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Non-native English Speaking Teachers' Subjectivities and Colombian Language Policies: A Narrative Study

Subjetividades de profesores de inglés no nativos y políticas lingüísticas colombianas: un estudio narrativo

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This article reports the results of a study whose purpose was to trace the configuration of professional subjectivities by analyzing the narratives of four Colombian non-native English speaking teachers in the framework of language policies. In this qualitative-narrative study we used written narratives and narrative interviews as instruments to collect data from the participants who work in different universities and schools in Colombia. Their stories were analyzed using short story analysis, and the results allowed us to identify a core category: Re-creating the self: An entangled, changeable and endless process which shows that the subjectivities are influenced by others, teachers go through processes of acceptance or rejection when configuring them, and knowledge and reflection play an important role.

Key words: Dichotomy, language policies, narratives, native English speaker teachers, non-native English speaking teachers, subjectivities.

En este artículo se reportan los resultados de una investigación cuyo propósito fue trazar la configuración de subjetividades profesionales analizando las narrativas de cuatro profesores colombianos no nativos de habla inglesa en el marco de las políticas lingüísticas. Este estudio cualitativo-narrativo utilizó narrativas escritas y entrevistas narrativas como instrumentos para recopilar datos de los participantes que pertenecen a diferentes universidades y colegios de Colombia. Sus historias se analizaron utilizando el análisis de historias cortas; los resultados permitieron identificar una categoría central: re-crear el yo: un proceso complejo, cambiante y continuo que muestra que las subjetividades son influenciadas por otros, que se dan a través de procesos de aceptación o rechazo y que el conocimiento y la reflexión son procesos cruciales en las mismas.

Palabras clave: dicotomía, narrativas, profesores nativos, profesores no nativos, subjetividades.

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Introduction

Historically, language policies in Colombia have not been designed to consider the needs, desires, and experiences of the people directly involved in their application, especially teachers (Cárdenas, 2006; de Mejía, 2012; González, 2007; Guerrero Nieto, 2008, 2009, 2010; Usma, 2009). One of these policies is the National Bilingualism Program (PNB)¹ launched in 2004 by the Ministry of Education. As one of the strategies towards the implementation of this bilingual policy, the Ministry of Education has hired foreigners to serve as English assistants in public schools. This particular strategy has provoked resistance among Colombian English teachers because these foreigners are not English teachers and are not native speakers of English—for the most part—although they are called “native speakers” in official discourse (see Correa & González, 2017).

We contend that language policies—overt and covert (Shohamy, 2006)—operate as subjectivity devices (Foucault, 1977; Jiménez-Becerra, 2011). According to Foucault (1996) subjectivity is configured externally and internally and is mediated by the relationship of the subject with knowledge and power. For example, institutions impose language policies and teachers have to implement them. Teachers’ subjectivity is externally constructed when, in official discourses, they are fashioned as less capable of teaching English because they are not native speakers of the language. Internally, using the “technologies of the self”, teachers transform themselves into their desirable “self”. As such, we find Colombian English teachers that participated in exchange programs in the United States to improve their command of the language; others enrolled in master’s programs in order to obtain better qualifications as English teachers; and others paid for private lessons with native speakers to improve their vocabulary and pronunciation.

¹ The program has changed names several times but it is basically the same. For the purpose of this paper we will keep the original one, in Spanish: Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo.

A critical aspect in language policy in Colombia has to do with the discourses and practices around the privilege of native English speaking instructors (NESIS)² over non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs). De Mejía (2002) in her early research on bilingualism in Colombia revealed the unequal working conditions between native English speakers who serve as English teachers and NNESTs, where the first were better paid and had less work load than the latter.

Adding to this unequal situation, for too long media and official/dominant discourses have portrayed teachers as eternally unprepared (González, 2007); as technicians and clerks (Guerrero Nieto, 2010); as soldiers (Phillipson, 1992); and as inferior (Correa & González, 2017). As researchers and teacher educators, we think it is of paramount importance to undertake a study to examine how teachers configure their professional subjectivities as a way to acknowledge them as complex subjects who participate actively in their own professional being (Méndez-Rivera, 2017). This study might serve as a way to counter these other discourses and to enlighten language policy makers.

