

# Native speakerism crossing borders: comparing stakeholders' attitudes towards English and Basque native and non-native teachers

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**ABSTRACT:** Perceptions towards English native and non-native speaking teachers have drawn the attention of researchers in language acquisition. However, no study has examined its implications in the teaching of minority languages. This study aims to analyze 563 students', parents', and teachers' attitudes and preferences towards English and Basque native and non-native teachers. Using questionnaires and group discussions, education stakeholders were questioned about their teacher preferences and their beliefs concerning assessment and support, attitudes, motivation, culture, and perceived linguistic abilities. Results revealed that education stakeholders appeared to assign concrete characteristics to native and non-native speaking teachers, regardless of the language under scrutiny.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, native speakerism, minority language teaching

**La ideología del hablante nativo: actitudes hacia el profesorado nativo y no-nativo de inglés y euskera**

**RESUMEN:** Las percepciones hacia los profesores nativos y no-nativos de inglés han llamado la atención de investigadores en la adquisición de lenguas. Sin embargo, ningún estudio ha examinado sus implicaciones en la enseñanza de lenguas minorizadas. Este estudio analiza las actitudes y preferencias de 563 estudiantes, progenitores, y docentes sobre los profesores nativos y no-nativos de inglés y euskera. Utilizando cuestionarios y grupos de discusión, los participantes fueron cuestionados acerca de sus preferencias de tipo de profesor y sus opiniones respecto a la capacidad para evaluar y apoyar al alumnado, las actitudes y motivaciones, el conocimiento de la cultura y las habilidades lingüísticas de cada tipo de profesor. Los resultados revelaron que los participantes asignan características específicas al profesorado nativo y al no-nativo, independientemente de la lengua.

**Palabras clave:** enseñanza del inglés, native speakerism, enseñanza de lenguas minorizadas

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic policy refers to any decision made upon language at individual, family, or national level. In this sense, linguistic policies are greatly influenced by language ideologies, as the latter mark the value attached to languages and their varieties by a speech community (Spolsky, 2009; Troyan and Auger, 2022). From a top-down approach, the linguistic policy of a nation can control the linguistic needs and requirements of its inhabitants, examining

the role of languages in the everyday life, developing maintenance and revitalization policies, and influencing the linguistic ideologies and practices of individuals (Muniain, Manterola and Nandi, 2019; Tollefson, 2013). Under this umbrella, students, parents, and teachers are social groups that interpret, implement, and replicate the linguistic policies and ideologies of states in their everyday language use (Nandi, 2016). English, being the quintessential international language of the 21st century, has been the subject of debate in linguistic policies around the world. Economic globalization has enhanced the need for students to acquire English, due to its communicative and economic value, accelerating its use as the language of instruction in non-English-speaking countries worldwide (Boonsuk and Fang, 2021; Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). As a result, non-English-speaking countries have devised specific language policies aimed at improving the English proficiency of students through English Medium Instruction (EMI) at different educational levels (Codó, 2022; Lasagabaster, 2022). However, the ongoing linguistic policies regarding English have their own repercussions on education, languages, and identity (Han, De Costa and Cui, 2016; Mirhosseini and Khodakarami, 2016).

One of the English language aspects that has received most attention is the construct of nativeness. Although research has contributed to a more fluid understanding of speaker identities, the traditional native/non-native classification of speakers is still present and in-use. The most extended definition is the one linking nativeness to speaking a language natively since birth (Bloomfield, 1984), hence regarding non-native speakers as individuals who have learned that language later in life. This conception has been criticized in modern discourses, arguing that the two labels are “ideological, chauvinistic and divisive” (Holliday, 2013:25), and linking the terminology with perceptions of speakerhood based on non-linguistic elements like nationality, race, and self-identification (Curran, 2021; Kiczkowski and Lowe, 2021). While academics have brought up new terminology that acknowledges speakers’ competence and avoids superiority/inferiority distinctions through recognizing speakers’ language use (De-waele, 2018; Jenkins, 2015), the native and non-native labels are still influential and in-use.

Language teaching and second language acquisition have been greatly impacted by nativeness and by the common understanding of what it is and what it entails to be a native and a non-native speaker (Cook, 2016; Pastor and Poveda, 2020). As a result, the majority of studies have been targeted on examining the notions and implications of English nativeness.

## 2. ENGLISH AND NATIVENESS

The native/non-native condition of English language teachers has influenced the profession of thousands of practitioners throughout the world. The disparity behind the definition of speakers compelled Holliday (2005) to propose the term *native speakerism*, the predominant ideology that English native-speaking teachers (NESTs), as representatives of Western culture, society, and values, are intrinsically better prepared to teach the language. According to this, NESTs’ voices are believed to be more valid and authorized to determine what and how to teach. The English Language Teaching (ELT) industry is also party in supporting *native speakerism*, as the focus continues to be on attaining native-like proficiency through classes where materials exclusively reference idealized forms of British or American models (Rose, McKinley, and Galloway, 2020). This promotion of native speakers as the ultimate goal for students, together with the implications of *native speakerism* have influenced students’ atti-

tudes towards English native and non-native speaking teachers (NNESTs) for many decades, a belief promoted by language policies across the globe.

