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Can I Make the Language Mine?

 Dynamics and Implications of Language Ownership within ESOL Classrooms

Megan Ellsworth

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in TESOL degree at

SIT Graduate Institute Brattleboro, Vermont

August 8, 2020

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Student name: Megan Ellsworth   Date: August 8, 2020

Abstract

This paper discusses and investigates the concept of *ownership* with an interest in gathering information which may enable educators to empower learners towards possession and ownership of the English language. The literature review and discussion seek to understand *ownership* as an experience and the particular dynamics at play with English as the target language: perceptions, attitudes, larger contextual factors which may help or hinder the strength of language ownership. The resulting connection with the target language has an observable impact on the learners' motivation and engagement with the language-both inside and outside of the classroom. Considering this research, analysis is offered which may aid in program/curriculum development and teacher training; along with suggestions to spark continued development of in-class activities/strategies and practical tools practitioners may experiment with to potentially grow learner ownership.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) DESCRIPTORS

Motivation Techniques

Learner Engagement

Instructional Effectiveness

Student Attitudes

Adult Education

5

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Today I'm going to in embark you in a journey, which is still developing…

The purpose of this story is talk about of the beauty that I've discovered through my migration journey, where I've approached to a new culture, a new world full of new words for me, that I'm just trying to make them mine.

I'm inviting you to observe the beauty that I've been observing. [1]

Background and Rationale for the Project

My recent work with adult immigrants in Houston has illuminated the challenges this population faces. Themes of loneliness, alienation, and voicelessness have consistently emerged in class as deeply felt experiences. There seems to be an idea that the learner will never be fully accepted into the target language's community because their speech varies from that of *native speakers*. Many learners who have immigrated to the U.S. have had negative experiences with immigration control and the local community; the resulting effect of these experiences echo into the classroom, often manifested in ambivalent attitudes, lack of engagement and a general projection of negative perception on the associated *American* English-speaking community. Further consideration caused me to reflect on my time abroad in Central Asia and Russia. Generally, I could note a similar perception of English being the language of the *local Americans* or *native speakers*. Their own interaction with the language was that of utility with proficiency being a means to achieve goals or influence. Rarely did I encounter students using the target language to self-discover, be artistic, or debate. Those students who chose to challenge this perception and explore English as a new form of self-expression and connection seemed to observably improve

[1] - Alejandra, 2019, English Language Learner

their engagement with the class, social media, classmates, literature, music-every aspect of the target language world.

Equally relevant to the evolution of this inquiry has been the emergence of connection, community, and dialogue frequently enjoyed in class. Much of this inquiry was catalyzed by observing learners who were at first resistant to engaging in the language, but, in time, found a way to engage and possess English to express their identities, opinions, and even art. My own time living abroad and learning language offered a personal lens through which to process these observations. The engagement I had with my second language was stimulated by a sense of connection with the language and culture. In my early childhood, I had previously learned it although I had since lost much of my language skill. I viewed it as part of my identity even though I wasn't proficient enough to call it *my* language in any way. Over time, I grew in my language skill and the continued friendships I had within that language community gradually increased my affection and self-perceived ownership of the language. These breakthroughs and resulting energy, motivation, and engagement encouraged me to explore the impediments of such language possession and wonder if educators could do more to foster this type of ownership.

In a world fast becoming more globalized, this conversation is deeply relevant to encouraging empowered and involved citizens. I believe many teachers desire to see more engaged and integrated groups of learners who may benefit from the empowerment and connectedness of considering their L2 their own. I recognize not all learners and teachers actively desire to engage in a community outside of their L1. In fact, there may be resistance to this type of identification with an L2. I also resign that this study cannot address all the inherent dynamics. Rather it is an

examination of how this ownership forms and strategies to encourage it. It admittedly begins with a personal assumption that owning one's target language offers far more to the learner than an attitude of mere utilization. It should be noted that my personal observations have been conducted primarily with adult learners; growth and development are not specifically addressed in this paper. Some of the research done in this field includes data drawn from students in middle school, and high school with the assumption that many of the motivational, identification, and engagement mechanisms are shared between young and adult ELLs. Further inquiry may be necessary to distinguish the impact of contextual factors during an individual's developmental years and how that may influence their perceived inclusion in the English-speaking community.

Introduction

The literature review aims to present some of the current dynamics at play in regard to ownership formation; specifically, those factors which impede a learner from fully connecting with the language. Current attitudes and perceptions of language ownership will be considered drawing on research done among various demographics and emphasizing how attitudes may or may not reflect reality. I would posit that one of the roadblocks our learners have in connecting and feeling fully empowered in English has to do with fallacies, misunderstandings, and institutional falsehoods. These perceptions are shaped by a multitude of factors stretching far beyond language to include political and institutional structures, culture, policies, institutional racism; all of which may contribute to one's belief about their eligibility to certain power circles. Beyond mere perception, it would also appear that there are institutional realities: frameworks which may in fact entitle a person to power within a specific language community. We cannot detangle these realities and its effects on our learners' psyche. Acknowledging the perceptions and realities of our learners will allow educators to create an approach in class which explores and confronts the

crippling fallacies and empowers our students in their personal ownership of English to access the institutional power advantages afforded by being an *owner* of English. Throughout this paper, applicability to learners and classrooms is discussed drawing upon personal observations and documented accounts of how learners may choose to socially engage in the target language, artistic expression and taste, and expressing views and opinions. All of this data must eventually trickle down to instructional practice, so, to conclude, I will discuss possible avenues from which language ownership may be explored, challenged, and perhaps deepened.

WHAT IS OWNERSHIP?

