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EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIVE-LIKE PROFICIENCY AS AN ACHIEVEMENT TARGET

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Abstract

The most appropriate models for teaching English have always been a point of interest in the SLA and EFL fields. In recent decades due to globalization, the standard model based on native speaker norms has been challenged by alternative models that do not rely on English spoken by native speakers. Therefore, this thesis set out to investigate whether Croatian secondary school EFL learners still aspire to emulate native speaker norms. In order to elicit their attitudes towards native-like proficiency as an achievement target, and see if there are attitudinal differences based on age, a questionnaire was administered to 68 secondary school EFL learners (23 freshmen and 45 juniors). The gathered data was analyzed by the means of SPSS. Participants' responses showed a strong inclination towards attaining native-like proficiency, which suggests that the standard model of teaching English based on native speaker norms still has a looming presence in Croatian EFL classrooms.

Key words: native-like proficiency, native speaker, non-native speaker, English as foreign language

EFL Learners' Attitudes towards Native-like Proficiency as an Achievement Target

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Introduction

Private language schools often advertise that their teachers can teach learners to speak English as good as native speakers (NSs) of English (or any given target language). Attaining native-like or near-native proficiency, the level of proficiency that corresponds to that of an NS, often seems to be the end goal when learning/teaching English. Therefore, this paper will deal with the question whether achieving native-like proficiency (or near-native proficiency) and conforming to NS norms is something that is universally considered by Croatian secondary school students to be the end-goal of their education or, more artistically put, the holy grail of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) so as to question the current EFL models. In addition, the aim of this paper is to investigate how present in Croatian EFL is the notion of the NS as the role model for Croatian EFL learners while delivering some fundamental ideas behind the notion and the problematic nature of the notion itself.

1.1.1. NS conceptualization

In order to gain a better understanding of what is meant by the term *native-like proficiency*, which implies that a person is able to speak a given language like a native, one must first deconstruct what it means to be an NS in second language acquisition (SLA) and EFL contexts since it serves as the backbone for the term native-like proficiency.

Arguably, in academic circles the term NS dates back to the 19th century when it was used by Harvard professor Charles Hall Grandgent, an American Romanist and Italian scholar, yet Davies (1991), as read in Cook (1999), suggests, and Bonfiglio (2010) agrees, that the first recorded use of the term is by Leonard Bloomfield (1933, p. 43): "The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language".[1]

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[1] Lee (2005) argues that this is a problematic notion since there are people who may no longer use the first language they learned, which could have been replaced by the language they acquired shortly after through more frequent and fluent use; e.g. children immigrants or adopted children.

Bloomfield's use of the term marks the point at which the term entered the research focus, where it has remained ever since.

At first sight, the concept of the NS and the accompanying concept of native-like proficiency seem rather reasonable and self-explanatory. The concept of people whose birth right is the complete mastery of their mother tongue and the accompanying concept of reaching their level of language proficiency seem like something logical that should not be questioned, and hence they are often taken at face value. After all, who is more proficient in the target language than the speakers of the target language? Therefore, for a long time linguists have considered the NS as Ferguson (1983, as cited in Davies, 2003, p. 2), puts it: "the only true and reliable source of language data". This kind of scientific infatuation with the concept of the NS lead to the fact Anchimbe (2006) points out, the fact that many linguistic schools of thought derived their theories from NSs' performances; he mentions: transformational-generative grammar, in which the NS serves as a basis for Chomsky's (1965) *ideal speaker-hearer*; he also references van Dijk's (1977) *P-system*; and the politeness theory, in which Brown and Levinson's (1987) *model person* is the NS; and also that Bloomfield's (1933) and other linguists' bilingualism theories fixated on near-native competence in two languages. All of the mentioned theories depend upon NS's spontaneous and inherent power of distinguishing between familiar or strange constructions, grammatical and ungrammatical utterances in his or her language.

In order to form a better understanding of what an NS exactly is, Cook (1999) and Lee (2005) have taken upon themselves to analyze a plethora of different conceptualizations of the NS that are offered in the relevant literature. Cook (1999) analyzed the definitions of the term found in some modern sources; she cites Stern (1983) and *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* (Johnson & Johnson, 1998), whereas Lee (2005) went more in depth and isolated six defining features of an NS according to various SLA scholars (Davies, 1991; McArthur, 1992; Phillipson, 1992; Kubota, 2004; Maum, 2002; Medgyes, 1992; Liu, 1999; Nayar, 1994; Coulmas, 1981; Scovel, 1969, 1988) along with the two sources Cook used. The attributes Cook (1999, p. 186) extracted from Stern (1983) are the following:

a) a subconscious knowledge of rules
b) an intuitive grasp of meanings
c) the ability to communicate within social settings
d) a range of language skills
e) creativity of language use

While Lee (2005, p. 155) offers these six features the aforementioned SLA scholars agree upon:

a) the individual acquired the language in early childhood and maintains the use of the language

b) the individual has intuitive knowledge of the language

c) the individual is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse

d) the individual is communicatively competent, able to communicate within different social settings

e) the individual identifies with or is identified by a language community

f) the individual does not have a foreign accent.

Some of the definitions Cook (1999) and Lee (2005) isolated are almost identical. For instance, Cook's a) and b) are similar to Lee's b); Cook's c) and Lee's d) are identical, while others overlap. The first two attributes Cook (1999) took from Stern (1983) belong to the sphere of knowledge-how and correspond to previously mentioned Chomskian notions. It is clear that NSs do not need to know formal grammar rules in order to speak their language. However, it is questionable how extensive is their implicit knowledge of the rules and how good their ability to understand what is being said is. The next one on the list is dismissed by Cook (1999) by saying that some NSs function poorly in social settings, which is true since not all people are socially savvy or know how to act in various social settings and occasions; while *a range of language skills* is not something that is exclusive to NSs and it arguably is not a very clear construct either. Moreover, not all NSs can express themselves creatively (furthermore, this notion remains vague without a definition where creativity begins and ends). In addition, Lee (2005) mentions some other features he found in SLA literature, but ultimately considered them to be too dubious to be included. These features are: race, the capacity to write creatively, the capacity to interpret and translate from another language into their own, capacity to differentiate between standard and non-standard varieties of a language. He dismisses race by giving an example of a Chinese child being adopted by a family that is not Chinese; to write creatively would mean that all NSs are highly proficient and creative in writing due to a great number of years of formal schooling and that somehow all of them possess a great talent for expressing themselves creatively in written language and not to mention the fact that illiterate NSs still exist; other than that, it would create a logical fallacy that speakers of languages without writing systems are not NSs; Cook (1999) illustrates the falsehood of the claim that NSs easily distinguish between standard and non-standard varieties by giving the reader an example of them using the non-standard *between you and I* instead of *between you and me* (*they're* and *their, your* and *you're* illustrate

this as well) to show how even educated NSs fail to distinguish between the two; finally, to be able to translate from one language to another puts monoglots out of the equation and even when an NS knows another language other than his or her native language, it does not guarantee that they would produce quality translations.

In the end, Cook (1999) and Lee (2005) conclude that the only indisputable element in the definition of the NS is that a person is an NS of the language learnt in childhood (that he or she uses continuously), nothing more and nothing less, while everything else is incidental and depends on individual competence and performance, including language proficiency. Additionally, if an individual acquired a language in childhood, he or she will most likely not exhibit a foreign sounding accent.

