

"I used to believe in the superiority of NSTs": Non-native Speaking Teachers' Collaborative Reflection on Their Identity

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Abstract

While non-native speaking teacher (NNST) identity has been examined from various perspectives, little attention has been given to collaborative reflection-based approaches. This study addresses that gap by facilitating a reflective focus group of four novice and experienced NNSTs who explored and negotiated their professional identities. Using microgenetic, moment-by-moment discourse analysis, the findings revealed that collaborative reflection brought implicit self-perceptions to the surface and supported identity (re)formation. Participants highlighted several advantages of being NNSTs, including their personal experience learning a language and their shared linguistic and cultural background with students—factors they felt enhanced empathy and instructional clarity. However, they also perceived native-speaking teachers (NSTs) as holding greater authority due to their linguistic proficiency. Through mutual reflection and negotiation, the group reached a consensus: NNSTs are especially effective in lower-level classes where their learner experience is valuable, while NSTs may be better suited to advanced classes requiring higher-level proficiency. The reflective process itself proved vital in reshaping how participants viewed their roles. The study suggests that teacher educators and institutions should offer more collaborative, reflection-based professional development, and that NNSTs can benefit from engaging in shared reflection to strengthen their professional identity.

Keywords: Collaborative reflection; Language teacher identity; Microgenetic analysis; Non-native speaking teacher identity

Language teacher identity, perceived as a fluid and segmented construct, has been increasingly under exploration over the last decade (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). The currently accepted definition of teacher identity aligns well with what poststructuralists, as the opposite pole of essentialists, proposed (Lawrence, 2020). According to the poststructuralists' viewpoint, "the singularity (i.e. unity), predictability, and stability of identity are illusions" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 221). Indeed, it has been widely accepted that teacher identity is transitional and dynamic by nature (Zhang & Kim, 2024) and changes according to the particular context (Rauf, 2022). Thus, it is a multifaceted construct consisting of different dimensions (Flores, 2020) and is (re)shaped in situ under the impact of a variety of contextual factors including the dominant sociocultural (Zhang & Kim, 2024) and historical ideologies (Ahn, 2020).

Language teacher identity has been explored from different perspectives, among which the issue of non-native teacher identity has been under debate over the last decade (Rauf, 2022). Indeed, there has been a long controversy over the competency of non-native speaking teachers (NNSTs) versus native speaking teachers (NSTs) in the language teaching profession. Under the impact of essentialization and idealization (Weekly, 2018), a dichotomous view toward native speakerism has emerged based on which the privileged status has been mainly given to native speakers (Lee & Kim, 2021) due to their high level of language proficiency and pronunciation (Whitehead & Ryu, 2023), fluency, knowledge of the appropriate language, and cultural-awareness (Tajeddin et al., 2023). As English is their native language, NSTs are accepted as the most legitimate model for others to follow (Chen, 2024). However, the counterargument was proposed by poststructuralists, who questioned the use of binary labels (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018) such as NS/NNS, us/them, Western/non-Western, center/periphery, monolingual/multilingual, and privileged/marginalized as it has been proven that achieving a native-like proficiency is not beyond the capability of NNSTs and therefore should not be considered as a weak point. Besides, NNSTs have been widely appreciated due to the value of their past experience of learning (Egitim, 2021) and sharing the same native language with their learners (Weekly, 2018) in empathizing with learners and establishing a better rapport with them, and consequently running classes more efficiently (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). As research findings indicate, neither NNSTs nor NSTs are privileged in language teaching, and each group has its strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Wang & Fang, 2020). Overall, what seems noteworthy is teachers' classroom management and teaching skills and their ability to convey information more effectively to students, regardless of their language background. All these issues, along with the rise of movements such as World Englishes (WE), English as Lingua Franca (ELF), and English as an International Language (EIL), have led scholars in the field of language teaching to question the hegemony of native-speaker standards. This epistemic paradigm shift has discredited the idea that white native speakers are the owners of English and therefore the best teachers (Ramjattan, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Despite these new strands, NNSTs are still suffering from a sense of inferiority and marginalization in different educational contexts (Kubota, 2023; Sekaja et al., 2022).

