

# **Examining attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs: a comparison of a thematic vs. an appraisal analysis**

## **Abstract**

This paper evolves from research on students' attitudes towards their native and non-native English language teachers (NESTs vs. NNESTs). It discusses the language that students use when commenting on their teachers. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics Appraisal theory, it examines a set of essays written by 19 Japanese high school students attending an ESL program in the United States. Using the Appraisal framework, the paper presents the linguistic resources used by the students when evaluating their NESTs and NNESTs, and compares this approach with previously used thematic analysis of the same data. The Appraisal analysis is shown to present a much more detailed picture of the students' attitudes than the thematic analysis did.

## **Introduction**

Over the last decade we have seen a shift in the nature of work on non-native English speakers in TESOL (NNESTs). This work has moved away from a deficit model where NNESTs were compared to NESTs (native English speakers in TESOL) in terms of their language background and found to be mostly lacking. Instead, the new work on NNESTs looks at the strengths that these teachers bring to the profession. This work has focussed on different aspects of the TESOL profession, e.g. auto-ethnographies (Braine 1999), professional strengths (Medgyes 2001), program administration (Mahboob et al. 2004), teacher development (Pasternak & Bailey 2004), and perceptions of NNESTs (Mahboob 2004, Moussu 2006) etc. This last thread of work includes self-, students', and teachers' perceptions of NNESTs and it is our review of this work that has led to the current project.

Recent research on attitudes towards NNESTs, not unlike other work on attitudes towards languages or speakers of particular languages/dialects, has used surveys (Benke & Medgyes 2005, Lasagabaster & Sierra 2005) and/or qualitative data that focussed on emerging themes/content (Mahboob 2004, Mahboob & Griffin 2006). While survey data provide a statistical analysis of participants' attitudes (based on a predetermined set of comments and/or criteria), the qualitative data document participants' attitudes in terms of the categories of comments that

emerge from the data. However, missing from this literature is an analysis of the actual language used to comment on NESTs and NNESTs in interview and other qualitative data. The results of the current studies that do look at qualitative data are presented in terms of categories of comments that were recorded in favour of or against teachers' native-speaker status. The actual discourse of evaluation is not analysed. It is our contention that an analysis of students' language of appraisal will add to the richness of our understanding of perceptions. It is, therefore, the goal of the present study to re-examine a set of previously analysed data (Mahboob and Griffin 2006) on attitudes towards NNESTs and to see if a language-based analysis presents a different picture of the data as compared to a thematic analysis. Thus, the purpose of the current paper is to evaluate two approaches to studying attitudes towards NNESTs: a thematic approach (using the Grounded Approach) and a linguistic analysis (using the Appraisal Framework). An understanding of the specific attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs, although presented in this paper, is not the primary goal of this study.

The two specific questions that will be examined in this paper are:

- What linguistic resources do students use when they evaluate NESTs and NNESTs?
- How does a linguistic analysis of the data compare with a thematic analysis of the same data?

In investigating these questions, we will first describe the source of the data used in this study. This will be followed by a description of the Appraisal framework as it is used in this study and the results that we received based on this framework. The results will then be discussed in relation to the questions that we seek to address before we conclude the paper by sharing some of the key findings of this study.

## **Background and methodology**

The data for this project come from essays written by 19 Japanese high school students attending a 4-month ESL orientation program at the beginning of a year-long study abroad program in the United States. The program was taught by two TESOL professionals: one an NEST and another an NNEST. Program participants were asked to write a diagnostic essay at the beginning and end of the program on the topic:

Some students think that only native speakers can be good language teachers. Others think that non-natives can also be efficient teachers. What is your opinion about this issue. Please feel free to provide details and examples.

These essays were collected by Mahboob and Griffin with two goals in mind: 1) to evaluate students' writing and grammar, and 2) to explore any shift in

