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Voicing Connection to English.
Language Ownership, Legitimization, and Stancetaking

Abstract: The present study explores the nature of the connections that advanced English language users enrolled in a graduate editing seminar had with English and how they articulated these connections. In particular, it aims to unveil the multifaceted nature of language ownership, the resources participants occasion to explicate their language ownership and, more generally, their relationships to English. It also seeks to unearth the resources they draw on to legitimate their connections to English and how they achieve this legitimation linguistically. To explore these dimensions in a more elaborated fashion, the study combines both quantitative analysis and qualitative approaches, for which an overarching poststructuralist lens to discourse analysis was employed, applied to different data sources. Findings disclose the ways in which agency and adherence to norms impact ownership, how users position themselves with respect to and in terms of their target language, and how they voice their connections (or lack thereof) to English.

Keywords: *language ownership*, *editing and revision training*, *language and identity*, *legitimization*, *stance*

1. Introduction

The status of English as a lingua franca brings to the fore tensions between language accuracy and precision on the one hand and language variability and flexibility on the other, especially in university-level contexts within language-driven fields in which English is studied by advanced language users. This paper investigates one context that accentuated these tensions: an English editing and revision training seminar held in 2019 within the graduate Specialized Translation course at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". The seminar wished to reconcile – or at least lay bare – the paradoxical relationship among the instruction of editing (which generally favors standard English exonormative models) and the international nature of English (which rejects norm dependence), and it aimed to have graduate students of a language-focused degree stake a claim for the ownership of English. To achieve this aim, students were offered spaces to reflect on and voice their relationships with English, a language that they had been studying for more than half of their lives, via questionnaires and narratives constructed by means of linguistic autobiographies.

This study takes advantage of the reflective opportunities granted by the seminar and investigates the connections to English of language users whose graduate-level instruction positions them as language specialists. It draws on existing models recently conceptualized to explain language ownership and explores how these individuals' relationships to English are mediated by factors such as the role of English as a lingua franca, its instruction in traditional educational settings, and the authority bestowed upon native speakers. It applies different approaches to the analysis of questionnaires and linguistic autobiographies to investigate the factors determining and impinging upon connections to English and how these connections are articulated linguistically. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to the literature by speaking to the ongoing debate on language ownership and by delving deep into and shedding additional light onto this critical construct.

2. Conceptualizing and Debating English Language Ownership

Over half a century ago, Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens challenged the view that people from Anglophone countries own English on the grounds that "English is no longer the possession of the British, or even of the British and the Americans, but an international language which increasingly large numbers of people adopt for at least some of their purposes".[1] Widdowson built on this argument to assert: "you are proficient in a language to the extent that you possess it, make it your own, bend it to your will, assert yourself through it rather than simply submit to the dictates of its forms".[2] Much of the discourse that has ensued surrounding English ownership has lent itself to the critique of the native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) dichotomy. Ben Rampton notably identified a set of assumptions that being a NS of a language tends to imply, which are grounded in a monolingual bias and reflective of an oversimplified view of language users, including: languages are inherited; if you inherit a language, you speak it well; people are either NSs or they are not; NSs have a "comprehensive grasp" of a language; and people are NS of a single mother tongue.[3] In a recent Applied Linguistics Forum piece that demonstrated the ongoing and arguably unresolved nature of this debate, Dewaele maintained that the term NNS reveals "a strong monolingual bias" and, on the heels of the increasing use of the term L2 user over NNS, suggested a move from NS/NNS to L1/LX user, where LX signifies any language learned after the age at which the first language(s) was acquired.[4]

Building on Dewaele's contribution, Thomas and Osment present a three-part hierarchical model to further challenge the NS/NNS dichotomy.[5] Borrowing heavily on the three-dimensional conceptualization of ownership as legitimate knowledge, prevalent use, and affective belonging developed by Park and elaborated by Seilhamer,[6] Thomas and Osment devise the Language-Usage-Identity State Model. At its base, instead of legitimate knowledge (which, according to Seilhamer, adds an emphasis on legitimacy to Rampton's notion of language expertise[7]), the authors opt to include language to represent "even basic working knowledge of a language" as an LX in the model. The second level, usage, is closely related to prevalent usage, or the "degree to which a language is used routinely in one's daily life"[8] but Thomas and Osment add the following qualifiers: primary, additional, and peripheral. While primary users utilize the language daily or almost daily across domains, additional users make use of the language variously but not as a main language, and peripheral users utilize the language only for specific, restricted purposes. The third and highest level of Thomas and Osment's model, identity state, closely linked to affective belonging and based on Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory,[9] describes a person's identification with a language and is again divided into three states: manifest, introjected, and neutral. At the top, the manifest state identity unfolds when a language is a strong part of a user's broader identity and of the way the person thinks, feels, and acts. The introjected state identity is assumed when a user feels that the language is part of her broader identity but it has not been fully internalized. Lastly, the neutral state identity describes

[1] M.A.K. Halliday et al., eds., *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (London: Longman, 1964), 293.
[2] Henry Widdowson, "The Ownership of English", *TESOL Quarterly*, 28.2 (1994), 384.
[3] Ben Rampton, "Displacing the Native Speaker: Expertise, Mediation and Inheritance", *ELT Journal* 44.2 (1990), 97.
[4] Jean-Marc Dewaele, "Why the Dichotomy 'L1 Versus LX User' is Better than 'Native Versus Non-native Speaker'", *Applied Linguistics*, 39.2 (2018), 236.
[5] Nathan Thomas and Christopher Osment, "Building on Dewaele's (2018) L1 versus LX Dichotomy: The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", *Applied Linguistics*, 40.3 (2019), 1-7.
[6] Joseph Sung-Yul Park, "Ownership of English: Implications for Heritage, Identity, and Our Future", Talk presented March 31 (2011) at Singapore National Library. Mark F. Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan", *World Englishes*, 34.3 (2015), 370-388.
[7] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan"; Rampton, "Displacing the Native Speaker".
[8] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan", 372.
[9] Henri Tajfel and John Charles Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33-47.

feeling that the language is merely a tool that satisfies transactions but personal associations with the language are lacking.