The low level of professional self-confidence and the internal sense of disempowerment in achieving the idealized native speaker standards experienced by NNSTs seem too serious to eradicate (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). In this regard, language teachers are suggested to embrace continuous professional development through reflective practice (Faez, 2018) if they desire to overcome their feelings of inauthenticity, inadequacy, low self-efficacy, and tension. Farrell (2018) emphasized teachers' reflection on their identity as it can give teachers more insight into who they are. Previously, it was believed that reflective practice is a solitary engagement done by an individual. However, the shift in the concept of teacher reflection has been witnessed in the

existing literature as findings pointed to the significance of reflective practice in collaboration with others (Farrell, 2015) if the target is teachers' professional development (Karim et al., 2024; Tajeddin et al., 2022). Although the constructive role of collaborative reflection in raising teachers' awareness of who they are has been substantiated (Farrell, 2018), collaborative reflection-based research on different dimensions of language teacher identity has received scant attention (Farrell, 2022). Non-native teacher identity is no exception. Against this backdrop, the current study draws on teachers' collaborative reflection to reveal the extent to which it can raise NNSTs' awareness of their status as non-native teachers through their microgenetic moment-by-moment identity (re)construction.

Literature Review

Non-Native Teacher Identity

The native/non-native dichotomy is a lens through which language teacher identity and its development have been scrutinized (Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2022). It has been acknowledged in the existing literature that although the majority of language teachers are NNSTs, they are still considered second-class members/citizens in language teaching (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). There has been a well-established ideology in favor of native-speaker teachers (e.g., Houghton & Bouchard, 2020; Lowe, 2020) due to regarding their language as the most reliable model and source of information. Previously, English language teachers' empowerment and competence were revisited critically through the following theoretical lenses: (1) linguistic imperialism introduced by Phillipson (1992), who brought to light the concept of native speaker fallacy highlighting that it is native speaker teachers who are ideal; (2) native speakers' ownership of English pointed out by Widdowson (1994); and (3) native speakerism introduced first by Holliday (2005) as "an established belief that native-speaker teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (p. 6). What is embedded in these conceptualizations is the native-speaker discriminatory ideology, which should be counteracted and redressed. The sense of underachievement and inferiority emerging from a reductionist native/non-native dichotomy has been labeled in the existing literature in different ways including Stockholm syndrome (Llurda, 2009), impostor syndrome (Bernat, 2008), and comparative fallacy (Mahboob, 2005). They all convey the idea that we are living in a world where authenticity is still attached to native speakers (Lowe & Pinner, 2016). As such, it is undoubtedly native speakers who are considered legitimate norm providers and the ideal language teachers causing NNSTs to experience a permanent feeling of inferiority. Attaching labels such as prestigious, privileged, and promoted to NSTs seems unfair and inappropriate (Kiczkowiak & Wu, 2018) as these types of ideologies in favor of native-speakerism have resulted in the marginalization of NNSTs and discrimination against them despite their competencies (Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2022). NSTs and NNSTs each have their own strengths and weaknesses (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). For instance, while the latter have been claimed to be able to empathize with their students due to undergoing the same process of learning as their students (Faez, 2012), the former have been considered more appropriate when it comes to the correction of students' errors as NNSTs have been revealed to be stricter compared with their native counterparts (Cheng & Zhang, 2022).

Over time, new movements have emerged, which questioned the very nature of theoretical structures downgrading the status of NNSTs. The concept of global Englishes, introduced first by Galloway and Rose (2015), and the anti-native-speakerism movements including English as a Lingua Franca (LF), World Englishes (WE), and English as an International Language (EIL) (Selvi

et al., 2024) emphasize the fluidity and diversity of English use in different contexts and the legitimacy of varieties of Englishes. The most significant consequence of this paradigm shift was the reconceptualization of the identity of NNSTs perceived as qualified and legitimate ELT professionals as opposed to the idea of idealized NSTs (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). More precisely, the studies conducted on language teacher identity through the lens of global Englishes aim to promote NNSTs' identity, respect, and status by giving insight into the complexity and fluidity of marginalization and privilege and their impact on NNSTs' identity (re)construction and (re)negotiation (e.g., Widodo et al., 2020; Zacharias, 2019).