With this in mind, the research question that guided this study was: How do NNESTs configure their professional subjectivities in the frame of Colombian language policies?

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the post-structuralist paradigm which rejects the conception of order, deconstructs the universal idea of truth, understands the complexities and multilayered construction of life, and gives account about one of the many stories that could be told (Baxter, 2008; Hatch, 2002). This

² We are aware that the acronym widely accepted is NEST (native English speaking teacher) but in Colombia it has been a common practice to hire native speakers of English as teachers regardless of their qualifications. The only requirement is to speak English as their L1. For that reason we will be referring to them as native English speaking instructors to indicate that they are not certified teachers.

epistemological stance gives us the ground to conduct a narrative study about teachers' professional subjectivities. Narrative, because this study reports the personal stories of English language teachers located in a specific moment and context, and, in reference to a particular situation, which is the role of language policies in the construction of their subjectivities. Subjectivities, as a poststructuralist construction, allow us to give account of the complexities and multilayered nature of being and existing in the world.³

A Theoretical Approximation to Subjectivities

The subject configures their⁴ subjectivities in diverse ways and taking into account different factors from their social, cultural, and historical context; Muñoz (2007) claims that "the subject is not a flat and constant surface, but variable and polyhedral, which implies an awareness of the heterogeneous processes configured in there" (p. 69). According to Muñoz, the subject is at the same time conscience, practice, and language: *conscience* because the subject "thinks" about the self; *practice* because their subjectivities transcend the body and in their relationship with others and with the context they co-construct their subjectivities; and *language* because subjects are constituted through language (Foucault, 1999b). Additionally, Muñoz explains that subjectivities are inner but they have a public manifestation, which takes place in spaces such as the family, the school, the neighborhood, at either local or national levels. So, there is co-relation between the factors that influence the configuration of subjectivities and the manifestation of such configuration which allows the subject to transform their context and to be transformed by it.

³ We are aware that "identity" is another possibility, but from our own epistemological understanding, "identity" as a concept has been constructed from a modern perspective where the individual is seen as more stable and permanent.

⁴ We will use "their" and "them" whenever possible to adopt a gender perspective.

For Foucault (1999a) the configuration of the subject is determined in three dimensions: knowledge, power, and subjectivity, being the latter a reflection of the way the subject understands and expresses itself depending on the context. Therefore, subjectivities are multiple, fluid, and have several manifestations (Greenwalk, 2008; Kelly, 2013; Wright, Cranny-Francis, & Winsor, 1992). Weedon (as cited in Calhoun, 2012) defines subjectivities as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). Consequently subjectivities are configured both consciously and unconsciously; the environment plays a role that the subject cannot avoid. Subjectivity is both thinking and performing so it comes to life in the actions of the subject; activity changes the external and inner nature of the self (Huerger, 2004; Meguins & Carneiro, 2015).

In sum, subjectivities are the particular ways the self senses, sees, and experiences the world when interacting with others and the contexts they are immersed in. By effect of interactions with the self, others, and the context, subjectivities are multiple, dynamic, complex, and continuously reconfigured.

The Controversial Issue of NESTs and NNESTs Dichotomy

To start, the concept of "nativeness" itself is controversial. For instance Kachru (1998) made a distinction between two concepts that he named "genetic nativeness" and "functional nativeness". People are "genetic natives" if they were born in Australia, Canada, the USA, or the UK, what he calls the Inner Circle countries. In contrast, people could be "functional natives" if they were born in an Outer Circle country where English is the second language, for example India or Singapore. People born in other countries, like Colombia, would be non-native. In a different take, Paikeday (1985) states that this term cannot be precisely defined while Davies (1991) argues that a native or non-native category is

an issue of self-recognition, that is, the subjects identify themselves as native or non-native based on the knowledge they have of the language and whether or not they are recognized as one by the native community.

