More and more nonnative speakers (NNSs) are seeking to publish in international journals devoted to English language teaching and applied linguistics. Strong anecdotal evidence and occasional references in the literature attest to the disadvantages NNSs encounter vis-à-vis their native speaker (NS) peers. This article presents the results of an interview study with the editors of 12 leading international journals in applied linguistics and English language teaching. The purpose was to find out how these editors viewed the issue of NNSs publishing in their journals and to gain insight into how to enhance the chances of successful publication by NNSs. The results of the interviews included a questioning of the concept of the term nonnative speaker, the overall attitudes of editors and reviewers to NNS contributions, problematic aspects of NNS contributions, and positive attributes of NNS contributors. Problematic aspects included surface errors, parochialism, absence of authorial voice, and nativized varieties of English. Positive attributes include awareness of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural issues, objectivity of outsider perspectives, an international perspective, a testing mechanism for the dominant theories of the centre, access to research sites and data where NSs would be intrusive, and the alerting of centre scholars to research undertaken on the periphery.

As part of the overall trend toward globalization in many spheres, including education and academic research, more and more nonnative speakers (NNSs) are seeking to publish in international journals devoted to English language teaching, applied linguistics, and related areas. In a forum at the annual TESOL convention, journal editors answer questions from aspiring and experienced teachers and researchers about how to get published in their journals. Similar forums are organised at various other conferences internationally. Regularly attending a considerable number of these sessions over the years, I have noted that NNSs often express their particular difficulties in achieving publication and even allude to the possibility of intentional or unintentional
discrimination against NNSs on the part of these journals. Occasional references in the literature also suggest the disadvantages NNSs face vis-à-vis their native speaker (NS) peers. Van Dijk (1994), for example, has talked of “the triple disadvantage of having to read, do research and write in another language” (p. 276).

In order to investigate the question of NNSs publishing in international journals, I conducted a survey of NNS academics in Hong Kong to find out their perceptions, problems, and strategies regarding publication in English (Flowerdew, 1999b). One of the significant findings of this survey was that just over two thirds of subjects felt themselves to be at a disadvantage in publishing in English as compared with NSs, this in a territory with an English language heritage and in which English is the medium of instruction. Perhaps more disturbing, nearly a third of the respondents felt that prejudice by referees, editors, and publishers placed NNSs at a disadvantage when writing for publication.

In a globalizing world, to place NNSs at a disadvantage when it comes to publishing their work not only goes against natural justice but is also likely to be impoverishing in terms of the creation of knowledge. As Van Dijk (1994) has stated, “It hardly needs to be argued that lacking insight into theories, methods, data and results of scholars elsewhere on the globe is a form of scholarly and cultural chauvinism which at the very least diminishes the relevance and generality of our findings, and in any case contributes to the reproduction of prevailing forms of cultural and academic hegemony” (p. 276). Similarly, Canagarajah (1996) has argued that what he calls *periphery* perspectives (Galtung, 1971, 1980; Wallerstein, 1974, 1991) in the various disciplines, that is, the perspectives of academics who work outside the intellectual centres of the developed countries, may provide important alternative cultural perspectives, on the one hand (p. 463), and “vibrant,” “marginal” contributions to the often “stable” and “conservative” “centre” (p. 465), on the other. Periphery perspectives may thus provide both valuable alternative theories of their own and a healthy questioning of theories and approaches already prevailing in the centre. Mauranen (1993) has argued along similar lines from the perspective of Finland.

A number of examples in the literature describe how NNSs have come to terms with the struggle to write for publication in English. At least two approaches appear in Braine’s (1999) collection on the contribution of NNSs to TESOL. Connor (1999), originally from Finland, describes how she increasingly became acculturated to the U.S. way of academic writing and life, including marrying “a supportive native English-speaking husband” (p. 32), and how she was happy to develop her writing style based on U.S. models. She makes it quite clear that, after her extensive apprenticeship, she “feel[s] like a U.S. writer” (p. 32); she feels no guilt about no longer writing anything in Finnish except personal letters,
arguing that many NNS international scholars do most of their professional writing in English (p. 36). Li (1999), on the other hand, originally from China, prefers to “hover between two worlds” (p. 44). While valuing the criteria applied by U.S. writers—“originality, individuality, spontaneity, honesty, rationalism, and the aversion to sentimentality and didacticism” (p. 44)—she nevertheless appreciates the emphasis in Chinese writing that she had been schooled in: “convention, organization, poetic images, historical allusions, and moral correctness” (p. 44). She is less willing than Connor to abandon her original identity. Yakhontova (in press), a Ukrainian national, takes a stronger view, arguing that although Ukrainian scholars such as her want to participate in the international academic community and write in English, they nevertheless want to do so on their own terms, retaining their own unique Ukrainian voice and rhetorical style in their auxiliary language.

**CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

The research reported in this article is related in theoretical terms to work in the last decade or so on issues of power, access, and the social construction of knowledge, especially as it relates to speakers whose L1 is not English. In his seminal book, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1992) drew attention to how and why the English language achieved its world dominance. Specifically, Phillipson looked at “the ideology transmitted with, in, and through the English language, and the role of language specialists in the cultural export of English” (p. 1). Particularly emphasized by Phillipson was the privileged role played by the NS in the spread of English. Following shortly after Phillipson’s work, Pennycook’s *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (1994) examined further issues of power and dominance with regard to English, questioning the view of its spread as “natural, neutral, and beneficial” (p. 6) and emphasizing that English is “bound up in a wealth of local social, cultural, economic and political complexities” (p. 7). Pennycook also discussed “aspects of resistance and human agency in appropriating English to its local contexts” (p. 7). Ideas of how to resist the hegemony of English were further examined in Pennycook’s later book, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (1998). Resistance to the hegemony of English is also the theme of Canagarajah’s *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism* (1999). In her 1995 article, “Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning,” Peirce emphasized the importance of power relations in interactions between NSs and NNSs of English. It is these power relationships, Peirce claimed, that create or deny the conditions for the nonnative to speak and be heard. An analogy can be drawn here between Peirce’s NNSs and the nonnative writers who seek to publish in international
The research reported in this article is part of a broader-based study into the question of NNSs writing for publication across the disciplines that I have conducted with Cantonese L1 Hong Kong scholars. This research has included the quantitative survey already referred to (Flowerdew, 1999b), in-depth interviews (Flowerdew, 1999a), text analysis (Flowerdew, 2000b), ethnographic case studies of the manuscript submission process (Flowerdew, 2000a), genre analysis of editorial correspondence (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 1999), and a colloquium involving NNS writers and journal editors (Braine & Flowerdew, 1997). The focus of this article is a set of interviews with leading international journal editors. The purpose of this particular aspect of the investigation was to find out how the editors of leading journals in English language teaching, applied linguistics, and related areas viewed the issue of NNSs publishing in their journals and to gain insight into how the chances of successful publication by NNSs might be enhanced.

