1 Introduction

The book attempts to problematise the native speaker (NS) of English in relation to the native user (NU), the non-native speaker (NNS) who lives his/her life professionally and often socially in English. The book will seek to demonstrate with empirical evidence that on international English-language proficiency tests there is no significant between-group difference between native speakers and native users. It is further argued that the cognitive and Second Language Acquisition Research (SLAR), which maintains that there is an absolute difference, should be queried by virtue of the native-speaker informants it uses, all of whom are highly educated and therefore atypical of the native-speaker population(s). Such educated native speakers present a somewhat idealised view of native-speaker competence, an idealisation that is based on a description of an educated variety which is what we mean by the Standard Language. The book will conclude that the academic construct of the native speaker is isomorphic with the standard language. The implications of the argument are: (1) since mother-tongue speaker comes to represent the idealised native speaker through education, the L2 learner can also, again through education, attain a similar native-speaker idealisation (hence the overlapping NS–NNS samples in the Birdsong (2004) research); (2) while the book concludes that there is no evidence for the absolute distinction, that does not mean that one does not exist or that one may never emerge. For one to emerge, what is required is for a native-user speech community to grow sufficiently in self-confidence to describe its own variety and publish its own norms. It would then establish its own separate standard language (following Australia) which would make any distinctions between British and, say, Indian or Nigerian English more likely and more demonstrable. So far, contemplation of such an eventuality has been resisted on the grounds that distinct norms are found only in a first-language (L1) speech community, not in a second-language (L2) community such as Singapore, India, Nigeria. This is a comment about transmission: in principle there is no reason why a largely L2 community should not create its own norms; and, if such a native-user community were to thrive, the likelihood is, no doubt, that in time the L2 (in this case the local native-user English variety) would become the L1 for children born into that community, thereby normalising the

situation in the sense that US, Australian, New Zealand and Canadian English (each with its own norms) are normal.

Current doubts about the unique status of the native speaker as the norm for language-learning tend to be directed at English and are perhaps more a political than a linguistic appraisal. Differences of approach to the native speaker by SLAR and by Applied Linguistics are considered: SLAR is more committed to there being a fundamental difference between the native speaker and the proficient non-native speaker while Applied Linguistics prefers the idea of a continuum. Reconciliation between these seemingly incommensurate views may be found in the concept of the Standard Language. The Standard Language is appealed to by both SLAR and Applied Linguistics as the criterion for their research and practice. It is also the goal of all language-learners, both NS and NNS. For both, the language-learning norm, the goal to which they aspire, is the idealised native speaker. Test evidence for the lack of a gulf is provided in Zhang and Elder (2011) and by the present author (see Chapter 6) in a comparison of NS and NNS raters of speaking and writing performances by Belgian and Malaysian NNS. As with Zhang and Elder no significant difference was found between the NS and the NNS raters. It is concluded that between NS and NNS there is a continuum and not a gulf, and that what unites them is the Standard Language.

The native-speaker dispute

Thomas Paikeday (1985) was undoubtedly angry when he published his attack on the native speaker (*The Native Speaker is Dead!*). Many others have subsequently agreed with him (Braine 1999, Edge 2006, Holliday 2008), maintaining that we no longer need the native speaker as a norm, that there are models in World English varieties, in proficient second-language speakers and even, more radically in *lingua franca* varieties such as English as a *lingua franca* (Jenkins 2007, Seidlhofer 2010).

Two aspects of these attacks are noteworthy. The first is that they all come from sociolinguistic, applied linguistic, educational scholars. Little attention in this debate seems to be paid to the research of psycholinguistic and second-language acquisition scholars (Sorace 2003) who take the view that there is a cognitive disjunction between native speakers and non-native speakers. The research of Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) is particularly convincing.

