they just making fun of each other and is that just humour? I can't judge the situation, but that's just things that other people must have as well as me."

She related the reason why she found this difficult to 'the drinking culture' and to different expectations people have when they go out like most participants:

In this country, to be honest, people drink so much, and then I don't know what happens. Some people go out and expect to blow and be violent somehow; some people don't of course- maybe they want to get away from their routine lives. You have to have this tolerance of not knowing exactly what's going on and just don't shake hands kiss or hug if you're not sure- don't think.

Bobo also illustrated cultural differences he explored from a few English friends who struck him as kind and polite to him, and they seemed to have very peculiar conception of life which is very different from the one in his country. He found it very show-like, like a TV show as he thought people were pretending to be polite all the time and they behaved differently in the UK. He said that he paid attention to using more polite forms in his communication in the UK: *"You show more respect for basic situations and circumstances. In different contexts you can say the same things but you have to use different wordings. I take a softer approach to say the same things."*

As another extract regarding the different cultural expectations about communication, Koz, coming from a context where 'the lecturer was the boss', recounted his memory with a professor as a surprise for him during his student years in the UK:

"I remember seeing one very important professor you know the guy saw me on the road 'Hello Koz'. I was shocked. I wasn't used to saying hello to you, a big Professor. You know I did see him he walked up to me and said: "How are you?""

He said in his country the younger one has to greet the lecturer *"because he is your superior, not him greeting you"* and he found it good that there is no gap between students and him. As he concluded: *"We are all human beings. We are all people."*

For Julia, it was difficult to be able to read between the lines and make meaning during communication. This was similar to the memories that Sylvia narrated. Explaining why sometimes she found teaching international students easier, Julia identified her worry about finding new answers out of tricky statements that are "very British" as she related:

"I find it quite tricky sometimes to read between the lines, and it is a very British thing you know. I am still learning it now after 10 years. You think that's not what they mean. When they are saying this, they actually mean that, and that is still very very tricky, and you just miss out on a lot of cues."

She exemplified from her experience in different occasions:

“An obvious example is that British people say that is very interesting. What they mean is “I’m not interested in it at all. This is just a stupid idea”. Basically, ‘they are interesting’ means ‘stupid idea’ you know generally. Another thing like that you know, I can be in a meeting and I think I would always, in B (her country) you just say if things are not going well, we should do this or change that and you discuss that in a meeting and here in the UK they are still having that meeting and people are going ‘blah blah blah’ and everybody talks and very nice and maybe yes we should do that and that might be an idea oh yeah and then they all go away and that was a stupid meeting you know and they would all start talking about how they are not going to do this and how his ideas are rubbish and you know, why didn’t you say that in the meeting? I would be at the meeting and I would say what I was hoping you know and everybody would go away and say, no, no. I still find it quite difficult to still read between the lines and I find it quite difficult in terms of identity.”

She also highlighted the difficulty in expressing her sense of identity in the English language, and she said that when she arrived in the UK, she had to carve out her own identity again because in her country, she was quite a vibrant kind of person talking in a vibrant style, whereas in English she felt that she could not do this because she does not have the vocabulary that is needed. As she explained:

“I didn’t have the vocabulary at least that is needed to be vibrant in the ways in which you use language. You know the little twinkles to make a language interesting. I can speak English, but it is on a good conversational level, not ok as for a sense of humour. I like the English sense of humour, and I think I am good enough to understand it, but to use it is a different matter. You become more subtle and you learn different ways of saying things in time but yeah I find that people in the UK are all very serious for instance. I am not a serious person at all, but initially they said you know she is really serious and I thought ‘Me? I don’t think so’ but it is just the way in which they saw me because I was using the language in a particular way.”