Previous research examining learners' attitudes towards NESTs and NNESTs has encountered an overall preference for NESTs and a native norm-bound perspective, regardless of the context or students' profile (Andreani and Puspa, 2017; Author et al., 2020; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2005; Todd and Pojanapunya, 2020; West, 2004). The debate has entailed the assignation of positive features to NESTs, like being perceived as linguistic authorities, owners of a superior proficiency, wider vocabulary, and more attractive accents, while being more prepared to transmit the cultural aspects linked to English. Conversely, NNESTs have been linked with negative assumptions such as not being proficient, having "non-standard" accents and deficient pronunciations (Author et al., 2020; Gurkan and Yuksel, 2012; Ma, 2012; Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014).

Nativeness has also influenced the self-identities of English teachers, because as Tsui (2007) argues, they are influenced by their own self-perceptions, but also by the interaction with their working contexts. The superiority status of NESTs resulting from *native speakerism* intervenes in the perceptions of students, school, and educational policies, engendering stereotypes and biases about teachers that can intervene in the learning process by changing learners' attitudes and expectations.

Although the majority of studies on the effect of language teachers' native/non-native condition have revolved around English, the topic of speakers' legitimacy has also been studied, but to a much lesser extent, with regard to some minority languages.

### 3. BASQUE

The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) alludes to the region occupied by the Basque speech community in the provinces of Bizkaia, Araba and Gipuzkoa. Within this territory both Spanish and Basque are official languages, although the former is the majority language as presumably all inhabitants are Spanish speakers. A 2016 sociolinguistic survey reported that among the 2.1 million inhabitants of the BAC, 35.7 % (751.500) regarded themselves as Basque speakers and 20.6% (434.000) of those over the age of 16 reported being able to understand but not speak Basque (Basque Government, 2016). Hence, given its number of speakers, patterns of usage, and role, Basque is treated as a minority language (Echeverria, 2010). There are five main Basque dialects geographically distributed among the territory of the BAC, and their dissimilarities often hinder communication across different dialects. In an attempt to resolve this concern and to guarantee the maintenance and growth of Basque, a standard version of the language (*Batua*) was created by the Academy of the Basque Language in 1968. This standardized version was embraced by the media and education, a step that played a crucial part in expanding and promoting this newly-created *Batua*.

#### 3.1. A historic overview

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a positive linguistic situation, when as much as 83% of the population of the BAC spoke Basque. However, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the decline of Basque, when an incoming migration flow from

Spanish-speaking communities and Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) decreased the number of Basque speakers. For almost four decades, there was a generalized prohibition to speak Basque in every domain, which drastically diminished its number of speakers to 24% and prevented many generations from accessing Basque-medium education (Echeverria, 2010). As a response to this repression and in an attempt to promote education in the minority language, from the 1960s onwards Basque-speaking parents founded *ikastolas*, clandestine schools where small groups of children could access rudimentary education in Basque. By the end of the 1970s Basque was recognized as an official language, putting the language on the same official status as Spanish within the BAC, which opened the door for subsequent linguistic normalization policies that lead to the establishment of today's linguistic models (Flors-Mas and Manterola, 2021).

As a result, three different linguistic models were established in education: model A, where Spanish is the vehicular language and Basque is taught as a subject; model B, a partial immersion programme where both Spanish and Basque are the languages of instruction; and model D, a total immersion programme where Basque is the language of instruction and Spanish is taught as a separate subject. Although model A began as the most-liked option (72.8%), eventually the D model became more popular, and these days 74.5% of primary education and 70.5% of secondary education students are studying in Basque-medium instruction (Basque Government, 2021). Although the rise of the D model has resulted in an increase in the number of youngsters who can speak Basque (55.4%), such positive evolution has not been mirrored in their language use, and promoting Basque use among this age group is one of the main challenges of the BAC (Ortega, Goirigolzarri and Amorrortu, 2021).

### 3.2. Who is defined as a Basque speaker

Nativeness is still a determinant trademark in assigning speakers to different categories in minority languages. Instead of using the native/non-native labels, in minority languages these categories are substituted by new/traditional speaker. According to O'Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo (2015), new speakers of Basque or *euskaldun berriak* are "individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education programmes, revitalization projects or as adult language learners" (p.1). This group of speakers usually resides in Spanish-speaking urban areas where Basque use is low. *Euskaldun berriak* are usually speakers of the standard, which is learned at school and often not employed in their everyday life (Ortega et al., 2015). On the other side, traditional speakers or *euskaldun zaharrak* are those who have acquired Basque at home and who are gathered in small interior and western seaside areas of the BAC where the presence of Basque is noteworthy (Ciriza, 2012). Traditional speakers tend to learn and use a dialectal variety for their everyday interactions, relegating the standard to formal contexts. Even though both types of speakers co-exist and interact with each other within the same territory, traditional speakers' commitment to preserve their Basque identity has generally speaking been stronger than that of new speakers.

