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# Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching

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This article argues that language teaching would benefit by paying attention to the L2 user rather than concentrating primarily on the native speaker. It suggests ways in which language teaching can apply an L2 user model and exploit the students' L1. Because L2 users differ from monolingual native speakers in their knowledge of their L2s and L1s and in some of their cognitive processes, they should be considered as speakers in their own right, not as approximations to monolingual native speakers. In the classroom, teachers can recognise this status by incorporating goals based on L2 users in the outside world, bringing L2 user situations and roles into the classroom, deliberately using the students' L1 in teaching activities, and looking to descriptions of L2 users or L2 learners rather than descriptions of native speakers as a source of information. The main benefits of recognising that L2 users are speakers in the own right, however, will come from students' and teachers' having a positive image of L2 users rather than seeing them as failed native speakers.

Language professionals often take for granted that the only appropriate models of a language's use come from its native speakers. Linguists look at the intuitions of native speakers or collect quantities of their speech; language teachers encourage students to be like native speakers. This article argues that the prominence of the native speaker in language teaching has obscured the distinctive nature of the successful L2 user and created an unattainable goal for L2 learners. It recommends that L2 users be viewed as multicompetent language users rather than as deficient native speakers and suggests how language teaching can recognise students as L2 users both in and out of the classroom.

## DEFINING THE NATIVE SPEAKER

Davies (1991) claims that the first recorded use of *native speaker* was the following: "The first language a human being learns to speak is his

*native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language” (Bloomfield, 1933, p. 43). In other words, an individual is a native speaker of the L1 learnt in childhood, called by Davies (1996) the “bio-developmental definition” (p. 156). Being a native speaker in this sense is an unalterable historic fact; individuals cannot change their native language any more than they can change who brought them up. This definition is echoed in modern sources such as *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (McArthur, 1992) and the corpus-based *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary* (1995).

This core meaning of *native speaker* is often supplemented by detailing the nondevelopmental characteristics that they share. Stern (1983) claims that native speakers have (a) a subconscious knowledge of rules, (b) an intuitive grasp of meanings, (c) the ability to communicate within social settings, (d) a range of language skills, and (e) creativity of language use. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) adds (f) identification with a language community. Davies (1996) adds (g) the ability to produce fluent discourse, (h) knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the “standard” form of the language, and (i) the ability “to interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker” (p. 154).

Some of these characteristics are in a sense obvious: Native speakers are not necessarily aware of their knowledge in a formal sense ([a] and [b]), nor could they explain how they ride a bicycle. Others are debatable: Many native speakers are unaware how their speech differs from the status form (h), as shown, for example, in the growing use of the nonstandard *between you and I* for *between you and me* even by professional speakers such as news readers. Many native speakers are far from fluent in speech (g), some, such as Stephen Hawking and Helen Keller, having to communicate via alternative means. Some native speakers function poorly in social settings (c). In the Chomskyan sense of creativity, any novel sentence uttered or comprehended is creative (e); a computer can create new sentences, for instance, by means of the speech program that answers telephone directory enquiries with every possible telephone number. In a general literary sense, creativity characterizes a small percentage of native speakers, such as poets and rap singers. Only native speakers who have an L2—and not necessarily all of them—possess the ability to interpret from one language to another (i). Native speakers, whether Karl Marx in London, James Joyce in Zurich, or Albert Einstein in Princeton, are free to disassociate themselves completely from their L1 community politically or socially (f) without giving up their native speaker status.

These characteristics are therefore variable and not a necessary part of the definition of native speaker; the lack of any of them would not disqualify a person from being a native speaker. A monk sworn to silence is still a native speaker. In addition, nonnative speakers, almost regardless

of their level of proficiency in the language, share many of these characteristics: Nonnative speakers show a rapidly developing awareness of gender-linked pronunciation (Adamson & Regan, 1991) and of the status of regional accents (Dailey-O'Cain, 1998); what level of L2 English did it take for Marcel Duchamps to create "surrealistic aphorisms" such as *My niece is cold because my knees are cold* (Sanquillet & Peterson, 1978, p. 111)?

The indisputable element in the definition of *native speaker* is that a person is a native speaker of the language learnt first; the other characteristics are incidental, describing how well an individual uses the language. Someone who did not learn a language in childhood cannot be a native speaker of the language. Later-learned languages can never be native languages, by definition. Children who learn two languages simultaneously from birth have two L1s (Davies, 1991), which may not be the same as being a monolingual native speaker of either language. L2 students cannot be turned into native speakers without altering the core meaning of *native speaker*. Asserting that "adults usually fail to become native speakers" (Felix, 1987, p. 140) is like saying that ducks fail to become swans: Adults could never become native speakers without being reborn. L2 learning may produce an L2 user who is like a native speaker in possessing some of the nine aspects of proficiency detailed above to a high degree but who cannot meet the biodevelopmental definition. The variable aspects of *proficiency* (Davies, 1996) or *expertise* (Rampton, 1990) relate to a separate issue of quality rather than being defining characteristics of the native speaker (Ballmer, 1981).