1.1.2. NS: Myth and reality

Therefore, it is essential that a distinction is made between the NS as a myth and as a reality[2]; between the idealistic construct of an infallible master of their mother tongue that is often present in EFL classrooms and on which the concept of native-like proficiency is based upon, and a diverse group of people from various socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds with different levels of mastery of their native language. Although, as Anchimbe (2006) comments, Hocking (1974) and Chomsky (1965) would like people to believe that NSs are error-free entities since they are learning the language from infancy, it can be deduced from research data that this is not the case, thus Anchimbe (2006) points out that even in native areas sub-par speakers of the native language can be found. Moreover, he asserts that error analysis in linguistics did not stem from studying NNSs but from the study of NSs. Additionally, Nayar (1994) reasserts, as quoted in Lee (2005, p. 154), that NSs are not "ipso facto knowledgeable, correct and infallible in their competence".

To answer the question: why even NSs make errors, Trudgill (1998) (as read in Anchimbe, 2006) offers an explanation; his reasoning is that most NSs are actually NSs of some variety of the native language and not the standard variety of the native language *per se*, meaning that it was something they had to acquire later on. This is further explained by Kramsch (1997) (as read in Majlesifard, 2012), and Saniei (2011), who affirms Phillipson's (1992) ideas about languages having several different dialects, registers and styles by asserting that NSs

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[2] Alan Davies wrote an entire book on that dichotomy titled *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality.*

"display regional, occupational, generational, and social class-related ways of talking" (p. 74), thus making the task of defining the NS difficult and the accompanying concept highly controversial from a linguistic point of view. Namely, as Saniei (2011) states, the term suggests the existence of a single, unified and idealized register of the target language, completely disregarding the fact that there are a number of various registers, each one valued discriminately according to various historical and sociopolitical reasons.

1.1.3. Ownership of English

For instance, the most popular varieties of English are American English and British English, which belong to Kachru's (1998) *inner circle* of English. The inner circle is composed of countries where English is the native language (ENL) and it includes countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Anglophone Canada, and some of the Caribbean territories. Since varieties from the inner circle other than the British and American varieties are rarely represented in EFL, there is little chance that varieties from the other two circles will make the curriculum. The second circle is the *outer circle*, which includes countries where English is not a native language, but plays a major role in their communication nonetheless and is often taught as a second language (ESL) due to historical reasons. This circle includes India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Kenya, non-Anglophone South Africa and Canada, etc. The ultimate circle is called the *expanding circle* and it encompasses countries where English has no political or historical role and it is not an official language, but it is widely taught as a foreign language (EFL) intended for international communication. Countries that belong to the expanding circle are Russia, China, Japan, most of European countries, including Croatia.

Standardization authority has been in the hands of the inner circle countries for a long time because, according to Bonfiglio (2010), all language authorities must invoke notions of *standard* or *proper* language and this standardization process hands language authority over to the NS. Why? Because NSs are allegedly, as seen in Saniei (2011), who paraphrases Chomsky (1965), the only ones who can assess the grammaticality of given sentences since they are the best sources for such grammatical judgments. This is why Bonfiglio (2010) argues that the notion of the NS as the role model in EFL classrooms becomes problematic since the notion of standardization is linked to the general literacy of the population, which means that the authority of NSs comes into question because they have to be taught how to write and speak properly even when they reach higher education. However, based on the ideas of infallible NSs and their

inherent right to the ownership of English language, Hocking (1974, p. 46) adamantly declares that "what is correct in a language is just what native speakers of the language say. There is no other standard".

However, history shows how these postulates about what is the proper variety of the English language change. Bonfiglio (2010) calls back to the time of Benjamin Franklin, who deemed the form of English used in North America as the proper one, whereas disregarding the varieties used by Germans and blacks. Furthermore, Noah Webster went even further and negated the form of English used by the British. In the twentieth century ethnic versions of English were also considered to be out of the scope of the notion of proper English (e.g. Hispanic, Eastern and Southern European, etc.). Widdowson (1994) tackles this notion of *proper* English in an amusing way. In order to show how arrogant this idea is, he uses an analogy that goes something like this: there can be only one Champagne because any other fizzy wine that does not come from that French region cannot be the *real thing* no matter how good it tastes. For Champagne denotes quality, and if any fizzy wine can be classified as Champagne, the standards are at stake.

The question is - can this belief in only one strong center of power really survive in today's postcolonial and postmodern world? A world where English has reached, according to Crystal's (2000) data, as seen in Alqahtani (2012) about a billion and a half speakers all over the world, but nonetheless a world where roughly three out of every four of those speakers is not an NS, which means NNSs outnumber NSs by a billion speakers, an information provided by Crystal (2003) and used by Alqahtani (2012). Such great number of English-speaking people is mostly the result of the British colonial endeavors and recently of the appeal of American pop culture, especially Hollywood, but also of the need for an international communication tool due to the globalization process which subsequently enabled easier migration. Crystal (1997), as seen in Anchimbe (2006), observes that English is the most widespread and spoken language in history. In 1996 Dickson and Cumming (1996) discovered that English was the most popular modern language studied in the world. And in the meantime English has become an absolute behemoth among other languages. Eurostat's research from 2016 showed that according to their data from 2014 English is the most studied foreign language in the EU (94% students in upper secondary education learnt English) with French (23%) as a distant second and Spanish and German (19%) as third and fourth respectively. Ergo, it is not a surprise that the research showed that 99.5% of students in general programs in Croatia learn English (see Figure 1)

	Pupils learning English in general programmes		Pupils learning French in general programmes		Pupils learning German in general programmes	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
EU-28	94.2	94.1	26.0	23.0	23.1	18.9
Belgium	95.0	95.6	49.3	48.4	29.3	27.6
Bulgaria	87.5	90.7	14.5	12.4	35.9	34.3
Czech Republic	100.0	95.0	24.8	16.2	60.6	55.8
Denmark	91.6	82.1	10.7	14.6	35.1	28.0
Germany	91.8	86.8	28.1	23.8	–	–
Estonia (²)	96.2	97.6	6.9	7.0	39.2	28.5
Ireland	–	–	58.2	59.5	16.4	16.5
Greece	93.8	94.4	7.8	4.4	3.4	2.5
Spain	94.4	97.5	27.0	24.2	1.1	1.7
France	99.5	99.8	–	–	21.3	21.5
Croatia	99.0	99.5	3.7	4.2	62.5	61.5
Italy	96.5	97.8	20.1	16.1	6.9	8.2
Cyprus	91.4	90.2	40.6	37.1	2.2	6.2
Latvia	97.2	97.8	3.9	5.7	28.8	27.6
Lithuania	90.8	95.3	3.8	2.9	18.8	8.6
Luxembourg	97.7	92.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Hungary	79.4	83.1	6.6	5.7	48.7	46.3
Malta (²)	100.0	100.0	6.9	22.2	1.5	4.7
Netherlands	100.0	95.5	64.2	31.1	69.8	40.3
Austria	98.5	99.4	42.5	37.7	–	–
Poland	92.2	94.6	8.7	8.0	54.4	46.7
Portugal	83.2	65.2	13.3	2.8	1.7	1.5
Romania	98.1	99.3	85.3	85.2	12.1	12.8
Slovenia	92.8	98.2	9.8	10.8	66.4	63.4
Slovakia	98.3	99.0	16.4	13.2	67.9	57.7
Finland	99.7	99.9	17.9	11.3	27.8	16.9
Sweden	99.9	100.0	20.0	16.8	27.0	21.4
United Kingdom (²)(⁴)	–	–	32.3	28.3	11.8	9.7
Iceland	73.2	72.2	13.7	10.7	25.4	22.5
Liechtenstein (⁵)	100.0	100.0	100.0	96.8	–	–
Norway	44.8	43.9	12.8	9.9	20.3	21.3
Turkey	81.8	99.2	1.4	25.2	14.8	24.1

