

The Prevailing Issue of Native Speakerism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of ELT Institutions' Websites

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Abstract

The English language teaching (ELT) industry has been expanding in China, and at present there are private online ELT institutions which provide English lessons which focus mainly on communication skills. The official websites of these institutions not only provide information about the programmes offered but also communicate their English language teaching pedagogical beliefs and stances. This paper aims to examine the language use in these websites and to explore how it reflects language ideologies. The websites of nine Chinese online ELT institutions were selected. Textual data were collected from the front page and subfields of these websites and were subjected to a critical discourse analysis based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional methodology. The findings suggest that there is a prevailing bias toward native-speakerism language ideology in the ELT industry. This emerged from the use of intentional vocabulary and word choice for their marketing campaigns. Repeated use of these words normalizes the authoritative image of teachers who are native English speakers. Additionally, these institutions also adopt multiple discursive strategies which intensify the stereotype of native speakerism to the public whilst seeming to discriminate against teachers who are not native speakers of English. The findings shed light on social inequity and biases in private online ELT institutions.

Keywords: Native Speakerism, ELT Institutions, Language Ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis, Official Websites

1. Introduction

English has become an essential foreign language to master in China in order to pursue opportunities in both academics and the labour market. This is despite its lack of official status and limited use for communicative purposes in the country. Under the influence of the market economy, globalization, and international exchanges, such as China's entry to the World Trade Organisation (Lam, 2002), English is a powerful fuel for foreign language learning for modernization and for international stature. The English language teaching (ELT) industry has continued to expand. In 2010 alone, it reached a multibillion-dollar scale (Gao, 2017). In 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China released the *double reduction* (*shuangjian*) a policy, which states that "new off-campus training institutions are banned during compulsory education" (Ministry of Education, 2021). In other words, private subject-training classes for elementary and middle school students are banned. However, online English lessons mainly focus on providing entertaining language lessons that target communication skills, thus avoiding the prohibitions stated in the policy. In addition, online learning became the only option for many teachers and students during the global pandemic and is accepted in China as a learning tool. Since the internet offers a wide and virtually uncontrolled space for language learning (Blommaert, 2009), private ELT institutions offer a vast range of lessons that are designed to look appealing. However, the quality of teaching content that they promise to offer is sometimes questionable. In addition, official websites used by institutions not only present their strengths as a programme and the teaching tools used, but also their English language teaching pedagogical beliefs and stances.

To identify their language policies and their ideologies communicated to prospective learners and parents, this paper is based on a critical discourse analysis of information from nine Chinese online ELT institutions' websites which were collected as discursive texts. The research aims to provide a critical perspective of the ELT industry in China, unmasking their teaching beliefs and pedagogies, and hopes to provide a critical perspective toward English language education. The questions that this research addresses are as follows:

- 1) What language beliefs and ideologies have institutions articulated through their websites?
- 2) What discursive practices do institutions employ on their websites to legitimize their language beliefs and ideologies?

2. Literature Review

Language ideologies are produced by social resources shared by a community as norms or common sense. Research of language ideologies rests on assumptions about how beliefs are formed and used in everyday communication (Surtees, 2016). Silverstein (1979, p. 193) defines language ideologies as a “set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use”. From his perspective, the importance of language ideologies suggests that beliefs about language mediate between language use and social organization. By building on Silverstein’s ideas, Woolard and Schieffelin (1994, p. 57) define language ideologies as “shared beliefs about language or language use which are mobilized as meaning-making resources in interaction and are themselves reproduced and transformed through such use”. Language ideology can be seen as a bridge between linguistic and social theory because it relates the microculture of communicative action to political and economic considerations of power and social inequality, confronting macrosocial constraints on language behaviour. Therefore, language ideologies undergird language use, which then shapes language ideologies, and together they serve social ends. By giving a life to language itself outside of its existence, which is considered only in contextual interactions, language becomes open to and an influencer of social manipulation (Piller, 2015).

