

Native-speakerism as an obstacle to teacher mobility in the EU: interviews with Hungarian teachers of English

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Introduction

Facilitating geographical mobility of the workforce has been one of the major objectives of the European Union (EU), and the contribution mobile teachers, trainees and assistants could make to European integration was recognised early. The European Commission (EC) has been considering the introduction of a centrally organised long-term (5-10 months) primary/secondary level teacher exchange programme across EU countries for over a decade. There were two waves of planning at the EC, the first between 2002-2009 and the second between 2010-2013 (Ecorys, 2013; Strubell, 2009). The new Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) has finally included long-term (2-12 months) teacher mobility, which currently belongs to the Strategic Partnership framework. This entails that, instead of a central teacher selection procedure, it is the partner schools within a funded project that may decide on sending or receiving school staff. Interestingly enough, Hungarian teachers seem to be reluctant to take advantage of these opportunities. Out of the 164 Hungarian schools having coordinated a Strategic Partnership project since 2014, *none* has included long-term staff mobility in their project (Lampért-Kármán, personal communication, 2016). This lack of interest raises some questions: Do Hungarian teachers not see the benefits of EU mobility schemes or do they not consider themselves suitable or adequately trained for participation in a teacher exchange programme? In the research presented in this paper I attempted to find answers to these questions from the point of view of Hungarian teachers of English.

The benefits of teacher mobility in the EU

As part of the earlier preparation waves, the EC commissioned two surveys to identify the attitudes and readiness of foreign language teachers and school staff, the results of which appeared in the Williams-report (Williams, Strubell, Busquet, Solé, & Vilaró, 2006) and the Ecorys-report (2013), respectively. Both surveys found that participants were extremely enthusiastic about mobility programmes, though they reported possible personal, financial and bureaucratic obstacles.

The EC promotes the long-term mobility of teachers in view of the beneficial effects for all stakeholders, including the participating teachers themselves (see e.g., Strubell, 2009; Williams et al., 2006):

- the visiting teacher can experience a different education context professionally, culturally and socially, offering new challenges and enrichments;
- teachers in the host school can have an intercultural experience, both professionally and personally, by negotiating their respective professional views and methods with the visiting colleague;
- students in the host school have the opportunity to gain an intercultural experience by working with a teacher with a partly different set of cultural norms and expectations, even if the selection process is sound and prudent resulting in the host and exchange teachers having the same standard of professional knowledge and skills;
- students in the base school can welcome back their returning teacher, who disseminates their experiences through their teaching;
- teachers in the base school can welcome back their returning colleague, who disseminates their experiences through staff room discussions, workshops and conferences;
- both the host and base schools can profit from the teachers' exchange of information, views and routines, and both the host and base school system can indirectly benefit from the teachers' cooperation;
- teachers could thus spearhead a tighter-knit Europe-wide integration and European identity formation of the next generation.

One particular advantage of the EC-organised long-term mobility programmes for language teachers is that they provide the opportunity of working abroad not only to native speakers of a language but also to qualified teachers who are non-native speakers of the language they teach.

Native speakerism

In the case of English language teachers, who are in the focus of the present study, a long-term teacher mobility scheme begs the question of how far such a teacher exchange programme can match the readiness of EFL teachers to participate in it. Would they be enthusiastic or would they shy away from it, undervaluing themselves on the basis of their own *native speakerism* or fearing that of others?

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Akoha et al. (1991, as cited in Seidlhofer 2001, p. 152) were among the first to draw attention to native speakerism as an ideology. The notion is defined by Holliday as “a pervasive ideology within ELT” (2006, p. 385), a “chauvinistic belief that ‘native speakers’ represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the language and of language teaching methodology” (2008, p. 49); elsewhere he also applies the term to native teachers (2006, p. 385). In other words, native speakerism is not a linguistic but a political-ideological question, one that pervades the linguistic and language teaching profession.