While this model improves on the language ownership model described in Seilhamer by qualifying both usage and identity state with subcomponents on which researchers can draw in interpretative frameworks, Thomas and Osment's model has several shortcomings.[10] First, this model neglects to consider the albeit regrettable relevance that inheritance, or whether a speaker is born into the group traditionally associated with a language,[11] continues to hold in users' identifications with the language. While inheritance may be embedded within the neutral state identity, it certainly is a specific manifestation of said state that warrants explicit mention. Second, the model omits legitimate knowledge. Thomas and Osment validly hold that "users' language knowledge need not show signs of 'expertise' to be considered legitimate ... nor do users need to project themselves as having 'authority over the language'" and add: "proficiency varies from context to context and is socially defined".[12] Further supporting their stance, they maintain that: "Language knowledge in our model is not subjected to an outsider's scrutiny".[13] While these affirmations are both honorable and valid, even if it is problematic and can be fleeting, being sanctioned as a legitimate speaker of a language has a strong valence on how speakers make meaning of their relationship with a language in certain settings. The experience many language users have had with their LX is tied to traditional educational settings, so, by default, many speakers seek the say of outsiders to confirm their perceptions about their language abilities. More poignantly, Seilhamer aptly notes: "Even if one's English, by any criteria, is nothing short of exquisite, this exquisite usage may not be regarded as legitimate by the speaker or those co-inhabiting the speaker's context, based purely on the speaker's ethnicity or origins".[14] The exclusion of the legitimate knowledge dimension constitutes an oversight seeing that it overlooks the critical role of power and legitimization in language use. Many studies in recent decades have indeed attested the value of examining how speakers define and construct their proficiency in a language (and lack thereof) and the extent to which users feel that they have authority over the language,[15] preferring, for instance, their own intuition over reference to prescriptive rules to make acceptability judgements on language (as discussed in Bokhorst-Heng et al. and Rubdy et al.[16]).

Thomas and Osment's omission of legitimate knowledge can be viewed as tied to their arguments that "there is no ownership", that ownership is "antiquated" and that "any claim of language ownership is irrelevant in this day and age".[17] The authors argue that language should not be seen as a commodity: no one owns any language, and everyone is a user of language. There is validity in the claim that speaking of language learners as deficient and in need of acquiring full ownership (as mastery) of the language is an obsolete and even detrimental point of view. The notion that we are in a post-ownership world was already authenticated by linguists who convincingly argued decades ago that language is not a possession and everyone can claim ownership. However, language users continue to perceive different degrees of language ownership (across languages, contexts, skills, media) and, more importantly, the analysis of how ownership is constructed can provide enlightening insights into the processes that determine users' relationships to the language and how they identify

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[10] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan"; Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model".

[11] Rampton, "Displacing the Native Speaker"; Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan".

[12] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", 2.

[13] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", 4.

[14] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan", 374.

[15] Christina Higgins, "'Ownership' of English in the Outer Circle. An Alternative to the NS/NSS Dichotomy", *TESOL Quarterly*, 37.4 (2003), 615-44. Widdowson, "The Ownership of English".

[16] Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng, et al., "English Language Ownership among Singaporean Malays. Going beyond the NS/NNS Dichotomy", *World Englishes*, 26.4 (2007), 424-445; Rani Rubdy et al., "Enacting English Language Ownership in the Outer Circle. A Study of Singaporean Indians' Orientations to English Norms", *World Englishes*, 27.1 (2008), 40-67.

[17] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", 4-5.

with the language. Furthermore, it can help us to recognize (and then dismantle) obstacles that users perceive. In this light, one of the aims of this study is to apply the three-dimensional conceptualization of ownership as legitimate knowledge, prevalent use, and affective belonging with the qualifications to the latter two dimensions designated in the Language-Usage-Identity State Model to investigate the language ownership of aspiring editors.

3. Narratives, Identities, and Voice

In addition to language ownership, one of the central facets of this study is how experiences with and connections to English are constructed and expressed via narratives, specifically linguistic autobiographies. Bernstein maintained that "one of the ways human beings assess and interpret the events of their life is through the construction of plausible narratives".[18] In line with Ushchyna[19] and other recent research, the present paper is grounded in the premise that narratives serve as interactive, discursive vehicles of stancetaking and identity construction. Accordingly, a review of conceptualizations of stance and identity, grounded in poststructuralism, follows.

Du Bois affirms that "one of the most important things we do with words is take a stance"[20] and defines the construct as follows: "Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field".[21] Stances, which rely on the context of the utterance[22], encode speakers' attitudes towards the stance object, their moods, evaluations, points of view, and opinions at different levels of language including lexis, grammar, style, and pragmatics.[23] In her seminal piece "Constructing Social Identity: A Language Socialization Perspective", Elinor Ochs theorizes the relation between language and social identity and argues that speakers position themselves and others by discursively performing social acts and displaying stances.[24] Thus, stancetaking and the recognition of intended stances are critical for identity construction.

Investigations into style have unearthed the relationship between identity and stance. Recently, style has been retheorized "as a multimodal and multidimensional cluster of linguistic and other semiotic practices for the display of identities in interaction".[25] A burgeoning strand of research has applied indexicality to the exploration of stylistic practice to unearth the ideologically-bound and fleeting interactional moves through which social actors take stances, create (dis)alignments, and construct personas.[26] Indexical processes may construct identity within interaction directly, where linguistic forms index interactional – i.e., affective, evaluative, and epistemic – stances, or indirectly, where ideological associations emerge between these linguistic forms and social types (for instance,

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[18] J.M. Bernstein, "Self-knowledge as Praxis. Narrative and Narration in Psychoanalysis", in Christopher Nash, ed., *Narrative in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), 57.

[19] Valentyna Ushchyna, "Stancetaking in the Discourse on Risk Identities Construed", in Dylan Glynn and Mette Sjölin, eds., *Subjectivity and Epistemicity Corpus, Discourse, and Literary Approaches to Stance* (Lund: Lund U.P., 2014)

[20] John W. Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", in Robert Englebretson, ed., *Stancetaking in Discourse. Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (Amsterdam/Philadelpia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 139.

[21] Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", 163.