Ownership in language is an elusive term. Is it a felt experience or a legal property right? It seems that there are a variety of opinions regarding what qualifies a person to claim ownership. One theory is that it may be a cognitive and perhaps institutional construct meant to establish *who can own the language, have access to that language community's resources, and be accepted into the language community*. The very term denotes power and considering the socio-political weight of many of the countries who claim *ownership* to English, it is no surprise from a socio-political perspective that there is a tendency to establish exclusive access to the privileges enjoyed by those who call themselves *native speakers*. Saying "English is my language" is a bold claim of possession; which denotes a certain wider acknowledgement of *belonging* within this language community. However, an important differentiation to make between English and other languages is its acceptance as an international lingua-franca among travel, business, medical and other circles. Few in the world of applied linguistics today would dispute the view that English belongs to all who use it. Indeed, to do so in such circles now would seem backwards. The idea of a central group with exclusive rights to uphold and define the standards of English has even

been called "a throwback to the neo-colonialist attitudes" (Prator, 1968 & Quirk, 1990, p. 371 as cited in Selheimer 2015). A revolutionary statement was made by Halliday et al. (1964) in the 1960s, 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'" (p. 293) (as cited in Selheimer, 2015). Later, in the 90's, Nelson (1992) went a step further calling on individual users of English to claim ownership with the exhortation "Each English user must now say 'It is my language' and then adapt it variously to appropriate contexts, in my culture or another's" (p 337). Can we continue to tout English as an international language, yet still have a rather ethno-centric view of English ownership?   If this elite group is indeed made up of *native speakers* who claim the title based solely on ethnic/cultural association, should we change the current definition of the *native speaker?* In Rampton's foundational work *Displacing the 'native speaker'* (1990), he coined the terms *language expertise* and *language allegiance* as a more precise way to discuss the connection and possession one feels for a language. These have become widely used as an alternative to the *native speaker* dichotomy as they operate on a negotiable spectrum more conducive to interpreting the varied experiences of language learners. Building on that work, Park in his 2011 talk identified legitimate knowledge, prevalent usage, and affective belonging (as cited in Selheimer, 2015). Although this framework is not widely used, similar concepts are often alluded to in ownership research and so a relevant lens to view this topic.

So, the trend has been to move away from dichotomy and identify the significant factors in the ownership-making process. However, if we reject exclusive ownership rights in English, what is the alternative? The term *micro-ownership* has been used to convey a more diplomatic

interpretation of ownership (Parmegiani 2012). This term is used to describe an option where learners have the potential to own their own *inherited,* as well as learned *affiliated* languages. Perhaps this is our benchmark as educators where learners can keep their ties to their *first language* while also assuming possession of English and potentially given a say in the future of the language. It certainly sparks the imagination, but what might this look like practically? Ownership seems to exert its influence on an individual through individual interpretation and perception, as well as existing power structures with limiting boundaries. To move forward in addressing ownership in class, I believe it is critical to examine the inner and outer forces at work in the formation ownership and its real-world applicability.
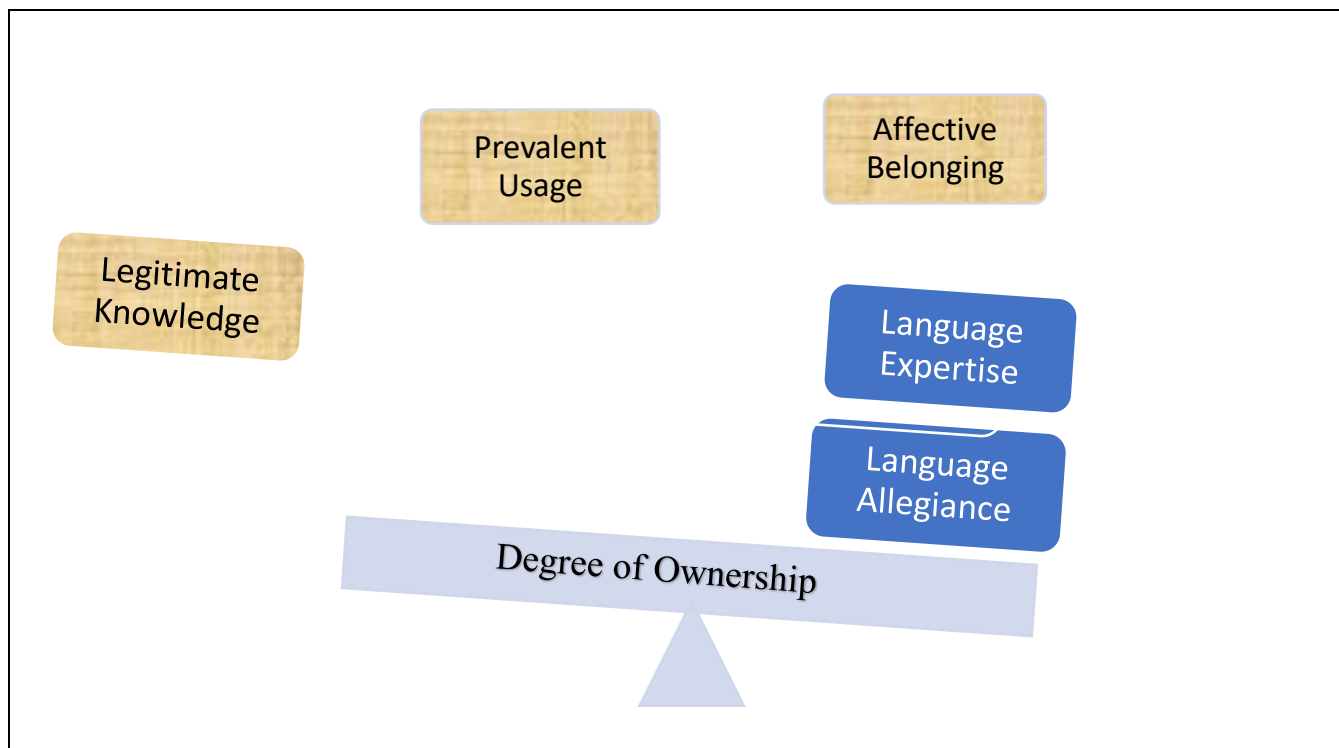
Dynamics Effecting Degrees of Ownership

Illustration Combining Rampton (1990) and Park's (2011) frameworks

Language Expertise

Many in the world of linguistics now point to the concept of language expertise as a suggested replacement of the native speaker ideal; with a movement away from using the native speaker as the standard and ultimate goal of the learner (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, B. 1997). As the name suggests, *expertise* refers to a learner's knowledge and proficiency of the language. However, the reality of this paradigm is actually far more complex. Again, we are faced with the duality of self-perceived language expertise and what is considered by others as language expertise. L*egitimate knowledge* differentiates the two by emphasizing what is perceived as *good* English by the speaker's context (Selehimer, 2015). In contrast, Widdowson (1994) asserts that a speakers proficiency should not be determined by others but rather that one is "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 form" (p. 384).