An important argument against native speakerism is that its conception of the native speaker is idealistic, that the complex and variable reality of English native speakers is in opposition with the monolithic perception of them. The idealisation of native speakers is partly rooted in the belief that the native speaker always speaks better English. However, those four hundred million native speakers of the English language speak the language in extremely diverse ways.

Medgyes (1992, 1994) was among the first to trigger the native English speaker teacher (NEST)/non-native English speaker teacher (non-NEST) debate, claiming the following: while NESTs have an advantage in their language competence that is impossible to surpass, non-NESTs have advantages to offset their relative language handicap:

- the latter are role models, living examples to prove that it is possible to learn a foreign language well,
- being experienced language learners, they can be more effective in teaching language learning strategies,
- being experienced language learners, they are more empathic and can foresee the difficulties ahead of their learners; they also have more conscious, verbalisable knowledge about the language, and
- if they speak their learners’ L1, they can exploit that as well (Medgyes 1992, pp. 346-347); if not, they should start to learn that language.

Thus, Medgyes (1992, 1994) finds it futile to ask the question whether NESTs or non-NESTs are worth more: as their advantages and disadvantages balance each other out, schools should employ both of them.

Bernat (2008, p. 1) observes that many non-NESTs suffer from the “impostor syndrome”: they feel inadequate for not being able to meet the expectations of native-level language competence, for being “still” learners of the language they teach. (This is similar to what Medgyes (1983) called the schizophrenic teacher.) Bernat recommends that teacher training programmes should incorporate the task of empowering non-native teacher trainees to recognise their own worth in the face of status inequalities between NESTs and non-NESTs in the language teaching market.

In order to find out the reasons for the reluctance of Hungarian EFL teachers to participate in EU mobility schemes, an interview-based investigation with 67 Hungarian teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), including teachers in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programmes, was carried out. The research questions that guided the investigation were formulated as follows:

1. How do participating teachers view themselves as non-native teachers of English?
2. How do their views relate to their willingness to go to teach English in another EU country?

Method

The participants

The interviews were organised, conducted and recorded by the author and three Hungarian-L1 English teachers between 2010 and 2013. Participants were chosen on the basis of being active Hungarian-L1 teachers of EFL or CLIL, following quota sampling for gender, age and school type in a way that fieldworkers asked teachers to participate so that the sample could mirror the distribution of the Hungarian teacher population (based on Balázs, Kocsi and Vágó, 2010). Not more than two colleagues were asked from any one school. The distribution of participants is shown in Table 1. Altogether 67 interviews were included in the analysis. They form the basis of the findings presented here. The distribution of genders in the sample is 58 (87%) female to 9 (13%) male teachers. The mean age of the participants was 37.9 years.

Table 1. *Participants of the Transcribed Interviews (N = 67)*

Age Gender Main school type	23-30		31-35		36-40		41-50		51-		Sum
	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	
Primary school	4		6		8	1	3	1			23
Grammar school	2	1	5	1	1		5		5	1	21
Other secondary	2	1	3		1		1				8
Tertiary					1		2				3
Private language school	2	2	2			1	1		1		9
Private classes	1		1				1				3
Sum	11	4	17	1	11	2	13	1	6	1	67

The research tool

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing participants to comment on related issues at any point or any length (mean interview length: 52.75 minutes). The interview questions were based on the DROFoLTA survey (meaning “*Detecting and Removing Obstacles to Foreign Language Teaching Abroad*”; Williams et al. 2006). The DROFoLTA survey was an online questionnaire-based study answered by 6,251 language teachers (312 of whom had Hungarian as their L1), focussing on their attitudes towards a possible mid/long-term teacher mobility programme in the EU, the advantages and disadvantages they see, and so on. The interview questions of the present research study started with biographic and professional data, including those related to living, studying and working abroad, and then contained most of the content questions of the DROFoLTA questionnaire. Thus the 20 main questions were of variable complexity; in Questions 12 and 18, participants were asked to comment on 6 and 22 statements, respectively. (For the complete list of questions see the Appendix.)