Another common assumption is that the native speaker speaks only one language. Illich and Sanders (1988) point out, "From Saussure to Chomsky 'homo monolinguis' is posited as the man who uses language—the man who speaks" (p. 52). Ballmer (1981) and Paikeday (1985) include monolingualism in their extended definitions of *native speaker*. In Chomskyan linguistics, monolingualism is part of the abstraction involved in obtaining the idealized native speaker. "We exclude, for example, a speech community of uniform speakers, each of whom speaks a mixture of Russian and French (say, an idealised version of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy)" (Chomsky, 1986, p. 17). Important as it is for other purposes to consider the different types of native speakers and the different abilities that native speakers possess, the distinction here is between people who speak the language they grew up with and those who speak another language as well—that is, between monolingual native speakers and L2 users. The meaning of *native speaker* here is thus a monolingual person who still speaks the language learnt in childhood.

In contrast to *native speaker*, the term *L2 user* refers to someone who is using an L2. The L2 user is further distinguished from the *L2 learner*, who

is still in the process of learning the L2. The point at which an L2 learner becomes an L2 user may be debatable because of the difficulty in defining the final state of L2 learning; moreover, some learners are regularly users whenever they step outside the classroom. Although this distinction is in some ways imprecise, its rationale will emerge during the argument.

## IMPLICIT STATUS OF THE NATIVE SPEAKER

In recent years the role of the native speaker in language teaching and second language acquisition (SLA) research has become a source of concern. Some analysts have seen the issue in quasi-political terms as the exercise of power and status (Holliday, 1994); the native speaker concept has political and economic benefits for the countries from which particular languages originated (Phillipson, 1992). Others see it in cultural terms as the imposition of native speaker interaction norms contrary to the students' own preferred types of interaction (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Still others point out that "one man in his time plays many parts": English-speaking people show they are men by using /ɪn/ in *waiting* (Trudgill, 1974), that they are American by having /r/ in *corn*, or that they are British working class by dropping the *h* in *hair* (Milroy, 1983). Native speakers form only one of the social groups to which a speaker belongs (Rampton, 1990); the role of native speaker is no more basic than any other (Firth & Wagner, 1997). In practice, despite these objections, the native speaker model remains firmly entrenched in language teaching and SLA research.

### The Native Speaker in Language Teaching

Overt discussion of the native speaker as a model is rare in language teaching. However, indirect evidence for the importance of the native speaker in English language teaching is indeed the perennial issue of which kind of native speaker should be the model for language teaching (Quirk, 1990). This discussion assumes that the choice lies between different types or aspects of native speakers, not in whether to use them as models at all. Stern (1983) puts it bluntly: "The native speaker's 'competence' or 'proficiency' or 'knowledge of the language' is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching" (p. 341). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (Harmer, 1991) describes different areas of language competence in a chapter entitled "What a Native Speaker Knows" and goes on to say that "students need to get an idea of how the new language is used

by native speakers,” although the usage shifts to the combined expression “native speakers (or competent users of the language)” (p. 57). Kramsch (1998) sums up the issue pithily: “Traditional methodologies based on the native speaker usually define language learners in terms of what they are *not*, or at least *not yet*” (p. 28). Or, one might add, *not ever*.

Another source of implicit views about the native speaker in language teaching is the course book, which provides a structure for many classes (Hutchinson & Hutchinson, 1994). The description of English underlying course books seems implicitly native based, reflecting the teaching tradition’s idealised normative view of English rather than actual description. The *Collins COBUILD English Course* (Willis & Willis, 1988), for example, “focuses on the real English students will encounter and need to use in today’s world” (back cover) based on a large database of native speaker usage. The model situations met in course books almost invariably involve native speakers interacting with native speakers, apart from the typical opening lessons in which students introduce each other and exchange personal information, for example, Unit 1 in *Headstart* (Beavan, 1995) and in *True to Life* (Collie & Slater, 1995).

## The Native Speaker in SLA Research

SLA research in the 1960s borrowed from L1 acquisition research the assumption that learners have language systems with distinctive features of their own (Cook, 1969; Corder, 1967). This assumption formed one aspect of the well-known interlanguage hypothesis (Selinker, 1972), implicit in the continuing aim of the SLA research field to describe and explain the L2 language system in its own right. In other words, SLA research aims in principle to detach L2 learning from the native speaker.

In practice, however, SLA research has often fallen into the *comparative fallacy* (Bley-Vroman, 1983) of relating the L2 learner to the native speaker. This tendency is reflected in the frequency with which the words *succeed* and *fail* are associated with the phrase *native speaker*, for example, the view that fossilisation and errors in L2 users’ speech add up “to failure to achieve native-speaker competence, since in Chomsky’s words, native speakers (NSs) are people who know their language perfectly” (James, 1998, p. 2). The success and failure of L2 learners are often measured against the native speaker’s language use in statements such as the following: “learners often failed initially to produce correct sentences and instead displayed language that was markedly deviant from target language norms” (Ellis, 1994, p. 15). Many SLA research methods, such as grammaticality judgments, obligatory occurrences, and error analysis, involve comparison with the native speaker (Cook, 1997b; Firth & Wagner, 1997).