The second aspect is that most of the research that agrees with Paikeday refers to English which, because of its worldwide growth, first through colonisation and settlement, then through business, finance and media interests, has spread in three ways (Kachru 1986; Crystal 1997): first as a more or less unitary Standard English, mainly recognised for writing; second as a range of, generally mutually intelligible, first languages (L1s) (Scottish, English, American, Australian. . .),

and third as a growing number of post-colonial lects (Singapore, Nigerian, Indian. . .) (Davies 2003a).

The native speaker is attacked even more widely. The American, Charles Ferguson, first Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics, wrote:

> Linguists . . . have long given a special place to the native speaker as the only true and reliable source of language data . . . much of the world's verbal communication takes place by means of languages which are not the users' mother tongue, but their second, third or nth language, acquired one way or another and used when appropriate. This kind of language use merits the attention of linguists as much as do the more traditional objects of their research . . . the whole mystique of native speaker and mother tongue should preferably be quietly dropped from the linguists' set of professional myths about language. (Ferguson 1983: vii)

And Chomsky goes even further: 'the question of what are the "languages" or "dialects" attained and what is the difference between "native" and "non-native" is just pointless' (Chomsky 1985). Should we acquiesce? Is the native speaker dead?

Characteristics of the native speaker

What is it that is thought to distinguish the native speaker from the proficient non-native speaker? The native speaker (and this means all native speakers) can be characterised in these six ways:

(1) The native speaker acquires the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker in childhood.
(2) The native speaker has intuitions (in terms of acceptability and productiveness) about his/her idiolectal grammar.
(3) The native speaker has intuitions about those features of the Standard Language grammar which are distinct from his/her idiolectal grammar.
(4) The native speaker has a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse, which may exhibit pauses mainly at clause boundaries (the 'one clause at a time' facility) and which is facilitated by a huge memory stock of complete lexical items (Pawley and Syder 1983). In both production and comprehension the native speaker exhibits a wide range of communicative competence.
(5) The native speaker has a unique capacity to write creatively (and this includes, of course, literature at all levels from jokes to epics, metaphor to novels).
(6) The native speaker has a unique capacity to interpret and translate into the first language (Ll) of which s/he is a native speaker. Typically, international organisations require interpreters to operate one way – from their L2 to their L1. Disagreements about an individual's capacity are likely to stem from a dispute about the Standard Language (Davies 2003a).

How criterial are these distinctions in supporting the idea of a gulf between the native and the non-native speakers? All except (1) are contingent issues. In that way the question: can a second-language learner become a native speaker of a target language? reduces to: is it necessary to acquire a code in early childhood in order to be a native speaker of that code? Now the answer to that question, and this is where the circularity lies, is to ask a further question: what is it that the child acquires in acquiring his/her Ll? But I have already answered that question in my criteria (2)–(6) above, and so the question again becomes a contingent one. However, we need in (2) and (3) above to ensure a cultural dimension since the child Ll-acquirer does have access to the resources of the culture attached to the language and particularly to those learnt and encoded or even imprinted early. Still, having said that, what of subcultural differences between for example the Scots and the English; of different cultures with the same standard language (for example the Swiss, the Austrians, the West Germans and the East Germans)? What too of International English and of an isolated Ll in a multilingual setting (for example Indian English)?

Can a non-native speaker become a native speaker?

English varies widely even within the confined space of the UK, such that Glaswegians, for example, and Londoners, may have difficulty understanding one another. And yet they are all native speakers of English. That being so, it does appear that the post-pubertal second-language learner has a difficult but not an impossible task to become a native speaker of a target language which can contain such wide diversities. The answer to the question of L2 learners evolving into native speakers of the target language must therefore be 'Yes': but the practice required, given the model of the child Ll-acquirer who for five or six years spends much of his/her time learning language alone, is so great that it is not likely that many second-language learners become native speakers of their target language. The analogy that occurs to me here is that of music where it is possible to become a concert performer after a late start but the reality is that few do.