The method of qualitative analysis

When analysing the transcripts, Creswell’s method (2007) in the framework of grounded theory was followed, categorising emergent themes, with some insights from Maykut & Morehouse’s (1994) suggestions on how to use the constant comparative method. In the analysis of the data, MA in ELT students of a research seminar at a Hungarian university were involved in spring, 2013. The problems and solutions in the analysis, for example, sequencing in the coding, finding thematic units, coding-recoding, and so on, were based on the discovery procedures while the students and the researcher were reading the transcripts. We worked on trying to find units of meaning that were shared by all (or most) analysts, and categorising them according to discussions and negotiations over what to classify as themes, that is, recurring patterns of topics. The basis of classification of the units was the way interview participants interpreted their experiences related to a topic in similar ways through comparable word usage, including metaphors. Finally, 110 themes were decided upon, which cannot all be discussed in a short paper. Therefore, nine themes will be outlined here which are the most closely related to the research questions stated above:

- the participants struggling to comprehend the suggestion that they could be employed to teach English abroad;
- direct native speakerism;
- directly or indirectly declining the NEST/non-NEST contrast with reference to themselves;

- colleagues teaching abroad as a still strange reality;
- “the unskilled immigrant worker”: non-NESTs are employed because NESTs do not take teaching jobs anymore;
- non-NESTs are not employed abroad as their degrees are not accepted;
- the participant’s self-evaluated competence in English: to be improved;
- the participant’s self-evaluated competence in English: satisfactory;
- a different person when speaking English vs. Hungarian.

Results and discussion

The focus of analysis is on one aspect of the interviewed language teachers’ identity: their self-perception as non-NESTs. In the interviews, this feature of the teachers’ identity turned out to be of central importance in their attitudes to mobility perspectives. On the one hand, most of them would welcome the idea of teaching abroad (64 interviewees, 94%); moreover, several are enthusiastic about it (34 interviewees, 51%). On the other hand, several participants perceive the non-NEST (themselves included) as being of secondary value, and thus unworthy to participate in such a mobility programme.

While some participants consciously advocated the superiority of the native speaker/the native speaker teacher, others held that belief in a fairly unreflective way, so much so that they often found it hard to even grasp the question of whether they wished to go abroad for some time to teach English: they simply could not picture themselves in such a role, they could not make sense of the suggestion that working abroad could mean teaching English. Those reflecting on the question as a complex reality were in the minority. Let us see a few examples of how the interviewees related to the question of the non-NEST in their formulations.

Initial incomprehension

The first examples present excerpts where the participants initially could not comprehend the suggestion that they, as non-NESTs, could go abroad and teach EFL. In Example 1, Kinga implies, without saying so, that she cannot grasp that working abroad can mean teaching English, and she supports her opinion with examples of non-professional work.

[The examples are translations of the Hungarian originals (*italics: in English in the original*). Participants are identified with pseudonyms, the locus in the recording is given in minutes and seconds. The fieldworkers are identified as Interviewers (Int.). Transcript symbols: **XXX** means unclear text; **[XXX]** means masking (proper name or other feature covered to protect the participant’s anonymity); text between **quotation marks** means interview question/statement read out verbatim; **[chuckles]** means relevant non-verbal communication.]

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Example 1 Kinga 72:00

- Kinga: Living abroad. That is, working abroad. I see, I see. To work abroad, that's not certain. That is, what type of work. That is, if an English teacher teaches English, or an English teacher works as an au pair, or a would-be English teacher works as an au pair or as a waitress abroad. That is, it's useful if she is abroad, in the target country, working anywhere.
- Int.: Anywhere?
- Kinga: Anywhere. Whether it is being an au pair or a waitress. I used to wash hair at a hairdresser's when I once was there [in the UK].

Example 1 indicates how the participant struggles to make sense of the interviewer's suggestion about going to teach English abroad. Her fragmented sentences may be due to her concentrating on making sense of the issue. What she arrives at is a counter-suggestion she offers for negotiation: working abroad means working in an English speaking country, not necessarily as a professional but in non-professional employment – the primary aim is the cultural and linguistic presence, while professional presence is secondary.