Regarding the dichotomy which involves NESTs and NNESTs, it could be defined as the preference given to NESTs since they are “considered to be the best model and type of language teacher for non-native speakers to follow” (Shibata, 2010, p. 125), and “the model speaker and the ideal teacher” (Clark & Paran, 2007, p. 407). This preference has its foundation in the belief that NESTs overpass their non-native counterparts in terms of oral skills, namely vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural knowledge (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Clark & Paran, 2007). Nevertheless, the advantages of NNESTs have been referred to by the same and other researchers. For instance, Hayes (2009) emphasizes the method and the commitment showed by NNESTs in their classrooms. Árva and Medgyes (2000) and Çakir and Demir (2013) highlight the knowledge of the local language and the grammatical and pedagogical knowledge as characteristics that most of the NNESTs have.

This dichotomy has been in conflict for many years. Ma (2012) claims that the idealization of the NESTs as “fully competent users of their language” (p. 2) is problematic. She asserts that “native speakers of a language may not possess all the knowledge about the language they speak.” (p. 2). In the same sense, Phillipson (1992) used the term “native speaker fallacy” to refer to this idealization. The author said that the advantages that are usually assigned to NESTs can be taught to NNESTs which will eliminate the supposed superiority.

It is clear that for many scholars and teachers the NESTs and NNESTs dichotomy is a conception in conflict, but from the results of different studies, including the present, the superiority given to NESTs is still in effect in the imaginary and practices of both teachers and students, and reinforced by policies and by educational models (Correa & González, 2017).

Finally, it is important to highlight that in the literature NEST refers to certified teachers who are “genetic natives” (Kachru, 1998); but in the Colombian context this category is used to refer to any foreign English speaker who serves as English teacher. In order to distance ourselves from this categorization we will use the label native English speaking instructors (NESIs).

Language Policies in Colombia: From Theory to Reality

Theories about the implementation of language policies agree on the fact that all stakeholders should take active part in their design and implementation (Corder, 1973; Medgyes & Nikolov, 2005). Contrary to what is stated in literature, in Colombia language policies are designed unilaterally, following a top down and bureaucratic model (Correa & Usma, 2013) where the voices of teachers and students have been silenced (Cárdenas, Chaves, & Hernández, 2015; de Mejía, 2006; González, 2007; Miranda & Echeverry, 2011; Sánchez & Obando, 2008; Usma, 2009).

The PNB is no exception as has been documented by Guerrero Nieto (2009). In the same line of thought, one of its latest initiatives (as mentioned in the introduction) has been the recruiting of foreigners to serve as English teaching assistants, in a program called “Formadores Nativos Extranjeros” in Spanish and “Fellowship Teaching Programme” in English (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2016). These so called “formadores nativos extranjeros”⁵ come from different parts of the world: 63% from the Americas, 21% from Europe, 4% from Asia, 6% from Africa, and 6% from Oceania (MEN, 2016). As stated by Correa and González (2017) the requirements to become a fellow are to have a C1 English level and a professional degree; teaching experience was desirable but not mandatory.

By and large, language policies in Colombia have followed a top down approach, which has excluded

⁵ We will not offer any translation because it would sound awkward.

linguistic minorities and important stakeholders like teachers. As such, there is a huge gap between theory and practice in this context.

Method

According to Creswell (2007) narratives can be both a phenomenon to be studied and a method to collect and analyze data; this study focuses on the vision of narrative as a method or what is called *narrative inquiry*. Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) assert that narrative inquiry helps us to “understand the experiences of teachers in the particular contexts in which they teach” (p. 372). Narratives are stories told by the participants' own voices in which they make sense of their experiences and become a window for the researcher to get a glimpse of participants' subjectivities (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Elliott, 2005).

In addition, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state that if we are interested in using narrative inquiry to study teachers we have to learn how to think narratively. According to the authors, narratives are developed in an ongoing life space with three main dimensions:

1. Temporal: Narratives go back into the past and span into the future.
2. Personal-social: Narratives happen because individuals interact with society and with the environment.
3. Place: People change their subjectivities as they move from one place to another.