The ‘native speaker’ myth plays a widespread and complex iconic role outside, as well as inside, the English-speaking West. Holliday (2006) defines native-speakerism as an ideology that native English speakers are the best models and teachers because they represent ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals and methodology of teaching the language. Therefore, this system of ‘Western’ ideals represents a distorted worldview to students. The ELT industry in China has a vested interest in promoting the so-called ‘native speaker’ brand. Despite its lack of official status and limited use for communicative purposes domestically, English has received increasing attention in language education and it has become the most coveted and prized linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). China has been the largest national market for private English teaching since 2012 (Liu, 2018), and China’s English policy and the growing ELT industry have become a battlefield of ideological debates (Fang, 2016).

Holliday (2006, p. 2) argues that “native speakerism” is neo-racist on two counts. On the one hand, “culture” becomes a euphemism for race, which is implicitly expressed by othering non-native teachers. The celebration of cultural difference is a mere façade, decorated with ‘inclusive’

and ‘nice’ professional veneer (Kubota & Lin, 2006). Further, the English-only policies in ESL classrooms are underpinned by the assumption that maximum exposure to English is beneficial to learners (Razfar & Rumenapp, 2012). Auerbach (1993) argues that this belief is rooted in a particular ideological perspective and is used to reinforce social inequalities. Historically, English-only practices in the classroom were a direct outcome of the Americanization movement. Auerbach (1993) explains that stressing the importance of using oral English overpowered the use of a student’s native language, which was the main reason English-only became the norm in ESL classrooms. However, research evidence suggests that the use of native languages in the classroom reported positive learning outcomes. This argument has been verified by the work of many scholars who argue that the use of a student’s native language, such as Chinese, in the English-learning classroom increases efficiency of instruction and access to more complex language (Jong & Zhang, 2021). Wang (2005) asserts that using Chinese to explain English grammar concepts increases understanding, given limited class time. Gu (2018) gives a similar finding, that where six Chinese English-language teachers who participated in the study used Chinese to explain grammar and assignments. This supports the argument that using Chinese in the English-learning classroom provides better access to more challenging linguistic structures and conceptual knowledge, especially when a teacher’s goal is meeting the demand of teaching difficult subject matter (Jong & Zhang, 2021).

Other than emphasizing the importance of pure and authentic language environment, teachers who are native English speaker (NES) tend to be considered as more competent in an ELT context. Litman (2022) examined difference between how online Chinese education companies promoted either North American or Filipino teachers to their clients. He found that teachers from North America were portrayed as ideal English teachers, and this phenomenon further intensified when the pandemic began. In addition, they portray two racializing practices around English when promoting North American teachers with their pure English accents and Filipino teachers with their knowledge in English training. Liu (2022) talks about how the viewpoints of Chinese ELT stakeholders (students, teachers, and administrators) still indicate that current English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in China is affected by a bias toward native speakerism. Stakeholders assert that NES teachers are more competent in English than the teachers who are non-native English speakers (NNES), and particularly better than local Chinese EFL teachers. In addition, Liu (2022) also criticizes the long-entrenched belief that English varieties of the Inner Circle countries,

such as the United Kingdom and the United States, are superior to other English varieties, a belief that encourages linguistic discrimination.

A more recent study done by Gao and Liu (2023) investigates the prevalence of native speakerism on Chinese social media. They claim the online discourse has been constructed by people from diverse backgrounds who share ELT-related content on social media. Research findings have demonstrated that native speakerism in the ELT community has had systemic and significant influence regarding the authenticity and ownership of the English language. However, the ELT industry still advocates for the native-speaker model, promoting the idea that native-like fluency should be the ultimate goal for students (Fang, 2017).