(¹) Refer to the internet metadata file (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/educ_uoe_enr_esms.htm).
(²) Data for 2008 instead of 2009.
(³) Data for 2010 instead of 2009.
(⁴) Data for 2013 instead of 2014.
(⁵) Data for 2011 instead of 2009.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: educ_ilang and educ_uoe_lang01), Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), OECD

Figure 1. Percentage of students learning English, French, and German in general programs in the EU.

Therefore, one must consider the gravity of Widdowson's (1994, p. 385) reply in light of Hocking's (1974) statement: "how English develops internationally is no business of native speakers of English", which emanates the belief supported by the numbers that NSs are no longer the sole owners of the English language when it is used as a tool for international communication. Especially, if the fact that NSs are often excluded from interactions through the medium of the English language, which take place all over the world among the NNSs, is taken into account. Thence, Ranta (2009) observes, which is mentioned in Josipović Smojver and Stanojević (2011), that it seems a bit unfair to learners to compare them to these idealized NSs since there are more NNSs of English than NSs of English in the world.

From this notion, confirmed by Djigunović's (1991) research, which highlighted that English is perceived as a language of international communication, which does not necessarily belong to any specific national and cultural group, and that it is primarily perceived as a language used by NNSs, and also from the accompanying shift in orientation in which in recent times most learners have been motivated to learn English in order to be able to communicate with other NNSs since as Prodromou (1997), as mentioned in Timmis (2002), estimates that up

to 80% of communication in English is between NNSs, the idea of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)[3] was born.

1.1.4. ELF vs. ENL

The topic of ELF, which Bjorge (2012), as quoted in Soruc (2015), defines as a tool for communication between interlocutors who do not have the same L1, has been extensively researched in the past few years. Josipović Smojver and Stanojević (2011) name a few studies on teachers' and learners' attitudes towards ELF: Sifakis and Sougari, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; Moussu & Llurda, 2008; in their own study on university students' attitudes towards ELF. Some other studies on the topic of ELF in Croatia include Josipović Smojver & Stanojević (2012); Stanojević, Kabalin Borenić & Josipović Smojver (2012); Drljača Margić & Širola (2009, 2013). However, the most prominent name of the ELF movement has to be Jennifer Jenkins, who wants to describe ELF and its features in order for ELF to become a relevant model for English language teaching (ELT). However, not everyone agrees with abandoning the NS models in favor of ELF (Quirk, 1985, 1990; Kuo, 2006; Van den Doel, 2007, 2009, 2010).

Nevertheless, Poppi's and Mansfield's (2012) assertion that economic reasons were always the number one reason for learning foreign languages and that therefore languages should be treated as economic commodities supports the idea of ELF as an alternative to the native based teaching models, thus creating ground for the introduction of ELF into Croatian classrooms[4].

English language teaching (ELT) industry has become a global, transnational and transcultural enterprise thanks to the ever-growing popularity of the English language that became a prominent lingua franca. However, due to globalization and subsequently easier

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[3] English as Lingua Franca (ELF) in terms of a tool for international communication language belongs to the general phenomenon of English as an International Language (EIL) also known as, as documented in Josipović Smojver and Stanojević (2011, p. 106): *International English* (Gorlach 1995), *Global English* (Crystal 2003) or *World Englishes* (Jenkins 2003), while Seidlhofer (2001) adds *English as a Global Language* (Crystal 2003; Gnutzmann 1999), *English as a World Language* (Mair 2003) and *World English* (Brutt-Griffler 2002)

[4] Although English has spread enormously around the globe thanks to the Internet, the most popular way to learn the language is still situated in the classroom setting according to Zhang and He (2010), paraphrasing Horwitz (2008).

migration, countries where English is not an official language have developed a market demand for NSs of English as English teachers taken in by the, as Anchimbe (2006) observes, general conception that NSs are the perfect teachers of their language. Consequently, this shows how entrenched the NS model and native-like proficiency are in the countries where English is learned as a foreign language. Especially, since even non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), who are most often the most important role models for their learners, are "required to teach a model that they themselves are not the representatives of". (Kirkpatrick, 2007, in Zhang & He, 2010, p. 773)

Wherefore, Kirkpatrick (2006), as seen in Zhang and He (2010), argues that the NS model benefits native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), who are seen as the correct model that provide the proper English to their learners. In light of these circumstances, it does not come as a surprise that private language schools opt for NSs as teachers even when they do not have a background in teaching or possess the required qualifications for that profession, which, according to Anchimbe (2006, p. 4), are: "professional training, educational qualification, experience, language proficiency", thus creating an employment discrimination against the people who are not born and bred in the target culture. This could be considered problematic because such a criterion as Paikeday (1985), as read in Davies (2003), points out should not be used to exclude certain categories of people from teaching or any other academic pursuits in their non-native language. Of course, both NSs and NNSs have their disadvantages and advantages, but Paikeday (1985) suggests that proficiency should be a more important criterion than one's nation of origin along with their teaching qualifications because, as mentioned before, "true arbiters of grammaticality are proficient users of languages, not just native speakers". (Paikeday, 1985; as quoted in Davies, 2003, p. 6) Therefore, any ELT attempt that is primarily based on NS origins without solid ELT training is not a safe haven for error-free language transmission.

Surely, the evidence all around us points out that one's nation of origin does not guarantee his or her proficiency in English (or any other target language) or in another words, the complexity of a language is so vast that being an NS of a given language does not automatically qualify a person as a competent user of the language, thus it is possible for an NNS to be more proficient than certain NSs.

In the end, Paikeday (1985, p. 392) regards the distinction between NSs and NNSs as artificial, calling it "a linguistic apartheid imposed on us by theoreticians" Furthermore, he believes that everyone who is capable of speaking English belongs to the same linguistic species of people he calls "Homo loquens anglice". (1985, p. 352)

This means that the proficiency tests and scales NNSs are subjected to would only show, according to Paikeday (1985), that the term NS is fuzzy at best and that it simply denotes (in linguistic terms) that one is a competent language user, which would show no regard to one's origin, mother tongue and other circumstantial differences in language acquisition.