Context and Participants

Four NNESTs participated in this study, one male and three female young adults. The participants were selected following three main criteria. First, they had to be professional English language teachers; second, they had to be enrolled in a master's program; and third, they had to be in-service teachers. This study followed ethical considerations (participants were informed about the specificities of the study; their anonymity was ensured by using nicknames and no

reference was made to the particularities of their contexts).

Instruments

Data were collected through written narratives and narrative interviews. These narratives were produced in Spanish. Participants had the possibility to use English or Spanish but they preferred Spanish because they felt more comfortable. The researchers translated only the excerpts included in this document for publication purposes. For the written narratives, participants were prompted to recall any experiences in reference to NESIS that had an impact on their learning process or that influenced their pedagogical practice. The reflection covered from the moment they started their undergraduate studies, including the present time and projected into the future. After reading each narrative several times, we identified specific issues that puzzled us as researchers and in order to avoid any misinterpretation, we prepared and applied individual protocols for a narrative interview (transcribed for data management).

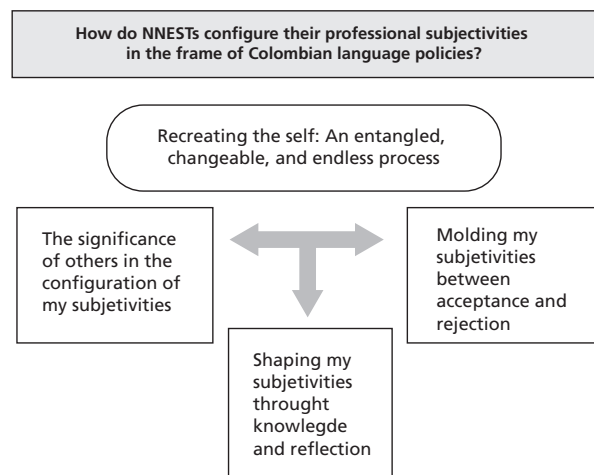
Both the written and oral narratives were analyzed following the short story analysis (SSA) model, which is an eclectic perspective in narrative studies analysis (Barkhuizen, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011; Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Gimenez, 2010; Hayes, 2007; Norton & Early, 2011; Trejo & Mora, 2014; Xu & Connelly, 2009), and follows an inductive process. That is, the narratives were classified in a matrix and the categories emerged after reducing the information from themes to patterns, and to categories. In this method, the unit of analysis is a complete short story (it includes a *who*, meaningful people; a *where*, setting and meaningful practices; and a *when*, one or more of these elements: past, present, and future).

Findings and Discussion

To answer the research question (see Figure 1) we found a core category we named *Recreating the self: An entangled, changeable and endless process*, which is

consistent with the existing literature about subjectivities and was discussed in the theoretical framework of this paper (Greenwalk, 2008; Kelly, 2013; Muñoz, 2007; Wright et al., 1992). This core category is actualized through three main dimensions: (a) the significance of others in the configuration of my subjectivities; (b) modeling my subjectivities between acceptance and rejection; and (c) shaping my subjectivities through knowledge and reflection. In what follows we unpack and discuss these findings.

Figure 1. Main Category and Its Dimensions
From the Data Analysis (Source: Own)



Recreating the Self: An Entangled, Changeable and Endless Process

Subjectivities are the result of different elements, circumstances, and people, which give them the entangled, changeable, and enduring nature that names our core category. We will use the following two short stories by Natalia to exemplify and develop this category.

Later I started working in an English consulting firm and several of my colleagues were native speakers. At first it was an enriching experience because I knew it was an opportunity to improve my proficiency. Although I was teaching English to Colombian students, *I still felt like a student* when I run into them in the office. However, things changed when these stopped being random encounters and I was asked to train them. That stopped being

fun. Being in charge of training the foreign teachers (who, in fact, were not teachers but professionals in different fields or simply tourists) I felt a great responsibility. I had to do a good job and I was worried about the image these strangers would make of my proficiency and therefore of my professionalism. At first, *I remember my hands getting sweat and trying to speak strictly what I needed*, I even rehearsed at home everything related to pronunciation. It was more than five years doing that exercise and in that time my vision for the native teacher began to disfigure. That fear of being judged was transformed into disbelief when, for example, I asked them questions of their native language and they did not know how to respond. Little by little, I began to realize that I was a teacher, a professional who knew better than them how English worked. I started to gain self-confidence and to lose respect towards them. (Written narrative, Natalia)