Another neo-racist aspect of “native speakerism” (Holliday, 2006, p. 2) that is gradually becoming more obvious in the advertising of native teachers has more to do with ‘Whiteness’ (Kubota, 2011) than with language. Pennycook (2016) echoes this sentiment, stating that the term *native speaker* contains racial undertones, which often refers to particular racial formations like white faces or white voices. Some non-white teachers whose first language is English are treated as insufficient. This is implicit in job advertisement that specify teachers from Inner Circle English-speaking countries. Chinese tend to refer to people who are white, native-English proficient, and from Western cultures as ‘Euroamerican’. Rather than addressing any countries in particular, it is a relatively broad concept which covers a wider region. Scholars of education, like Kubota and Lin, (2009) and Lan (2011) argue that students often assume white native teachers are more competent regardless of professional qualifications. Discrimination based on the appearance of a teacher has often been found in ELT hiring procedures. Jovic (2017) found that the candidates who claimed to be native speakers, or who created images of false passports to indicate that they were from countries in the Inner Circle, had a 93% acceptance rate, intimating that candidates from Inner Circle countries are the most desirable. Henry (2020) analysed how English schools in Shenyang, China promoted its English lessons by commodifying whiteness to attract clients. In their advertisements, *Whiteness* signifies positive social values like modernization through English language, cosmopolitanism, and neoliberal citizenship. In researching the discrimination of Black online English teachers, Curran (2023) found that Chinese learners are more likely to become paying customers if the demo class was given by a white-looking native language teacher. However, Wang and Fang (2020) found that the opposite was true when they investigated how teachers and students at a university in southeast China perceived NES teachers and NNES

teachers where no clear difference between these types of teachers were found. They suggest that this native and non-native dichotomy should be revisited to avoid generalizing individual teachers as features of entire NES or NNES groups.

Based on the existing literature, the extant discussions on the private English-teaching industry in China mainly cover the perspectives of ELT stakeholders, while investigations from the industry's perspective are still limited. Considering the large proportion of private English language institutions in the domestic market and the lack of unified policy supervision, it is necessary to take a closer examination regarding institutions' attitudes towards ELT to look at the kind of beliefs and ideologies they perpetuate.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

Nine institutions which mainly focus on providing online English trainings, targeting students aged 4-12 years old were selected for this study. These official websites of the English language institutions included in this article are labelled as follows:

1. Institution A
2. Institution B
3. Institution C
4. Institution D
5. Institution E
6. Institution F
7. Institution G
8. Institution H
9. Institution I

With the exception of Institution H, which was established early in 2013, most institutions were founded between 2014 and 2016. Only Institution D and Institution I were established relatively recently, in 2018 and 2019 respectively. All institutions are privately owned organizations. These institutions all operate online nationwide, providing services for language learners across the country. They provide spoken English courses taught by foreign teachers, which differ from the traditional offline face-to-face courses focusing on grammar content and literacy skills. There is not much information regarding syllabus structure or textbooks found on the websites. Most

institutions claim that they use self-developed teaching materials, referencing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), and selectively use materials from Pearson's *BIG English Series*, and some original American textbooks.

All the official websites selected for this study had to be owned by the private institutions and be functioning websites. The textual data were collected from the homepage and subfields of the websites, which included information about curriculum design, teaching faculty, and pedagogical beliefs. The text in Chinese was also translated by the author, whose first language is Mandarin. The translations were reviewed by another researcher, who is bilingual in English and Chinese. Although websites as sources of information may seem to offer limited qualitative data, they serve an increasingly important role in this digital era. Winter et al. (2003; cited in Wilson & Carlsen, 2016, p. 29) state that "(w)eb sites are on-stage work areas where a performance is given to an actual or implied audience of potential customers ... they provide frames of symbolic representations that inform and lure these potential stakeholders into take a closer look." Ethical Guidelines 3.0 published by the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke, 2020) were adhered to ensure that there was no conflict of interest or ethical misconduct in the study.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is based on the understanding that discourses like spoken or written language are used as a form of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This framework is seen here and throughout as a resource for people who are struggling against domination and oppression in its linguistic forms (Fairclough, 1995). CDA provides a means to analyse the production and reception of discourse with an eye toward explicating taken-for-granted assumptions and both explicit and latent meanings (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). This study draws on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional methodology, which sees discourse as an amalgamation of three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension of Fairclough's model is text. The second dimension is discursive practices, focusing on the processes involved in the production and reception of the text. The last dimension is social practices, examining the larger social context (cultural, political, or economic) that bears upon the text and governs the production and reception of the discursive practices. This research chose Fairclough's (1992) perspective that documents do not just represent the world but help to shape it. In other words, "(d)iscourse is a practice not just

of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting, and constructing the world of meaning (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). Therefore, the websites of institutions do not just deliver information to the public; they act to shape their thinking and help them to decide what they want. CDA investigates “a relationship between text and social conditions, ideologies and power-relations” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 98-109). The online websites employ already existing beliefs and attitudes about learning a language by using certain exercises, organization of data, or incorporation of socio-cultural context; thus, contextualizing language learning effectively by reclaiming language ideologies (Wagner, 2017).