In an important paper, Canagarajah (1996) has drawn attention to some of the nondiscursive problems that afflict peripheral scholars. Although many of these scholars are NNSs, Canagarajah is primarily interested not in any linguistic problems they might have but in problems of a material and logistical nature. These problems include, on the one hand, lack of physical resources, such as libraries, word processors, and even money for postage, and, on the other, physical marginalization and exclusion from what Bazerman (1980, 1985) calls the *conversations of the discipline*—the current intellectual debates that drive research and to which access is fundamental for researchers to be able to locate their research contribution. Canagarajah does nevertheless mention in passing what he refers to as discursive problems, stating that “because these mostly bilingual/bicultural scholars are influenced by their indigenous communicative conventions, their writing will display peculiarities that are usually treated by Western scholars as ample evidence of their discursive/academic incompetence” (p. 436). The findings of the present study do not touch upon the more material problems referred to by Canagarajah. This may be because my perspective was that of Hong Kong, a territory with very adequate material resources, its universities having undergone extensive expansion and development in recent years. On the other hand, the findings focus closely on the discursive issues mentioned by Canagarajah and, to a lesser extent, on the problem of physical isolation.

As well as indicating problems associated with NNS academics, this study also reports on some of the positive attributes of this important group of scholars, that is, aspects of their situation that give them a certain privilege (Kramsch, 1995). To neglect the positive attributes that
derive from the privilege of being an NNS would be a disservice not only to those NNS individuals concerned but also to the development of the disciplines.

METHOD

Participants and Interviews

The method used in this research was the in-depth interview. Eleven editors (7 male, 4 female; referred to here as E1, E2, etc.) were interviewed (see Figure 1). All described their journals as international. However, the editors of RELC Journal (published in Singapore) and Asian Journal of English Language Teaching (published in Hong Kong) said that they were particularly interested in research that focused on issues of special concern to language professionals in Asia.

The 11 journals varied considerably in their focus within applied linguistics, language teaching, and related areas. Chosen on the basis of purposive sampling, they are only a subset of such journals, however, and the generalizability of the findings must be considered with caution. I looked for examples of the leading journals in mainstream applied linguistics and English language teaching and a few more peripheral journals; I also wanted representation from Asian journals. Apart from the two Asia-based journals, two are specialized (Journal of Phonetics and Journal of Child Language); three are primarily devoted to the teaching of English (TESOL Quarterly, English Language Teaching Journal, and English for Specific Purposes, although the latter has a strong emphasis also on the description of special varieties of English); and two are language
learning/teaching journals that cover languages other than just English (Applied Linguistics and Language Learning). I included World Englishes because I felt that one of the editors of that journal would be in a particularly advantageous position to comment on some of the NNS issues I was interested in.

The interviews were conducted over a period of 3 years, from 1996 to 1999, either at international conferences, where I was able to meet the editors, or in some cases when editors came to Hong Kong. No editor I approached declined to be interviewed. Some of the editors I already knew personally, which may have affected the level of rapport achieved and therefore the quality of the data collected. However, in all cases the editors appeared open and willing—indeed, in many cases, very keen—to answer my questions.

The interview format could be described as reflective (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). I attempted to minimize my influence as researcher on what the interviewee said, but at the same time the interviews followed a framework so that they covered certain key areas identified in my ongoing related research and my reading of the literature. This ongoing research included the survey and interviews with NNS writers, the linguistic analysis of their writing, the ethnographic case studies of the manuscript submission process, and the analysis of editorial correspondence referred to above. These other sources of data, although not included in this article, can be viewed as a form of triangulation that informed the questions posed in the interviews and the subsequent analysis.

The questions asked in the interviews were designed to elicit a large sample of utterances (Spradley, 1979). Participants were encouraged to answer at length. As the interviewer, I had a set of general areas for discussion, but participants were encouraged to introduce any information or interpretation that they felt appropriate. Initial questions were mostly open-ended and descriptive (Spradley, 1979), such as “Can you describe the typical contribution from an NNS from Hong Kong or Asia”? and “How do your reviewers handle contributions from NNSs?” Structural questions (Spradley, 1979), such as “Could you give me other examples of problems you have had with contributors from Hong Kong?” and “What other positive attributes do NNSs have when it comes to international publishing?” were adapted to each participant in order to follow up on descriptive questions, to test hypothesized categories, and to elicit examples to fit into hypothesized categories. Contrast questions were used to compare participants across interviews. “Some editors I have interviewed have said that grammar is not a big problem

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1 My use of the term contrast question is different from that of Spradley (1979).
with NNS contributions. What is your feeling on this?” and “Some editors have said that they have a policy of actively trying to help NNS contributors. Does this policy apply in your journal and why/why not?” are examples of contrast questions.

Analysis

The interviews were all recorded and transcribed by a research assistant. The interview data were loaded onto the software ATLAS.ti (1997) and sorted and re-sorted into categories. The aim was to look for both commonalities and differences within the interviews. The assistant and I each independently coded and analyzed the data, providing an element of investigator triangulation to the analysis (Denzin, 1978, cited in Patton, 1987). The starting point was the categories that arose from the initial set of interview questions. However, as the interviews developed, new categories manifested themselves, hence the need for recoding. Out of a large set of categories, those judged to be the most interesting and relevant (according to negotiation between the researcher and the research assistant) became the framework for the results section of this article (see Figure 2).