1.1.5. CEFR and TEFL

On the subject of scales, the most common scale for describing learner's language proficiency in Europe is CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). By observing CEFR (CEFR 2001, p. 23) it can be noticed that it is divided into three levels: A (basic user), B (independent user) and C (proficient user) with its sublevels A1 (breakthrough or beginner) and A2 (way stage or elementary), B1 (threshold or intermediate) and B2 (vantage or upper intermediate), C1 (effective operational proficiency or advanced) and C2 (mastery or proficiency). In some instances, the levels are further divided into A1.1, A1.2 and so on. *(See Table 1)*

Table 1 CEFR table with its descriptors (CEFR 2001, p. 24)

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

User	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

However, since the focus of the thesis is the concept of native-like proficiency, the C2 level is the only category that should be looked into because it is the highest attainable level of proficiency according to the CEFR. Therefore, if native-like proficiency is interchangeable with the C2 level, the linguistic characteristics of native-like speakers of English would be, as visible from *Table 1*:

Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

It is obvious from the description of the level in question that CEFR (CEFR 2001, p. 36) avoids equating the C2 level of language proficiency to the notion of native-like proficiency by saying that:

whilst it has been termed 'Mastery' it is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include: convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices; has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning; backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

By doing so, CEFR shifts the attention from the ever elusive idealized NS model towards the individual learner. This coincides to Rampton's (1990) idea, referred to in Lee (2005), that it might be time to change the focus from *who you are* to *what you know*. It also shifts from the paradigm of good/bad NS impersonators towards (un)successful learners. And this is exactly what Cook (1999) proposes; namely, that L2 users should be viewed as multicompetent language users instead of deficient NSs.

Moreover, Cook (1999) observes that it is taken for granted by teachers and researchers alike[5]; that the model of the ever elusive and illusive ideal NS is offered as the only appropriate model[6] for ELT; always disregarding the competent L2 users and thus setting up L2 learners against an

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[5] Cook (1999) mentions that many SLA research methods such as grammaticality judgments and error analysis involve comparison with NS, while Saniei (2011) adds that even early SLA researchers used the native-like proficiency as the goal of all language learners and the NS model as the most appropriate means for achieving that goal.

[6] Murphy (2014) questions the hegemony of the NS models in EFL and explores the possibilities of diverting some attention towards NNSs models when teaching pronunciation in EFL. He lists some famous people, non-native English speakers, as possible role models. People like Kofi Annan, former UN secretary general; Thierry Henry, former Arsenal player and French international; Jehan Sadat, former Egyptian first lady; since teenagers are usually interested in pop culture and Hollywood, famous actors and actresses like Christoph Waltz, Austrian actor; Javier Bardem, Spanish actor; Vincent Cassel, French actor; Noomi Rapace and Alicia Vikander, Swedish actresses; Lea Seydoux, French actress, etc. might have even more appeal to them. There are numerous proficient NNSs that can be used as models in EFL classrooms. These are the ones that first came to mind, but there are other good models from other parts of the world and not just Europe.

ideal of the NS that is impossible to attain since they could never become NSs of the target language since individuals cannot change their native language unless they have the ability to be reborn[7] instead of offering them a model that is much more attainable[8] and similar to themselves.

Does this mean the NS should be cast out of the classroom? It does not. The NS can still serve as a reference point or model for those who wish to attain native-like proficiency for the sole purpose of communicating with NSs and integrating into the target culture, but it should not be used as a model for everyone else. Simply put, the focus of language teaching should shift from treating learners as NS imitators towards competent learners and users; especially because NNSs differently process English than NSs, hence they should be treated as different kind of language learners as well and not be compared to their native counterparts. Therefore, alternative terms have been suggested that are more appropriate and that should replace the NS model in TEFL classrooms. Lee (2005) mentions Paikeday's (1985) *proficient user of the language*, Rampton's (1990) *language expert*, Cook's (1991) *multicompetent speaker* and also offers his own *competent language user*, while Ur's (2010) *fully-competent ELF user* can also be put into consideration.

1.2. Previous research

Before revealing the results of this thesis' research, previous research in the domain of attitudes towards native-like proficiency and teaching models based on NSs should be reviewed.

For many years, the only internationally acceptable models for TEFL were the American and British standard varieties of English. However, since the question if NNSs of English should conform to NS norms in a time when so much communication in English is being held without the presence of NSs arose. In the last few decades the idea was challenged by the likes of Kachru (1985, 1988, 1992a, 1993, 2005), Jenkins (1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007), Kirkpatrick (2002, 2006, 2007, Kirkpatrick and Xu, 2002) and Seidlhofer (1999, 2001, 2004, 2006). Soon after the question which models should be used for teaching English in outer and expanding circle countries (Bamgbose, 1999, 2001; Davies, 1999; Kachru, 1992b; Seidlhofer,

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[7] In this light Felix's (1987, p. 140) statement that: *"adults usually fail to become native speakers"* taken from Cook (1999, p. 187) seems unreasonable.

[8] Some talented individuals may pass as NSs, especially if they had been learning English before puberty, which means it is possible to attain the so-called native-like proficiency.

1999; Starks and Paltridge, 1996, Widdowson, 1997) was posed. Furthermore, various studies aimed to question whether learners' goal in non-native settings is to conform to NS norms (Kachru, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 2006; Li, 2006, Seidlhofer, 2001; K. K. Sridhar and S. N. Sridhar, 1986). One of those studies was Timmis' (2002) which aimed to show that students' attitudes towards conforming to NS norms of English might differ from the views of teachers and scholars. The sample of his survey consisted of students and teachers from 45 different countries and it showed that the majority of students still wanted to conform to NS norms in relation to attaining native-like pronunciation (67%) and in relation to conforming to NS grammatical norms (68%), whereas teachers were more lenient towards students attaining native-like pronunciation, but equally interested as students for their students to conform to NS grammatical norms. Interestingly, He and Zhang (2010), who used Timmis' (2002) questionnaire, reported to have found both similar and different findings. Opposed to Timmis' (2002) participants, Chinese students were more at ease with the idea of not conforming to NS pronunciation models as long as they were intelligible to others. However, most of the Chinese teachers hoped their students would attain native-like pronunciation. In terms of grammar, both Chinese students and teachers from He and Zhang's (2010) study showed preference for NS norms; this corresponds to Timmis' (2002) findings. In the same research He and Zhang (2010) reported that Kirkpatrick (2006b) researched the advantages and disadvantages of three possible models for English teaching in East Asia and Australia. Those models were: a native speaker model, a nativized model and a *lingua franca* model. He concluded that the *lingua franca* model was the most appropriate one to use in such contexts where English is primarily used for communication between NNSs.

Furthermore, Van den Doel (2007) lists several studies that showed students were not willing to be taught non-native models (Major et al. 2002; Major et al. 2005; Scheuer 2005; Van den Doel 2006). He also mentions that according to Christophersen (1975) learners were opposed to the idea of being denied access to *normal* English. Saito's (2012) findings also showed Japanese students were more in favor of native varieties than non-native varieties and were more inclined to learn ENL than ELF, which is similar to other studies in Japan (Honna, 1995; Honna and Takeshita, 2000) that suggest Japanese students strive to conform to NS norms and want their English to be native-like, while having negative perceptions about non-native models of teaching English. Kirkpatrick's (2007) research also revealed that the role model in EFL contexts in Japan remains the NS.