[22] Scott F. Kiesling et al., "Interactional Stancetaking in Online Forums", *Computational Linguistics*, 44.4 (2018), 683-718. (Kiesling et al. 2018)

[23] Ushchyna, "Stancetaking in the Discourse on Risk Identities Construed".

[24] Ochs, Elinor (1993). "Constructing Social Identity. A Language Socialization Perspective", *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 26(3), 287-306.

[25] Mary Bucholtz, "From Stance to Style: Gender, Interaction, and Indexicality in Mexican Immigrant Youth Slang", in Alexandra Jaffe, ed., *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009), 146.

[26] Mary Bucholtz, "From Stance to Style". See also, for instance, Scott F. Kiesling. "Variation, Stance and Style. Word-final -er, High Rising Tone, and Ethnicity in Australian English", *English World-Wide*, 26.1 (2005), 1-42.

some forms come to be seen as inherently feminine or masculine). The present study takes heed of stance markers in the analysis of how language users orient themselves with respect to English.

In addition, in the analysis of identity construction in discourse, this study draws on the tactics of intersubjectivity, which assume that identity is an outcome of the social semiotics of indexicality, ideology, and performance. The framework, developed by Bucholtz and Hall to describe the social relations established through semiotic processes,[27] marries de Certeau's notion of tactics – or the "ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong" to transform the dominant cultural economy and "adapt it to their own interests and their own rules" [28] – to intersubjectivity, which is included to accentuate the role of agency and interactional negotiation in the construction of identity. It views identity as accomplished via "the production of contextually relevant socio-political relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy",[29] and therefore involves the following sets of tactics: adequation and distinction, which capture processes related to the erasure of discordant elements or the accentuation of discrepancies; authentication and denaturalization, which concern processes related to claims for 'real' identities or the signaling of imposture; and authorization and illegitimation, which involve the processes by which particular social identities and the power structures that sanction identities are legitimated, while others are suppressed and become non-choices.[30]

4. Methods and Approaches

Coffey and Atkinson made the following recommendation at the start of their seminal work *Making sense of qualitative data:*

> There is much to be gained from trying out different analytic angles on one's data. New insights can be generated, and one can sometimes escape from analytic perspectives that have become stereotyped and stale […] to reveal different facets of the data.[31]

In line with this suggestion, the present study aims to explore the nature of the connections with English of a group of forty-four university-level language users enrolled in a language-focused seminar and how these users articulated such connections by relying on different data sources – questionnaires and linguistic autobiographies – and by applying different analytical lenses to these data.

4.1 *Research Setting and Participants*

This research is situated within an English editing and revision training seminar focused on language awareness developed and taught by the author in the 2019/2020 academic year for the graduate-level Specialized Translation course at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Language awareness was selected as a focus of the seminar because this multifaceted construct taps into a series of factors deemed critical for the success of students interested in the field of editing and revision. First, it is not possible to correct an error unless said error is noticed, so fostering language awareness – in terms of training seminar participants in the recognition of language problems in texts to accomplish editing

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[27] Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Language and Identity", in Alessandro Duranti, ed., *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 369-394. See also Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Identity and Interaction. A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach", *Discourse Studies*, 7.4-5 (2005), 585-614.

[28] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xvii, xiv.

[29] Bucholtz and Hall, "Language and Identity", 382.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data. Complementary Research Strategies* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 1996), 13, 15.

and revising – was a main objective of the course. In addition to helping students become more skilled at noticing errors, a second aim of the seminar was to instill awareness of the skills that trainees interested in pursuing careers as editors and revisers needed to succeed in this line of work. Third, the seminar aimed to foster a higher degree of awareness of the skills that they brought to the table to help them identify both their strengths and their lacunae. The most critical aspect in this vein was their self-perceived English knowledge. A high level of English proficiency could situate these learners very favorably as editors or revisors of English texts written by Italian authors. In fact, while Mossop posited that editors of texts written by non-native English speakers should ideally be native English speakers educated in English, he also acknowledged that very proficient 'near-natives' in English – like the language specialists enrolled in graduate-level study – who know the native language of a text's author bring added value since they can more easily reconstruct what the non-native English-speaking author had in mind in ambiguous passages.[32] Lastly, and most relevant for this paper, the seminar wished to reconcile the paradoxical relationship among instructing editing (which generally favors standard English exonormative models) and the international nature of English (which rejects norm dependence) to ultimately have participants stake a claim of English.

Language	Count	Percentage
Arabic	8	18.2%
English	42	95.5%
French	5	11.4%
German	15	34.1%
Spanish	9	20.5%
Russian	9	20.5%

Table 1

The graduate students who opted to participate in the course were enrolled in the second year of a Specialized Translation program. As participants in the seminar, they practiced self-revision, other-revision and editing, and honed their ability to identify and verify the linguistic correctness of texts along with the suitability of a text's style to its future readers. They were additionally offered spaces to reflect on and voice their relationships with English.

Forty-four students completed the seminar and consented to participate in this study. Only six were male, which is largely consistent with enrollment in the graduate course of studies here examined. Table 1 reports the languages they chose to study as part of their two-language requirement of their graduate program. Two students enrolled in the English editing and revision course did not select English as one of their languages of study. The average numbers of years that participants reported studying English across the full sample was roughly 16.

4.2 *Data Collection*

The language ownership questionnaire was administered online on the first day of the seminar, which was held in a computer lab. The decision to administer the questionnaire at the start of the course was to collect data about the participants' level of language ownership that was untainted by the aims and activities of the seminar. In addition to eliciting the descriptive information reported above, it included closed- and open-ended items that prompted participants to indicate the extent of their ownership of English and their identification with the language, the importance they assigned to speaking English

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[32] Brian Mossop, *Revising and Editing for Translators,* Third Edition (London-New York: Routledge, 2014).

accurately and like a NS, the length of time in and frequency with which they used English, their self-perceived competence levels, details about their future, and their decision to enroll in the seminar. This paper focuses on the closed-ended questions that relate directly to the ownership dimensions articulated in Seilhamer and Thomas and Osment[33], whereas a single open-ended response was selected for analysis. This item, which prompted participants to explain their answer to the closed-ended item "To what extent do you feel that you have ownership of English?", was selected because, although the questionnaire did not limit the length of responses, the nature of the question and the questionnaire format compelled participants to commit to a concise, targeted response and thereby, arguably, to home in on the dimension(s) most salient for them. The questionnaire items on which this paper focuses are included in Appendix A.