As stated in the theoretical framework, subjectivities are conscious and unconscious (Weedon as cited by Calhoun, 2012). Throughout this short story, Natalia buys the discourse of the native speaker. Consciously or unconsciously, as a NNEST, she positions herself as inferior and says that she “felt like a student” (which plays well with the mentality of the colonized (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992) in which the colonizer is assumed to be superior). In the NESTS - NNESTs dichotomy, the former is constructed as the model only because of their command of the spoken language (González & Llurda, 2016), which neglects a holistic view of teaching where the English teacher needs to know/have a whole lot of other skills (teaching methodology, evaluation and testing, materials design, classroom management, awareness of the context, etc.) (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Clark & Paran, 2007). Her subjectivities at that moment were performed by fear, sweaty hands, and insecurity. It took her five years to change her thoughts and behavior; she started valuing her professional experience and felt empowered when she demystified her NESIS counterparts.

Although in the previous short story we see that Natalia comes to terms in regard to NESIS, in the following

one, she shows that her subjectivities are still challenged and molded by other factors:

I remember that a Colombian company hired the services of the company I worked for and we were very excited about it. However, I was disappointed when I learned that one of the requirements was that all of its teachers should be native speakers or foreigners. The coordinator in charge complied with the claim but one of the teachers resigned so she sent me to teach the class. I will never forget the face of disappointment of those students when they saw me enter and the challenge in which that class became to me. *Although I did not have perfect pronunciation and did not know all the idiomatic expressions of my predecessor*, I knew that I was a teacher and that I could respond to their concerns. Suddenly my disrespect turned into rage towards them and into a personal challenge with myself. (Written narrative, Natalia)

By the time of this short story, Natalia had demystified the NESIS but the people in the context in which she worked had not. Her security and empowerment was weakened and again she buys into the belief that being a good English teacher is limited to “pronunciation” and “know[ing] idiomatic expressions”.

The request from the company and the attitudes of her students are linked to some widespread misconceptions about NESIS and NNESTs and fed by language policies and programs like the PNB, which has as one of its objectives hiring NESIS in all Colombian universities (MEN, 2014); there is not a rationale for this policy nor are there any other requirements beyond being a native speaker of English.

As can be seen, subjectivities do not remain stable, simple or fixed, but are continually re-created and contingent on the context. In what follows, we will offer an analysis of three dimensions that unfold from the main category.

The Significance of Others in the Configuration of My Subjectivities

There is an undeniable role played by others in the configuration of subjectivities; by “others” we mean

institutions (schools and government agencies), colleagues (NNESTs or NESIS), friends, family, and so on. It is the interaction with others which allows the subject to reflect on their experiences, to express their feelings, to evaluate their beliefs, and to act accordingly (Calderón, 2011). We will use two narratives to illustrate the role of institutions, of NESIS, and of fellow classmates.

In the short story below we can see how an institutional policy (inspired by national policies) influences the configuration of the subjectivities of our participant. Margie was telling that her school decided to hire NESIS for its bilingual program; we asked if she and her colleagues knew about that policy.

No, an explanation per se was not given, the administration mentioned that briefly. The school was certified with a quality system, which is another issue. *One of the strategic goals of the school is to become bilingual in a given period of time*, then they simply told us they were going to hire “teachers” who were English speakers but they did not give us any further explanation, and the teachers who did not speak English had to study because the idea was to get them into the goal of becoming a bilingual school. (Narrative interview, Margie)

Although our participant is a competent bilingual, the school does not acknowledge her competences (or the competences of her Colombian colleagues) but assumes (wrongly) that being bilingual equals speaking English (Guerrero Nieto, 2008) and that having NESIS is enough to achieve their goal (González & Llurda, 2016). Furthermore, it seems that speaking English is the only requirement to teach content subjects; it is not necessary to have a degree in teaching biology, chemistry, math, and the like. In terms of subjectivities, our participant and her co-workers are left silenced and disempowered by the school because they were not taken into account when making decisions on this policy. Institutions mirror government practices of overlooking teachers. However, in a subsequent interview Margie told the researchers that only one of the NESIS hired under this schema remained working in the school; the rest could

not cope with the disciplinary and pedagogical demands of being a teacher.