Approaching the minority language from this identity-wise perspective, Basque is perceived as a symbol of Basqueness (Augustyniak, 2021). As Ciriza (2012) suggests, the establishment of the three linguistic models can be considered as the main linguistic policy

of the BAC to secure an educational framework that assured the revitalization of Basque as the central symbol of Basque identity. However, traditional speakers' vernacular enjoys a symbolic position placing it as the most prestigious, authentic, and legitimate variety, linking Basque dialects with a stronger affiliation to Basque culture and identity (Urla et al., 2018). Although there is not recent data on the topic, the conception of natives' vernacular as a trademark of Basqueness was also present in Basque language teaching materials a decade ago, which represented Basque identity through representations of rural male speakers of vernacular varieties (Echeverria, 2010). Hence, although the standard has gained ground, it is considered by a sector of the population as a purely linguistic tool that gives access to specific jobs, but still lacks the authenticity and legitimation of society as an emblem of Basqueness. As a matter of fact, the work of Ortega et al. (2015) on Basque new speakers' self-perceptions put forward that they regard themselves as less real and complete Basque users than traditional speakers, who are perceived as more proficient and legitimate Basques. All this data appears to indicate that individual speakers' judgements as well as wider linguistic policies place Basque traditional speakers in a superior position in terms of legitimacy and correctness in comparison to new speakers, a favoritism that echoes the *native speakerism* ideology in minority languages. However, although such prejudice may not be alarming for the English language, it is a major threat for the maintenance of Basque, considering that new speakers nowadays outnumber traditional speakers and consequently their relevance for the development and transmission of the minority language is crucial (Urla et al., 2018).

Globalization has led to the capitalization of languages, English being the most cherished communication tool in the international market. The previous review of the role of nativeness in English has evidenced the weight of native speakerism in ELT, a harmful ideology influencing the beliefs and preconceptions towards NSTs and NNSTs. Research in different multilingual settings has suggested that students' languages attitudes and ideologies may be exported to other languages in their repertoires (Cenoz, 2013; De Angelis, 2007; Lasagabaster, 2017), hence affecting their language attitudes and practices. As evidenced above, the native/non-native speaker distinction is not solely present in English, and it does play a crucial role in speakers' thoughts and legitimacies in minority languages like Basque, where traditional speakers appear to be inherently linked to a superior status with regard to their identity and legitimacy as Basque speakers (O'Rourke and Ramallo, 2011). Given the crucial role of education in the construction of language attitudes and beliefs and taking into consideration the weight of these ideologies for the maintenance and survival of minority languages, the current study approaches the native speakerism ideology from an educational perspective within the minority language setting of Basque. The thorough study of minority language speakers' attitudes and beliefs towards different types of speakers appears to be vital for the deconstruction of negative ideologies that may hinder the use and survival of an endangered language like Basque.

#### 4. THE STUDY

The current study examines the attitudes and preferences of education stakeholders for English and Basque native speaking teachers (NSTs) and non-native speaking teachers (NNSTs) through a mixed-methods approach combining data from questionnaires and focus groups. The investigation is targeted at responding the following research question:

Do students, parents, and teachers perceive advantages and disadvantages in having English and Basque NSTs and NNSTs? Do these perceptions vary depending on the language under scrutiny: Basque (the minority language) or English (the international language)?

#### 4.1. Sociolinguistic context

The present study was conducted in three different schools in Santurtzi and Portugalete, two adjoining urban towns in the outskirts of Bilbao, the largest city in the BAC. Sociolinguistic surveys in the zone reveal that it is a predominantly Spanish-speaking area where only 18.6% of inhabitants perceive themselves as able to speak Basque. Furthermore, the street usage of this setting is reported to be low (2.5%), which limits youngsters' Basque usage to school, considering that Spanish is their primary language for their daily interactions (Ortega et al., 2021).

Two of the surveyed schools followed D model education, while the other one was a B model school. On average, students in the three schools had 3 compulsory hours of English and Basque classes per week respectively. The curriculum of D model schools, being a total Basque immersion programme, exposed those students to the minority language considerably more than that of the B model school, considering that other content subjects like mathematics, history or science were also taught in Basque. On the other side, B model learners' contact with Basque was limited to the specific 3-hour language classes, as the vehicular language of their content subjects was Spanish. Still, their in-school contact with English was almost identical, as all surveyed schools devoted three hours to the learning of the foreign language.

#### 4.2. Participants

563 education stakeholders took part in this study: 355 students, 101 parents and 107 teachers. Students' sample was made up of both male (43.38%) and female (56.62%) respondents, who belonged to secondary (80%) and high school (20%) courses (ages 14-18). Data from these students' parents was also gathered, a group particularly relevant for the transmission of language ideologies to their children. This group of participants also varied in terms of gender (28 male and 73 female respondents) and age (30-61). As regards teachers, data from four different groups was collected: 11 English NSTs, 40 English NNSTs, 35 Basque NSTs and 21 Basque NNSTs. 39 males (36.45%) and 68 females (66.55%) participated in the study, with different teaching experiences that ranged from 1 to 42 years, with an average of 18 years. With respect to English teachers' academic training, 77.9% of instructors had a degree in English studies, foreign languages or translation and interpretation, whereas 22.1% held an unrelated degree. Concerning Basque, 84% teacher held a degree in Basque studies, pedagogy, or education, and 16% had an unrelated qualification. Although not all participants were currently teaching at secondary or high school, all of them had working experience in that specific educational level.