Post-structuralism also appeared in response to the increasing dissatisfaction with the binary juxtaposition of NST-NNST and these types of demarcations among ELT practitioners and professionals as it led to fixation and essentialization of teacher identities and unpleasant experiences of marginalization, discrimination, privilege, and inequity against NNSTs (Selvi et al., 2024). This paradigm shift led to a new line of scholarship that pursued the repositioning of the essentialized, unidirectional, and decontextualized orientations toward the language teacher identity construct (Rudolph et al., 2015). In effect, under the influence of post-structuralism, scholars started to scrutinize the very nature of language teacher identity as a construct that is fluid and dynamic and therefore the subject of (re)negotiation and (re)construction (Lee & Canagarajah, 2019). These studies gave a deeper insight into the contextualized nature of trans-national/-cultural/-lingual identities, which stand against the essentialized and oversimplified NS-NNS binary oppositions and their extensions, i.e., NST-NNST (Selvi et al., 2024). However, this humanistic approach toward language teacher identity has remained at the level of abstraction and has only been transferred into teacher education, but not into workplace contexts. Despite attempts to redefine, reconceptualize, and renegotiate the very nature of native speakerism (Matsuda, 2021), the manifestation of the worldview in the form of inequalities and discrimination still exists (Selvi et al., 2024). This calls for more research on the status of NNSTs compared with their native counterparts to give more insight into the nature of their challenges and to come up with possible solutions to mitigate the intensity of the pressure imposed on them from the world outside.

Research on Non-native Teacher Identity

The very essence of non-native teacher identity has been addressed by numerous researchers through different lenses. For instance, in Aneja's (2018) study, the participating NNSTs looked at the issue of native speakerism from two different perspectives. Half of them claimed to suffer from a sense of marginalization and inferiority. Conversely, the other half believed in their legitimacy and teaching qualifications. Moreover, all of them pointed to the cultural and linguistic expertise of their NS counterparts. In another study by Haung (2018), it was shown that NNSTs believed in the superiority of NSTs when it comes to the issues of accent and language proficiency. Besides, they accepted themselves as lifelong learners who are required to get engaged in the process of language learning constantly as English is not their native language. However, in Wang and Fang's (2020) study, the superiority of NSTs over NNSTs was rejected, and they concluded that each group has its own strengths and weaknesses. For instance, it was revealed that while NSTs had a higher level of language proficiency, NNSTs were able to empathize with learners and understand their challenges in the path of language learning as they underwent the same process when they were language learners themselves.

Aoyama's (2021) study on NNST identity revealed that this construct can be a source of tension and conflict. More precisely, it was found that the participating NNSTs considered themselves good role models for students as they shared the same cultural background. However, they

believed in their inferiority compared with their NS counterparts as English was not their native language. Moreover, Saba and Frangieh (2021) concluded that being a native speaker cannot qualify one for teaching. Some factors possessed by NNSTs including bilingualism, intercultural competence, and experience of learning a language are more decisive in making good teachers. Farrell (2022) conducted a study to provide 10 Irish student teachers with the opportunities to reflect critically on their non-native identity in relation to the prevailing ideologies in the world of ELT through online peer blogs, teaching practice diaries, and collaborative reflective practice (guided group discussion). The results gave insight into the existing discrimination against EFL teachers due to their status as NNSTs and the challenges they encountered as a result of the ideological status quo in favor of native speakerism in the ELT world. It was then found that collaborative reflective practices could raise teachers' awareness regarding these complexities and make them prepared to cope with them.

Akinmulegun and Kunt's (2022) narrative inquiry on the identity (re)construction of a number of NNSTs revealed that their sense of inferiority faded away after attending teacher education programs: They developed a positive image of self as they started to believe in their ability to communicate with their students effectively due to sharing the same native language and to realize their learning challenges. Besides, their level of self-efficacy was boosted as they found themselves successful in empathizing with their students. Adopting a dialogic approach and conducting semi-structured interviews, Rauf (2022) reported that their participating NNSTs believed in their ability to empathize with learners and help them solve their challenges in the path of language learning due to their experience of learning. However, they were suffering from a sense of inferiority, marginalization, discrimination, and lack of job security. For instance, they claimed that although they were more qualified than their native-speaker counterparts, they were paid less. Camacho's (2023) life-history interviews and classroom observations showed that all of the targeted NNSTs rejected the concept of perfect or standard English, particularly in the area of pronunciation. Besides, some of them considered translanguaging an important pedagogical strategy enabling their students to improve their language skills without any limitations. They also found that although the myth of ideal native speakerism persists in society, the participants felt neither disadvantaged nor privileged because of their status as NNSTs. Finally, Ershadi et al. (2024) investigated the impact of native speakerism on the identity construction of a group of NNSTs through a questionnaire, interviews, and narrative inquiries. The results revealed that the participants were suffering from a sense of marginalization and NS-NNS inequality imposed on them by institutional policymakers and were doubtful about their instructional competence.