As the data were analysed, some of the editors were e-mailed for follow-up information. This was particularly useful when I wanted to find

**FIGURE 2**
Framework for Analysis of Interview Data

1. Concept of the nonnative speaker (NNS)
2. Overall attitudes toward NNS contributors
   2.1. Editors
   2.2. Manuscript reviewers
3. Problematic aspects of NNS contributions
   3.1. Surface errors
   3.2. Parochialism
   3.3. Introductions and discussions as most problematic sections of the research article
   3.4. Absence of authorial voice
   3.5. Nativized varieties of English
4. Positive attributes of NNS contributions
   4.1. Show an awareness of aspects of language such as cross-cultural pragmatics
   4.2. Display the objectivity of an outside perspective
   4.3. Possess native speaker (NS) knowledge of other languages
   4.4. Are essential to the international nature of international journals
   4.5. Can test theories of the dominant centre
   4.6. Can investigate issues that might not occur to researchers in the centre or investigate these issues in different ways, using different data
   4.7. Have access to research sites where NSs would be intrusive
   4.8. Can alert the centre to research undertaken in other scholarly traditions
out what proportion of the editors held a particular view on a given issue. (Given the open-ended nature of the interviews, not all interviewees were asked all of the same questions.)

After a draft of this article had been written, it was sent to the editors who had been interviewed for comment, with the objective of obtaining participant verification (Ball, 1988). All of the editors acknowledged reading the draft, and a number had specific comments on how it might be improved. In addition, it became clear that for a number of editors the draft achieved a certain degree of what Lather (1991) refers to as catalytic validity, a term applied to research that develops understanding in those it studies and encourages them to reassess the way they view the world.

**FINDINGS**

**The Concept of the Nonnative Speaker**

All the editors interviewed implicitly recognised that NNSs formed a specific category of authors submitting papers. Most editors were aware of the sort of criticisms voiced by NNSs at various forums on publication referred to in the introduction to this article. However, a number spoke of the problematic nature of the construct. For example, one editor spoke of the practical difficulty of classifying people as NS or NNS:

E4: To define who is a NS and who is not is tough on several dimensions. Here, within [name of country], I mean, a large portion of the university faculty are NNSs themselves, but they are citizens of [name of country]. Perhaps they may have lived in [name of country] for most of their lives. By NNS take someone like [name of person] from [name of university in foreign country]. She writes as well as anyone, and she is a NNS and has published a large number of articles in our journal—in our journal and elsewhere—so I don’t know exactly where to count her.

Another editor, while accepting that the NS/NNS dichotomy was sometimes a useful one, felt that it was a gross oversimplification and would prefer to refer to “language expertise”:

E5: Instead of saying you are a NNS, we should say, “What is your area of expertise in the English language?” because there are some so-called NNSs who are far more knowledgeable. And I don’t just mean grammatical knowledge. I mean awareness of cross-cultural pragmatics and all kinds of others things that NSs are just not aware of.
On the other hand, another editor rejected the dichotomy altogether:

E11: Our journal is looking for quality work by anyone. It doesn’t matter if it is written by a NS or NNS. I think such a classification implies that NNSs can’t compete with NSs, and that has not been the case with us at all.

In general, while accepting that the distinction between NS and NNS was sometimes useful in practice, on theoretical grounds editors found it to be problematic. In this they were reflecting the view of a number of influential writers, such as Kachru and Nelson (1997), Liu (1999), Paikeday (1985), and Rampton (1990).

**Overall Attitudes Toward NNS Contributors**

*Editors*

Although most editors were reluctant to state that they adopted an official policy of affirmative action toward NNS as such, they all expressed sympathy for those having to write in an L2—“being as sympathetic as possible to the stuff that we get . . .,” in the words of E6, and “being more supportive,” in the words of E3. E7 described this position in more detail as follows:

E7: We don’t have a special policy—and I think it is important for me to stress that—but an informal policy. This was never about their writing. It was that here we have people who are . . . in order to make headway in their academic careers, have to publish in English, that we should be sympathetic to them, and that we should give them a reasonable amount of help. But certainly, our correspondence with them should be encouraging.

One editor explained how experience as a foreign language teacher had led to a strong personal awareness of the difficulties of expressing oneself adequately at the highest academic level in the L2. Many editors described cases in which they in fact went out of their way to help NNS contributors. In many cases, this help consisted of taking more trouble over the manuscript and selecting reviewers carefully.

E5: I think I am more sympathetic. I would try to get sympathetic reviewers. I would get as many revisions as possible. I mean I still would uphold that we have to have high standards for the journal, but I would give as much support as I could to the NNS to publish in the journal.
On a pragmatic level, this same editor felt that NNS representation in the journal was essential if it was to live up to its claim to be international:

E5: I think, as a board, we feel strongly that we want to get more voices from outside the U.S., UK, and Canada. I mean, if we are truly an international journal, we have just got to broaden that.

Sometimes editors would expend greater effort on behalf of NNSs because they wanted a contribution from a particular region that was underrepresented in the literature:

E1: In one instance we got a paper from [name of continent], and since we had never had a paper from [name of continent] before, we tried to go out of our way, in an informal way, not a policy way, to do what we could to move the article along.

In other cases some editors felt it was important to get an NNS perspective on a particular issue. The editor of an Asia-based journal told of promoting the journal along with colleagues at conferences and meetings and soliciting contributions, telling prospective NNS authors that research on some of the issues in the field that needed addressing had to come from them as NNSs.

One editor considered it a duty to put in the editorial work required on a contribution that contained meritorious research, whatever the language might be like:

Interviewer: . . . do you put more effort into a NNS submission, or do you try to be equitable for all papers?

E8: Well, I have to, if it gets . . . if it’s clear that the research itself is worthwhile, then I put in an enormous effort to translate it back into proper English.

Editors E9 and E10 both explained that if they attended a good presentation by an NNS at a conference, they might encourage the presenter to submit the paper to their respective journals. E2 was the most emphatic in stating that the journal practiced positive discrimination. To the question, “Does the journal have a special policy for nonnatives, or are all contributions treated the same?”, this editor responded as follows:

E2: We have, time and time again, agreed with our advisory panels and publishers that we will try to help the nonnative author, if we feel that he has a good argument but has problems in nonnative expressions on one hand. Or if she or he is writing from an academic centre where the availability of such resources is limited. So, in that sense, yes, we do have a positive discrimination policy. . . . recently we have a [name of
continent] example where we put in a lot of time to bring in a particular paper from scratch, which we do simply because the contributor is an NNS and is coming from a part of the world where the particular author doesn’t simply have access to any resources. But we feel that he has a powerful, intellectually good argument. So, yes, there is a code of an element of positive discrimination.