The other data source was linguistic autobiographies, or narratives that centrally feature language. In addition to serving as a writing and later as a self-revision task and as a means to foster awareness in students, the linguistic autobiographies were meant to grant a deeper understanding of learners' ownership of and relationships with English. To develop their linguistic autobiographies, students were instructed to write a narrative about languages – particularly English – in their lives. They were told to reflect on their language learning paths beginning at their first experiences with English, the language attitudes and ideologies that drove and/or impacted their language use choices, and the current role of language(s) in their lives. A link to William Labov's narrative *How I got into linguistics, and what I got out of it* was provided concomitant with the directions.[34] Seminar participants had two weeks to author the texts and submit them as assignments online. Together, the linguistic autobiographies constituted a 43,153-token corpus.

4.3 *Data Analysis*

As suggested at the start of this section, this study comprised different levels of analysis and applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore, in a multifaceted and in-depth manner, the connection that participants had with English. Closed-ended questionnaire data were analyzed via descriptive statistics (response means, standard deviations (SD), and frequencies), and bivariate correlations were performed using SPSS version 23. The latter were investigated using a Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (rho). This coefficient, used with non-parametric tests, is recommended for use with questionnaire items in which the responses are ordinal-level, as was the case in the present study (See Table 2).

Responses from the selected open-ended questionnaire item were first analyzed via qualitative content analysis using Seilhamer's legitimate knowledge, prevalent use, and affective belonging framework[35] to investigate the most salient language ownership dimensions. In a second level of qualitative analysis, the excerpts were examined discursively to identify stance markers and tactics of intersubjectivity[36] with the aim of unveiling the resources participants occasioned to explicate their language ownership and, more generally, their relationships to English, and of unearthing the resources they drew on to legitimate their connections to English and how they achieved this legitimation linguistically.

Comparative keyword analysis was conducted using Sketch Engine, an online text analysis tool, on the linguistic autobiography corpus against the reference corpus English Web Corpus (enTenTen) 2020 constituted by roughly 44 billion tokens from texts collected from the Internet between 2019 and 2021. This analysis, which makes quantitative comparisons of the relative frequency of words between

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[33] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan". Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model".

[34] William Labov, "How I Got into Linguistics, and What I Got out of it", https://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/HowIgot.html.

[35] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan".

[36] Bucholtz and Hall, "Language and Identity".

two corpora, highlights the keywords, or the words that appear more frequently in one body of text than in another. The comparative keyword analysis generated a list of keywords, and collocation analysis of these keywords followed. The linguistic autobiography corpus was then analyzed using a frequency-driven approach to multi-word units. To perform this, 3- and 4-grams were identified in Sketch Engine. Next, the functional classification of common lexical bundles delineated in Biber et al.[37] was applied to analyze the top twenty lexical bundles that emerged in the linguistic autobiographies. The linguistic autobiography corpus was then analyzed using Dedoose, a software designed for use with mixed methods data. Using this software, closed-ended questionnaire item responses were inserted as (quantitative) categories for each text and the texts themselves were coded following the framework described in Thomas and Osment[38] with the aim of discerning emergent patterns and of grouping autobiographies based on level of ownership across dimensions. Based on these criteria, three autobiographies were selected for discourse analysis and closer investigation of the strategies used by participants with different levels of ownership to express their connections to English. Concomitant with this analysis, legitimate knowledge was also coded using Dedoose following an inductive grounded theory approach to develop a potential set of qualifiers for that dimension.

5. Results

5.1 *Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations*

Table 2 illustrates the means and standard deviations of a series of closed-ended questionnaire responses. In summary, on average, participants felt ownership of English and that English was part of their identities to a moderate extent. They felt that speaking English like a NS was between moderately and very important; and speaking and/or writing English accurately was deemed even more important. While self-perceived English proficiency averaged at about 'good' across the four skills, the highest rated skill was reading and the lowest was speaking. Participants reported using English between sometimes and often.

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	SD
To what extent do you feel that you have ownership of English?*	3.05	0.861
To what extent is English part of your identity?*	3.18	0.582
How important do you think it is to speak English like a native speaker?**	3.53	0.550
How important do you think it is to speak/write English accurately?**	3.91	0.294
Rate your English ability in the following four skills:***		
Reading	3.27	0.449
Listening	3.00	0.440
Speaking	2.89	0.629
Writing	3.03	0.305
How often do you use English?****	3.53	0.667

* Scale: 1= Not at all; 2= A small extent; 3= A moderate extent; 4= A great extent
** Scale: 1= Not at all important; 2= Slightly important; 3= Moderately important; 4= Very important
*** Scale: 1= Very Poor; 2= Poor; 3= Good; 4= Excellent
**** Scale: 1= Never; 2= Rarely; 3= Sometimes; 4= Often

Table 2

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[37] Douglas Biber et al., "If you look at…: Lexical Bundles in University Teaching and Textbooks", *Applied Linguistics*, 25.3 (2004), 371-405.
[38] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model".

The relationships among the previously discussed items were investigated, using a Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient, to explore the strength of the relationship between ownership of English and its constituent parts (Table 3).

