

Identity Orientation in an English as a Lingua Franca Context: A Case Study

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Abstract

This work presents an exploration of individual and collective identity orientations in an English as a Lingua Franca context. Subjects of the study were forty-two non-native English speakers studying in different American universities. A mixed approach was implemented using a questionnaire and an interview. The exploration consisted mainly in identifying the effect of English proficiency, ethnic origin, and gender on the participants' individual and collective identities orientations. To this end, the subjects were stratified based on their English proficiency, their ethnic origin, and their gender. Descriptive results indicated a tendency of the whole sample towards associating with individual identity. Data from the interview revealed a dynamic, hybrid identity orientation of the participants. With regards to the impact of English proficiency on the participants' identity, although the participants felt part of a global community speaking English, it did not seem to have any effect. In fact, a boundary seemed to be adopted between English use and identity. However, some significant dissimilarities with regards to some dimensions relating to individual and collective identity orientation were revealed among the Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants as well as among males and females. Though not generalizable, these findings are worth considering when extending the research to a larger population. Other variables can also be considered for future research.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca; individual and collective identity; English proficiency; ethnicity; gender.

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1. Introduction

Being a global language, English as a lingua franca (ELF) has become the world's language of cross-cultural communication and awareness [1] as it is used in various sectors; including, instruction in higher education [2], commerce, technology, politics, and diplomacy [3]. English proficiency, therefore, opens the doors for post-secondary [4] and social and economic success [5]. In this regard, being the main language used in multinationals [6] people yearn to learn English from childhood to adulthood not only to be able to understand and communicate in a new language, but also to have access to better job opportunities [7]. Besides, adopting a homogeneous language for communication, ELF, in this case, also plays an important role in determining the identity of a person [8].

Language is perceived as one of the most powerful ways of shaping a person's identity and cultural background [3]. In fact, among the many representative elements that define identity, language seems to be the most flexible and predominant one [9]. As of 2021 English is the most spoken language in the world with 1.348 billion people. It is used as a lingua franca by people from different cultural backgrounds in order to communicate in different fields; including education, science, engineering, information technology, medicine, tourism, business, media, and social networking sites [10]. People use English regularly which makes it predominant over other languages [2]. As a global language, English led to the development of a new identity where fluent English speakers consider themselves not merely part of a certain group [11], but also may feel "more at home" in English as part of their own linguacultural community or even as an international Non-Native Speakers (NNS) community"[12]. Such feelings of belonging to a given group not only lead to acknowledging similarity that helps in the shaping of identity, but more essentially neglects differences [9]. It is often perceived that adopting English as a lingua franca may harm the cultural identity of a given group [3]. However, it is also perceived that in this context of globalization adopting English as the main language of communication not only shapes the identity of NNS but also of native speakers (NS). In fact, Dörnyei and colleagues [13] pointed out to the fact that "English is rapidly losing its national cultural base and is becoming associated with a global culture" (p. 9). In the last few years there has been a growing interest in exploring the relationship between language and identity. Yet, due to the intricate type of relationship between the two notions and the rapidly evolving context and people's perceptions, further research is required.

As part of a larger research project investigating English as lingua franca and its relationship with individual and collective identities, this paper contributes to the literature by bringing a new perception of the phenomenon of identity orientation. More particularly, it explores whether the English as a lingua franca (ELF) context affects individual and collective identity orientation in a sample of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who use ELF for different communication purposes. To this end, this work seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Does English proficiency affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?
2. Does ethnicity affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?
3. Does gender affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?

The remainder of this paper goes as follows. The second section presents the literature review about English as lingua franca, individual and collective identity, English proficiency, and ethnicity and gender identity construction. The third section outlines the methodology adopted to answer the three research questions. Then the results and discussion section follows. Finally, the paper ends with conclusions, research limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

This section is divided into three parts. First it gives an overview of English as a lingua Franca and defines the concepts related to identity; including individual and collective identity. Then it outlines variables in relation to individual and collective identity orientation; including English proficiency, ethnicity, and gender as mentioned in the research questions.

