

## Book Review

**Le Van Canh**

**University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam**

George Braine,  
*Nonnative Speaker English Teachers: Research, Pedagogy, and Professional Growth* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010). 112pp. ISBN 978-0-415-87632-2 (pbk).

Despite a vast bibliography on the subject of the nonnative speaker (NNS) English teacher - more than 200 publications, according to the author (p. 6) - none of them covers such a wide range of aspects related to the issue as Braine's (2010) *Nonnative speakers English teachers: Research, pedagogy, and professional growth*. In his brief introduction, Braine acknowledges that his personal experiences in teaching English from primary schools to universities in Asia and North America and his active professional contributions to the field "enrich the more academic contents in the text" (p. x). The ten chapters of the book present comprehensively the three broad areas of research, pedagogy and professional growth with reference to NNS English teachers.

Chapter 1 traces the history of English language teaching by NNS teachers, dating as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, through to the formal establishment of the Nonnative Speaker Movement in 1998. The author - himself a first language speaker of Sinhala - was one of its founding members, and attributes the widespread interest in the movement to the concept of World Englishes first advocated by Braj Kachru and Larry Smith in the 1970s. Chapter 2 discusses the conventional, and simplistic, classification of English

teachers into native and nonnative speakers. In the increasingly multilingual world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the distinction is becoming increasingly blurred – but nevertheless Braine (pp. 10-11) gives examples of where prejudice towards teachers identified as ‘NNS’ continues to discriminate against them in terms of employment in many Asian countries, as well as in Britain and the USA.

Chapters 3 and 4 review the research on self-perceptions of NNS English teachers, and then students’ perceptions of them. Prominent among the teacher’s reported anxieties was a general concern about their language proficiency, especially as regards their pronunciation. However, Braine also points to the many advantages that NNS teachers bring to the classroom: “[B]ecause they shared linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, these NNS teachers had a better ability to read the minds of their students and predict their difficulties with the English language” (p. 28). Most of the studies in Chapter 4 were carried out among ESL students in the USA, with only three from foreign language contexts, where actually very few students would have the opportunity to compare NS and NNS teachers. While presenting and discussing the findings of those studies, Braine also points out their methodological pitfalls, i.e. the extensive use of self-reported questionnaires as the sole instrument of data collection.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide insights into the contrasting lives of two NNS English teachers; one from China and the other from Malaysia. Each of these case studies presents a brief sociolinguistic account of the country, a biography of the teachers concerned, and their attitudes and perceptions about their profession. The stories are interesting in themselves, but Braine’s main point is to make the reader realise the need to avoid stereotyping the category of ‘NNS teacher’. In Chapter 8, the author reflects on the internal challenges faced by many such teachers arising from their own perception of their professional shortcomings (notably their English language proficiency), and then the challenges from external factors such as the high status accorded to NS teachers by parents, students and employers. These points are taken up in the following chapter, where Braine considers how these challenges can be

faced in four ways: enhancing the English language proficiency of NNS teachers; learning to collaborate with NS teachers; making the most of professional organisations; and diversifying the scope of research on NNS English teachers. This is followed up by Chapter 10, in which he provides suggestions for professional development for NNS English teachers. In my opinion, he overemphasizes the pursuit of higher degrees and doing research for academic publications as the two pathways to professional development. There is also a need, not discussed in this chapter, to consider how the identity and positive qualities of prospective NNS teachers can be enhanced in pre-service teacher training – both for them and for NS teachers.

In spite of the unquestionable value of the book, I take issue with Braine's view of teacher-led research. He argues that:

research by NNS on issues that are critical to themselves may cast a shadow of doubt on the validity and reliability of the data. It must be pointed out that most of these researchers had not removed themselves, as they should have, from the data gathering process. Instead, some had designed and distributed the questionnaires, conducted interviews, and analyzed the data by themselves" (p. 29).

I do wonder whether there are any empirical studies into teachers' beliefs in which the researcher can actually distance himself/herself, as Braine implies above, from the research process. I think the methodological problem of the studies presented in the book lies less in the fact that they are conducted by the teachers, and more in the extensive use of questionnaires, as pointed out by Braine himself (p. 88). Even when they are well-constructed, questionnaires can only capture the surface of deeper issues, and also the respondents may conceal their real attitudes, such as by attempting to satisfy the researcher's expectations. Therefore, I agree with his recommendation to use more longitudinal and ethnographic case studies of NNS English teachers' beliefs and practices. Such methods as semi-structured or unstructured interviews, observations, diaries, and narratives should be employed. Moreover, the most useful such research could, and should, be carried out by the teachers

#### Book Review

themselves. I would suggest from my own experience the value of practical professional activities such as small-scale collaborative action research projects conducted and distributed within school-based critical study groups or local professional communities.

Despite these caveats, I strongly recommend this extremely readable and valuable book to all ELT stakeholders.

#### **THE REVIEWER**

Dr. Le Van Canh is a senior lecturer at the University of Languages and International Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam, where he teaches the graduate program in Teaching English as a foreign language. Email: levancanhvnu@gmail.com

#### **REFERENCES**

- Cook, G. (2010). *Translation in Language Teaching*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Turnbull, M., & Dailey-O’Cain, J. (Eds.). (2009). *First language use in second and foreign language learning*. Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.