According to the studies reviewed above, what seems obvious is that NNST identity has been explored through a variety of methods including narrative inquiries, life histories, questionnaires, and interviews (e.g., Camacho, 2023; Ershadi et al., 2024; Rauf, 2022) in different contexts. However, one area of research that has received scant attention is the investigation of the nexus between NNSTs' collaborative reflection and their identity to unravel how reflection contributes to the (re)construction teacher identity (e.g., Farrell, 2022). Collaborative and dialogic reflection has been introduced to the field of teacher education by socioculturalists over the past two decades (e.g., Chacón, 2018; Johnson, 2009). According to this perspective, collaborative reflection that is scaffolded by other participating teachers in the collaborative group provides teachers with the opportunity to reflect on not only their teaching experiences but also those of others, eventually leading to their professional development (Tajeddin et al., 2022). Looking at the issue of non-native teacher identity through the lens of collaborative reflection-based research, this study

pursued the following research question: How are EFL teachers' non-native identities (re)constructed microgenetically during novice-experienced teachers' collaborative reflection?

Method

Participants

Four NNSTs who taught teenagers and adults participated in the current study. They held B.A. or M.A. degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and were aged between 20-40. To be employed in the private language institute where they worked, they had undergone the following recruitment process. First, they passed a mock paper-based TOEFL test and an oral interview. Then, they took part in a pre-service teacher training course and were trained to teach English based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Finally, they passed a micro-teaching test and observed experienced teachers' classes to accomplish their practicum.

The targeted participants were selected through convenience sampling. A number of NNSTs from the available language institutes were informed about the process of the targeted research project by the third author and were given enough time to decide if they wanted to take part in this study. Among them, four teachers who gave their informed consent and volunteered to cooperate were selected based on their gender and years of teaching experience. Two of them were male and the other two were female teachers. An equal number of male and female teachers were selected to neutralize the impact of gender and to come up with more valid results. Moreover, they were either novice ($n = 2$) or experienced ($n = 2$) teachers. The novice teachers were selected based on Gatbonton's (2008) conception that novice teachers are those with less than two years of teaching experience. To select the experienced teachers, Tsui's (2005) classification of experienced teachers as those who have more than five years of teaching experience was used. The details of the participants' demographic information are provided in Table 1. The participants' names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Demographic information about novice teachers (NTs) and experienced teachers (ETs)

Participants	Gender	Age	Degree in TEFL	Years of experience	Experience category
Nika	Female	29	M.A.	9	Experienced
Sam	Male	40	B.A.	15	Experienced
Yas	Female	21	B.A.	1	Novice
Ali	Male	20	B.A.	1	Novice

Data Collection

In the present study, data collection was conducted through a collaborative reflection focus group. To this end, first, a meeting was set up by the three authors to reach an agreement about the required number of reflection sessions, the duration of the sessions, and the characteristics and number of participating teachers in the sessions. The result of this negotiation was a precise focus group plan. As the next step, the third author, who was in touch with different teachers as she worked at a private language school, invited some of them who aligned well with their defined characteristics to participate in the current study. Among them, four teachers who volunteered to cooperate with

the researchers and gave their informed consent were selected. Next, a short meeting was held by the third author with the participants to determine the date and time of running the sessions based on their preferences.

For data collection, a collaborative reflection session was run. The paradigm shift in teacher reflection from a solitary monolog to a collaborative dialog occurred under the influence of constructivism, emphasizing that knowledge construction can occur in interaction and collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). This shift is framed by sociocultural theory, which considers learning as a social phenomenon that first involves interaction with others (mainly more experienced others), i.e. other-regulation, and next comes under individuals' control, i.e. self-regulation (Dimitrieska, 2018; Wenger, 1998). According to the existing literature, it is widely accepted that teachers' collaborative reflection is much more influential than individual reflection (Farrell, 2007). Although the older version of sociocultural theory highlighted the effective role of collaboration with more expert others in the process of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), the more recent version accentuates knowledge (re)construction as a reciprocal phenomenon in which all participating collaborators, irrespective of the level of their expertise, might be beneficiaries (Vygotsky, 2018). In this regard, the reflection group in the current study consisted of two novice and two experienced teachers and was aimed at providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their status as NNSTs and revealing the extent to which their non-native teacher identity was transformed microgenetically during their collaborative negotiations.