It can be understood from Julia’s accounts that languages are important in how people shape their identities which are formed in the subtleties of languages, and that this is a barrier for some people, as is reflected in Sylvia’s and Julia’s extracts. As language usage plays a crucial role in a speaker's involvement in social interactions, and particularly in teaching, the language performance of teachers whose first language is not the language they use in teaching and daily life varies immensely according to their individual differences. To understand such possible differences in their language use, firstly I looked at the linguistic backgrounds of the participants from different parts of the world. Another important issue was related to an understanding and an appreciation of the types of English used in higher education by the academics, regardless of the language variety they speak or the context in which they teach. The

perspectives of university teachers about English used by EAL speakers around the world (World Englishes) also showed their approach to their use of English while teaching home and international students or establishing relationships with the staff. This section also became useful for accounting for the reasons behind the participants' language performance and for making sense of experiences and encounters in the early part of their transition to the life and university teaching in the UK.

5. Discussion

The key findings regarding the participants' language experiences and attitudes towards "non-native-like" language use as bi-multi-lingual speakers are discussed as follows:

A. Being an EAL speaker or a "loser": English as a post-colonial language – ELL experiences were influential on the participants' linguistic, sociocultural, psychological, intellectual and academic lives, and English as a post-colonial language had deep effects on individuals' way of thinking and living in diverse ways. This was the case not only for participants from a former British-colonised country but also for the rest of the academics from Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The quality and the system of language education differed in their countries of origin, in accordance with the emphasis attached to the status of English. This also affected their English proficiency and attitudes towards the use of English as a medium of building a career in academia and gaining status in the society. While all the academics gave evidence of how English was perceived as a language that is important to learn in their countries, this importance and the priority of English given over other languages resulted in some tensions within their intellectual and psychological worlds. For example, its prevalence has been evident in the education systems in which English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is adopted at the expense of other native languages, and in academia in which scientific and intellectual developments are promoted in English. This caused a fear of not being able to learn English, the feeling of insecurity and inferiority and the attrition in the mother tongues both in the academic and sociocultural lives of some participants, as evidenced in their accounts in 4.1. The effects of these fears and psychological pressures on them about "*not being able to learn it and being labelled as a pauper or a second-class citizen or a less intelligent person*", have continued for years -- even until now -- in terms of the proficiency in their mother tongue and their way of thinking in L1. The prolonged maximum exposure to English caused first-language attrition in their daily lives. This also became the reason for feeling a sense of belonging to the place where English is spoken and being home for some academics. Their accounts were important to show that the language one speaks and his/her thought system are related to each other (Ray, 2013; Vygotsky, 1962; Whorf, 1971), and that the boundaries of intellectual capacity are affected from the conceptual frameworks within that language which also builds on the new developments in the cognitive, social and cultural life. Their ELL experiences also revealed that the role and status of English were prioritised in their countries to the extent that English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; 2009)

continues to prevail as neo-imperialism, as a result of which *“the assumptions that English is the language of the privileged and the language of the science or that it is easy to learn”* are promoted and taken for granted.

B. The influence of “nativeness” on the use of English – The second key finding concerns the participants’ attitudes towards the dichotomy of “native/non-native English speakers”. As detailed in 4.2, most of the participants viewed the features attributed to “non-nativeness” such as accent, natural and normal. They gave importance to the intelligibility, communication, clear expression, a good level of proficiency, fluency, effective teaching and the accommodation of student needs, rather than “nativeness”, “native-like” accent or correctness. A majority of them also suggested that speakers of EAL have advantages over monolingual speakers of English in that they are experienced in listening to the varieties of language use. This seemed to indicate that the process of getting used to different uses of English both within and outside the UK is important for communication rather than simply having a native-like standard British accent. As a result, they disagree with the assumption that “NES” are privileged over the “NNES”, suggesting that the use of the terms “NNES and NES” are discriminatory, because a non-element is attributed to EAL speakers as “others”. The findings from the participants’ accounts about the use of terms like NES and NNES are in parallel to the discussion in the literature. In section 2, I discussed why these terms are problematic, and why it is important to approach terms (like ESL, EFL, ELF etc.) with caution by considering whether or not these terms are appropriate to use by those inside the Periphery’s social and cultural context (Holliday, 2009; Phillipson, 2007; 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). While most of the participants viewed this concept from such a critical perspective, a few of them were under the influence of the taken-for-granted assumptions that the status of English as a “coordinating” language among others is natural.