In Example 2, Ditta contemplates whether it is possible for a non-NEST to teach EFL abroad. At the end of the excerpt it turns out that she is unable to accept that as a reality; even if the topic has been negotiated together, the example she brings shows that she has another idea, the Hungarian CLIL context, in mind.

Example 2 Ditta 44:00

- 1 Ditta: I know of many teachers who go abroad to teach other subjects. But to actually teach English? Is that possible?
- Int.: Let me ask: do you know many such teachers? Who teach subjects, biology, physics, in English?
- 2 Ditta: I'm not saying that. I've heard about that, indirectly. For example, I took the same train with a PE teacher, who came to the same school in [XXX – a town in England] for a training like me, because he's going to teach PE in an immersion programme school [chuckles].
- Int.: Where? Where is he? In England?
- 3 Ditta: Where? No. He's going to do that here, in Hungary.

In Example 2, Ditta, in her first turn, shows signs of contemplating and then rejecting the idea that teaching English abroad for a Hungarian-L1 EFL teacher has a reality. The fact that her rejection is total is shown by the way she changes the topic without signalling it in her second turn: while referring back to the previous context ("I've heard about *that*", that is, about Hungarian teachers teaching abroad), she turns out to have changed the context of her example: in her clarification turn (Turn 3) she explains that the PE teacher of her example is going to teach PE in English in a CLIL programme not abroad but in Hungary. This unmarked change of the context shows how difficult it is for her to contemplate the issue offered by the interviewer.

In Example 3, Babett does not understand the interview question read out by the interviewer.

Example 3 Babett 5:30-6:00

- Int.: And “Would you teach in another country if you had the chance?”
Babett: Wow, that’s a good question. So the question is if I would teach Hungarian to foreigners?
Int.: No, English, English. In one of the European Union countries, probably.
Babett: English?

The way Babett reacts shows that she may have never considered the question of going abroad to teach English – her reaction shows that she may find the possibility of getting a job on the basis of her Hungarian L1 more plausible than her professional background in EFL. Moreover, the above signs of incomprehension also indicate that it may not have occurred to her that her profession may be marketable abroad. Delay in understanding the question may mean that she, and the other participants quoted above, took some time to frame themselves as English teaching professionals in a foreign context.

Direct native speakerism

Some participants openly adhere to their belief in NEST superiority as, for example, Zsóka in Example 4.

Example 4 Zsóka 11:00

- Int.: Why wouldn’t you go to teach English as a foreign language in a target country? Why not?
Zsóka: Well, because I’m not a native speaker, and I think that’s why. Obviously a native speaker would not want to learn, and when people from abroad, Spaniards, Italians come, they would not want to learn from a Hungarian, but from a *native speaker* [uses the English term in the Hungarian discussion]. That’s why I’ve gone there [= to the UK], twice.

Zsóka here takes native speakerism for granted: she went to Britain twice to learn English from “a native speaker”, and she understands that other nationals going to Britain to learn English will have the same preference. What this entails is that a non-NEST will not be employed there or in another English-speaking country, simply due to the non-interest of those taking the courses.

In Example 5, Anett expresses a feeling of inferiority towards NESTs. She openly claims that a native (that is, a NEST), as if by nature (“obviously”), is superior to a non-NEST, both in terms of knowledge and experience.

Example 5 Anett 25:30

- Anett: Well, I don’t know. I think I would have an inferiority complex facing those teachers [= NESTs]. Obviously, a native has a much higher level of knowledge and experience.

This is a clear example of how idealising the native speaker (teacher) and thinking about native speakers as uniform, non-variable and perfect entities can be expressed by someone influenced by native speakerism, as pointed out by Holliday (2006). The fact

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that such a belief is (as all ideologies are) “a very strong filter of reality” (Arnold as cited in Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005, p. 3) may be noticed if we consider the high number of native speakers and NESTs Anett must have met during her pre-service teacher training and since then, in her professional life.