### 4.3. Instruments

For the quantitative data, a specific questionnaire was designed by combining those employed by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005), Llurda and Huguet (2003), Moussu (2010) and West (2004). The design, testing and administration of the questionnaire followed Dörnyei's (2010) well-known guide for the construction, distribution, and processing of questionnaires in the field of second language acquisition research.

Questionnaires were originally composed by 31 multiple-choice and close-ended statement-type items. Predetermined questions were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale where the lower the mean the higher the agreement with the presented statement: *1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree*. Likert-scale items were distributed among four categories: assessment and support, attitudes and motivation, culture, and perceived linguistic abilities. The classification of items in the aforementioned categories has been proven to be a satisfactory as well as insightful for the analysis of nativeness, eliciting participants attitudes and preferences towards the two types of teachers. The selection of individual items was based on the criteria of the previously mentioned experts in the field that consider them as key for a thoughtful analysis of the topic. Separate questionnaires were designed for each language and each type of participant, but all shared the same items that would later allow the comparison of responses between English and Basque and across education stakeholders. Bearing in mind the distinct profiles of participants, the original questionnaire was adapted to each type of participant, but maintaining shared items that would later permit the comparison of results across students, parents, and teachers. Adjusting items to each type of participant, students' questionnaire addressed their own learning process, whereas parents' questionnaire targeted mothers' and fathers' perceptions of their children's learning and teachers were questioned about their own language and teaching abilities as well as the effect that these would have on their learners. Students completed a paper version of the questionnaire in class and parents were also given a printed version to fulfill at home. Language teachers in the surveyed schools completed the questionnaire in paper, whereas additional participating teachers responded to an online *Google forms* version of the questionnaire.

Focus groups were used for collecting the qualitative data. By fostering participants' contributions and interactions, this instrument was chosen due to its utility for analyzing the different opinions and ideological perspectives of the group under study. Focus groups were guided by 24 questions aimed at analyzing participants' quantitative responses in more detail and prompting individual testimonies on the examined topics. 24 different focus groups were conducted with 75 students, parents, and teachers. Discussions lasted an average of 20 minutes and were conducted both in Spanish and Basque, audio-recorded and transcribed by the author.

### 4.4. Analysis of data

Prior to the statistical analysis of data, negatively worded items were reverted. Internal consistency reliability tests were performed with Likert-scale items, which led to the analysis of 24 of the original 31 items, as the remaining 7 did not fit into the previously set



categories. The results obtained after performing internal consistency reliability tests using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient with the four categories revealed values above .60, and can thus be regarded as satisfactory (Dörnyei, 2007). The average value of each item and category was calculated, and subsequently normality tests were conducted to examine the distribution of the data. Results revealed that the data was both normally and not-normally distributed and thus both parametric and non-parametric tests were conducted.

The qualitative data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA), a method that allows a methodical identification, organization, and emersion of shared themes in a qualitative data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Through understanding the data, searching, generating, revising, and defining themes, TA aims at creating a final report where all the shared themes are presented and interpreted in detail.

#### 4.5. Results

Participants’ responses to questionnaires and focus groups are combined and analyzed in the following section. As for the Likert-scale items, values between 2.85 and 3.15 will be interpreted as neutral values where teachers’ nativeness does not influence participants’ responses, due to their closeness to the “neither agree nor disagree” option in the scale. Concerning the qualitative data, the number of the focus group and participant will be provided after each quote.

The research question focused on analyzing education stakeholders’ attitudes and preferences for English and Basque NSTs and NNSTs in the four categories under scrutiny.

**Table 1.** *Assessment and support*

<i>Variables</i>	STUDENTS		PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>
Item 1. A non-native teacher would assess my listening comprehension better than a native speaker.	2.74 (1.08)	2.67 (.90)	2.67 (1.08)	2.40 (1.07)	2.37 (.66)	1.92 (.70)
Item 2. A non-native teacher would assess my writing better than a native speaker.	3.53 (.95)	3.49 (.85)	3.78 (.98)	3.83 (.90)	3.39 (.72)	4.13 (.68)
Item 3. A non-native teacher solves my problems with English/Basque learning better than a native teacher.	3.12 (1.02)	3.14 (.98)	3.54 (.90)	3.66 (.96)	3.02 (.88)	3.86 (.90)
Item 4. Non-native teachers support students with more notes and materials than native speakers.	3.47 (1.04)	3.30 (.99)	3.44 (1.01)	3.74 (.98)	3.39 (.82)	3.86 (.81)
Item 5. A non-native teacher would assess my speaking better than a native speaker.	3.50 (.87)	3.39 (.86)	3.62 (.83)	3.90 (.83)	3.57 (.75)	4.02 (.75)
Item 6. A non-native teacher would assess my reading comprehension better than a native speaker.	3.47 (.81)	3.54 (.84)	3.78 (.79)	3.86 (.84)	3.55 (.67)	4.05 (.69)
Item 7. In general, a non-native teacher would give me more strategies/ideas to learn better.	2.66 (1)	2.91 (1.07)	3.36 (.94)	3.41 (1.08)	2.98 (.99)	3.73 (.96)
TOTAL	3.22 (.52)	3.21 (.53)	3.45 (.55)	3.54 (.57)	3.18 (.47)	3.65 (.50)