In Croatia the topic of students' attitudes towards native norms was mostly touched upon in research primarily focused on attitudes towards ELF. For instance, Irena Vodopija-Krstanović and Marija Brala-Vukanović (2011) asked students whether NS accents should be regarded as the aspirational model in the classroom. They found out that students when faced with an option to choose between the NS and NNS ideal, lean towards the former, thus confirming that in practice NS remains the model and the norm for EFL. Similarly, Drljača Margić and Širola (2009) revealed that university students majors of English were unwilling to accept non-native varieties instead of the NS model regardless of whether they were exposed to non-native varieties or not. Conversely, Josipović Smojver and Stanojević (2011) believe that recent learner attitudes studies (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007), which show that learners are satisfied with their English classes except for the traditional instructivist approaches to teaching, indicate secondary school learners in Croatia might be open to the idea of ELF. However, their study revealed that English majors and more proficient students (self-assessed) were more willing to conform to NS norms.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Aim

The aim of the thesis is to establish whether secondary school learners of English as a foreign language are interested in attaining native-like proficiency by conforming to NS norms, which would show how present NS models of teaching English are in Croatian EFL classrooms, and whether secondary school learners are willing to give alternative models a try; namely ELF.

2.2. Sample

Overall sample included 68 (13 male and 55 female) participants. The participants were secondary school learners drawn from a single metropolitan high school focused on modern languages. Specifically, the sample consisted of 23 high school freshmen (first year students) with an average age of 15.17 years and 45 high school juniors (third year students) with an average age of 17.24 years. The freshmen students had been learning English for 9 years, whereas the junior students learned it for 11 years, which means both groups started learning English in the first grade (ages 6 to 7) of primary school. Moreover, 45 participants had visited an Anglophone country; the most visited Anglophone destination was Great Britain (95%), while 8% of participants had visited the US. Moreover, when asked how often participants used

English outside of the classroom, many of them (22) claimed to use English on a daily basis when they are not in class (see *Figure 2*).
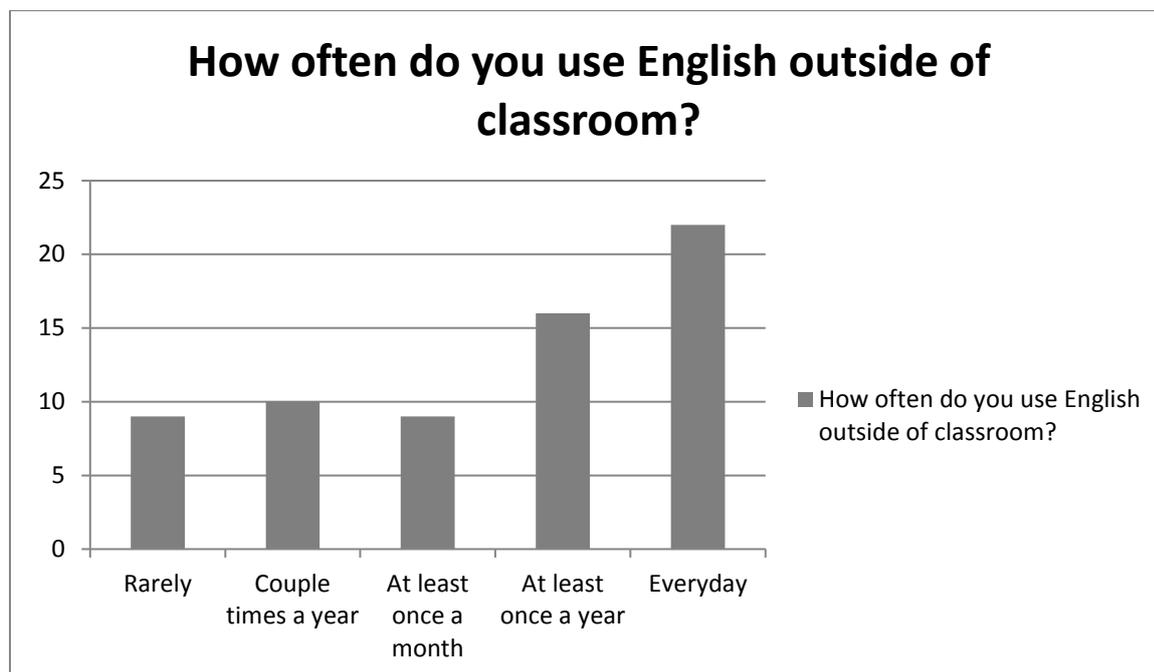

Figure 2. Chart about participants' frequency of using English outside of classroom

2.3. Instrument

For the purposes of the thesis an instrument (see *Appendix* for English translation) in the form of a questionnaire was designed by the author in order to obtain EFL learners' attitudes[9] towards native-like proficiency as an achievement target because a standardized questionnaire that obtained all the information required for writing this thesis could not be found. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, both of which were written in Croatian. The first part consisted of two sub-parts; a quantitative part composed of sixteen items, which were inspired by items found in questionnaires aimed at investigating attitudes towards topics that were similar enough to the topics the author of the thesis wanted to write about. However, they were reshaped, (most of them almost entirely) changed to fit the purpose of the questionnaire and were translated into Croatian so as to avoid any possible misunderstandings of the items due to English not being the participants' native language. Items were designed to obtain the participants' attitudes by showing their agreement or disagreement with a given statement on a

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[9] Attitude is seen as defined by Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1) "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor".

5-point[10] Likert scale; 1 meaning *strongly disagree* and 5 meaning *strongly agree*. The Likert scale was used because it is generally deemed useful for measuring latent constructs or variables such as opinions, feelings or, in this case, attitudes. Three out of sixteen items elicited information about what the participants see as the defining characteristics of NSs (fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy). The next four items were about the participants' attitudes towards language imperialism. The following three items were designed to investigate if and to what degree do the participants conform to the NS model and the concept of native-like proficiency. The final six items were constructed to get an insight into the participants' attitudes towards the presence of the NS model in their education; i.e. whether they welcome it or oppose it.

The second, qualitative sub-part consisted of an open-ended question: *How would you define the concept of native-like proficiency?* The question was asked in order to see how secondary school learners conceptualize this concept and if it means the same to the majority of the participants.

In the second part of the questionnaire the participants were asked to fill out their personal information.

2.4. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to whole groups; first to freshmen students and then three weeks later to juniors during their regular classes. Before administering the questionnaire, participants were informed about the aim of the questionnaire and the topic of the thesis. Additionally, participants were assured that their data would remain anonymous and confidential and that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes by the writer of the thesis. Furthermore, participation was voluntary and participants were asked to give their permission to use their responses in the form of a written consent. After participants consented to participate, they were given final instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire. Namely, participants were instructed to express their attitudes by showing agreement or disagreement with given statements by circling a number on a 5-point Likert scale (again, 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly disagree). Finally, the questionnaires were administered to the participants, who started filling them out in their classroom with their teacher present. The

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[10] The 5-point Likert scale was chosen in favor of a 6-point Likert scale to give participants the neutral option *neither agree, neither disagree.*

process lasted for ten to twenty minutes. After all of the participants finished filling out the questionnaires, the questionnaires were collected, and the participants were thanked for their cooperation.

