PhD Studentship Proposal

The Impact of Community Language Schooling on Language Learning and Teaching: A Case Study

1. Native-speakerism in language learning and teaching

Language education across the globe remains deeply shaped by *native-speakerism*—the belief that so-called "native speakers" are inherently superior users and teachers of a language (Holliday, 2006; 2015; 2018). This pervasive ideology constructs nativeness as a proxy for legitimacy, often at the expense of multilingual, non-native speakers—teachers and learners alike. Specifically, it distorts conceptions of what counts as "good" language teaching and learning (Mahboob, 2004; Lim & Park, 2022).

On the one hand, native-speakerism contributes to employment discrimination against non-native speaker teachers in the global TESOL market (Clark & Paran, 2007), marginalising qualified non-native instructors (Ruecker & Ives, 2015; Thompson & Asanov, 2024), and affecting non-native English teachers' self-esteem (Kim, 2011). On the other hand, it also limits learners' understanding of what it means to be a successful language user (Rudolph, 2012), reinforcing the myth that native-like pronunciation is the most accurate and desirable model for language learning—with native-speaker teachers often perceived as offering superior pronunciation and non-native teachers viewed as less accurate in this regard (Walkinshaw & Duong, 2014). Native speakerism also shapes parental expectations, often equating effective teaching with having a native accent (Bozsó & Nagy, 2018).

Despite growing critique of this ideology in applied linguistics, little is known about how native-speakerism plays out in non-mainstream educational contexts, such as community-led or volunteer-based language programmes.

2. Challenging native-speakerism: York St John University's Community Language School

One such instance is the Community Language School (CLS) at York St John University, which offers a unique lens through which to examine how language ideologies and teaching practices intersect in grassroots, multilingual education.

Established in September 2022, the CLS advocates for heritage language maintenance and inclusive language learning by offering weekend classes to children from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds. Some of these children come from migrant families in Yorkshire, where parents wish to pass on their home language(s); others are from monolingual or mixed-language households where parents are keen for their children to grow up bi/multilingual. Importantly, the CLS welcomes volunteer teachers of varied linguistic repertoires and experiences, and does not prioritise native-speaker status as a criterion for teaching—thereby adopting a non-discriminatory approach in this respect, and aligning with social justice principles.Instead, it values lived experiences,

community ties, and cultural knowledge, offering a more inclusive and empowering model of language education.

This model offers a rare space where native-speakerism may be challenged in practice—but, to date, no published empirical research has systematically examined its impact. A small but growing body of work is emerging (e.g., Meddegama, Skender-Lizatovic & Sors, under review; Meddegama & Zingaretti, in preparation; Zingaretti et al., in preparation), but further research is needed to understand how ideologies, teaching practices, and learner experiences intersect in this space.

3. Research aims

Therefore, this PhD project will investigate the impact of community language schooling on language learning and teaching, with specific attention to how native-speakerism is challenged and/or transformed in this context. The research will focus on three stakeholder groups: teachers, parents and children. The study aims to:

1. Explore how native-speaker ideologies shape teachers' professional identities, parental expectations, and children's attitudes toward language learning and language models in the CLS context.
2. Investigate the teaching strategies used in CLS classrooms (e.g., translanguaging pedagogies vs. TBLT, PPP), evaluating their effectiveness, and examining the extent to which they may reinforce or challenge native-speaker norms in language learning and teaching.
3. Assess the impact of a targeted intervention aimed at shifting parental beliefs about bilingualism and ideal language teachers.

4. Methodology

This project will adopt a mixed-methods case study approach, focusing on teachers, parents, and children involved in the Community Language School at York St John. Data collection may include:

- Semi-structured interviews with volunteer teachers to explore how native-speaker ideologies shape their professional identity, perceived legitimacy, and teaching practices.
- Focus groups with parents to investigate how native-speakerism influences their expectations of teachers, beliefs about bi/multilingualism, and attitudes toward heritage and additional language learning.
- Focus groups with children using creative tasks (e.g., drawing, storytelling) to elicit children's perceptions of language learning, bi/multilingualism, and who they view as effective or ideal language teachers.
- Classroom observations, using fieldnotes and audio/video recordings to document teaching practices (e.g., translanguaging pedagogies, TBLT, PPP) and teacher–student interactions.

- Comparative case studies of two classrooms using different pedagogical approaches, focusing on how children engage with and use language during activities, supported by teacher reflections and classroom interaction analysis.
- Parent intervention and evaluation, involving a bilingualism-focused workshop assessed through pre/post questionnaires and qualitative feedback.

5. Expected impact and evidence collection

This PhD project is designed to generate meaningful impact across three interconnected areas of language education practice and policy. Namely:

(a) Challenging native-speakerism in language education

The project will investigate how native-speaker ideologies are experienced and negotiated by teachers, parents, and children in the CLS. By documenting how the school actively includes non-native-speaking volunteers and supports multilingual learning, the project will contribute to disrupting dominant assumptions about who can teach and how heritage/additional languages are best learned. Evidence of impact may include:

- Testimonies from teachers, parents and/or children describing how their views on language teacher legitimacy, heritage language maintenance and language learning shifted as a result of engaging with the CLS
- Public or community-facing outputs (e.g., co-produced infographics, blogposts, videos, etc.) that promote inclusive models of language teaching and learning, shared by schools, families or education/community networks
- Changes in recruitment materials, training materials or communications within the CLS—and potentially in other community or complementary schools—that make explicit the value of non-native speaker teachers, informed by project findings

(b) Informing language teacher training and professional development

The project will generate practical insights into the pedagogical strategies used by volunteer teachers in multilingual classrooms and how these relate to their professional identities and practice effectiveness. A particular focus will be placed on how teaching practices and identity development can either reproduce or challenge native speakerism within community-based education. Findings will inform the co-design of training materials and reflective tools to support community-based educators—particularly those without formal teaching qualifications—with inclusive and socially just teaching practices. Evidence of impact may include:

- Any training resources co-developed with the CLS (e.g. volunteer guidebooks, reflective tools, short video modules) integrated into future onboarding or training sessions, explicitly addressing inclusive teaching models and challenge native-speaker norms
- Reported changes in teacher confidence or pedagogical practice, supported by self-assessments, reflective journals or peer feedback

- Use or adaptation of project outputs by other community schools, third-sector organisations or teacher education providers promoting non-native-speaker inclusion and multilingual pedagogies

(c) Influencing heritage language education practice and policy

Through direct engagement with parents and children, this project will highlight how informed parental involvement and inclusive teaching practices—i.e., practices which challenge native speakerism and are more socially just in positively valuing linguistic diversity—can support heritage language maintenance and multilingual development. Findings will be relevant for policymakers, educational authorities and organisations supporting community language education. Evidence of impact may include:

- Pre/post intervention data and follow-up feedback showing potential shifts in parental beliefs about bilingualism, language teaching and learning and non-native-speaker legitimacy
- Engagement with local authorities or education networks, such as invited talks, use of research insights in family outreach, or consultation in language education initiatives
- Requests for project materials or models (e.g. workshop templates, parent resources, policy briefs) by heritage language organisations, councils or schools

6. References

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