Overall, editors were united in claiming at least equal treatment for NNSs, the majority going out of their way to help them, while being fair to NNSs and NSs alike. Of course, one’s reaction to these findings might be that editors are hardly likely to admit to any bias against NNSs even if it existed. However, my impression was that they were sincere in what they had to say on this issue. That is not to say that cases of discrimination never occur; none were identified by this admittedly vested interest group, however.

**Manuscript Reviewers**

In addition to the editors, external reviewers are important gatekeepers of the academic journals. One editor, indeed, claimed that decisions were totally dependent on the reviewers:

E2: It is not me and my . . . coeditor who makes the final decision to what is being published [but the reviewers].

One way to ensure that NNSs receive fair treatment, therefore, would be to have adequate representation from this group on the editorial board. All editors claimed to have NNSs, bilinguals, or both as members of their editorial boards. Some said that they tried to get NNS reviewers to look at NNS manuscripts whereas others assigned manuscripts according to the reviewers’ expertise. One editor (of a non-Asian journal) said that it was editorial policy to have a member from each Asian country on the editorial board of the journal.

Just as they claimed that they as editors viewed NNS contributions positively, editors also claimed to be satisfied with the reviewers’ attitude to NNS contributions. However, some editors cited examples of reviewers’ making disparaging comments about NNSs’ language competence:

E8: Sometimes they say, “The English is so bad, I can’t even begin to plough through this.”

E9: Some people [reviewers] react very harshly.

These editors were, on the whole, conscious of the sensibilities of the NNS recipients of such reviews:
I understand the irritation and the suggestion to have someone read it, and I am sorry that sometimes that comment must seem very harsh to the writer, as it does to us as editors.

E2 said that such comments would be censored. In general, however, editors were satisfied with the attitude of their reviewers toward nonnative contributions:

E7: On those rare occasions [when reviewers are critical of nonnative features of manuscripts], eventually the reviewer will say something like, we feel that this should have been read by a NS. And I can’t have any other instance where we have anything stronger than that.

One editor encouraged NNS reviewers to review NNS manuscripts, feeling that the quality of the feedback might be better:

E9: Yes, in my case I encourage [NNS] reviewers. . . . I have noticed that reviewers get more advice giving special attention if they suspect it is from a NNS—that’s been good—not often, not all the time, not consistently, but I did see it a few times.

Some editors, however, noted that NNS reviewers tended to be more critical of features of manuscripts they felt to betray nonnativelike features:

Interviewer: Do you find that [NNS reviewers] are particularly sensitive perhaps to issues concerning NNS?

E6: I’m sorry, I’ve just read three reviews. I don’t think so, honestly. In a way, actually, one of the paradoxes of ELT in general it seems to me [is that] the NSs are much more tolerant of language problems out of NNSs than other NNSs are. You know, I think it seems to me generally true, in my experience, a NNS teacher will pick up mistakes and errors made by students far more actively than NS teachers will do. And I haven’t noticed any difference on the panel in terms of willingness to accept or be tolerant of deviations on the part of NNS—no, I wouldn’t differentiate it on that sense.

As an alternative to NNS reviewers, one editor would look for reviewers who had experience in EFL contexts and were sensitive to NNS concerns:

E5: If they are of a calibre that they warrant review, then I try to get reviewers who have had quite a bit of experience in the EFL context. So people who recognize that there may be different discourse strategies and maybe [have done] more work [in EFL contexts] than
other ones . . . [who] are more sympathetic and may want to have more of a voice from outside.

One editor felt that the international makeup of the editorial team encouraged a certain cosmopolitanism:

E2: The multiplicity of voices that go into the editorial process, and that is the editors themselves, the reviewers, the publishers and the advisory panel if it is cosmopolitan.

Finally, one editor adopted a policy of using NNS reviewers as part of what was considered to be a mentoring process:

E8: I figure they [NNSs] can’t possibly know how to write the papers unless they sort of are on both sides of the review process. And so I will try to make them [review], especially if they’re an author that I’ve dealt with, and I feel that you know intellectually they’re fine, they just need some work on other areas.

This policy also had the advantage of creating goodwill on the part of the invited NNS reviewer:

E8: And they’re always very grateful. So I got a guy from [name of country] who just sent me a thing saying, I’m delighted and so honoured you asked me to review and so on.

In general, therefore, editors were satisfied with their reviewers’ attitudes when dealing with NNS manuscripts, in spite of the fact that insensitive comments occasionally appeared in some reviews.

Problematic Aspects of NNS Contributions

Because this study is part of a broader investigation into how Hong Kong Chinese academics go about publishing in general, editors were asked to specifically comment on their perceptions of submissions to their journals from Hong Kong or China (if they had had any). However, whereas some editors made comments specific to Hong Kong/Chinese writers, most editors tended to remark on features of NNS manuscripts in general. This section therefore cites comments about NNSs in general as much as about Hong Kong/Chinese NNSs. Indeed, as some editors pointed out, many of the problems identified apply to novice writers from any background, NS as well as NNS.
Surface Errors

Most editors acknowledged that NNS contributions in general tended to contain what they referred to as surface language errors, such as in article usage or subject-verb concord. In general, editors felt that these were not problematic, as they would be dealt with by a copy editor. However, one editor singled out the question of grammatical complexity as being a major impediment to the communicative intent in some NNS contributions:

E8: Well, often the grammar gets so convoluted that you . . . you know, do they mean this or this or this by it?

As another editor pointed out, sometimes the border between form and function cannot be clearly delineated. This editor mentioned the use of modal verbs, in particular, as problematic from this point of view:

E2: . . . modality and modal verbs. These are the recurring problems, like could instead of can, or would instead of will. And these are not problems of form that can simply be dismissed, because they do create different meanings. . . . subject concord simply creates problems of readability, which the readers have to go back to remind themselves that it is a singular subject even though it has a plural verb or something like that. . . . Whereas the modality—[the] modal verb does cause problems. . . . I suspect it goes wider and would include the whole range of hedgers and downtoners. I definitely would identify that as a problem area.