In the short story below, Amarok let us know how his interactions with NESIS and with fellow classmates formed and transformed his subjectivities. On the one hand, the pressure of interacting with a NESI made him to self-monitor his English performance at all times. In terms of his subjectivities, he enacts the role of a foreign language speaker who seeks the approval and validation from the owner of the language (Higgins, 2003); in this case, he performs the role of the colonized who wants to emulate his master and to please him⁶ (Freire, 2005; Pennycook, 1994).

During my undergraduate studies I didn't have a lot of interaction with native speakers, except for some assistants that came to some of the classes as a contribution to the alliances established by the university with different entities. To speak with these natives in English meant a sense of scrutiny, *I always worked hard trying to maintain a self-monitoring to verify what and how I was saying something, even more than in front of my teachers*. During that time I noticed that many of my partners who traveled to the United States returned with much better communicative skills, however they didn't show any significant improvement in the subjects that were taught in English. So, *I came to the conclusion that travelling to and living in an English speaking country can enhance English proficiency (at least spoken) but not necessarily the academic skills*, it doesn't mean that this person is a good teacher or good at teaching. (Written narrative, Amarok)

On the other hand, Amarok's subjectivities are transformed due to his relationship with his fellow classmates, some of whom traveled to the USA in order to achieve better linguistic skills. Our participant acknowledges that an improvement in English proficiency does not necessarily imply an improvement in teaching skills; then his subjectivities as a professional teacher are not determined by traveling to an English speaking

country or by having a native-like proficiency. He, as did Natalia, also demystifies the NESI and brings to the fore a broader understanding of the complexities of teaching (Pennycook, 2004).

Molding My Subjectivities Between Acceptance and Rejection

As we stated above, subjectivities are entangled; teachers live in a constant tension between the acceptance and rejection of the imaginary superiority of the NESTS (Clark & Paran, 2007; Shibata, 2010), reinforced by some national and institutional language policies like the "Fellowship Teaching Programme" mentioned earlier. In the following extract from Amelia, she displays a conflicting subjectivity when explaining why one of her teacher's (NESI) praise was so meaningful for her; on the one hand, she acknowledges that it was valuable because it came from a foreigner; yet on the other hand she gives importance to her teacher's academic qualifications.

For several things. The cultural part because I think Colombians are a little "down on their knees" when interacting with foreigners, obviously, *as he was a foreign teacher* telling me that I spoke good English, that I had potential and that I was smart...before, I was not buying it, but *when he told me so, I was filled with motivation*, with joy and it was significant because he was this kind of teacher that students feared, it was a kind of "much-respect-for-you-feeling" *because he knew his stuff and his subject was difficult*, that's why it was significant. (Narrative interview, Amelia)

Another short story told by Margie helps to exemplify her differing subjectivities that move between acceptance and rejection; she starts by complaining about the unequal working conditions (salaries vs. workload and responsibilities) between NESIS and NNESTs; conversely, she finishes her story stating: "That is why one has to improve every day". Her attitude relates to what Foucault (1977) calls *normalization*, which is a repeated situation that becomes "normal" to the point that it is no longer questioned. The preponderance of folk beliefs about NESIS and NNESTs is so strong that

⁶ Here we use "him" to be consistent with the colonial construction of the colonizer as masculine.

participants end up accepting and integrating them into their discourses and practices.

Leidy: When you worked with native speaking, practitioners, were there any differences in the working conditions or salary?