In Example 6, Karina states as a fact that where there are NESTs available, non-NESTs have no business. Her rhetorical question (“why would they fill [the job] in with a Hungarian teacher of English?”) shows that she may not have thought about the advantages a non-NEST can offer.

Example 6 Karina 12:50

Karina: It is rather *native speakers* they fill in the English teaching jobs. If there is an open position, why would they fill it in with a Hungarian teacher of English?

Examples 4-6 show the participants’ rejection of the suggestion that a Hungarian-L1 teacher of EFL could teach English abroad in general, or in an English-speaking country in particular. The way they formulate their belief is strengthened by the force of their expression: they refer to the self-evident nature (“and I think that’s why”, “obviously”, “why would they”) of NEST superiority.

Rejecting the NEST/non-NEST dichotomy

Some interviewees did not reflect on the NEST/non-NEST dichotomy but, rather, behaved as if the distinction did not exist. In Example 7, Ditta talks about the difficulty one faces in a new job, irrespective of whether it is at home or abroad. She rejects the native/non-native dichotomy even when she is asked directly about it. When reading the transcript, it seems that she probably consciously avoided being drawn into that stereotype.

Example 7 Ditta 51:00

Ditta: “It would be difficult to have the status I have achieved accepted in the host country.” That is so. What you have achieved as an English teacher, that you know more than others, would not certainly be accepted abroad. [...]

Int.: Yes. So is it the same [whether it is a new job abroad or in Hungary]?

Ditta: Probably yes. That is, if I get a job now in Kecskemét [a Hungarian town], it would be the same. It’s irrelevant where.

A few other participants openly rejected the contrast, claiming that they could be as good as a NEST in a classroom, in Hungary or abroad. This is how Robi formulated his point in Example 8:

Example 8 Robi 22:10

Int.: “Would you teach in another country if you had the chance?”

Robi: Now, that would be a great idea. Now that you are saying, I wonder why it hasn’t occurred to me.

Int.: “Why?”

Robi: Well, I have an Irish colleague in my school, and honestly, well, he is a nice guy, really professional, but I've been thinking that, and I don't want to praise myself too much here, I've been thinking about it just for myself that I'm good enough when we're compared. You know, when we talk shop, I sometimes explain to him a good classroom task, and he teaches me something. So this teaching abroad idea just fits in here.

At this point in the interview Robi reports that he has been contemplating the comparison between himself and a NEST colleague, and found, somewhat even to his own surprise, that he is not inferior to a NEST. This reporting of surprise may imply that he came to this recognition from a possible earlier acceptance of native speakerism – probably meaning that he recognised that it had been false, and that professional achievement is comparable, irrespective of the teacher being a native or non-native speaker.

Teaching abroad: real yet odd

Some interviewees considered the issue of teaching English abroad in a more complex way, reflecting upon it as an already existing reality. Kata in Example 9 indicates that from her viewpoint, the understanding of the issue was happening as a process: first she thought that non-NESTs had no business abroad, but then started to hear about colleagues teaching there, although she still found it odd.

Example 9 Kata 1/69:00

Kata: Well, it is also true that I can see some development. What I have never thought, a colleague of mine goes abroad, and has an English as a foreign language class in a language school, to learners who go to England to learn the language. And they have Polish, Hungarian and I don't know what other teachers of English. [...] Though I find this still strange.

It is unclear what she means here by “some development”: she may be referring to the improving situation of more and more NESTs being employed abroad. Or she may mean an improvement in her (and others') self-perception, that is, that Hungarian-L1 teachers are good enough to have a place in the international language teaching market. The fact that she is referring to this latter sense is strengthened by her reporting that she finds it difficult to accommodate to this new self-perception.

