



California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THOSE CONCERNED WITH TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE OR DIALECT AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION
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CATESOL position paper opposing discrimination against Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) and teachers with “non-standard” varieties of English

Passed by the CATESOL Board of Directors, October 5, 2013

Resolved

CATESOL opposes any sort of discrimination against English teachers based on the “nativeness” of their English and / or their English variety. Sufficient proficiency in English should be an important criterion in the employment and ongoing assessment of English teachers. However, CATESOL does not condone job announcements that list “native English,” “native command of English,” “native-like fluency,” “standard accented English,” or similar, as required or desirable qualities. If reference is to be made to language ability at all in job announcements, suggested changes to such criteria are “high proficiency in English,” “proficiency in English suitable to the position,” or the like.

Rationale

The best teachers of English language are those with experience and professional preparation in their field, regardless of their own linguistic backgrounds. Instructors with noticeably “non-native” backgrounds or accents are often excellent teachers possessing an advanced understanding of cultural sensitivity (and are in addition prime role models for English learners), while some English teachers who grew up with English and are thus considered “native” may very well be poorly prepared (even entirely unprepared) or inexperienced, resulting in ineffective teaching. In all cases, the work of English teachers should be judged, and teachers should be employed, on the merits of their teaching abilities, of which the “nativeness” of their English should play no part.

The same principle holds true for teachers with “non-standard” varieties of English (commonly referred to as accents or dialects). Excellent teachers speak a wide range of local, regional, and / or field-specific English varieties. Sociolinguistic scholarship testifies to the systematicity, legitimacy and richness of varieties such as those in the “Expanding and Outer Circles” of World Englishes, the various forms of English as a Lingua Franca, and the myriad local and regional dialects across the traditionally native English-speaking world. No judgment should be made about the value of any these varieties – indeed, each has great value in the context in which it is used – nor, in turn, about teachers who use these varieties.

Teaching job announcements that indicate a preference or requirement for a “native” speaker of English trivialize the professional development teachers have received and teaching experience they have already acquired. Such announcements are also discriminatory, as they commit the “native speaker fallacy,” the notion that only native speakers are the possessors and nurturers of a language, when in actual fact, language is a public phenomenon that belongs to no one and is subject to constant innovation and disruption*. Finally, such announcements ultimately harm all teachers (native or not) by devaluing teacher education, professionalism, and experience. Therefore, CATESOL opposes such discriminatory job announcements and does not condone their distribution.

*See Phillipson, Robert. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.