The collaborative panel was held face-to-face in the participants' native language, i.e. Persian, over one session. It lasted approximately two hours. The third author was the coordinator of the session, whose role was to help keep the discussion going and prevent the probable negotiation breakdown. To start the session, a broad, open-ended question was asked by the coordinator: What do you think of the general status of non-native speaking teachers compared with native speaking teachers?

The coordinator did not devise more detailed questions to prevent the probable imposition of ideas. However, during the session, some new questions emerged from the heart of the collaborators' negotiations, which made them reflect on their non-native identity through different lenses and in depth. The whole session was audio-recorded and later transcribed for data analysis by the third researcher.

Data Analysis

In the current study, the research question scrutinized both novice and experienced teachers' beliefs about their non-native identity and the extent to which their identities were (re)shaped microgenetically during their collaborative negotiations during reflection sessions. To this end, microgenetic constructivist moment-by-moment discourse analysis (Vygotsky, 1978) was conducted on the transcriptions of the participating teachers' collaborative negotiations. It was a process-oriented intensive analysis as the third author went through the lines of the transcriptions and conducted a moment-by-moment analysis to trace every new aspect that emerged in the participants' perspectives about their status as NNSTs and to show the gradual process of their identity (re)construction. The analysis outcome was checked with the first two authors to ensure the stability of data analysis.

Findings

The teachers' collaborative reflection on their non-native identity was analyzed microgenetically to identify different aspects of non-native identity they reflected on and the process of their identity (re)formation. Excerpt One, adopted from their collaborative negotiations, is revealing in this regard. When asked by the session coordinator (SC) about the general status of NNSTs vs. NSTs, Ali (male, experience: 1 year) starts the discussion (line 3) and states that, in general terms, neither NNSTs nor NSTs are superior to one another. He believes that each group has its own weak points and strong points. For instance, he points to NSTs' high level of language proficiency and NNSTs' status as previous learners as their positive features that the other lacks (lines 4 to 6). Then, Yas (female, experience=1 year) takes turns and confesses that previously she used to believe that NSTs are superior to them as NNSTs as English is their native language. However, after reflecting on Ali's assertions, she expresses her agreement with Ali in line 8. It seems she becomes cognizant of the merits of being an NNST and starts to look at the issue of native speakerism through a new lens. She states that although NSTs can feel more confident due to having a comprehensive knowledge of the language they are teaching as it is their native language (positive point), they cannot establish a good relationship with learners as they do not share the same culture (negative point).

Excerpt One:

1. **SC:** *What do you think of the general status of non-native speaking teachers compared to*
2. *native speaking teachers?*
3. **Ali:** *It depends on different factors. None of them is superior to another. For example,*
4. *students trust an NST more as English is their mother tongue. By contrast, an NNST*
5. *experienced the process of language learning before and therefore can understand*
6. *students better. Each of them has their own positive points.*
7. **Yas:** *I used to believe in the superiority of NSTs. NSTs are more confident as English is*
8. *their mother tongue. But, You're right; e.g., NSTs do not share the same culture with*
9. *their students and can't establish a good rapport with them.*
10. **Nika:** *Being NSTs doesn't necessarily mean that they are good teachers. I'm a native*
11. *speaker of the Farsi language, but it doesn't mean that I'm a good Farsi teacher.*
12. *It might be true that students trust NSTs more as English is their mother tongue. But, we,*
13. *as NNSTs, share the same culture with our students and can establish a better rapport*
14. *with them. Or, we can realize the grammatical mistakes our students make due to the*
15. *impact of their mother tongue as we share the same language and can give better*
16. *feedback to correct them indirectly. Generally, being an NNST is superior to being an*
17. *NST in the context of Iran.*

Nika (female, experience: 9 years) presents a new idea in lines 10 to 17. She believes that NNSTs are generally more successful in the context of Iran and therefore are superior to NSTs. In response to Ali's and Yas's assertions, Nika states, "It might be true that students trust NSTs more as English

is their mother tongue,” but they lack some important factors that language teachers should possess if they want to be more successful in teaching in the context of Iran. She believes in the necessity of sharing the same language and culture with learners so that teachers can establish a better rapport with learners and realize and correct errors they make due to their L1 negative transfer.