It is difficult for an adult non-native speaker to become a native speaker of a second language precisely because I define a native speaker as a person who has early acquired the language. However, the limitations imposed by the later acquisition, when it is very successful, are likely to be psycholinguistic rather than sociolinguistic. The adult non-native speaker can acquire the communicative competence of the native speaker; s/he can acquire the confidence necessary to membership. What is more difficult is the cognitive problem, to gain the speed and the certainty of knowledge relevant to judgements of grammaticality (Sorace 2003; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2003). But as with all questions of boundaries (for the native speaker is a boundary that excludes) there are major language differences among native speakers. Native speakers may be prepared

to make judgements quickly about grammaticality but they do not necessarily agree with one another. And so I am left asking to what extent it matters. If a non-native speaker wishes to pass as a native speaker and is so accepted then it is surely irrelevant if s/he shows differences on more and more refined tests of grammaticality. That may be of interest psycholinguistically but for applied linguistic purposes I maintain that it is unimportant.

Native speakers may have a cognitive advantage over native users but that does not mean that they necessarily have an advantage in its uses: thus a native user of English who is a professional scientist will always have the advantage of the language of scientific English control over the non-scientist native speaker of English. In other words, both native speakers and native users of English have to learn the language varieties and uses that they need: being a native speaker butters no parsnips. It is therefore revealing to consider examples of specialised language use in Chapter 7 and 8, equally open to both native speakers and native users in order to argue that all social occasions are typically ritualised through specific language uses, uses that need to be learned.

Native speakers are presented with their first language as a gift, but they can lose it too and one of the enduring questions today, especially in the Minority Language field, is just who owns the language: native speakers, or proficient learners who may considerably outnumber native speakers. The native user gains the language over many years which make him/her proficient, indeed fluent, especially in formal registers. The issue at the heart of this book is whether the native speaker and the native user are separated from one another by a fundamental difference or by a continuum.

In Chapter 2, I examine the literary aspects of the native speaker, paying particular attention to the négritude views of Aimé Césaire and more generally to questions of identity. Autobiographical accounts of growing up with more than one language (and identity) are considered. I also examine accounts of language learning by those who seek what they (may) regard as their (lost) identity.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the status of post-colonial Englishes (for example Singaporean English), with particular attention to Indian English and to English as a *lingua franca*, and consider their relation to Standard English. In Chapter 4, I examine the distinction between studies of second-language learning and of second-language acquisition. In Chapter 5, I suggest that what is striking about the spread of English in current times is not its variability, of which, admittedly, there is a great deal, but its stability (Sedlatschek 2009). In this chapter, I suggest that there are two such forces that encourage resistance to change: the first is language norms (Bartsch 1988) which members, those who (wish to) belong as speakers of language X, recognise and practice. Not to do so would imply a wish no longer to belong. The second such force is the Standard Language which comes under attack precisely because it represents a normative position

and, like other modernist grand narratives, it is an easy postmodern target. I examine the arguments of those for whom the Standard Language is a social fact as well as a useful linguistic device, and the arguments of those who view the Standard Language as a hegemonic instrument of political control. I argue that social institutions such as education require norms and that therefore the Standard Language, like the native speaker, performs a useful function.

In Chapter 6, I return to the argument I put forward in the earlier chapters, that the English code which native users learn and which they aspire to perform in daily life is Standard English or an approximation thereto. The question that then has to be asked is how far this view is borne out empirically. In part answer to that question, I present three studies (and refer to a fourth) in which I have investigated whether the model or norm that native users work to in their English performance is the same or different from that of comparable educated native speakers of English.

The three studies are: (1) Davies, Hamp-Lyons and Kemp 2003; (2) Hamp-Lyons and Davies 2008; (3) 'Judgments by educated native and non-native speaker raters of performance by native users of English' (a study funded by the Leverhulme Trust 2007–8 and conducted in Edinburgh, Belgium and Malaysia by Alan Davies).

In Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss specialised language use. In Chapter 7, an empirical study of ministry in Quaker Meetings for Worship is reported. Quaker Meetings for Worship take place in silence, a silence that may be broken by ministry, spoken messages that all are free to utter when they feel called on to contribute. There is no programming of such contributions, no liturgy, no order of service: indeed, Quaker worship is reckoned to be spontaneous, regularly ritualised, which must mean that how to do it and what to say have to be learned.