Language Allegiance/Loyalty

This speaks to the felt sense of loyalty and connection one has to a language. Two important aspects here are that of *affiliation* and *inheritance;* where affiliation describes a relational connection between two distinguishable and separate groups, and inheritance refers to groups with a close kindred link (Rampton, 1990). Terms such as *native or mother tongue* reflect this inherited affiliation and has also been labeled the 'birth-right paradigm' (Parmegiani, 2012)*.* Affiliation, on the other hand, can take place across social boundaries. These boundaries are the aspect most commonly negotiated in the sociopolitical realm and perhaps the source of the most heated debates on this topic. After all, if you claim inheritance of German, there is a shared history, experience, social structure which you may also inherit. Shouldn't speakers of English

who claim inheritance also enjoy these benefits? The connection is strong. Many testify to feeling that their second language seems cold, impersonal, and even stuck on; "it does not awaken the same deep layers of the personality. One is more oneself one's mother tongue" (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981: 50 as cited in Parmegiani, A. 2012 p. 109) My own learners have often stated that English feels like a language for academia and other utilitarian purposes, while the language they feel affective belonging towards tends to be used for relational and emotive language. However, even Rampton (1990) admits that "that affiliation can involve a stronger sense of attachment, just as the bond between love partners may be more powerful than the link between parents and children" (p. 100). Parmegiani (2012) affirms that many learners have expressed some ambivalence to their first language and even a preference for a language learned later in life (p. 111). This emotional dynamic has been called *affective belonging* and is used to conceptualize how one may feel about a language and it's the language community (Selheimer, 2015). One question to consider is whether educators should intentionally encourage affective belonging in English. Perhaps higher affective belonging would allow learners to engage more actively in the language community. Conversely, a belonging in English my pose a threat to connection in the inherited language's community, and learners my resist or even resent any encouragement to connect with the English language.

Exploring Ownership:

In an insightful study by Aiello (2018), questionnaires were used to gather some grounding information regarding language attitudes of ownership. When questioned about their ownership of the language a resounding 92% percent of participants claimed at least *a little* ownership of the language, however only 7.8% said they possess *a lot* of ownership. Further investigation into

self-perceived language expertise revealed that most felt they had *fairly good,* but not *excellent*

language skill, which seems to match Rampton's theory that language expertise is positively

correlated to ownership. An amazing 97.4% of responders said that the language is at least *a*

little a part of their identity, with 17.2% saying that it represents a major part of their identity.

To what extent do you have ownership of English?
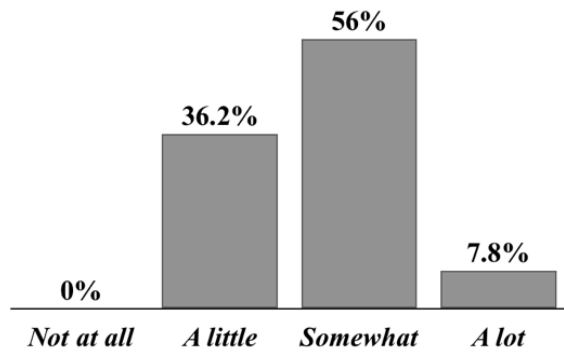
Aiello. (2018). Figure 1, Response frequency for Questionnaire Item: "To what extent do you have ownership of English?" p. 13

Language expertise in English (means)
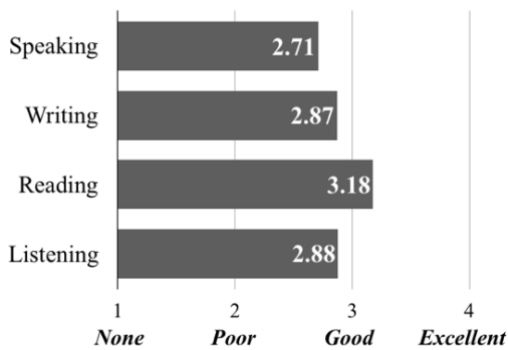
Aiello. (2018). Figure 2, Average Questionnaire Responses: Participant self-ratings in the four skills in English. p.13

To what extent is English part of your identity?

Aiello. (2018). Figure 3, Response frequency for Questionnaire Item: "To what extent is English part of your identity?". p. 14

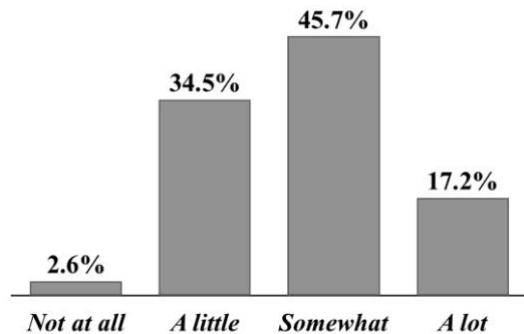In the same study, Aiello engaged with 4 participants for some qualitative insight. Giovanni seemed frustrated by the adulation of English among global language citing French, German, and Greek as "better" languages. In the questionnaire, he marked that he was unmotivated to learn the language and when questioned about it he said

> "I'm not English so I speak your language but it's not part of my identity, no [...] I think that when one studies a language, [one] studies also the culture, and I'm not against English culture, but it's not [...] my culture." (p. 16)

Clearly his connection with English is not inherited and demonstrates no significant affective belonging. His opinion regarding accent is also markedly dismissive.