The original data were all in Mandarin Chinese, and thus, some nuanced meaning may have been lost due in the translation. Therefore, themes were grouped before translating the texts into English, in order to save the connotations. Thematic analysis (TA) developed by Braun and Clark (2006) was used due to its independence and flexibility to tackle texts and organic processes to extract codes and themes. The author follows the six phases of TA: (1) initial reading of texts to gain familiarity; (2) getting familiar with texts; (3) developing basic themes; (4) consolidating into organized themes; (5) deriving global themes and networks; and (6) describing and analysing networks. TA provides a method for data analysis but does not prescribe methods for data collection, theoretical positions, or epistemological or ontological framework. Underpinning Fairclough’s three dimensions of CDA as the theoretical framework, description, interpretation, and explanation, textual codes were sorted and categorized as the themes emerged.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in two parts. In the first section, the reasons native-speakerism ideology is conveyed through word use and connotations in Mandarin Chinese combining its social context, are explained. Following this, three discourse strategies adopted by the institutions are summarized, analysing the ways in which they are used to further endorse the institutions’ online rhetoric. In doing so, the hidden native-speakerism admiration discourse was unmasked and the reification and naturalization of a native-speakerism admiration in their online rhetoric were revealed.

4.1 Native Speakerism

All textual data in Table 1 were collected from the front page of the institutions' official websites. Three buzzwords are found with frequent appearances. Firstly, 'mother tongue' (*mu yu*) is found on six out of nine institutions' front pages. As the selling point for platforms, the belief conveyed through this word is that only NES teachers are best qualified in language education. In contrast, it otherizes non-native speakers as deficient interlocutors and professionals, creating an inequitable linguistic hierarchy between NES and NNES teachers. The demand for NES reflects the desire for English-only as the linguistic input.

Table 1. mother tongue appears six out of nine

Institutions	Websites texts
Institution A	Acquiring English as your mother tongue; 1v1 foreign teachers teaching mode; 25 min every day, 30 days speaking English fluently.
Institution B	A purely mother-tongue learning environment; foreign language teachers work/live in countries that English is either a mother tongue or an official language, guaranteeing their authentic accents.
Institution C	Euroamerican-language teachers; creating purely authentic English language environment.
Institution D	Euroamerican language teachers.
Institution E	Euroamerican mother-tongue language teachers; authentic English pronunciation; making English your second mother tongue.
Institution F	Euroamerican language teachers; authentic mother-tongue language learning environment.
Institution G	Mother-tongue foreign teachers; coming from native English-speaking countries; purely authentic English-learning environment.
Institution H	Mother-tongue alike language learning environment.

Secondly, the words 'pure' and 'authentic' are consistently used to describe foreign teachers' English accents and pronunciation. In Mandarin, the word 'pure' (*chun zheng*) means standard and unadulterated. 'Authentic' (*di dao*) means local. The use of these two words suggest that NES teachers on their platforms are able to provide an 'authentic' experience of providing an immersive English-speaking environment. The online rhetoric on the website caters to parents' desire to cultivate an ideal language environment for their children to acquire linguistic input. However, rhetoric like this is native-speakerism-oriented in nature, aiming to reduce the influence from

language learners' L1. The same principle applies to the use of the word 'mother tongue'. Institutions want to reduce interference from any other language in English language learning. The quest for a 'pure' and 'authentic' accent reflects an underlying native-speakerism ideology. For example, in one of the websites, it is stated that "all foreign teachers come from native English-speaking countries like UK, US, and Canada" and that "students are free to pick (a) British or American accent". On another institution's website, a profile of a male teacher contains the following profile: "his gentlemen-of-the-old-school accent from London, England, allows children to immerse themselves in the purest English learning environment". In this case, the institution not only flaunts the so-called standard English accent but also suggests that Britain is the country that truly owns English. Even when the nationalities of the teachers are not specified, the common premise is that "all teachers work and live in the official language or native English-speaking countries for a long time to ensure that their accent is pure and authentic". The institutions suggest that requiring their teachers to come from a native English-speaking environment provides an assurance that the students will be earning from an 'authentic' source of English.