Then, in line 18 (Excerpt Two), Sam continues the discussion and expresses a thoroughly different idea regarding the general status of NNSTs compared with NSTs in Iran. He believes in the general superiority of NNSTs over NSTs in teaching at lower levels and NSTs over NNSTs in teaching at upper levels (lines 19 to 24). He asserts that although sharing the same language and culture is necessary to establish a good rapport with learners at lower levels, it is not a priority at upper levels. What seems significant at upper levels is the teachers’ comprehensive knowledge of the target language and culture to provide learners with more accurate linguistic and cultural information.

Excerpt Two:

18. **Sam:** *English teaching is divided into two parts: language proficiency and instructional*
19. *competence. I think NNSTs are more successful in teaching in lower-level classes as they*
20. *share the same language and culture with their students. But, NSTs are better teachers at*
21. *advanced levels. At upper levels, it is not necessary to share the same language and*
22. *culture. At upper levels, students are eager to learn complicated structures and gain*
23. *precise information about the target language culture. So, NSTs are more successful*
24. *teachers at upper levels in our country.*
25. **Nika:** *I disagree with you. NSTs know the slang and can just transfer them to learners.*
26. *They also know complicated grammatical structures, but they cannot teach them to*
27. *learners. Even they might face problems explaining and teaching simple structures.*

In line 25, Nika expresses her disagreement with Sam’s claim and rejects the general superiority of NSTs at upper levels. In contrast to Sam, she believes that it does not matter how comprehensive NSTs’ knowledge of the grammatical structure is as they might encounter problems in teaching not only the complicated structures but also the simple ones. To defend his view and convince Nika of the general superiority of NSTs at upper levels, Sam takes turns to elaborate more on the issue under discussion (Excerpt Three).

Excerpt Three

28. **Sam:** *We are not talking about NSs but we are talking about native-speaker TEACHERS.*
29. *They are familiar with different structures and they know how to teach them. In upper*
30. *levels, students might encounter some complicated structures for which we, as NNSTs,*
31. *might not have any explanations because they are not mentioned in our course books.*
32. *Even in available grammar books, there are some contradictory points. A structure that*
33. *is right according to one book, is considered wrong in another book. Some linguistic*
34. *points do not have any grammatical explanations. There are always some exceptions in a*

35. *language that just native speakers of that language living in that authentic context are*
36. *aware of them. So, NSTs are more successful in teaching these complicated structures as*
37. *they have been exposed to the authentic language.*

In lines 28 and 29, rejecting Nika's view about NSTs' inability to teach grammatical structures, Sam emphasizes the status of NSs as teachers, not ordinary people, and maintains that as they are teachers, they have acquired the knowledge of different linguistic structures and the appropriate skill to teach them. Then, he starts to prove his claim about the superiority of NSTs at upper levels by pointing to the complexity of the nature of the English language that causes NNSTs to encounter problems answering some students' questions at advanced levels. He believes that the nature of the authentic language is infinite and so complicated that even the available textbooks in the market may not provide NNSTs with a clear and comprehensive picture of the target language they are teaching and, consequently, they may not be aware of some linguistic exceptions (lines 30 to 34).

By contrast, as Sam states in lines 34 to 37, NSTs who have grown up in the authentic context of exposure to the authentic language are more cognizant of these exceptions and therefore can be more responsive to upper-level students' needs. In response to Sam's explanations, Nika expresses her complete agreement with the superiority of NSTs at upper levels as she says "You are absolutely right" in line 38 (Excerpt Four). Then, she maintains that Sam expanded her viewpoint regarding the status of NSTs, made her reflect upon the issue under discussion from a new perspective, and caused her to change her mind. Therefore, their collaborative and reflective negotiation resulted in Nika's identity reformation as a NNST. Looking at the following excerpt will be more revealing:

Excerpt Four:

38. **Nika:** *You are absolutely right. It's a new perspective. I haven't thought of it before.*
39. **Yas:** *I have never thought about this point that NSTs might be better teachers in upper*
40. *levels. As I've heard your reasons, I came to the conclusion that NSTs can be better*
41. *teachers for upper-level learners. Also, upper-level students are old enough to establish*
42. *a good rapport with NSTs. It might be problematic at lower levels in which NNSTs*
43. *might act better.*
44. **Ali:** *I also agree with you. In lower-level classes, NNSTs are more helpful as students*
45. *have a low level of language proficiency and can't speak English well. Therefore, a*
46. *NNST can understand learners and establish a better rapport with them due to sharing*
47. *the same language and culture. But, as you underscored, NSTs are more helpful in*
48. *upper levels.*

