Native and Non-native Speaking Teachers of Italian: an exploration of differences in students’ and teachers’ perceptions.

Rebekah Sturniolo-Baker – BA Hons, MA

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Abstract

In recent years there has been much discussion, and even debate, among scholars regarding the advantages and disadvantages of being taught by a native or a non-native speaking language teacher. The notion that native speakers are the best language teachers has a long-established history in the field of language teaching, and is known as the native speaker fallacy. It has even had an effect on hiring practices in many language institutions around the world, with native speaking teachers often being given preference over non-native speaking teachers. This in turn has led to a response from non-native teachers who have sought to show that they can be equally good teachers on their own terms.

This study explores the different perceptions that students of Italian at university level in Australia have towards their teachers who are native speakers of Italian, and those who are non-native speakers. It also examines the perceptions that these native and non-native teachers have of themselves. Online questionnaires were administered to both students and teachers, and then one-on-one interviews were carried out. Through these methods both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered and analysed.

What is clear from this study is that students do perceive differences in being taught various aspects of the language by a certain type of teacher; and that ultimately not only do they acknowledge these differences between their native and non-native teachers, but they appreciate the opportunity to be taught by both. Teachers are also aware of their strengths, and of the challenges they face in connection with their linguistic background, and they also appreciate that students can benefit from being taught by both native and non-native speaking language teachers.
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Introduction: Globalization, English language teaching, and the native speaker fallacy

With the exponential growth of technology during the twentieth century leading to faster and more economical means of transport and communication, even across vast expanses of the globe, people from many different nationalities and cultures have the opportunity to interact with each other on a daily basis. As a result of this the world has become somewhat smaller, the next city or town no longer a journey but merely a short trip. For many people, particularly those living in Western societies, the idea of living one’s whole life in the place where they were born and never travelling, or indeed living, elsewhere is unheard of. The relative ease with which one can travel to a different country has made the issue of foreign language teaching and learning extremely relevant in today’s world.

Even with the increase in technology, language remains a completely human-based phenomenon. The nuances and subtleties of the thousands of languages in existence mean that one can never completely remove the human element when attempting to learn or teach a different language. One only has to look at the various software programs that exist on the internet that attempt to translate text from one language to another to see the inaccurate and often comical results that occur. Language is a cultural artefact, and culture is not easily reduced to set of prescribed rules and norms, like a mathematical formula or chemical equation. The teaching and learning of a language therefore will, for the foreseeable future, remain the province of human teachers and students for all but the most basic of phrases.

English language teaching

Throughout the world English is one of the most widely taught languages. Not only are there a significant number of native speakers (according the website of the British Council, approximately 375 million), but many countries use it as a lingua franca; and so the demand for teachers of the English language is very high. According to Crystal (2003), English language teaching has become one of the “major growth industries around the world in the past half-century” (p. 112). He quotes figures from the British Council which state that in 1995-6 there were over 400 000 candidates around the world who sat for English language examinations.
administered by them. He goes on to say that these figures have steadily grown, and that “with thousands of other schools and centres worldwide now also devoted to English-language teaching, the Council estimated that the new millennium would see over 1000 million people learning English” (2003, p. 113). This also means, however, that there are simply not enough native speaking English teachers to take on the teaching load. In fact, Canagarajah (1999) estimates that more than 80% of the world’s English language teachers are not native speakers of the language.

A situation exists, therefore, where there is a distinction made between teachers who are native speakers of the language, and those who are non-native speakers. While this is certainly very prevalent amongst English language teachers, it is also true amongst teachers of Italian. Many universities in Australia employ both native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian. Some of these non-native teachers have no Italian background at all, while others may be second or third generation Italians who, having grown up in Australia, learnt Italian as a second language.

This thesis is concerned with exploring this distinction between native and non-native speaking language teachers. These teachers all have different attributes, some of which are influenced by their linguistic background, and these are often observed by their students. It is these observations that will be examined in detail for this study.

The native speaker fallacy

This issue of native versus non-native language teachers has certainly manifested itself with regards to hiring practices which have been noted in many English language schools and universities, where, in some particular countries, it has been observed that there is a general preference for employing native speaking English teachers as opposed to non-native ones. Canagarajah (1999) recounts a conversation he had with a Korean student of his. This particular student was close to finishing her MA in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) at a university in the United States and she was asking for his advice about the job market for English language teachers in the US. She felt that there was no way she would be able to get a job teaching English back in Korea as language schools there just do not hire non-native speakers.
Two leading researchers in this field are both non-native speaking teachers of English: Peter Medgyes, who is Hungarian, and George Braine who is Sri Lankan. Medgyes’ research is considered to be one of the first to examine in detail the issue of native and non-native speaking language teachers, and as such will be discussed in detail in Chapter One. Braine (1999), like the student mentioned above, recounts his experiences of discrimination as a non-native speaking teacher of English. In the early 1980’s when working in the Middle East he observed that there were disparities in salary between native and non-native speaking teachers. He noted that teachers from Britain, most of whom only had three or six month teaching certificates, were paid double the amount that highly qualified and experienced teachers from the Indian subcontinent were paid. This continued in the United States where he applied for a position as a tutor teaching English and was turned down despite having fourteen years of experience, while some of his native speaking classmates were given a job despite having no teaching experience at all.

Braine gives a detailed overview of the background of the non-native speaker teacher movement, and discusses what he terms “the native speaker – nonnative speaker divide” in the first two chapters of his 2010 book (pp. 1-16), and also illustrates the challenges that have been faced by non-native speaking teachers of English over the years. He describes the native speaker movement as having its origins in the United States, specifically at a Colloquium held during the 30th Annual TESOL Convention in Chicago in 1996. A number of non-native speaking scholars at the conference presented “highly charged, mainly personal, narratives” (2010, p. 3), which led to the formation of a Caucus that aimed, among other things, to “create a nondiscriminatory professional environment for all TESOL members regardless of native language and place of birth” (p.3), and to “encourage research and publications on the role of nonnative speaker teachers in ESL and EFL contexts” (p. 4).

Wu (2009) further corroborates this view of a preference in learning institutions for native English speaking teachers. He claims that in Taiwan, even though there are more non-native speaking teachers than native speaking teachers, it is the natives that seem to be more favored. He observes that language institutions which offer English language programs “often promote themselves as employing native English speaking teachers” (p. 45), and that “advertisements for teaching positions often require that applicants are native speakers” (p. 45).
This belief on the part of employers, and sometimes also students, that foreign languages should only be taught by native speakers is labeled by Phillipson (1992) as the “native speaker fallacy”. According to Phillipson, “the native speaker fallacy dates from a time when language teaching was indistinguishable from culture teaching, and when all learners of English were assumed to be familiarizing themselves with the culture that English originates from and for contact with that culture” (p. 195). In this setting a native speaker was seen as ideal as they possessed both the linguistic knowledge and the cultural knowledge to fulfill this assumption. Phillipson also notes that at this point in time (the earlier half of the twentieth century) technical resources such as tape recorders and sound equipment was not available, and so students were not able to be exposed to a range of native speaker models. The only model that they could have was their native speaking teacher.

Phillipson questions this belief that the ideal language teacher has to be a native speaker. As he states, the belief has always been that native speakers are the best at speaking the language fluently and idiomatically, are aware of its cultural aspects, and perhaps most importantly, are the “final arbiter(s) of the acceptability of any given samples of the language” (1992, p. 194). In Phillipson’s view, however, it is possible to impart all of these skills, even to non-native speakers, through appropriate teacher training. Good teachers, as Phillipson puts it, are “made”, that is, through their own efforts and the efforts of others they can be trained to be competent teachers. Through the appropriate training, teachers can be given an insight into the language learning process, and how to best explain the structures and usage of a language to their students. The issue of whether or not they are native speakers should not, therefore, be regarded as the sole criteria for being a skilled language teacher. In fact, as Phillipson points out, an untrained native speaker teacher can potentially do more harm than good to their students. A student may easily become frustrated and disillusioned if he/she feels that they are not learning the language properly, especially if he/she feels that this is due to the teacher’s incompetence. Phillipson indicates that teaching in general, in fact, also relies very much upon other qualities, such as training, knowledge of the topic, and a teacher’s ability to be engaging and enthusiastic, and encourage their students to want to learn more. This thesis too challenges the notion of the native speaker fallacy. While it examines other aspects such as teacher training, the amount of time that they have taught, and their level of
engagement with their students, it is focused on examining the perceptions surrounding native and non-native speaking teachers and their performance in the classroom.

The Italian context

While the concept of the native speaker fallacy originated from the teaching of English, its principles can certainly be extended to the teaching of other languages. As mentioned above, there are many Italian departments in universities around Australia that employ both native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian, from Italian and non-Italian backgrounds. A major difference of the Italian in Australian context is that while a teacher of English as a Second Language will often encounter students from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the students studying Italian at an Australian university generally do not display such diversity. As will be seen in later chapters of this thesis, the majority of students who participated in this study were Australian-born and native English speakers. In addition to this, the teachers of Italian tend to come from less diverse backgrounds, in that they are most commonly either Italian born, Australian born from an Italian background, or Australian born with no Italian background. Whilst teachers of Italian in Australia have not necessarily had to face the same bias in hiring practices as many teachers of English have, both native and non-native speakers face challenges in the classroom due to their linguistic background, which will be explored and discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

In addition to hiring practices, the so-called divide between native and non-native speaking teachers (as characterized by Braine) has been observed by students. He devotes the fourth chapter of his book (2010) to summarizing studies that have been conducted analyzing the perceptions of students towards their native and non-native teachers. In view of the native speaker fallacy, and the perceptions of students regarding their native and non-native teachers, it is not at all surprising, then, that there have been so many studies undertaken, particularly in the last decade, looking at the characteristics of native versus non-native speaking language teachers; and the vast majority of these have been concerned with the teaching of English. There have been no significant studies carried out, to my knowledge, in the field of Italian language teaching, which is what my study is based on; therefore the literature review in Chapter One is based on studies regarding the teaching of English. In these studies students’ perceptions of their teachers, both native and non-native, have been
examined, as well as the teachers’ perceptions of themselves in the classroom, and their students’ reactions to them. That is, what are the advantages and/or disadvantages of being taught by one over the other? Are there any major differences in being taught some aspects of a language by a native or non-native speaker? And ultimately, is there an ideal choice for a language learner in terms of the linguistic background of their teacher?

Luksha & Solovova (2006), when considering what makes a good language teacher, acknowledge that “both native and non-native English speaking teachers have certain intrinsic advantages and disadvantages but it depends on the personality and their abilities” (p. 98). The topic of native versus non-native speaking language teachers is highly relevant in today’s world, and in the following chapter I intend to examine all of the issues that have been examined in previous studies regarding the teaching of the English language throughout the world by both native and non-native teachers. This topic is also applicable to the field of foreign language teaching in general and not just the teaching of English. My aim in this thesis is to highlight this issue in relation to the teaching and learning of Italian at university level in Australia.

Specifically, the thesis will identify and describe in depth the perceptions that students have towards their teachers who are native speakers of Italian and those who are non-native speakers, and also the perceptions that these teachers have of themselves in regards to their linguistic background. It is about recognizing the unique qualities that both native and non-native speaking teachers bring to the learning experience, and how these qualities are observed and experienced by their students. This study is not an attempt to make a comparative assessment about native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian, but is rather an ethnographic description of these teachers. This study will also investigate how the teachers themselves identify their own qualities, and how they perceive that these qualities are linked to their native or non-native status. In addition, this research will explore the challenges that are faced by native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian as a result of their linguistic and cultural background. This study will fill a gap in the literature where no such study has been done before by extending the research carried out in the field of English language teaching into the area of Italian language teaching at tertiary level in Australia.
This thesis will approach the topic in the following way. Chapter One is a literature review, focusing on the research that has been conducted regarding perceptions of native and non-native speaking teachers, and therefore providing a background to this research. The research questions for this study will be outlined in detail at the end of the chapter. Chapter Two will explore the concept of the native speaker, the history of the term, and how it can be defined. In the third chapter I will discuss in detail the methodology chosen for this study, in particular highlighting the reasons why the particular approach to gathering data was taken. Chapters Four and Five are a detailed analysis of the data gathered, from the students’ and the teachers’ point of view. Finally, Chapter Six will provide a detailed discussion of the data, with a final Conclusion at the end.
1.1 Medgyes’ Pioneering Work

One of the first in-depth attempts to study the issue of native versus non-native speaking language teachers was the series of studies conducted by Peter Medgyes in the early 90’s in the area of English as a second language. As his study was the first to set out to examine this issue in a methodical and systematic way, many of the subsequent studies have referred to his work, or have used his study as a guideline or starting point. Medgyes’ work, therefore, is an excellent starting point for a survey of the literature in this field, and I feel that it is important to begin with a detailed look at his ground breaking study.

Medgyes, a native Hungarian and non-native speaker of English, had been teaching English as a second language for a number of years. His motivation for examining the issue of native versus non-native speaking teachers stemmed from his own frustration at feeling that as a non-native teacher he had to constantly strive to be as proficient as a native speaker, when in fact as a non-native speaker he had unique qualities that he could offer his students, and that he could be just as competent a teacher on his own terms. In 1983 he published an article entitled *The Schizophrenic Teacher*, where he lamented the fact that non-native teachers often suffered from a lack of confidence in the classroom, which was due to the fact that non-natives “are both teachers and learners of the same subject” (1983, p. 2). He also pointed out that there are certain cultural barriers that lead a non-native speaker to certain “errors of appropriateness” (1983, p. 5). He affirmed, therefore, that in order to combat this lack of confidence non-native teachers “ought to take it for granted that they are irrevocably non-native speakers and view this as matter-of-factly as possible” (p. 5). He went on to say that as learners of the language, non-native speakers are particularly well placed to teach the techniques of how to learn the language, that they are particularly aware of the difficulties that their students may face, and of any errors that they may make (p. 5). In other words, non-native teachers should focus on the strengths that they have as non-native speakers and not focus purely on attaining a native-like competence.
Medgyes’ major study, entitled The Non-Native Teacher (1999), first published in 1994, and then again in 1999, aimed to examine the major differences in teaching attitudes between native speaking teachers of English (“NESTs”) and non-native speaking teachers of English (“non-NESTs”). He stated that his primary concern was to examine the characteristics of non-native speaking teachers by comparing them to native speaking teachers. Medgyes’ hope was that as a result of his study he would be able to suggest ways for non-native speaking teachers to become better teachers on their own terms.

He acknowledged that language proficiency was an extremely important factor for any teacher, particularly non-native speaking teachers, both in increasing their confidence as teachers and in aiding their effectiveness in the classroom. He also, however, regarded teacher education as crucial, and for Medgyes the term “teacher education” does not just refer to formal teacher training, but also includes “any voluntary, self-generated activity which a teacher, NEST or non-NEST, pursues with the intention of enhancing her professional expertise” (1999, p. 109). Beyond that, he considered that the ability of teachers to be reflective about their own teaching practice, and therefore to be able to change and/or modify it if necessary, to be the most important factor for a teacher’s success.

Medgyes formulated four hypotheses for his study:

- that native and non-native speaking teachers differ in terms of their language proficiency;
- that native and non-native speaking teachers differ in terms of their teaching behaviour;
- that the discrepancy in language proficiency accounts for most of the differences found in their teaching behaviour;
- and that native and non-native speaking teachers can be equally good teachers “in their own terms” (1999, p. 25).

To test these hypotheses Medgyes carried out three surveys using both questionnaires and interviews to gather data. Survey one was administered to 28 teachers of English employed at the American Language Institute, based at the University of Southern California.
25 of them were native speakers of English, and three of them were bilingual. They all held either an MA or a PhD, or were working towards attaining their postgraduate degrees. Their range of experience in teaching English ranged from two to thirty-four years, and interestingly thirteen of them were teaching English with no formal teaching qualifications. All were asked to complete a questionnaire, and then seven were interviewed as a follow-up.

Survey two involved 216 respondents from ten different countries. The survey was designed to be administered to both native and non-native speaking English teachers, however only 8.3% (18) of the respondents claimed to have English as their native language. The group from this survey taught in a range of environments, from primary school right through to university. They completed the questionnaire, however this time there were no follow-up interviews.

Survey three covered 81 non-native speaking teachers of English, all of whom were native speakers of Hungarian. As with survey one, they all completed written questionnaires first, then Medgyes completed follow-up interviews with ten of them. In this way he was able to combine both a quantitative and a qualitative approach into his study. All three surveys, therefore, were able to cover a wide range of both native and non-native speakers from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with differing amounts of experience and working in many different countries.

Medgyes found that non-native teachers were quite easily able to identify their difficulties as English teachers. The top five areas where they had difficulty as declared in this survey in the realm of language proficiency were, in order from most frequent: vocabulary, fluency, speaking, pronunciation, and listening. The least common area where difficulty was reported was writing (p. 31). In survey three, 59.2% of respondents felt that their English had improved in the time since they had graduated; that is, while teaching it. 65.4% of the same group also believed that they were still making progress, that they had not reached the end of their journey in learning English. Of those who felt that they were not making any progress, vocabulary and speaking/fluency were again seen as the most common problem areas (p. 32). On the other hand, for native speakers fluency was an area where they scored very highly. The strongest area for non-native speakers was most definitely grammar, and Medgyes attributes this to the fact that it is more concrete, more learnable, than vocabulary or
pronunciation (p. 35). He also believes that as a result of this relative strength in grammar, non-native teachers tend to be much stricter on grammatical errors than their native counterparts. This is a view supported by a study undertaken by Sheorey (1986) on the perception of written errors by native and non-native speaking teachers of English as a second language. Sheorey found that overall the native speaking teachers were more tolerant of errors than the non-natives, as the non-native teachers tended to deduct more points on average for the same errors. Medgyes even states that some non-native teachers are “preoccupied with (grammatical) accuracy to the point of obsession” (1999, p. 35); although the more highly proficient non-native teachers tend to have a more balanced view on the learning process. They realise that grammar is just one part of the study of a language as a whole.

Having an understanding of the teachers’ language proficiency (even though declared) was important to Medgyes because he was concerned about whether or not non-native teachers felt that their language difficulties hindered them in their work (i.e. teaching English). A majority, 69.2%, claimed that they were not hindered at all, or only hindered a little, a figure that surprised Medgyes somewhat. One reason he posits for this surprising result is that non-native teachers do not, in fact, see language proficiency as a very important factor in their success as a teacher. When he then compared these results with the respondents’ teaching qualifications, he found that the better qualified teachers felt less “hampered” (1999, p. 49) by issues of language proficiency. Medgyes felt that there could be two reasons for this. Firstly, that their university education gave them a solid knowledge of English; and secondly that receiving more actual teacher training showed them that their ability to use English was only one aspect of the teaching experience. On the other hand, if a teacher has received less training then he/she might be more anxious about their language skills, either because of less linguistic competence, or less teacher training, or both.

Medgyes’ work was able to shine a light on the issue of native and non-native speaking teachers, their strengths and weaknesses as they themselves perceived them, in a concrete and systematic way. Where before there had been some anecdotal evidence and much speculation, his study set the scene for further research into the perceptions that both teachers and students have in regards to the native versus non-native debate.
In the following section I will examine those studies that have come after his. Some of these studies have focussed, like Medgyes, on teachers and their own observations and insights into their teaching practice. Other research has focussed on students and questioned them about their opinions and viewpoints towards their native and non-native speaking teachers. I intend to explore how both sides of the native/non-native issue have been investigated and analysed by various researchers, from Medgyes until the present day.

1.2 The Teacher’s Perspective

In the following section I will examine aspects of the native versus non-native debate that have been explored in previous studies from the teacher’s perspective. This survey of the literature in the next two sections will cover research undertaken at both university level and secondary level. Although there are some differences between university and secondary education, there are also many common elements, and as such the research findings are equally relevant.

1.2.1 Teacher training

There are many factors that have traditionally been perceived as important in the process of learning and teaching a foreign language. Having a language teacher who has been adequately trained in teaching techniques, and who is well-prepared for their classes is extremely important. A potential teacher needs to be given training in classroom management skills and ways of effectively conveying knowledge to their students, and these methods need to be age appropriate. Beyond these practical skills, a strong desire to teach, a yearning to impart knowledge to others, is also traditionally seen as an important attribute for a successful teacher. The most engaging and motivating teachers are those who are not only passionate about their chosen topic, but enthusiastic about passing on this passion and knowledge to other people. When considering the characteristics of a competent language teacher, their level of training and preparation, as well as their personal drive to be a teacher, are often seen as fundamental. As mentioned previously in this chapter, Medgyes (1999) considered teacher education to be vital if teachers were to be successful in the classroom, whether native or non-native. He acknowledges that a high level of language proficiency is
key to the success of any language teacher, although he cautions against the belief that a “high degree of English-language proficiency alone is the guarantee for successful teaching” (1999, p. 109). He contends, however, that any teacher has the ability to improve their level of proficiency in the language through education. Furthermore, to give the best advantages teacher education needs to include both formal training, and learning that teachers take upon themselves to carry out.

Braine (1999) also discussed the issue of teacher training when describing his own experiences as a non-native speaking English teacher. He himself, while not a native speaker of English, has had extensive teacher training which includes two years at a teacher’s college, an MA in TESOL and a PhD in Foreign Language Education. For many non-native speaking teachers, academic qualifications become a necessity if they want to be employed in the education field, as they do not have that ultimate qualification of being born into a culture of the target language.

### 1.2.2 Proficiency in the target language

As discussed previously in regards to Medgyes’ work, the teacher’s level of competence in the target language is an important factor. By definition a teacher must know more than their students about their chosen topic; the teacher is seen as the ‘expert’ in the field. How, then, does one assess the extent and depth of a teacher’s expertise? It could be judged, amongst many factors, by level of experience, how many years a teacher has been using and/or teaching a particular language. Often this is also looked at on a more straightforward level by simply asking whether or not a teacher considers themselves to be a native speaker of that language, or whether they consider themselves non-native speakers who have also had to learn the language themselves. For many people this factor is the most important one in determining whether a teacher has the abilities and skills to be a competent teacher.

A study by Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) aimed to document the self-perceptions of a group of non-native speaking TESOL graduate students, who were also teaching English. One of the questions asked of the group was for them to rate their own command of English. Out of 17 respondents, only three responded that their command of English was “excellent”, whilst another eight claimed that their command of English was “good”. The remaining students described their English as either “average” or “poor”. Interestingly, though, when
then asked about how their proficiency in English affects their teaching, ten of the group responded that their teaching was “not at all” affected, or only “a little”. Only three of the student teachers claimed that their level of English proficiency affected their teaching “quite a bit” or “very much”, and four of them had no response. So while only a minority (three) of these non-native speaking graduate students felt that they could describe their English language skills as excellent, it was again only three who felt that their level of English had a great effect on their teaching skills. It would appear then that for these student teachers they feel that other factors have a more important effect on their performance in the classroom, such as their pedagogical skills, which was also a factor considered by Medgyes.