C. Further concerns about language performance – This third sub-theme was related to the challenges that the EAL speaking academics had while communicating with their students, colleagues or local people -- such as familiarity with colloquial language and vocabulary use, expressing emotion, humour and identity in L2, having different cultural expectations about (non-)verbal communication and meaning-making/ being (un)able to read between lines. While some of these concerns such as comprehension, the knowledge of vocabulary, and the expression of emotions, were also revealed in a study on the “NNES” (EAL speaking) teaching assistants’ experiences in the classroom (Han, 2008), the issues related to identity and meaning-making were emerging themes. As detailed in section 4.3, exemplifying these concerns from the lecturer’s lived experience, the lack of vocabulary that is needed to be as vibrant person as one can be in his/her own language constrained some academics to express their senses of identity in English. In addition to the impact of the language on thinking and intellectual development as explored from the accounts of participants like Samir, Saroj, Koz and Anna about their linguistic experiences, the findings of this study supported the view that the language used also has an important role in how people shape their identities which are formed in the subtleties of languages.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study are parallel to some findings of the previous studies on international academics, as can be seen as follows:

A. My findings different from others

- The effect of previous language learning experiences.
- The quality of the English language education and the attrition of the proficiency in the mother tongue on the linguistic, socio-cultural, psychological, intellectual and academic aspects of their lives: Being an EAL speaker or a “loser”.
- Further concerns about language performance: familiarity with colloquial language and vocabulary use, expressing emotion, humour and identity in L2, having different cultural expectations about communication and meaning-making/ being (un)able to read between lines.

B. Similarities between this study and others

- The advantages of being an IA: “Foreignness” as a teaching resource, exposing students to a different perspective (Alberts, 2008); utilizing their non-native status as a positive source in teaching (Lee, 2009), the reward of the experience of teaching abroad (Dunn and Wallace, 2004; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010).
- Being exposed to different accents and varieties of English use (Lee, 2009).
- Concerns about understanding students’ accents and being understandable to them; expressing themselves in the way they wanted (Han, 2008; Bang, 2011; Huang, 2009; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010; Luxon & Peelo, 2009), ideological influences on beliefs and attitudes toward English language education (Han, 2008; Bang, 2011; Huang, 2009).

C. The additional findings of key studies

- Discriminatory hiring practices; issues of credibility; preferences for NES teachers (Lee, 2009).
- Finding culturally appropriate ways to ask for and receive critical evaluative feedback from the off-shore students and tutors. (Gribble & Ziguas, 2003; Dunn & Wallace, 2004).

Considering the paucity of research on the lived experiences of “international” academics and on EAL speaking academics’ experiences, the present study makes a useful contribution to the literature about speakers of EAL within the internationalising UK higher education context. Moreover, beyond revealing the decentred voices of EAL speaking academics who are positioned as “international” and “NNES” in this study, the findings of this study also suggest that those who are supposed to be in the centre position have to value the uncertainty and complexity of voices by making “the familiar” strange- which is to put aside established descriptions, seek a broader picture and look for the hidden and the unexpressed- rather than rendering the voices in the imagined periphery invisible. This aim underpinning the present study is also crucial for those in the centre in relation to power if they are going to appreciate the deep sense of not being heard in the face of a profound inequality of who is defining whom. It is also important if they are going to restrain themselves from defining, categorising, and

imagining the one other than the self so that this “one” can find space to claim the world in his/her own terms. Through this study, I explored the position of this “one” which was largely unsaid and invisible; i.e., the unsaid position of EAL speaking academics, by locating and consciously putting aside established descriptions and labels.

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