2.1. English as a lingua franca

English has spread so widely that its non-native speakers exceed its native ones [14]. Fiedler [14] notes that language is determined by power, and like the previous ruling languages of the past; including Latin, the choice of English as a means of global communication is due to “its speakers’ dominance in military, economic, political and cultural spheres” (p. 202). With globalization, English has acquired a unique position as a lingua franca in intercultural communication worldwide [15]. ELF means using English as a common language among speakers from different linguistic backgrounds in a specific communication context [16]. As Jenkins [12] suggests ELF is perceived “as an emerging English that exists in its own right and which is being described in its own terms rather than by comparison with English as a native language” (p. 2). In this regard, NNS are no more perceived as unsuccessful speakers of English [17]. Rather, they are considered as competent speakers who use the language to serve their communicative needs while at the same time retaining their own cultural identity [14]. In fact, ELF is “neither a culturally impoverished nor identity neutral form of communication” [18] (p. 46). It is therefore important to investigate the issue of the identity of speakers who use English as a lingua franca for communicative purposes when they are engaged in ELF communication.

2.2. Individual identity

The concept of identity is quite complex and hard to define as several components can interact together to give a sense to the term ‘identity’. One basic definition according to the third edition of Oxford dictionary of ‘identity’ is “the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.” Individual identity definition is based on individual internalized characteristics [19]; including how one person perceives himself or herself [20]. Although the self seems to be at the forefront in defining individual identity, an individual identity can be interconnected with social and collective identities [19]. In fact, contrary to the constant aspect of identity as defined by the Oxford dictionary, identity is not fixed; it is rather an evolving concept, depending on the environment and the culture in which one is born into which regularly shape and determine its interpretation [21]. Social identity theorists believe that people take on a different identity in each different interaction

[22]. As an ever-changing concept, identity can be retrieved from knowledge that is stored in the mind and active at some point of time [23]. Individual identity develops from the network of roles and relationships that an individual is rooted in [24]. One of the examples of multiple identities is given by Oyserman and colleagues [22] who point out to the emergence of a religious identity carrying relevant values and goals in particular situations. Other contexts can trigger other identities. For example, someone's occupational identity might emerge at the workplace, but that same person's identity can show up as a family member during a family gathering or crisis [23]. Identity is dynamic, multidimensional, subject to ongoing change [25, 26] and contextually negotiated [23]. People have different identities which are not only based on the context and the knowledge stored and retrieved at a particular time, but they are equally based on membership to a social group known as social identities or collective identities [22].

2.3. Collective identity

Often used interchangeably with social identity, collective identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept that came from knowledge of his/her membership in a social group, together with emotional significance attached to it" [27]. Like individual identity, collective identity can emerge in different contexts; including but not limited to, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationalism, social movements, as well as gangs, sports and celebrity fans, and occupational communities [28]. Collective identity involves a shared sense of 'we-ness' and collective agency [19], which are organized and streamlined by social groups [29]. A collective identity prevails whenever there is a positive, shared sense of self among a group of people, establishing therefore a framework for individuals' perceptions of who they are and how they ought to respond to particular situations [30]. Thus, sharing the same interests and characteristics through increased immersion and engagement among the group members indirectly expresses a strong and long-lasting connection among them [31]. Similar to individual identity, collective identities seem to be defined through regular interactions with potential identity groups over virtual spheres enabled by the online world and IT tools; including computer mediated communication (CMC) [32], and smart phones [33].

Collective identities are not static, they are dynamic, multidimensional and subject to change [25, 26]. People can have multiple identities relating to different social or geographically-defined groups [34]. Identifying with a given group is mainly based on seven dimensions according to Ashmore and colleagues [35]. These include: 1) self-categorization or identifying oneself as a member of a particular group, 2) evaluation which is partly based on the person's self-evaluation, and partly on the person's perception of the other group members' views, 3) the extent to which a particular group membership is important to the individual's self-concept, 4) attachment to the group, 5) social embeddedness, 6) behavioral involvement with the group, and 7) cognitive awareness which involves "the degree of knowledge a person has of a group that directly implicates his or her identity with the group as a whole." (p. 94). However, collective identities can easily dissolve. Many cases were found to lead to such a dissolution. Potter and colleagues [36] give the example of a lack of shared history of collaboration between the group members. Differences in the personality traits of the group members contribute to individualism as mentioned by McCarthy and colleagues [25]. Identity perception, therefore, reflects how the psychological and social aspects of the self are linked together to create a self-concept [37].