> it's not my accent, of course, and when I use British accent, I feel like I'm playing something, so it's strange (p. 16)

The allegiance and belonging were clearly to Italian, and without any felt affective belonging or allegiance to English it seems he has no motivation to promote or English up in any positive way.

Another study conducted in Taiwan by Seilhamer (2015) interviewed six English speakers regarding their felt ownership of the English language. Monica described a deeply positive connection with English and says she was "the best in class" (p. 378) in 5th grade. She at least perceived a sense of language expertise. Despite her passion and love of English, she didn't claim any ownership over the language or even consider herself as part of the broader English-speaking community. So in terms of Rampton's framework, she possessed low affective belonging and allegiance, but still felt a positive regard for the language and even some language expertise. In that same study, Fiara demonstrated a higher self-perceived language expertise, however, she denied that she was in the *global community* of English speakers with whom she frequently used English (p. 379). Even with the high language expertise, she seemed to either reject the global community of English speakers or simply felt excluded and unable to claim that connection. This should lead us to question how much affective disassociation, or feelings of exclusion, stem from true community ostracization or if it is based on voluntary and preferred choice. However, even if Fiara made the voluntary choice to isolate herself from the global community, how much of that decision was fully informed? I wonder with my own students how much their language connection and belonging are based on thoughtful consideration of the language rights and privileges available to them.

Developing Affective Belonging

Although language expertise and affiliation also have room to develop and deepen, what happens when the language suddenly becomes a medium from which to describe some of our most personal and deeply felt experiences? What happens when we know that people hear and understand us? These are powerful milestones which we should feel proud to make in our first

language, much less in other languages. This affective connection may be positively correlated to engagement within the target language community and affect the cognitive engagement in class. Skinner, Pitzer, & Brule (2014) discuss emotion's significance in engagement and resilience by saying "they are markers of the quality of students' participation and coping, informing researchers and teachers about whether students are building motivational resources or are at risk for burn-out" (p. 3). Perhaps growing affective ownership and language affiliation would positively correspond with learners who are able to withstand the various frustrations of language learning. A study done in Uganda (Norton & Mutonyi, 2007, as cited in Norton, 2010, p. 7) saw school aged children (especially girls) explore and express repressed, or even totally new identities, through several artistic mediums. This was conducted in many locations with many participants. The resulting engagement with the language created profound personal investment as they explored concepts of aggression, HIV/AIDs, and processed ideas previously unexplored (p. 8). Data gathered from classrooms in Canada, Pakistan and Uganda seem to suggest that if learners develop increased ownership "they will have enhanced identities as learners and participate more actively in literacy practices" (Norton. 2010, p. 1).

In speaking to my own students, it would appear that for some, ownership is formed by an ethnic or community connection or *inherited* (i.e. American or British etc.) connection. I've also heard students refer to those who have a "perfect accent" or who exemplify high language expertise and communicate with ease as the goal they wish to attain. However, when questioned if such an ideal learner could eventually teach the language, they responded with hesitation and even some frustration. A couple students expressed resentment that their childhood teachers were not *native speakers* and modeled incorrect grammar or *bad* pronunciation. It seems that there is a perception that learning from a teacher who is not regarded as a native speaker, puts the learners

at a disadvantage in the English-speaking world. I recall references to *incorrect* grammar, pronunciation, and lack of *cultural knowledge* as being some concerns of studying under a *non-native speaker*. Further questioning revealed that their perception of this cultural knowledge referred only to those cultures which are currently legitimized as English Speaking; in other-words *native speakers*. However, this title of *native speaker* was very selectively given. A previous coworker of mine hailed from New Delhi. She was raised speaking both English and Hindi in a country which claims English as one of their official first languages. However, in a candid conversation with some of my learners transferring to her class, they expressed fears that they would learn "bad pronunciation" and be unable to understand *English-speaking culture*. The extrapolated fear seemed to be that they their career or educational goals might be impeded by such apparently *deviant* English. It seems that my learners did not legitimize her English as inherited but rather affiliated, with characteristics not matching those of *legitimately native* British or U.S. English (Norton, 1995).

On a different note, many students seemingly protect they own inherited language by limiting their affective belonging and affiliation to English. Many do not wish to make deep relational ties with other English speakers and are happy to focus on their expertise alone. In some ways, their loyalty to their own language may be supported by the supposition that they have a certain power in their first or "native" language. They acknowledge their own privileges in Spanish (etc.) as native speakers and ascribe that same power to English; making allowances for those who claim *native speakership*. Other learners seem frustrated that they will never achieve the *native speaker status* no matter how hard they try. However, I wonder how much of this sentiment has to do with actual beliefs about language allegiance or whether it's an expression of doubt in their ability to communicate in English in what *they* consider a fully proficient way. In

that case, this generous attitude may be less about allegiance and more about the *language expertise*.

Perhaps some of the deviation in learner opinion could be explained by history. Colonization and language imperialism have certainly jaded many to English, sometimes resulting in disenchantment and reluctance to learning the language. In contrast, countries that are not historically English colonies and still developing idealize English as a way to equalize power (Norton & Pavlenko 2019). Research done in Pakistan by Norton and Kamal, 2003, "revealed a widely-held belief that English was a gateway to development and perhaps even a key to "equalizing the perceived power/prestige of Pakistan in its relation to the rest of the world" (as cited in Norton, 2010, p. 5). This perceived avenue of gaining entry to power circles appears everywhere, from Pakistan to other developing nations. Admission to this power appears to be through language expertise, adherence to standard English, and *native-like* fluency. While language expertise may be fairly straight forward, the concepts of standard English and native-like fluency begs clarification.

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Who is the "Native Speaker"?