The assessment and support category showed that all stakeholders leant towards NSTs in both the global and the minority language. While students’ support for NSTs in English



and Basque was almost identical ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $M = 3.21$ ), parents' ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $M = 3.54$ ) and teachers' ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $M = 3.65$ ) seemed to display a stronger preference for Basque NSTs than for English NSTs, teachers being the group with the strongest Basque NST preference. Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to examine the significance of those differences and results revealed that teachers' responses in both languages differed significantly, scores in Basque ( $Md = 3.71$ ,  $n = 56$ ) being significantly more favorable towards the NST option than in English ( $Md = 3.14$ ,  $n = 51$ ) with a medium effect size:  $U = 718$ ,  $z = -4.457$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r = 0.43$ . The analysis of individual items revealed that NNSTs were preferred only for the assessment of listening comprehension, while NSTs were the favored alternative for the assessment of writing, speaking, and reading comprehension in both languages. The qualitative data alluded to the current linguistic demands in both languages as the reason to prefer NSTs for the assessment and support category. Language proficiency requirements appeared to accentuate the need to have NSTs that presumably prepare students better for those exams:

*If you want to have a good job in the BAC it is essential to have a certificate both in English and in Basque proficiency, and in order to do so you have to pass those exams. A NST will always prepare students better for those exams because it is their first language. (FG3-P2)*

Parents and teachers appeared to give more importance to teachers' nativeness for the assessment and support of Basque. A possible explanation may rely on NNSTs' anxiety about compensating their non-nativeness with being as correct and as accurate as possible:

*I think we [NNSTs] are always overconcerned with correctness. We don't have the oral naturality and richness of NSTs, so we have to compensate it with being correct and transmitting it to students [...] the downside of that is that we are constantly correcting students and being strict when assessing their mistakes. (FG1-Basque T2)*

**Table 2.** Attitudes and motivation

Variables	STUDENTS		PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	English	Basque	English	Basque	English	Basque
Item 8. I would have more positive attitudes towards English-speaking countries/the Basque country and their speakers with a non-native teacher.	3.30 (1.11)	3.21 (1)	2.73 (1.19)	2.48 (1.29)	2.59 (1.04)	2.33 (1.10)
Item 9. I would have less language difficulties with a non-native teacher.	2.53 (1.01)	2.37 (.99)	2.29 (.83)	2.29 (1.01)	2.10 (.87)	2.08 (1.03)
Item 10. I would feel more motivated towards learning English/Basque if I was taught by a non-native teacher.	3.50 (1.22)	2.94 (1.13)	2.79 (1.13)	2.75 (1.20)	2.53 (.73)	2.41 (.94)
Item 11. I would have more positive attitudes towards the learning of English/Basque if I was taught by a non-native teacher.	2.20 (.95)	2.08 (.88)	1.93 (.75)	1.81 (.73)	2.24 (.73)	1.82 (.74)
Item 12. In general, I would prefer having a non-native teacher.	3.69 (1.05)	3.36 (1.09)	3.41 (1.08)	3.29 (1.06)	2.94 (.67)	2.87 (.89)
TOTAL	3.04 (.73)	2.79 (.68)	2.63 (.75)	2.52 (.81)	2.47 (.56)	2.30 (.70)

The data from the attitude and motivation category revealed that parents and teachers had an overall preference for NNSTs in both languages, while students discarded the effect of nativeness in English and leaned towards NNSTs in the case of Basque. Teachers appeared to be the group displaying the strongest NNST preference in both languages (M = 2.47, M = 2.30), followed by parents (M = 2.52, M = 2.47). Mann-Whitney U tests revealed that students' preferences for NNSTs in Basque (Md = 2.80, n = 339) significantly differed from those in English (Md = 3, n = 352) with a small effect size: U = 47996, z = -4.46, p = .001. r = 0.16. A closer look at individual items disclosed participants' agreement on NNSTs' advantageous position as creators of more positive attitudes towards learning and as originators of less language difficulties, areas where NNSTs' first-hand experience as language learners made the difference:

*NNSTs have studied the language the same as us. They started from scratch, they have been through the different stages of learning the language and now they are able to speak it proficiently [...] They are also able to give you learning tips to facilitate your learning. (FG3-S3)*

A particular difference between the two languages was also mentioned in focus groups, where participants regarded English NNSTs' ability to use students' first language (L1) as a differentiating advantageous characteristic.