Similarly, Ali and Yas changed their mind under the influence of Sam and Nika's negotiations. They previously believed that neither NSTs nor NNSTs are superior to one another and that each group has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, in lines 39 to 43, Yas confesses that her view of the status of NSTs and NNSTs has changed and that she has come up with a new perspective after listening to Sam's convincing statements. In the same direction, in line 44, Ali also expresses his agreement with Sam's view and asserts that it seems reasonable enough to accept

the general superiority of NSTs at upper levels according to Sam's explanations. In addition, in alignment with Sam's assertions, both Ali and Yas have come to posit that NNSTs are superior to NSTs in only lower-level classes in which students do not have a good command of English and may not be able to establish a good rapport with NSTs. Therefore, they have accepted that NNSTs who share the same language and culture with learners are just superior to their native speaker counterparts at lower levels. Overall, the identity of Ali and Yas as novice teachers has been reshaped under the influence of collaboration with more experienced colleagues.

Discussion

The result of the microgenetic analysis of the participants' negotiations in reflection sessions is revealing as their collaborative reflection made their perspective about their non-native identity come from the tacit to the conscious level. For instance, the participating teachers unanimously pointed to NSTs' higher level of language proficiency and comprehensive knowledge of the targeted language either directly or indirectly although they did not believe in the superiority of NSTs over NNSTs. The merit of NSTs' high level of fluency and accuracy and consequently higher level of language proficiency has been highlighted by different scholars numerously (e.g., Aoyama, 2021; Li, 2022; Wang & Fang, 2020). However, the point is that native or native-like proficiency does not guarantee teachers' instructional competence, and NSTs are not necessarily highly qualified teachers simply because English is their native language (e.g., Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2022; Wang & Fang, 2020; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). Instructional competence and language proficiency are two distinct factors, and the former does not depend on the latter. Thus, NNSTs might be more competent in teaching even though English is not their mother tongue (Saba & Frangieh, 2021). Aligning with this claim, the novice teachers in this study both emphasized that NSTs and NNSTs have their own strengths and weaknesses and that NSTs are not superior to their non-native counterparts due to their native language. More precisely, they talked about some of the advantages of being NNSTs which NSTs lack and may make them encounter problems in their teaching practice or even establishing rapport with their students in expanding circle countries like Iran. Non-native teacher identity is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of different facets (Lee & Kim, 2021) including NNSTs' past experience of learning, their role as previous language learners, and sharing the same culture with their students addressed in this study. Undergoing the same process of foreign language learning, NNSTs are more conscious of the second language learning pitfalls and non-native students' challenges, based on which more efficient teaching methodologies meeting students' needs might be devised (Aoyama, 2021; Egitim, 2021) or more practical teaching strategies might be used (Rauf, 2022). Besides, as past language learners, NNSTs can transfer their experiences to their students and even devise more practical lesson plans based on them or their past teachers' teaching strategies (Saba & Frangieh, 2021).

One of the experienced teachers even considered NNSTs more privileged in the context of Iran, completely rejected the superiority of NSTs, and highlighted the necessity of sharing the same language and culture with students in empathizing and establishing a better rapport with them as one of the main characteristics of effective teachers (Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2022). The facilitative role of NNSTs' first language in language learners' process of learning and establishing a more intimate teacher-student relationship has been addressed numerously by scholars (e.g., Camacho, 2023; Li, 2022; Llorca & Calvet-Terré, 2024; Weekly, 2018). Instead of considering NNSTs deficient users of English and consequently inferior to ideal NSTs under the influence of native speaker idealization, their status as bilingual teachers has been appreciated by the proponents of the World Englishes movement due to its ample advantages (Akinmulegun & Kunt, 2022). For

instance, in the current study, NNSTs accentuated their capability to correct errors due to being cognizant of the origin of errors rooted in their mother tongue. Along the same lines, Saba and Frangieh (2021) valued the role of sharing the same mother tongue in that it can help teachers recognize errors made by students due to the negative language transfer and consequently raise students' awareness to avoid probable fossilization. However, the result gained here was in contrast with what Ershadi et al. (2024) revealed about the identity of a group of Iranian NNSTs who felt marginalized and were doubtful about their instructional competence under the influence of the existing inequity between NSTs and NNSTs in their society fueled by language school stakeholders and policymakers.