students' perceptions towards native and non-native English speaking TESOL professionals. The essay task was based on Mahboob (2003) in which the essays written by ESL students in an intensive English language program in the United States were studied for their attitudes towards NNESTs. Mahboob (2003) used the grounded approach to study these data and observed that ESL students did not prefer native or non-native speakers but rather found them to bring unique attributes to their classes. Following Mahboob (2003), Griffin and Mahboob (2006) also applied the grounded approach to their study. Corroborating earlier findings, they found that students' comments could be placed into three broad categories: linguistic factors, teachings styles, and personal factors. The first group, linguistic factors, includes "oral skills", "literacy skills", "grammar", "vocabulary", and "culture"; the second group, teaching styles, includes "ability to answer questions" and "teaching methodology"; and the third group, personal factors, includes "experience as an ESL learner", "hard-work", and "affect". Within each of these categories, they reported both positive and negative comments (examples of these categories are provided in Appendix A.) The results of the study showed that the trends in student responses did not change over time: e.g., NESTs were still considered strong in teaching oral skills and NNESTs were considered strong teachers of literacy skills. The results also indicated that ESL students in this study found the distinction between NESTs and NNESTs less relevant after being exposed to both in an ESL setting. However, like previous work in this area, students' language of appraisal was not studied. It is here that the present study presents a fresh perspective on the data.

In order to study the language used by participants to evaluate NESTs and NNESTs, we chose to look at one set of data analysed by Mahboob and Griffin. We only examined data collected at T2 – at the end of the 4-month intensive language training. We focussed on these data because they were sufficient to explore if an appraisal analysis can provide a picture that is different from a thematic analysis. Essays written at T2 were also appropriate because they were based on students' experiences with both NESTs and NNESTs in an ESL setting and not just experiences in their home countries (where they may not have been exposed to NESTs at all). The appraisal analysis gave us a much more fine-tuned understanding of participants' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. However, before we look at the findings of the study, we will present a brief summary of the appraisal framework. We will develop this understanding of the appraisal framework by drawing on examples from the data used in the study.

### **Appraisal framework**

Systemic Functional Linguistics' system of Appraisal deals with evaluative meanings (see Martin 2000, White 2002, Martin and Rose 2003, Macken-Horarik

and Martin 2003, Martin and White 2005 and White 2005 for further description). It describes the linguistic means by which people share their feelings and values with others, how they intensify or downgrade these feelings and how they align themselves with their readers/listeners, hence the three systems of ‘Attitude’, ‘Graduation’ and ‘Engagement’ (see Figure 1).

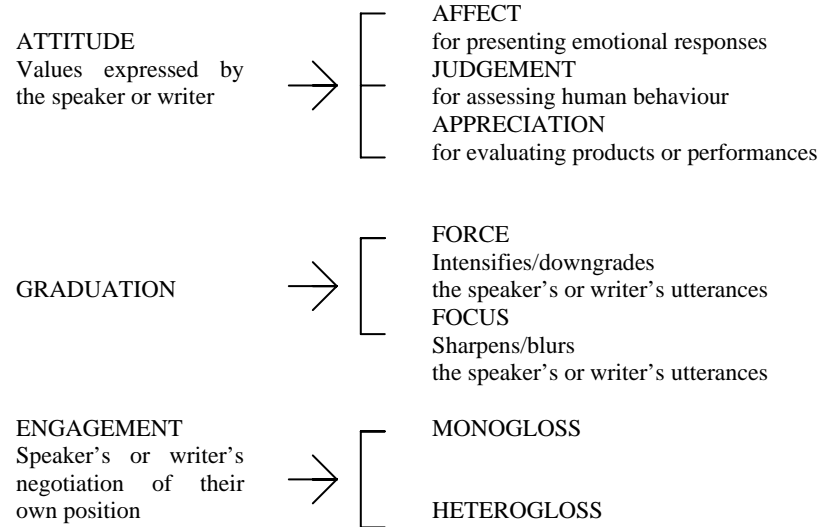


Figure 1: System of Appraisal (adapted from Martin and Rose 2003)

Broadly defined, attitudes are values expressed by the speaker or writer. Within attitude, “Affect” deals with emotions and desires. In (1), the student highlights her teacher’s love for the English language as well as her desire to become an English teacher (attitudes and their subcategories are coded in the square brackets; “+” marks positive attitudes and “-” negative ones):

(1) She [NNEST] said she have studied English so hard for 10 years because she likes [+AFF: Happiness] studying English and wanted [AFF: Desire] to be a English teacher someday. #8T2<sup>1</sup>

“Judgements” assess people’s character and behaviour, including their capacity. In (2), the student assesses her teacher’s competence:

<sup>1</sup> All spellings are original – we have not formatted any of the students’ essays.

(2) When I was first year of high school there was a English teacher I think she is very smart [+JUD: Capacity] because she knew whatever I want know [token, +JUD: Capacity]. #3T2

Example (2) also shows how attitude may be either “inscribed” or “evoked”. Whereas the teacher’s capacity is explicitly stated through the student’s use of the evaluative lexical items “very smart”, it is merely evoked through her description of “hard facts” in “she knew whatever I want to know”. Thus, attitudes can be either inscribed through explicit evaluative lexis, or evoked through the description of one’s experience.