The ever-sought-after *native speaker*. Often idealized and seemingly regarded as the holder of a target language's truth. This one notion, the legitimacy of which has been critically questioned in recent years, has an apparently profound influence on one's perceived acceptance and belonging within the English Language Community. Whether we affirm the existence of a true native speaker or believe it to be an institutional construct which "'exists only as a figment of linguists' imagination'" (Paikaday, 1985, as cited in Farahnaz Faez, 2011, p.12), the prevalence of this idea

is very real in the minds of language learners. Chief among the attitudes regarding NESs2 is the

idea of a "birthright" to the language (Parmegiani, 2012). Rooted back in concept of "mother

tongue", the birthright belief posits that the person's first language at birth is their "designated"

language (Rudolph, N. 2013). There has been a fair amount of inquiry into the attitudes

surrounding the idea of Native Speakers. Rampton, in his influential article *Displacing the*

Native Speaker, proposes the following five beliefs about the Native Speaker within educational

circles.

> **1.** A particular language is inherited, either through genetic endowment
> or through birth into the social group stereotypically associated with it.
> **2.** Inheriting a language means being able to speak it well.
> **3**. People either are or are not native/mother-tongue speakers.
> **4.** Being a native speaker involves the comprehensive grasp of a
> language.
> **5.** Just as people are usually citizens of one country, people are native
> speakers of one mother tongue (Ramption, 1990, p. 99)

These beliefs seem to hold weight. In a study by Faez (2011) the question: "are you a native

English Speaker?" was posed to 6 diverse teacher candidates in Canada. The initial and most

consistent reaction across participants was confusion. In Sandy's case, her first language was

Italian, however, she had received an English education, so her technical proficiency in English

effectively exceeded her skill in Italian. However, since she identified herself as *Italian*, it

seemed difficult for her to call herself an NES. Interestingly, those who worked with her did not

hesitate to identify her as native speaker. It could be that her lack of accent and comprehensive

knowledge of the language made her speech indistinguishable from those of other accepted

NESs (Faez, 2011).

---

2 NES refers to a Native English Speaker

Another instructor, Gaby, responded to the question in this way:

> *Well, at home it's French Catholic, that's my background and in the town where I come from about 45% are French and 55% English. But I've always moved in areas where English was sort of the dominant language. So that's probably why when people ask me what my first language is, I'm confused because I speak English, I understand it and I read it. I have no problems with it, but at home, in my family, we all speak French. We speak English at times as well"* (Faez, 2011, p. 388).

In Gaby's case, she actually had a mix of inherited and affiliated connection to the point where the NES tittle almost felt like a forced paradigm. To resolve this ambiguity of belonging, she tried to break down her overall affiliation and experience of the language. Like Sandy, other participants with mixed lingua-cultural backgrounds seemed to use different factors to find a place on a spectrum rather than accepting or denying the title. The two participants with no resistance to answering the question were Ann and Grace. Ann had a clear inherited familial and experiential connection to the U.S. and so automatically claimed herself an NES. Grace, on the other, was from China and claimed native speakership of Mandarin even though her skills in English were substantial. The opinions of peers often echoed the self-perceptions of the teachers, however, peers seemed more generous, allowing language skill to play a significant role in whether someone qualified as an NES.

In Rudolph's 2013 article *Negotiating Halil,* he recounts the journey of Halil (pseudonym), a "self-identified international doctoral student, researcher, and teacher from Turkey" (p. 133). He was educated in English and later pursued an MA in teaching English. During his master's program he became increasingly aware of, what he terms, the *NS Fallacy*. In recent years, he has become a voice advocating for a more inclusive definition of language ownership; taking into account the additional bias that the existing beliefs about NS project upon English: with an "idolization of native speakers as ideal English teachers" (Wei, 2016, p. 102). He joins a growing

group of linguists who assert "that speakers' own ideological stances toward their linguistic

identities should be more significant than the label they are given by others" (Hassan, 2011)

Whether we ascribe to the paradigm or not, the beliefs regarding the NSs and NNSs are clearly

prevalent as an accepted idea/concept. The next question seems to be whether these beliefs are

problematic. Rampton (1990) posits that the fallacy indeed presents a problem and summarizes

his stance with the following:

> 1 They spuriously emphasize the biological at the expense of the
> social. Biological factors doubtless do count in language learning,
> but they never make themselves felt in a direct and absolute way.
> Their influence is only ever interpreted in social context, and so to a
> considerable extent, they are only as important as society chooses to
> make them.
>
> 2 They mix up language as an instrument of communication with
> language as a symbol of social identification. (Rampton 1990)

He is not alone in his critique of the Native Speaker, with many saying that the NNESs/NESs

dichotomy is "more of a social construction than a linguistically based parameter" (Higgins,

2003, as cited in Hassan 2011). Norton, in the 2011 article *Identity*, differentiates the two main

camps of identity/language theorists; explaining that *structuralists* see a homogenous socially

constructed meaning for each language symbol; whereas, *post-structuralists* see power as a

multi-faceted lens from which numerous people could regard the same symbol in countless ways

(p. 319). From a post-structuralist perspective, the identity is a much more fluid concept. We

now have linguists theorizing that there may be a way to allow any person, regardless of their

background to claim legitimate knowledge and affiliation to the language in a way which does

not compel the assimilation of one NS communities' mannerisms, accent, or culture (Mahboob,

2010). On a more personal level, it would seem that while the concept of the Native Speaker is

globally prevalent, most have had little in the way of truly processing what is meant by the term.

Considering the power ramifications of labeling oneself an NS, this type of processing is deeply significant. Clearly, within this concept of the native speaker is a cognitively constructed language identity with an "assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication… (e.g. English)" (Rezaei and Khatib, 2014, p.527). It is on this level of language identity, that many of the shifts of ownership take place. It is here that the language educator may find their role.

Standardization

The most compelling argument in defense of the limited ownership and the continuation of an exclusive *native speaker* is standardization. The argument for standardization tends to say that for the quality of the language to continue there must be an agreed upon *true* English. In Widdowson's 1994 plenary speech, he likened the concept of standardization to champagne; which is only considered authentic when it comes from a specific area of France. Much of the concepts regarding standardization are built on a similar philosophy where what qualifies as legitimate English is strictly limited and any changes must be made through *legitimate* channels. All other variants of *English* are then sub-par if they do not conform to those parameters (Widdowson, 1994).