As previously indicated, Medgyes believes that teacher education is of paramount importance to success in the classroom, and this includes informal training, where the teachers take it upon themselves to improve their English language knowledge base. Medgyes (in Braine, 1999) acknowledges the importance of proficiency and states that “for non-native speaking English teachers to be effective, self-confident, and satisfied professionals, first, we have to be near-native speakers of English” (1999, p. 179). He believes, and has experienced through his own extensive experience as a non-native speaking teacher of English, that a strong proficiency in English engenders respect and confidence in students. If a non-native teacher has a strong English competency then their students will trust that they will have all the answers that they need to know. Medgyes goes on to say that “a good EFL teacher is not simply a teacher but the ambassador of the English language” (1999, p. 184). He highlights the fact that in the literature it is a generally accepted fact that a good teacher must be competent, if not near-native, in the target language. He cites Murdoch (1994), who describes language proficiency as the “bedrock of the NNS English teacher’s professional confidence”, and Lange (1990) who sees it as “the most essential characteristic of a good language teacher” (1999, p. 188). Clearly, therefore, a high proficiency in the target language is an important goal for any language teacher, but particularly the non-native one.

In their study of native and non-native teachers in Hungary, Arva & Medgyes (2000) note that one of the biggest advantages for a native speaking teacher is their superior proficiency in English. This was a “small-scale ethno-cognitive study” (p. 358), in which ten teachers at secondary schools (five native speakers and five non-native speakers) were observed through a video-recorded lesson, and then took part in a follow-up interview, in an
effort to examine the differences in teaching behaviour between the two groups. Arva & Medgyes maintain that this superior English proficiency allows native teachers to use the language spontaneously in class and in a range of diverse situations. And it is not only the students who are aware of this, but other non-native speaking teachers too. One non-native teacher commented that the native speaking teachers commanded respect from their students because their students had no other option but to speak English to them, as the teachers often had very little knowledge of Hungarian. And as the natives have such a high proficiency, in their students’ eyes they can do no wrong – “Natives can say anything. They are even forgiven for making mistakes” (p. 361). By contrast, according to Arva and Medgyes, non-native speakers lacked spontaneity in their spoken English and acknowledged that the areas of pronunciation, vocabulary and colloquial expressions were challenging for them. Arva and Medgyes affirm, however, that the non-native teachers in their study “took pains to make improvements” (p. 361) in their English proficiency.

In the following sections I will explore further the issue of proficiency amongst native and non-native speakers, and how this is explained in term of implicit versus explicit knowledge.

1.2.2a The Native Teacher

The native speaker, a person who was born into and grew up speaking a particular language, has traditionally been viewed as an expert in this language. They are seen as insiders, informants on the language and the culture that it represents, with an instinctive knowledge of all the colloquialisms and subtle nuances of the language, as well as any cultural items.

Native speakers are often said to have an implicit, or intuitive, knowledge about their language. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, implicit knowledge is possessed intuitively, but is not able to be articulated. (This is in contrast with explicit knowledge, which is able to be verbalised). McNeill (2005) makes note of this in his study of native and non-native speaking teachers and their awareness of lexical difficulties amongst their students. He notes that “it is assumed that all L1 users have an implicit knowledge of their mother tongue because they have mastered it successfully” (p. 109). The native speaker’s metalinguistic knowledge, that is, their knowledge about the correct forms and structure of their native language, is also implicit. In other words, the native speaker
knows intuitively if a sentence or structure is grammatically correct. The issue of the
characteristics of a native speaker, and how to define one, is an aspect that will be explored
in greater depth in Chapter Two.

Arva & Medgyes (2000) affirm in their study of native and non-native English speaking
teachers in Hungary that the native speaking teachers were “rich sources of cultural
information, highbrow as well as lowbrow, about any topic around which the lessons were
structured” (p. 365). In this case, then, the native speaking teachers were fulfilling their roles
as informants by sharing their wide cultural knowledge with their students. Arva & Medgyes
also note, however, that, as native speakers, “they felt culturally alienated in the local
environment”, (p. 364) which can present other challenges to both teachers and students
alike, as will be discussed in further sections of this chapter.

1.2.2b The Non-Native Teacher

In contrast to a native speaker, non-native speakers have traditionally been viewed as
‘outsiders’, as they have not grown up using this language and are not innately familiar with
the culture it represents. They have had to learn it as a second language, and so their level of
expertise on the language is sometimes perceived by others as not quite measuring up to that
of a native speaker, which links back to the notion of the native speaker fallacy discussed in
the introduction.

While a non-native speaking teacher may lack the intuitive, implicit knowledge that the
native speaker has, they do possess explicit knowledge about the language that they are
teaching. As stated above, this knowledge is able to be verbalised. Due to this type of
knowledge, some scholars have suggested that a non-native speaker is sometimes better able
to explain why and how to form grammatical structures in the target language, and this is
most certainly an advantage in the classroom. For example, in McNeill’s (2005) study
mentioned above, a group of both native and non-native speaking teachers were given a
reading text and asked to select what they thought would be the twelve words that would
present the greatest source of difficulty for the students translating them. In the end, the
results suggested that as a group the non-native speaking teachers were more successful at
predicting the students’ errors than the native speakers. McNeill states that the native
speaking teachers “generally failed to identify the words which students found difficult” (p.
115), while the non-native speakers were more successful in predicting the learners’ difficulties. It would appear that the non-native speaking teachers’ explicit knowledge of the target language, as well as their experience of having learnt the language themselves, was helpful to them in being able to anticipate where the students’ difficulties would lie. Arva & Medgyes (2000) also refer to the metalinguistic awareness of the non-native speaking teacher, which is discussed in further detail in section 1.2.3e regarding empathy.

1.2.3 The Teacher in the classroom

There are also classroom management issues, both practical and cultural, that have received the attention of scholars, and which are outlined in the following subsections.

1.2.3a Attitudes/ Classroom Management

Some of the issues that have emerged in the literature relate to how the teacher is able to understand the goals and motivations of their students, and particularly the students’ expectations of the teacher in the classroom. This can include the teacher’s attitude towards discipline in the classroom: how strict he/she is with the students about issues such as punctuality, lateness of work, attitudes of students towards their peers, and so on. The level of formality in the classroom can also be a matter that needs to be addressed directly by the teacher. For example, the teacher may need to ask him/herself if the students will still have respect for them if allowed to be on a first name basis. How hard does the work given to the students need to be, and how much is enough, or too much?

In her study of university students of English in Turkey, Ustunluoglu (2007) addresses these questions regarding the teacher in the classroom. She shows that non-native speaking teachers have a real advantage in the area of classroom management as they have knowledge of the culture of the institution they are teaching at, the goals of the students, and the appropriate classroom atmosphere. This awareness that non-native teachers have of the appropriate classroom norms can aid them in a whole range of issues; for example, how to deal with a student caught cheating in an exam when no guidelines are in place, or how much can be expected of the students in terms of their own responsibility and autonomy in class.

Hayes (2009) investigated a group of non-native English language teachers in Thailand, through interviews with seven teachers and observation of them in class, in an effort to gain
a deeper understanding about their “classroom methods and commitment to teaching” (p. 1). He adds to Ustunluoglu’s observations regarding the teacher in the classroom. He states “Thai teachers in the Thai educational system may be ‘non-native’ speakers of the language they teach, but they are ‘native’ in terms of their situational teaching competence” (p. 2). In other words, these non-native speaking teachers are intimately familiar with the classroom setting and with the cultural background of their students, which helps them to connect and engage with their students, and to meet the students’ expectations. Hayes goes on to note that there was a prevailing attitude amongst these non-native teachers of enjoyment in their teaching, and a desire to teach well was a “strong motivating force” (p. 8).

1.2.3b Teaching methods

Teaching methodology is another area which studies on the native versus non-native teacher issue have looked at. One of the most important questions that a language teacher needs to address is what language will the class be conducted in, the target language or the students’ native language, or a combination of both? This can often go beyond being simply the personal choice of the teacher, as often the students have expectations about this based on their previous experiences. The teaching culture of a particular learning institution may encourage its teachers to conduct lessons predominantly in a certain language, and as the students move through the system they will come to expect a certain continuity with the way their classes are conducted.

The ability for a teacher to use the students’ native language in the classroom is undoubtedly an asset when utilised in an appropriate way. For the native speaking teacher this can be a difficult thing to do, especially if they have come to teach in a foreign country with little or no knowledge of that country’s language; however for a non-native speaking teacher working in his/her home country it is not a problem. McNeill (2005) makes the observation that teachers who speak their students’ first language have a “distinct advantage in knowing where their students’ language difficulties lie” (p. 116).

Non-native speaking teachers in Thailand also appreciate being able to use their students’ native language when conducting a lesson, as is highlighted by Hayes’ (2009) study. The teachers in his study observed that they will try to use English in class wherever possible, however when teaching grammar in particular it became necessary to use Thai in order to
explain certain concepts. Several teachers commented that if they used English in grammar lessons then the students would not understand; and they also noted how important this was in regards to helping the students prepare for their university entrance exams. Another teacher mentioned that she tended to use more Thai than English in order to check vocabulary and to confirm instructions in class. The students’ native language was also used by another teacher as a tool to engage with them, stating “in some classes when they are very good, I start to use Thai or Lao just to make a joke when they are sleepy or they feel bored or something like that” (p. 6).

The lack of knowledge of the students’ native language is a disadvantage that has been noted by native speaking teachers in Arva and Medgyes’ (2000) study. They describe native speaking teachers as feeling “handicapped” when not being able to explain something to a student in Hungarian, which as one teacher noted was a particular problem when teaching beginners level students. They also note that in addition to not being able to give explanations, not being able to understand Hungarian meant that the native speaking teachers missed out on other things, for example they did not “realise when students are being nasty or funny” (p. 362). It can also make it more difficult for the native teachers to correct errors. A non-native speaking teacher from the same study made the observation that “If natives don’t speak the students’ mother tongue, they cannot really ‘interpret’ the mistakes the students make” (p. 362). Conversely, the non-native speaking teachers obviously speak Hungarian as well as their students, and so do not have these potential problems or misunderstandings in communication.

Ustunluoglu (2007) refers to a study in Brazil (Mattos, 1997), which points out that while native speaking teachers of English have a definite advantage when teaching cultural aspects of the language, often they are not “real” teachers. They have not received any formal teacher training and are hired simply for the fact that they are native speakers of the target language. These teachers may experience some difficulties in being able to explain certain features of the English language, as they do not have the metalinguistic awareness of those aspects that have been learnt naturally and not taught in a formalized manner. Other activities that teachers regularly take part in, such as planning a lesson or a unit, preparing course outlines, and so on, may also prove to be more difficult for the untrained teacher.
Wu (2009), in his study based in Taiwan, also notes that there is a gap “in the interactions between the native speaking teacher and the students” (p. 47). While the aim of the study was to examine students’ perceptions, he also interviewed three native speaking teachers in order to gain their perspective on the issues explored. He found that the expectations of the students about how their native speaking teachers would interact with them in class did not match up to the reality. The students expected their native teachers to teach them “‘real’” and “‘authentic’ English” (p. 48), and the native teachers were more popular with students “because of their appearance, way of talking, and flexible teaching approach” (p. 48). According to Wu, however, the reality was “very different in terms of teaching approach, teaching attitude, and knowledge of English” (p. 48).

Wu (2009) also argues that it is important to close the gap between students’ expectations and the reality in the classroom. He suggests three practical ways that could help teachers to overcome this. Firstly, simply by making native speaking teachers and their students aware of the potential misunderstandings or differences that there may be in what their students expect of them in the classroom. Universities and high schools could hold orientation meetings for new students that would highlight any of these issues; as well as offering information and training to new teachers who do not have much experience with teaching students from a different culture. A second option would be to take a team-teaching approach, whereby a native speaking teacher is paired up with a local, non-native speaking teacher in order to “make the instruction more effective” (p. 48). The third option that Wu proposes is that “both native speaking teachers and local teachers are suggested to rethink their roles and adjust self-expectation as the world changes rapidly” (p. 48).

Certainly for many of the classroom management issues discussed above it will be up to the administration of the learning institution to pass on the appropriate information to the teacher. If, however, one is a native speaker of English with no teacher training, for example, and that person is teaching their native language in a foreign country, then these are not aspects that he/she would readily know. A native speaking teacher of English in a foreign country would not automatically understand the students’ expectations and attitudes towards many of these classroom management issues. If, however, one is a non-native speaker of English, teaching it in one’s own home country, then this person has insider knowledge of many of these procedures and expectations. The non-native teachers
themselves have been members of that particular student culture when they were learning the language.

1.2.3c Self-perceptions

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999), as mentioned previously, carried out a study of the perceptions of non-native English speaking trainee teachers in a graduate TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) program in the United States. There were several questions that they hoped to answer through this study: how do non-native TESOL graduate students perceive themselves as professional teachers of English? Do they think that there are differences between native and non-native speakers of English in their teaching behaviour, and if so, what are they? Do they feel that they are disadvantaged in any way by not being native speakers of English, and if so, in what way? What are some of their concerns as teachers of English?

Analysis of the quantitative data (gathered via a written questionnaire) seemed to indicate that the majority of the participants observed differences between native and non-native speakers of English in their teaching behaviour. This did not necessarily lead to the belief, however, that native English speaking teachers were superior to their non-native speaking colleagues. Rather the participants noted that successful teaching depends upon more than just whether or not the teacher is a native speaker. There are numerous factors that can have an effect, such as the goals and objectives of a teaching program, the age and level of the students, as well as the individual teachers’ personality and skills.

In Samimy and Brutt-Griffler’s study, interviews were conducted subsequent to the questionnaire. Many participants argued that having a native-like proficiency in English may not be the most important issue for English language teachers. They were more concerned with the English curriculum, with pre-service teacher education and with professional development. In terms of teacher education, the Japanese participants felt that is was difficult for them to teach communicative English when they were never themselves taught communicative skills. As a result of this, native speakers of English had been actively recruited to teach in Japan, the problem then being that many of them had no formal teaching qualifications. The Japanese teachers felt that the government would do better to invest money in educating non-native speaking teachers – “English teachers should be homegrown”
(1999, p. 138). Regarding professional development, it can be very frustrating for non-native teachers if they feel that there is a lack of support, or that there are not enough resources available to them. As stated by a participant from a Latin American country, “it is very difficult to keep up with what is happening in our field. We have very little support from the government to attend TESOL conferences, for example. In fact, we are still using the same textbooks that we used 20 years ago” (1999, p. 138). Clearly non-native teachers feel that these aspects are extremely important contributors to their success in the classroom.

1.2.3d Background culture of teachers

From the teacher’s perspective, a particularly relevant issue that comes up in the native versus non-native debate is the matter of the background culture of the students learning a second language, and the culture of the learning institution where they are being taught. This is important because teachers do not always share the same cultural background as their students. Thomas (1999, p. 7) quoting Murray, a former president of TESOL, explains “In many cases, our students’ life experiences have been so different from ours, their teachers, that we cannot assume that they bring the same background knowledge to the classroom as white, middle class children”. In other words, as Thomas clarifies, native speaking ESOL teachers can identify with students who are from white, middle class backgrounds because they are themselves from this background. How does this help them, therefore, if some of their students do not fit into this pigeon hole? A native speaker teaching English in an Asian country may not necessarily have the same baseline, the same point of reference, as their students do because of their different backgrounds. What is expected of students in the classroom may well be different in the teacher’s native country, as well as what the students expect of their teacher.

Millrood (1999) draws attention to the cultural issue in his study of native-speaking English teachers in Russia. He hypothesized that the main reason why these teachers were not particularly successful was due to the fact that they lacked knowledge about the Russian teaching culture. His hope was that through his study he would be able to help native English teachers to be more effective in the classroom. Data was gathered through observations of lessons, and through interviews of teachers, students, and students’ parents. In this way he was able to gain insights into the perspectives of both the teachers and the students, however
the main focus of the research was to find practical ways to help the teachers overcome these difficulties that arise from a lack of knowledge of Russian teaching culture.

Millrood believed that there were three essential components that contributed to a teacher’s success in Russia – language, teaching techniques and culture. He concluded that for native English speakers, “the missing link on the chain of success is the ‘culture’, meaning teaching culture or socially expected classroom experience” (1999, p. 1). He acknowledged that while native teachers often displayed interesting teaching techniques, which initially are welcomed by students, eventually the students feel that their expectations about how the language should be taught are not being met. Unfortunately for these teachers they are often unaware that the students are feeling this way, and so lack the insight to adjust their teaching methods accordingly. He concludes that these non-native teachers can be helped through having them undertake special training to help them understand how to conduct a lesson in Russia, and what their students will expect of them in class.

The background of the teacher in regards to their students is clearly related to the classroom management issue discussed previously (Ustunluoglu, 2007). A non-native speaker of English, teaching in his/her home country, has the advantage of knowing what is expected of him/her in the classroom, the level of support that is expected, even how strict they need to be in class. They know what to expect from and how to deal with the administration of the teaching institution, and their colleagues. A native speaker of English, however, who works in a foreign country, does not necessarily possess this innate awareness of these cultural norms, which may hinder their effectiveness as a teacher and therefore be a disadvantage for the students.

Cheung (2002), through her Master’s research, combined an investigation of both teachers and students in a single study. Her aim was to analyze the perceptions that university students in Hong Kong had towards their native and non-native speaking English teachers, and what strengths and weaknesses they had from the students’ viewpoint. In the study it was discovered that both students and teachers saw an awareness of the cultures of English speaking countries as a strength for native English-speaking teachers. On the other hand, for non-native English speaking teachers their shared cultural background (for those who were Hong Kong natives), was also seen as a strength.
1.2.3e Empathy of the non-native speaking teacher

This notion of the empathy of the non-native speaking teacher towards their students was noted by Clark & Paran (2007), who see it as an advantage for them over native speaking teachers. They quote Nemtchinova (2005), who in her study of non-native speaking trainee teachers in the US found that their empathy was “a distinctive attribute that the non-native English speakers brought to their classrooms” (2007, p. 410). Clark & Paran go on to state that this sense of empathy, or “the ability to view the learning of English from the students’ perspectives” (p. 410) has the potential to be particularly valuable for non-native teachers in their own home countries “where they share the students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (p. 410).

Arva & Medgyes (2000) draw attention to the lack of empathy of native speaking teachers towards their students. A native speaking teacher from their study in Hungary made this observation regarding students, “Being a native speaker, it is difficult for you to appreciate what the students are going through when they’re learning English” (p. 362). In comparison to this, Arva and Medgyes note that non-native speaking teachers have “moved along the same road as their students” (p. 362), and so they have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties involved in learning English. The non-native teachers in their study claimed that this awareness “of their students’ individual goals” (p. 362) helped them to design “more realistic and concrete teaching plans” (p. 362), which on the whole were more thorough.

1.2.3f Grammar

The analysis of native and non-native speaking teachers in Hungary by Arva & Medgyes (2000) demonstrated that the biggest difficulty in teaching for the native teachers was grammar, while for the non-native teachers grammar was their biggest strength. The difficulty for the native speaking teachers was in being able to explain grammatical concepts to their students. One of them stated, “This is wrong and this is the correct way you should say it, I know, but I can’t explain why it’s wrong or right” (p. 361). According to another native teacher, “Most native teachers I know never really came across grammar until they started teaching it. So you have to learn it as you go along” (p. 361). On the other hand, for the non-native teachers, due to their own experience in learning English as a second language, in addition to any teacher training they had undertaken, they had an in-depth knowledge of English grammatical
structures “as well as a metacognitive awareness of how it worked” (p. 362). As a result of this, Arva and Medgyes found that in four of the five schools where their research was carried out the native speaking teachers were given only conversation classes to teach, while the non-native speaking teachers taught everything else, which included grammar.

Llurda & Huguet (2003) interviewed 101 non-native speaking English teachers, from both primary and secondary schools. This was an attempt to determine how these teachers perceived their own language skills, what effect these skills had on their teaching, and how their language skills had evolved over time. They also sought to gather information on the subjects’ teaching ideology, and their position in the native speaker/ non-native speaker debate. Through their study it was shown that secondary non-native speaking teachers showed more confidence in their skills than primary teachers, especially in the area of grammar and knowledge of grammatical rules. Interestingly, many of the primary teachers seemed to subscribe to the native speaker fallacy, which seems counterintuitive given their non-native status. When asked, half of them stated that they would hire more native speakers than non-native speakers if it were up to them, whilst two thirds of the secondary teachers stated that they would hire teachers from both groups.

1.2.3g Reading skills

Llurda & Huguet’s (2003) study (as mentioned in the previous section) demonstrated that secondary non-native speaking teachers showed more confidence in reading comprehension than primary non-native teachers. This was another aspect that helped to prove their hypothesis that non-native teachers at secondary level rated their language proficiency higher than non-native teachers at primary level.

1.3 The Student’s Perspective

The previous section examined issues from the point of view of teachers; in this section the same kinds of issues will be looked at from the students’ point of view. Research reveals that for a student his or her preference for a certain teacher over another is based on various factors. It could be a question of personality, of whether or not they find the teacher pleasant and likeable on a personal level and feel like they share a rapport. For other students it is
more related to the teacher’s competence in a classroom, whether or not they feel that the
teacher is confident, knowledgeable and well-prepared in their field of expertise. For a
language student the issue of whether or not their teacher is a native speaker of the target
language can also be a very important one.

1.3.1 Knowledge of the Target Language and its culture

As discussed below, the literature shows that students feel that only a native speaker has
innate and insider knowledge of the target language, and that this is necessary for the teacher
to effectively pass on his/her knowledge to the student. A native speaker, having grown up
speaking the target language, has instinctive knowledge of both the language and the target
culture. The native speaker teacher has been a participant in a whole range of interactions
and situations, for various purposes, where he/she has had to use their native language. Their
everyday lives, in a sense, have been a preparation for teaching this language.

In a study by Coombe & Al-Hamly (2007), university students from Dubai and Kuwait
were asked to give written responses to questions about whether or not they preferred native
or non-native English speaking teachers. Overall 47.7% of the students had a preference for
the native speaking teachers, 16.9% preferred the non-native speakers, and 35.3% had no
preference. They were asked to provide reasons as to why they felt this way. For the students
who preferred the native speaking teachers, the most common factor listed was the desire to
have a native-like pronunciation and accent, and the native speakers were felt to be the best
examples for this. The students also felt that their oral skills and fluency would be better
developed if they had a native teacher.