This statement is consonant with recent research by, for example, Hyland (1998) into the hedging practices of academic writers. Writers need to hedge, but in a way appropriate to their particular discourse community. This is a difficult skill for NSs as well as NNSs. Hence E11’s comment that grammar is a problem “for everyone who submits, NS and NNS alike.”

Parochialism

Apart from one individual, editors tended to be more concerned with what they felt to be more substantive problems in NNSs’ writing:

E6: [Reviewers] are very aware, sympathetic, to the problems of NNSs inasmuch as it relates to surface feature language problems. Where the reviewer cannot afford to be generous to NNSs any more than they can afford to be generous to NSs is the question of parochialism, nonrelevance for the readership, and that’s what the reviewers pick up more than anything.
This problem of parochialism, or failure to show the relevance of the study to the international community, was felt to be probably the most serious impediment to NNS contributors. Contributions from peripheral contexts tended to be too localised, many editors stated. Most editors had something to say on this issue:

E9: Manuscripts themselves are more on obscure themes that might not appeal to a wider audience, somewhat parochial, that’s the overall feeling that I have.

In many cases the problem was not that the topic of the paper was not relevant to the international readership per se but that writers failed to indicate how their research addressed current issues in the international community of scholarship:

E1: The research question is so locally focused that it does not spread out into more general interest areas. . . . My guess is that it is harder for NNSs who have spent less time abroad, spent less time professionally abroad, for them to see how it might be applicable to other places. I have seen that, too, with articles from Hong Kong, that they were clearly related to the domain here [in Hong Kong], and, interestingly, I’m not sure how other people reading the journal might feel or relate.

E2: [referring to three papers from Hong Kong that the editor was dealing with at the time] In all those three contributions is the inability to generalise to the end of the paper beyond the Hong Kong context. . . . They all failed to go beyond the local context in terms of their results . . . .

When papers are grounded in the local context but also reach out to the wider readership, they may become publishable:

Interviewer: [discussing a particular submission that suffered from the problem of nongeneralizability] Was it a case where the article was not generalizable, or was it the case that the author had not been able to in fact point out the generalizability?

E1: I think probably both . . . both cases. I remember the one that we thought, in spite of the fact that it was tied into the secondary school system here [in Hong Kong], we thought that there was a general applicability, and that ended up being published.

This problem of nongeneralizability does not, of course, result from a writer’s being an NNS or not per se but from the fact that the writer, who may be an NNS, is working in a periphery context, away from the mainstream centres. In English language teaching and language study in general, one has to ask, however, whether it is appropriate that the
mainstream should be in monolingual English-speaking countries rather than in countries with a much greater need for English as a second or foreign language.

**Most Problematic Sections of the Research Article**

When asked if any parts of the article were particularly problematic for NNSs, the editors singled out two sections for special attention: the introduction/literature review and, to a lesser extent, the discussion/conclusion. As E3 put it, these sections were “often not structured appropriately.”

Following Swales (1990), much has been discovered about the structure and function of the introduction to research articles. It is generally agreed that the main purpose of an article introduction is to present a number of moves that, by referring to previous studies, serve to create a research space for the study that is to follow. This is sometimes referred to as *carving out a niche*. The following quotation reflects one editor’s concern about this failure to establish the niche:

E8: The conventional introduction is a kind of a listing of a literature review where you situate your work within the literature and you explain why you’re doing it. But you obviously refer to the many other studies that have already been done on related topics. What I seem to get from the NNSs is either an insufficient literature review, so they don’t show that they really know the literature. And maybe it’s because they have difficulty getting access to the literature that we’re familiar with here. I don’t know if that’s part of it or whether it’s a more cultural approach. The other thing that I get from NNSs, sometimes, is the reverse—where they begin 600 years ago or something. . . . Well, we’re only interested in the last 5 years or so. But I think that’s a different thing—where they want to show that they’re erudite, right? That they know the long history and, again, a NS would never do, but that’s a cultural thing. That’s not a nonnative [thing], that’s a cultural thing.

E4 again took a similar position, although more succinctly:

E4: [referring to the introduction] Some people put too much, some people don’t put enough, some people don’t take a particular position, some people just recite a number of previous publications and don’t have a purpose or a point to it.

However, this editor stressed that this problem was not particular to NNSs:
E4: But I don’t think that is related to NSs and NNSs. It is more the experience and the skill and the purpose of the authors. The skilled, experienced authors seem to know how to do it, and they have done it. The inexperienced author, who may be an NNS or an NS, often is learning how to do that. In that context I see that very frequently with my graduate students.

Problems with the discussion, which fewer editors commented on, were also related to the research niche. In the case of the discussion, the problem was in demonstrating how the study had been able to occupy the niche and being able to claim that it had done so:

E1: If there are problems in the discussion section, those problems seem to be related to claims.

E5: It’s one of the most important parts of the paper [the discussion]. If you have done careful quantitative research, you are saying, look what I have found or haven’t found.

Interviewer: I guess this ties in with a point you made earlier about how people have difficulty showing how their study has any wider implications.

E5: Yes, and that they really have filled a niche that was there, and they have made a significant contribution.

Finally, E11 referred not to problems with introductions and discussion/conclusions but to “differences which we appreciate.” Similarly, E3 “certainly welcome[d] the diversity.”

In sum, introductions and discussions were identified as sometimes diverging from the accepted norms of dealing with the question of the research niche. Whereas some editors saw this as a problem, a minority felt this to be a welcome diversity.