Margie: *Those teachers earned two million [Colombian] pesos more than us, and they had to teach only 45-minute classes, they did not grade papers, check attendance or had to file paperwork, nothing.* The heavy work, apart from the classes, was done by us, they did not do it. But, some of them were good, because I shared with three of them, they prepared their sessions very well, their lessons [had] lots of materials, slides...yet, they earned two or two and a half million [Colombian pesos] more than us. *That is why one has to improve every day.* (Narrative interview, Margie)

The fact that the NESIS are not assigned administrative work is an example of a policy established in a private institution that follows the same practices used in the national plan "Fellowship Teaching Programme", which is an initiative for public schools. This situation is not new, and despite having been reported by de Mejía in 2005, working conditions are still very unequal for NESIS and NNESTs. It seems our participant is not aware that earning significantly more salary is a good motivation for NESIS to do their job, and still she thinks she needs to be better, to improve.

Shaping My Subjectivities Through Knowledge and Reflection

This dimension accounts for the self-reported practices that reveal the configuration of the NNESTs' subjectivities as they reflected on their own learning, which can be traced from the past through the present to the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

In the first story, our participant configures her subjectivities as a competent user of English. Natalia was summarizing her professional experiences starting from the first stage as a student, the second stage as an English language teacher, and in the excerpt below, she refers to what she calls the third stage. Her reflections on what speaking English means allows us to see that she regarded

it as a mere instrument to "teach others" but through time she adds a new dimension: "a communication vehicle". Further, when having the opportunity to use language with a different purpose she understands that there are socio-cultural aspects attached to it.

When I accepted the position of Academic Coordinator, for the first time in my life I felt that I was already using English as *a communication vehicle and not just to teach others*. From the interview to the induction week and the day-to-day instruction both face-to-face and over the phone helped me greatly to improve my level of understanding, speech and *the perception of their culture*. Talking with them made me extremely pragmatic, both in written communications and on the telephone. One day, my best friend who is Colombian, was surprised at the way I finished a conversation on the phone and reminded me who she was and that I was not talking to a native teacher. At that moment, I understood how the contact with native speakers had changed my way of communicating and I had to learn again to separate situations and people so as not to make anyone feel bad. (Written narrative, Natalia)

Having a more holistic perspective about what language is for (as a result of her reflection) configures Natalia's subjectivities, in the sense that she acknowledges not only her linguistic competence but also her pragmatic one of feeling as (and being) a competent user of English.

Amarok, another participant, configures a subjectivity as a doer; after telling the story of a student who rejected him for being a NNEST, he stated that the situation occurred due to the "colonial mentality" that is widespread in Colombia and which benefits NESIS over Colombian teachers. When asked if he believed that situation could be changed and if he had done anything to change it, he answered:

I do believe it can be changed, in fact me and a colleague published an article on tools of decolonization in the last issue of the peer reviewed journal of my department. I think it is possible to focus on the problematic aspects of other societies, not only the good aspects because that bias makes people believe that other countries have no problems... in that article we talked about checking textbooks; textbooks always have certain things that are standardized and

only cover positive aspects of culture, to analyze the textbook with students and other teachers is a good way to raise awareness about it . . . to talk, for example, about the implications of the policy that is immersed in any discourse, discourse analysis, those are tools we have at our disposal to change this ideology. (Narrative interview, Amarok)

The participant displays a full knowledge of the situation he is describing, which is rooted in his MA studies and in his participation in collaborative research. His view on how colonized thought can be changed is based on the actions that he has actually taken like publishing a scholarly article in which he offers some practical teaching tools to decolonize the classroom; Amarok moves from reflection to action, giving way to different subjectivities. Calderón (2011) asserts that reflection is the articulator between practices and subjectivity. We would like to highlight that reflection has to be enriched from knowledge, which is the fuel that boosts thinking.

A third participant, Margie, projects what she thinks will happen to NNESTs and NESIS in the years to come, and through her reflection, her subjectivity is configured as a receiver of knowledge.