In a more recent study Alseweed (2012) examined the perceptions of 169 university
students of English in Saudi Arabia towards their native and non-native speaking teachers,
using online questionnaires and interviews. He found that 77% of the students in the sample
felt that they would have “more positive attitudes toward the learning of English if they had
a native English teacher” (p. 47). Alseweed goes on to state that this is likely “due to the
students’ belief that a NEST motivates them to learn about English speaking people and the
teachers’ culture as indicated by 91% of the sample” (p. 47).
Language, however, is not just about communication, it is also about culture. The student’s motivation for learning a particular language so that he/she can be a part of the community it represents explains the positive attitudes some students have towards the native speaking teacher. To be a part of a certain community one needs to be knowledgeable about the cultural norms and expectations.

1.3.2 How the Teacher Acquired the Language (shared background/ empathy)

There are studies that show that many students feel that as non-native speakers, non-native teachers have the unique experience of having been a student of the target language themselves. In effect, non-native speakers have insider knowledge of how to learn this particular language, and this experience is vital in being able to be an effective teacher. A non-native speaking teacher knows exactly how the students feel and how difficult it is for them, and can therefore tailor their teaching methods accordingly. The way a person learns how to speak English is different to the way one would learn Japanese, or Russian, for example. These languages have great variations in phonology and syntax, and therefore require different learning strategies. And it is certainly very different to experience the target language as a second language as opposed to it being your first language, your mother tongue that you grew up speaking. A non-native speaker has had the distinctive experience of having to acquire the target language as a second language, and can therefore pass this exclusive understanding on to their students. A non-native teacher has complete empathy for their students because they have been in their place; what they have found difficult, or straightforward, in learning this language helps them to understand what the students are going through. For the students this often proves to be extremely encouraging, the knowledge that their non-native speaking teacher was once in their position too, and that they were able to learn the language well enough to now teach it.

In Liu’s (1999) study of seven non-native English-speaking teaching professionals where he examined in depth their perceptions of themselves as teachers, the teachers also spoke about the students’ point of view, and how the students perceived them as teachers. One teacher was usually perceived by her students as a native speaker of English due to her fluency and European appearance, even though her first language is actually Danish. In her interview she stated that it was always a “battle” to decide whether or not she should tell her students
the truth, or let them go on believing that she is a native speaker of English – "on the one hand, if I do tell them, I can show that I am empathetic with their language learning and that I too faced a difficult time learning English. On the other hand, I worry that telling them will make them feel discouraged – i.e., my English is good and they may feel discouraged that they will never speak English that well" (1999, p. 170). She does, however, emphasize to her students that she has been exposed to English for 20 years, having started learning it at the age of 10. In the end she believes that, as an acknowledged non-native speaker with many years of experience learning and practicing English, she is able to be a model to her students of the correct usage and pronunciation, whilst at the same time “being empathetic to their needs and experiences” (p. 170).

Another participant in the same study, who is a native speaker of Italian, echoes this sentiment. Again, most students presume she is a native speaker of English as she has no trace of a foreign accent; however she purposely told her students in the first class that as a child she did not speak English at all. The purpose of doing this was to motivate her students to study English hard, and to use herself as an example of what was possible for them. She highlights to them the fact that she has also gone through the process of learning English as a second language. She believes that the fact that she is a non-native speaker and has learnt a language herself “creates and establishes trust and rapport with the students at their level of experience” (1999, p. 171).

In Alseweed’s (2012) study, as previously mentioned, he found that 68% of the students claim that their non-native speaking teachers know the English language difficulties of their students better than native speaking teachers (p. 47). Through the interviews he conducted it became clear that the students appreciated the fact that their non-native teachers had “gone through the same experience in learning English as a foreign language” (p. 48), which meant that they had a better idea of what their students needed from them and were familiar with their learning styles. In fact, 82% of the students said that the non-native speaking teachers were more conscious of the students’ learning styles. This links to the notion of empathy which results from a shared background between the students and their non-native teachers as second language learners of the target language (as outlined by Arva & Medgyes (2000) and Clark & Paran (2007)).
Another important factor, especially from the students’ viewpoint, that emerged in the literature is the issue of whether or not a native-speaking teacher has sufficient command of the students’ first language to conduct a class effectively. Are the native speakers able to adequately explain grammatical points and rules, or to translate complex words and sentences for their students during class time, including spontaneous or unplanned items? As discussed below, this factor is of more relevance depending on the level of students being taught. A beginners’ class who have no previous knowledge of the language being taught will need to have the basics of the language explained to them, and often feel that this is best done in their own language. A more advanced group of students, however, often do benefit from being given instructions and explanations in the target language, as by this stage that have already mastered the basics of the language.

In Coombe & Al-Hamly (2007), the students who showed a preference for non-native speaking teachers most frequently commented on the fact that the non-native teachers had an implicit knowledge of the students’ first language. Many of these students focused on the fact that these teachers had the ability to speak the native language of the students and use it in class when necessary. As one student stated – “when a student is first learning a foreign language, they need to communicate with their teacher in their native language to explain difficult things” (p. 63).

This is further corroborated by Alseweed (2012). In the online questionnaire he administered, 77% of the students said that native speaking teachers have difficulty understanding their students’ questions (p. 47). In a follow-up interview one student clarified this further, saying “I like a NNEST (i.e. non-native English speaking teacher) because he can understand my questions when I use some Arabic” (p. 48).

1.3.4 Students’ attitudes towards being taught by a non-native teacher

In the introduction the attitude towards the hiring of non-native speaking teachers by language institutions was discussed, however discrimination against non-native speaking teachers can also come from students. Braine recounts a time when he was teaching in the United States and two students requested to be transferred out of his class (and into a native
speaker’s class) because they did not like his accent (he is originally from Sri Lanka). Thomas (1999) also talks about this when she describes a time when she asked her students how they felt about having a non-native speaker teaching them English. Several of them did admit that they felt a little disappointed when they initially saw her in their first class, a “foreigner” with a different accent (Thomas is originally from India). It is important to note, however, that Thomas did say that this initial reaction changed after she began to teach and the students could see that she was a competent and capable teacher. These experiences described by Braine and Thomas are certainly not unique, and unfortunately can lead to a lack of confidence in oneself as a teacher. As Thomas puts it, these sorts of experiences, particularly with students, “challenge (her) credibility and make (her) apologetic, nervous about (her) ability to succeed, and sometimes even lead to a kind of paranoia” (1999, p. 9).

As discussed in section 1.3, there are certainly instances when, from the teacher’s perspective, being a non-native speaker can be an advantage. As referred to previously, in Liu’s (1999) study of non-native speaking ESL teachers, two of the teachers interviewed felt that informing the students of their non-native status, even when the students believed that they were actually native speakers, worked to their advantage in that they were able to show empathy towards the students’ learning process and use themselves a role models of good language learners. In the same study, however, for one teacher this actually became a problem. Mr C was a native speaker of Cantonese, whose pronunciation of English was so good that some students would ask if English was actually his first language, even though he is from an Asian background. Mr C found that while the graduate students in his class were impressed by his proficiency in English, his undergraduate students were actually quite intimidated by it. In his words, “some of them don’t like to be in my class, not because they think I’m not good enough, but because I’m too good for them (“good” in the sense that they think I’m expecting “perfection” from them)” (1999, p. 167). These particular students felt pressured that they had to measure up to a particularly high standard, seeing as their non-native speaking teacher was practically as good as a native speaker. Mr C felt that the way to get around this was to emphasize to his students that he did not expect them to be perfect, and to highlight the fact he has the ability to identify with them as he has been through the process of learning English as a second language.
Despite all this, there are instances where students prefer having non-native speaking teachers right from the beginning. Braine (1999) recounts another occasion when he was teaching at a university in the United States, and many ESL students enrolled in his first year and advanced writing classes. Not only were they able to help and support each other linguistically, but they appreciated having him, a non-native English speaker, as their teacher as they felt that he would better understand their difficulties with the language.

Some studies have shown that as they proceed to higher levels, students tend to prefer more having a native speaking teacher. In their study of undergraduate students of English in the Basque Autonomous Community, Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002) found that, while there was a general preference for the native teacher at all educational levels, this preference discernibly increased in the higher levels. This tendency was also shown in Alseweed’s study from 2012, where the preference for a native speaking teacher increased as the students progressed to higher levels.

Studies conducted by Braine and others, however, have conversely shown that there is a marked increase in preference for having a non-native speaking teacher the longer a student studies a language. Moussu and Braine (2006) conducted a study regarding the attitudes of English as a Second Language students at a university in the US. They administered questionnaires to 84 students, given to them on the first day of class, and then the last day. In answer to the question “would you encourage a friend to take a class with this non-native English speaking teacher?”, 56% answered yes at the beginning; however after fourteen weeks the number who answered yes to the same question rose significantly to 76%. Similarly, in a study carried out by Cheung and Braine (2007) with university students in Hong Kong, it was discovered that “as the students progressed from their first to third (final) year, their positive attitudes towards NNS teachers appeared to increase” (p. 266). Furthermore, any negative attitudes that they may have had appeared to decrease. This implies that after being taught for a period of time by a non-native teacher students tend to be more aware and appreciative of the positive attributes of these teachers.

In her study of university students’ perceptions of native and non-native speaking English teachers at a university in Turkey, Ustunluoglu (2007) found that there was a significant difference between the native and non-native teachers in terms of in-class
management roles. She found that, overall, the non-native teachers were perceived by their students to be “more punctual and prompt at arriving in the classroom, (were) better prepared, and (were) better able to maintain order and discipline in the classroom” (p. 71) than the native teachers were. The results also suggested that the students felt that their non-native teachers completed the lessons on time, spoke more clearly and comprehensibly, knew their topic better, and ensured the active participation of students better than their native teachers (p. 71). Ustunluoglu also makes special note of the fact that the students found it easier to understand the speech of the non-native teachers compared to the native ones. She speculates that a reason for this may be that the native speaking teachers spoke more rapidly or with an accent and that this could impede the students’ understanding. A non-native speaker, on the other hand, is perhaps more conscious of this, having been a student of English in the past, and so speaks a bit more slowly. And of course he/she would have a Turkish accent when speaking English, similar to the students.

Ustunluoglu also refers to a study by Shimizu (1995), whose study at a Japanese university aimed to identify students’ perceptions about their native and non-native speaking teachers of English. His study focussed on their teaching skills, classroom management skills, and personal characteristics. Shimizu found that over half the students felt that their English classes taught by Japanese (i.e. non-native speaking) teachers were “gloomy, dead, lifeless, serious and at times tedious” (in Ustunluoglu, 2007, p. 67). The Japanese teachers were valued more by their students for their intelligence and knowledge, while the foreign teachers felt the pressure of having to be “interesting, cheerful and entertaining” (in Ustunluoglu, 2007, p. 67), as this was what the students expected of them.

1.3.4a Background culture of students

As mentioned in the previous section, Cheung (2002) examined both teachers and students in a study in Hong Kong. She found that for students, they saw their native speaking teachers’ knowledge of English speaking cultures as a strength. Conversely, students felt that their non-native English speaking teachers’ ability to empathize with them on the basis of their shared cultural background, for those teachers who originated from Hong Kong, were also strengths.

The background culture of the students was another aspect that was highlighted in Alseweed’s (2012) study. In his online questionnaire 73% of the students said that a non-
native speaking teacher was competent because they were more aware of the students’
culture (p. 47). Alseweed notes that the non-native teachers from his study all share their
students’ religious background (Islamic), and a number of them share the same native
language as their students.

1.3.4b Vocabulary, pronunciation and speaking skills

Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002), as mentioned in section 1.3.4, carried out a study in the Basque
Autonomous Community (in Spain) of university students’ perceptions of native and non-
native speaking teachers of English. They administered questionnaires to 76 undergraduate
students, and the questionnaire was based on four hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated
that in general different groups of students would not show a clear preference for native or
non-native speaking teachers. The second hypothesis was that there would be no differences
in the students’ preference when different educational levels were compared. Hypothesis
three stated that there would be a preference for native speaking teachers in the areas of
vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, culture and civilization, and attitudes and assessment.
The fourth hypothesis stated that there would be a preference for non-native speaking
teachers in areas of grammar, listening, reading, and learning strategies. They found that
there was a general preference for native English speaking teachers over non-native ones in
the areas of pronunciation, speaking and vocabulary. They note a parallel between these
findings and those of Medgyes (1999), who found that non-native speaking teachers reported
difficulties more frequently with these three areas (2002, p. 134).

Liang (2002) in her Masters research makes an interesting point on students’ attitudes
towards accents and pronunciation of non-native speaker teachers. Her study examined 20
English as a second language (ESL) students, looking at their attitudes towards six ESL
teachers’ accents. The students listened to audio recordings of the teachers speaking and
then had to rate the teachers’ accents according to a scale of preference. Liang also
administered written questionnaires to the students in order to collect information about the
students’ backgrounds and their beliefs about teaching. Results showed that although the
students rated the pronunciation and accent of an ESL teacher’s speech as very important,
they held generally positive attitudes towards their non-native speaking teachers in their
home countries. Liang determined that a teacher having an accent or non-native
pronunciation was not as important to these students; rather their level of professionalism and preparedness was seen as more relevant. She concludes by suggesting that the debate surrounding non-native speaking English teachers should focus on their level of professionalism in the classroom, and that their ethnic and language background is less relevant.

Mahboob (2003) carried out his doctoral research on the topic of non-native speaking teachers of English in the United States. The second phase of his study examined in detail students’ perceptions of their non-native speaking English teachers. To do this he had students who were enrolled in an intensive English course write essays about their opinions regarding whether they felt that only native speaking teachers could be good language teachers, or if non-native speakers could also be efficient teachers (p. 83). Of these essays Mahboob was able to use 32 for his research. He found that oral skills were viewed more positively by the students in the native speaking teachers, and more negatively in the non-native speaking teachers. He notes that the students’ comments in general “stated that native speakers can provide an ideal model for pronunciation” (2003, p. 146).

In terms of vocabulary, the students from Mahboob’s study said that both native and non-native speaking teachers could be good teachers of vocabulary, although out of twelve positive comments, eight referred to native speakers and four referred to non-native speakers (p. 156). Native speakers were noted for being able to teach slang words as well as new vocabulary. Mahboob observes that as there were no negative comments made in regard to vocabulary, then he must conclude that “both NESTs and NNESTs are considered to be efficient teachers of vocabulary” (p. 157).

The notion that the native speaker teacher is preferred by students in the area of speaking skills is also supported by Alseweed (2012), who, as mentioned previously, used quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the perceptions of university students in Saudi Arabia. 65% of the students from his online survey said that the native speaking teacher would encourage them to learn to speak English better.
1.3.4c Grammar

The previously mentioned study by Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002) also showed that in the area of grammar skills, students preferred to be taught by non-native speaking teachers. They acknowledge that as their study is quantitative it is difficult to give definite reasons as to why this is the case; however they speculate that in this area the teaching styles of native speaking teachers “can be detrimental to them [i.e. the students]”, as native speaking teachers have been shown to be less strict towards grammatical errors, as shown (and discussed earlier in this chapter) by Sheorey and Medgyes (p. 136).

Cheung (2002), as described previously, conducted a study of both teachers and students in Hong Kong. From the teachers’ perspective, she wanted to examine their capability of motivating their students to learn English. Cheung used a variety of methods to collect data, including questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The emphasis that non-native speaking teachers placed on grammar in their classes was seen by both teachers and students as an important strength, as well as their ability to empathize with the students as fellow second language learners, and a shared cultural background.

In Mahboob’s (2003) study (as mentioned in the previous section), non-native speaking teachers received more positive comments from their students in relation to their grammar skills, and their ability to answer questions. One student observes that the non-native speaker’s grammar teaching is “useful in helping them do well in standardized tests of English” (p. 154), with Mahboob observing that many non-native teachers would have taken these grammar tests themselves, and so “this may aid them in their ability to help their students prepare for the tests” (p. 154). In this same area, the native speaking teachers received more negative comments. The students commented on the fact that while it is easy for a native speaker to speak the language, it is difficult for them to actually teach it in regards to grammar, which Mahboob attributes to the native speaker’s “lack of experience of explicitly learning it” (p. 156).

1.3.4d Listening and reading skills

For listening and reading, Lasagabaster & Sierra’s study (2002) showed a preference for students towards native speaking English teachers. Again they do not seem to offer a
particular reason why this would be so, just that, unlike grammar, students are perhaps less concerned about error correction in these areas.

1.3.4e Learning strategies

The students in Lasagabaster & Sierra’s (2002) study indicated a preference for the non-native speaking teaching in the area of learning strategies. When discussing this point Lasagabaster and Sierra choose to group learning strategies with the area of grammar, which perhaps indicates that they feel that the two are linked, although they do not state this explicitly.

1.3.4f Culture of the target language

Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002) note that in their study the students showed a clear preference for the native speaking teacher in the area of culture and civilization. They observe that this finding echoes Medgyes’ (1999) study, in which the non-native speaking teachers thought that the native ones were able to provide more cultural information about the target language.

This preference for the native speaking teacher to teach students culture is corroborated in Alseweed’s (2012) study. In his online questionnaire an overwhelming majority of 94% of the students claimed that they would learn more about the culture of English speaking people from a native speaker (p. 47). In a follow-up interview a student stated, “a native teacher is a real and live representative of the foreign culture” (p. 47).

In contrast, Mahboob’s study (2003) showed positive comments regarding the teaching of culture towards both native and non-native speaking teachers, although there were six for the native speaker, as opposed to four for the non-native speaker. There was also one negative comment directed towards the non-native speaker regarding the teaching of culture (p. 157).
1.4 Research questions

After reviewing studies on native and non-native speaking teachers of English, there are a number of research questions that have emerged and which I intend to examine in light of the data resulting from my own research.

- *Perceived advantages of native and non-native speaking teachers:* How do students feel about their native and non-native teachers in regards to their linguistic background; do they feel that it is an advantage to have a teacher who is a native speaker of the target language, and do they equally see an advantage in the non-native teacher sharing the same native language as their students?

- *Characteristics of teachers in relation to native versus non-native:* Is language proficiency an issue for non-native teachers; do they see it as affecting their teaching experience in a particular way? And how does the cultural awareness and cultural background of both native and non-native teachers impact upon their teaching experience, and on the students’ learning experience?

- *Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of various aspects of language:* How do students’ perceptions differ in being taught various aspects of the language – grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and speaking skills, reading and listening skills, cultural knowledge – between a native and non-native teacher? And how do the teachers perceive themselves when they teach these aspects?

- *Teaching style:* How do native and non-native teachers differ in terms of their teaching style in the classroom, if at all, and are these differences perceived by their students?

These are the questions that I will be addressing in Chapters Four to Six.

In the following chapter (Two) I will discuss further the concept of the native speaker, how it has been defined, and whether it is actually possible to give it a conclusive description and definition.
Chapter Two – Defining the Native Speaker

Introduction

In Chapter One I examined the issues surrounding native and non-native speaking language teachers, both from the teachers’ own viewpoint and from the students’ point of view. It is important now to examine the notion of ‘the native speaker’. I have used the term in a very general sense in Chapter One, but now I intend to discuss the characteristics of a native speaker, and how one can define a native speaker. In the literature, as will be discussed in detail in this chapter, scholars have recognised the difficulties in attaching a finite definition to the term native speaker, both from a theoretical standpoint and a sociolinguistic one, as well as the complexity that is added when one considers the acquisition of a second or more languages, and the notion of self-perception and identity. In some cases there appears to be little question or confusion, and the issue of who can be classified as a ‘native speaker’ of a particular language appears to be a relatively simple one; however in other situations the defining characteristics are not so clear. If a person is born and grows up in an English-speaking country then he/she is generally considered to be a native speaker of English; if they are born and raised in Italy then they are considered native Italian speakers, and so on.

When a second or more languages are involved then matters become more complicated, and this is particularly evident with migrants. A child born in Italy who then migrates to Australia at the age of five will often come to speak fluent English with no trace of a foreign accent. Even a migrant as old as fifteen can learn to speak fluent, ‘native-like’ English, particularly if he/she uses English predominantly in his/her home and work environment. The question then arises – can a person who was not born in a particular country learn that country’s language well enough to be considered a native speaker? Is being born in a certain country, or learning a language before a certain age, a prerequisite for ‘native-speakerness’?

In today’s world people are more able to move easily from one country to another, from one linguistic community to a different one, and so it is possible for an individual to have exposure to more than one language at various stages in his/her life. Language teachers, as
we have seen in Chapter One, often teach a language that is not their first one; their language proficiency may be equal, or nearly equal, to that of a native speaker. How does one define such an individual, and how do they define themselves? These are just some of the issues that will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter will be divided into the following sections. First I will examine the history of the term, and the issues surrounding how the phrase ‘native speaker’ has been traditionally used. I will then move on to discuss the various claims that have been made regarding the use of the term and the problems associated with its traditional definition. These positions can be divided into three perspectives, beginning with language theory, continuing on into a sociolinguistic perspective, and then concluding with a second language learning and teaching viewpoint. The third section of the chapter will be concerned with the context of Italian in Australia, and the issues of linguistic and ethnic identity associated with the notion of native speakerness.

2.1 Defining the native speaker

2.1.1 History

The term “native speaker” has a long history. According to Lepschy and Sanson (2000), one of the earliest uses of the term was in 1835, in a periodical entitled the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The author of one of the articles contained therein describes two Greek migrants who had lived in Connecticut for some time, and gives the following description about one of them who had lived in the US for eleven years: “(he) speaks our language fluently and intelligibly: indeed, as is usual with those who learn a foreign tongue from books, and from enlightened native speakers, his English is remarkably pure” (p. 125). Lepschy and Sanson go on to cite two other examples from the nineteenth century. In 1854 a book entitled *Types of Mankind*, when describing a language spoken in Southern Arabia, says that it “is called Ehkili by native speakers, and Mahri, or Ghrawi, by surrounding tribes” (p. 125), with a clear reference to the local inhabitants of that area. And finally in 1883, in a review of a French language book, the author of the review states “even the so-called conversational methods that have occasionally been employed have made use of a style of conversation such as never
went out of the mouth of a native speaker” (p. 125). Lepschy and Sanson point out that these uses of the term already highlight the idea of native speakers being a distinct group, that they are “not one of us” (p. 125), that is, they are separate and distinguishable from those who are learning and speaking the language as a second one. An actual definition, however, is still not given in any of these works.