Chapter 8 takes on an equally problematic use of language, this time the situation of the hoax. Following Goffman (1974), the chapter argues that the act of hoaxing reveals by its ready acceptance how much we take for granted in our primary frameworks of spoken and written interactions. The chapter examines four well-known hoaxes and points out that in its uncovering of what we so readily – and perhaps necessarily – take for granted, the hoax, like the analysis of Quaker ministry in Chapter 7, emphasises the importance in the social lives we lead of learning. A hoax is an error in learning. It reminds us of the importance of continuing to learn so as to avoid such errors. A hoax beguiles us into thinking that our knowledge is perfect: it isn't; learning is always partial, our use of language is always incomplete.

Chapters 7 and 8 take somewhat recondite examples of the native user: the Quaker skilled in ministry is the proficient native user who may, of course, also be a native speaker. And the hoaxer, and the critical reader or listener who sees through the hoax, they too are proficient native users who may also be native speakers.

In Chapter 9, I draw the arguments I have presented together, noting that in spite of the powerful sentimental attachments to local varieties of English and in spite of the powerful rhetoric in their favour, local inertia at present stands in the way of the institutionalising of these varieties. As Schneider (2007) comments: 'Obviously, Postcolonial Englishes have more in common than one might think at first sight' (5). And what they have in common is Standard English. With that in mind, it does seem that what separates the native speaker and the native user is a continuum and not a gulf.

2 The sense of language loss

In this chapter, I discuss how language loss can lead to a sense that identity has been lost. For Francophone writers in the 1940s and 1950s, this expressed itself as a loss of their négritude. This language-identity association has echoes of the Linguistic Relativity Principle. Anglophone writers avoided this insecurity, clear that whichever language they thought in and even, perhaps, wrote in, they were always themselves. It seems possible that the very different colonial philosophies of Britain and France may have encouraged these very different views of the colonial language. For some scholars such as David Punter (2000), hybridity is not an answer: his pessimism requires him to focus on the untranslatable, those experiences which he regards as lost when the colonial language, whether it is English or French in Africa, in Wales or in Brittany, takes over. They are lost because there is no language in which to express them. Here again is linguistic relativity writ large, giving language too important a role by asserting that it wholly shapes one's identity. In terms of the NS–NU distinction what differentiates the Francophone and the Anglophone writers of the 1950s and 1960s was that the Francophones were dissatisified with their native-user status in French and convinced they had lost their native-speaker status in their African languages, while the Anglophone writers were content with being native users in English and remaining native speakers in their mother tongues.

When old settlers say 'One has to understand the country,' what they mean is 'You have to get used to our ideas about the native.' (Doris Lessing 1950: ch. 2)

> Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land!
> Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
> As home his footsteps he hath turned,
> From wandering on a foreign strand.
>
> (Walter Scott 1805: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, canto 6, st. 1)

Native, it seems, is about ownership, origin, identity. The quote from Doris Lessing makes very plain the extension of ownership to what one does not own

and the resulting guilt of the old settlers that they may be blamed for taking away ownership from the 'real' originals. This is a central colonial problem, especially in those areas where the incomers are richer economically and racially different from the indigenous 'natives'. Indeed, in North America, these 'natives' are (or were) known as 'Native Americans', the American Indians. And so, from being derogatory, the term can be used as a mark of pride to indicate difference, as in James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*.

The quote from Walter Scott embraces identity: 'native' is contrasted with 'foreign'. The speaker *belongs* in this place, which is hard on those with a convoluted heritage such as Afro-Americans, yanked away from where they were native to a new land where as slaves they had no rights, a land which they were not permitted to regard as theirs. Which means that Baldwin was being both brave and provocative by insisting that he, though a descendant of slaves, he too belonged, he was a *native* son.