*NNSTs [of English] are also Spanish speakers and in case you have a doubt that you cannot understand in English they can switch to Spanish and explain it to you. They can tell you "past perfect is like the Spanish han hecho" and that is when you understand it. [...] NSTs cannot do that. (FG1-S1).*

**Table 3. Culture**

Variables	STUDENTS		PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	English	Basque	English	Basque	English	Basque
Item 13. You have to be a non-native teacher to be able to transmit the culture, history, and traditions of English-speaking countries/the Basque Country.	2.60 (1.08)	2.68 (1.08)	2.47 (1.02)	3.16 (1.14)	2.14 (1.04)	2.23 (1.07)
Item 14. I would learn more about the history, culture, and traditions of English-speaking countries/ the Basque Country if I was taught by a non-native teacher.	2.92 (1.09)	2.64 (1.03)	3.61 (.92)	3.83 (.90)	3.76 (1.03)	2.10 (1.07)
Item 15. A non-native teacher is the best option to teach the history, culture, and traditions of English-speaking countries/the Basque Country.	3.79 (.94)	3.74 (.99)	2.86 (1.11)	1.58 (.82)	2.73 (1.04)	2.75 (1.22)
TOTAL	3.10 (.49)	3.01 (.78)	2.98 (.48)	2.34 (1.02)	2.86 (.44)	2.35 (1.01)

Different results were observed in the culture category, where the majority of participants discarded the effect of nativeness in the transmission of the cultural aspects linked to language, but parents and teachers perceived that Basque NNSTs were better positioned to do so (M = 2.34, M = 2.35). Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that there were significant differences among the scores of parents and teachers. In the case of parents, their scores in Basque (Md = 2.33, n = 74) significantly differed from those in English (Md = 3, n = 100) with a medium effect

size:  $U = 2094.5$ ,  $z = -4.934$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r = 0.47$ . As for teachers, their preferences for Basque NNSTs ( $Md = 2.33$ ,  $n = 56$ ) differed significantly from those in English ( $Md = 2.66$ ,  $n = 51$ ), also with a medium effect size:  $U = 815$ ,  $z = -3.871$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r = 0.37$ . Rather than nativeness, focus groups revealed that exposure was more decisive in determining language teachers' ability to acquire and transfer the cultural, historical, and traditional aspects of English and Basque:

*It doesn't matter if you are native or not, I think that what is key is each individual's exposure and contact with Basque culture. Speaking Basque natively does not automatically turn you into an encyclopedia on Basque traditions, you have to be exposed to them to embrace them. (FG2-P2)*

*We have been in English-speaking countries and we have lived with that people, we are not individuals who have never been in those countries, and who have only learned English in our hometown [...] We have lived and learned the culture and in that sense we transmit what we know and what we have been exposed to. (FG1-English T2)*

However, the three types of participants agreed on the importance of learning the history, culture and traditions linked to Basque, due to the value attached to it:

*In my opinion it is crucial that my children learn Basque history and culture. We are part of a unique community with a very interesting history attached to our language. [...] There is no other language like Basque in the whole world, and we need to make sure that younger generations learn and experience it to the fullest. (FG3-P1)*

**Table 4.** *Assessment and support*

<i>Variables</i>	STUDENTS		PARENTS		TEACHERS	
	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Basque</i>
Item 16. In general, I would learn more vocabulary with a non-native teacher.	3.98 (1.01)	3.71 (1.06)	3.15 (1.20)	3.04 (1.26)	2.90 (1.06)	2.80 (1.06)
Item 17. Non-native teachers are good examples of how to learn English/Basque.	2.03 (1.14)	1.89 (.94)	1.97 (.84)	1.83 (.90)	2.41 (.77)	2.64 (.94)
Item 18. In general, my listening skills would be better with a non-native teacher.	3.76 (.95)	3.44 (1)	3.90 (.78)	3.79 (.93)	2.75 (.93)	2.53 (1.04)
Item 19. In general, my reading skills would be better with a non-native teacher.	3.32 (1.04)	3.05 (1.05)	2.75 (1.10)	2.71 (1.22)	2.20 (.63)	2.16 (.97)
Item 20. In general, I would speak more fluently with a non-native teacher.	3.70 (1.01)	3.41 (1.01)	3.26 (1.17)	2.91 (1.24)	2.75 (1.95)	2.58 (1.14)
Item 21. In general, a non-native teacher explains grammar better than a native teacher.	3.34 (.93)	3.29 (1)	3.41 (.87)	3.66 (.94)	2.16 (.70)	3.96 (.73)
Item 22. In general, my pronunciation would be better with a non-native teacher.	3.96 (.99)	3.58 (1.09)	3.49 (1.14)	3.25 (1.18)	3.16 (.98)	2.94 (1.16)
Item 23. My level would improve faster with a non-native teacher.	3.69 (1.03)	3.44 (1.01)	3 (1.07)	2.85 (1.21)	2.47 (.78)	2.19 (.88)
Item 24. In general, my writing skills would be better with a non-native teacher.	3.25 (1.04)	3.07 (1.04)	2.76 (1.01)	2.59 (1.20)	2.33 (.79)	2.30 (1.06)
TOTAL	3.44 (.55)	3.20 (.56)	3.08 (.62)	2.96 (.68)	2.56 (.59)	2.67 (.65)

The perceived linguistic abilities category unfolded different opinions among education stakeholders: students displayed an overall preference for NSTs in the two languages, while teachers bended towards NNSTs and parents showed neutral values discarding the effect of nativeness on the perceived linguistic abilities of English and Basque teachers.