Bonfiglio (2010) also traces the history of the use of the term native speaker, and like Lepschy and Sanson provides an example from the nineteenth century. He observes that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the earliest recorded instance of the term “native speaker” in English was by George Marsh at Columbia University in 1859. He also states that in 1890 the terms “native speaker” and “native hearer” were used by Charles Grandgent of Harvard University, an American linguist who was an expert on Vulgar Latin and was also noted for his studies on Dante. Again, however, while the term was used it was never properly defined.

As we have seen, the term ‘native speaker’ has been present in the literature for close to two hundred years. In fact this notion, if not the term, goes back hundreds of years. Bonfiglio (2010) draws attention to the Latin root of the word “native” – *natus* – which stems from the verb *nascor*, ‘to be born’. Following from this, *innatus* is to be born into, therefore one is born into his/her native language, it is innate. Bonfiglio states, “the associations evoked are those of womb, mother, and birth and are associated with the language that one is born into” (2010, p. 13). By contrast, an individual’s second language is referred to as “foreign”, which is derived from the Latin *foras/foris*, meaning outside. One’s native language, then, is “in-natus, in the body; L2 is outside of the body” (p. 13). The imagery created by the use of these words is that of one’s first language, one’s native language, being natural, whilst the second language is outside, foreign.

Lepschy (2002), when looking back at the history of the words *nativo* and *natio* in the Italian language, gives two examples where “native” is used as an attribute of language. The first comes from Dante’s *Inferno*, written in the early 14th century, and the second from Varchi (quoted in Lepschy), who in the 1500’s wrote, “native languages, which we call our own, are those which are spoken naturally, that is learnt without studying them and almost without realising it, through hearing nurses, mothers, fathers, and the other inhabitants of the
neighbourhood speak, those in sum which can be said to be sucked with the mother’s milk and acquired in the cradle” (p. 7). Varchi’s view, like the images described by Bonfiglio above, offers a very natural view about first language acquisition, that it is an instinctive and innate process. In section 2.2 it will be shown that in reality there is more to ‘native-speakerness’ than just what an individual is exposed to at birth.

While the term had been in usage for a number of years, Leonard Bloomfield was the first scholar to give it a definition. He stated that “The first language a human being learns to speak is his *native language*; he is a *native speaker* of this language” (1933, p. 43). Bonfiglio maintains that Bloomfield was the “major conduit for deployment of the term in modern linguistics” (2010, p. 9). Bloomfield himself had used the term even earlier, in 1914, in his book *An Introduction to the Study of Language*, where he states, while referring to language teachers, “As to the preparation of the teacher, a prime requisite is, of course, mastery of the language to be taught, - in modern languages a knowledge comparable to that of an educated native speaker and in ancient a fluent reading ability and some facility in writing” (1914, p. 297). In this earlier quote the term is used to describe what a native speaker does; that is, that a native speaker is someone who has mastered the language, and presumably is proficient in reading, writing and speaking. The quote from 1933, however, is concerned with what a native speaker actually is; that is, what characterizes the native speaker is the fact that he speaks the first language he has ever learnt. Bloomfield (1933) goes on to explain that language is not something that is biologically inherited by an individual, like hair or eye colour, but rather is “entirely a matter of environment”. An infant may grow up to learn an entirely different language from his/her parents if he is adopted into a different speech community as a baby, and he will learn the language in exactly the same way as a child who was born into that particular speech community. “The child learns to speak like the persons round him” (1933, p. 43)

Chomsky is another scholar who gives a very important contribution. Much of his work involved developing theories about the innate nature of language acquisition. Chomsky maintained that a native speaker is one who is able to accurately judge whether or not a sentence is grammatically correct. He states, “One way to test the adequacy of a grammar proposed for L is to determine whether or not the sentences that it generates are actually grammatical, i.e., acceptable to a native speaker” (1957, p. 13). Like Bloomfield’s quote from
1914, this description illustrates what a native speaker does, or should be able to do; that is, instinctively know if a sentence is grammatically correct, without actually saying definitively what a native speaker is. Chomsky later described the characteristics of an “ideal speaker-listener” (discussed in section 2.2.2), and affirmed that for an individual learning a second language, the ultimate goal was to achieve the “intrinsic competence of the idealized native speaker” (1965, p. 24).

2.2 Challenging the concept of native speaker

As described above, a native speaker is often proposed by linguists as the judge of what is correct or incorrect, acceptable or unacceptable, in a particular language. There are some scholars who believe that this idealized notion has been taken so far as to be removed from reality. Mey (1981) challenges the view that “Native Speaker is the final criterion of matters linguistic: his verdict settles all linguistic disputes, ... Like the Kings of Old, Native Speaker can do no wrong” (p. 70). Mey believes that once one considers carefully this concept it is possible to see that this image of the native speaker is not reflected in the real world, in the everyday users of language. He states, “society is not by any means a homogeneous collection of identical individuals using the same language in identical ways. There are at least as many different kinds of native speakers as there are divisions in society” (1981, p. 76). This intuition might explain why Chomsky talks about “idealized” native speakers.

The debate regarding this issue has reached the point where Paikeday (1985) has declared that “the native speaker is dead”. In the following discussion of how to define the native speaker and the various problems associated with this, I have divided the discussion regarding the validity of the term native speaker into three different areas: arguments from the language theorists (2.2.1); those arguing the point from a sociolinguistic point of view (2.2.2); and arguments from the field of second language teaching (2.2.3).

The notion of a ‘native speaker’ is a highly contested topic. Many scholars have pointed out various exceptional cases, situations where the traditional definition of native speaker simply does not apply. The traditional definition is one that has been held over many years, that the native language is the first one an individual is exposed to at birth and then grows up
speaking – a person is a native speaker of his/her native language. The complicated nature of learning and using a language, or several languages, however, does not allow for any simple or straightforward explanations. The sociolinguistic perspective draws attention to the idea that in reality language speakers’ life circumstances change over time, so it is possible and even probable that they experience a variety of linguistic situations; and so their language usage does not necessarily remain constant in the course of their lifetime. Language is a social phenomenon, not just a biological one; an individual may be born and raised speaking a certain language but their social settings over time often do not remain constant, and this needs to be acknowledged. The view of those directly involved in second language teaching and learning is also very important towards our understanding of the native speaker concept, particularly in the context of this thesis which will be examining the perceptions of teachers and students in relation to their native or non-native speaking status. Teachers and students are often all too aware of just how complex one’s linguistic background can be, and how difficult, perhaps even impossible, it is to accurately define an individual as either a native or non-native speaker. Saniei (2011) sums this up quite succinctly, “native speakers do not always speak according to the rules of their standard national languages. They display regional, occupational, generational, and social class-related ways of talking that make the notion of an ideal native speaker controversial” (2011, p. 74).

In addition to this, there are many terms used when describing the concept of a native speaker and the issues that surround it. One of the most commonly used terms includes ‘mother tongue’, which feeds into the concept of the notion of the native speaker being a purely biological one. Other terms that have been used or suggested by other scholars are: ‘proficient’ or ‘expert’ speaker, as opposed to native speaker; or referring to an individual’s ‘first’ or ‘dominant’ language as opposed to their native one. These terms place more emphasis on an individual’s life circumstances, such as whether or not they were born and grew up in the same place, or whether they went on to learn a second or more languages.

The following three sections will look at each of these viewpoints individually; that is, how the concept of the ‘native speaker’ is viewed by language theorists, how it is viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, and how it is viewed from a second language teaching and learning perspective.
2.2.1 Language Theorists

Bloomfield’s definition of the native speaker, as one whose native language is that learned at birth, is succinct and encapsulates what has traditionally been seen as the fundamental nature of a native speaker. There has been, however, some opposition to this definition. Lepschy and Sanson (2000) voice two main objections to Bloomfield’s definition.

Firstly, a child may be exposed to more than one language from birth, either from parents who both speak different languages, or as the child of migrants who speak one language at home and a second in the community. As they point out, one should not assume that monolingualism is the norm for the majority of people. In fact, Crystal (2010) also points out that “multilingualism is the natural way of life for hundreds of millions all over the world” (p. 372). He maintains that while there are no official statistics as to how many people in the world speak more than one language, the very fact that there are 5000 languages in fewer than 200 countries in the world suggests that there is a large amount of language contact happening, which leads to individuals learning more than one language. In addition, Crystal points out that it has been argued that there is no such thing as a completely monolingual country, and lists several examples. In the USA, for instance, around 20% of the population regularly speaks a language other than English. In Ghana, Nigeria and many other African countries that only recognize one official language, “as many as 90% of the population may be regularly using more than one language” (p. 372).

Secondly, according to Lepschy and Sanson, depending on individual circumstances, a person “may be considered a native speaker of more than one, or indeed none, of the languages or varieties originally acquired, or even of some other one acquired successively” (2000, p. 121). They give the example of Eva Hoffman, a writer who describes her journey of being a native speaker of Polish to a “native-like user of English” (p. 121) after her migration from Poland to Canada at the age of thirteen. Lepschy and Sanson also mention the writer Canetti, who as a child was exposed to many different languages, and whose parents spoke German to each other but Ladino to him and his siblings; whilst he learnt and spoke Bulgarian with children he played with. As an adult, however, he became a great writer using the German language. They go on to state that in the end the notion of the native speaker may
have to be “one of those basic intuitions which we cannot do without but which we are unable satisfactorily to define” (p. 122).

So is the native speaker, then, simply one who was born that way? Paikeday was the first to definitively question, and in fact deny, the meaningfulness of the term ‘native speaker’. His book is a discussion with other scholars about the various aspects of defining a native speaker, or if it is even possible. He opens up the discussion by stating in the beginning of his book: “I believe there is no such animal as a ‘native speaker’. The more I study it, the more it seems a myth propagated by linguists” (1985, p. xiv). He agrees with several of them that it may be better to view the concept of native speaker as a “theoretical construct rather than as flesh and bone” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 2). He discusses at length the complications, and at times contradictions, involved in trying to pinpoint an exact definition of a native speaker. He laments the many exceptions to the rule that exist, and the fact that “one could have a mother tongue and as many first languages as circumstances permit and never be able to use any of them as a ‘native speaker’” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 5), due to the fact that an individual may not have a strong aptitude for language learning, or may not have the educational opportunities that are needed to attain a high level of proficiency. An individual may also leave the country of their birth at a relatively young age which diminishes considerably their opportunities to use their first language. He also points out that, “at the same time, one could become proficient in all of them” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 5).

Despite all this, Paikeday, most likely bending towards his impulses as a lexicographer, does suggest a tentative definition for the native speaker, which he splits into two different senses. The first sense, like Bloomfield, places an emphasis on the native language being the language learned first by an individual: a native speaker is “a person who has a specified language as the mother tongue or first-learned language” (1985, pp. 9-10). The second definition emphasizes language proficiency: a native speaker is “one who is a competent speaker of a specified language and who uses it idiomatically” (1985, p. 10). Paikeday goes on to propose that perhaps native speakers are “made rather than born” (1985, p. 19); that is, that there is so much more to do with being a native speaker than simply being born in a particular place, or into a certain language-speaking family. Paikeday also draws attention to the fact that, as already mentioned, changes in an individual’s personal circumstances, for example the place they live, and the passage of time, can have an effect on their everyday
language use. He then goes on to highlight the example of a friend of his who, after leaving the country of his birth at the age of 21, has only returned for sporadic visits during the following 35 years. This friend is described as still being able to use his first language easily, but with a limited vocabulary; however now “English [i.e. not the language of his birth] is practically George Kurien’s first and last language” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 36). The language he was born speaking, his first language, is no longer dominant and it is now English that has taken precedence in his linguistic repertoire.

Paikeday challenges the view that errors made by non-native speakers mean a lack of competence in the language. He points out that linguists who hold Chomsky’s belief in the native speaker as being the ultimate expert in what is or is not grammatically correct in their native language “seem to explain away a native speaker’s mistakes as lapses, slips of the tongue, syntactic blends, and errors of judgment” (1985, p. 39). A native speaker, by definition, knows the grammatical rules of his/her mother tongue. On the other hand, Paikeday points out that mistakes made by non-native speakers are often viewed differently, in that they “are supposed to be of a different kind from mistakes made by a native speaker” (1985, p. 39). He refers to Corder, who maintains that a non-native speaker’s errors are signs that they do not have a perfect knowledge of the language and its various grammatical rules, which Paikeday questions. Corder also asserts that “native speakers are able to correct their own errors, but learners cannot” (Paikeday, 1985, p. 40). Corder likens the situation of non-native speakers to that of a child slowly acquiring his/her mother tongue; but as Paikeday points out, while the native speaker acquiring their mother tongue in childhood will eventually become an adult and “graduate” as a native speaker, the non-native speaker seems to be unable to do this, is condemned to live in limbo where he will never acquire the “perfect” knowledge that a native speaker has.

As already mentioned above, many linguists differ in how they define a native speaker, or in the particular characteristics a native speaker ought to possess. Mufwene (1998) objects to the idea that native speaker is only about birth. He uses the term native speaker “for a person who speaks a language (variety) as a mother tongue, having acquired it before the end of what has been identified in the child language literature as the ‘critical period’” (p. 111). He further states, however, that “native speakers need not be proficient in all varieties of their language; nor need they remain proficient during their lifetime in the variety they
acquired as a mother, or native, tongue” (p. 111). He joins Paikeday in arguing that it is the “proficient speaker – not necessarily the native speaker – (who) should be the arbiter of language usage” (p. 112).

He also argues that a speech community in which all, or at least a majority, of its speakers are monolingual and have not moved from their geographical or social environment “are likely to be found only in the most isolated parts of the world” (p. 113). Speakers in recent years have become increasingly mobile and therefore come into contact with various language varieties, and often may speak more than one variety themselves. One can no longer, therefore, rely on the notion of an idealised, uncontaminated native speaker to be, as Mufwene puts it, “the ultimate reliable source of information on the norm of that language” (p. 113). He contends, then, that the concept of proficiency, of a proficient speaker, is more relevant in today’s world than the traditional concept of native speaker, in terms of collecting reliable data about certain languages: “having informants who are proficient in a variety seems far more relevant than having native speakers” (p. 121). Mufwene defines a proficient speaker as “a person who speaks a particular language variety idiomatically, consistent with accepted practice in a speech community” (pp. 121-122).

The age at which an individual acquires a language is another issue that is raised by the language theorists with regard to the native speaker issue. This has long been considered an important factor in terms of whether that individual would be, or indeed could be, considered a native speaker of the language. The critical age or critical period hypothesis is defined, according to the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, as “the period during which a child can acquire a language easily, rapidly, perfectly, and without instruction” (Richards, 2010, p. 146). Lenneberg (1967) was the one to first coin this hypothesis. He stated that “between the ages of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition continues to be good” (p. 158). He believed that brain lateralization is complete at the age of puberty, therefore acquiring a language after this point is very difficult – “basic language skills not acquired by that time, except for articulation, usually remain deficient for life” (p. 158).

The complete acquisition of a second language at a later age, generally given as after puberty, would therefore be considered highly unlikely. Some researchers now hold that the critical age for the acquisition of phonology may be as early as five or six, while there is
perhaps no age limit for the acquisition of vocabulary. Some speculate that there is no critical period at all, that it is possible to learn a second language “perfectly” after puberty, while others argue that there is a steady decline in language learning ability with age, with no sharp breaks identifying a critical period. For this reason the term “sensitive period” is sometimes preferred (Richards, 2010, p. 146).

While scholars such as Lenneberg believe that age is crucial to language acquisition, others question this notion, and support their objections with experimental data. In Coppieters’ (1987) analysis of the different intuitions on French sentences displayed by native and non-native French speakers, he acknowledges the non-native speakers in his study as “near-native speakers”. He describes these individuals as speakers “for whom an L2 has become the functional equivalent of a mother tongue” (p. 545), and that, while they may possibly have an accent, it is nevertheless difficult to distinguish them “from native speakers by the ‘mistakes’ they make, or by the inappropriateness of their language” (p. 545). These near-native speakers have a proficiency level that puts them on a par with those native speakers who are born into the language. Crucially, however, Coppieters points out that all of these near-native speakers in his study acquired French as adults, not as children before the onset of puberty. This demonstrates that while age in language acquisition is undoubtedly a significant factor, it is not crucial to gaining native-like competence. Defining these individuals who have acquired the language after puberty as actual “native speakers” as opposed to near-native is, however, still contentious.

Another scholar to question the critical period hypothesis is Piller (2002), who carried out research on a number of couples where one partner in the relationship had English as their first language and the other one had German. She acknowledges that most researchers in the field of second language acquisition “have doubts that L2 users who learnt their L2 after the onset of puberty can ever pass for native speakers” (p. 185); she contends, however, that “highly proficient L2 users are not extremely rare exceptions, but more common than is generally assumed” (p. 186). In her research she found that 27 out of 73 individuals from her study, when invited to self-evaluate their linguistic competence in their non-first language, claimed to have a high enough level of proficiency in their second language to be able to pass for native speakers in certain contexts (p. 186), which as she points out is not an insignificant minority. Out of these individuals who claim to be as proficient as native speakers, the
average age where they began instruction in their second language was 11.7 years, and four of the informants had never received any formal instruction at all. The average ages of the informants when they first encountered the languages naturally is even higher, at 20.9 years of age (p. 188). Piller continues, explaining, “my data tentatively suggest that the learners’ motivation and agency, the control they have over their own learning, might be much more important than the age at which they begin” (p. 188).

Piller gives several examples of individuals from her study and details their linguistic history. One of them learnt English formally from the ages of 10 to 19, but did not move permanently to the United States until the age of 24. She did, however, have an American boyfriend from the ages of 17 to 22 with whom she conversed regularly in English and who provided a natural environment in which she could learn to speak fluently. Another informant, while taking regular trips to the United States from the age of 15, claimed that when she eventually moved there permanently at the age of 21 for work and had to use English all the time, this was when her competence in English really grew – “that’s when it really started, when I became really proficient” (p. 189). The common thread between the individuals who claimed native speaker proficiency in their L2 was the fact that often they distinguished between a point in their lives when they first had contact with the language, whether it was through formal instruction or travel, and a point where they “really” started learning it, which may have come through a personal relationship, a job opportunity, or a particular interest in the language or country it represents. Piller concludes by affirming “my data suggest that age is not the critical factor in reaching high levels of L2 proficiency it is often assumed to be. Rather, personal motivation, choice and agency seem to be more crucial factors in ultimate attainment” (p. 201).

From the point of view of language theory there are serious weaknesses in the traditional definitions of “native speaker”. A child may be exposed to more than one language at birth, especially if his/her main caregivers both speak different languages. The first language learned by an individual may not be the language maintained into adulthood for various reasons. And proficiency in a language is something that can be achieved, even by adult speakers. Moving from theory to practice, from a sociolinguistic perspective the notion of the native speaker is subjected to further criticism.
2.2.2 Sociolinguistic view on the native speaker

Chomsky’s claims about the native speaker and about homogeneous speech communities in the late 1950’s and 1960’s were challenged in the 1960’s by the birth of sociolinguistics. Chomsky stated that:

“Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance” (1965, p. 3).

Pioneers in the field of sociolinguistics, such as Labov, wanted linguistics to concern itself with the reality that language does not exist in an ideal form, and these homogeneous speech communities described by Chomsky are a theoretical construct that has very little to do with the real world where boundaries are not so clear cut. As Labov (1973) states, language “is used by human beings in a social context, communicating their needs, ideas, and emotions to one another” (p. 183). The following section highlights this social aspect of language in relation to the concept of the native speaker.

One scholar who believes that it is particularly difficult to impose precise boundaries on speakers is Rampton (1990). Rampton’s article on “displacing the native speaker” is particularly useful here as it gives a clear and concise summary of many of the arguments proposed by others. He maintains that individuals do not belong to the same social group for their whole lives, and that it is sociolinguistically inaccurate to believe so. It is, in fact, more likely that over time people will switch from one group to another, be they family groups, peer groups, or ethnic groups, and in doing so their dominant language may, and often does, change. While the terms ‘native speaker’ and ‘mother tongue’ are widespread in linguistics, and in everyday common parlance, Rampton expresses dissatisfaction with use of these terms in the linguistic domain. He feels that “the whole mystique of the native speaker and the mother tongue should probably be quietly dropped from the linguist’s set of professional myths about language” (Rampton, 1990, p. 97), and that there is a need for new terms to describe a person’s language ability.

There are many attributes traditionally ascribed to a native speaker, and, as Rampton maintains, these can all be contested due to the fact that speakers move through different
social settings throughout their lives. He states that in an educational context, being a native speaker tends to imply the following things: that a particular language is inherited, either through genetic endowment or through birth into the social group stereotypically associated with it; inheriting a language means being able to speak it well; people either are or are not native speakers; being a native speaker involves the comprehensive grasp of a language; and, just as people are usually citizens of one country, people are native speakers of one mother tongue (1990, p. 97). He points out, however, that each one of these aspects can be disputed. He contends that nobody has complete functional command of a language, that there are always areas where one person may be more proficient than another; for example, some individuals have access to higher levels of education than others, or are engaged in professions that require them to develop more sophisticated and complex levels of verbal and written language skills. In addition, in multilingual countries children are exposed to more than one language from a young age, and so have the potential to become fluent in several languages simultaneously. In this situation they would have more than one native language, and it would not be considered unusual or out of the ordinary.

The biological factors associated with one’s native language – that is, where an individual was born and the language of the caregivers who raise them – are undeniably important in cementing the importance of that language or languages. Rampton feels, however, that while these concepts are important, there are two main problems. Firstly, “they [i.e. the concepts of mother tongue and native speaker] spuriously emphasize the biological at the expense of the social” (1990, p. 98). In other words, Rampton feels that, while these biological factors such as place of birth and the language spoken by others in the home are definitely of great significance in the acquisition of a language(s), in reality the influence of these factors is “only ever interpreted in a social context, and so to a considerable extent, they are only as important as society chooses to make them” (1990, p. 98). Secondly, the concept of mother tongue and native speaker “mix up language as an instrument of communication with language as a symbol of social identification” (1990, p. 98). In choosing an alternative for these concepts, Rampton contends that we must keep in mind that there are very important social processes that link an individual to a certain language, not just biological ones. An individual may spend his/her early years using the language(s) of his/her parents; however if they, for example, migrate to a different country, then it is necessary to
learn this new language in order to feel socially accepted by their peers. In some cases the individual may develop a social and emotional attachment to this new language which surpasses that of his/her original language(s).