Native as belonging also applies to flora and fauna. In the early days of settlement in Australia, plants and animals, including birds, from Europe were introduced, no doubt to remind the settlers of their *real* identity in the old country, which for many was the UK. These invasions of plant and animal life have in recent years been much criticised: today's Australians are confident as to where their home is, that they have an Australian identity, that they are native sons and daughters, and so there is a movement to remove the plants (less perhaps the animals – sheep and cattle have become Australian just as the settlers have) which are said to be destroying the native varieties. Rather like the settlers themselves: in their case, it is the aborigines who have been destroyed. The settlers are not going to be destroyed but cherishing the native plants may promote their sense of identity. Of course, there is something of a logical dilemma to the claims of nativeness. What does 'original' mean? We see this in an acute form in New Zealand where present-day politics accepts that the Maori people were the original inhabitants, the natives. But there are those who maintain that the country was already settled when the Maori arrived in New Zealand about a thousand years ago. Does that mean that the Maori, like the nineteenth and twentieth century European and Asian settlers are not native, not indigenous? While plants and animals cannot make that decision for themselves, why should the products of human generations in the new place not be seen to be native? If it is difficult to determine who was first, perhaps it should be acceptable for all those resident to claim that they are native. But there is a condition to this and the condition is that the incomers, of whatever vintage, must wish to identify with the place they are in. In other words, to be native is a matter of self-ascription – as James Baldwin (1955) demonstrated.

In Scotland, where I live, many powers are devolved from London to the Scottish government. At present, the political party in government in Scotland is the Scottish National Party (SNP). It is obvious that the SNP government is

eager to reassure everyone living in Scotland, newcomers as well as old hands, that we all belong. Thus, by replacing the term of address '(O) Scots!' which suggests a somewhat insular view by 'People of Scotland', the First Minister, Alex Salmond, is trying to say that everyone can choose their identity and it does not matter where they or their forebears came from. Being native, it is suggested, is a state of mind.

Does this apply to 'native speaker'? Is being a native speaker simply a matter of personal choice? It is not an issue for most people for whom the question does not arise. But the fact that they may have chosen is highlighted by what happens to those brought up in a semi-bilingual situation. No doubt those whose early lives are fully bilingual can genuinely claim to be native speakers of both languages (although there are doubts as to whether ambilingualism is possible). Yet since it is common for exposure to one language to be less than to the other, the individual does choose, just as we all do. We are unlikely to claim to be native speakers of a language we do not know. After all, identity is a two-way process: we wish to claim ourselves to belong to a particular cultural and linguistic group but we also want/need the group to accept us. And just as there is no stipulation as to how robust a native plant must be, so there is no requirement to be highly proficient or fluent, or even individually literate, to be regarded and to regard oneself as a native speaker.

The evidence for whether one can claim to be a native speaker I discuss later in the book. For now I wish to stay with attitude and perception. A postgraduate Saudi student of mine was brought to the UK when he was two years old. His father studied at London University and then stayed on in the UK for a number of years. The student was sixteen when the family returned to Saudi. At home in London the family spoke Arabic but the boy had gone to an English-medium school and become fluent in English. But from the return to Saudi until coming to Edinburgh for his Master's degree, Arabic was his medium of instruction. No doubt there were some English-language encounters in Saudi and for some time there he taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL). But in his early weeks in Edinburgh he was worried about how to classify himself. As a boy in London the issue had never arisen. His English, both spoken and written, was no different from that of his London schoolmates. But back in the UK years later, he was aware, as he never had been before, and no doubt influenced by the academic discussions he was now engaged in on topics such as proficiency, fluency, literacy, academic English, native speaker, second-language acquisition, aware that his status of being a native speaker of English, which, as a boy, he had never considered and, if he had, would have taken for granted, that that status was now questionable. When he explained this to me, I asked him what it was he felt he could not do which, if he were a native speaker, he would be able to do. What seemed to be the case was that he felt somewhat uneasy in chatting to native speakers of English. I pointed out that this could be a socio-cultural