2.4. Variables in relation to individual and collective identity orientation

This section outlines three main variables in relation to identity orientation. In line with the three research questions, three variables were explored in relation to identity orientation; namely English proficiency, ethnicity, and gender. The selection of these variables is based on practicality issues, and prominent data revealed from the participants' background. Some variables; including students' major were excluded due to the negligible effect they might have on the outcome [38]. In fact, most of the participants (39) were undergraduates and, therefore, starting a college major is assumed not to have a significant effect on identity orientation.

2.4.1. English proficiency and identity orientation

Language is not only a vehicle for communication, it is also a tool to foster one's identity [39]. Language has often been associated with a social community [40]; whereby the speaker identifies his/her belonging to the community through a certain accent, vocabulary, or discourse [39], and maintains a sense of power and pride [41]. When speaking English NNS are also negotiating and reorganizing their identity in relation to the rest of the world [42]. In this regard, two main attitudes towards identity may emerge. For instance, some NNS of English can assume their cultural identities in ELF contexts, especially when it comes to retaining their particular L1 accents [12]. On the other hand, other NNS of English may prefer to express their belonging to a wider global ELF community, and affiliate themselves to a global identity. However, sometimes the expression of individual or collective identity among ELF speakers may be associated with an identification with both local and global contexts [43] producing, therefore, dynamic and hybrid identities [18].

As aforementioned, contradictions in identity construction exist in ELF communication. In one study, for example, Sung [44] reported that students at a Hong Kong university perceived a complex relationship between accent and identity. In fact, some students yearned to speak English with a native-like accent to express their identities as competent L2 speakers of English; on the other hand, other students showed the need to keep "a strong L1 accent for identity construction while at the same time ensuring international intelligibility in ELF" (p. 63). In another study, ELF speakers showed some flexibility in identity formation in relation to their interlocutors [45]. The findings show that the participants switch between maintaining their own linguistic behavior based on their cultural characteristics to a more flexible way of language use, facilitating thereby knowledge sharing and appreciation for their interlocutors, and adopting a "fluid attitude towards language boundaries and identities" (p. 140). With such an attitude, they strike a balance between intragroup cohesion with intergroup consensus by creating a short-term in-group membership.

2.4.2. Ethnicity and identity orientation

Ethnic identity is a multidimensional construct which reflects not only nation and race but also self-categorization, commitment to a group, specific values and beliefs that are associated with the group, as well as a positive or negative perception of the group [46]. Knowledge and use of an ethnic language, in particular, have also been considered to be significant characteristics of ethnic identity [47]

Ethnic identity is “by nature dynamic, flexible, and dependent upon groups, contexts, situations, political climates, social relationships, interactions, and more” [48] (p. 214). A lot of people have diverse affiliations and more complex identities as a result of migration and integration [49], modernization or globalization process [50] and interacting on online social networking sites [51]. However, despite such tendency towards ethnic identity homogenization, there are exceptions where individuals at some point stick to their original ethnic identity.

A relevant ethnic identity becomes salient depending on the context. In fact, sometimes emotional factors enter into play and provoke ethnic identity salience [52].

When individuals are exposed to news about their own country, they are more likely to have stronger affective responses to the related content than when exposed to news reports about another country [52]. Yip and Fuligni [53] reported that American adolescents of a Chinese origin felt more “Chinese” on days in which they took part in ethnic-related events.

2.4.3. Gender and identity orientation

Whether in a physical or virtual environment, males and females behave differently, and this is due to the way their identities have been constructed by family [54] as well as the cultural context that defines favorable traits of women and men [55].

Gender differences can also be viewed from two other levels: individual and collective. Depending on the context, gender identity can refer to the individual level as ‘me girl’ or ‘me boy’, or as ‘we girls’ and ‘we boys’ when children think of themselves as members of a gender group [56]. In this context, traditionally women and men have been given different roles inside and outside the family [57].

Based on these individual and collective gender identity associations, identity construction becomes internalized and impacts social networks and future interactions [54].

When it comes to speaking English in an ELF context, findings show that gender is a significant factor with regards to one’s own accent. In fact, women are more likely to favor native-like accents more than men and are willing to dedicate much time and effort to do so [58]).

Although gender differences in labor force participation significantly decreased in Europe during the early 21st century [59], women still seem to be imposed to maintain their feminine identity dimension in several parts of the world. In fact, exclusion or lack of women participation in the formation of national identity; including political, social and economic dimensions nationally and across countries [60] is not an unusual fact.