Grammar has been referred to as a kind of *shibboleth* which marks a person and may result in inclusion or marginalization within the English-speaking community (Widdowson, 1994). In a crucial study by Wei (2016), a questionnaire was given out to a group of 85 undergraduates at a University in Beijing, investigating the perspectives and beliefs students held about English and English learning. The results of the study showed a clear slant to regarding Native Speakers as

the bearers of *good* English. There appeared to be a general idea "that English with Chinese flavors in pronunciation and manner of expression was not endorsed and were mistakes that should be corrected according to native-like ways" (p.110). This indicates an assumption that the *gate holders* of English are ascribed that status through birthright and inherited allegiance. So even NNES[3] who have high proficiency in the language as well as deep affiliation and affective belonging are then excluded from any legitimate say in English's evolution. It should be noted that not all contexts share this desire to align themselves with standard English. Countries and contexts with a history of English colonization seem a bit ambivalent to English and its's cultural/political connections. However, countries without English post-colonial history, like China, may "aim to promote Standard English in order to align themselves with the Western powers and gain an entry into the global market" (Norton & Pavlenko, 2015, p. 6).

In Widdowson's 1993 Plenary address, he makes the argument that the protections surrounding the standardization of English should be reassessed; fully questioning who the cultural possessors of English are. In his address, he acknowledges the fears and implications of broadening what is considered *standard.* Certainly, there are factors such as: intelligibility, replication, and integrity of English as a distinct and recognizable language. Despite these fears, he believes there is still a way to keep the integrity of English while allowing for particular, recognized adaptations.

[3] Refers to a Non Native English Speaker

> "*I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience...But it will have to be a new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding.*"

> (Chinua Achebe, 1975, p. 62 as cited in Widdowson)

Wei (2016) lays out the *pluri-centric* approach: which allows for the combining of these two realities: the integrity of English as well as deviations which allow for personal ownership and expression. This approach to language ownership and identity "would enable each learner's and speaker's English to reflect his or her own sociolinguistic reality rather than that of a usually distant native speaker" (p. 102). This framework could be conducive with an *international standard* however this standard would not be directly correlated to any national identity.

Discussion and thoughts for Practitioners

I've become convinced that there is no feeling more empowering than knowing that "I have every right". Although we must preserve an agreed upon standard of English so that the language remains distinct and recognizable, admission to the language elite should not be dictated by mere inheritance. If English is the language of the world, we must offer the world a seat at the table. This includes legitimizing variants of English created by groups of English speakers who did not learn English as their first language. So, if we legitimize the so call *North American English*, why not Venezuelan English or Lebanese English?

With this new wave of understanding globalized English, the practical application for both practitioners and the academic world at large must be considered. There is clearly a great disparity between what learners perceive as their right of ownership, and what is actually

available to them. Language material highlighting the current experiences of ELLs should (continue to) be developed; bringing forward the challenges L2 speakers of English face in contrast to those regarded as native speakers. A good example is the book *Cross-cultural research and methodology series, Vol. 9. Intercultural interactions: A practical guide* by Cushner & Brislin, (1996), in which they present various problem-solving scenarios where international dynamics and issues are discussed. Loneliness, isolation, and marginalization are addressed and explored which may not only increase a learners' expertise but also allow them to process their own experience and internalized connection with the language and community. Instructors should also consider the audio and reading discourse samples they utilize in class to see if it represents both native and non-native interactions. It's important that many contexts and attitudes be displayed to legitimize the diversity of English speakers (Andreou & Galantomos, 2009). As we bring the realities of the English-speaking world to the classroom, our learners can discover for themselves where they fit in the world and decide if they see themselves as legitimate speakers or not. To see calculable changes in our students' connection and ownership, the instructor must shift the attitude and awareness towards this topic so that it is brought to the table in a safe and productive way.

The actual manifestation of ownership is a diverse and personal process. Not all students will embrace connection and interaction with the language. What individuals desire, from the language can vary widely. Some may strive for personal, emotional, and even artistic expression in their target language. Others may wish to take advantage of their voice within English power structures: educational, socio-political. Some learners may even decide to defer inclusion within the inner community and focus on increasing their language expertise. Regardless of what the

learner chooses, ultimately the learner should arrive at an informed choice and develop some possession of the language. To encourage this type of processing, we need educators to acknowledge this inner world, belief system, and existing internal narrative already at place in our learners and sensitively and purposefully lead conversations which may allow them to question their preconceptions and engage with English in a more empowered way.

It's this type of motivational basis which appears to lead to more positive feedback loops between the teacher, peers, and academic work (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2012; Skinner et al., 2008; Reeve, 2012). For example, more engaged students tend to join peer groups who are more engaged and seek more motivational and academic support from teachers who likewise tend to respond to that engagement with warmth and support. This response and availability of a teacher in-turn enables learners to handle the stresses of learning, failures, and frustrations which come with language learning (Skinner, Pitzer, & Brule, 2014). In contrast, unengaged students tend to catalyze negative feedback loops where they may join peer groups of learners with similar disaffected attitudes and illicit less support and even negative energy from the teacher (p 18).

Below I have included some avenues, inspired from personal experience, which may allow discussions of power, ownership, standardization etc. These may create opportunities for students to process their language connection. These opportunities may be through artistic or personal expression. It may also allow for increased autonomy as they attempt to share and even defend their thoughts on a particular subject. While they explore and problematize, their competence of the language grows as they interact with it in nuanced ways. These suggestions are meant to be a starting point from which to brainstorm and consider how ownership might be

addressed in one's context. It's important to recognize that the implementation of such activities may be of little help if the learners do not feel safe and supported. No amount of curriculum innovation will substitute an instructor's awareness of context pedagogical sensitivities (Medgyes, 1999 as cited in Andreou & Galantomos, 2009). The burden falls upon the educator to catalyze these positive feedback loops, which allows for this type of interaction.