Initially, the questionnaire was also administered to sophomore students of the same high school, but it was decided against using their results in order to focus on the attitudes of freshmen and juniors so as to see whether there are any differences between the two groups of learners, one group of learners that just enrolled into high school and the other group that is closer to graduating[11]

2.5. Methods of data analysis

Participants' responses from the first, quantitative sub-part of the questionnaire, containing sixteen Likert items, and the participants' information from the second part of the questionnaire were analyzed by means of the Software Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS) in order to primarily investigate if there are any differences between the attitudes of the two groups of participants and also to find out if there are any interesting correlations in the collected data. Namely, descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, Mann-Whitney *U* test, independent and dependent samples t-test are statistical procedures that were used for the analysis of the gathered data. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha was used as an estimate of the reliability of the quantitative sub-part of the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the participants' definitions of the concept of native-like proficiency were analyzed qualitatively by going through all the definitions and assessing what seems to be the most prevalent definition amongst participants or the most common interpretation of the term, but also keeping an eye for interesting definitions that stand out from the rest.

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[11] Even though seniors were a better option for participating in this study than juniors since they are in their last year of high school, during the time the questionnaire was administered they were busy preparing for their *matura* exams.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Qualitative data

In order to see how the participants conceptualize the term *native-like proficiency*, the participants were asked to give their definition of the term in a sentence or two. The responses were analyzed as a whole. By going through their definitions of native-like proficiency, it was revealed that most of the participants defined native-like proficiency as the ability of NNSs to use English like NSs:

"It means you can speak like a native speaker."

"The level of proficiency when a person is on the same level as native speakers."

"The ability to speak exactly like a native speaker."

This was mostly the base which some of the participants expanded a bit by adding that it means to speak as fluently and/or as accurately as NSs:

"Being able to speak fluently and accurately, while using a wide range of vocabulary just like native speakers."

"When someone speaks as fluently as native speakers."

"It is when a person sounds like a native speaker, but also uses correct grammar."

Furthermore, some of the participants thought it meant sticking to standardized NS norms:

"Using a variety of English that minimally strays or does not stray at all from the standard variety."

while others added that it is an ability of NNSs to pass as NSs even though they are not NSs:

"A person who sounds like a native speaker even though they are not."

"This term to me means a level of fluency in some language when it is hard or impossible to recognize that a person is not a native speaker."

Finally, there were some participants who thought native-like proficiency was proficiency based on comparing NNSs' English to NSs':

"Proficiency in English is evaluated on how similar it is to the proficiency of native speakers."

Since it was inevitable for the participants to mention in some way the NS while defining native-like proficiency, they were also asked to show on a 5-point Likert scale which of the three presumed attributes or characteristics (pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy) they see as the most defining traits of NSs. The results are shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2 Characteristics of NSs.

Item	Year	*N*	Min	Max	M	SD
Pronunciation is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1	23	2	5	3.78	0.902
	3	44	2	5	3.91	0.96
Fluency is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1	23	3	5	4.35	0.714
	3	45	1	5	4.07	0.986
Grammatical accuracy is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1	23	1	4	3.04	0.976
	3	44	1	5	3.25	1.241

These findings suggest that participants see fluency (M=4.35/4.07) as the defining trait of NSs, while pronunciation is ranked second according to participants' responses (M=3.78/3.91). Furthermore, these findings also reveal that participants of the study do not generally see all NSs as people who are grammatically-wise infallible (M=3.04/3.25). By means of the t-test it was established there are no statistically significant differences between the freshmen and junior students when discussing their view of NSs' characteristics (See *Table 3*).

Table 3 Characteristics of NSs: t-test.

Item	t	df	p
Pronunciation is the defining attribute of native speakers.	-0.522	65	> 0.05
Fluency is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1.212	66	> 0.05
Grammatical accuracy is the defining attribute of native speakers.	-0.693	65	> 0.05

Furthermore, Mann-Whitney's U test revealed no differences between the two genders concerning the items in question.

All in all, the plethora of different definitions suggests there is not a single, clear conceptualization of the term native-like proficiency in participants' minds. By combining the qualitative and quantitative data, it is discovered that the participants mostly see *native-like proficiency* as the ability of NNSs to speak English language as fluently as NSs of English while displaying to varying extent a native-like accent while more-or-less producing grammatically sound utterances/sentences.

3.2. Quantitative data

The reliability or Cronbach's α of this part of the questionnaire was .846, which conforms to academic research norms and deems the results usable for writing the thesis. The scale has thirteen items and its arithmetic mean (M) is 43.95 while its standard deviation (SD) is 8.421.

Since the goal was to establish whether there are differences between the two groups' attitudes, the t-test was utilized to measure the significance of difference between the two sub-samples (high school freshmen and juniors). The T-test showed that the attitudes between the two groups were identical in all bar two items, but their p-values suggest they are not very significant (p<0.09, p<0.07). Furthermore, to investigate if there are any attitudinal differences between male and female participants the Mann-Whitney U test was used because of the small number of male participants and it showed that there are no significant differences based on gender concerning their attitudes towards the given statements. Moreover, in the hope of finding a correlation between participants who self-assessed themselves highly and participants who did not assess themselves as highly in terms of grammatical accuracy and pronunciation, and their attitudes towards native-like proficiency, self-assessments were compared to their responses pertaining to the thirteen statements about the NS model. However, no significant correlation was found between the participants' self-assessments and their responses about questionnaire items.

The following results are grouped into three sub-sections in accordance with the different aspects they aim to investigate.

3.2.1. Attitudes towards linguistic imperialism

Table 4 Participants' attitudes towards linguistic imperialism.

Item	Year	*N*	Min	Max	M	SD
Only native speakers have the right to decide the rules/standardize English language.	1	23	1	5	3.09	1.443
	3	45	1	5	3.56	1.078
English language is inseparable from the culture of the countries where it is a native language.	1	22	1	5	2.82	1.402
	3	45	1	5	3.49	1.254
The only acceptable variety of English language is the one used by native speakers.	1	23	1	5	2.48	1.123
	3	45	1	5	3.27	1.156
Every native speaker has a better mastery of English langugage than non-native speakers,	1	23	1	4	2.30	1.185
	3	45	1	5	2.60	1.156

notwithstanding the amount of time they had spent learning English.						

Table 5 Participants' attitudes towards linguistic imperialism: t-test

Item	t	df	p
Only native speakers have the right to decide the rules/standardize English language.	-1.508	66	.136
English language is inseparable from the culture of the countries where it is a native language.	-1.977	65	.052
The only acceptable variety of English language is the one used by native speakers.	-2.686	66	.009
Every native speaker has a better mastery of English langugage than non-native speakers, notwithstanding the amount of time they spent learning English.	-.990	66	.326

The results presented in *Table 4* show that both groups of participants possess the same attitudes towards all the items in this group except for the item: *The only acceptable variety of English language is the one used by native speakers,* which was revealed by employing the independent t-test (t=-2.686, df=66, p<0.09) and only showed a bit of discrepancy between the two sub-samples. Thereupon, it can be said that while freshmen learners consider this on average to be something they mostly do not agree with (M=2.48), third year learners seem to be more favorable towards the notion. However, the mean value of their responses (M=3.27) still suggests they mostly share a neutral perspective on the matter, with a slight inclination to agree with this statement.