In this context of divergent perceptions of NNS’ identity perceptions in ELF contexts, there is a clear necessity for additional research to meet this objective. This study aims to further research in this domain by exploring the identity orientation of a group of NNS students in an ELF context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and context

A total of 42 NNS participants answered the questionnaire. They were studying in different universities in the USA, and due to the context, they were using English as a lingua franca daily for studying and communicating. Most of them were undergraduates (39) and only 3 were postgraduates. Twenty-three students were from the Business and Management major, and nineteen students were from the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) major.

To answer the three research questions, a cluster sampling method was used. The participants were thus classified based on their gender, nationality, and English proficiency. The sample consisted of 22 females and 20 males. They were in their twenties with 21.05 as the mean age for females, and 20.60 as the mean age for males. Most of the participants were Hispanic (22), while the other ones (20) were of two main origins; including the MENA region and Eastern Europe. For practicality reasons, they were classified into 2 major ethnic origins: Hispanic and non-Hispanic. With regards to English proficiency, the mean of English proficiency in terms of number of years studying and using English was 8.73. To this end, the participants were classified as highly proficient speakers with a mean score ≥ 8 (22), and less proficient speakers (20) with a mean score < 8 . The participation in this study was voluntary.

3.2. Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were used. Quantitative data were obtained by means of a questionnaire, and qualitative data by means of a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section one explores the participants' biographical data. Sections 2 and 3, adapted from Cheek and Briggs [61] relate to individual and collective identity orientations. Some questions relating to attitudes towards English adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery [62] were inserted in section 2 and 3. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1: "Not important to my sense of who I am" to 5: "Extremely important to my sense of who I am" was used to explore individual and collective identity orientations. Answering with values ranging from 1 to 3 denoted a lack of relevance of the dimensions to the participant's individual and collective identity, whereas 4-5 indicated that the dimensions were relevant in defining the participant's individual and collective identity. The questionnaire items were subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach alpha. The semi-structured interview aimed to gauge more information related to the concept of individual and collective identity the participants were likely to feel in this context of lingua franca. To this end, five females and four males; including three from the MENA region, three from Eastern Europe, and three from Latin America were randomly selected for an online interview. Data analysis was carried out by identifying recurring key words and themes from the participants' answers.

3.3. Procedure

A pilot study was carried on 8 students to check if any item needs to be more clarified. The questionnaire was sent via Google forms to reach the maximum number of students. Cronbach alpha was calculated. The results

revealed a high reliability of the students' answers in the two levels of the identity questionnaire; namely the individual orientation section and the collective identity section with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.816 and 0.818; respectively.

The questionnaire items were automatically registered in a Google sheet form. The data were coded for an easy processing. Descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the participants' biographical data as well as to define each respondent's individual and collective identity orientation. This was carried out by calculating the mean and standard deviation of every respondent's answer, and identifying the participants' most important individual and collective identity dimensions. For each independent variable; i.e., English proficiency, ethnic origin and gender, two groups were assigned depending on the participants' answers. For example, based on the participants English proficiency in terms of number of years learning and communicating in English, the participants were divided into proficient and less proficient groups, biographical data, helped identify Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups, and males and females. Statistical tests; including t-test, and p value of $\leq .05$ were used to compare the difference between the means of each population. Note that the greater the T value, and the further it is from 0 in the positive or negative direction, the greater the difference between the two groups' means [63]. These statistical tests helped interpret the significance of the effect of the three independent variables in the predictive model relative to English proficiency, ethnicity, and gender on individual and collective identity orientation. Data from the questionnaire were triangulated with data from the interview.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Findings about the participants' English proficiency in terms of English learning/communication experience revealed that there are significant differences between females and males (Table 1). In fact, females had a longer experience learning/communicating in English ranging from 3 to 21 years ($M= 11.00$) than males, whose English learning experience ranged from 1-17 years ($M=6.25$).

Table 1: English Learning/communication experience.