	Ownership of English	Importance of NS English	Importance of accuracy	Frequency of English Use	Reading self-rating	Listening self-rating	Speaking self-rating	Writing self-rating	English as part of identity
Ownership of English	1.000								
Importance of NS English	0.086	1.000							
Importance of accuracy	–0.032	0.413**	1.000						
Frequency of English Use	0.548**	0.225	0.053	1.000					
Reading self-rating	0.335*	–0.083	–0.172	0.058	1.000				
Listening self-rating	0.407*	–0.294	–0.248	0.144	0.450*	1.000			
Speaking self-rating	0.523**	0.098	–0.045	0.566**	0.184	0.397	1.000		
Writing self-rating	0.127	0.287	0.033	0.326	0.159	0.241	0.298	1.000	
English as part of identity	0.556**	0.395**	0.091	0.396**	0.105	0.275	0.440*	0.443**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3

As seen in the second column of Table 3, the strongest relationships significant at the .01 level emerged between language ownership and a) frequency of English use, b) self-perceived English-speaking ability, and the c) extent to which participants felt that English was part of their identities. Thirty percent of the variance in language ownership can be accounted for by frequency of English use, twenty-seven percent of the variance can be accounted for by self-perceived speaking proficiency, and thirty-one percent by the identification with English. The findings that transpire from this analysis suggest that those who use English more frequently (linked to prevalent use), have higher self-perceived speaking proficiency (linked to legitimate knowledge), and feel that English is part of their identity (linked to affective belonging) to a greater extent, tend to experience ownership to a greater extent. Although, as is the case with all correlation analyses, claims of causality cannot be made, these findings indicate that prevalent use, legitimate knowledge, and affective belonging are all related to the ownership construct, providing validating evidence for Seilhamer's framework.[39] In order to investigate this aspect further, the next section reports on the results of the analyses of open-ended responses.

5.2 Prevalent Use, Affective Belonging and Legitimate Knowledge

The closed-ended questionnaire item that prompted participants to indicate the extent to which they felt that they had ownership of English was followed by an open-ended question asking participants to explain their answer. Content analysis of these open-ended responses aimed at identifying on which of the three ownership dimensions – prevalent use, affective belonging and legitimate knowledge – participants relied to explain their ownership (or lack thereof) revealed that 19.5 percent drew on their prevalent usage; language ownership rested on affective belonging for 19.5 percent of participants; and 61.0 percent of participants referred to legitimate knowledge.

A random selection of open-ended responses of participants for whom language ownership rested on prevalent use follow:

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[39] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan".

(1) *Thanks to university studies and my personal experience, I speak English every day and this makes me feel that I have ownership of English*

(2) *In everyday life I use english to send e-mails or speak to my friends who don't speak my mother tongue. I read books and watch movies in english. I often write or speak in english on social medias*

(3) *I don't talk in English very often*

(4) *i feel i have ownership of english thanks to years and years of studying but it is a moderate ownership because i need more practice.*

(5) *I think I don't have ownership because I have been only studying it and I haven't practised it yet at all. I believe that to have a ownership of a language it isn't only necessary to study it on the books.*

The participants who provided responses (1) and (2) draw on their academic choices and experiences linked to English to support and legitimize claims to English language ownership. However, as seen in sample responses (3), (4) and (5), participants who cited prevalent usage in their responses mainly did so in reference to their infrequent use of English and to justify their lagging (moderate or low) level of ownership. Indeed, these three responses cite a lack of current use of English (3), for which the participant may be collocated as a peripheral user following Thomas and Osment's designation,[40] and lack of practice (4, 5), thereby suggesting that they deemed their language use insubstantial in terms of quantity.[41]

As depicted in the histograms in Figures 1 and 2, while the responses to the prompt "For how many years have you studied English" are negatively skewed with a mean amounting to most of the participants' lives (i.e., 15.86 years), the responses to a question concerning English use in non-educational settings is positively skewed, with a mean of roughly five years and a mode of only one year. This suggests that, with the exception of a few outliers, despite longstanding access to and engagement with English, for most participants, English use is confined to educational/academic domains.
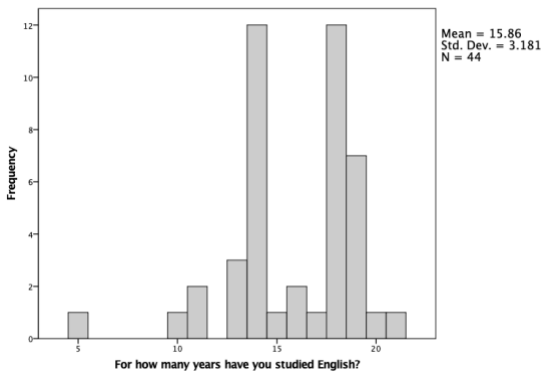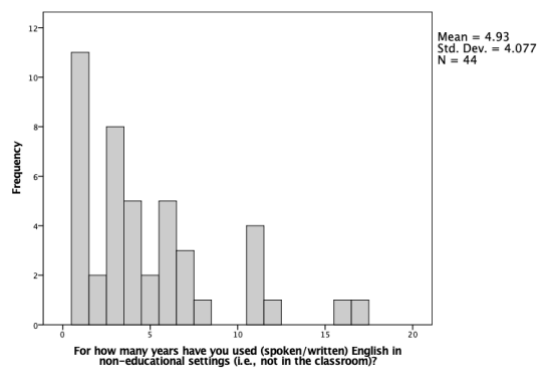

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

This finding is particularly compelling in light of the fact that the selected representative responses illustrate the acknowledgement that having studied the language does not imply practice in and use of English. Therefore, it adds another dimension to the prevalent usage construct: not only must language use be considered substantial in terms of quantity but also substantial in terms of quality. For these participants, English should be used both frequently and in non-educational domains for language ownership to feel legitimized and authenticated.

[40] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model".
[41] Seilhamer, "The Ownership of English in Taiwan".

The duration of English instruction was referenced as a means by which an emotional attachment was forged with the language, as indicated in the open-ended responses of participants for whom language ownership rested on affective belonging:

(6) *Because I have been studying English for a long time and even if I have a low level of ownership, I have acquired some mental English structure*
(7) *Because I have studied the language for a very long time.*
(8) *English is something I live everyday, I happen to dream in English sometimes, it has become a massive part of my persona during these years.*
(9) *because I am not mothertongue and I do not practice English in my everyday life*
(10) *Because I'm not [a] native speaker*

Responses (6) and (7), in which authors reported feeling ownership to a small and great extent respectively, both enact inexact extent of time, realized by duration epithets such as "long" (6) and "very long" (7), and subjective experience of time – versus "the 'objective' reality of clock time"[42] – with the effect of accentuating the duration of English study and of linking this length to the characterizing nature of the study experience. Response (6) attributes to the duration of study the acquisition of English structures while response (7) is even more targeted, seeing as the length of study is sufficient to support the claim for the great extent of ownership. Then, response (8) is indicative of an internalization of English. With this response, the participant, who indicated owning English to a great extent, adheres to Thomas and Osment's description of the manifest state identity by which "the language is part of the way that person thinks, feels, and acts, most likely at the subconscious level".[43] However, participants also cited inheritance, or whether a speaker is born into the group traditionally associated with a language, to explain a lack of English ownership, as seen in responses (9) and (10). This is unsurprising since, as mentioned above, this cohort expressed that speaking English like a NS was important. In addition to the noteworthy allusion to prevalent usage in (9), which suggests a connection between inheritance and substantial language use, these responses imply that these participants' identities can be neither authenticated nor authorized as owners of English because of their NNS status.