“Appreciations” evaluate products and performances. In (3), the student evaluates her Japanese teachers’ oral skills:

(3) In Japanese school, we are taught English by non-natives teachers. Their prononciation is so bad [-APP: Reaction] [token, -JUD: Incapacity]. #4T2

Naturally, there are strong links between performance and capacity of the performer, and a positive or negative appreciation of something may imply a positive or negative judgement of the performer, as in example (3): while “bad” presents the student’s reaction to her Japanese teachers’ pronunciation of English, it is also a token of judgement of their speaking skills.

Attitudes are also gradable, so they can be intensified, as in (4), or downgraded:

(4) When I was first year of high school there was a English teacher I think she is very [GRA: Force: intensity] smart because she knew whatever I want know. #3T2

In this instance, “very” amplifies the student’s judgement on her teacher.

Utterances can also be sharpened or blurred, as in (5):

(5) Non-natives teachers support us, when we have homesich or something [GRA: Focus down]. #4T2

Lastly, “engagement” deals with how people align themselves with their propositions. In (6) for instance, the student makes room for opinions other than her own:

(6) I think that both native teachers and non-natives teachers can be good languages teachers. #4T2

## Results

The selected T2 essays were coded, counting every instance of Attitude (Affect, Judgement and Appreciation) and Graduation (Force and Focus). However, in order to keep the focus of this report on the method of analysis, we will not present these results (for a detailed discussion of our findings, see Lipovsky & Mahboob (forthcoming)).

There are few instances of Affect in the essays, as the students focus on the abilities and performance of their N/NESTs. The students use Affect either to highlight their own feelings and desires as in (7) and (8), or their teachers' feelings as in (9):

(7) One of my English teacher is not native speaker. But he was really good teacher. His class was very interesting. And, he taught me good English and many interesting things. I liked [+AFF: Happiness] his class. #7T2

(8) To learn the language which is not first language for students by the teachers who are not native, students can be encouraged [+AFF: Happiness]. #19T2

(9) She [NNEST] have studied English so hard for 10 years because she likes [+AFF: Happiness] studying English and wanted [AFF: Desire] to be a English teacher someday. #8T2

Judgements and Appreciations serve to highlight the N/NESTs' linguistic and teaching skills as well as their tenacity. Seven students mention tenacity in their essay, with a total of 26 instances. Five students in particular refer to their Japanese teacher's efforts to learn English, e.g.:

(10) I have a good English teacher ho is non-native speaker in my high school. She speaks very well even though she is non-native speaker. [...] When she was in university, she study English very hard [+JUD: Tenacity] #15T2

When discussing their experience in Japan, six students make positive comments on their native teachers' ability in English. 13 students also refer to their non-native teachers' competence in English, e.g.:

(11) She [NNEST] was like native speaker [token, +JUD: Capacity]. #3T2

Some students also make comments on their N/NESTs' teaching skills, e.g.:

(12) Non-natives have some great [+APP: Valuation] necks [techniques] they prooted because they became the language teachers by doing their own necks, not

learned when they were babies like native speakers do [token, +JUD: Capacity].  
And then, they can tell their students about that [token, +JUD: Capacity] ! #19T2

Lastly, some students comment on their N/NESTs' teaching range, e.g.:

(13) He [NNEST] has many many [GRA: Force: quantity: amount] experiences and knowleges [+JUD: Capacity]. He taught us his own cultures and coustoms [token, +JUD: Capacity]. We learned a lot of [GRA: Force: quantity: amount] things from he [token, +JUD: Capacity]. #2T2

## **Discussion**

The results of the Appraisal analysis present a much more detailed picture than the thematic analysis in previous research. For example, Affect appears in the thematic analysis, but only marginally in the form of NNESTs' empathy for their students. The Appraisal analysis highlights new aspects, such as students' emotional response to their class (see 7 above), or their feelings about their language learning experience (see 8 above), and gives voice to the teachers themselves (see 9 above). By looking at themes instead of the language, the thematic analysis did not consider a number of attitudes that are coded in the lexical, grammatical, and discoursal choices that the participants make. Here we will look at two such processes in more depth: invoked attitude and graduation.