Bearing all this in mind, there may be a need for a different, more appropriate term to be adopted over the term ‘native speaker’. Rampton proposes that the term ‘expert speaker’ be used. He lists many advantages with the use of the term expert speaker, including that expertise: is different from identification; it is learned, not fixed or innate; it is relative and partial; and that one can challenge an expert’s knowledge (1990, p. 99). Most importantly, however, for the field of second language teaching and learning, is the fact that “the notion of expert shifts the emphasis from ‘who you are’ to ‘what you know’” (1990, p. 99). Rampton observes that if we focus on teachers as experts in their field, rather than categorizing them as either native or non-native speakers, then the emphasis for teachers can be on being proficient in the “body of knowledge that students have to aim at” (1990, p. 99). And proficiency is something that any teacher can attain through personal study and professional development, regardless of where they were born or what their first language was.

Kirkpatrick (2007) also expresses dissatisfaction with the term “native speaker”. He acknowledges the many attempts that scholars have made over the years to “provide workable and rational distinctions” (p. 8) between the native speaker and the non-native speaker, and notes that many other terms have been used to try to capture this distinction – “mother tongue speaker”, “first language speaker”, “second language speaker”, and “foreign language speaker” are all examples that he cites (p. 8). Kirkpatrick states that the assumption behind these terms is that “a person will speak the language they learn first better than languages they learn later, and that a person who learns a language later cannot speak it as well as a person who has learned the language as their first language” (p. 8). He points out, however, that there are many cases where this is simply not true. He draws attention to the fact that in immigrant communities and multilingual societies it is, in fact, quite common to have what he calls a “shifting L1” (p. 9). That is, the language a person speaks best is not always the first language that they spoke. He gives the example of a Sicilian migrant whose first language was Sicilian dialect, and who then learned standard Italian. At the age of eight she arrived in Australia and began learning English. Having been in Australia for over thirty years, it is now the third language that she learned, English, which is the one that she is
strongest in. As Kirkpatrick states, “she is a so-called native speaker of Sicilian but one who does not speak it well. She is a so-called non-native speaker of English, but speaks it fluently” (pp. 8-9).

Kirkpatrick maintains that a possible reason why these various terms – native speaker, mother tongue speaker, etc. – are not particularly satisfactory is the fact that they were coined “by linguists who grew up in monolingual societies where both parents and the community as a whole spoke the same language” (2007, p. 9). For these people there was an assumption that these monolingual societies were representative of the norm, and that any other languages one might learn were “foreign”, and would only be useful if you intended to travel abroad. In fact, Kirkpatrick observes (as does Crystal, in section 2.2.1) that multilingual societies are actually more common than monolingual ones, and that in these societies the “concepts ‘native’ speaker and ‘mother tongue’ speaker make little sense” (p. 9). In these societies, Kirkpatrick claims, it can actually be quite difficult for an individual to name their mother tongue.

2.2.3 Views on the native speaker from a second language teaching and learning perspective

The discussion above seems to suggest that it is indeed possible to become a native speaker of a second language, a language that was not the one learnt from birth or the one spoken by an individual’s parents. This is precisely the focus of the next section, which examines the characteristics of native and non-native speaking teachers.

Corroborating Bloomfield’s definition, Cook maintains that, “an individual is a native speaker of the L1 learnt in childhood” (1999, p. 186); and Davies (2003) refers to this as the “biodevelopmental definition”. Cook also affirms that according to this definition it is impossible for individuals to change their native language; the language first learnt is an “unalterable historic fact” (p. 186). Davies, on the other hand, holds the view that it is possible, although very difficult, for an “adult second language learner to become a native speaker of the target language” (p. 4).

Beyond this core definition, Cook also gives a number of other characteristics that have been used by linguists over the years to describe the native speaker. These state that native
speakers: have a subconscious knowledge of rules; have an intuitive grasp of meanings; have the ability to communicate within social settings; have a range of social skills; have creativity of language use; identify with a particular language community; have the ability to produce fluent discourse; have knowledge of the differences between their own speech and that of the “standard” form of the language; and have the ability to interpret and translate into the L1 of which he or she is a native speaker (p. 186). Cook also points out, however, that lacking one or even several of these characteristics does not mean an individual cannot be defined as a native speaker of the language in question. Many of these characteristics are variable, and Cook cites several exceptions; for example, an individual may function awkwardly in some social settings, or may not be aware of any differences between their own use of the language and the standard forms. The crucial aspect, according to Cook, in defining a person as a native speaker of a particular language is whether or not the individual has learnt that language as their first one. “Someone who did not learn a language in childhood cannot be a native speaker of the language. Later-learnt languages can never be native languages, by definition” (p. 187). Following this definition, L2 students cannot be turned into native speakers without altering the core meaning of native speaker; that is, discounting the fact of whether or not an individual was born and raised speaking that particular language. The focus for students instead would be on language competence.

For a language teacher (as has been demonstrated in Chapter One), being a native speaker of the target language has traditionally been seen not only as an advantage, but in some cases a necessity, in employment. There are situations, though, where it is not immediately clear who is a native speaker and who is not. As Medgyes (1999) explains, quite often the criteria given for being a native speaker are “fuzzy and inconsistent” (p. 10). These include being born in the country where the language is spoken, acquiring the language during childhood, speaking it as your first language, having a “native-like command” of the language, being able to produce the language fluently, spontaneously and creatively, and being able to reliably distinguish correct and incorrect forms in the language (1999, p. 10). He cites many instances (corroborating Rampton’s views) where there are exceptions or grey areas that cannot be easily explained. For example, a child may be born in a certain country but then move to a new country soon after, so that his/her country of birth does not provide them with their first language. Or a child may grow up in a household where the parents speak one
language but the community speaks a different one. Medgyes also questions the use of words “knowledge”, “competence” and “proficiency” as being unclear, and wonders at which point knowledge of a language ‘crosses over’ into native speaker territory. In other words, how does one quantify knowledge of a language? How much knowledge do you have to gain as a teacher to be considered, if not a native speaker, then as good as a native speaker? For teachers this can be difficult as many feel that they have different strengths and weaknesses depending on their various backgrounds (as has been shown in Chapter One, and will be demonstrated further in Chapter Five).

According to Davies (2003) the term “native speaker” refers to people who have insider knowledge of their particular language. They are the ideal models of the language to those who are learning it; and a language without sufficient native speakers will eventually die out, as has been the case with many indigenous languages around the world. Davies cites a comment from Ferguson (1983) as a strong motive for examining in detail the notion of what defines a native speaker: “Linguists... have long given a special place to the native speaker as the only true and reliable source of language data” (in Davies, 2003, p.2). Davies’ view on the native speaker is that it is possible, although quite difficult, for an adult second language learner to become a native speaker of the target language. This view is echoed by Halliday (1978), who talks about a person’s “mother tongue” rather than using the term native speaker. He claims that “no language ever completely replaces the mother tongue. Certain kinds of ability seem to be particularly difficult to acquire in a second language” (in Davies, 2003, p.3). Halliday, however, is not suggesting that these abilities can never be learnt in a second language; just that for adults at least it is particularly challenging.

It is a somewhat different story, though, for children learning a second language. Felix (1987, in Davies, 2003, p. 35) believes that after puberty a second language learner cannot become a native speaker; however it is possible for a child learning a language to eventually become a native speaker of that language (which is in line with the critical age hypothesis as described by Lenneberg). As Davies describes it: “In other words, second language learning is in complementary distribution to native speakerness in that the second must happen before puberty and the first only afterwards” (2003, p. 35).
Davies also discusses what he sees are the characteristics of a native speaker. He characterizes native speakers as having membership to a certain group, in that “membership is an acceptance of and an agreement to use certain norms of behavior” (2003, p. 203). Davies also acknowledges that native speaker membership can lapse, in that if native speakers spend a long enough time outside of the group then they can lose the contemporary usage of the language, could lose some of their ability to generate new utterances, and could also become less tolerant of change (p. 203). He lists six particular characteristics of native speakers, which include: the native speaker acquires their native language in childhood; the native speaker is intuitive about what is acceptable in their native language; the native speaker is intuitive about what is distinct between their L1 and L2; the native speaker is able to produce fluent and spontaneous discourse; the native speaker is able to write creatively in their native language; and the native speaker is able to interpret and translate into their native language (p. 210). In regards to whether a second language learner can also possess any of these characteristics, Davies affirms that all of them except for the first one can be attained by an L2 learner.

It is interesting to note that Cook and Davies list some of the same criteria when describing the characteristics of a native speaker. In all there are six characteristics that both scholars mention. These include: the fact that the native speaker’s L1 is acquired in childhood; the native speaker has an intuitive knowledge about their L1; the native speaker is able to use the L1 creatively; the native speaker is able to produce fluent discourse; the native speaker is able to interpret and translate into their native language; and native speakers are members of, or identify with, a certain group.

In practical terms, Davies also gives five possibilities, or “reality definitions” as he calls them, for the native speaker. They are: native speaker by birth; native speaker (or native speaker-like) by being an exceptional learner; native speaker through education using the target language medium; native speaker by virtue of being a native user; and native speaker through long residence in the adopted country (2003, p. 214). In effect, Davies is saying that there are five different ways that a person can be described as a native speaker.

Opinions are certainly divided over whether or not a person can become a native speaker. Davies and Halliday believe it is possible, however Felix believes it is only possible if
the L2 has begun to be learnt in childhood, more specifically before the onset of puberty. Cook contends that, if the definition of native speaker is taken to be the first language one learns, then it is impossible for an individual to acquire a native language later in life, whether the process is begun in childhood or adulthood. Davies states that “native speakers move from a position of insecurity to one of security, while non-native speakers move in the reverse direction” (2003, p. 37). A native speaker, from the time he/she is a small child, is constantly learning the language they are offered. The more they learn and the more meaning they gain, the more secure they feel in being able to communicate and in some sense control their environment. On the other hand, non-native speakers who already have that control in their L1 must abandon that security in order to learn a second language. The ultimate goal of any serious L2 learner is to make sufficient progress in their target language in order to gain security in their L2 as well as their L1. The question then is this: If they can gain enough security in L2, does that not make them, at least in principle, a native speaker of the language?

Saniei (2011), like Mufwene and Rampton, proposes using an alternative to the term ‘native speaker’, particularly in regards to language learning. He suggests using the term “ideal language user”, which he states could be used “to define any language learner who has more creativity of language use, uses language functions more skilfully, shows more proficiency in language use, and is more capable of expressing his/her thought via language, no matter to which community she/he belongs” (p. 76). This term and definition again brings the meaning of ‘native speaker’ away from the notion of birth and mother tongue, and places it more in the idea of an individual possessing the ability to become highly proficient in a language, whether it be their first or a subsequent one.

Others argue that defining a person as simply either a native or non-native speaker is in fact a distinction that is too simplistic. They have proposed that rather than a person being one or the other, he/she occupies a place on a language continuum, and that this position changes over time, and sometimes even in different contexts. And this is especially relevant when attempting to assign a native/nonnative speaker label to language teachers. The studies discussed in the next section raise a different, crucial consideration: ‘native-speakerness’ as a matter of self-perception and identity, rather than as an external evaluation.
2.2.4 Perceptions and identity

Research on language teachers shows that for a teacher defining their own linguistic identity, the terms ‘native speaker’ or ‘non-native speaker’ are often not adequate or appropriate choices. Liu (1999) observed in his study of non-native speaking ESL teachers that some of the participants “found it hard to accept the simplistic way of categorizing a rather complex phenomenon with a NS/NNS dichotomy and expressed difficulty in affiliating themselves with either category” (1999, p. 163). According to Liu, the participants in his study preferred to define themselves along a continuum which was defined by various dimensions. These included sequence (is English learned first?), competence (is English their most competent language, or is it their L1?), culture (what culture are they most affiliated with?), identity (who do they prefer to be recognized as under different circumstances?), environment (did they grow up bilingually?), and politics (why do they have to be labeled as one or the other and not on a continuum?) (p. 163). Liu points out that as each person has a unique history and experiences, a rigid definition of who is a native or non-native speaker is problematic and limiting, and fails to recognize this uniqueness.

These difficulties in assigning a native or non-native status also apply when observing others. Liu’s study also discovered differences between the way the participants viewed themselves and the way they were viewed by their students. The participants were all asked whether they viewed themselves as native or non-native speakers of English, and also their beliefs about how their students perceived them. In several cases the way the teachers perceived themselves was not the same as the students’ perception of them, according to the teachers. One teacher, born in Korea and arriving in the US at the age of nine, defined himself as a native speaker of English. His students, however, due to his Asian appearance, did not perceive him as a native speaker, despite the fact that he had an American accent. Similarly, another student who defined herself as bilingual was seen as a non-native speaker by her students. Again it was her non-Caucasian appearance (she is originally from the Philippines) that seemed to have an effect on her students.

Since differences in perception that students have of their teachers can also lead to differences in expectations, it is important to explore this issue further. Inbar-Lourie (2005) corroborates Liu’s study of teachers that observed potential differences in self-perception
and perception by others. She states that “there may be instances where a gap is created between the group an individual identifies with and the status attributed to the individual by others, i.e. between one’s self identity as compared with one’s perceived identity” (2005, p. 265). This can be seen with native and non-native language speakers who identify themselves as being one or the other, whilst members of the speech community in question may not necessarily identify them in the same way. There may be perceived benefits of some kind for individuals claiming a certain status/identity, whether it is as a native speaker or a non-native speaker, however these will not be gained if other native speakers do not accept them as such. Inbar-Lourie goes on to list various reasons why a speaker claiming a particular identity (be it native or non-native) may not be perceived as such by others. These include “social conventions as to who qualifies for native speaker status” (p. 267); having a low level of language knowledge or gaps in conceptual knowledge between the interacting parties; and their relationship and reciprocal status, such as in the case of language teachers and learners. Conversely, a strong proficiency in the language, particularly with idiomatic usage, may lead a native speaker to assign “native speakerness” to another person who in fact defines him/herself as non-native. And there is always the possibility that language teachers may perceive themselves in one way while their students, as well as other speakers of the language, may perceive them in the other, which can lead to potential misunderstanding.

Inbar-Lourie (2005), from her study of perceived identities of native and non-native speaking teachers, maintains that pronunciation plays a crucial role in defining identity, be it native or non-native; like Grimson, who states “pronunciation may most obviously provide clues for non-native status since it is formed in early age and may be the least conscious element in speech” (Grimson, in Paikeday: 1985, p. 23). Paikeday also refers to pronunciation as a clear indicator to most students, and other members of the speech community, of whether or not to consider a teacher as a native speaker. Inbar-Lourie also contends that language proficiency is related to confidence and/or anxiety amongst language teachers. Teachers with both native-like pronunciation and high level language abilities (especially regarding the idiomatic use of language) will be more confident, and highly proficient users may be mistaken for native speakers, particularly by their students.

Inbar-Lourie’s study (2005) examined 102 EFL teachers in Israel and how they ascribed their own identity – native or non-native – versus how they were perceived by others. The
study showed that there was indeed a gap in the self and perceived identities, and where this was most apparent was in the case of non-native English teachers. While they defined themselves as non-native speakers, they were often perceived as native speakers by other non-native speakers and by their students. This was partly due to the fact that the younger students were less able to tell the difference between a native speaker and non-native speaker with regards to accent. When asked to give reasons why there was a gap in perceptions, the most common reasons given by the teachers were knowledge of the language, accent and language fluency.

The way teachers perceive themselves can have a significant effect on their self-confidence in the classroom. Non-native speaking teachers, as has been shown in Chapter One, are often made to feel less worthy, like “second class citizens”, as Rajagopalan (2005) puts it, particularly in the field of English language teaching. This is despite the fact that 80% of the world’s English language teachers are non-native speakers of English (see Introduction). Rajagopalan states “the native speakers were said to be the true custodians of the language, the only ones authorized to serve as reliable models for all those wishing to acquire it as a second or a foreign language” (p. 284). It is no wonder, then, that a non-native speaking teacher might feel anxious and frustrated, because as Rajagopalan points out, no matter how hard they work they can never become a native speaker; at least, not a native speaker in the traditional sense of the term. He contends, however, that in today’s world the concept of native speaker has become more ideological and less in tune with what goes on in the real world, and that people are becoming increasingly aware of this. In his study of English language teachers in Brazil, he found that those teachers with less teaching experience (and who he presumed to come from a younger generation) were actually less worried about the fact that they were non-native speakers than their older counterparts, which would suggest that in recent years the focus has shifted away from the native/non-native debate and that new teachers are more concerned with aspects such as teacher education and reflective teaching practices (p. 290). The study also found that there was “a clear indication that what really counts when it comes to assessing a teacher’s self-confidence is not necessarily their actual, publicly attestable knowledge of the language, but rather the way they perceive themselves and rate their own fluency” (p. 290). With all of this anxiety and frustration that accompanies teachers when faced with the native speaker issue, Rajagopalan rather
interestingly points out that, the native speaker “is simply non-existent in the world of lived reality” (p. 294). For a native speaking teacher to remain “uncontaminated” (echoing Mufwene’s views), he/she would not be able to meaningfully engage with people from other speech communities, which ironically would preclude them from any actual teaching.

Faez (2011) also looks at self-perceptions in his study of English language teachers, coupled with the complexities involved in classifying teachers as either native or non-native speakers. In his article he discusses the difficulties in defining what a native speaker actually is, and talks about how the native/non-native speaker “dichotomy falls short in capturing the complex and multifaceted nature of individuals’ diverse linguistic backgrounds and tends to misrepresent them. This misrepresentation often leads to discrimination and perpetuates social inequality” (p. 232). In his study of twenty-five candidates enrolled in a teaching course, all of whom came from diverse linguistic backgrounds, Faez found that the traditional native/non-native distinction did not adequately describe them. Based on questionnaires and interviews conducted over the course of the academic year which were designed to elicit their perceptions of themselves, Faez concluded that these twenty-five participants could actually be defined in six different categories: bilingual; English as a first language speaker; second generation English speaker; English-dominant; L1 dominant; and English-variety speaker. Faez also cites Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), who emphasize that an “individual’s identity emerges out of the dialogic struggle between the learner and the community” (p. 149). Faez contends that “this position is particularly important in research on native/non-native designation as it indicates that the identities of individuals should be viewed in light of what is constructed and negotiated in social contexts and not simply according to their self-affiliations, backgrounds, or countries of birth. The negotiated nature of identity also implies that identity is fluid and, therefore, constantly evolving across time and space” (p. 234). There are two important aspects to note here. The first is that one’s ascribed status as either a native or non-native speaker may not give enough detail about that person’s linguistic heritage and their language proficiency at the present time. The native/non-native dichotomy does not allow for the rich linguistic diversity that exists in the world. Secondly, that a person who perceives themselves a certain way at a certain point in time, may identify differently after the passage of time; for example, after having lived in a particular country for a number of years.
The issue of identity, both linguistic and ethnic, is also particularly relevant to the notion of the native speaker. Mawhinney and Xu (1997), whose study examined the challenges faced by foreign-trained teachers enrolled in a pilot program developed at the University of Ottawa, found that accent and identity were intrinsically linked. This program was aimed at helping these teachers to gain access to the Ontario school system and to acquire actual experience teaching in Ontario classrooms, as well as assisting them to upgrade their skills in order to obtain an Ontario Teaching Certificate (p. 632). As these teachers were all foreign-born, English was not their native language and they all carried a foreign accent when speaking English. The study showed that a difficult area for most of the teachers was being “constantly questioned about their accents in English” (p. 636). One of the principals at the schools where they were teaching claimed “If these teachers want to be accepted in my school, they must totally get rid of their accent because the students will have trouble understanding them” (p. 636). This view was strongly contested by the foreign teachers, who not only claimed that their students, in fact, like their foreign accents, but also that their accents were a part of their linguistic identity. One of the teachers maintained that as an adult it was impossible for her to develop a native-like accent. She further argued that “she would be neither Finnish nor Canadian if she tried to do so and that her non-native accent was her identity. Moreover, she felt there was nothing wrong with that identity” (p. 636).

This stance is supported by Demirezen (2007), who states that while some scholars believe that there is no direct link between language and ethnic identity, he contends that language and ethnic identity are complementary to each other and as such “cannot be separated from each other”. He goes on to give an example of Italian immigrants in the US who use their mother tongue (i.e. Italian) as an indicator of their ethnic identity. Language becomes a way for them to not only define themselves as a distinct ethnic group, but to distinguish their group from others in the community. Demirezen goes on to affirm that for bilingual speakers, and in particular language teachers, “second language learning in many respects involves the acquisition of a second language identity”. He also states that “some contexts of foreign language learning involve an identity crisis”. Demirezen suggests that for non-native speaking English language teachers, consciously maintaining a foreign accent in their speech is a way of accentuating their own ethnic identity; of differentiating themselves from native speakers.
2.3 The Italian Context in Australia

This thesis is a study of native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian in Australia. A part of this study includes the teachers’ perceptions of themselves in the classroom, their strengths and weaknesses in relation to their linguistic status; and their students’ perceptions of them. It is, therefore, important to discuss the linguistic situation of Italian in Australia as a way of setting the scene. The circumstances surrounding the linguistic status of Italian are particularly complex due to the history of Italian migration to Australia, and to the presence of first, second and third generation Italo-Australians. Adding to this is the fact that, as will be discussed in greater detail below, Italian migrants often spoke dialect as their native language, and these dialects differed significantly, not only from one region to the next, but from standard Italian (based on Florentine dialect) as well.

Italian language teachers in Australia come from a range of backgrounds. There are those who have no Italian background at all, but who have learnt Italian and developed a strong enough link with it that they feel the desire to pass their knowledge of Italian language and culture on to new students. There are Italian teachers who come from an Italian background; they may be first generation Italians who came to Australia in the 1950’s or 60’s when Italian migration was at its peak, or they may be from the second or third generation, the children and grandchildren of these original migrants. While mass migration from Italy to Australia finished in the 1970s, there have been some Italians who have come to Australia in the last twenty years; a new first generation of migrants. The Italians who migrated to Australia post-1970s, unlike those from the post-World War II period, tended to be more skilled and professional migrants, who, according to Baldassar and Pyke (2014), decided to migrate “for love (and lifestyle) first and opportunity second” (p. 128). Then there are the so-called “new migrants” or “third wave” of migration (2014, p. 129), who arrived in Australia after 2000, mostly on working holiday visas. The principal motivation for these migrants was a desire to leave the more difficult economic conditions in Italy and find work, which as Baldassar and Pyke point out has become increasingly difficult since the Global Financial Crisis, which has led, according to them, to unemployment rates in Italy of around 12% (p. 130).
Linguistically speaking then, these teachers are all different, ranging from native Italian speakers who speak little to no dialect (the most recent arrivals), to native dialect speakers who perhaps spoke very little Italian to start with (first generation migrants post-World War II).