A majority of participants grounded their understandings of ownership in legitimate knowledge, as illustrated in the following randomly selected excerpts within this category:

(11) *I received a C1 grade A+ certificate*
(12) *I can understand native English speakers and talk to them, I can read and write texts in English*
(13) *I think I can talk to english people about different topics and I can understand them as well as I can explain my ideas.*
(14) *I feel that I can read and understand a text in English, I can write a text and speak in English because I have learned grammar rules.*
(15) *I've made many experiences abroad, i've lived with locals and they taught me how to use english properly*

Participants drew on possession of language certifications (11), perceived abilities in various skills (12, 13, 14), knowledge of grammar rules (14), and experiences abroad (15) to support their assessments of ownership. By drawing on the procurement of a stated language level as ascertained in a language exam, the participant who provides the response noted in excerpt (11) relies on an authoritative source to explicate their ownership. In this brief response, citing the exam outcome – an external referent – is sufficient evidence to justify the great extent of ownership felt. The authors of excerpts (12) and (13),

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[42] Theo van Leeuwen, "Time in Discourse", *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, 1.1 (2005), 137.
[43] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", 2.

who selected feeling ownership to a great and moderate extent, respectively, cited the ability to speak with NS of English and to use, orally and textually, the language. The insertion of the mental state predicate "I think" in excerpt (13) serves as an epistemic stance marker that signals a subjective opinion (in contrast, for instance, with the stance expressed in excerpt 11). This marker highlights a further distinction between excerpts (12) and (13) in that the latter more explicitly references the participant's experiences in successfully interacting (with NS) in English and draws on them as evidentials to legitimize their knowledge of the language. A similar strategy is employed by the author of excerpt (14) who begins their response with the personalized marker "I feel", which refers to their subjective stance in constructing their perceived English abilities, but they then cite the external, exonormative referent "grammar rules". Although we may expect that responses collected within the context of a university seminar contain reference to institutional evaluations of language, reference to prescriptive rules[44] (over, for instance, one's own intuitions and experiences) suggests a reliance among these participants on external judgement and objectively authoritative means to determine their (self-perceived) language ability.

Next, as exemplified in excerpt (15), some students perceived ownership because they spent time and participated in English-speaking communities. In particular, in excerpt (15), the participant references the "locals" with whom they lived who taught them how to use English "properly". In so doing, they bestow on these "locals" expert authority and, by referring to these experts, epistemic status is reinforced. In addition to experiences abroad, this expert instruction both fortifies and legitimizes the connection between the participant and the language.

As displayed by the insights gleaned from these responses, it would be remiss to disregard the nuances inherent in the legitimate knowledge dimension of language ownership, and, like the other dimensions, it can also be qualified further. This issue will be expatiated on later in this paper, by drawing on the in-depth analyses of linguistic autobiographies.

5.3 *Keywords and Lexical Bundles in the Linguistic Autobiographies*

Table 4 displays the results of the comparative keyword analysis conducted on the linguistic autobiography corpus using Sketch Engine. The top 20 keywords are arranged by their 'keyness', a statistic determined by a Log-likelihood calculation performed by the software, and exclude the name ('Orientale') and city ('Naples') of the university in which participants were enrolled.

	Item	Frequency (focus)	Score		Item	Frequency (focus)	Score
1	English	934	158.3	11	classmate	18	65.4
2	linguistic	44	135.4	12	globalize	5	58.1
3	Germanic	15	126.8	13	vocabulary	26	57.6
4	franca	8	124.1	14	translator	22	57.4
5	lingua	8	120.6	15	grammatical	8	55.4
6	pronunciation	23	95.7	16	linguistics	11	50.2
7	fascinate	25	85.6	17	Italian	72	38.3
8	Arabic	44	82.1	18	interpreter	13	37.7
9	language	645	81.9	19	dialect	11	37.5
10	grammar	39	71.6	20	Spanish	73	37.1

Table 4

Given the prompt that elicited the narratives, it comes as no surprise that the top keyword is 'English', and that the top 20 keywords include the names of other languages, language-based terms ('linguistic',

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[44] Bokhorst-Heng, et al., "English Language Ownership"; Rubdy et al., "Enacting English Language Ownership".

'language', and 'linguistics'), and university- and degree-focused terms ('classmate', 'translator' and 'interpreter'). Concordance analysis revealed that participants' fascination with English undergirded their decision to pursue the study of the language. The presence of the word 'grammar' is in line with the findings discussed in the previous section. Although the presence of the terms 'lingua' and 'franca' suggests awareness of the role of English as global means of communication, the keyword 'pronunciation', which often occurred with 'improve', is prevalent. This suggests a continued focus on and interest in aspiring to acquire a native-like accent.

The next analysis focused on lexical bundles. Lexical bundles, according to Biber and Barbieri, "provide interpretive frames for the developing discourse", and can be situated within three primary discourse functions: stance expressions, discourse organizers, and referential expressions.[45] Because these sequences are "clearly useful devices for the comprehension and construction of discourse",[46] a frequency-driven approach was applied for the identification of lexical bundles in the corpus of linguistic autobiographies, displayed in Table 5.

