

**The concept ‘native speaker’ in Russian and English professional language
teaching discourse**

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‘Native speaker’ is one of the central concepts in ELT both in Russia and abroad. However, the meaning, significance, understanding and usage of the concept differ a lot in Russian and English professional language teaching discourse. The goal of the paper is to discover the core of the concept ‘native speaker’ in Russian as well in English language to clarify the differences and similarities of its perception in two ELT linguocultures. To fulfill the task we turn to definitions of the term ‘native speaker’ in encyclopedias and dictionaries of language teaching, fundamental and applied linguistics, published in Russia and inner-circle countries. Thus, we try to answer the question “Is there any difference between Russian and English definitions and, if there is, how big is it?”

First, we need to highlight that the term ‘native speaker’ can be found in many Russian and English references, so we may establish that ‘native speaker’ is accepted by professional ELT community as a term. Secondly, we noticed that the length of Russian and English entries is different. While Russian dictionaries offer laconic definitions, English entries may be up to several pages.

However, both English and Russian ways of defining the notion point to the same main features of the concept: native speaker is a person for whom that language is a mother tongue, and a person who learns a language as a child and continues to use it grammatically, fluently and appropriately. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7] Judging by it we may conclude that the notion ‘native speaker’ does not differ neither for Russian nor for English applied linguistics and that all definitions share three main characteristics: the place of birth, the level of language competence and the level of language proficiency. All the characteristics are disputable for English professional community, whereas for most Russian scholars such definitions seem to be sufficient.

In the English professional discourse linguists scrutinize the criteria of the term. Thus, the Routledge encyclopedia reads: “all the criteria for determining ‘native speakerness’ are fuzzy and controversial, including birth” [Medgyes, 2000, c. 436]. Such an approach is caused to life by the global spread of English language. Nowadays that led to the situation when English language has been localized and adopted by non-English-speaking peoples. This brought to life the question of English language ownership.

The first issue is tightly connected with the second one, which concerns with the concept of a standard language. Many teachers accept the assumption that “the goal of learning a second or foreign language is to approximate as closely as possible to the standards set by native speakers”. However, for the same reason of the global spread of English language when the language belongs to everybody who speaks it, the scholars question what standard to accept. For instance, Tom McArthur proposed the Circle of World Englishes, where he names eight types of Standard Englishes. [7] Even if we accept Standard British or American English as a model, it does not solve the problem because they include many versions of English, like

Scottish and Welsh English or Southern and African American Vernacular English, which are very far from what teachers usually mean when they use the term 'standard English'.

The level of language proficiency is also a debatable criterion for indentifying a native speaker. Nowadays English language is the unrivalled Lingua Franca and the number of non-native speakers of English has already exceeded the number of native speakers. Many of them develop a 'native-like' command of a foreign language and there are many bilinguals who can speak fluently both English and another language and it may be difficult to say which one is their native language. In this connection some scholars have created new terms to substitute the traditional terms. They are 'accomplished user of English' (Edge, J., 1988), 'expert speaker' (Rampton, M. B. H., 1990), 'bilingual speaker' (Jenkins, J., 1996), 'L2 user' (Davies, A., 2003). [5, 7]

Unlike the professional discourse of English teachers and scholars, Russian dictionaries and encyclopedias of language teaching and applied linguistics lack for these controversies regarding the concept 'native speaker'. Though, in one recent English-Russian language teaching dictionary these emerging disputable issues in defining the concept 'native speaker' have got attention. [2] So we may propose a hypothesis that soon the concept 'native speaker' will evoke in Russian ELT circles the same heated discussion as in English-speaking world.

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