

A non-native voice

The *EFL Gazette's* editorial of August 92 discusses issues that have often been raised in *ET*. The monthly newspaper of the ELT world evidently receives a growing number of letters from non-native speakers of English who want to teach the language outside their own countries. They ask where such jobs can be found, and the editorial says: 'The short answer is – they can't.'

It adds, however, that in recent years 'the status of the non-native speaker has changed radically'. From being generally considered inferior, non-native teachers 'are now seen as equal, if not superior, to their English speaking colleagues. It is universally acknowledged that they make fine teachers, teacher trainers, materials designers. They can be anything they want to be. As long as they stay at home.'

Beyond their own countries they remain a step behind the native-speaking import, lacking some 'magic ingredient' associated with a 'good' accent, a firsthand knowledge of Anglophone culture, or up-to-date EFL methodology. Local teachers might tolerate the expatriate natives among them, but 'are less keen on competition from other non-natives. What have they got, they ask, that we haven't?'

The *Gazette*, however, looks towards places like eastern Europe, where whole new systems of English teaching need to be set up quickly, and asks: in such a position, 'who would you ask for help? The British and Americans who fail to teach their own children languages. Or the multilingual Dutch and Scandinavians?'

It is a compelling question. In our last issue, a German and two Danes wrote about the worldwide teaching of English. One currently teaches in Germany and another in Japan, while the third is an eminent retired academic who has been a professor of English across the gamut of possibilities – in Nigeria, Oslo, and Ulster.

Non-native teachers and other skilled users of English do today have a higher profile than in the past. They are part of the great majority now, and among them are hundreds of thousands whose capacity lies well beyond that odd, often patronizing level 'the advanced learner'. Theirs is a powerful new constituency in terms of education, publishing, and the media. Their voices will, I suspect, become more and more significant as the 1990s advance, and as the old and once oh-so-natural dividing line between competent native and non-native becomes ever harder to discern. *Tom McArthur*

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A call for papers: In *ET's* files we have cuttings/clippings from a wide range of British and North American newspapers, and a scattering of material from many other sources. If readers would care to add to our files by sending in occasional (titled and dated) materials from their local newspapers, etc., this would be a great help in widening the range of usage which we can quote in *From Our Files*.

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