Item	Freq	Item	Freq
I decided to	46	the fact that	24
I wanted to	42	of my life	24
a lot of	39	part of my	23
in my life	33	I would like	22
I had to	33	to study English	21
I have always	31	I was very	21
I think that	29	I used to	21
when I was	28	of the language	20
the English language	27	in order to	20
to improve my	24	I have been	20

Table 5

When this list was compared with the lexical bundles and discourse functions delineated in Biber et al. and Biber and Barberi[47], many commonalities emerged, which suggests that participants – albeit writing in their LX – have internalized word sequences inherent in university writing in English. Indeed, this list includes both personal ('I think that') and impersonal ('the fact that') epistemic lexical bundles, where the former usually express possibility but a lack of certainty (and may include referential identification) and the latter express degrees of certainty rather than uncertainty. Then, the second and fourteenth most frequent bundles, 'I wanted to' and 'I would like', fall under the category of desire bundles, which frame self-motivated wishes. Other lexical bundles are referential and fall under the specification of attributes including those that specified quantity ('a lot of', 'part of my') and provide intangible framing attributes ('in order to'), yet others refer to text-specific foci ('in my life', 'of my life', 'the English language', 'of the language', 'to study English').

Through a different lens, more insights can be generated. First, the verbal constructions of both 'I have always' and 'I have been' index a continuity in the story lines that participants created and therefore reinforce the plausibility and coherence of their narratives (and, by extension, their connections with English). Second, since choices made during their language-learning path constituted a pivotal notion for participants who authored linguistic autobiographies, it is unsurprising that 'I decided to' was the most frequent lexical bundle. However, considered alongside the second most frequent bundle 'I wanted to', which also includes the first-person singular pronoun, it can be viewed

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[45] Douglas Biber and Federica Barbieri, "Lexical Bundles in University Spoken and Written Registers", *English for Specific Purposes* 26 (2007), 270.

[46] Douglas Biber and Federica Barbieri, "Lexical Bundles", 284.

[47] Douglas Biber et al., "If you look at…"; Douglas Biber and Federica Barbieri, "Lexical Bundles".

as an agentic formula or, put differently, an expression of agency. Therefore, the study of English was not something that happened to participants but it was a decision that was made consciously by them. In contrast, the frequent use of 'I had to' suggests a lack of agency since requirement, the highest level of obligation modality,[48] indexes the perception of being unable to make a choice.

5.4 *Voicing Different Degrees of Ownership*

This section investigates the nature of participants' connections to English by zeroing in on excerpts of the language autobiographies of participants who declare ownership to different degrees. To begin, below is an excerpt from the linguistic autobiography of a participant who expressed having ownership of English to a great extent. In this excerpt, after having described the experiences with English in their life, the participant takes English on directly, artfully describing what the language means to them:

> 1 *In the light of what I have said, it is clear that the English language plays a key role in my life. In one way*
> 2 *or another, since I was a child, I have always been surrounded by foreign words that sounded like magic*
> 3 *spells. English – but actually every language – is not just a collection of words and grammatical structures.*
> 4 *It is rather a tool; it allows you to step into another world and to express yourself in a different way. Many,*
> 5 *too many Italians think sadly otherwise. It is mostly perceived as something unintelligible and "static",*
> 6 *whereas it is a proper living being: just like people, English grows and evolves all the time.*

The author legitimizes both the narrative that they have presented ("In light of what I have said", line 1) and the strong connection that they maintain with English with the formula "it is clear" (line 1), an impersonal predicate expressing normativity that displays confidence that the reader will accept the information they presented as valid.[49] Both by stating that it is "clear" and by reiterating their long-standing relationship with languages implied in the formulations "since I was a child" and "I have always been" (line 2), they position themselves as an expert of English. The participant's redefinitions and interpretations of the stance object (as "a tool" (line 4), "a proper living being" (line 6), etc.) create disalignment (linguistically marked by formulations including "not just", "rather", "otherwise", "whereas") with respect to the wider community ("Italians", line 5). Thus, the articulation of the view that English is a dynamic tool that can be used for self-expression and to access other worlds itself conveys the participant's strong sense of English ownership. Then, by referencing others who are unaware of the true nature of English, the participant is propelled to a special status in which they can more powerfully and convincingly stake a claim to English.

The next excerpt is from the linguistic autobiography of a participant who experienced English ownership to a moderate extent:

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[48] Mollee Shultz et al., "The Expression of Agency by Graduate Teaching Assistants and Professors in Relation to their Professional Obligations", *Linguistics and Education*, 52 (2019), 33-43.
[49] Juana I. Marín Arrese, "Effective vs. Epistemic stance and Subjectivity in Political Discourse. Legitimising Strategies and Mystification of Responsibility", in Christopher Hart, ed., *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 193-223.

1 Despite the years spent studying hard to improve my English skills, I know now that the path is still so long,
2 and I should do something more. I often wonder about my future and about the role of English in my life; the
3 answer is always the same: I'd like to become an English teacher at primary school to share my emotions and
4 my passion with other people. That's why I started my career at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and
5 when I did the entrance test to attend the courses, I was very satisfied because I got a high score. I realized that
6 I had made the right choice and that all the efforts would have been rewarded. However, I have to admit that
7 now something has changed in me: sometimes I feel like I'm not very good at English as my peers, then I feel a
8 little discouraged [...]

The author also begins by acknowledging the length of their study – with an adverb of manner to qualify the nature of this effort – before using the epistemic verb "I know" (line 1), thereby expressing their certainty in regard to the duration of their learning trajectory – to which they add the intensifying adverb "so" – and to the need for action on their part. Although their verb choice conveys certitude, its in-context effect imparts both increased awareness and decreased confidence. The participant's choice to study English at university was grounded in an affective link to the language and was buttressed by the high score they received in an exam. This latter external validation is nonetheless insufficient to sustain high self-perceived English proficiency. The semi-modal of obligation "have to" (line 6) strips their agency and frames the affective stance act in which the participant acknowledges that they perceive a worsening in their English ability when juxtaposed with their peers.