An unknown object is often described in terms of one that is already known (Poulisse, 1996); someone who has never seen a tomato before might describe it as a rather soft apple with a large number of pips. But this description is no more than a temporary expedient until the individual has understood the unique properties of the object itself. The learner's language is an unknown object, so SLA research can justifiably use native speakers' language as one perspective on the language of L2 learners, provided it does not make native speakers' language the measure of final achievement in the L2. Klein and Perdue (1992) warn in particular of the danger of the "closeness fallacy" (p. 333), in which one is deceived by learner utterances that bear a false resemblance to those of the native speaker. The avowed aim of their large multilanguage project was to discover "why . . . adults attain the state they do" (p. 334). Despite some recognition that the L2 user should be treated as independent in SLA research, the native speaker often maintains a ghostlike presence.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MULTICOMPETENT LANGUAGE USERS AND L1 USERS**

*Interlanguage* refers to the knowledge of the L2 in the speaker's mind. But this L2 interlanguage exists in the same mind as the L1 does. Because no word existed to describe the knowledge of both the L1 and the L2, the term *multicompetence* was coined to refer to the compound state of a mind with two languages (Cook, 1991). Multicompetence covers the total language knowledge of a person who knows more than one language, including both L1 competence and the L2 interlanguage.

*Competence* is a neutral term in linguistics for the native speaker's knowledge of language; it does not involve a judgment about whether such competence is good or bad according to some outside criterion. In a sense, whatever the native speaker does is right—subject, of course, to the vagaries of performance and the like. Multicompetence is intended to be a similarly neutral term for the knowledge of more than one language, free from evaluation against an outside standard. The difficulty is that, whereas all the speakers of an L1 arguably have similar competences, L2 users notoriously end up with widely differing knowledge. Nevertheless, so far as any individual is concerned, a final state of L2 competence exists for the L2 learner just as a final state of L1 competence exists for the native speaker, difficult as this state may be to generalise across many L2 learners.

The term *multicompetence* implies that at some level the sum of the language knowledge in the mind is relevant, not just the portions

dedicated to the L1 or the L2. Language teaching is concerned with developing an L2 in a mind that already contains an L1; as Stern (1992) puts it, “whether we like it or not, the new language is learnt on the basis of a previous language” (p. 282). Multicompetent minds that know two languages are qualitatively different from those of the monolingual native speaker in a number of ways.

## **The L2 Knowledge of Multicompetent Language Users**

Nobody is surprised that the second language of L2 users differs from the language of L1 users. Very few L2 users could be mistaken for native speakers. Most L2 learners resign themselves to “failing” to reach the native speaker target. Some research looking at ultimate attainment in L2 learning shows that even fluent bilinguals can be distinguished from monolinguals in grammaticality judgments (Coppieters, 1987; Davies, 1991), but other studies have demonstrated that some L2 users are nevertheless indistinguishable from native speakers in syntax (Birdsong, 1992) and phonology (Bongaerts, Planken, & Schils, 1995). As White and Genesee (1996) noted, “Ultimate attainment in an L2 can indeed be native-like in the UG [universal grammar] domain” (p. 258). But the comparison with the native speaker again creeps in; valid ultimate attainment seems to be phrased with reference to the native speaker’s competence rather than in its own terms.

The ultimate attainment of L2 learning should be defined in terms of knowledge of the L2. There is no reason why the L2 component of multicompetence should be identical to the monolingual’s L1, if only because multicompetence is intrinsically more complex than monolingualism. Whether or not one accepts that some L2 users can pass for native speakers, these passers form an extremely small percentage of L2 users. Research with this group documents the achievements of a few unusual people, such as those described by Bongaerts et al. (1995), as typical of human beings as are Olympic high jumpers or opera singers.

## **The L1 Knowledge of Multicompetent Language Users**

An early definition held that transfer between the L1 and the L2 went in two directions, producing “instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language” (Weinreich, 1953, p. 1). Whereas the effects of the L1 on the L2 interlanguage are easy to see, the effects of the L2 on the L1 have been little discussed. Yet everyone who has been exposed to an L2 can tell anecdotes about its effects on the L1.



For example, my own speech has sentences such as *What do you want for a book?* and vocabulary such as *pulli* for *pullover*, probably showing the use of L2 Swiss-German as a child.

A body of research shows that this effect of the L2 on the L1 exists in most aspects of language. In terms of phonology, the timing of voicing at the beginning of plosive consonants (i.e., voice onset time [VOT]) in the L1 moves slightly towards that found in the L2, French L1 speakers of English having a slightly longer VOT for /t/ in their L1 than French monolinguals do (Flege, 1987). In vocabulary, L2 words affect their twins in the L1. For example, the meaning of the English word *coin* (piece of money) affects the way French L1 speakers who know English understand the French word *coin* (corner) (Beauvillain & Grainger, 1987). Loanwords have a slightly different meaning in the L1 for people who know the L2 from which the words are derived; for instance, Japanese *bosu* (gang leader) is perceived as less related to crime by Japanese who know English *boss* (Tokumaru, 1999). In syntax, too, L1 grammaticality judgments are affected by the L2: English speakers who know French judge English sentences with null subjects, such as *Is raining*, differently than monolinguals do (Cook, 1996); Francophones and Anglophones learning the respective L2s have different reactions to middle verb constructions in their L1s than monolinguals do (Balcom, 1998). Several experiments have shown that L2 users become slightly slower at processing the L1 as they gain proficiency in an L2 (Magiste, 1986). In reading also, Greeks who know English read Greek differently than monolinguals do to some extent; for example, they are more affected by the order of presentation (Chitiri & Willows, 1997). In short, multicompetent L2 users do not have the same knowledge of the L1 as monolinguals do; for some this may indeed amount to partial loss of their L1 (Seliger & Vago, 1991).