Facilitating Discussion and Debate to Examine Ownership

Certainly, ownership is a personal process, however there is much that can happen in class which can help affirm learner frustrations and encourage consideration of their options and realities. Engagement within the conversations should be prioritized and can be facilitated by offering real life examples of learners and teachers: displaying NNES dialogue, public speaking, artwork so that they notice linguistic features which might be different that the NES. Once they are noticing, engagement soon follows (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) and the conversation can be scaffolded as learners explore. Let them know the legitimate access they have to ownership/micro ownership, the power of affiliation, and affective belonging. Affirm and validate each learners' existing, inherited allegiances. Discuss some of the current frustrations and even limitations that many ELLs face. What disadvantages do they feel they have that "native speakers" do not? Encourage learner awareness and agency and allow them to explore these avenues, even integrating the topics into the planned activities. Some students may wish to pursue the exploration more than others.

Some of these topics like legitimate access, micro-ownership, privilege, access could all potentially be integrated into a debate. Debate requires an interesting mix of free-form discussion as well as systematic logical thought. I've noticed that some learners thrive within the free form

discussion yet struggle when given a more formatted process. By allowing learners to have plenty of agency in the process, a happy medium is found where learners are challenged to communicate what is on their mind and are not overly frustrated by the lack of words or grammatical structure available to them. It's important that they feel a sense of empowerment and autonomy with the task rather than resignation and defeat. This is another avenue from which competence and relatedness can grow, as well as challenging one's autonomy in the language.

Example Discussion and Debate Topics:

- What disadvantages do they feel they have that "native speakers" do not?

- World Englishes or Standardization?

- English Globalization

- Non-Native Teachers?

- Are accents important?

I'm happy to see more resources with relevant discussion content for adult learners. As I primarily work with adults, I am fairly ignorant of current trends of discussion topics among school aged ESOL students. Certainly, the exploration of ownership is not relegated to 18+ adults. This sort of processing should happen at any age of language learning where one is creating a schema for language identity, connection, and personal empowerment. A resource which I have found particularly helpful is *ESL Library*, which is a paid subscription database for English language instructors. From compelling stories, to discussion-based lessons, to debates, they continue to design lesson plans which invite learners to have a voice on significant topics. Their debate series includes many power and language topics, for example, this sample page from the *English Globalization* debate.

ESL library.com

English Globalization
Mini-Debates

Discuss

Work with a partner or in small groups. Discuss the following questions.

1. At what age do you think children should begin to study a second language in school?

2. What do you think is the best way to teach English to children?

3. Why do you think English has become the global language?

4. Besides business and technology, what other industries function primarily in English?

5. How is the spread of English throughout the world affecting local languages and local cultures?

6. What can countries do to preserve their local languages?

7. Do you think it is important for English language teachers around the world to try to maintain a standardized form of English? Why or why not?

8. In what ways do languages change throughout time? Give some examples.

9. Nowadays, many young people are traveling to foreign countries to teach English as a second language. Do you think this would be a good job? Explain your answer.

Debate

Below are two topics to debate in small groups or pairs. Your teacher will tell you if you will be debating for or against the idea. You will have ten minutes to prepare your arguments.

Topic #1

With English becoming the global language, the loss of national languages and cultures is inevitable.

Topic #2

In order to facilitate effective international communication, the mixing of local languages with English should be discouraged and teachers everywhere should use one global standard for English language instruction.

Write

Choose one of the questions from the Discuss section above. Then write a paragraph in your notebook stating your own opinion.

4

(ESL Library, Red River Press Inc., 2019)

Writing to Deepen Self Expression in English

> **"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."**
> — **Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

My first year teaching an adult-only class, I began to take more chances by challenging my learners to go deeper. In a simple poetry assignment, low-intermediate learners were given a format beginning with "I AM". One learner from Venezuela wrote an absolutely heart-wrenching poem about the difficulties her home country had faced. Instead of using "I am" with descriptors of herself, she wrote as though she were the country itself. Choked by emotion, she asked me to read it to the class. I attempted to do it justice before breaking down in tears myself. The sincerity and pain were poignant in the piece and beautifully expressed despite some grammar and spelling flaws. She was under no obligation to go that deep, however, by doing so, she was able to express an important part of her identity in an unfamiliar language in which she still struggled for academic proficiency. Despite these hurdles of language, she made the words her own, and the class picked up on the main idea conveyed in the poem. As the other learners listened and tried to understand the words of a fellow student, a growing relatedness and belonging to the language and class community were fostered.

Writing prompts are incredibly adjustable and can be made to fit whatever learning objectives an instructor may be working on. Allowing open-ended journaling may help language and cultural frustrations to emerge, while more direct discussions regarding language, power, identity, marginalization etc. may encourage learners to research and problematize the issues in an argumentative or opinion essay. Some learners may even be motivated to continue inquiry of a language problem with inquiry in a research piece.

Writing and "I Am" Poem

Writing an "I Am" Poem

MODEL

FIRST STANZA
I am (2 special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something of curiosity)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

SECOND STANZA
I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA
I understand (something that is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

EXAMPLE

I am polite and kind
I wonder about my kids' future
I hear a unicorn's cry
I see Atlantis
I want to do it all over again
I am polite and kind

I pretend I am a princess
I feel an angel's wings
I touch a summer's cloud
I worry about violence
I cry for my Gram
I am polite and kind

I understand your love for me
I say children are our future
I dream for a quiet day
I try to do my best
I hope the success of my children
I am polite and kind.

(ReadWriteThink, 2004)

Example Writing Activities and Topics:

- Topical blogposts with a self-selected inquiry or topic

- Personal journaling

- Storytelling: self-selected or based off of a prompt or image

- Poetry

- Research projects with self-selected topics

- Argumentative essays inspired from discussion or debate topics

Many more avenues are afforded by listening to videos or reading articles on the topic. I've

found that learners are more than willing to engage in these materials and offer their thoughts.