As far as other items are concerned, both groups of participants shared the same attitudes towards the given statements as evident in *Table 4* with no significant statistical differences obtained by analyzing the items by means of the independent t-test as shown in *Table 5*. The participants do not believe that NSs by nature have a better mastery of English language than NNSs (M=2.30 and M=2.60 respectively), which shows that they are not burdened by the image of the idealized NS and almost firmly believe it is possible for them to be able to be more proficient in English than at least some NSs, notwithstanding the fact that English is not the participants' native language. The remaining two items with their mean value of 3.09/3.56 (*Only native speakers have the right to decide the rules/standardize English language.*) and of 2.82/3.49 (*English language is inseparable from the culture of the countries where it is a native language.*) as evident from *Table 5* suggest that once again the participants as a whole decided to take a more-or-less neutral stand.

Consequently, even though the participants do not consider NSs to be all-knowing entities, the results give an impression that they are still uncertain about the rights of NNSs to participate in the standardization process; even when we consider the aforementioned fact that nowadays there are more NNSs than NSs of English. Furthermore, as visible from the mean values, participants are unsure if they should any longer consider NSs as exclusive owners of the language, and they are still uncertain if they have the right to become part of the process and claim their share of the English language. In connection to language ownership, the last item suggests that participants neither agree nor do they disagree with the statement that the English language and cultures of Anglophone countries are inseparable entities.

3.2.2. Attitudes towards the NS model in the classroom context

The second set of items, consisting of six statements, that were designed to obtain the participants' attitudes towards NS models in the classroom context were analyzed and their results can be seen in *Table 6*.

Table 6 Participants' attitudes towards the NS model in the classroom context.

Item	Year	*N*	Min	Max	M	SD
Schools should only teach the American or British variety of English, and not some kind of neutral variety.	1	23	1	5	2.78	1.204
	3	45	1	5	3.04	1.043
TEFL textbooks should only incorporate contents that are related to the culture of anglophone countries (in the form of authentic newspaper articles and similar texts), whereas the listening tapes should only feature recordings of native speakers.	1	23	1	5	3.13	1.180
	3	45	1	5	3.18	.984
The aim of TEFL is to enable learners to attain native-like proficiency.	1	23	1	5	3.87	1.290
	3	45	2	5	3.93	.688
Native speakers are the only relevant role models for TEFL.	1	23	1	4	2.30	1.185
	3	45	1	5	3.02	.917
I would prefer a native speaker over a non-native speaker as my English teacher.	1	23	1	5	3.30	1.222
	3	44	1	5	3.45	1.150
The secret to succesful acquisition of English language lies in imitating native speakers.	1	23	1	5	2.74	1.356
	3	45	1	5	2.98	.941

Once again, the participants' attitudes were practically identical with the exception of the item *Native speakers are the only relevant role models in TEFL,* which was the only item from the set that showed a glimpse of difference between the two groups after the independent t-test analysis (t=-2.762, df=66, p<0.07) (See *Table 7*).

Table 7 Participants' attitudes towards the NS model in the classroom context: t-test.

Item	t	df	p
Schools should only teach the American or British variety of English, and not some kind of neutral variety.	-.929	66	.356
TEFL textbooks should only incorporate contents that are related to the culture of anglophone countries (in the form of authentic newspaper articles and similar texts), whereas the listening tapes should only feature recordings of native speakers.	-.175	66	.861
The aim of TEFL is to enable learners to attain native-like proficiency.	-.267	66	.790
Native speakers are the only relevant role models for TEFL.	-2.762	66	.007
I would prefer a native speaker over a non-native speaker as my English teacher.	-.497	65	.621
The secret to succesful acquisition of English language lies in imitating native speakers.	-.849	66	.399

As before, high school juniors were more prone to conform to the NS model (M=3.02) than their freshmen colleagues who mostly did not approve of the notion (M=2.30) that NSs are the only relevant role models for TEFL. However, the mean value of responses of junior learners yet again simply meant that they have a neutral opinion about the matter and not that they favor the NS model over other possibilities. This result corresponds to that from the previous set of items about the variety of English spoken by NS being the only acceptable variety (M=2.48/3.27). Moreover, it can also be connected to the fact that students do not really see NSs as idealized entities (M=2.30/2.60), thus feeling sort of indifferent to the NS model in the classroom context. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the results show that they do not have prejudice towards NNESTs because they clearly believe, as visible from *Table 6*, that NNSs can master English language as well as NSs. However, the mean value (M=3.30/3.45) does show that participants have a slight preference for native teachers of English, but it is a shift from the previous overwhelming belief of NSs being ideal teachers of English as stated by Phillipson (1992), as mentioned in Majlesifard (2012).

Furthermore, their attitudes towards teaching materials correspond to their attitudes towards inseparability of language and culture. Because they do not exclusively see language as something that is completely inseparable from cultures of Anglophone countries, they are also uncertain about only incorporating texts from Anglophone cultures.

Perhaps one of the most interesting results of the questionnaire is the participants' response to the item *Schools should only teach the American or British variety of English, and not some kind of neutral variety*. It is interesting because the participants' response (M=2.78/3.04) suggests they might be interested to give ELF a try.

3.2.3. Attitudes towards emulating the NS model

The group of items aimed to get insight into the degree to which the participants want to conform to the NS model or, put more plainly, whether they want to achieve native-like proficiency after all. Their responses are visible in *Table 8*.

Table 8 Attitudes towards emulating the NS model.

Item	Year	*N*	Min	Max	M	SD
I want to sound like a native speaker.	1	23	3	5	4.65	.647
	3	45	1	5	4.33	.929
I want to speak with a native speaker accent.	1	23	3	5	4.35	.832
	3	45	1	5	4.13	.968
I want to emulate native speakers in all linguistic aspects (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency).	1	23	1	5	4.30	1.146
	3	45	1	5	4.02	.965

An independent t-test was used to find possible differences participants' responses. It showed there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups as can be seen in *Table 9*.

Table 9 Attitudes towards emulating the NS model: t-test.

Item	t	df	p
I want to sound like a native speaker.	1.471	66	.146
I want to speak with a native speaker accent.	.905	66	.369
I want to emulate native speakers in all linguistic aspects (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency).	1.070	66	.289

By interpreting the results, the answer to the question whether secondary school learners want to achieve native-like proficiency arises. In short, the answer is positive. Despite all the indifference they have shown towards the NS model; despite the fact that they do not think that NSs in general have a better mastery of the English language (M=2.30/2.60) despite the fact they generally do not see NSs as the only relevant models for the classroom context (M=2.30/3.02); despite the fact that they tend neither agree nor disagree that the secret to successful English language acquisition lies in imitating NSs (M=2.94/2.98); they still believe that the aim of EFL is to achieve native-like proficiency (M=3.87/3.93). Although it cannot be deduced due to the construction of the item whether they believe that this is the aim set by the curriculum or whether that is their personal preference, from the remaining three items it is

pretty clear they want to achieve native-like proficiency. The mean values of the items are considerably high (see *Table 8*).