## Language Processing by Multicompetent Language Users

During language processing, multicompetent language users have the L1 constantly available to them. For example, L2 users compensate for gaps in their vocabulary with the same communication strategies that they use in their L1 (Poullisse, 1996). L2 users are faster and more accurate in a language-switching task than in a monolingual condition on an auditory version of the STROOP test, which asks people to decide whether voices saying the words *high* and *low* are actually high or low (Hamers & Lambert, 1972). L1 Spanish users of English understand sentences that are translations of Spanish idioms more quickly than monolinguals do (Blair & Harris, 1981). L2 users tend to switch from one language to another for their own private purposes; 61% prefer the

L1 over the L2 for working out sums, and 60% prefer it for praying, whereas 61% use the L2 for keeping their diary, and 44% for remembering phone numbers (Cook, 1998).

A distinctive process that multicompetent users engage in is code switching. When multicompetent users are talking to other people who know both languages, they may alternate between languages. For example, a Bahasa Malaysia teacher of English was overheard saying to fellow teachers in the staff room, “*Suami saya dulu slim and trim tapi sekarang plump like drum*” (Before my husband was slim and trim, but now he is plump like a drum). They can not only use either language separately but also use both languages at the same time—what Grosjean (1989) calls the *monolingual* and *bilingual modes*. Code switching has complex rules, partly at the pragmatic level of the speaker’s and listener’s roles, partly at a discourse level for topic, and partly at a syntactic level (see the range of articles in Milroy & Muyskens, 1995). Code switching is the most obvious achievement of the multicompetent user that monolingual native speakers cannot duplicate, as they have no language to switch into. It shows the intricate links between the two language systems in multicompetence: In the mind, the L1 is not insulated from the L2.

## Thought Processes of Multicompetent Language Users

Multicompetent speakers and monolingual native speakers also differ in certain thought processes. It may not be surprising that people who know two languages are slightly less effective at language-related cognitive tasks in the L2 than are monolinguals (Cook, 1997a). Long-term memory of information gathered in lectures is less efficient in an L2 (Long & Harding-Esch, 1977); working memory span in the L2 is usually slightly below the L1 level at all stages of L2 performance (Brown & Hulme, 1992; Service & Craik, 1993). L2 users perform slightly below the level of L1 peer monolinguals in naming objects and following instructions to mark letters in words (Magiste, 1986); “the very fact of having available more than one response to the same stimulus may lead to slower reaction times unless the two response systems are hermetically isolated from each other” (p. 118). In other words, the minds of L2 users differ from the minds of monolinguals in several respects other than sheer knowledge of language.

Indeed, this difference is one reason why, in many educational systems, L2s are taught in the first place. Learning a foreign language is seen as leading to “an interest in language and culture” in Japan (Tokyo, 1990), to the ability “to recognize cultural attitudes as expressed in language and learn the use of social conventions” in the United Kingdom (*The National Curriculum*, 1995), and to “courage, honesty, charity

and unity” in Malaysia (Kementarian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1987, p. 2). A particular benefit has often been claimed to be *brain-training*—learning other mental skills. SLA research has indeed shown some truth in these claims, particularly the bilingual’s keener awareness of language itself. Bilingual children are aware of grammatical properties of their L1 sooner than monolinguals are (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990) and are better at judging how many words there are in a sentence. In particular, bilingual children are more capable of separating meaning from form (Ben Zeev, 1977; Bialystok, 1986). Most remarkably, English-speaking children who learnt Italian for an hour a week in the first class of primary school showed advantages over monolingual children in learning to read (Yelland, Pollard, & Mercuri, 1993). Diaz (1985) lists many advantages for bilinguals, such as *measures of conceptual development, creativity, and analogical reasoning*.

Clearly, multicompetent people differ from monolinguals in many ways. L2 users are different kinds of people, not just monolingual native speakers who happen to know another language. The native speaker-based goal of language teaching cannot be achieved in part because the students, for better or for worse, do not remain unchanged by their new languages.

## L2 DIFFERENCE OR DEFICIT?

Most L2 users differ from L1 monolinguals in the way they know and use the L1 and the L2, but how are these differences relevant to questions about the role of the native speaker as a model for L2 learners? Should such differences be seen as deficits from the native speaker standard?

Labov’s (1969) classic argument held that one group should not be measured against the norm of another, whether Whites against Blacks or working class against middle class; Labov’s argument was in a sense a belated recognition of ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906) in linguistics. People cannot be expected to conform to the norm of a group to which they do not belong, whether groups are defined by race, class, sex, or any other feature. People who speak differently from some arbitrary group are not speaking better or worse, just differently. Today almost all teachers and researchers would agree that a comparison between groups yields differences, not deficits.

However, teachers, researchers, and people in general have often taken for granted that L2 learners represent a special case that can be properly judged by the standards of another group. Grammar that differs from native speakers’, pronunciation that betrays where L2 users come from, and vocabulary that differs from native usage are treated as

signs of L2 users' failure to become native speakers, not of their accomplishments in learning to use the L2. Just as it was once claimed that women should speak like men to succeed in business, Black children should learn to speak like White children, and working-class children should learn the elaborated language of the middle class, so L2 users are commonly seen as failed native speakers.