### ***Invoked attitude***

Students frequently appraise their N/NESTs by providing hard facts (invoked attitude), rather than through direct evaluative meanings (inscribed attitude), as shown in examples (2), (11), (12) and (13) above. In example (14), the student uses the example of her NNEST in Japan to demonstrate how NNESTs can achieve proficiency in English through their tenacity:

(14) I was taught English by my mother's friend in Japan. When she was a high school student, she desided to go to America in summer vacation. She came to America and felt her English is poor. So she wrote a letter everyday to her host family and also she listened English as much as she can. She passed difficult enterence examination of university then she came to America again as a university student for a year. And now, she is a teacher of college and sometimes works as a interpreter. I really respect her the best in the world because she had never given up her dream and she kept studying. She is a hard working person and has a strong will.  
#1T2

Our coding of inscribed attitude in (14) is outlined in Table 1 (with "+" marking positive attitudes and "-" negative ones). Evaluation focuses on the NNEST's

proficiency in English, her admission to university and her determination to improve her English. It also involves affect, in the form of the student’s admiration for her teacher.

Appraising items	Affect	Judgement	Appreciation	Appraised
poor			-valuation	English skills
difficult			-composition	university examination
respect	+admiration			NNEST
hard working person		+tenacity		NNEST

Table 1: Inscribed attitude

Invoked attitude is outlined in Table 2 (with “t” marking ideational tokens/invoked evaluations). The tokens serve to extend the positive judgements on the NNEST, highlighting both her tenacity and her competence.

Appraising items	Affect	Judgement	Appraised
she decided to go to America in summer vacation		t, +tenacity	NNEST
she felt her English is poor	t,-satisfaction	t, -capacity	NNEST
she wrote a letter everyday to her host family		t, +tenacity	NNEST
she listened English as much as she can		t, +tenacity	NNEST
she passed difficult entrance examination		t, +capacity	NNEST
she came to America again [...] for a year		t, +tenacity	NNEST
she is a teacher of college		t, +capacity	NNEST
[she] sometimes works as an interpreter		t, +capacity	NNEST
she had never given up her dream		t, +tenacity	NNEST
she kept studying		t, +tenacity	NNEST
[she] has a strong will		t, +tenacity	NNEST

Table 2: Invoked attitude

The text is intertwined with instances of tenacity and capacity, so the NNEST is construed as determined to improve her English, after experiencing during a stay in the USA that her language skills were “poor”, and rewarded in her efforts as she first passes the difficult Japanese university entrance examination, and then becomes proficient in English, eventually succeeding into becoming a college teacher and an interpreter. The teacher’s various accomplishments (entering university, becoming a college teacher and an interpreter) are explained through her tenacity and constant studying – a recurring theme throughout the corpus. The text is saturated with instances of the teacher’s tenacity, with evaluations being invited on the part of the reader through the grading of ideational meanings (“she wrote a letter everyday to her host family”, “she listened English as much as she

can”, “she came to America again”). The overall effect is of an ongoing accumulation. In the end, the NNEST is construed as worth of admiration because of her determination (“I really respect her the best in the world because she had never given up her dream and she kept studying”).

In contrast, the thematic analysis in this instance only highlighted the teacher’s hard work. It does not provide any insight into the teacher’s efforts for improving her language skills, nor does it account for her poor language skills and dissatisfaction as a student of English, or her later achievements (since it only takes specific linguistic factors into account). The thematic analysis does not record either the student’s feelings of admiration for her teacher’s tenacity. The Appraisal analysis thus expands and finetunes the findings of the thematic analysis in various ways.

### ***Graduation***

Graduation intensifies or, on the contrary, downgrades students’ evaluations of their teachers. It is realised in various ways, including via intensification (15), quantification (16), and repetition (16 and 17), e.g.:

(15) One of my English teacher is not native speaker. But he was really [GRA: Force: intensity] good teacher. His class was very [GRA: Force: intensity] interesting. #7T2

(16) He [NNEST] has many many [GRA: Force: quantity: amount] experiences and knowledges. #1T2

(17) She [NNEST] studied English harder and harder [GRA: Force: intensity]. #15T2

One important function of Force is to flag to the reader that meanings that are not explicitly evaluative actually are. It is one of the resources by which ideational tokens/invoked evaluations, as opposed to inscribed attitude, are construed (Martin and White 2005; Hood and Martin 2006). Thus, in extract (14) discussed in the previous section, invoked attitudes can be recognised as such on account of the scaling of the processes:

(18) So she wrote a letter everyday [GRA: Force: enhancement: frequency] to her host family and also she listened English as much as she can [GRA: Force: Enhancement: Vigour]. #1T2

“Everyday” and “as much as she can” operate as signals that the student is exemplifying her teacher’s tenacity. Thus, resources of Graduation contribute to flagging attitudinal meanings on the part of the students. Whereas the thematic

analysis only recorded instances when students specifically mention their teachers' hard work, the Appraisal analysis in contrast records all the instances that illustrate the teachers' tenacity, thus extending students' appraisal of their N/NESTs.