The word 'Euroamerican' (*ou mei*) is used to suggest the geographical range of institutions' hiring practices. In other words, the English-teaching industry has promoted the assumption that all Euroamerican language teachers are native speakers, which has become the norm in China. White foreigners are often perceived in China as the default group of foreigners (Litman, 2022). Automatically, English speakers from non-Euroamerican countries are considered as deficient users of the English language. These practices exemplify the underlying native speakerism language ideology that only legitimizes speakers whose L1 is English as the authoritative figures of this language. Companies try to promote their teachers' English accents in relation to their racialized identities in order to attract consumers (Litman, 2022). This kind of impression is not only based on personal beliefs alone but is also constructed and made meaningful by multiple actors in discourse and in action (Murji & Solomos, 2005, cited in Litman, 2022).

4.2 Discourse strategies

4.2.1 Professionalism

The first discursive practice, called 'professionalism' appears to be discriminating against NNES teachers, despite the institutions providing evidence that they are adhering to responsible hiring criteria. Some institutions provided the passing rate of teachers for their language examinations

and emphasize the foreign teachers' educational background. For example, one institution states that "all teachers are graduated from internationally prestigious universities". Another, states that they will be "recruiting only full-time language teachers who graduated from Top 100 universities". If what they say is true, it can be seen that native speakerism ideology influences rigorous hiring criteria. Four of the institutions use the term *you zhi* (meaning "high quality"). To describe their foreign teachers under their teaching team section. In the Chinese context, *you zhi* is mostly used to describe objects that have excellent quality.

Such descriptions are accompanied with texts like "high quality foreign teachers provide high quality English lessons and even references to the teachers' looks such as "beautiful Euroamerican foreign teachers". For instance, one of the websites linked beauty to the teachers ability to teach: "her beautiful looks will make kids enjoy more of her class". In this case, there is a sense of commodification of the foreign teachers based on their nationalities, accents, and appearance. In contrast, NNES teachers and even non-white NES teachers are excluded, regardless of their qualifications. Thiessen (2021) asserts that if institutions choose not to adhere to this linguistic hegemony, they perpetuate discrimination, which could lead to social and economic disadvantages. This practice provides evidence for Holliday's (2006) argument, which states that non-white ELT teachers are discriminated against in the market. Having perpetuated such ideologies about the superiority of one group of ELT teachers, it is perhaps not surprising that Asian and especially Chinese students are more likely to stay when a native teacher conducts the demonstration class as part of their promotion activity for their institution (Curran, 2023). On the surface, educational institutions seem to be selective; however, they are actually only considering speakers of certain varieties of English, namely those that are regarded as 'standard' and 'White'.

4.2.2 Comparison to the Traditional Pedagogy

Table 2 shows the selected texts from institutions' websites.

Table 2. Traditional pedagogical practice fails to meet learners' needs

Institutions	Websites texts
Institution C	Our courses are full of interesting teacher-student interactions, and the class is not boring.
Institution E	Traditional teaching is not necessarily good. The "one-to-many" teaching style emphasizes a teacher's role in the classroom and asks standardized behaviors from

	students. The lack of communication between teachers and students makes it impossible to guide students according to their aptitude. The oral English class needs a great amount of practice, and the “one-to-many” class form cannot meet the training needs of every student at the same time.
Institution G	The traditional curriculum is heavily scripted, which affects students’ efficiency of understanding. The classroom form is chaotic, and the content is repeated.
Institution I	The flipped classroom relocates the time inside and outside the classroom, transferring the learning autonomy to students. Children can learn independently outside the classroom and spend time interacting with teachers during class.