Teaching abroad: the unskilled worker

Some interviewees have considered the opportunity of teaching English abroad as a reality and often approached the difficulties through recurring themes. One such approach is presenting the situation within the framework of the “unskilled worker” theme: a non-NEST can get a job in an English-speaking country because NESTs will not take it anymore, the same way as we often hear about washer-cleaner jobs open to East-Europeans in Western Europe because it is difficult to fill these jobs with locals. This is how Kata presents it (Example 10):

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Example 10 Kata 1/70:00

Kata: The way I heard about this is that it [employing non-native teachers] is because teachers there will not do teaching any more. That's why they take teachers from abroad. [...] Because there are a lot of types of work that only immigrants are ready to do. In Germany, in England, because locals live so well that they would not do it.

The comparison Kata offers here may be surprising: the framework of implied reference to the often heard story of blue-collar jobs being filled by East-Europeans, here applied to teaching professionals, offers a rather unattractive parallel. The message this framing seems to send is that even if non-NESTs think the borders are open and they can compete for international teaching jobs on equal terms, they may have to think twice: those jobs are only left-overs of the teaching job supply.

Teaching abroad: degree not accepted

Another recurring theme to make sense of the possible difficulties in finding teaching employment abroad is to frame it through administration difficulties, more precisely, the problems of having one's qualifications acknowledged. Dóri, in Example 11, develops this theme as a narrative.

Example 11 Dóri

Dóri: He had a Master's degree in English teaching, and when he went there [= England], they [= language school employers] couldn't classify him in terms of salary categories. Not even those simple CELTA, DELTA trainings, like teachers working there have. He was put into the lowest, 'unqualified' category, though he had a five-year degree in that.

This framing of the job search by Dóri as overwhelmingly difficult, even humiliating, constructs a negative image of international employment, just like Example 10 by Kata. Taking all the interviews into consideration, of the few themes related to the reality of colleagues looking for, or finding, teaching employment internationally, a majority were either neutral or negative, and only a few framed this reality from a positive angle. The above quotes can be considered as examples of how EFL teachers may perceive themselves and construct their realities (themselves, each other and their professional life today) through negotiating beliefs and interpretations in verbal interactions with each other, when talking shop in staffrooms, teacher clubs and elsewhere.

Competence in English

Although it was not a major aim of the research to study how satisfied Hungarian non-NESTs are with their level of English, the issue is both related to the research questions and was an emergent theme, related to one of the statements in Question 12 of the interview ("It would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach"), which the participants were asked to comment upon. In Examples 12-14, the participants agree with the statement.

Example 12 Kinga 27:00

Kinga: It's absolutely important. "It would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach." There's always something to improve about it, and it's a good thing. And through receiving some language training, you can forward it somehow.

Example 13 Flóra 5:00

Flóra: Yes. "It would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach," I think to a high degree. Because I would have to use the language, English, continuously, in class, out of class. What I've noticed is that if I don't use it for a short time, the quality starts weakening, both in pronunciation and grammar, and other aspects as well. But when I'm forced to speak in English, the situation soon improves.

Example 14 Ditta 25:00

Ditta: [not only in a target country] Naturally, it would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach, that is, I think it's obvious. Simply by using English-language materials in the library, everywhere, and talking in English to everyone, that is, absolutely.

The above examples show various ways how these participants consider exploiting the possibilities of a teaching period abroad to improve their command of English. They would be using it "in class, out of class", "in the library, everywhere, and talking in English to everyone", Kinga would even register for extra language training – these lists show how central their language invigoration would be for them during a possible teaching period abroad.

Several participants were satisfied with their present level of English in the sense that they expressed or implied that they were taking good care of it. This is how two of them refer to this (Examples 15-16).

Example 15 Pali 2/1:30

Pali: "It would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach"? Well, I don't want to improve it a lot. What sticks, sticks. What doesn't stick, doesn't stick. I use it anyway, I don't know, I use English half of my time, half of my day. So I practise a lot, that is.

Example 16 Margó 2:00

Margó: "It would improve the language", the one I teach? My English? Well, I hardly think. Though one never knows where, what place one gets to.

Pali and Margó seem to take pride in their command of English. Pali claims that with the amount of English in which he immerses himself in Hungary, new input may or may not bring further development in his command of English. Margó thinks that it may also depend on the situation if her English were to develop while teaching abroad – whether she means the country (English-speaking or elsewhere) or the type of position (the level of her possible courses) remains unclear.