Any input we bring to class will be cognitively processed by our learners, whether they seem intensely engaged or not. Writing tasks offer a methodical, artistic medium from which a learner can expose their position, story, emotion for their own benefit or to be shared with others. Manipulating the words for their own purpose and agenda. It's their words to do with as they will. A beautiful expression of ownership.

Final Thoughts

I have been deeply encouraged by the inquiry being done on this subject. Practitioners are increasingly becoming aware of the disparity between the power of ownership afforded *native speakers* compared to that of English speakers of other languages. Research into the resulting interaction and engagement with the language are also being brought to the table. Whether the motivation of such discussions is spurred by pedagogical concerns or empowerment, this is clearly a vital issue worthy of attention both from individual practitioner and the educational power structures. If we as educators can at least reveal the ability of each learner to become an owner of English in some way, the educator would be doing their part in opening the door to the power and connection afforded by ownership.

It is overwhelming to consider what goes into social attitudes and perceptions, as well as the implications for an individual's access to community power and resources. Social politics, culture, localized history, psychological needs, allegiances, standardization: ownership has a breadth of significance on our individual and collective psyche. While I believe that this overview and scope on the topic allows us enough information to make some informed decisions in our classrooms; it is also just the tip of a much greater iceberg. Certainly, more work needs to

be done to study the connection between ownership and the resulting engagement, artistic expression, efficacy, and motivation. I would specifically be interested in the artistic connection with a new language's words as a medium for self-expression. As with any artistic medium, one must both make allowances for the uniqueness of that particular medium and also bend it to the artist's will. With time and skill, the artist will be able to express more dimension and depth with their work.

There is much ground to cover practically if we are to reach a point where the monolingual and native speaker bias is quieted. The native speaker as the end-all goal of language learning is a deeply entrenched idea; one which will not go away soon without some conscience effort to create an alternative solution. The marginalization of the NNES teacher must be considered as one of the challenging hurdles we must overcome if we are to work towards future where any learner can become a true owner of English (Calafato, 2019). A useful resource for delving deeper into the paradigm of NNES Teachers is *The NNEST Lens: Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL* edited by Mahboob (2010), which compiles research and perspectives from some of the leading minds in the field regarding this issue. Further firsthand experience accounts can be found in Hassan's 2011 dissertation *Unheard Voices: Narratives of Developing TESOL Professionals in a Graduate Discourse Community.* Although some of the more detailed aspects of the NNES teacher experience is beyond the scope of this paper, it is imperative to understand the teacher experience at large, especially if one is generally conferred the title of 'native speaker'.

If we offer the English language as true global language: belonging to the world, then we must allow the world to take possession of it. If not, English as an international language effectively becomes a mere power ploy of exerting British, U.S. and others influence through the use of language. On the other hand, we must acknowledge the populations who possess an inherited allegiance to English and will naturally want to defend the language they feel a sense of loyalty to. We are at a critical juncture, questioning the old order with the hopes of adapting the language to fit the needs of the world today. We should certainly affirm those with long-standing inherited allegiance and felt possession of English. History, tradition, language is all tied up in one's identity and should be affirmed. However, we must be careful to not ascribe hierarchical prestige based merely on this history and tradition. As instructors we are, in some ways, propagators of this language. Are we propagating an international language meant to empower and unify the world, or are we still using the age-old strategies of colonizers: teaching language as a means of exerting language superiority? What we acknowledge, discuss, and foster in our classrooms are important in these trends of change. Allowing learners to call out misconceptions and explore what the true and current realities are, respects them as learners, encourages language engagement, and protects them from being involuntarily marginalized.

"The migration process, has been meaning a 'going back' to my 'home' to then find it again, to see with new eyes, to recognize it is even more special than it was and having more personal power… in connecting with words that can express my personal Art.

"I want to go home" means: *I'M DISCOVERING A NEW SIDE OF ME where I can be at maximum power.*

- English Language Learner, Alejandra, 2019

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Appendix

Poem by English Language Learner Alejandra [Formatted to reflect the original work, without any corrections]

SOMETIMES
I WANT TO
GO TO MY HOME
'a veces quiero IR a mi hogar'.

By: Alejandra Colina

SOMETIME I WANT TO GO TO MY HOME

I don't miss the house.

I miss the Smells,
* My grandmother's food, that made me smile and feel loved.
* The perfume of my dad's, when I smelled it, I could feel protected.

I miss my places.
The house where I grew up,
The place where I used to played with my cousins,
The coffee where I was to spend time with my friends.
Across the bridge and enjoy de breeze on my face, was one of the sensations that I loved.

Sometimes I want to go to my home

To see MY PEOPLE.
whom with I could spent a long time talking and laughing while I could
Felt the emotional warmth of talking about each one, that was no price.

SOMETIMES, to go… to smell,
Just to smell what I ALREADY KNOW.

SOMETIMES I WANT TO GO TO MY HOME

To Running near of my lake while the breeze was touching me and then Drink a ''cepillao.

SOMETIMES I WANT TO GO TO <u>MY HOME</u>

No, My Home it's not Venezuela...
My House it's what I've been building and discovering   inside of me.

SOMETIMES I WANT TO GO TO <u>MY HOME</u>

To ask myself:

What do I hurried myself to grow up?
What do I wanted to do?
What was supposed to be the dream of my life?

Besides all these questions the most important one that is I ask myself:

Where is my Home?

To be Honest, I'm still discovering what is or where is…
But, in fact, I have been discovering a beauty
that has been HIDING behind of this special journey:

* Life is a collection of memories, feelings and actions.

* Doing what makes me feel full

*The material things don't define the person I am. There are people with whom I
connect and learn from them

Exists a space full of possibilities to being anything that I want

So… This bring me to conclude that:
The migration process, has been meaning a 'going back' to my 'home' to then find it
again, to see with new eyes, to recognize it even more special than was and having
more personal power.. in connecting with words that can express my personal Art.

I WANT TO GO TO MY HOME, MEANS:

IM DISCOVERING A NEW SIDE OF ME where I can be at maximum power.