Taking a historical view, Lepschy (2002) claims that it is estimated that only about 10% of the Italian population actually spoke standard Italian at the time of Unification in 1860, and for these people it would most likely not have been their first language. As Manzoni had observed in 1846 (as quoted in Lepschy), “there is in Italy no language that is, as they say, sucked with the mother’s milk, used, understood by everyone, the language, in other words, of those who only have one language, and which therefore can be called the Italians’ very own native language and can in this sense properly be termed the Italian language” (2002, p. 18). For the vast majority of Italians dialect was their native language, and these dialects varied greatly from region to region. Lepschy states that the commonly held view is that native speakers of standard Italian started appearing after 1950, “owing to the general diffusion of television, which for the first time in Italian history made spoken Italian familiar to everyone in the country” (p. 20). Prior to this a diglossic situation existed, whereby dialect was used as the everyday, informal language, and standard Italian or Latin were the literary languages used in formal situations. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century, therefore, that a much larger portion of the Italian population was using standard Italian, and one could find “children who can be described as native speakers of Italian rather than dialect” (p. 20).

This is especially pertinent to the Italian community in Australia, and to their language usage, as the greater part of Italian migration to Australia took place after 1950. Between 1947 and 1976 over 360 000 Italians left Italy “da difficili condizioni economiche”¹ in order to find work in Australia (Bettoni, 2007, p. 39), with the peak decade being 1951 to 1961. During this time there was an average of almost 18 000 Italian migrants arriving in Australia each year - almost 180 000 for that decade alone (Castles, 1992). As Rubino (2002) affirms, it is fairly safe to assume that most, if not all, of these migrants, coming mainly from rural and impoverished areas, spoke dialect as their first language and Italian as their second; therefore

¹ “from difficult economic conditions”
they brought their various dialects to Australia as their native languages and any Italian that they spoke was “conosciuta con competenza variabile”\(^2\) (Bettoni, 2007, p. 40).

In the early 1980s, Carsaniga (1983) attempted to give a more detailed linguistic profile to Italian migrants and their children. He first divided them into two groups; those who learnt the language, or languages, they speak before the age of eight, and those who acquired them after, which links to the critical age hypothesis. Of those languages acquired there are four possibilities – dialect, regional Italian, a variety he refers to as Australitaliano, and Australian English. For a monolingual speaker, therefore, there are only four possibilities; however for bilingual speakers there are twelve possibilities. In the first instance they could have acquired either one or both of their languages either before or after the age of eight, and then of course there are the four languages previously mentioned. An individual, for example, could be a speaker from birth of dialect and then acquired English, or some form of regional Italian, or indeed any other language, after the age of eight. Simply defining first and second generation Italo-Australians as native speakers of a particular language becomes, according to Carsaniga’s classification process, complex, and perhaps ultimately too highly detailed to be of any practical use.

Characterising first and second generation Italo-Australians linguistically can, therefore, be quite complex, especially as many first generation Italians from the post-World War II period came to Australia with dialect as their dominant language, Italian as a second and weaker language, and often little to no English. After arriving in Australia some English would be picked up, particularly by those working outside the home, but for many migrants there was never a need to learn more than the very basic level of English. With the birth of the second generation English became more prevalent, particularly in the home. Once the first-born child started attending school he/she would quickly learn English as it was the medium of instruction and the only way for them to communicate with their peers. They would then start using English in the home with their parents and younger siblings, and so the home ceased to be a dialect-only domain. As Bettoni explains,

\(^2\) “known with variable proficiency”
“la lingua acquisita per prima è di solito il dialetto dei genitori. Tuttavia, dal momento in cui i bambini cominciano a frequentare la scuola, l’inglese diventa rapidamente la lingua dominante. L’italiano è di solito la lingua che i giovani conoscono meno”^{3} (2007, p. 40-41).

For the third generation, the attrition of dialect and Italian is quite significant. These children are often brought up in an exclusively English speaking home, and even if their parents do speak dialect or Italian, the children rarely use it themselves. Bettoni states “I risultati della ricerca in questi ultimi anni indicano chiaramente che i ragazzi usano ben poco le due vecchie lingue, anche quando le capiscono”^{4} (2007, p. 51). Bettoni goes on to explain that in passing from one generation to the next dialect becomes, for the parents, a way to communicate with the grandparents of the family, but for the children it is really only used occasionally, in single words or phrases repeated from their parents or grandparents, or in an expressive sense rather than purely communicative. Italian, Bettoni maintains, is rarely used by anyone in the family domain. For grandparents and parents it remains a formal, “high” language, and for the children it is a language that is learned at school. Bettoni claims that the third generation, while acknowledging their Italian background, are “ormai saldamente australiani”^{5} (2007, p. 43), and for this generation an attempt to reclaim their linguistic heritage means learning Italian, not dialect as their grandparents would have spoken – “oggi l’acquisizione interessa soltanto l’italiano”^{6} (2007, p. 58).

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter has been concerned with how to define a native speaker, or if it is indeed actually possible. The traditional view holds that a native speaker is one who was born and raised speaking a particular language; that a native language is the first language an individual learns to speak. From a theoretical perspective there have been many doubts cast about the use of this term, and how it is conceptualised. Paikeday (1985) questions whether the term has any

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3 “the language acquired first is usually the parents’ dialect. Nonetheless, from the moment in which the child begins attending school, English rapidly becomes the dominant language. Italian is usually the language that the young people know least”.

4 “the research results in recent years clearly indicate that young people use the two old languages very little, even when they understand them”.

5 “by now firmly Australians”.

6 “today acquisition involves only Italian”.
validity at all, and others, such as Mufwene (1998) and Rampton (1990) (arguing from a sociolinguistic perspective), contend that “proficient speaker” or “expert speaker” are more practical terms to use. Sociolinguistically there are many issues that lead us to believe that the idealised notion of the native speaker just does not exist in real life. In today’s world there are few homogeneous speech communities, and, as Kirkpatrick (2007) observes, a person’s dominant language may change over the years depending on geographical and social factors. From the perspective of second language teaching and learning, again finding an exact definition of “native speaker” is problematic, with many teachers finding it difficult to define themselves as either one or the other. The complex and diverse backgrounds of many teachers have led some scholars to propose a language continuum that many teachers move along during the course of their lives.

Davies (2003) and Cook (1999) draw attention to certain characteristics that they believe a native speaker possesses. In their opinion native speakers are intuitive about their native language, are fluent and spontaneous, are creative in their native language, are able to translate into their native language, acquired their native language in childhood, and by virtue of their being native speakers of a certain language belong to a particular language community.

For the purposes of my study, my position (based on the research) is that self-perception is the most authentic way to approach the issue. I feel that there are so many underlying complexities in judging an individual’s potential ‘native speakerness’ that in many situations it is too difficult to impose a label on someone else. A person may be born in one country but move to another at a relatively young age, and that new language may eventually become the dominant one. An individual may be raised in a bilingual or multilingual environment, and therefore may feel equally comfortable speaking more than one language. A non-native speaker by birth may gain, over time and with experience, a proficiency in the language equal to any native speaker. If a person perceives themselves to be a native speaker of a particular language, then they are. If they describe themselves as bilingual, or as a proficient speaker, or having a native-like competence, then those are also equally valid descriptions.
This is the approach that I have taken with this study, in that I have not imposed a set of rules on who can be classed as a native speaker or not. Rather, I have asked the teachers involved in this study to define themselves as either native or non-native, and then taken their definition as the most appropriate one for them.

In Chapter Three I will outline the methodology that I have used to carry out this study, detailing all of the decisions that were made and the processes that were undertaken in order to collect data.
Chapter Three – Methodology

This study combines both a qualitative and quantitative approach in its methodology, and focuses on both teachers of Italian at tertiary level, and students of Italian at tertiary level. The method for gathering data involved administering online questionnaires to both university students and teachers, and then conducting follow-up interviews with both groups.

The following chapter will first describe the methodologies used in previous studies regarding native and non-native speaking language teachers, discussing why they were chosen and how they were implemented (section 3.1). It will then go on to explain the methodological approach that I have taken with this study (3.2), describing in detail the process by which it was decided to take this approach and how it was carried out. The participants chosen for this study will be discussed (3.3), as well as the instruments used to collect data – the questionnaires and interviews (3.4 & 3.5). I will also review the process of how the questionnaires were administered (3.6), and the carrying out of the interviews (3.7).

3.1 Methodologies used in previous studies

The various methodologies used in previous studies of native and non-native speaking teachers generally fall within two categories – quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative approach tends to use larger numbers of participants in the study, and frequently relies on written surveys or questionnaires. As compared to a qualitative approach, “quantitative research refers to approaches to empirical inquiry that collect, analyze, and display data in numerical rather than narrative form” (The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, 2008, p. 713). Qualitative research, however, is ethnographic in nature, and therefore less focused on the numbers and more on the reasons why the participants believe certain things or behave in a certain way. It often utilizes face-to-face interviews with the participants in an effort to gain deeper insights into the information gathered. The quantitative approach will address what are the pertinent factors that are relevant to a
particular study, while the qualitative approach goes further into explaining why those factors are relevant.

Ustunluoglu (2007) and Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002), as described in Chapter One, both used quantitative approaches in their studies. For Ustunluoglu, the aim of her study was to identify university students’ perceptions of native and non-native teachers of English, as well as to identify any deficiencies and needs in the teaching process. This was so that suggestions could then be made to teachers in order to help them improve the quality of their teaching. To gather this information Ustunluoglu administered a questionnaire to 311 students at a private university of economics in Izmir, Turkey. There were thirty items in the questionnaire, divided into four sections; and thirty-eight teachers were evaluated by the questionnaire. In Lasagabaster & Sierra’s study of university students’ perceptions of native and non-native speaking teachers of English in the Basque Autonomous Community, seventy-six undergraduate students completed questionnaires, based around four hypotheses (as explained in Chapter One).

It is clear that when using written questionnaires as an investigative tool larger numbers of respondents can be surveyed. Ustunluoglu demonstrated this in her study where she was able to analyze responses from over 300 students. This is because with most questionnaires it is simply a case of counting ticks in boxes, or using numbered scales that can be collated and analyzed mathematically. Questionnaires can also be designed to take much less time for an individual to fill out, sometimes only fifteen to twenty minutes, than it would take to conduct an interview. In addition, questionnaires can be taken simultaneously by large numbers of participants and, if administered via email, by participants anywhere in the world.

A quantitative study can often tell us what the important issues are, but not always all of the reasons why these issues are important; to go deeper than that a qualitative approach is often needed. In fact, Lasagabaster and Sierra note that the views of the students from their study could be explored in greater depth through the use of qualitative data gathering. They go on to say that a “hybrid” use of quantitative and qualitative approaches can increase the validity of a study and give the researchers more insight into the issues being examined.

A good example of this hybrid use of methodologies is the study by Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999). As mentioned previously in Chapter One, their study involved examining the
beliefs and self-perceptions of a group of non-native English speaking graduate students who were studying to be teachers of English. There were seventeen participants involved, all enrolled in an MA or PhD program in TESOL at a university in the United States. The study was conducted in two phases, with the first phase employing a questionnaire to gather data, distributed at the beginning of the academic quarter. This phase examined how the participants perceived themselves as teaching professionals in terms of their linguistic competence, communicative competence and teaching techniques in comparison to native English speaking teachers. This constituted the quantitative element of the study. The second phase involved conducting in-depth interviews with the participants throughout the course of the academic quarter, and examining their autobiographical accounts of experiences learning and teaching English. The purpose of this was to gain an in-depth insight into the perceptions and beliefs of these students about the issues of native versus non-native in the teaching of the English language. This constituted the qualitative element.

Purely qualitative methodologies, on the other hand, tend to involve a lesser number of respondents, usually with one-on-one interviews or discussion groups utilized to gather the required information. Survey one from Medgyes’ (1999) study (see Chapter One) is a good example of a qualitative study that utilized a much lower number of respondents. Twenty-eight people were given questionnaires, and then seven of them were subsequently interviewed. This allowed Medgyes to gather more in-depth information about why the respondents felt a certain way, and in a reasonable time-frame. Mahboob (2003) was another example of a study using a qualitative method, although in this case rather than interviews he asked students to write reflections on their experiences of being taught by native and non-native speaking teachers.

3.2 The present study

As has been discussed in Chapter One, there has been much debate about this native speaker issue; about the factors affecting a teacher’s experience in the classroom, and how this is shaped by their native/ non-native background. Certainly there are differences between native and non-native speaking teachers; they are bound to have different strengths and weaknesses due to their different linguistic backgrounds, and this has been demonstrated in
the literature. In better understanding how a teacher’s linguistic background impacts upon their skills and abilities as a teacher, it is hoped that we can give teachers the tools to help them make the most of their classroom experience, both from their position as teachers, and from the students’ position as learners. This thesis is, therefore, concerned with asking language teachers what they think and how they feel about their teaching experience, what they feel are their strengths and limitations. With this in mind, this study focusses especially on the teachers’ backgrounds, that is, whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language that they are teaching. And on the other side of the classroom, this study is asking students to reflect about their learning experience, and how it is related to the status of their teachers as native or non-native speakers. In other words, I intend to explore the perceptions that teachers of Italian have of themselves, and the perceptions that students have of them, and this will be in the context of a university setting. In regards to the whole classroom experience I will investigate what it is that these teachers are happy about, confident in, proud of, frustrated about, nervous or unsure about, and so on. The underlying theme, however, in exploring these teacher and student perceptions, is always how they are related to the issue of ‘native speakerness’. The ultimate goal of the thesis is not simply to highlight any particular group of teachers’ faults and failings, but rather to be able to offer insights so that the teachers can implement strategies in the classroom to help them to be better teachers.

In order to achieve this I decided that the best way to gather data for this study would be to employ a hybrid approach; that is, to have both a quantiative and a qualitative element present, as described in the previous section, using questionnaires and interviews as my research tools. Whilst questionnaires are a valuable research tool and have been used in many studies (as discussed in depth in Chapter One), they can also have weaknesses. According to Braine (2010), “Questionnaires may not be taken seriously by respondents and their responses may be limited by the prompts on the questionnaire” (p. 30). In addition Braine describes the “discourse-analytic” approach taken by Mahboob in his research, in which he invited students to provide detailed written responses to certain written cues, as “a welcome change from the use of questionnaires” (2010, p. 40). Acknowledging Braine’s views on the use of questionnaires, and to allow for any potential limitations imposed by the nature of the questionnaires used in this study, I provided an opportunity at the end of the questionnaires for the respondents to leave written comments if they wished. These comments were then
analysed in terms of common themes or ideas that were expressed, and are described in detail in Chapters Four and Five. I then conducted in-depth interviews with a smaller number of respondents. Braine (2010) maintains that in-depth interviews may “reveal perceptions that remain suppressed” (p. 30), and the purpose of the interviews in this study was undoubtedly to delve deeper into the perceptions of the respondents.

The initial phase involved collecting data through an online questionnaire sent via email to the students and teachers that I had targeted for this study, which represented the quantitative element of the study. The second phase then involved carrying out follow-up interviews which were carried out with a number of participants in a face to face setting. This of course provided the qualitative data for the study.

The phases of this study were conducted in this order precisely so that the data gathered from the questionnaires could help to inform and shape the interview questions. It is important to note that it has been a deliberate and careful decision on my part to choose university students for this study, and not primary or high school students. The reason for this is that I believe that university students have a greater capacity to be reflective about their experiences as language learners, and about their perceptions of their teachers.

In summary, this approach is intended to be ethnographic in nature. While the numerical data is very important, this study is not intended to be a statistical analysis. Rather, the quantitative and qualitative data together will provide a detailed description of the students’ and teachers’ perceptions, which will then be further analysed.

Below I will highlight in detail the process by which it was decided who the participants would be, when the phases of the study would take place, and explain in detail the design and content of the questionnaires and interviews.

### 3.3 The participants

As stated in the introduction, this study is focused on both the perceptions of tertiary level students towards their teachers of Italian who are either native or non-native speakers of Italian, and the perceptions that these university teachers have of themselves in the
classroom. In the following section I will highlight the processes through which I chose the participants to be involved, beginning with the students.

3.3.1 Students

When considering the students for this study one needs to bear in mind the different levels that students may be at in their learning journey, the number of years that they have been studying for and the context in which they are learning the language; and in fact many of the studies I have researched have focused on students who are at different stages in their language learning. Ustunluoglu (2007) administered her questionnaires to students covering a range of levels, from beginners through to advanced. In Lasagabaster and Sierra’s (2002) study the respondents to their questionnaire also varied in their level of language skills. The students ranged from having studied English for four years up to fifteen years. I felt, therefore, that it would be extremely beneficial in my study to administer questionnaires to students who were in their 1st year of studying Italian, and to those who were in their 3rd year. Within each year group of students it was also helpful to look at both students who had begun studying Italian at university at a beginners level, and students who had studied Italian throughout high school.

There are several reasons for selecting students at different levels. Firstly, studies of English language students have shown that students who are at different levels in their studies often have different preferences for a certain kind of teacher. Lasagabaster & Sierra’s (2002) study, for example, showed that the preference for native speaking teachers increased as the education levels of the students rose. In conjunction with this, their study also showed that there was a general preference for non-native speakers in the areas of learning strategies and grammar, while native speaking teachers were preferred in the areas of pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary, and culture and civilization. They suggest that students at a beginners level are generally more focused on the grammar of the language, and they often show a preference for non-native speaking teachers as these teachers are often seen to have a strong proficiency and a greater emphasis on grammar in the classroom (discussed in more detail in Chapter One). This is because as non-native speakers they too have had to learn the grammar of the language from a second language learning perspective. Interestingly, in Medgyes’ (1999) study where he administered questionnaires to both native and non-native speaking
teachers, the non-native teachers felt that their greatest strength was in the area of grammar. More advanced students, however, who have already mastered the grammar of the language are often more interested in cultural aspects of the language, and in gaining better oral skills. For this reason they tend to prefer native speaking teachers as these teachers’ strengths are perceived to be oral fluency, knowledge of colloquialisms and slang, and knowledge of cultural aspects of the language. In Medgyes’ study of teachers, the native speaking teachers stated that oral fluency was their greatest strength. It is, therefore, important to see if these characteristics are also displayed in the context of Italian language teaching in Australia.

Another reason to administer questionnaires to 3rd year students in particular is that after having studied Italian for several years at university it is very likely that they would have been taught by several different teachers, both native and non-native, and so they would have insights into having both types.

It is also important to point out that the students may not have been taught by the same teachers who participated in this study; however it is still possible to comment on the differences and similarities that arise from the perceptions of both groups, as there is some common ground in their experiences. The students who participated in the questionnaires and interviews were reporting on their own experiences, as were the teachers, and yet, as will be shown in the following chapters, there are parallels that exist between those experiences.

### 3.3.2 Teachers

Some studies have focussed solely on non-native speaking teachers (Liu, 1999; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), some have examined only native speaking teachers (Millrood, 1999), and others have looked at both native and non-native speaking teachers within the same framework (Medgyes, 1999). For this study I decided to examine the perceptions of both native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian in Australia, at university level. The reason for this is to be able to compare and contrast the views of natives and non-natives in regards to their own teaching experience, and then further to see how their views compare to those of their students. In his study, Medgyes administered questionnaires and conducted interviews with teachers from a range of backgrounds with differing levels of teaching
experience. There were three phases to Medgyes’ research involving three different questionnaires, therefore there were a different number of participants for each separate phase. For the first phase there were twenty-eight teachers who completed the questionnaire, and then he conducted follow-up interviews with seven of them. In the second phase there were 216 teachers who completed the questionnaire, with no follow-up interviews conducted. Finally, for the third phase eighty-one teachers completed the questionnaire, and then ten of them were interviewed later.

In this study too the perceptions of teachers were investigated through a questionnaire and interviews. The online questionnaire for this study was sent to teachers who were full-time, part-time or casual staff, and who had been teaching in Australia for a diverse number of years. I hoped to have as many teachers as possible complete the written questionnaire, and will discuss later in this chapter the details of how many questionnaires were actually completed.

3.4 The questionnaires

The design of the questionnaires for both the students and the teachers required thorough consideration of many different issues. They were closely based on those found in other studies, (especially Medgyes 1999; and Lasagabaster & Sierra 2002), and also through extensive consultation with my supervisors. (See Appendix A for a full copy of the student questionnaire) The criteria for the design of the questionnaires were: easily understandable language, reasonable length, specific order of questions, specific order of responses (primacy effect), and subdivision into specific linguistic features.

As a general principle the questions themselves needed to be easily understood and therefore easy for the respondents to answer, and care was taken to achieve this. Both of the questionnaires were based around short, simple answers; this was so that the questions could easily be answered using a numbered scale, or simply with multiple choice answers. There was, however, a space at the end for any comments or thoughts that the respondents may have had regarding any of the questions they answered. As noted before, this questionnaire
is quantitative by nature, so it was necessary that it be easy to count numbers and add up answers at the end, and longer written answers are not as easy to quantify in that manner.

In all there were thirteen close-ended questions regarding teaching and learning, and then, as indicated above, a space at the end where the students could write any comments, but which was not obligatory. Lasagabaster and Sierra follow a very similar pattern in their questionnaire, in which there are eleven sections, each with a heading which indicated the theme of that particular set of questions – e.g. grammar, vocabulary etc. Their questionnaire, however, while helpful as a guideline, was somewhat longer than the one used in this study, and was not administered online as this one was.

Written questionnaires, especially those that are self-administered like online questionnaires, need to consist predominantly of close ended questions. As Bourque states,

“although highly motivated respondents may be willing to answer a few open-ended questions, the surveyor who writes a self-administered questionnaire dominated by such questions will find that few questionnaires will be returned, and those that are returned will frequently have substantial amounts of missing or irrelevant data” (2003, p. 20).

It must be noted that it was a conscious choice on my part to use close-ended questions in the questionnaire as they “typically involve a greater uniformity of measurement and therefore greater reliability. They also lead to answers that can be easily quantified and analysed” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 93).

For both of the questionnaires I made the questions short and specific, with easy to understand language and straightforward answers to choose from. Keeping the questionnaires to a reasonable length meant it was more likely that the respondents would complete them; and as Bourque suggests, I did not give the respondents an unrealistic estimate of the time it would take to complete them. Too short a time frame is misleading, and may lead the respondents to believe that the information being gathered is of a simplistic nature or of less importance. A longer time frame may discourage respondents from deciding to complete the questionnaire. The online questionnaires for this study did not need to have open ended questions, as the follow-up interviews were designed to allow for these, so that more in-depth information could be gathered. It was also important to make the questionnaires as easy as possible to fill out as the respondents were completing them on
their own with no interviewer to assist them or clarify the meaning of certain questions. Ideally everyone taking the questionnaire should have been able to answer the questions with little or no difficulty. The format I chose was a multiple choice, with the participants choosing the answer that best described how they felt, and it should only have taken around fifteen minutes to complete.