**Absence of Authorial Voice**

Lack of authorial voice, what E1 referred to as “that lack of a voice or an authority saying that I am part of this discourse community,” was identified as a major problem by many editors. The issue of voice and its relation to culture has been controversial in the recent literature (see Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, for a review). Many have argued that different cultures approach the question of voice in different ways. Ramanathan and Atkinson, for example, claim that Americans have a particular voice that is individualistic and emphasizes the expression of the “unique inner self” (p. 51). Asian cultures, for Ramanathan and Atkinson, on the other hand, are “diametrically opposed” (p. 53) to this U.S. conception as put forward by, for example, Elbow (cited in Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 53).
For some of the editors interviewed in this study, a lack of authorial voice may be a characteristic of the novice writer in general, whether NS or NNS. In this they were in agreement with Elbow (1994), who finds voice to be a problem of graduate students wishing to publish in general, stating that “one of the traditional problems when we revise dissertations for publication is getting rid of the deferential, questioning, permission asking, tone—getting more authority into the voice” (p. 15). Other editors, in line with Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), noted absence of authorial voice as a possible specific cultural trait of East Asian writers, relating to the deferential discourse system operating in that region (see also Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). This point was noted by one of the Asian editors:

Interviewer: Some [editors] said that [Hong Kong] writers have difficulty presenting an authorial voice—you can’t really work out what the position of the author is in the paper.

E10: I would say that that’s not particularly Hong Kong writers. There are a lot of young researchers in the region who are the same. I wouldn’t mark it as particularly only for Hong Kong writers. No, in fact, because we work in the region . . . we can recognize a young researcher who is afraid to say what exactly he feels. They sort of hide under the mask of research, and only towards the end—like maybe when they make sort of suggestions—do you hear a little voice saying what they think. Even then [there are] a lot of modalities. I think that is peculiar to a lot of Southeast Asian writers. . . . Sometimes it’s also with very, very professional writers and very effective writers. Because this, I think, is also a cultural thing. For example, in Thailand, when I used to conduct courses with them on writing, they’re very proficient speakers and writers, but they say this would offend someone in Thailand. So I think one has to be sensitive to the fact that Southeast Asians on the whole—I mean to varying degrees, of course—are conscious that they don’t say anything as loudly. I mean they will sort of defer to authority. . . . This is something I am sensitive to . . . .

This same editor also attributed the problem of generalizability discussed earlier to cultural traits:

E10: I’m not sure, but I do think that there’s something to do with that cultural [thing]. . . . not making a big “hooha” about what they have found and not being able to say, “Look, this is something that has wider application, not just here.” They become defensive sometimes and just say, “maybe,” and they even give you reasons for why it should be, instead of saying, “This is it.” I am sensitive to that.
One editor remarked that the problem with contributions from Hong Kong was not so much the absence of an authorial voice per se but the inability to incorporate that voice at the appropriate moment:

E2: The difficulty is, I think, the failure to distinguish the moment when the authorial voice should emerge, and those moments when it is sufficient just to report . . . it is a question of intervention.

Some editors were reluctant to attribute a lack of voice to a particular cultural style:

Interviewer: Chinese discourse style is more deferential, so do you think that there may be a cultural reason [for the absence of an authorial voice]?

E1: That’s hard to say because I would hesitate to use that to say it’s cultural. It could be because I see that same deferential voice in the NSs in the U.S. who are trying to take their dissertation and now get it published as an article, and they haven’t yet made that transition from being a doctoral candidate to a published author. So I think the same kind of thing goes on. Maybe it’s to a greater extent. I’m not sure.

Interviewer: What about weighing up the pros and cons of an article, of boosting and hedging, do you find . . . ?

E5: I think that goes with those who have a voice that see themselves as part of the publishing world. Their voice tends to reflect that they will say “I argue,” but others will say “it would seem to me” or “it would be more beneficial.” The ones that are more hedging are the ones that are more hesitant about the appropriateness of their work and their voice in a larger academic community.

However, when asked for additional comments at the end of the interview, this editor identified a perceived absence of a particular rhetorical stance on the part of Hong Kong writers:

E5: You talked about a culture having a certain discourse voice. I have just spent a lot of time in [name of country]. I have just gotten submissions from [name of country]. There is a different stance. I think for one thing there is a stance in [name of country] of argument that many, many people who submit will say, “I argue” or “I take the position.” I think that reflects a certain cultural assumption about what you do when you write, you argue a point. I don’t have enough sense about what that Hong Kong structure might be, but there might be one, a typical stance of a Hong Kong author.

As this editor acknowledged in responding to a follow-up question, however, the particular stance of the Hong Kong writer the editor was
looking for and could not find might just be that of not taking up a position. The Hong Kong or other East Asian writer might prefer self-effacement to the strongly argued position the editor suggests writers from another part of the world take. Other research supports the explanation that some East Asian writers are self-effacing (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Fox, 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Nativized Varieties of English

The growing interest in and increasing assertiveness on the part of proponents of native varieties of English in recent years (Braine, 1999; Fox, 1994; Kachru, 1992) led me to ask editors if they had been confronted with this issue in assessing contributions from NNSs and, if so, how they had dealt with it. Editors exhibited a range of awareness and sensitivity to this question.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the Asian editors was most sensitive to the issue. Noting that academic writing was “pretty much Eurocentric,” this editor’s attitude to nativized rhetorical styles was to adopt a compromise between maintaining international intelligibility, on the one hand, and the integrity of the nativized variety, where possible, on the other.

E10: Sometimes we do have writers that display discourse patterns that may carry a lot of resemblance to the first language, for example, Chinese rhetorical style, or Japanese writers.

To the question of how to determine whether a certain pattern might be a local variety or merely an example of poor writing, the editor answered,

E10: Okay, when it’s consistent with the whole text and if it doesn’t jar too much, we allow for that. But where it is grammatically not so much wrong but inappropriate, we do make changes. For example, if it is rhetorical—for example, thematization of writing—if it is fronted very heavily—if something is foregrounded which in English writing, we probably wouldn’t foreground that way—we’d leave it, if it’s direct translation from maybe Chinese styles. But if it intrudes into the rest of what the writer is trying to say, then we make changes. I know it is hard for me to tell you . . . but we try to look at the flow of the writing. Where there is a naturalness even within the difference, we allow it to go, because you can’t chop a bit and then leave out others.

One of the NS editors took a similar stance to nativized rhetorical patterning:
Interviewer: Some people involved in cross-cultural discourse have identiﬁed different rhetorical patterns according to the cultural background of the writer, and one or two people have even suggested that international journals perhaps should be willing to accept different rhetorical patterns in the articles that they publish.

E1: Yes, I am definitely in favor of accepting different patterns . . . I have not come across anything where I have said that the way that this is set up is so difﬁcult for me that despite interesting information or data that we can’t use it . . . I don’t think we would do that, I don’t think we have ever done that.