According to the definition used above, L2 users are not monolingual native speakers and never will be; they are as incapable of changing places as are most women and men. L2 users have to be looked at in their own right as genuine L2 users, not as imitation native speakers. It is no more relevant for language teaching that a few L2 users can pass for native speakers than it is for the study of gender that the female novelist James Tiptree Jr. wrote as a man or than it is for the study of race that the clarinet player Mezz Mezzrow claimed to be a White Negro. The study of L2 learning should not be based on a handful of extraordinary people. L2 users should not be treated as an exception to the dictum that one group should not be measured against another. Comparing the characteristics of native speakers and of L2 users is like comparing tomatoes and apples, useful only at a gross level.

L2 users should be treated as people in their own right, not as deficient native speakers. Halliday (1968) wrote, "A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the color of his skin" (p. 165). Clearly, until now many people have had little compunction about treating L2 users in this way.

An illustration is that the measure of success in L2 learning is often held to be the amount of foreign accent—the extent to which people's pronunciation conforms to native standards. Joseph Conrad is taken as a failure at L2 learning because Virginia Woolf, among others, claimed he was "a foreigner, talking only broken English" (Page, 1986, p. 64) despite the excellence of his written English and, indeed, of his L2, French. Apart from a few die-hard writers of letters to the newspapers, nobody would claim that speakers of Brummy and Glaswegian fail to acquire native speaker language because they were born in Birmingham or Glasgow. Consciously or unconsciously, people proclaim their membership in particular groups through the language they use. However, L2 learners are not supposed to reveal which part of the world they come from; they are considered failures if they have foreign accents, as much research into age differences in language learning assumes (Cook, 1986). Why should English-speaking people who sound as if they come from Houston be accepted as L1 successes when Polish people speaking English are deemed L2 failures for sounding as if they come from Warsaw? A French winegrower once said, perfectly sensibly, "My English

is not good but my French accent is perfect.” L2 users belong to the general group of L2 users, to smaller groups of L2 users with particular L1s, and to many other language groupings in the languages they know. The one group they cannot belong to is the group of native speakers of their L2. Only if the native speaker is the sole arbiter of language can L2 learners be seen as failures for revealing the social groups to which they belong.

An objection that is sometime raised to the argument against the native speaker model is that it is the L2 users themselves who want to be native speakers. Even bilinguals, according to Grosjean (1989), “often assume and amplify the monolingual view and hence criticize their own language competence” (p. 5). Their attitudes are the product of the many pressures on them to regard L2 users as failed natives. Bilinguals have accepted the role assigned to them in a society that is dominated by monolinguals and where bilingualism is a problem but monolingualism is not, just as psychologists once used to talk of *African precocity* in children’s development, not *Euroamerican retardation* (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992). But this acceptance of the native speaker model does not mean these attitudes are right. Members of various groups have indeed wanted to change the color of their skin, the straightness of their hair, or the shape of their eyes to conform to other groups, but this desire highlights the status of various groups in society not the intrinsic deficits in other groups. The only occasion on which L2 users can justifiably be measured against native speakers is when they are passing for natives, for example, when making translations to be read as native rather than nonnative texts.

Monolingual bias is also reflected in the prevalent use of the term *L2 learner* for anybody who knows an L2, whereas the term *L1 learner* is not applied to an adult native speaker. People who learn an L2 are implied to be in a permanently unfinished state, never reaching a final form (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 292). Hence *L2 user* here refers to the person who uses a second language and *L2 learner* to the person in the process of learning it. Although complete consistency is impossible, it seems preferable at least to attempt to credit successful L2 learners with the status of users. It does, incidentally, seem condescending to reduce *L2 acquirer* to *L2er* (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, p. 42).

## CONSEQUENCES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The logical consequence of the arguments raised above is that language teaching should place more emphasis on the student as a potential and actual L2 user and be less concerned with the monolingual native speaker. Abandoning the native speaker totally may be unrealistic

because this model is so entrenched in teachers' and students' minds, yet some steps in the right direction can be taken. The following suggestions apply to an EFL setting. Some may apply rather differently to the teaching of English to students residing or intending to reside in an English-speaking country; indeed, some of them, for example, the use of students' L1s in special alternative instructional programs in the U.S. (Lucas & Katz, 1994), have already been assimilated. These suggestions are more concerned with syntax, vocabulary, and phonology than with pragmatics.

## **Set Goals Appropriate to L2 Users**

Language teaching has traditionally balanced the educational gains for the student's mind, attitudes, and personality from learning the L2 against the social and communicative gains from being able to use the L2 for practical purposes. The aims of language teaching can be divided into internal classroom goals that relate to the students' life within the classroom, such as communicating their backgrounds and feelings to each other, and external goals that relate to the students' use of English outside the classroom, such as traveling or living in an English-speaking environment (Cook, 1983). The classroom-internal goals are not explicitly related to the actual use of the L2 in the world outside, whether by native speakers or by L2 users, and so may be relatively unaffected by any change in the status of the native speaker. The process syllabus in which students negotiate continuously over what they want to do and achieve (Breen, 1984) relates neither to the native speaker nor to the L2 user, only to the students' own wishes. Community Language Learning allows the students themselves to shape the processes and goals in the classroom without reference to anything outside (Curran, 1976). Though the students are still doubtlessly influenced in their choices by target-based perceptions of what they will need as L2 users and of the status of native speakers, in principle they can decide what they like.