Students in their essays also use graduation to compare their NESTs' and NNESTs' skills and competences, e.g.:

(19) Actually, we were having native speaker in our class. the native speakers were celled ALT (Asistant Language Teacher). My ALT's name was Angela. She was from New Zeiland. [...] Of course her pronusation was much [GRA: Force: intensity] better [+APP: Valuation/GRA] than Japanese teachers. #18T2

(20) Sometimes our accent were not correct, but [NNEST's name] understood [+JUD: Capacity] what we want to say more [GRA: Force: intensity] than [NEST's name]. #2T2

In the thematic analysis, example (19) was coded in favour of the NEST, whereas example (20) was in favour of the NNEST. In each of these instances however, one teacher is evaluated as having a *better* performance/skill than the other one. In (20) for example, the NNEST is said to understand his students "more" than the NEST, so both the NNEST and the NNEST are actually judged positively. So in instances when students use Graduation for comparing their NESTs' and their NNESTs' skills, the findings of the Appraisal analysis are more finetuned than those of the thematic analysis.

## Conclusion

An Appraisal analysis of ESL students' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs provides a rich understanding of students' views towards their teachers. As compared to a thematic analysis, an Appraisal analysis focuses on the language in which attitudes are presented and not only the themes that emerge in the data. It highlights not only objective values such as judgements or appreciations about their teachers' ability to teach or perform, but also subjective values such as their own feelings vis-à-vis their teachers and their teaching. An understanding of inscribed versus invoked attitude as well as Graduation adds to a more finetuned analysis of the data. While our study was based on a small data set, the strength of the findings suggests that the Appraisal framework be applied to other studies that explore attitudes.

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## Appendix A

Examples of categories from Mahboob & Griffin (2006)

Linguistic Factors

Oral Skills

Positive Comment NEST

I wanna learn English by native speakers because I wanna be like a native speakers. Their conversations are so cool! Non-native's conversations are not real...(TS: T1)

Negative Comment NNEST

And non-native speakers is difficult. I think non-native speakers no beautiful. I think native speakers is natural. non-native speakers is no natural...(MT: T1)

Grammar

Positive Comment NNEST

...It we want to learn grammatical English, non-natives are better... (ES: T1)

Writing

Positive Comment NNEST

My high school's English teacher can't speak English well but, I can learn good writing at his class...(ME:T1)

Negative Comment NEST

...And, my English school's teachers are all American and Canadian. They teach me writing not so much...(ME: T1)

Culture

#### Positive Comment NEST

...natives teachers teach me many slangs, American culture, and about American...(AKA: T2)

#### Teaching Styles

Ability to Answer Questions:

#### Negative Comment NEST

...if we asked some questions to native speakers, they didn't answer them clearly... (ES:T2)

#### Teaching Methodology

#### Positive Comment NNEST

I think that non-natives are also good teachers because they can teach us the pleasure of learning new language! If there hadnotbeen Japanese English teacher, I would never know the pleasure of learning English...(TS:T1)

#### Personal Factors

Experience as an L2 Learner

#### Positive Comment NNEST

I think that non-natives can also be efficient teachers. Because this four month, we learned with non-native and native. Sometimes our accent were not correct, but non-native understood what we want to say more than native. When we talked, they understood more than hostfamily. Non-native speakers know how to learn English from teacher. They know which word we learned fast. They know what kind of words we can use. They understand us.(AM:T2)

#### Hard Work

#### Positive Comment NNEST

I think that non-native speaker can be also be efficient teachers. Because. I think that if we effort to learn English, we can teach. It may be so hard but I think it is important for non-natives speaker to try their best. My high school English teacher is non-native speaker, but he have tried his best for twenty years. So he is as good as native speaker...(MHO:T1)

#### Negative Comment NEST

For example, if you native teachers, you haven't to study English very hard. Because they were born in America. That's they have spoken English...(SK:T1)

#### Affect

#### Positive Comment NNEST

...how to make friend in the country I don't know anything, and many other things. And non-natives teachers support us, when we have homesich or something...(AKA: T2)