Participants' desire to attain native-like pronunciation does not come as a surprise considering other research in the field. For instance, most of the participants[12] (68%) from Josipović Smojver and Stanojević's (2011) research responded that they would be willing to master their English pronunciation in order to sound like an NS no matter how long it would take and how much effort they would need to put into it. Timmis (2002) research yielded no different results - most of the participants were willing to conform to native speaker pronunciation norms. This strong inclination towards attaining native-like pronunciation can be explained in a few ways. Firstly, learners might view not setting one's goal on attaining native-like pronunciation as not pushing themselves enough. Moreover, most people want to adapt and blend in well with others, especially if they are a stranger in a country that does not use their L1. This kind of integrative motivation can be found among some participants of Timmis' (2002, p. 242) research:

Example A: "I live in this country. I want to be natural. "
Example B: "If I work in an English company, maybe some nasty client would insult me: 'Ah, she's non-native.' "
Therefore, sometimes having a native-like pronunciation can give non-native speakers a sense of empowerment and remove the social implications of them being a foreigner and the sense of not belonging.

Furthermore, the participants' responses (M=4.30/4.02) indicate they wanted to conform to the NS model in linguistic aspects (pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, fluency and vocabulary). In this light, Willis' (1999) suggestion, as mentioned in Timmis (2002), not to conform as much to NS grammatical norms in EFL contexts, seems out of place.

It is interesting to point out that high school juniors are a bit more willing to give more power to the NS than their freshmen colleagues, while freshmen learners are more interested in achieving native-like proficiency. However, this could just be a statistical coincidence since only the differences between the mean values in two out of 13 items showed some discrepancy, albeit not a very important one statistically, which means that that the two sub-samples displayed identical attitudes throughout the whole questionnaire. Therefore, this observation

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[12] The sample consisted of 1461 university students.

should be taken with more than just a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, if a case could be argued why the results point that way, maybe the reasoning lies in the fact that they might have been more exposed to their school's strong emphasis on the English language and NSs then their freshmen colleagues, who just enrolled into the school; although, one would possibly expect that the learners closer to their graduation would be the ones who would be less impressed by NSs and their norms.

4. Limitations of the study

The study could have benefited from having semi-structured interviews with the participants prior to designing and administering the questionnaire in order to gain more insight into their attitudes towards the NS model and what native-like proficiency really means to them, which would have in effect improved the reliability of the questionnaire by triangulating the results.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, seniors would have been better subjects due to them being closer to graduation than juniors. Also, a bigger sample would have benefited the statistical significance of the results, while more items could have yielded more interesting correlations. Moreover, this thesis does not resolve the question where does the participants' inclination towards achieving native-like proficiency come from. It could be a by-product of them being a part of the system that nurtures such a model for so long and not knowing any different. Consequently, the question whether teachers and policymakers should intervene and introduce students to other models arises.

5. Further research

Since all the participants were drawn from the same metropolitan secondary school focusing on modern languages, it would be interesting to compare their responses to the responses of students who are attending vocational schools. Most likely, students who are attending a vocational school would be more practical and would not be so inclined to conform to the NS model; hence they might show bigger interest in ELF. The same could be said for older learners who probably mostly see English as a tool for achieving their career goals. Moreover, it would be beneficial to see what teachers' and future teachers' opinions on the matter are so as to compare their attitudes to students' attitudes and bridge the gap between the two in case the two would be disparate.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to establish whether secondary school learners of English in Croatia aspired to achieve native-like proficiency in order to reveal whether it was time to substitute the NS-based model of ELT with an alternative one that is not focused on conforming to NS norms and imitating NSs. The sample consisted of 68 secondary school learners from a single metropolitan high school focused on modern languages, who were asked to fill out questionnaires which combined quantitative and qualitative data.

The results revealed that the participants were very much interested in somewhat conforming to the NS model and achieving native-like proficiency. Although the thesis went in depth to show how problematic those concepts are and suggested that those terms should be replaced by terms more suitable, and that students' attainment of English should not be evaluated in terms of how good of an imitation of NSs they are, but instead in terms of how good learners they are, students should still be allowed to learn whichever variety of English they want to, be it ELF or English based on the NS model and NS norms because, in accordance with Jenkins' (1998) and Timmis' (2002) remarks, as much as it is inappropriate to impose the NS model and its norms on students who neither want nor need them, it is as equally unacceptable not to offer students the target they aspire to.

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Stavovi učenika engleskog kao stranog jezika prema dostizanju razine izvornih govornika kao cilju učenja

U akademskim i znanstvenim krugovima već se nekoliko desetljeća raspravlja o odgovarajućim modelima za poučavanje engleskog jezika. U jeku globalizacije standardni model baziran na normama izvornih govornika želi se zamijeniti alternativnim modelima koji se ne temelje na jeziku izvornih govornika. Stoga, rad istražuje kakvi su stavovi gimnazijalaca u Hrvatskoj prema standardnom modelu poučavanja engleskog, odnosno žele li učenici dostići razinu izvornih govornika. Također, ispituje se postoje li razlike u stavovima između učenika prvih i trećih razreda. Istraživanje u obliku upitnika provedeno je na 58 učenika (23 učenika prvih razreda i 45 učenika trećih razreda). Njihovi su odgovori analizirani softverskim paketom SPSS, a rezultati otkrivaju da učenici i dalje teže postići razinu izvornih govornika čime potvrđuju jaku prisutnost normi i modela utemeljenih na jeziku izvornih govornika u nastavi engleskog jezika.

Ključne riječi: izvorni govornik, neizvorni govornik, poučavanje engleskog kao stranog jezika,

8. Appendix

Questionnaire about learners' attitudes

Please circle the answer which best corresponds to your opinion. When you are asked to assess a statement on a 5–point scale, please use the following values:.

1 – strongly disagree

2 –partially disagree

3 – neither agree nor disagree

4 – partially agree

5 – strongly agree

1.	**Pronunciation is the defining attribute of native speakers.**	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Fluency is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Grammatical accuracy is the defining attribute of native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Only native speakers have the right to decide the rules/standardize English language.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	English language is inseparable from the culture of the countries where it is a native language.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The only acceptable variety of English language is the one used by native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Every native speaker has a better mastery of English langugage than non-native speakers, notwithstanding the amount of time they had spent learning English.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I want to sound like a native speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I want to speak with a native-like accent.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I want to emulate native speakers in all linguistic aspects (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency).	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Schools should only teach the American or British variety of English, and not some kind of neutral variety.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	TEFL textbooks should only incorporate contents that are related to the culture of anglophone countries (in the form of authentic newspaper articles and similar texts), whereas the listening tapes should only feature recordings of native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The aim of TEFL is to enable learners to attain native-like proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5

14.	Native speakers are the only relevant role models for TEFL.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I would prefer a native speaker over a non-native speaker as my English teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The secret to succesful acquisition of English language lies in imitating native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5

How would you define the term *native-like proficiency?*

_____

_____

_____.

Participant data

Gender: M   F

Age: _____

Grade: _____

School:_____

How long have you been learning English?_____

Assess your knowledge of English grammar:
a) very bad   b) bad c) good d) very good d) excellent

Assess your English pronunciation:
a) very bad   b) bad c) good d) very good d) excellent

How often do you use English outside of school?
a) rarely b) couple times a year   c) at least once a month d) at least once a week
e) every day

Have you ever visited an English speaking country? YES   NO

IF YES: which one?_____

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