In formulating the questions and considering the order of the questions it was necessary to be aware of several items. Firstly, as supported by Bourque (2003), it was important to start the questionnaire with several basic questions, such as the age of the respondent, their educational level, and their linguistic background. This also enables one to obtain basic demographic information which is important in many studies. As the questionnaire progresses it can then “proceed to more complex or sensitive questions” (Bourque, 2003, p. 56). Bourque maintains that placing difficult questions at the beginning of the questionnaire may contribute to a higher number of the respondents choosing not to complete the questionnaire. Of both the student and teacher questionnaires in my study very few of them were started and then abandoned; the vast majority were begun and completed. Therefore, in terms of content, to begin with the student questionnaire needed to elicit some basic information – the age of the student, gender, their linguistic and ethnic background, and how long they have studied Italian for.

I then chose to break down the language into its various linguistic features – grammar, vocabulary, speaking skills/ fluency, pronunciation, cultural aspects of the language, classroom management skills, and learning strategies/ class preparation. An example from the student questionnaire is no. 12 – “In general, I would learn more vocabulary with a”: a) non-native speaking teacher, b) native speaking teacher, c) no preference.

Another issue that Bourque draws attention to is the primacy effect (2003, p. 21), which is the respondents’ tendency to select the first response that they come to. In order to try to overcome this I made sure that I varied the order of the responses, particularly in the student questionnaire. This was also important to ensure that no bias was reflected in the questionnaires. As Bourque states, “one of the most difficult things that surveyors must do is to minimize the extent to which they project their own ideas about how people behave or what they think about onto the survey respondents” (2003, p. 80). The order of the questions,
how they are asked, the types of responses given as alternatives for the respondents to choose from can all affect the data that are generated. The questions needed to be as neutral as possible. This was especially relevant to me as prior to administering the questionnaires I had read widely on the topic of native and non-native speaking teachers and so I had some expectations about the data I would receive. The fact too that I am a non-native speaking teacher of Italian is also significant, and so it was important for me when writing the questionnaires to take a step back and not have any preconceptions about the results that would be generated. In the instructions for the questionnaire, while informing the respondents that these questionnaires were part of a PhD research project, I did not say that I was a non-native speaking teacher of Italian myself.

To avoid any potential bias the responses for the student questionnaire were alternated between each question. For example, qu. 11 asked “in general, I would prefer to learn grammar with a:” and then the three alternatives were given in the order “native speaking teacher, non-native speaking teacher, no preference”. For qu. 12, the order of the responses was swapped to be “non-native speaking teacher, native speaking teacher, no preference”. For each subsequent question the order was switched each time, so that the students were not always given the same possible response first. The structure of the teacher questionnaire was very similar to the student one.

According to Bourque, self-administered questionnaires, like online surveys, “generally work best when the focus of the research question is on the present” (2003, p. 30), rather than the past. Most of the questions, therefore, in both the student and teacher questionnaires were worded in the present conditional tense. The questions were deliberately framed in the conditional (i.e. using “would”) as I assumed that some of the students taking part might not have been taught by both native and non-native teachers, and I wanted those students to consider what their preference would be, what their perceptions are.

Like the student questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire was designed as to elicit some basic information such as age, gender, place of birth, educational background, whether they had undertaken any teacher training, how long they had taught Italian in Australia, and how many hours they taught per week on average (see Appendix B for a full copy of the
teacher questionnaire). I also included a question asking the teachers to define themselves as either native or non-native teachers, or, if they prefer, some other label (eg. bilingual). I believed that it was best for them to define themselves rather than trying to impose a definition on them, as we have already seen (in Chapter Two) how difficult and complex that can be. I then asked them a series of questions relating to various aspects of language teaching where they had to rate their feelings about teaching it. There was also an opportunity at the end of the questionnaire for them to write any comments or thoughts that they may have regarding their teaching experience, which was optional.

An example from the teacher questionnaire is no. 11: “Out of the following aspects of Italian language teaching, which would you rank as your top four/ strongest skills”. They were then given a list of eight skills, from which they had to choose four and rank them in order. Clear and sufficient instructions for any questionnaire are crucial. The respondents were sent an email explaining the purpose of the study, who I am and which university I am from, my contact details should they have any questions, and reassurance of anonymity and that ethics approval for the project had been given. Only after reading all of that were they given the link to the online questionnaire. Follow up reminder emails were sent, but only to students at the University of Western Australia, as with the other universities I did not have direct access to student email addresses but had to rely on other administrative or academic staff. For the teachers I was able to send reminder emails to all of them as I had access to their email addresses.

Bourque refers to open ended questions where respondents are invited to write their own comments as “ventilation questions”, as they “allow respondents to ventilate their feelings about the topic or the questionnaire” (2003, pp. 111-112). These are quite common in written questionnaires as they give those participating in the questionnaire the opportunity to not only comment about the content of the questionnaire, but also make mention of something that perhaps was missed in the questions, or even to make a complaint if necessary. While these ventilation questions were not compulsory, many of the respondents, both the students and teachers, chose to leave some sort of comment; and these comments were helpful when formulating the questions for the follow-up interviews.
One last important aspect to note about both the student and teacher questionnaires was that, apart from the very last question (where they could leave any comments if they chose), all of the questions had a forced response. This meant that the respondents were obligated to answer each question, and that they were not allowed to continue through to the end of the questionnaire if they had missed any questions. One obvious reason for this was that I did not want to have any questions accidentally left out, therefore losing important information and possibly rendering that respondent’s questionnaire invalid. In addition to this I wanted all the respondents to be aware that every single question in each questionnaire was important, was well thought-out and integral to the whole. While this may have created some difficulties for the respondents, in the end 94% of the students who began their questionnaire went on to complete it, and 91% of the teachers who began it completed their questionnaire.

It is difficult to know why exactly those particular participants chose not to complete their questionnaires. It could have been due to an unexpected interruption, or a lack of clarity in the questions which made it difficult for the respondents to answer them all. In every study there are limitations, and there are differences between the individuals participating in the study which can make it difficult to predict how all of the respondents will react. Ultimately, however, as indicated above, almost all of the respondents were able to complete their questionnaires.

The details regarding the administration of the questionnaires are discussed in the following section.

3.5 Administering the questionnaires

Both the questionnaire to the students and the questionnaire to the teachers were administered via online links, which they received in an email. There are several advantages to dispensing a questionnaire in this fashion, rather than in a face-to-face, pen and paper scenario. Firstly, they allow for a much wider geographic coverage (Bourque, 2003, p. 10), with respondents able to be reached anywhere that they have internet access. For this study it also meant that I was able to administer questionnaires to students all around Australia without having to physically leave Perth. This in turn means that I was able to include a much
larger sample size, as there are limited numbers of students of Italian in Western Australia. Bourque also points out that while some people may be reluctant to talk with anyone that they do not know, whether in person or on the phone, “these same persons may, however, be willing to respond to a mail or online questionnaire” (2003, p. 11). Other advantages for an online questionnaire are that they are much easier to implement than traditional paper or other forms of questionnaires and interviews. There is no need to hire interviewers or other personnel to administer the questionnaires – I was able to construct the questionnaire and write and forward the emails myself. In terms of timing online questionnaires also have an advantage as I could send the questionnaires out when they were ready at a time of my choosing, and I did not have to worry about intruding on class time in order to administer the questionnaires. It also meant that I could administer them all at once for both the first and third year students, and to all the teachers regardless of where they lived in Australia. Bourque also points out that online surveys have the advantage of “providing relatively clean data that require little or no end-stage processing” (2003, p. 12). The computer programs that set up these questionnaires also calculate numbers and totals automatically as the questionnaires are completed, therefore there is no need to manually count ticks in boxes or numbers of responses, and no need to calculate any percentages.

The student questionnaire was administered in the final two to three weeks of the second semester, giving them a longer period of teaching to reflect on, and before the final exam period when many students would likely be preoccupied with study. The teachers were sent their questionnaire immediately after the end of semester, so that their current teaching duties were finished and therefore they potentially had more time to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires to the teachers were sent at the same time, via email addresses that were obtained from their universities’ websites. The student questionnaires were not all sent at the exact same time as with each university I had to be given permission to administer the questionnaires and the time it took to be given permission varied. They were all sent within one to two weeks.

The easiest and most efficient way to administer this questionnaire was via email; that is, emailing the students a link that took them directly to the online questionnaire. A quick search on Google revealed that there are a number of web-based resources with which one can build an online survey, some of which are free and some which have an attached cost. As
a UWA student I had access to an online survey tool called “Qualtrics”, which I was able to use free of charge, and is both easy to use and able to gather complex data effectively and confidentially. Once the survey was constructed I was able send it via email to the relevant students through an administrative staff member at the University of Western Australia; I simply sent her an email with the questionnaire link which she then forwarded on. The process at other universities around Australia was the same. Ethics approval for this project was sought and granted by the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia. While participation in this study was completely voluntary, by providing a financial incentive I hoped to encourage more students to take part; therefore I offered vouchers to several randomly chosen people who filled out the questionnaire. This is certainly a common practice amongst questionnaires that are often emailed to university students, and I have often been more encouraged to take part in a survey if there is the potential for a reward.

To begin with I administered the questionnaire to students at the University of Western Australia, and then to students at other universities in Australia. The questionnaire was sent to multiple universities in order to maximise the response rate. As an example, in Ustunluoglu’s study she received responses from 311 students; with Lasagabaster & Sierra there were seventy-six students who filled in questionnaires. I had no definite expectations in regards to numbers for the questionnaire, but was confident that I would be able to receive at least 100 responses, and I believed that this number would give me enough data to make observations and draw some conclusions. In the end there were six universities that agreed to pass on the link to the questionnaire to their students – the University of Western Australia, the University of the Sunshine Coast, the University of Sydney, Flinders University, La Trobe University, and the University of Technology, Sydney. There were several universities that I never heard back from, even after sending them more than one email. One university politely declined to send the link as they had already asked their students to respond to several online questionnaires regarding the implementation of new courses and did not wish to overwhelm them with yet another one. Another two had stated that they needed permission from higher up before they could pass on the link, and then nothing further was heard from them; however as the academic year was rapidly drawing to a close, time was probably a factor in these cases.
It is difficult to know exactly how many students received the email inviting them to participate in this study by completing the questionnaire. In all cases I was never given personal access to any student email addresses, but rather I sent the email to an administrative assistant or course coordinator, who then forwarded it on to the relevant students. At the University of Western Australia I know the administrative assistant in the department of European languages quite well, and so I was able to ask her to send reminder emails to the students with the online link on two further occasions before the end of the academic year. After each reminder was sent I noticed a small jump in the number of questionnaires completed. In all there were 142 student questionnaires completed – 102 from first year students, and 40 from third year students.

The issue of when to administer the questionnaires was an important one to consider. As far as the students were concerned, I wanted as many of them as possible to complete the questionnaire, so it was decided that it should not be given around exam time when students were likely to be very busy, or during holidays when they would possibly be travelling or certainly not particularly interested in doing anything related to their university studies. The 1st year students as well needed to have spent at least several months studying Italian at university in order for them to have had time to form views on the issues being asked about. I felt, therefore, that the best time would be towards the end of the university semester, but before the beginning of the examination period, which offered me two opportunities to administer the questionnaires. For first semester this would be between May and June, and for second semester it would fall between September and October. In the end I chose to administer the questionnaires in October, which ensured that both groups of students had had ample time to form opinions about their various teachers. This was also done by Ustunluoglu (2007), who administered her questionnaires at the end of the second term, so that the students had developed some experiences in the language classroom.

Again, to maximise the response rate for the teacher questionnaire I sent emails with the link to teaching staff at all of the universities where Italian is taught. I found email addresses from the universities’ websites, and in one case was given the email addresses of several casual staff members from the head of the Italian department at another university. In all there were 63 teaching staff members that were sent the link for the questionnaire, and I received 32 completed questionnaires. According to Nulty (2008), one can expect, on
average, a 33% response rate to online questionnaires; however in this case the response rate was just over 50%, which is a very pleasing result.

The issue of when exactly to administer the questionnaires to the teachers was somewhat less problematic than the same issue regarding students. Teachers would most likely be equally busy throughout the semester, and while they may have more marking to do at the end of semester – end of semester essays, exams etc. – they will also be free of teaching duties. I decided to send the teacher questionnaires in October; however I felt that in general teachers would be more flexible in having the time to fill them out than students. Teachers also tend to still have duties to attend to at university, even after the end of semester, unlike students, who are more likely to forget about university once their last exam or assignment is completed. And I was also fairly hopeful that as this is a PhD research project the teachers that I contacted would be happy to participate, so I chose not to offer any financial incentive for completing the questionnaire. I sent a reminder email with the online link to all the teachers in November, which, as with the students, resulted in a small jump in the number of completed questionnaires.

3.6 The interviews

Following on from the questionnaire I conducted one-on-one interviews. The interviews provided me with the opportunity to complete the qualitative part of my study, as I was able to gain more in-depth answers and go beyond the basic yes/no answers or numbered responses. While the questionnaires were able to tell me what the relevant issues are, the interviews enabled me to work out why they are important. This hybrid approach is seen by some scholars (Ustunluoglu (2007), Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002), Medgyes (1999)) as advantageous, as it utilises elements from both methodologies, and is a way of identifying the issues and then exacting detailed information about them. I decided that the ideal situation would be to interview five first year students and five third year students. I believed that this would be a reasonable and manageable number to carry out within the confines of this study. In order to find participants for the interviews I placed an item at the very end of the online questionnaire requesting that those students who would be interested in taking part in
interviews leave me their e-mail address for later contact, and I also indicated that they would be paid for their time. The questionnaire was constructed in a way to ensure that those who chose to leave their email addresses would not be identified with their answers in any way, and so preserving the anonymity of the questionnaire. In this way I hoped to garner enough interest to be able to choose the appropriate numbers from each group.

As with the students, I interviewed a number of teachers as well, and so again I placed a request at the end of the questionnaire for anyone who might be interested in being interviewed to leave their contact details, and this did not compromise the anonymity of the answers. The interviews provided qualitative data for this part of the study, and as such were very important. I decided to interview six teachers – ideally three would be native speakers and three would be non-native speakers. This was a manageable number for me to conduct on my own and yet high enough to gain some interesting and diverse data. I also decided that I should interview teachers with a diverse range of teaching experience, and who have been teaching in Australia for different periods of time; for example, I would prefer to interview a native speaking teacher who has been living and teaching in Australia for only several years, and also one who has done so for more than ten years. The results of the questionnaire, in both the student and teacher groups, helped to shape the interview questions; that is, anything interesting that came up, as well as items that I expected to see from my previous reading on the topic, were able to be examined further in the interviews. As stated previously, the questionnaires discovered what, and the interviews examined why.

3.7 Carrying out the interviews

Before the online questionnaires were administered there was a plan for the kinds of questions that would be asked during the follow-up interviews; however the responses that were received from the questionnaires, particularly the written comments at the end, helped to shape the questions that were ultimately asked. In the early interviews, certain aspects were brought up that I had not directly asked about, and so I made sure to ask questions about them in subsequent interviews. For example, one student mentioned that she felt less comfortable making mistakes with a native speaking teacher, so in following interviews I often prompted students to talk about how they felt making mistakes in front of their teachers, or
if there were differences in how their mistakes were treated by certain teachers. The teacher interviews took place after the student ones were conducted, and so I was also able to use what the students had observed in the questions that I asked the teachers. Many of the students commented that native speaking teachers used more Italian when conducting a class than the non-native speaking teachers, so I made sure to ask the teachers whether they conducted their classes completely in Italian, and how likely it was that they would revert to English.

Unlike the questionnaires, the interviews also gave the opportunity for the respondents to not only reflect on their current experience, but also on their past experiences, and whether or not these had changed at all. For example, the students were asked if, at the current point in time, they had a preference for a certain type of teacher over another. They were then asked whether or not they had had a particular preference when they first began their university studies, and if there were any differences then these could be discussed. The teachers, especially those who had been teaching for a larger number of years, quite often reflected on their past experiences, comparing and contrasting them with their current experience, and this often occurred of their own accord without any prompting from me.

While the interviews had a prepared structure with specific questions laid out (see appendices C and D for interview questions), as they progressed they often took on the form of a conversation, especially once I had broken the ice and the respondents began to feel more comfortable with me. I started all the interviews asking about basic demographic information – age, place of birth etc – in order to help them ease into the interview with easy questions. I let them speak for as long as they wished about a certain point without interrupting, and sometimes they naturally went on to a different topic without any prompting from me.

In the following sections I will describe in detail the interview process, where they took place, how long they took, and the format, focussing on the student interviews first, and then the teachers.
3.7.1 The students’ interviews

The student interviews all took place at the University of Western Australia in November 2012, which was only several weeks after the students had completed the online questionnaire. The students interviewed had all indicated on the questionnaire that they were happy to participate in interviews and had left an email address for me to contact them. At this time I had been teaching two first year beginner conversation classes, and so I made a conscious effort not to contact any students that were in my classes. I wanted to ensure that the students’ responses were as objective as possible, and was concerned that if I interviewed any of my current students that they may feel guarded in their answers or not wish to say anything that they perceived might offend me. As I only had the students’ email addresses and no other identifying features about them, I chose a number of them and sent them an initial email asking if they were still interested in taking part in an interview, and giving a time period where they would need to be available. If they were interested I requested that they reply to my email, and to state what year level of Italian they were, and whether they had begun their first year at university as a beginner or had studied Italian in year 12. This was so that I could have an even number of first and third year students to interview. Almost all of the students responded affirmatively to that initial email, with only three not responding at all.

There were ten students interviewed in total, five of them from first year and five from third year. Of the first year students, three of them were beginners level students and two had studied Italian at high school before continuing at university. From the third year students interviewed, two of them had studied Italian at high school, and three had begun studying Italian at university as beginners. I chose to interview students from the University of Western Australia for two main reasons: firstly as I live in Western Australia it was obviously much easier for me to organise interviews and coordinate times with students who live there as well; secondly and most importantly, the Italian department at the University of Western Australia has an excellent mix of both native and non-native speaking teachers, which meant that most, if not all, of the students interviewed would have experience of being taught by both.
As mentioned before, the interviews began by eliciting basic demographic information, including what the respondents’ native language was, whether they had been taught by both native and non-native speaking teachers, and also their reasons for choosing to study Italian. I also asked whether they came from an Italian background. My aim in this first part of the interview was to help the students feel comfortable with me; they all knew that they were there to talk about their experiences with native and non-native speaking Italian teachers, but I did not want to jump straight into that, especially considering that nine of the ten students had never even met me before, and the tenth student (a third year) I had not seen or spoken to for two years. This approach is recommended by Yow (2005), who suggests beginning an interview with standard questions, such as where the interviewee was born. She states that “these nonthreatening questions help both of you ease into the interview” (2005, p. 96). I was also careful to point out that there were no right or wrong answers, that it was all about their personal experience and observations, and that they were free to not answer certain questions and could withdraw at any time.

The interviews ranged in length from approximately twenty to forty minutes, and they were all conducted in a private room in the university but away from the Italian department. It was important that the students not feel uncomfortable or inhibited in giving their answers, especially as some of the teachers we would be discussing were still at work in their offices. The students had all completed the online questionnaire, and were told via email that the interviews would be exploring the same issues in greater depth, and also that the interviews would take no longer than an hour and that they would be recorded. The students were also given $30 for their time in participating in the interviews, and for any travel expenses incurred.

The students did vary somewhat in the amount of information that they provided. Some of them answered the questions readily and gave a lot of detail with very little prompting from me, while others were rather quiet at first and needed a bit more effort on my part to draw them out. I did this by rephrasing questions or offering examples; for example, when asking about teaching cultural aspects of the language, I talked about aspects such as having grown up in Italy and attended school or university there, or Italian cuisine. In all cases I tried very hard, once the student was talking, to say as little as possible, and I never interrupted
the flow of the conversation. I did not offer any of my own experiences or observations in an effort to not influence their thoughts and observations.

3.7.2 The teachers’ interviews

In total there were six teachers interviewed for this research – three were self-described native speakers of Italian, and three were non-native speakers. Of the native speaking teachers, one of them arrived in Australia in the post-1970s wave of migration (as described in Chapter Two), and the other two are “new migrants”, or part of the so-called “third wave” of migration that took place post-2000. While I have relied on the teachers’ own description of their linguistic status, it can also be noted that all three of the native speaking teachers satisfy Cook and Davies’ criteria for what a native speaker should be able to do (as described in Chapter Two).

All of the teachers had a range of teaching experience, from several years of teaching Italian in Australia to around thirty years. They also ranged in age from their late 20’s to their 50’s, and the years that they had spent teaching in Australia also varied. This was a deliberate choice in order to obtain responses from a diverse range of teachers, and therefore receive a well-rounded view on the issues. Two of the interviews were conducted in December 2012, and the other four in the following February before university classes commenced. The first two interviews took place at the University of Western Australia, whereas for the other four I travelled to New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria to conduct the interviews. As with the students, all of these teachers had completed the teacher online questionnaire, and had indicated at the end of it that they were willing to participate in interviews. Again, the interview began with basic demographic questions, and I also asked them to describe briefly where they grew up, their professional and educational background, and what led them to teach Italian at university in Australia. This was again helpful in breaking the ice, especially as I had never met three of the teachers before interviewing them. And as with the students, they were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers, and could withdraw at any time.

The structure of the interviews followed a similar format to the student ones, in that I had a list of prepared questions but I was happy to let things flow into a conversation if the teachers were comfortable to do so. In general it was much easier to draw answers from them
than the students, and the interviews were somewhat longer, ranging from approximately thirty to fifty minutes. The challenge from my perspective was that I was very conscious of the fact that I was asking these teachers, some of whom have had many years of experience in the classroom, to reflect not only about their strengths as teachers, but also their weaknesses. While the online questionnaire asked the teachers directly about their weaknesses in the classroom, for the interviews I instead used the word “challenges”. This was in an effort to encourage the teachers to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of their teaching experience without them feeling like they were being judged or evaluated in some way, and it seemed to be quite effective. They were all quite friendly and open, and very willing to discuss areas where they felt challenged or had some difficulties, as well as the areas where they felt the most comfortable and at their strongest.