Similar emphasis on the classroom-internal goals can be found in task-based learning, a movement that now brings together areas ranging from the procedural syllabus (Prabhu, 1987) to the psychology of attention (Skehan, 1998). Writers on task-based learning seem divided over the extent to which tasks should be related to what happens outside the classroom. Nunan (1995) divides tasks into real-world tasks, that is to say, "the sorts of tasks required of [learners] in the world beyond the classroom," and pedagogic tasks, "things which it is extremely unlikely they would be called upon to do outside the classroom" (p. 62); Willis (1996), however, does not make external relevance one of the categories of task. Skehan (1998) considers it desirable for tasks to have real-world

relevance “but difficult to obtain in practice” (p. 96). Task-based teaching has not been concerned with external goals because of its primary concern with how best to create conditions for learning within the classroom. Issues about native speakers and L2 users are relevant only to the extent that tasks are designed to mirror “the world beyond the classroom.”

Approaches focusing on classroom-internal goals value language teaching as an educational activity benefiting the students in many ways, not only for utilitarian ends outside the class. The native speaker model is unnecessary because students get many things out of learning the language other than sounding like native speakers. The alternative aims of proficiency or expertise could be applied to these classroom-based goals. Skehan (1998), for instance, sets the goals of fluency, accuracy, and complexity, without explicitly mentioning either the native speaker or the L2 user. These are L2 student goals rather than L2 user goals—abilities that students acquire through L2 learning that can be defined independently of native speaker models.

At the other extreme, target-based external goals were emphasized in the heydays of the audiolingual and communicative methods of teaching. Audiolingualism stressed the situations and language used by natives (Rivers, 1964). Communicative teaching analysed the students’ needs in terms of notions, functions, topics, and so on (Van Ek, 1975), leading to the familiar lists of vocabulary and structures in course books such as *Reward* (Greenall, 1994) to this day. As communicative needs have seldom been established by empirical research into what happens in L2 user situations, the native speaker model is all-pervasive. External target-based teaching is also sometimes found in English for specific purposes, in which detailed analyses are made of the English used by native speakers in specific situations—restaurants (Bung, 1973), medical research papers (Nwogu, 1997), or science lectures (Jackson & Bilton, 1994). Again, insofar as such descriptions reflect what native speakers, not skilled L2 users, do, they have only indirect links to the L2 user target.

A practical way of moving towards an L2 user model is to present students with examples of the language of L2 users and of the language addressed to L2 users; the *pedagogic corpus* (Willis, 1993) of language the students encounter should be expanded to include specimens of the language that L2 users rather than native speakers need. This is not the same as saying that the students should listen more to each other. Rather, they should encounter skilled L2 use. Willis (1996) points out that an “internationally acceptable version of the target language” (p. 12) rather than a native speaker variety could be used. At least some of the authentic recordings used in the classroom could show skilled L2 use; at present such recordings are authentic for native speakers, not for L2

users. Many examples of L2 English are available from the media. Most continental European politicians manage to give fluent television interviews in English, even if English and U.S. politicians rarely manage the reverse. English language newspapers from many parts of the world can easily be accessed over the World Wide Web; for example, the *Straits Times* from Malaysia (<http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com/>) and the *Santiago Times* from Chile (<http://santiagotimes.cl/>) provide examples of good L2 user English as well as native-produced articles.

Teaching can also reflect the language L2 users employ with other L2 users, the most extreme perhaps being code switching. For example, the *New Crown* English course in Japan (Morizume et al., 1997) uses some code switching in dialogues. Some of the language that students encounter could reflect the modifications L1 users make in their speech to L2 users, for example, by providing information more explicitly (Arthur, Weiner, Culver, Young, & Thomas, 1980). Students who have heard only native-to-native speech should not be expected to use such features effectively when they eventually encounter them.

## **Include L2 User Situations and Roles**

The situations in course books fall into two broad types: those featuring all native speakers and those including L2 users. The exclusively native situations cast native speakers in all roles, as seen on virtually every page of any course book, particularly the “authentic” conversations in the COBUILD course (Willis & Willis, 1988), which rely on recordings of English native speakers talking about themselves and carrying out tasks with each other, such as giving directions and identifying photos. Although such conversations may well cover the relevant vocabulary of native speakers, which is indeed the main aim of the course, the conversations are between native-speaking friends and acquaintances, with hardly an L2 user in sight. The communicative aims in the beginners’ course *Flying Colours* (Garton-Sprenger & Greenall, 1990) include “asking who people are,” “greeting people,” “talking about people’s homes,” and so on (pp. v–vi); the word *people* is not explained, but the text shows that, with few exceptions, they are native speakers of English, even if they reflect multiethnicity.

In the situations in some materials, an L2 learner or a low-level L2 user plays a role; a typical example seen in virtually all communicative or audiolingual materials is the foreigner asking the way of the native speaker. Situations involving low-level L2 users may be relevant, provided they do not fall into the funny foreigner stereotype of Manuel, the comic Spanish waiter in *Fawlty Towers* who perpetually misunderstands everything addressed to him in English. One possibility is to reverse the roles



so that the native speaker is ignorant and the L2 learner omniscient, as in some English courses, in which a native shows an English person the sights and customs of the home country; the course *Angol Nyelv Alapfok* (Edina & Ivanne, 1987), for example, features English used by travel agents and tour guides in Hungary. It is, to say the least, unhelpful and unmotivating if the only L2 user models that the students see in the classroom are incompetent and ignorant.