The second discursive practice found in the websites of these institution the comparisons of their lessons and the traditional teaching. Here, ‘traditional’ refers to the conventional ‘one-to-many’ model, characteristic of public-school classrooms that typically accommodate larger numbers of students, emphasizing exam-oriented education. Teachers take the leading role and teach subject content in limited class time. All sampled ELT institutions offer one-on-one customized English trainings by purposefully controlling the teacher-student ratio. Institutions provide compare costly private language training to the free, public, mandatory education. The cost of traditional classrooms falls under the category of compulsory education, which covers grade one to grade nine, provided by the nation. On the websites, these institutions fail to acknowledge that these two systems do not share the same goal of learning output goals. Instead, they unfairly emphasize the negative aspects of the teacher-centred classroom style in the public education sector. Table 3 presents the texts that institutions advertise their interactive teaching style with fun.

Table 3. Emphasizing ‘fun’ is the main teaching feature

Institutions	Websites texts
Institution A	Interesting and diverse forms of gamified interactive teaching.
Institution B	Fresh learning content, full of fun interactions.
Institution C	Massive original English picture books, 4,000 bedtime stories, dozens of interactive sessions. Various and interesting teacher/student interactions, the class is not boring anymore.
Institution F	Experiential fun classes with emphasis on multimedia, animation, songs, and scene construction.
Institution G	In-time interactions through video call, learning English with fun.

Another comparison is the entertaining teaching style. All institutions mention the concept of “learning with *qu* (fun)” indicating that the language lessons they provide are highly interactive between teachers and students. They often use words like “easy approaching”, “expressive with gestures and facial expressions” and “good at using props” to describe foreign teachers. In one of the websites stated that “foreign teachers have their unique teaching methods”, creating an impression that only foreign teachers can organize such a vivid and interactive language lesson. The insinuation is that this is different from the traditional portrayal of a teacher as serious, unsmiling, rigid, and boring. This practice of othering is not only applied to teachers, but also is projected onto students, who are not considered as self-directed learners in traditional classrooms. In comparison, these online ELT institutions claim that they can provide an idealized learner-centred, self-motivating, learning environment with open communication which is perceived to be the norm in English-speaking western countries. Local education is portrayed as “hierarchical” in the teacher-centred classroom, and terms like “collectivist,” “passive,” and “docile,” are used to describe students. This suggest the prejudicial nature of the idealized ‘self’ in native speakerism, while the generalized and problematic ‘Others’ are discriminated against (Holliday, 2006).

Interestingly, on the websites, the profiles of the foreign teachers generally contain information like their first names (although it is unclear if these are real names), nationality, and whether the teacher has Teaching of English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) or Teaching of English as a Foreign Languages (TEFL) qualifications. Additionally, many profiles contain information like the years of online ELT experience, their teaching styles, and communication skills. Some institutions also present the profiles of local teachers but their information is more detailed in comparison to the foreign teachers. The information includes the name of universities where bachelor’s degrees or even master’s degrees were earned, their TESOL/TEFL qualification, their English proficiency (IELTS/TOFEL scores), experience of studying overseas, and their teaching experience. The standards for local teachers seem to be much more stringent, and their educational qualifications and teaching experience is put on display to convince the public that these local teachers are ‘good’ enough despite not being NES.

4.2.3 English and its ‘Internationalness’

Institutions promote the benefits of learning English by highlighting that students will be equipped with learning the so-called “international characters” and with “connecting the world with no boundaries”. Table 4 showcases that how institutions link the idea ‘talking to the world’ with English learning.

Table 4. English unlocks the door to the world

Institutions	Websites texts
Institution A	Let everyone have the ability to talk to the world.
Institution E	So as to achieve the cultivation of international vision of the World Citizens; new European and American education quintessence of global vision, not only do they provide professional language education but also through foreign teachers to share the world to us.
Institution G	Enrich the vision to stimulate Chinese people's interest in English learning and become a global citizen; The background of European and American foreign teachers provides an international vision, not only they can improve your English, but also, they can enlarge your horizon.
Institution I	Enabling more Chinese children to connect with the world through the use of English.