Gender	Number	Mean	St deviation
Female	22	11.00	5.82
Male	20	6.25	4.37

With regards to data pertaining to individual and collective identity orientations, results indicated that the participants have a tendency towards associating themselves with individual identity ($M= 4.08$) rather than with collective identity ($M=3.62$). Table 2 indicates the main dimensions of each of the individual and collective identity that had higher means. The main dimensions of individual identity that showed up in this set ranged in order of importance from personal goals and hopes for the future ($M=4.76$) to personal self-evaluation, and

private opinion of oneself ($M=4.2$). With regards to collective identity, the highest scoring dimensions were “race and ethnic background” and “places where I lived and I was raised in” ($M= 4.04$), respectively, and “feeling of pride in my country, being proud to be a citizen” ($M= 4.02$). While the standard deviation for the individual identity components shows a normal distribution of the values, where the data, more closely clustered around the mean, are more representative of the participants’ answers, the standard deviation for the collective identity components is more skewed, showing a wide variability in the participants’ answers. This means that the participants are more prone to identify with some values related to individual identity than with those related to collective identity. A dynamic identity orientation was revealed from the qualitative data. In fact, the participants stressed the individual dimension in their definition of identity besides a recognition of the importance of belonging to a group, which turns out to be their home community. The individual identity orientation was highlighted through recurring keywords ranging from “who we are, “personality characteristics” to “being unique and different”, and “having one’s own goals and characteristics”. The collective identity dimension was stressed by seven participants. In fact, participants from Eastern Europe (3) viewed their identity as being defined by certain values, standards or beliefs determined by their community. Besides, they felt the need to belong somewhere. The same feelings were confirmed by one participant from the MENA region who felt rather “safe and included when they were part of a group.” The Hispanics shared the same feelings as they (2) felt that belonging to a community “is important because it helps them to build a stronger identity and self-esteem. Normally individuals that do not form part of any group are depressed or unhappy somehow” as mentioned by one of them. The third one said that being part of a certain group gives them a sense of belonging and pride.”

Quantitative data, which reveal a higher focus on individual identity orientation agree with McConnell [23] who suggests that the context triggers certain types of individual identities. In the current case study, the participants are students who are in the USA in order to study and build their future careers. As a consequence, personal emotions, dreams, imagination, goals, and sense of self seem to be important to these participants in defining their individual identity. The hybrid identity orientation revealed from the interview agrees with Pennycook [43] as the expression of individual or collective identity among ELF speakers produces a dynamic perception of identities.

Table 2: Students’ most important determining dimensions in individual and collective identity orientations.

Identity level	Determining dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation
Individual identity	Personal goals and hopes for the future	4.76	0.48
	Personal values and moral standards	4.61	0.79
	Dreams and imagination	4.54	0.63
	Emotions and feelings	4.45	0.86
	Thoughts and ideas	4.42	0.73
	Self-knowledge, my ideas about what kind of person	4.38	0.85
	Personal self-evaluation, and private opinion	4.2	0.97
Collective identity	Race or ethnic background	4.04	1.05
	Places where I live or where I was raised	4.04	1.08
	Feeling of pride in my country, being proud to be a citizen	4.02	1.15

4.2. Individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context

4.2.1. Research question 1: Does English proficiency affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?

The effect size of English proficiency means < 8 showing lower proficiency, and means ≥ 8 showing higher proficiency on the participants' individual ($t=0.830$, $p=0.412$), and collective identity ($t=1.490$, $p=0.144$) was not significant (Table 3). Both females ($M=2.86$; $\sigma = 1.52$); and males ($M= 2.5$, $\sigma = 1.39$) did not seem to be prone to imitate native speakers' accent. The findings from open-ended questions relating to frequency and situations of use revealed that living in the USA imposed on the participants the use of English on a regular basis. In fact, the participants used English on a daily basis for different situations; including communicating with housemates, classmates, professors, teammates, co-workers, while shopping, and when playing online games. Consistent with Jenkins' [12] findings, the participants in the current research tend to retain their particular L1 accents maybe because they assume their cultural identities in ELF contexts.

Qualitative data revealed that the participants felt positive about their experience in the USA as students using English as a lingua franca because it was an enriching experience, helped them grow as persons, and made them feel more open to others. Besides, they felt being part of a global community as they were able to communicate with native speakers as well as people from different nationalities. Answering the question whether the ELF context and the use of English has affected their identity, all of the participants said that English did not affect their identity although they felt integrated in the ELF environment. They, in fact, put a barrier between using English and their identity as mentioned by one Eastern European who said: I'm only speaking their language, I don't change my personality just because I'm speaking English. Participants (2) from the MENA region felt that they used English but still felt part of their home community because "it still matters for them.". Another participant from the same region preferred to converse with their family in their L1. The three Hispanics felt that using English has in no way affected their identity. In fact, contrary to other people who tend to change because of the environment, they have a strong sense of who they are. Similarly, five out of nine participants felt they still used their L 1 accent, as for them it shows their roots. In addition, having a native-like accent would require a longer stay in the USA as mentioned by these participants.