Another of the NS editors was also sympathetic to nativized features of English:

E5: I’ve tried to recognize that there are different World Englishes, so what might be a tense in U.S. English doesn’t mean that it will be the tense used in some other kind of English.

Interviewer: So you recognize the use of nonstandard English.

E5: I wouldn’t call it nonstandard. I would call it World English.

Interviewer: So what would happen if a reviewer said that the tense was wrong here, but you felt that it was a feature of the writer’s English?

E5: I would leave certain lexical items that might be in more common use than U.S. English if I felt it was representative of the characteristics of that World English rather than idiosyncratic.

Interviewer: In Hong Kong, for example, certain noncount nouns are used by Hong Kong writers as count nouns—“This reports on a research,” for example—would you leave it?

E5: Yes, if I could establish that it was [representative of Hong Kong English].

Interviewer: One or two people that I have talked to have taken that a stage further and said that some cultures have a different rhetorical patterning of thought, so we should allow for these different cultural backgrounds and accept different arguments.

E5: I think we should. I think that in any profession that we should realize that any publication is a two-way thing and also contribute to the communication process. So whereas it may be more difﬁcult reading, that seems to me to be just part and parcel of our profession. We are saying that we are an international community and that we are taking international kinds of discourses . . . there was one speciﬁc article written by a NNS which I am sure taxed the reader more in terms of the density of its discourse structure, but I published it, and I was assuming that the readers, because of the worth that the ideas had, the depth of them, were willing to work a little harder to get those ideas.
While accepting that different cultures may have different ways of presenting research—having discussed the issue with a leading researcher in English for academic purposes who has written on this issue—E8 emphasised a sense of responsibility to the readership, which had certain expectations of the journal:

E8: I have . . . I have mixed feelings about that (accepting different rhetorical styles and conventions). I feel a strong responsibility also to the readers of the journal. I’m sympathetic to a point with that view. I think I respect that view, as long as it does not affect the standards of the journal.

In practice, this editor handled the issue by negotiating with authors and reaching compromises on what authors felt important and what the editor felt was acceptable for the readership. This editor also reported on the attitude of the reviewers, who were on the whole less sympathetic toward this issue:

E8: Some reviewers are incredibly intolerant, and that’s where my job comes in. Some reviewers just say “Right” and take the strong view of “It should be done the normal way, and if it isn’t, get rid of it.” But other reviewers are actually more tolerant than I am. Reviewers often say, “Well, I don’t think it should be this way, but to each his own,” [but] I’d say more reviewers are on the intolerant side than on the tolerant.

Reflecting the majority view of E8’s reviewers, another NS editor, while accepting that there were different rhetorical styles (and citing the Northern European style as being much more dense than the Anglo-American), felt that it was up to contributors to adapt their style to what was appropriate for the journal:

E6: One of the most important things for any would-be contributor to a journal to do is actually to read the journal because all journals have a style, a flavour, if you will. It is very important that if people want to publish in this journal that they read copies of it and familiarize themselves with the sorts of things that we publish. The famous phrase on the stock market, “The trend is your friend.” You want to write in the way that the journal encourages.

Not all editors had given consideration to the issue of nativization of discourse. E2 thought the idea was “rather astonishing.” This comment notwithstanding, overall there was general sympathy toward variation in discourse style and nativized varieties, the key criterion of acceptability being whether or not the readership would be likely to understand it.
Positive Attributes of NNS Contributions

When asked what they considered to be the positive attributes of NNS contributors, if any, the editors commented on a range of qualities. Most editors identified a positive contribution that NSs could not make. A case in point is E5’s comment, quoted above, that NNSs are aware of many aspects of language that NSs are not aware of, such as aspects of cross-cultural pragmatics.

For those journals that were not limited to publishing papers on the English language, the NNS contribution was seen as vital in providing research into languages other than English. NSs of these other languages were seen as likely to be better qualified to study these languages than NNSs:

E4: [Name of journal] publishes more articles about learning languages other than English than it does about English . . . it varies from year to year, but about 60–70% are about other languages. So that perspective means that often those people are NNSs themselves even if they reside in the U.S. or Europe.

E7: If we don’t get contributions from NNSs, then probably the range of languages that we were discussing in the journal would be more restricted. I think that is an absolutely difficult point. If we won’t be accepting papers from Italian NSs, then we won’t be publishing so much about Italian. And languages like Italian, they are of some theoretical importance. And the same is true of the writing of Chinese and Koreans at the moment.

Even when the object of study is the English language, however, the NNS can bring a different, more objective perspective, as one editor noted:

E2: Nonnative grammarians tend to be very good. And historically, we just have to look at the grammarians of the English language, and most of them are NNSs. They can bring an objectivity to a task that many NSs won’t be able to do.

At a more fundamental level, so-called international journals, if they are to merit such a designation, must publish papers from around the world, and this means papers written by NNSs:

E4: In the high-status, peer-reviewed international journals, the idea of the international perspective is really important, and for that reason I think it’s really important for people outside of the dominant Western culture to be contributing to that.
This same editor cited a particular example of that sort of contribution:

E4: I can think of one paper from [name of place] that I pushed for . . . . It was about language switching and language use in the schools in [name of place] and the uses of English. And I thought that paper had quite a bit to say about that topic which only a person from that society could have dealt with.

A further unique contribution from NNSs to the international literature identified by a number of editors was in testing out theories that were current in the dominant centre countries of North America and Western Europe. Application of such theories in different contexts in the periphery is a good way of testing them and bringing in alternative perspectives:

E5: What the periphery can do is say: “Well, it works there, let’s see if it works here.” They provide a healthy questioning and challenging of things that in the so-called centre are assumed to be the right way to do things. . . . I think that is a really healthy thing that they can provide.

Beyond applying ideas derived from the centre, however, periphery scholars can investigate issues that might not occur to centre researchers or investigate these issues in different ways, using different data:

E4: Helping us to better understand the world other than the fixed locations in North America that we might be familiar with. The guiding criterion for publishing in [name of journal] is making a unique contribution to knowledge. People who are outside of the area where most of the publications are in some sense in a unique position . . . an advantaged position. They can write about some things we don’t know—the majority of readers don’t know—both in respect to local situations [and] different ways of conceptualizing and analysing different data.

