Questions to think about...

What does it mean to own a language? What does it look like?
When does a language shift from a “second” or “foreign” language to a personal, meaningful part of the learner’s identity?
How does the learner develop language ownership?

Content: Language Ownership

If ownership is the goal, I have to understand it (I can’t own it if I don’t understand it). Language begins with having a need to convey meaning. This continues with each learner. There must be a reason to learn a language.

Learners should be able to play with language, construct meaning together, have freedom to develop a use for the language in their lives/their purposes.

Based on this process, it seems like key considerations in language ownership involve establishing meaning, motivation or personal investment/purpose in the language, co-construction, and a sense of play. So where do these come from? Do students walk into the classroom with these elements in them or does the teacher need to instill or activate them? To what degree, if any, are these factors embedded in the language itself?

Process: Small groups create a language

Imagination + humor + cooperation

Once we started engaging with humor, it was easy to be creative and take risks- anything was possible.

I have to establish a group norm before we start working.

This workshop reinforces the idea that learning and reflection often entails risk- but the rewards are worth it.

My response to the process: This is an interesting outcome of this workshop that I didn't expect to play as key of a role as it did. The environment of humor and a good group dynamic weren’t necessarily carefully planned or created. I’m thinking about how much of this comes from the SIT learning environment, the experiential cycle, or the individual learners. In planning this workshop, I had the expectation that the groups would work together and I tried to facilitate this by framing the task as an “experiment” and communicating that mistakes were acceptable. By taking risks in the structure and process of my presentation, did I somehow subconsciously model those attitudes for my participants?
Implications

Learners need to take an active role in constructing language.
Facilitate the comparing in the classroom. (L1 and L2).
Provide opportunities to play with the language for safe risk-taking, but structure the “play” with a purpose for making meaning.

It seems like students come into the classroom with brains programmed to make meaning. They also have an understanding of the organic nature of language to a certain degree. I can’t help but wonder if it's the classroom environment that is instrumental in facilitating or inhibiting these factors in language learning.

A bit of background
My thinking on this topic stems from the area of English as an International Language (EIL). I have taken to thinking about the idea of language ownership and what it means in today's more global culture. I am interested in finding ways to make my students believe they are co-creators of the English language and that it is no more mine than theirs. Ultimately in planning for this session, I pared down EIL into an activity that I wanted to try to stimulate discussion and thinking about this topic. My planning and ideas centered more around the content (and its possibilities) rather than the process, which surprised me as an integral and vibrant component of the workshop. I am still thinking about what this means for my language classroom and hope that you will continue to do the same.
The ________________ Language

I. **Letters**
Organize the letters of your language. Decide on an “alphabetical order” for them. Consider the number of consonants and vowels that your language will have. Do letters have multiple forms, such as a capitalized and a lowercase version?

II. **Structure**
Think about how your language works. Is it read left to right? How are words ordered in your language? How is your language similar to or different from English or other languages?

III. **Sounds**
What does your language sound like? Do any of the letters create new sounds when they are paired (diphthongs)? How do the sounds change? What is the rhythm and intonation of your language?

IV. **Words**
Create a word for a thing in your language. Practice writing and saying the word.

V. **Phrases**
Add an action and a description to your word, applying your structure rules and decisions.

VI. **Sentences**
If you haven’t already, develop your phrase into a full sentence or group of sentences. *You will be teaching this sentence to others, so be sure you have a strong understanding of your language and have a plan to help others learn it.*
Think about the following questions and be ready to discuss them with your small group. You may take notes as needed.

- How did your group go about completing the tasks?

- What was easy and why?

- What was challenging and why?

- How did you develop ownership of your invented language? What strategies did you use? What did you notice other people doing?

- How can you relate this experience to the language classroom?