Native Speakers and Native Users: Loss and Gain

'Native speakers' and 'native users' are terms traditionally used to differentiate between speakers who have acquired a language from birth and speakers who have learnt a second language. This book highlights the problems associated with making such a clear-cut distinction. By analysing a range of literature, language uses and proficiency tests, Davies argues that there is no significant difference between native speakers and native users, and emphasises the importance of the Standard Language. Whilst individual native speakers may vary considerably, the academic construct of the native speaker is isomorphic with the Standard Language which is available to both native speakers and native users through education.

In this book, Davies explores the 'native user', as a second-language speaker who uses language with 'native speaker' competence. This book will be of significant interest to students and researchers working in the fields of second-language acquisition and applied linguistics.

ALAN DAVIES is Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh.

For my children: Ben, Sara, Megan and Hester
and my grandchildren: George, Alice, Hannah and Amy

Native Speakers and Native Users: Loss and Gain

Alan Davies

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521119276

First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Davies, Alan, 1931 February 17–
Native speakers and native users : loss and gain / Alan Davies.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-11927-6
1. Fluency (Language learning) 2. Native language and education. 3. English language – Study and teaching – Foreign speakers. 4. Applied linguistics. I. Title.
P53.4115D38 2013
418.0071–dc23

2013002372

ISBN 978-0-521-11927-6 Hardback

Contents

Preface

We lead our lives in imagined communities. We take for granted that the world is divided neatly into homogeneous groups which exhibit internal cohesion ('we are all the same') and external differentiation ('they are all different'), those axioms of nationalist movements. But internal cohesion is a fiction: we are not all the same, individuals differ. Yet the need for the imagined community is so powerful, the urge to belong so insistent, that we accept the normative constraints which require us to accommodate to common ways of behaving, common beliefs which the long process of childhood acquisition inculcates in us.

And so there is for all of us a tension between the self in all its particularities and conforming to the mores of the group to which we belong. Or wish to belong. It is that tension which manifests itself in the limiting cases of the exiles, those suffering from anomie, the alienated, those between two worlds. I say 'in the limiting cases' as though such oddities were exceptional. They are not. They are the individuals who choose not to – or cannot – conform and in their dramatic particularity remind us what it is to be human.

I have suggested that those who feel they do not belong could be regarded as misfits. But that is just part of the picture. For those, no doubt the lucky ones, it is possible to belong to more than one group. I do not mean a group of, for example, bee-keepers and a group of bell-ringers. Such combinations are common and unremarkable. No, I mean two cultures, two languages which can provide the tension I've suggested. The lucky ones are those who find themselves enriched and more whole by their membership of two or more cultures in which their individuality is seamless. A good example of such comfortable fit is provided by the Scottish academic and writer, David Daiches, whose *Two Worlds* recounts his Scottish and Jewish childhood and student years in Edinburgh. He writes in his Foreword to *Two Worlds* (1987):

> one of the reviewers of the first edition of the book remarked that it was clearly a record of happiness, in spite of the cultural tensions it documents. That is on the whole true. Further, it is perhaps wrong to talk of cultural tensions, for the two cultures of my childhood did not fight each other but dove-tailed into each other. That is certainly how I saw them. I am always surprised when people misquote the title of the book as *Between*

Two Worlds as the whole point of my story is that I was not between two worlds but equally at home in both. That was my good fortune and I have never ceased to be grateful for it.

The subtitle of this book is: 'Loss and Gain'. Daiches represents the gain that two cultures, two languages can provide. You can be, as I suggest in the book, an African Anglophone writer and remain wholly African. You can learn to be a Quaker and not lose your identity as whatever else you were. But there is another story where what is focused on is loss. The African Francophone writers and poets I discuss in Chapter 2 are much concerned with their loss of négritude, the essence of being African. These African Francophones are native users of French who have gained native-like proficiency in French which makes them anxious and alienated, unlike the Anglophone African writers who had no such doubt as native users of English.