Mann-Whitney U tests showed significant differences in teachers' support for NNSTs in Basque (Md = 3.22, n = 334) and English (Md = 3.55, n = 343) with a small effect size:  $U = 42908$ ,  $z = -5.660$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $r = 0.21$ . However, it is particularly worth mentioning that the majority of participants' responses to teachers' perceived linguistic abilities did not change depending on the language, which may indicate that education stakeholders assign specific advantageous linguistic aspects to NSTs by virtue of their nativeness and regardless of the language.

While parents displayed balanced preferences for teachers' perceived linguistic abilities, students denoted a preference for NSTs' vocabulary, listening, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency in both English and Basque. As evidenced in focus groups, in the eyes of students and parents, speaking a language natively qualified those speakers not only to use it proficiently, but to transmit those aspects more favorably:

*After all it is native speakers' language, they have years of experience learning and speaking it [...] they will always have a better pronunciation, grammar and so on, and they will transmit it [to students] much better than NNSTs. (FG5-S1)*

The data from teachers' responses appeared to be particularly noteworthy, as both English and Basque language teachers placed NNSTs as advantageous in their listening, reading, fluency and writing abilities, but disagreed in the areas of pronunciation and grammar. In the case of grammar, the complexities and difficulties of Basque grammar appeared to entail an unscalable wall for NNSTs, an obstacle that could only be overcome by nativeness:

*There is no other language as complex as Basque [...] its grammar is particularly hard to explain and difficult to master. NSTs have naturally learned it during childhood, while we [NNSTs] have spent countless hours studying it, but we still make occasional mistakes. (FG2-Basque T1)*

#### 4.6. Discussion

The present study was initially designed and conducted grouping items in already-examined categories in research on native speakerism (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2005; Llurda and Huguet, 2003; Moussu, 2010; West, 2004), as this would allow a more nuanced and precise analysis of the issue under consideration. Notwithstanding the insightful data provided by the scales, the analysis of individual items revealed that participants appeared to lean towards NSTs or NNSTs more distinctly than in the overall four categories, thus showing clear-cut tendencies for the two types of teachers in the two examined languages. This finding is interesting in itself, as it indicates the need to focus research on native speakerism on specific items rather than on general categories, as this approach may shed more light on the topic under scrutiny. Based on this observation, the obtained results will be discussed both considering the overall values of the scales as well as individual items within each category.

The data from this study unfolds findings heretofore un-researched: there seem to be positive and negative characteristics assigned to NSTs and NNSTs by virtue of their nativeness and regardless of the language under study. In the case of NSTs, they seem to be perceived as superior in specific aspects as a result of being natives to English and Basque. A possible explanation for the presence of this trend in the minority language may be the side effect of the linguistic policies of English, a massive scheme with proven worldwide impact (Curd-Christiansen, 2022; Mirhosseini and Khodakarami, 2016). Despite the fact that the data from this study does not confirm this claim, it is hypothesized that the global perpetuation of the belief that the language is better used and learned from NSTs may have crossed boundaries and exerted its influence on minority languages like Basque. Although there is a broad body of research on the perceived characteristics of English NSTs and NNSTs in the eyes of students and teachers themselves (Andreani and Puspa, 2017; Author et al., 2020; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2005; Todd and Pojanapunya, 2020; West, 2004), to my knowledge, such features have not been examined and contrasted in other languages.

In the case of the assessment and support abilities, education stakeholders agreed on perceiving both English and Basque NSTs as better prepared for such aspects. The data suggests that participants perceive that NSTs, by virtue of being natives to those languages, are better equipped to assess and prepare students for the language proficiency requirements of the two languages. Teachers considered that nativeness is more important for the assessment and support in the case of Basque, due to NNSTs' overconcern and anxiety to be as correct and as accurate as possible, a consequence of the pressure exerted by *native speakerism* and the need to get as close as possible to native-like speech. The disparity in the number of participating NSTs and NNSTs in both languages may also account for the witnessed native preference in the minority language, as the majority of the enquired Basque language teachers were NSTs (62%), but only 20% of English teachers were NSTs. Although English NNSTs have previously reported feelings of anxiety resulting from judgements on their language use (Ma, 2012; Rajagopalan, 2005), this finding is new to a minority language context. The requirements of the globalized 21<sup>st</sup> century have emphasized the worldwide need to master English and the need to do so with Basque in the BAC. The ruling linguistic policies of the English language together with the pressure exerted by their parents, exert a significant influence on the language ideologies and beliefs of students, who replicate and perpetuate the learned beliefs (Muniain, Manterola and Nandi, 2019). Participants' testimonies suggest that the increasing linguistic requirements and the current linguistic policies in English and Basque accentuate the alleged need to have NSTs who will presumably better prepare learners to succeed in high-stakes exams.