In the future, I think that more and more native speakers of English-speaking countries will come to our country and position themselves in different fields, but mainly in the field of education, and even more in higher education. The question here would be, are they good at what they do or are they just there while they find something better? Do they love to teach and know how to teach their language? Of course there must be some for whom teaching is a task that they strive to do in the best way, regardless of whether they have careers and studies related to education or pedagogy. *Our job as Colombian teachers of English is to become more and more professional, improve our level in the language, update and learn from those native teachers who give the profession a high status.* (Written narrative, Margie)

Margie bases her reflection on the knowledge that she has about being a teacher. She understands that more NESIS will arrive in the country and beyond their native-

speakerism, she is concerned with their professionalism and devotion to teach. It is important to mention that in the frame of the PNB, 600 foreigners from Australia, Kenya, India, Jamaica, United States, Canada, and Italy, among others, who are labeled “native speakers” by the National Ministry of Education arrived in Colombia in 2016, and another 180 arrived on January 2017 from a group of 520 that were expected to come that year.

In her reflection, although she implies that most NESIS are not certified teachers or that they teach as a temporary job that helps them to survive, she later states that some NESIS are diligent and responsible and that NNESTs should learn from them. Margie has configured a subjectivity in which she positions herself as a constant receiver of knowledge, putting the NESIS as the role model.

Conclusions

The current study answers the research question about the way NNESTs configure their professional subjectivities in the frame of Colombian language policies by stating that such configuration is entangled, changeable, and enduring, which is consistent with the theories about subjectivities and the role of institutions (in this case overt and covert policies) as subjectivity devices. Entangled means that there are several aspects that influence the construction of teachers’ professional self and that those do not have a particular pattern but are intertwined. For instance, teachers, partners, colleagues, and the environment play a role at different times in the participants’ lives. Changeable, because when telling their experiences, teachers revealed the waving character of the process of configuring their subjectivities; it means there is a noticeable change from what they believed in the past, what they do now, and what they expect in the future. For example, Natalia showed how her subjectivities moved from admiration and respect to NNESTs to disrespect, rage, and acknowledgement of her superiority in terms of pedagogical knowledge. Finally, it was identified that constructing and re-constructing

the self is a never ending process. This was evident in the narratives of all the participants who were opened to the changes that the future might bring for them. Teachers will permanently interact with others and their subjectivities will continue being re-configured over and over, which confirms the theory that supported this study.

In terms of subjectivities, this study contributes to the ELT and policy making fields because it shows that NNESTs as subjects are not passive and steady actors but, on the contrary, they are in constant change looking to shape their being as teachers. That is the reason why Colombian policy makers should recognize such effort and allow the teachers to be part of the making of policies. In addition, policy makers should consider the NNESTs subjectivities before creating policies that, as shown in this study, tend to deepen the inequalities and foster an antagonism between NNESTs and NESIS. This finding of course is not new; researchers in other parts of the world have pointed out what is mentioned here (de Mejía, 2005; González & Llerda, 2016; Kubota, 2012; Liu, 1999, London, 2001; McKay, 2003), which leads us to acknowledge the pervasiveness of dominant discourses in regard to who are "legitimate users" of the language and who are not. Besides, these levels are misleading since they perpetuate the idea that to be an English teacher (instructor), being a native speaker is the only requirement (regardless of the variety and register spoken; that is, many Colombian teachers report that their fellow NESI were bartenders in Great Britain, or doormen in Aruba, or plumbers somewhere else).

Regarding the literature on NESTs, there is a general conception that it refers to certified teachers who are also genetic native speakers of English (Kachru, 1998). But in the Colombian context—and policies—this label is used to describe any foreigner who performs as an English teacher and who does not need to be certified as such. Colombians, on the other hand, who want to become English teachers, need to obtain a professional degree after studying at a university for five years. Part of their preparation includes up to five academic

semesters of teaching practicum, and as a graduation requirement they should conduct, write, and defend a research project (all this in English). Consequently, we have proposed the term NESIS in order to counter the perpetuation of the NESTs and NNESTs dichotomy which represents the former as superior (as has been previously stated by de Mejía, 2005; Holliday, 2015; Liu, 1999; Phillipson, 1992; to mention some scholars who have problematized these labels).

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