Developing this idea further, E2 explained that in many cases NNSs can gain access to research situations in their own NS contexts, where outside NNSs (i.e., NSs of English) would be intrusive:

E2: In my opinion, the positive aspect of nonnative contributions is that they very often provide data and perspectives that are different from the NSs’. They are able to provide data from the context in which the typical sort of “expat” or NNS who was doing the research would be an intruder. This is, I think, argued in a recent paper by Adrian Holliday, called “Developing Social Perspective,” where he raises these questions about the outside NS coming in to record some actions. The NNS contributor, especially in the case of English language teaching,
comes to provide data gathered in situations where they themselves work. [These] situations are geographically separated from the usual centres that provide such data sets, such as America and Great Britain.

Finally, NNSs coming from backgrounds that have their own scholarly traditions but that are nevertheless considered to be part of the periphery can sometimes draw attention to these untapped sources:

E2: Another thing that I wanted to say is . . . and this does happen occasionally, is that it is a good thing that nonnative contributors can refer to work which can reflect to those so-called intellectual centres people who are not aware of this. I think of a case recently where we have a paper from [name of country] that cited a fair amount of work that has been done in [name of place], and I certainly hadn’t heard of before. But obviously, it was relevant and might be worth looking at.

Summary

In general, while accepting that the distinction between NS and NNS was sometimes useful in practice, on theoretical grounds editors found it to be problematic. Overall, editors were united in claiming at least equal treatment for NNSs, many going out of their way to give them extra assistance, while trying to be fair to NNSs and NSs alike. Editors were generally satisfied with their reviewers’ attitudes when dealing with NNS manuscripts, in spite of the fact that it was not unusual to find insensitive comments in some reviews. Editors did not find surface errors, such as subject-verb concord, to be a problem, but for some editors convoluted syntax or unclear modality that led to difficulties in comprehension was more of a problem. More problematic still was the question of parochialism, of failing to link a study into the wider international research agenda. Introductions and discussions were identified as sometimes diverging from the accepted norms of dealing with the topic of the paper in view of the research niche. While some editors saw this as a problem, a minority felt this to be a welcome diversity. Most editors felt that the question of authorial voice was important. They often found it difficult to identify the voice of the author in NNS contributions, although like many problems identified in the study, this problem also applied to NSs, especially those who were beginning their publishing career. Overall, there was general sympathy toward variation in discourse style and nativized varieties, the key criterion of acceptability being whether or not the readership would be likely to be able understand it.

As a counterbalance to these problem areas, editors identified a range of potential positive aspects of NNS contributions. These included awareness of aspects of language such as cross-cultural pragmatics; NS
knowledge of other languages; the objectivity of an outside perspective; NNSs’ importance in maintaining the international nature of international journals; their ability to test out dominant theories of the centre; their ability to investigate issues that might not occur to researchers in the centre or investigate these issues in different ways, using different data; the access that NNS contributors have to research sites where NSs would be intrusive; and their ability to alert the centre to research undertaken in other scholarly traditions.

CONCLUSION

As an exploratory, qualitative study, this article has perhaps raised more questions than it has answered. In raising a range of issues, the results have made manifest some of the thinking that underlies the editorial process as it pertains to NNSs in applied linguistics, language teaching and learning, and related areas.

Implications for Editors

The majority of the editors interviewed share views on the editorial process, but the results also revealed differences of opinion. In this respect, the results of this study may be of some use to editors in alerting them to the similarities and differences in their thinking and resulting editorial practice. Indeed, a number of editors stated that the interview process itself had been valuable in raising the various issues, some of which they had not considered. To take just one example, those editors who had not considered the question of World Englishes may now be in a better position to appreciate this perspective on international publication.

Implications for NNS and NS Writers

The results may be of interest to both NNSs and NSs who submit their work to journals because anything that helps demystify the editorial process is likely to be helpful for novice contributors to international journals. The contributors to the journals that have been the focus of this study are all language specialists. They are likely to be in a better position than their NNS peers in other disciplines, who, other things being equal, may find the language barrier even greater.

The NNS issues raised may apply to a large extent to the writing of NNSs in other environments (e.g., graduate research writing). In these environments, ESL/EFL teachers have to make the same decisions about
what constitutes acceptable NNS writing as the editors do. The editors themselves pointed out that many of the issues raised apply to NSs as well as NNSs, especially novice NS scholars and NS scholars working outside the centre, on the periphery. Throughout the interviews, the problem of what constitutes an NNS was apparent.

Despite ambiguity concerning exactly how NSs and NNSs can be distinguished, the results highlighted the unique contributions of non-native scholars in addition to their problems. In highlighting the positive attributes of the NNS researcher in applied linguistics, the article may suggest that monolingual NSs should in fact be at a disadvantage and that it is the NNSs and the bilingual scholars who, as Kramsch (1995) so eloquently put it, should perhaps be the privileged ones.

**Power Relationships in the Editorial Process**

The results offer some insights into the workings of power relationships, differential access, and the social construction of knowledge in applied linguistics. The editors (and their referees) have the power to grant or deny access to would-be contributors, whether NS or NNS, who seek to participate in the academic conversation. It is the responsibility of the editors to ensure that all contributors, whether native or nonnative, have equal access. Peirce (cited in Angélil-Carter, 1997, p. 267) refers to Bourdieu’s analogy of the skeptron, the ritual symbol in Homer that is passed to the orator who is about to speak. For NNSs to gain equal access as NSs, criteria for holding the skeptron need to be fair. According to Bourdieu (cited in Angélil-Carter, 1997), speakers (or writers) achieve legitimacy only if the following criteria are fulfilled:

1. An utterance must be spoken (or written) by the person legitimately authorized to do so.
2. It must be spoken (or written) in a legitimate situation.
3. It must spoken (or written) to legitimate receivers
4. It must be spoken (or written) according to legitimate syntactic and phonetic forms.² (p. 267)

All of these criteria are negotiable, however, and in the context of writing for publication in scholarly journals, it is the editors, for the most part, who have the power to decide what is acceptable in these domains and what is not. This article is a first step toward understanding existing boundaries and raising questions about where such boundaries should lie.

²To these one might add discourse structure, or generic, forms.
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