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A different person when speaking in English

A few participants reported that they have a feeling of being a different person when they speak in English (Examples 17-19).

Example 17 Kinga 45:00

Kinga: I am not a native teacher. That is, it is another self for me when I speak and teach it [= English].

Example 18 Kata 2/5:00

Kata: My feeling is that when I communicate in English, I am another person totally. It is not exactly the same who speaks in Hungarian. For example, sometimes what I hear is that my voice is lower when I speak in English in the classroom.

Example 19 Györgyi 52:30

Györgyi: Sometimes I can't believe that I am listening to my own self, for example, in class. It is one thing that I'm not as fluent as I would like to be, but that even my voice, the way I say the words sounds alien. A rather frustrating feeling sometimes.

Here the participants directly refer to a phenomenon related to identity and self-perception, describing the experience of a "double identity," as can be seen in the expressions "another self" (Kinga), "I am totally another person" (Kata), "the way I say words sounds alien" (Györgyi) in the quotes. Both Kata and Györgyi mention that they find even their own voice, a deeply rooted feature of self-perception, different when speaking in English. In other occurrences of this theme in the interviews, participants refer to the higher level of comfort they feel when they use their first language, Hungarian, and a lower level of comfort when using English, irrespective of their self-perceived command of English.

The research data show that the satisfaction of the participants with their English competence may be related to their willingness to participate in a long-term mobility programme; all those claiming not to be interested in such an opportunity expressed some frustration with their present level of English ($n = 3$). Those who were willing to go ($n = 64$) were spread along the satisfaction-dissatisfaction continuum over their perceived command of English.

Conclusion

Above I presented the results of an interview-based study with Hungarian-L1 English teachers, investigating here how they view themselves as non-native teachers of English, and how that relates to their willingness to teach English in another EU country. It turned out that while welcoming the possibility of a long-term EU-organised teacher mobility programme, they at the same time tend to undervalue themselves in comparison with NESTs. More precisely, some participants consciously identify with the belief that native speakers and native speaker teachers are superior, while others advocate that belief less explicitly. A few participants decline to contrast NESTs and non-NESTs, whereas others contemplate the dichotomy. In a few interviews participants actually address the question of what happens to those taking up the challenge to teach abroad.

The reality of such an opportunity, open theoretically to all, is grasped and made sense of through various emergent themes by the interview participants. Most participants do not introduce practical problem-solution patterns (how to find accommodation, what to do with the family, how to solve the problem of their temporary absence from their home school, etc.). These issues are presented through the interview questions (see Question 18 in the Appendix). The themes that emerge, introduced by the participants, are more general, even intangible, like the warning parallel with the unskilled worker or the story of the qualifications not being recognised. Surprisingly, the problem of having to tackle the native speakerism of employers, learners or parents is marginal among the discussed issues.

In other words, the 67 participants of the interview survey follow various paths when making sense of the suggestion of teaching English abroad. Altogether 64 participants (94%) gave a direct 'yes' (or a more careful answer still classifiable as 'yes') to Question 8: "Would you teach in another country if you had the chance?" At one point in the interview almost all of them considered it possible to go to teach English abroad. Still, at a later point in the interview, after having discussed various details, several of them were constructing a contradicting image of themselves, undervaluing themselves as non-NESTs.

What can be the cause of that contradiction? It emerged as a result of the research, thus no research tools were prepared to reveal the causes. Therefore, one can only guess at this point. Two causes offer themselves. On the one hand, most language teachers in this country have little time to talk shop, to discuss professional issues, including their self-perception. This lack of discussion and reflection may strengthen stereotypes, including how they see themselves. The other cause may be language fossilisation (some interviewees pointed that out themselves): most language teachers teach at the A1, A2 and B1 levels, which can affect their own English competence even if the medium of their classes is English. Their treasured high command of English weakening may affect their professional confidence, as mirrored in how they perceive themselves (see Examples 12-13).

