

A post entitled ‘Pronunciation and Privilege’ could easily be about RP or some other prestige form of speech, and the kinds of benefits you get by having such an accent. But here, I want instead to reflect on a bizarre kind of privilege which exists only within the specific, limited sphere of ELT. It’s about the kind of privileges you get in our profession by virtue of being a native speaker of English.

If you’re an English native speaker in the domain of ELT, you have the privilege of being *sought after*. In

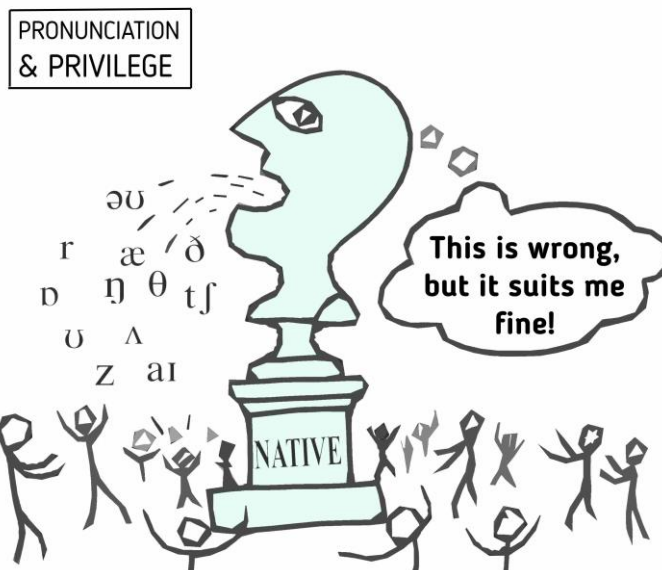
matters of the English language, you are seen by many people to be the best kind of expert there is, and there’s a market for that. Such people will defer to your judgement on what’s wrong or right. They will prefer you as a candidate for teaching jobs. They will display an unusual level of interest in the minutiae of your home culture. They will marvel at effortless vowels. They will pay you for being able to speak!

In today’s world, English teaching is not comparable with the teaching of other languages. English is an international Lingua Franca, your passport to a global speech community. The demand is huge; but demand for what exactly? What difference does it make that English is an international language?

You could say that traditionally, languages are taught as *national* languages. If you’re learning Greek, you are likely to want to do so in order to communicate with Greek people, and you are likely to want to match their pronunciation as far as you are able. And it’s true that many learners of English approach it in this traditional way, perhaps imagining themselves communicating, say, in Britain, with British people.

However, does this traditional, national approach make sense for the vast majority of people around the world who are learning English? Surely most people are more likely to use their English as a Lingua Franca, with interlocutors from anywhere, not just an English-speaking country such as Britain. And if this is the case, aspects of the language which are specifically British – including the pronunciation – will have little relevance.

This calls into question the preferential treatment which is given to native speakers in ELT. I feel that native speaker privilege is a hangover from a time when English was



taught as a *national* language, rather than an *international* one. It's time to move on and embrace the new reality. In this new reality, the very notion of 'native speaker' loses its sense: there are no native speakers of English as a Lingua Franca – everybody has to learn it, including people for whom English is their first language. Or to look at it another way, we could say that everybody who communicates effectively through English in an international context is a native speaker, regardless of their accent or mother tongue.

In terms of pronunciation, I don't think any specific accent of English does anything to earn for itself a privileged position. There is no evidence that 'native' English accents are more intelligible, globally, than 'non-native' ones. In fact, 'native speakers' are often *less* intelligible in international settings. So why should 'native speakers' still get preferential treatment in ELT? I suppose the point about privilege is that it is undeserved.

Perhaps this reflection goes against my own best interests – being a 'native' myself. I could just enjoy being on a pedestal like the character in my cartoon. On the other hand, the future no longer looks so glorious for things on pedestals, and that's alright by me!