

Proficiency or the native speaker: What are we trying to achieve in ELT?

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Outline ..

- examine both views of language teaching (*The goal of the native speaker & The goal of a proficiency level*),
- Attempt to define the native speaker and proficiency ...
- Proficiency appears to be more definable, for example, through oral rating scales.



Two goals of language teaching:

1. *the goal native-speakerhood*
2. *Predetermined level of proficiency*

The native speaker goal

What do we mean by native speaker?

- ❖ The native speaker is often appealed to but difficult to track down. - Columas (1981), Paikeday (1985), and Davies (1991)
- ❖ **Tay (1982)** notes that the two features usually appealed to as evidence for or against native speaker status are :

1. Priority of learning

Getting the Job

~~Skills~~

~~Aptitude~~

~~Knowledge~~

~~Membership~~

~~Suitability~~

~~Native Speaker~~ ✓



The proficiency goal

□ *Valdman (1998)*, defines achievement in language instruction in terms of functional use rather than exposure.

1. A general type of knowledge in the use of language.
2. The ability to do something specific in the language. e.g. proficiency in English to study in higher education in the UK.
3. performance as measured by a particular testing procedure. E.g. ('Superior' 'intermediate')

Proficiency and achievement

- The increasing use of proficiency scales in language assessment (speaking and writing) has both *positive and negative aspects*:
- *positive side* they are authentic examples of language in use
- *negative side* it must surely be pointed out that all tests (not indirect or semi direct ones) lack authenticity. They are stimulations of real life rather than real life itself. Same point by

Native speaker of a 2nd language?

An L2 learner can become a native speaker of the target language?

1. NS acquires L1 of which she or he is a native speaker in childhood.
2. NS has intuitions about his or her grammar.
3. NS has intuitions about those features of the grammar of the 2nd language which are distinct from his or her idiolectal one.
4. NS has a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse (Pawley and Syder 1983)
5. NS has a unique creative capacity which enables him or her to write or speak creatively.



To what extent can the L2 learner become a target language (TL) native speaker?

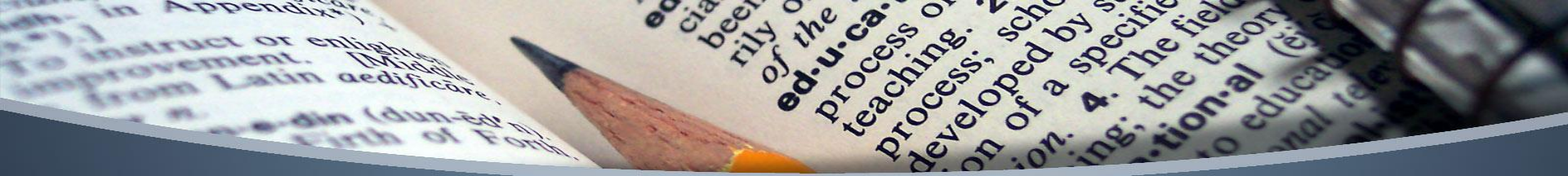
1. Childhood acquisition:-
2. Intuitions about the idiolect:-
3. Intuitions about the standard language:-
4. Fluent spontaneous discourse:
5. Creativity:-
6. Interpret and translate:-



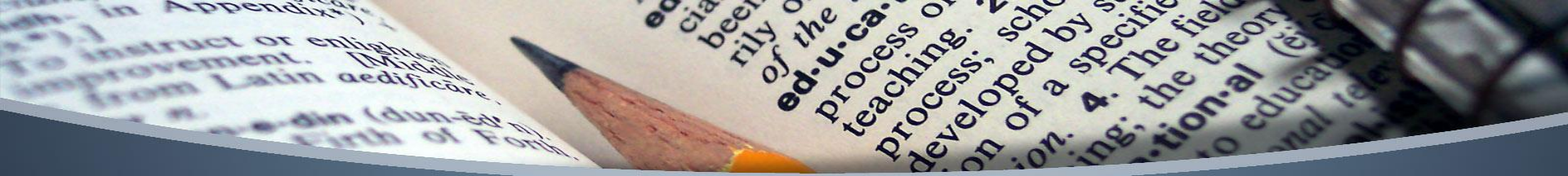
- All except (1) are contingent issues and they require that the question either a L2 learner can become a NS? answered by the further question:
- *is it necessary to acquire a code in early childhood in order to be ,a native, speaker of that code?*
- *What is is that the child acquires in acquiring his or her L1?*

Conclusion

- ❑ The NS is a fine myth: we need it as a model, a goal, almost an inspiration. But it is useless as a measure; it will not help us define our goals.
- ❑ there is a continuum between native speakers and non-native speakers,
- ❑ for language teaching purposes what is crucial is the definability of partial proficiency. –



- **Native Speaker**
 - **construct**
 - **voyage or exploration**
 - **history**
- **Proficiency**
 - **metric**
 - **chart or map**
 - **geography**



Thank You !