Institutions claim that the prestigious educational background of foreign language teachers equip them with an international perspective. However, the texts here contain multiple hidden rhetoric meanings. First, institutions legitimize their practice of hiring foreign, or native language, teachers by emphasizing their functions of providing this international perspective. This reasoning is further verified by teachers’ educational backgrounds. In other words, prestigious degrees from tertiary education are the representation of an international perspective in this context. Secondly, the international vision is arbitrarily equated to a Western perspective. Institutions ignore the fact that they selectively recruit teachers from English native-speaking countries. The number of teachers who are from the UK and US are overwhelmingly dominant, while leaving the rest of the world out of the picture. Thirdly, institutions use a Western cultural perspective as a monolithic concept to represent their international vision. The education institutions offer is not to help students gain a deeper understanding of and empathy for the worldview of speakers of other languages or even other varieties of English, but to capitalize on its neo-colonial benefits (Kramsch, 2019). The concept of an imagined global community is used by the institutions when

they describe teaching students to be world citizens. However, in reality, being able to speak English and interacting with native English-speaking communities is not all it means to be a global citizen. Even though the concept “English as a lingua franca” is used, it appears to be limited to being able to communicate with native speakers of English.

5. Discussion

The current status of the private ELT industry in China is still mainly dominated by the admiration of native speakerism. The market is fuelled by rhetoric which keeps it in a loop of linguistic imperialism, hypostatizing white supremacist systems and ideologies (Gerald, 2020). Institutions capitalize on the native-speakerism discourse by privileging certain linguistic and racial features as valuable commodities. The repeated uses of labels, such as ‘Euroamerican’ and ‘mother tongue’ constantly normalize the discriminations that are perpetrated on nominally linguistic grounds, intensifying the stereotype to the public that NNES teachers may not be accepted as qualified language teachers (Romney, 2010). The consequences of such discrimination result in unavoidably higher tuition fee for customers to pay, and NNES teachers must lower their price to be competitive. In the era of globalization, proficiency in English represents a desire for the identities represented by particular accents and their respective communities, which students believe will open doors of opportunity that only knowing English can unlock (Motha & Lin, 2014; Tollefson, 2000). Blindly pursuing native-like accents or pronunciation neglects the importance of communication skills. A similar result is found in Gao and Lin’s (2023, p.7) that online audience heavily pay attention to the idea of “authenticity’ by making comments like ‘is that how natives speak or sound like”. It is a misbelief that unimpeded communication can only be achieved under these parameters. There are more NNES teachers who do not share the same L1 and need to communicate in English globally than there are NES teachers. Realizing that English is no longer a privilege to people who are native speakers and that to know English varieties from other non-native countries is critical is an important lesson for students to learn. Simply focusing on pursuing native-like fluency and accent perpetuates the existing stereotypical views regarding the English language and prevents the public from developing more tolerant views of other English varieties. There are good concepts, such as global citizenship, but these ideas are taken out of context when used to endorse the hidden native-speakerism ideology in institutions’ rhetoric. They seemingly promote English as a lingua franca, which language can be used to communicate with the rest of

the world. However, in this context, the rest of the world is arbitrarily generalized as the West, where English is the native language. The desire to learn English should not be simply commodified as serving a utilitarian purpose as a valuable linguistic capital, while ignoring the real purpose of learning a language, which is to communicate. It is possible to break the existing vicious cycle led by the neoliberal market by of the public changing the market demand. Gradually developing a diverse point of view to the English language is what can lead China to have its own English variety in the long run.

6. Conclusion

This study analysed the pervasive existence of admiring native-speakerism language ideology in the ELT industry in China, in its current social and economic context. Contributing to the current research gap, the author provides an in-depth CDA of private ELT institutions' online rhetoric by taking Fairclough's perspective, differentiated from the extant studies which have focused on the teachers' and students' perspectives in higher education. The critical perspective argues that language use is the reflection of language ideologies, and language ideologies undergird social practices, which can further create more social inequality. This article reveals that native-speakerism language ideology is craftily integrated by private online ELT institutions into their website rhetoric, by employing different discursive strategies to further legitimize their biased pedagogical stance. It demonstrates how discriminations against NNES teachers in the ELT industry and the commodification of racial features are the product of misbelief about the English language. As for future research, more investigation is needed into student experiences of taking online English lessons and analysing learning outcomes.

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