A thoroughly new perspective was presented by the male experienced teacher who believed that at lower levels, NNSTs are privileged due to sharing the same language and culture with learners. However, in his view, native speakerism is an advantage at upper levels where students are overwhelmed with complex linguistic structures that might not even have clear explanations in the available textbooks. Therefore, a person living in an authentic context might be more responsive to the needs of advanced-level students. After presenting this classification, the other participants' horizons seemed to be expanded as they all confessed that they had not looked at the issue of native speakerism through this lens previously. Reflecting on the male experienced teacher's clarifications of his viewpoint, most of the other teachers were convinced and came to believe that NSTs are more privileged at upper levels as English is their native language although they lack the merits of NNSTs. What seems obvious is that the participating teachers still believed in native speakers' ownership of English and were so overwhelmed by the notion of the idealized native speaker. Even after becoming cognizant of the strengths of their status as NNSTs and rejecting the superiority of NSTs over them as a result of their collaborative reflections, they could not get rid of the trap of the myth of native speakerism and NST-NNST dichotomy thoroughly. This concurs well with the result of a study by Haung (2018) in which the NNSTs believed that they were not able to master English completely as it did not belong to them. The internal sense of disempowerment and underachievement experienced by NNSTs seems too serious to eradicate (Llurda & Calvet-Terré, 2024). Therefore, they are suggested to get engaged in continuing professional development by taking part in collaborative negotiations and reflections with their colleagues over a longer period of time to gain more insight into who they really are (Farrell, 2018), how they think of their status, and how they can overcome their sense of inadequacy and inauthenticity (Faez, 2018), particularly in upper-level classes where there are more advanced language learners.

Conclusion

Microgenetic moment-by-moment analysis on NNSTs' collaborative reflection on their identity indicated that although they became conscious of the advantages of their status as NNSTs including their past experience of learning, their role as previous language learners, and the merits of sharing the same language and culture with their students, they were still engrossed in the status of idealized native speakers as owners of English and enchanted with the belief that NSTs are privileged when it comes to the linguistic knowledge. After forming and reforming their viewpoints about the status of NNSTs during their collaborative negotiations, eventually, they reached a consensus that NNSTs are superior in lower-level classes and NSTs are more privileged in more advanced-level classes due to their comprehensive knowledge of the language. Overall, the significant role of novice and experienced teachers' collaborative reflection was evidenced in this study as it made the participating teachers direct their perspectives on the very nature of their

identity from the tacit to the conscious level, negotiate them, and (re)shape them to some extent. NNSTs' identity (re)formation occurred in both novice and experienced teachers during the panel session, disregarding their years of teaching experience.

This study has also some pedagogical implications addressing three parties. First, teacher educators are suggested to replace the transmissive system of teacher education programs with a more collaborative reflection-based system through which either prospective or in-service NNSTs' awareness of their strengths rises as a result of their reflective negotiations with their colleagues and the leading role of their teacher educators. These programs can enable NNSTs to redress their belief in the myth of idealized native speakers. Second, institutional administrators should provide NNSTs with the opportunity to take part in in-service teacher education programs with the cooperation of both novice and experienced teachers, whose negotiations might broaden their horizons about their status. NNSTs need to be guided through their lifelong career to achieve a more comprehensive image of self, become cognizant of their strengths and weaknesses, and strive to keep an equilibrium between them if they seek their identity (re)formation and development. The last implication is for NNSTs, who are encouraged to regulate their identity (co)construction in the company of their colleagues, irrespective of their years of teaching experience. This could have a decisive role in their constant awareness of the merits of their status as NNSTs and prevent them from feeling inferior, less privileged, or inauthentic when they encounter complex linguistic structures for which they have no idea as English is not their native language.

To contribute to the existing literature, other researchers are requested to conduct more studies on NNST identity and its interface with the notion of collaborative reflection through new lenses. For instance, as the current study was done in the expanding circle country, future researchers could replicate this study in other contexts including outer and inner circle countries to explore NNSTs' identity and the challenges as well as obstacles they might experience in their path of professional development there. Besides, they are suggested to conduct similar studies but longitudinally to trace NNSTs' identity (re)formation over time and to realize the extent to which their collaborative reflections could help them deal with native speakerism by coming up with more positive aspects of their status. Finally, they might also scrutinize the impact of NNSTs' collaborative reflections with their NS counterparts on their status as language teachers.

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