Conversely, the majority of participants' preferences in terms of attitudes and motivation revealed an overall inclination for NNSTs in both languages. Education stakeholders acknowledged that NNSTs' experience as language learners, which provided them with knowledge on the different language learning stages and difficulties, was an advantageous characteristic. As also found in previous studies on English (Gurkan and Yuksel, 2012; Ma, 2012; Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014), sharing the L1 with students was repeatedly mentioned in focus groups as a remarkable advantage on the side of English NNSTs, which allowed them not only to switch to Spanish for complex explanations but also to create linguistic parallelisms with other languages in students' repertoire. However, bearing in mind that all

Basque speakers are also Spanish speakers, sharing and using students' L1 was possible for both Basque NSTs and NNSTs, hence making no distinctions between the two types of teachers in the use of students' L1.

Contrary to previous research examining the transmission of the cultural aspects linked to language (Gurkan and Yuksel, 2012; Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014), participants discarded nativeness and pointed towards exposure as the most determinant characteristic determining teachers' ability to internalize and transmit the history, culture, and traditions of the two examined languages. Still, it is worth mentioning that parents and teachers bended towards Basque NNSTs for the transmission of these points. Considering that the present study was conducted in a Spanish-speaking context, it is hypothesized that these results are an illustration of the vindication of non-native speakers' connection with the culture, history, and traditions of Basque, an area formerly reserved for those who speak the language natively. In fact, the data seems to indicate that parents' and teachers' opinions may be a response to the stigmatization of NNSTs as less-legitimate Basques (Ortega et. al., 2015), where new speakers may be raising their voices and reclaiming their ability to claim themselves as recognized Basques.

The perceived linguistic abilities category revealed that teacher preferences did not vary depending on the language, hence hinting that specific advantageous and disadvantageous linguistic aspects are tight to NSTs and NNSTs regardless of the language. Stakeholders repeatedly mentioned NNSTs' learning experience and the subsequently engendered empathy as a determinant and advantageous trait. This finding has also been observed in other contexts with English as a foreign language (Author et al., 2020; Moussu, 2010), but it appears to be novel with regards to a minority language. It may consequently be affirmed that learning a language provides NNSTs with a finer understanding of students' current process and with notable empathy levels in terms of their difficulties and struggles irrespective of the language. However, students' and parents' perceived superiority of NSTs' linguistic abilities may reveal some kind of knock-on effect of *native speakerism*, a detrimental ideology that is able to cross language borders and interfere in judgements on speakers' linguistic abilities. This finding appears to be particularly alarming and risky for Basque, considering that it may entail illegitimacy and inferiority feelings among new speakers, a group whose language use is crucial for the survival and maintenance of the minority language (Urla et al., 2018). As for teachers, the dissimilar responses between Basque and English teachers in the areas of grammar are particularly notable. Although grammar has traditionally been perceived as one of the strengths of English NNSTs (Gurkan and Yuksel, 2012; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2005; Walkinshaw and Oanh, 2014), Basque teachers considered Basque grammar as too complex for NNSTs to master, which lead them to consider that only those who speak the language natively can attain its mastery. Assuming that nativeness places Basque NSTs a step above NNSTs in terms of grammar acquisition and teaching points towards a confirmation of *native speakerism* in the mindset of teachers.

#### 4.7. Conclusion

*Native speakerism* appears to be a cross-border ideology whose implications do not only condition English users' perceptions of speakerhood and teaching abilities, but also migrate and impact minority languages. Examining the effect of *native speakerism* in endangered

languages like Basque seems to be necessary for the deconstruction of detrimental ideologies that may hinder the language use and self-perceptions of speakers, a vital area for the maintenance and survival of minority languages.

The current study has confirmed that there are specific traits linked to NSTs and NNSTs, regardless of the language. This finding is particularly novel and intriguing for the field of second language acquisition and language teaching, as it may open the door for future studies. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations that should be tackled in future research. First, the current study was conducted in a Spanish-speaking area with low Basque use. It would be insightful to replicate the study in a Basque-speaking setting to observe the weight of the context. Second, the obtained results are minority language-specific and hence cannot be generalized to other settings. Replicating the study in different bilingual autonomous communities within Spain may also provide insightful data on the effect of external factors such as linguistic policies and the sociopolitical and educational context on students', parents', and teachers' perceptions towards NSTs and NNSTs. Likewise, the present study could also be replicated in other international minority language contexts like Ireland or Wales, where endangered languages co-exist and receive the influence of English on a daily basis.

As regards the pedagogical implications, the present study calls for a reconsideration and reconceptualization of the materials used in the teaching of English and Basque, so that they incorporate the real heterogeneous nature of the different types of speakers of the two languages and avoid discriminatory biases that may influence education stakeholders' ideologies. As for the minority language case of Basque, results point towards the need to promote awareness raising pedagogical practices within the Basque language class, so that students are aware of the negative impact of legitimacy, authenticity and authority preconceptions of the different language uses for the survival of their endangered language.

If minority languages are to flourish, it is indispensable to force education stakeholders to reflect on the prejudices that *native speakerism* stirs up, because new speakers and NNSTs must play a paramount role in the survival of all those languages whose speakers have endured discrimination and lack of prestige. Unfortunately, the results of this study reveal that there is still a long way to go to minimize the impact of the idealized native speaker.

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