In addition to illustrating the variable, fleeting and ultimately context-dependent nature of ownership, this excerpt also sheds light on the legitimate knowledge dimension in particular. Here, legitimate knowledge is defined first in terms of an exam outcome then in experiential terms, based on a comparison with the participant's peers at university. Indeed, the analysis of linguistic autobiographies supports the results of open-ended questionnaire responses: participants who most successfully hinge on this ownership dimension appeal to their experiences to legitimize their knowledge of English (or, as in the instance above, undermine perceptions of knowledge). In addition to building confidence, experiences in language use provided participants with the grounding on which to build language ownership and to internalize relationships with the language. Of note, however, as also discussed earlier, for many, English NSs remain the most prestigious apex of these experiences, as clearly evinced in the linguistic autobiography excerpts below:

(16) *I still have some difficulties and insecurities in speaking, and I think I need to practice more in this respect, having more conversations with native speakers, and travelling (or maybe moving, who knows..) to an English-speaking country.*

(17) *It's also important have to deal with mother tongues native speakers and it is important live in the place for a little while.*

(18) *I wish I could improve my English with native speakers*

The final excerpt comes from the linguistic autobiography of a participant who expressed having ownership of English to a small extent:

1 Despite all these things, my English is related to university environment. This means that I don't speak English
2 outside the English courses. This is for me very frustrating because I can't develop, in this way, the fluency in
3 speaking and acquire English mental structures. Speaking of this, I realised that for us Italian it is quite difficult
4 to think as English think because we use different patterns which influence our approach to English. So for
5 example we have difficulty in using the genitive or the perfect continuous.

The author explains that their use of English is limited to the university domain, which, as signaled by the anaphoric contrastive marker with which the excerpt begins, is in discordance with the narrative

they constructed of their past relationship with this language. Presently, the participant's development of English is limited by a lack of prevalent use, which again underscores the importance of quality – not just quantity – in this construct. The author attempts to reconcile the lack of coherence in their narrative and in their constructed relationship to English by positioning themselves among Italians for whom English is difficult, signaled by their use of first-person plural pronouns (lines 3-5).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In line with the conceptualization of the language ownership construct as complex, multifaceted and multiply-dependent, this paper reported on a study that applied different lenses and approaches to the investigation of this construct. Bivariate correlations of questionnaire item responses revealed that frequency of English use, the extent to which participants felt that English was part of their identities, and self-perceived English-speaking ability were most strongly related to feelings of language ownership. These constructs map neatly onto prevalent use, affective belonging, and legitimate knowledge framework. When open-ended responses were analyzed in light of this framework, additional insights transpired: legitimate knowledge was frequently cited to justify ownership; prevalent use should be considered not only in terms of quantity but also quality (i.e., non-educational settings); and, though English is used as a lingua franca, NSs remain a critical reference point for language users. The latter point underpinned the legitimacy of English knowledge: participants felt legitimated by successful experiences with language use but they felt most legitimated by or felt that they could gain this legitimation with experiences with NSs.

These findings support the notion that the legitimate knowledge dimension is preferable to the one-dimensional language as an LX level proposed by Thomas and Osment.[50] Bucholtz and Hall aptly maintain that "when identities are forged in relation to language, they become bound up with language ideologies", and they argue: "a speaker's work in positioning herself as linguistically competent and another as a linguistic novice does not end at the interactional level; rather, it enters a chain of ideologization involving locally specific beliefs about who is and is not able to speak a language fluently".[51] Moreover, as gathered from the findings of this study, we can suggest a delineation of qualifiers to describe legitimate knowledge, based on the extent to which proficiency judgements are externalized. A guiding question may be: does the evidence language users draw on to legitimize their language knowledge relate to the say of external, authoritative evaluators or is it grounded in an internalized intuition or experience (e.g., successful language use)? While in the former scenario language users seek expertise in and assign authority to others (e.g., such as language examiners or NS experts), in the latter they turn inward and provide a personalized, context-dependent and socially-defined meaning of their English expertise that is "not subjected to an outsider's scrutiny".[52]

Then, the analysis of linguistic autobiographies revealed how participants narratively constructed their connections to English. In these narratives, participants underscored both the duration of their study of English to warrant the strength of this connection and their agency – at times impinged – in their English-related story lines. Another recurrent thread related to how participants positioned their ownership of English with respect to others: a participant with a high degree of ownership saw themselves as disaligned from their community based on their understandings of English as a dynamic tool; a participant with a moderate degree of ownership reevaluated their ownership based on the proficiency of their peers; and a participant with a low degree of ownership positioned themselves

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[50] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model".

[51] Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Finding identity. Theory and Data", *Multilingua*, 27 (2008), 154.

[52] Thomas and Osment, "The Language-Usage-Identity State Model", 4.

among Italians for whom English is difficult to acquire. These relations crucially display how ownership is socially- and contextually-bound.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, this study focused on a relatively small group of participants enrolled in a single seminar at a single university. Also, some of the findings might have been influenced by the context in which the data were collected, or a language-focused seminar taught in English by a NS. Future studies should study a larger pool of participants and collect data outside of traditional educational settings and without the presence of NSs to explore whether there are differences in findings.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results that transpired from this study have implications for language learning and use. For one, there is a continuing need to deconstruct the notion that NSs are the authority on English and the recurrent preference for language exposure outside of educational settings gives us a lot to think about with respect to the settings that have been created for these learners. Lastly, linguistic autobiographies should be integrated within learning paths in order to both instill in learners awareness of their relationship with English and for instructors to gather valuable input that can inform instruction and curriculum planning.

Appendix A

(1) Languages studied in the MTS program: ❍ Arabic ❍ English ❍ French ❍ German ❍ Spanish ❍ Russian

(2) For how many years have you studied English? 0…30

(3) For how many years have you used (spoken/written) English in non-educational settings (i.e., not in the classroom)? 0…30

(4) To what extent is English part of your identity?   ❍A great extent   ❍A moderate extent ❍A small extent   ❍Not at all

(5a) To what extent do you feel that you have ownership of English?   ❍A great extent   ❍A moderate extent   ❍A small extent   ❍Not at all

(5b) Please explain your answer: _____

(6) How important do you think it is to speak English like a native speaker? ❍Very important   ❍Moderately important   ❍Slightly important   ❍Not at all important

(7) How important do you think it is to speak/write English accurately?   ❍Very important   ❍Moderately important   ❍Slightly important   ❍Not at all important

(8) How often do you use English?   ❍ Often   ❍ Sometimes   ❍ Rarely   ❍ Never

(9) Rate your English ability in the following four skills:

	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Reading	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Listening	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Speaking	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Writing	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