Table 3: English proficiency and individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context.

English proficiency	Individual identity orientation					Collective identity			
	Number	Mean	ST deviation	T value	P value	Mean	St deviation	T value	P value
Higher proficiency	22	4.128	1.04	0.830	0.412	3.79	1.18	1.490	0.144
Lower proficiency	20	3.991	1.22			3.44	1.35		

The findings also seem to replicate to a certain extent Gu and colleagues's findings [45] where the participants seem to adapt a flexible way of language use to facilitate knowledge sharing while establishing a certain boundary between their English proficiency and their individual and collective identity. It seems therefore, that

English proficiency does not play a significant role in the participants' two dimensions of identity. Data from the interview revealed that for these participants, speaking English in and ELF context made them identify as global citizens, adapting therefore, dynamic and hybrid identities, a finding that agrees with Pennycook [43] and Baker [18].

4.2.2. Research questions 2: Does ethnicity affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?

Data from the questionnaire and the interview seemed to reveal similar outcomes, with certain different preferences towards the identity dimension each group was more likely to feel close to. The participants' answers in the questionnaire showed a significant effect of ethnicity on both individual ($t = -1.70$; $p = 0.09$) and collective identity ($t = -2.37$; $p = 0.02$) (Table 4). Data from the questionnaire revealed that while both ethnic groups tend to relate more to individual identity than to collective identity, they differed in the degrees they identified with each dimension. The individual identity dimensions for the Hispanic group range from personal goals and hopes for the future ($M = 4.68$); personal values and moral standards ($M = 4.59$), dreams and imagination ($M = 4.40$), emotions and feelings, thoughts and ideas ($M = 4.36$), respectively, and "self-knowledge, ideas about what kind of person I really am" ($M = 4.27$). The Non-Hispanic group, on the other hand, scored higher values for all the individual identity orientation, more particularly in personal goals and hopes for the future ($M = 4.85$), "the ways I deal with my fears and anxieties; and "my feeling of being a unique person, being distinct from others" ($M = 4.1$); respectively. In the collective identity orientation, the non-Hispanic group again scored higher. In fact, "places where I live or where I was raised was more highly valued among the non-Hispanic group ($M = 4.63$; $\sigma = 0.49$) than the Hispanic one ($M = 3.61$; $\sigma = 1.16$).

The findings seem to agree with Carvalho and Luna [52] showing emotional factors provoking certain ethnic identity dimensions' salience. Emotional factors and values seemed to play a significant role in both ethnic groups' individual identity orientations with different degrees, but also, they seemed to be more important for the non-Hispanic group collective identity orientation. This might be explained by the geographic proximity of the Hispanic group to their countries which is not the case for the non-Hispanic group; provoking thereby a sense of attachment to one's place of birth; a finding which agrees with Yip and Fuligni [53].

Table 4: Ethnicity and individual and collective identity orientation.

Ethnic group	Number	Individual identity orientation				Collective identity orientation			
		Mean	ST deviation	T value	P value	Mean	ST deviation	T value	P value
Hispanic	22	3.95	1.19	-1.70	0.0961	3.40	1.31	-2.37	0.0228
Non-Hispanic	20	4.22	1.06			3.96	1.15		

The interview data, mining the participants' particular perception of their identity, revealed no effect of ethnicity on identity orientation. In fact, with an exception of 2 participants', one from the MENA region and another from Latin America, similar orientations towards the collective identity dimension among both ethnic groups were identified. In line with Woodward [37], it seems then that these participants seem to navigate between the

psychological and the social aspects that trigger certain identity orientation depending on the situation.