The basic need is to present situations in which L2 users take part. The unequal gender roles in EFL textbooks have been pointed out by, for example, Sunderland (1992), with women being fewer in number, lower in status and age, and less active conversational participants. The status of L2 users is in even more need of redress, because they are virtually never represented positively. At one level, materials simply need to demonstrate that L2 users exist in the world as role models for students to emulate. Psychology books have lists of famous bilinguals, including, for instance, Mohandas Gandhi, Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, and Samuel Beckett (Grosjean, 1982, p. 285); the famous people in EFL course books tend to be Ronald Reagan, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Beatles (Greenall, 1994, p. 83), none of whom are known for their L2 skills. Making some parts of language teaching reflect an L2 user target would at least show the students that successful L2 users exist in their own right and are not just pale shadows of native speakers.

A possible technique for introducing L2 user situations into teaching is found in the cross-cultural training in Cushner and Brislin's (1996) volume, which presents a series of key intercultural problems. Students discuss the alternative interpretations suggested and then see which of them is most likely to apply. For example, one case study features a U.S. student in Germany who is perplexed by her apparent rejection by her German colleagues; the students discuss the possible causes and discover that the most likely reason is her lack of interest in politics. Although selecting such situations or alternatives would be difficult, including them would at least bring the figure of the L2 user into the classroom as a person between two cultures.

An interesting type of L2 user role is the nonnative-speaker teacher. Often native speakers are assumed to intrinsically make better teachers than nonnatives do; "learn French from the French" is an advertising slogan for a language school in London. Medgyes (1992) comes to a more balanced conclusion about the possible advantages and disadvantages of being a native speaker. However, students may feel overwhelmed by native-speaker teachers who have achieved a perfection that is out of the students' reach; as Kramsch (1993) puts it, "Nonnative teachers and students alike are intimidated by the native-speaker norm" (p. 9). Students may prefer the fallible nonnative-speaker teacher who presents a more achievable model.

## Use Teaching Methods That Acknowledge the Students' L1

Most orthodox EFL teaching methods minimise the role of the L1 (Howatt, 1984, p. 212), called by Stern (1992) the *intralingual strategy*. Apart from the never-dying but usually decried grammar-translation method, virtually all language teaching methods since the Reform Movement of the 1880s, whether the audiolingual and audiovisual methods, the communicative method, or the Silent Way, have insisted that teaching techniques should not rely on the L1; “inventories of classroom techniques exist of which only a handful are not intralingual” (Stern, 1992, p. 289). Given that much EFL methodology arose from multilingual adult classes, teachers could not use the L1s of their pupils to convey meaning, as the teachers might know at most one or two of those languages. Methodologists' insistence on the L2 does not mean that the L1 has not in practice been used in most classrooms but that doing so goes against the official doctrine. The U.K. national curriculum for modern languages is typical in stating, “The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course” (Department of Education, 1990, p. 58).

Exceptions to this orthodoxy are Community Language Learning, with its reliance on translation (Curran, 1976), and a small group of teaching methods that employ alternating languages. These include the New Concurrent Method, which advocates controlled code switching (Jacobson & Faltis, 1990); reciprocal language teaching, in which matching pairs or groups of students who want to learn each other's language alternate languages as they choose (Cook, 1989; Hawkins, 1981); and the *Tandem* computer network (<http://tandem.uni-trier.de/>), which gets pairs of students learning different languages to send each other e-mails in their respective L2s. Apart from these more radical alternatives, at best course books supply meanings for words or an occasional discussion topic in the L1; *The Beginners' Choice* (Mohamed & Acklam, 1992), for example, asks students to decide whether adjectives go before or after nouns in their L1s.

At least two ways of using the L1 in the classroom should be distinguished. One is for presenting meaning: When students need the meaning of a new word or grammatical structure, they can access it through translation into their L1, which can come from the teacher or a dictionary, or through an explanation in the L1, from the teacher or a grammar book. Multicompetence theory supports the development of links between the languages, such as translation, rather than viewing the languages as residing in two separate compartments. One reason for the lack of reliance on the L1 has undoubtedly been convenience for the teacher. Given that much EFL methodology arose from multilingual adult classes, teachers could not use the L1s of their pupils for conveying

meaning as the teachers might know at most one or two of those languages.

The other main use of the L1 is for communication during classroom activities. The orthodox view encourages teachers to use the L2 throughout the class, as I have noted; students are expected to use the L2 even in activities in which they would naturally code switch with fellow students who share the same L1. A typical remark is, "If they are talking in small groups, it can be quite difficult to get some classes—particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones—to keep to the target language" (Ur, 1996, p. 121). Although the practical issue of diverse L1s requires the consistent use of the L2 in multilingual classes, this restriction should not apply to those classes where the students share a common L1. L2 users have the L1 permanently present in their minds. Every activity the student carries out visibly in the L2 also involves the invisible L1. The apparent L2 nature of the classroom covers up the presence of the L1 in the minds of the students. From a multicompetence perspective, all teaching activities are *cross-lingual* in the sense of Stern (1992); the difference among activities is whether the L1 is visible or invisible, not whether it is present or altogether absent.