What I argue in the book is that membership can change, it can be added to. Of course, application is needed: membership requires work. The native user is a learner who keeps on learning, keeps on gaining. That is equally true of the native speaker who must also keep learning, who comes to group membership from his/her idiolect and gains access to the group through control of the standard language, the gift and the opportunity of education, as it also is for the native user.

No doubt for some, those who leave one culture and never wholly gain admission to another, the classic case of the permanent shuttling immigrant, no doubt for them the gain does not compensate for the loss.

Defining the native speaker leads to a kind of reductionist circularity: the native speaker is a universal condition. We are all native speakers of the language/dialect/code/lect we come to first in childhood. But to say that is unhelpful because it tells us nothing about capacity or capability; it simply says that being a native speaker is to possess the faculty of language, the normal human condition. That condition is of interest only when compared with a non-native speaker or, in this book, a native user. What is it that the native speaker has or can do that the native user does not have or cannot do? That is the question I address. As I show, for Second Language Acquisition Research, the native speaker and the native user are categorically different. But there is other evidence, which I consider, which suggests that the two may not after all be quite so incommensurate.

Acknowledgements

This book brings together research I have carried out over many years starting with a study on Anglophone Africa writers I conceived as an English teacher in Kenya in the late 1950s. I continued but did not complete the study at Birmingham University in the 1960s. In later years that research expanded into broader work on the native speaker concept and more recently on native speaker and non-native speaker judgements of speaking and writing performance in English. My interest has always been in what it means to be native, a native speaker.

My first acknowledgement must be to the Leverhulme Trust for the award in 2006 of an Emeritus Fellowship on Native Speakers and Native Users (EM/20278) which allowed me to carry out the fieldwork reported in Chapter 6. An earlier study on ministry in Quaker meetings, presented here in Chapter 7, was also funded by the Leverhulme Trust (research grant 1983–1985). I am grateful to the Trust for their financial support and for allowing me unpressurised time to complete both studies.

Former colleagues, Cathie Elder, Liz Hamp-Lyons and Charlotte Kemp, were kind enough to give permission for the use in Chapters 3 and 6 of material previously published under our joint authorship: Elder and Davies 2006; Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp 2003; and Hamp-Lyons and Davies 2008. I am grateful to: Taylor and Francis/Routledge (successor to Croom Helm) for giving permission for the publication (in Chapter 7) of my chapter 'Talking in silence: ministry in Quaker meetings' previously published in N. Coupland (ed.) 1988. I am also grateful to *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* for permission for the publication (in Chapter 8) of my article 'Textual hoaxes: questioning the taken-for-granted', which appeared in *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 2003. Elizabeth Hiser kindly gave permission for her previously published discussion of my article also to appear here.

I acknowledge the contributions of the following to our seminar in Hong Kong, reported here in Chapter 6: Jay Banerjee, Nesamalar Chitravelu, Liz Hamp-Lyons, Charlotte Kemp, Tom Lumley, Yasmeen Lukmani, Bonnie Zhang.

For assistance with the data collection in Belgium and Malaysia reported in Chapter 6, I am grateful to Geert Jacobs, colleagues and students of the English

Department, University of Ghent and to Moses Samuel, Nesamalar Chitravelu, colleagues and students of the Education Faculty, University of Malaya. Further assessment was carried out in Edinburgh by the following TESOL-trained teachers: Nicholas Boyd, Barbara Campbell. Kerry Carruthers, David Cole, Jessica Dean, Jamie Dickson, Mark Hamilton, Isobel Maclean, Kirsty Murray, Mark Risen. Ute Knoch of the University of Melbourne camed out the statistical analyses reported in Chapter 6. Research assistance in Edinburgh was provided by Rodica Pamphilon (Mercea).

My thanks to Sara Davies, Mike Simm and Alice Dalkin for help with the index, and to Megan Davies for help with formatting.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Helen Barton of Cambridge University Press for her support and patience during the book's long gestation. Without her encouragement I doubt if it would ever have been finished.

I have made use in a number of places of material from my earlier publications, notably the 2007 *Introduction to Applied Linguistics: From Practice to Theory* and *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*, 2003. I am grateful to Edinburgh University Press and to Multilingual Matters for allowing me to use this material.