4.2.3. Research question 3: Does gender affect individual and collective identity orientation in an ELF context?

Data from the questionnaire and from the interview reveal different outcomes. Quantitative data show that gender has an effect on identity orientation, as well as the specific dimensions related to both the individual and collective identity each gender selected. Table 5 shows a significant effect of gender on both individual ($t= 2.74$; $p= 0.0091$) and collective identity ($t= 2.42$; $p= 0.0199$). Individual identity seems to be more conspicuous among females ($M=4.28$; $\sigma = 0.99$) than among males ($M= 3.86$, $\sigma = 1.25$). Significant effects were found at the level of emotions and feeling dimensions with a mean score of 4.72 for females and a mean score of 4.15 for males. Females and males also diverged in thoughts and ideas dimension where females scored higher ($M= 4.72$) than males ($M= 4.1$). Conversely, data from the interview revealed no difference between males and females with regards to identity orientation. In fact, both males and females seemed to prioritize individual identity over collective identity although they still value it. This explains the skewedness in the descriptive statistics of the respondents' answers showing a wide variability in the collective identity orientation, whereby the participants seemed more likely to identify with some values related to individual identity than with those related to collective identity. With regards to collective identity, the main dimensions that were valued by the females according to quantitative data were "my language, such as my regional accent or dialect or a second language that I know ($M= 4.45$; $\sigma = 0.67$); whereas males picked 'my race and ethnic background' ($M= 3.85$, $\sigma = 1.19$) as the most determining factor in their collective identity orientation. Data from the interview did not really reveal much difference from the quantitative data. In fact, except for two females, the other females (3) think that their collective identity orientation is still conspicuous in their L1 accent when speaking English. Findings about the individual identity dimension agree with Carter [54] who suggests that women and men are assigned different roles from family and society. Therefore, their identity construction becomes internalized where a more emotional trend among females in the individual identity orientation is observed than among males. Findings related to the collective identity dimension, whereby females tend to associate with the linguistic aspect and males favor race and ethnic background, agree with Jenkins [12], Sung [42] and Tariq and colleagues [39]. In fact, maintaining one's L1 accent, vocabulary, or discourse plays a significant role in the speaker's identifying with the community they belong to. In addition, they also display a sense of power and pride in the ELF context [41].

Table 5: Gender and individual and collective identity orientation.

	Gender		Individual identity orientation			Collective identity orientation			
	Number	Mean	ST deviation	T value	P value	Mean	ST deviation	T value	P value
Female	22	4.28	0.99	2.74	0.0091	3.86	1.11	2.42	0.0199
Male	20	3.86	1.25			3.36	1.38		

5. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations for future research

The study explored identity orientation in an ELF context of a group of 42 students studying in different universities in the USA. A mixed approach was used to get a better understanding of the identity orientation among these participants. Results from the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the participants were more likely to favor individual identity orientation. An exploration of effect size was carried by measuring the impact of three independent variables; namely, English proficiency, ethnicity, and gender role on individual and collective identity orientations.

The findings revealed different outcomes. English proficiency did not impact the two identity orientations among the participants. In fact, the participants seemed to put a boundary between their identity and English proficiency as they assumed that their use of English was only for practical reasons like studying, communicating with peers and friends, and for everyday life. However, a certain significant effect was observed from the ethnic origin and gender on both identity orientation dimensions. With regards to ethnicity, the non-Hispanic group tended to value individual identity more than their Hispanic peers. Collective identity orientation was also more visible among the non-Hispanic group who expressed certain feelings and a sense of attachment to their home countries and places of birth. Data from the interview, however, showed that although the individual identity orientation was mostly salient among the participants, seven of them felt more attached to their own culture and mother tongue, and still felt their identity part of their local community.

From a gender perspective, quantitative data showed a higher score in both individual and collective identity orientation among the females. The most important dimensions that confirmed this difference were related to females' tendency towards emotional factors as well as thoughts and ideas in the individual identity orientation, a tendency that was less observed among males. With regards to the collective identity orientation, qualitative data revealed both gender orientation towards identifying with a community. The quantitative data, however, showed more particular dimensions related to the females. In fact, they were more likely to favor language, more particularly their L1, as an important factor in their collective identity, whereas males showed a tendency towards their race and ethnicity.

The findings of this research should be interpreted with care. In fact, due to the small size of the population, in addition to the small differences between the means of the clustered samples often leading to some overlapping of dimensions between them, the findings cannot be generalized.

Part of a larger research on language and identity, the current case study presented a few examples of identity perception of a group of NNS of English in an ELF context. A clear cut perception of identity, which is an evolving concept, in such a context still seems hard to define. Future studies should consider larger samples. Also, samples can be clustered according to other variables; including students' major, sport field, and/or occupations. The investigation was limited to only individual and collective traits of identity which do not exhaust all identity traits. Other identity traits can bring more insightful findings. With regards to statistical analyses, besides, mean, standard deviation, T-test, and P-value, other tests should be performed to explore more relationships between identity orientation and independent variables.

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