In this case, the motivational power of the present or a centrally organised language teacher long-term mobility programme for practising non-NESTs is obvious. A full-blown EU-programme would also bring competition, which would invigorate the profession, would generate discussions in staff rooms and teacher clubs, and thus would affect not only those taking the challenge but everybody else as well.

A progressive debate about the worth of the non-native teacher must find its way into teacher discussions. The issue also carries a message for teacher trainers: it seems crucial to introduce our trainees to the native/non-native teacher debate. This could show them how they can be valuable at home and internationally as well, thus working towards their *empowerment* (Bernat, 2008). Consequently, in English teacher training programmes it is essential to provide a basis for this by ensuring our trainees graduate with strong professional and language competencies.

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Appendix: The interview questions

0. Inform the interviewee (aim of research, ethical principles).
1. Note the participant's gender.
2. Note the participant's age (approximately).
3. What tertiary level qualification(s) do you have? What in-service trainings have you done?
4. List the steps of your teaching practice: what level/school type, how long in each? Where do you teach now?
5. Have you ever lived abroad? [lived: more than a month] Have you studied abroad? (obligatory term abroad during university? Erasmus/Comenius?)
6. Have you ever applied for a professional programme abroad: a. study trip, b. training programme, c. work?
7. Have you ever taught abroad? (teaching assistant with Comenius?)
8. Would you teach in another country if you had the chance? Why (not)?
9. For how long would you go?
10. a. Which country would you go to? [After the reply:] b. List three countries in the order of your preference.
11. Why would such an experience be an advantage? a. in a native country? b. elsewhere?
12. Read and comment on the six cards one by one. (DROFoLTA Q53)
 1. It would improve my promotion prospects in my own country.
 2. I would learn about the culture associated with the language.
 3. I would learn about the education system and teaching practices of that country.
 4. It would improve my knowledge of the language that I teach.
 5. I would have a break from my routine.
 6. It would give my family a chance to learn the language.
13. Would you take your family with you?
14. Do you think your relationship with your family and colleagues would change?
15. Do you think you would get all necessary information about the host country? [after the reply:] Where would you get that from?
16. Why would such an experience be a disadvantage?
17. What difficulties would you expect?
18. Read and comment on these [22] cards one by one (DROFoLTA Q62).
 1. It would not be easy to find a candidate to substitute for me.
 2. My superiors would not like the idea.
 3. The administrative services that manage these transfers are inflexible.
 4. After returning, relations with my colleagues might worsen.
 5. The process of selecting candidates for mobility initiatives is somewhat vague and opaque.
 6. I might lose my present position if I went to work in another country.
 7. I might lose salary and pension or social security benefits that derive from my teaching position if I was absent from my post working in another country.

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8. It would be difficult for me to obtain the necessary information about the legal and social security requirements for working in the host country.
 9. I might have problems with social security rights and medical costs in the host country.
 10. I might find problems with insurance cover in the host country.
 11. The authorities at home would not recognise the experience which I would have attained during my stay in the host country.
 12. It would be difficult to obtain a recognition of my professional status in the host country.
 13. The experience could diminish my work status.
 14. I might have problems adapting to the education system and teaching practices in the host country.
 15. Working abroad could interfere with my relationship with my spouse/partner.
 16. Working abroad could interfere with my relationship with my family.
 17. My partner would not be in a position to give up his/her current job.
 18. It would be hard for me to find a school (or preschool education) for my children.
 19. It would be hard for me to find a place to live in the host country.
 20. What to do with my current home would be a problem for me.
 21. There are no specialised services for foreign teachers arriving in the host country.
 22. I would have to pay out of my pocket part of the costs attached to moving abroad.
19. Do you believe that all foreign language teachers should work for an academic year in a country where this language is spoken? (DROFoLTA Q52)
20. Do you know of any programmes that organises mid/long-term teacher mobility (teaching abroad or teacher exchange) a. in the EU countries, b. elsewhere?



looking forward, looking back



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