Many approaches to teaching seem to convey the message that the students should aim at L2 use that is unrelated to the L1, something that is virtually impossible to achieve and that denies their status as L2 users. Though teaching manuals such as Willis (1996) or Scrivenor (1994) now countenance some L1 use, the implication is that ideally the students would not be using their L1; "as an ideal I would like a classroom where learners were free to use their own tongue but in fact mostly *chose* to use English" (Scrivenor, 1994, p. 192). Use of the L1 is seen not as desirable but as a necessary evil. One practical suggestion is for teachers to see the L1 as a positive factor in the class rather than as a negative factor to be endured. Doing so may simply put a more positive light on what already happens in many classrooms. Such a change has already taken place in some L2 classrooms (Lucas & Katz, 1994); teachers can come to accept mixed languages in the classroom, however reluctant they are to do so at first (Giauque & Ely, 1990).

A second suggestion is to introduce activities that deliberately involve both languages. The Institute of Linguists (1988) examination, for instance, asks elementary students to listen to messages in the L2 and to relay them in either the L1 or L2; it tests advanced students by getting them to write a report in either language based on a series of interviews and texts in the L2. The classic dual-language task was translation, which might be used as a vehicle for more communicative exercises, for example, "Write down your favourite recipe in your L1 and then decide how you would explain it in the L2 to a fellow student with a different

L1." These activities above all see the student as an *intercultural speaker* (Byram & Zararte, 1994), not an imitation L1 user. The use of such activities in teaching may go some way towards developing the student as a multicompetent speaker rather than an imitation native speaker.

## Base Teaching on Descriptions of L2 Users

If the aim of teaching is to create L2 users, the description of English that is logically required is a description of L2 English. Applied linguistics has always claimed that language teaching can make use of descriptions supplied by linguists (Corder, 1973); much of applied linguistics today is indeed description oriented rather than problem oriented.

Descriptive approaches often use language corpora as data for developing linguistic description. The COBUILD project, for example, produced a large database of English from which it could derive grammars, dictionaries, and teaching materials (see, e.g., the list in Payne, 1995). Such descriptions would be far more useful if L2 users were represented in the corpora. Applied linguists do not at present have a clear idea of what typical successful L2 users know except through the distorting mirror of descriptions of native speakers. Furthermore, corpus-based description may be relevant to teaching only insofar as it is linked to a testable theory of language learning; it needs to attain explanatory adequacy, that is, show how language is learnt, not just observational adequacy, that is, list thousands of occurrences said by hundreds of people (Cook, 1985).

In the absence of descriptions of L2 users on which to base language teaching, one possibility is to see what can be gleaned from accounts of L2 learning. Collections of learners' English, such as *The Longman Learners' Corpus* (n.d.), could act as stepping-stones. Syllabuses and teaching materials could suggest intermediate goals for the students on their way to becoming successful L2 users. For example, the European Science Foundation project (Klein & Perdue, 1997) discovered that L2 learners of European languages acquired a basic grammar consisting of three rules: A sentence may be (a) subject-verb-object (e.g., *Jane drinks beer*), (b) subject-copula-adjective (e.g., *Beer is good*), or (c) verb-object (e.g., *Drinking beer*). This L2 grammar is valid not just for L2 English but also for L2 German, Dutch, French, and Spanish, almost regardless of the learner's L1. Although these rules represent an interim stage of L2 learning, they nevertheless provide a useful description of an L2 target for the beginner stage. An additional claim made in much contemporary work with syntax is that the initial stages of SLA depend upon word order rather than inflection (Klein & Perdue, 1997; Pienemann, 1985), a

finding of major importance for the teaching of English, which traditionally spends considerable effort on the plural *-s*, past tense *-ed*, and so on at early stages.

The suggestion to rely on descriptions of L2 user language should not be overstressed in that the differences between L2 users and native speakers described above could be marginal. L2 user goals could be hard to define because of the great variation among L2 users. Nevertheless, taking the description of the native speaker as the basis of language teaching is in a sense a temporary shortcut that avoids describing what L2 users are like and postpones the more satisfactory solution of tackling the description of L2 users themselves.

## CONCLUSION

Going beyond the native speaker lies not so much in following the specific suggestions as in adjusting the perspectives about models that underlie language teaching. If students and teachers see L2 learning as a battle that they are fated never to win, little wonder they become dispirited and give up. L2 learners' battle to become native speakers is lost before it has begun. If students are convinced of the benefits of learning an L2 and recognise their unique status as standing between two worlds and two cultures, more students may go on higher levels of L2 use; those who do give up may feel more satisfied with the level of L2 use they achieve. The graded objectives movement in language teaching tried to set interim targets (Harding, Page, & Rowell, 1981) so that students take away something of benefit no matter the level at which they stop learning a language. A beginners' EFL course took a worldwide external goal to be traveling abroad using English (Cook, 1980); the students who stopped after 1 year still gained a useful skill based on the L2 user, not the monolingual native.

Together with the change in attitude, placing more emphasis on the successful L2 user and on using the L1 more in teaching can bring language teaching to the realization that it is helping people use L2s, not imitate native speakers. Students, teachers, or indeed L2 researchers are unlikely to give up their reliance on the native speaker overnight, but judicious changes such as these can at least begin to acknowledge that L2 users have strengths and rights of their own by giving the students role models of L2 users in action and by requiring the use of both languages by one person. In short, these changes can convince students that they are successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers.

## THE AUTHOR

After teaching EFL and writing EFL course books, Vivian Cook concentrated on linguistics and language learning in books such as *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction* (Blackwell) and *Inside Language* (Edward Arnold). His current interests are linking SLA research to language teaching and the writing system. He was founding president of the European Second Language Association.

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