In the following chapters I will discuss in detail the results of the questionnaires, and the issues that were brought to light in the interviews. Chapter Four will focus on the student results, and Chapter Five on the teacher results, while Chapter Six will provide a discussion of the results as a whole.
Chapter Four – Analysis of the student experience

In this chapter I will describe in detail the quantitative data gathered from the online questionnaire administered to the students, and also the qualitative data from the follow up interviews. Sections 4.1 through to 4.4 will give a general description of the students who completed the questionnaire, before then going into detail explaining the various items that were asked of them. A preliminary summary of results will be given, as well as a description of the comments made at the end of the questionnaire, which was the only optional item. Section 4.5 will then describe in detail the student participants in the interviews, the structure of the interviews, and the various topics that were discussed. In Chapter Five I will then discuss the data from the questionnaire and interviews given to the teachers; and in Chapter Six I will further examine and interpret the data as a whole, with a view to drawing some conclusions and making observations about what the data has shown.

The purpose of the student questionnaire and interviews was to gather data in order to create a detailed picture of how students perceive their Italian language teachers in relation to their perceived status as either native or non-native speakers of Italian. The questionnaire was designed to discover what the students believed, and the interviews to discover more about why they felt this way; that is, the interviews gave the students the opportunity to discuss in depth the reasons and the context for the perceptions that they held towards their teachers.

4.1 Student questionnaire – general profile

142 online student questionnaires were completed. Of these, 102 were completed by first year students, and 40 by third year students. These questionnaires can also be broken down further by whether or not the students were beginners in their first year of Italian at university, or had completed Italian up to year twelve (or equivalent) and were studying Italian at an advanced level in first year. Among the first year students, 61 were at beginners level, and 41 were studying at advanced level. Within the third year group, 18 had begun their
first year of Italian at university as beginners, and 22 had completed Italian up to year twelve before studying it at university.

1st year ab initio

As stated above, there were 61 respondents in this group. They ranged in ages from 17 to 75; however the largest age group represented is the 18 to 19 year olds, who together account for 47.4% of the sample. There were also a number of mature age students in this group, with 11 students (18%) above the age of 25. 18% of the respondents were male, and 82% were female.

1st year advanced

In this group there were 41 respondents, who ranged in ages from 17 to 25. Again the largest age group represented, with an overwhelming majority, were the 18 and 19 year olds, with 82.8% of the sample. There was a distinct lack of any mature age students in this group, with one student aged 25, and then three students aged 20, with the rest being younger (i.e. 90% under the age of 20). 17% of the respondents were male, and 83% were female.

3rd year ab initio

From this group 18 students completed the survey, and their ages ranged from 20 years old to 56 years old. The largest age group here were the 20 and 21 year olds, representing 61% of the sample. There were four students between the ages of 22 and 24 (22.2%), and then three students over the age of 25 (16.6%). 28% of the respondents were male, and 72% were female.

3rd year advanced

There were 22 students in this group who completed the questionnaire, ranging from 19 to 44 years old. The biggest age group were the 20 and 21 year olds, who made up 59.1% of the total. There were 22.7% aged between 22 and 24, and 9.1% aged 19 years. As with the first year advanced group, there were very few mature age students, with only two over the age of 25 (9.1%). 23% of the respondents were male, and 77% were female. In all of the subgroups the majority of students were female, with an average of 78.5% overall.
Exposure to native and non-native speaking teachers

The students were told in a brief statement before they began the questionnaire what the purpose of the questionnaire was, that it was to gather information on their perceptions of their native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian in the classroom. The terms ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ were not given any specific definitions; rather it was up to the students to decide themselves whether they defined their respective teachers as native or non-native speakers. Towards the end of the questionnaire (question 20) they were asked how they felt about being able to identify a teacher as a native speaker of Italian, whether it was easy or difficult, and their answers to this will be discussed later in section 4.2.

The students were asked directly whether or not they had been taught at university by native speaking teachers only, by non-native speaking teachers only, or by both, and the answers were as follows:

![Chart showing exposure to native and non-native teachers]

*Fig. 1 – Exposure to native and non-native teachers*

In total 91 of the total number of respondents (64%) have been taught by both native and non-native speaking teachers. None of the third year students or first year advanced students have been taught by non-native speaking teachers only. I have treated the students as one complete cohort, regardless of whether they have been taught by one type of teacher or both.
This study does not distinguish, therefore, between perceptions that are based on belief and perceptions that are based on experience.

Amongst the first year respondents, 83.3% listed English as their native language, with a further 5.8% describing themselves as bilingual with English and another language. In the third year group, 92.5% gave English as their native language, and 7.5% were bilingual with English and another language.

4.2 Questionnaire items

In this section I will examine each item from the questionnaire one by one. After asking questions regarding demographic information, the next three questions in the questionnaire asked the students to consider what their general preference overall would be in terms of being taught by a native speaking teacher, a non-native speaking teacher, or both. The set of questions following on from this broke down the various aspects of language teaching, and asked the students to decide who they would prefer to have teach them that particular feature, or if they did not have a particular preference either way. The questionnaire then ended with the students being able to leave a comment if they wished (the comment section will be discussed in section 4.4). The questions are numbered and phrased here as they appeared in the questionnaire, and the results are all described in this section. The tables provided the results for each subgroup, while the overall results are given in the commentary, as required.
Q. 8: in general, I would prefer a native speaker as a teacher

As can be seen in figure 2 above, in the first year ab initio group 23% strongly agreed and 41% agreed with the statement (64% expressing agreement overall). This figure, however, drops somewhat to 51% in the first year advanced group, with 34% agreeing and only 17% strongly agreeing. The combined total overall for the first year respondents is 59% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, and 32% being neutral. With the third year respondents, in the ab initio group 6% strongly agreed and 50% agreed with the statement (56% expressing agreement overall); and the figures were quite similar in the third year advanced group, with 5% strongly agreeing and 55% agreeing (60% agreement overall). For the third year students as a combined total, therefore, 58% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and 43% were neutral. It can be seen, then, that the overall figures between the first and third year groups are almost identical; that is, the majority agree, a sizeable minority are neutral, and a very small minority disagree.
Q. 9: in general, I would prefer a non-native speaker as a teacher

Examining the results in figure 3, it can be seen that there are very few respondents who agreed with this statement. In the first year ab initio group, 0% strongly agreed and only 8% agreed, whilst the majority, 52%, were neutral. For the first year advanced respondents the number in agreement was slightly higher, with 5% strongly agreeing and 7% agreeing, but again the majority were neutral, at 56%. In both the first year groups there was also a considerable minority who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement – 40% of the ab initio students and 31% of the advanced students. Overall, only 10% of first year respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, with not much difference in the individual groups – 8% overall of the ab initio group, and 12% overall of the advanced group.

With the third year ab initio students, 0% chose strongly agree and only 6% chose agree, while a considerable majority, 72%, were neutral, and 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, in the third year advanced group 0% strongly agreed, 9% agreed, and the majority were neutral, at 64%, with 28% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. In the third year group overall therefore, only 8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement – 6% of the ab initio group, and 9% of the advanced group. These results after question 8 seem to follow an expected pattern in that the questions are the opposite of each other, and so a considerably larger majority agreed with the statement in question 8 compared with question 9. There

Fig. 3 – Preference for a non-native speaking teacher
were, however, quite a high number of respondents who, when asked about their preference for a non-native speaker, chose neither agree nor disagree.

**Q. 10: if I could choose, I would prefer to have both a native and a non-native teacher**

![Figure 4 - Preference to be taught by both native and non-native](image)

Within all the subgroups of respondents there was a majority who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. As can be seen in figure 4, with the first year ab initio students 23% strongly agreed with the statement and 34% agreed. For the first year advanced group the figures are slightly higher, with 29% choosing strongly agree and 37% agree. For the first year group overall, therefore, 60% agreed or strongly agreed, and only 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In the third year ab initio group the number of students expressing agreement was considerably higher than either of the first year groups, with 67% strongly agreeing and 17% agreeing, and only 11% strongly disagreeing. The third year advanced students followed a similar pattern, with 18% choosing strongly agree and 55% agree, and only 9% disagreeing and 5% strongly disagreeing. Overall for the third year respondents there was a large majority, 78%, who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and only 13% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. This figure increases to 84% amongst the third year ab initio group, and dips slightly to 73% in the third year advanced group. This appears to show that the longer a
student studies a language, the more they come to appreciate the benefits of being taught by both native and non-native speaking teachers at some point in their language learning experience. This theme will be explored further when analysing the student interviews later in this chapter.

Q. 11: in general, I would prefer to learn grammar with a …

![Fig. 5 – Grammar](image)

In this section the students were asked to select either native speaking teacher, non-native speaking teacher, or no preference. Interestingly the responses were very similar across both first and third year students, in that it was the non-native speaking teacher who was generally preferred. The clear picture that emerges is that the native speaker is the least selected option in all of the subgroups, and while the non-native speaker generally has the highest percentage out of the three choices, there is not a huge difference between that option and the no preference option; except in the third year advanced group where the non-native speaker is shown to have a clear majority. Overall in the first year group, 43% selected non-native speaking teacher, 25% selected native speaking teacher, and 32% had no preference. As can be seen in figure 5, in the first year ab initio group the figure for non-native speaker decreases slightly to 41%, and for native speaker it increases slightly to 28%. Conversely, for the first year advanced group the respondents who prefer the non-native speaker increases to 46%, and those who prefer the native speaker decreases to 20%. Amongst the third year respondents, 48% chose non-native speaking teacher, only 15% selected native speaking
teacher, and 38% selected no preference. When breaking down the third year respondents it can be seen that they follow a similar pattern as the first year group. With the third year advanced group the number who chose non-native speaking teacher rises to 55%, while in the ab initio group it actually decreases to 39%, with the no preference selection at a higher percentage of 44%, and the native speaking teacher still in the minority at 17%. The students, therefore, disregarding those who selected no preference, are quite clear in who they would not prefer to teach them grammar, and that is the native speaking teacher.

Q. 12: in general, I would learn more vocabulary from a …

Examining the graph in figure 6 it is immediately apparent that these results are the opposite to question 11 in that here it is the non-native speaker that is clearly the least selected option across the board. In fact, in no subgroup did the figure for the non-native speaker reach higher than 11%. The general trend, therefore, was that the students believed that they would learn more vocabulary from a native speaking teacher. Amongst the first year respondents a considerable majority of 70% selected native speaking teacher, with only 5% choosing the non-native speaker, and 25% expressing no preference. In the third year group again there was a majority that chose native speaking teacher, although not quite as high at 55%, with 10% selecting non-native speaking teacher, and 35% having no preference. Breaking down the first year group, the ab initio students showed 72% with a preference for the native speaker, with only 3% choosing the non-native speaker and 25% having no preference. The
advanced group had a slightly reduced preference for the native speaker, at 66%, with 7% choosing the non-native speaker and 27% having no preference. Interestingly in the third year ab initio group the number of those who selected native speaker, and no preference, was exactly the same at 44%, with 11% choosing non-native speaker, therefore not having a clear majority. The third year advanced group, however, showed the same pattern as the first years, with 64% selecting the native speaker, 9% selecting the non-native speaker, and 27% having no preference.

Q. 13: in general, I would prefer to learn pronunciation skills from a ...

Fig. 7 – Pronunciation

Figure 7 shows that across all the students in all of the subgroups there was an overwhelming majority that selected the native speaking teacher in this instance – from the first years 87% and from the third years 88%. The non-native speaker barely gets a mention, with only 3% of the first years, and 0% of the third years choosing that option. There was little variation in the subgroups. The first year ab initio group showed a preference of 89% for the native speaking teacher, and only 2% for the non-native speaking teacher, with 10% selecting no preference; while the advanced group had a preference of 85% for the native speaker and 5% for the non-native speaker, and again with 10% selecting no preference. 89% of the third year ab initio students chose the native speaking teacher, and 86% of the advanced group, with the remaining students in both subgroups selecting no preference.
Q. 14: in general, I would prefer to learn listening skills from a …

![Bar chart showing preferences for listening skills](chart.png)

**Fig. 8 – Listening skills**

Figure 8 shows that there was an overall majority of selected answers for the native speaking teacher, although in all but one of the subgroups the figure is below 50%. The figures for no preference are also notable. It is also clear that the non-native speaker is the least selected option across the board. The preference for the native speaker was slightly less marked amongst the first year group compared to the third years. Amongst the first years, 43% showed a preference for native speaking teachers, 21% for non-native speakers, and 36% had no preference; whilst for the third year group 53% preferred native speakers, 15% non-native speakers, and 33% had no preference. There was some variation within the subgroups, with 48% of the first year ab initio students showing a preference for the native speaker, as opposed to 37% of the first year advanced group. In fact, in the first year advanced group the majority actually chose no preference, at 41%. Within the third year group this trend is reversed, with 44% of third year ab initio students selected the native speakers, while 59% of the third year advanced group selected the native speaker.
Q. 15: in general, I would prefer to learn reading skills from a …

In all of the subgroups, except for first year ab initio, the majority of the respondents selected no preference as their response for this question. In the first year ab initio group the native speaker was the most popular choice, and in the other subgroups it was the second highest preference. It was fairly clear across the board that the non-native speaker was the least popular option. Amongst the first years overall, 38% chose the native speaking teacher, 16% chose the non-native speaker, and 46% chose no preference. In the third year group, 40% selected the native speaker, 8% chose non-native speaker, and 53% selected no preference. As already stated, the first year ab initio group was the only one that had a majority selecting the native speaking teacher, though only a slight one at 46%, while 43% of that group chose no preference, and 11% chose non-native speaker. The first year advanced group, however, had a very clear majority that selected no preference – 51%. The other two categories were quite close, with 27% choosing the native speaker and 22% the non-native speaker. The third year ab initio group again showed a clear majority for no preference, with 56%; while for the native speaker the figure was 33% and for the non-native speaker 11%. Amongst the third year advanced respondents there was again a majority for no preference, with 50%; however this was followed closely by the native speaker at 45%, and then the non-native speaker at 5%. It is also interesting to note that in the third year group overall the interest in having a non-native speaking teacher for reading skills has decreased from the first year group.

**Fig. 9 – Reading skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading skills</th>
<th>1st Year Ab Initio</th>
<th>1st Year Advanced</th>
<th>3rd Year Ab Initio</th>
<th>3rd Year Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native speaking teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native speaking teacher</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of respondents

1st Year Ab Initio 1st Year Advanced 3rd Year Ab Initio 3rd Year Advanced

Native speaking teacher Non-native speaking teacher No preference
Q. 16: In general, I would speak Italian more fluently if I had a ...

**Fig. 10 – Fluency**

As can be seen in the graph in figure 10, the non-native speaker was clearly the least selected option across the board for fluency. This question was also interesting in that if one looks at both the first and third year groups overall the figures are quite similar, and there is not a lot of difference between the two most popular preferences. No group scored higher than 6% for the non-native speaker, and the options of native speaker and no preference scored fairly equally, except for the third year ab initio students. Amongst the first year group, overall 53% selected the native speaking teacher, 4% selected the non-native speaker, and 43% selected no difference. Within the third year respondents, 48% chose the native speaker, 3% chose the non-native speaker, and 50% chose no difference. Breaking it down further, a larger majority of the first year ab initio students, 56%, chose the native speaker, while just 3% chose the non-native speaker and 41% chose no difference. Within the first year advanced group the top two figures were much closer, with 49% selecting native speaker, 46% no difference, and 5% non-native speaker. Interestingly, the third year ab initio group was the only subgroup that did not show a majority for the native speaker, with 56% selecting no difference, 39% the native speaker, and 6% the non-native speaker. In the third year advanced group the majority again swung towards the native speaker, with 55%, while none of the respondents selected the non-native speaker, and 45% chose no difference. The figures showed, then, that while the non-native speaker was not a common choice, there was not much difference...
between the other two options, indicating that in this area the teacher’s status as native or non-native is perhaps not a relevant factor.

Q. 17: in general, I receive better learning strategies/ ideas to learn better from a ...

![Learning strategies graph](image)

**Fig. 11 – Learning strategies**

The graph in figure 11 plainly shows that the native speaker is undeniably the least selected option in the area of learning strategies; however, like the previous question, the distinction between the first and second preferences is much less clear cut. Both the first and third year groups overall selected no difference as the majority preference, with the non-native speaker as a close second, and no score for the native speaker was higher than 16%. Overall 44% of the 1st year group selected no difference, with 40% selecting the non-native speaker and 16% the native speaker. In the third year group, overall 48% chose no difference, 45% the non-native speaker, and just 8% the native speaker. Breaking it down further, the first year ab initio group showed the same pattern, with 46% selecting no difference, 38% the non-native speaker, and 16% the native speaker. The first year advanced group, however, did show a slight variation, with the majority choosing the non-native speaker, at 44%, closely followed by no difference at 41%, and then the native speaker at 15%. The third year ab initio group was completely split down with middle, with 50% each choosing the non-native speaker and no difference, and 0% for the native speaker; while the third year advanced group showed a slight majority for no difference, at 45%, with 41% selecting the non-native speaker, and 14%
the native speaker. It is quite difficult, therefore, to name the most popular response for this question, as it seems to be a fairly even split between the non-native speaker and no difference. What is clear is the least popular response, which is the native speaker.

Q. 18: in general, I would learn more about the culture of Italy from a ...

![Fig. 12 – Italian culture](image)

In this section it is clear that there was a strong preference in all subgroups for the native speaking teacher, with no score for the non-native speaker above 3%. In the first year group, 75% chose the native speaker, with only 3% choosing the non-native speaker, and 22% selecting no difference. With the third year group, a similar majority of 73% selected the native speaker, 0% chose the non-native speaker, and 28% chose no difference. The first year ab initio students showed an even bigger majority for the native speaker, with 80%, only 3% for the non-native speaker, and 16% chose no difference. The first year advanced group had somewhat less of a majority for the native speaker, at 69%, with 2% for the non-native speaker, and a higher figure for no difference, at 29%. The third year ab initio and advanced groups shared practically the same figures, with both selecting 0% for the non-native speaker, 72% and 73% respectively for the native speaker, and 28% and 27% respectively chose no difference. The most popular response, therefore, was clearly the native speaker, however there were a sizeable minority who selected no difference.
Q. 19: in general, I believe that better classroom management skills come from a …

![Graph showing classroom management skills preferences](image)

**Fig. 13 – Classroom management skills**

Again, both main groups overall showed the same trend in preferences with this question, with the largest majority selecting no difference, some preferences for the non-native speaker, and native speaker showing the least amount of preferences, scoring no higher than 10%. Overall, 74% of the first years selected no difference, 20% selected the non-native speaker, and only 7% chose the native speaker. Amongst the third year group, 70% chose no difference, 30% chose the non-native speaker, and 0% selected the native speaker. The first year ab initio group showed a similar trend, with 72% choosing no difference, 18% the non-native speaker, and 10% the native speaker. In the first year advanced group, however, while the majority still chose no difference, there were also more respondents who selected the non-native speaker, and fewer who chose the native speaker, with the figures being 76%, 22% and 2% respectively. The subgroups amongst the third year respondents showed fairly similar preferences. In the third year ab initio group 72% chose no difference, and 28% the non-native speaker; while in the third year advanced group 68% selected no difference and 32% chose the non-native speaker. There were no preferences shown for the native speaker in both the third year groups. The most popular response overall was clearly no difference, with a sizeable minority selecting the non-native speaker, and the native speaker being clearly the least selected option.
Q. 20: in general, I can identify a teacher as either a native or non-native speaker of Italian...

![Graph showing identification of native/non-native speakers]

**Fig. 14 – Identifying a native/non-native speaker**

Overall, the majority of respondents claimed that they could identify a teacher as native or non-native easily or most of the time, with 70% of the first year group selecting this, and 80% of the third year group. 25% of the first years and 20% of the third years claimed they could do it sometimes; and 5% of the first year group claimed that they had difficulty doing this. The figures for the first year subgroups were very similar, with 69% of the first year beginner group selecting easily, 26% sometimes, and 5% with difficulty; while in the advanced group 71% chose easily, 24% sometimes, and 5% with difficulty. There was some slight variation in the third year subgroups, with 72% of the third year beginner group choosing easily and 28% choosing sometimes; while in the advanced group a larger majority of 86% selected easily, and 14% selected sometimes. In both year groups, then, the advanced students had higher results in being able to easily identify a teacher.

### 4.3 Preliminary summary of results

In this section I will give a general summary of the major trends that are evident from the questionnaire items (a more detailed discussion will be given in Chapter Six), and then in the
following section I will discuss the comments made by some of the students at the end of the questionnaire. Following on from that will be the discussion of the qualitative section of the study, which comprise the student interviews.

For some of the questionnaire items the most popular response had a clear majority, with the other responses having much lower figures. For other items it was the least popular response that was clear, with the other two responses being much closer or without an overwhelming majority. There were also several instances where the distribution of responses was more evenly placed. When summarising the trends shown in the questionnaire I have grouped them according to whether there was a clear majority or minority, or whether the percentages were closer.

In some areas the most popular response chosen had a clear majority amongst all of the respondents. With the areas of pronunciation and culture there is a definite preference shown for the native speaking teacher across the board in all of the subgroups. With pronunciation skills the numbers are all above 85% for those who chose this option. This clear majority preference is again shown in the area of culture, where the preference for the native speaker is demonstrated in all subgroups, from 68% onwards. In the area of classroom management skills there was also clear majority across the board; however in this case the majority selected no difference as their preferred option, with the numbers ranging from above 68%.

As mentioned above, there were also certain items in the questionnaire where there was a clear minority. In the areas of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and culture it was evident that the non-native speaking teacher was the least selected choice. With vocabulary the highest number that chose non-native speaker was only 11%, and it was even less in the other areas – 5% for pronunciation, 6% for fluency, and only 3% for culture. With fluency, however, the figures for no preference were very close to those for native speaker, so the choice of non-native speaker is not necessarily a “non-preference”. In the areas of listening skills and reading skills the non-native speaker was again the least popular choice, with the highest number for both of them being 22%. In terms of the native speaking teacher, there were three areas where this was clearly the least preferred option: grammar (highest number
being 28%); learning strategies (highest at 16%); and classroom management skills (highest number only 10%).

In addition, for the areas of listening skills and speaking skills, while showing a clear minority, the most preferred option was not consistent amongst all of the subgroups, or the numbers were much closer. For these items some of the subgroups had the native speaker as the majority response, while some had no preference. With listening skills (see fig. 8), the first year ab initio, third year ab initio and third year advanced group all chose the native speaker as the majority, while the first year advanced group had no preference as their majority option. And the figures in two of the subgroups were very close, with only 5% or less separating native speaker and no preference in the first year advanced and third year ab initio groups. In fact, in all of the subgroups only one showed a majority preference of over 50% for a particular option (third year advanced).

When it comes to reading skills, there were three subgroups where no preference was the majority option (first year advanced, third year ab initio and third year advanced) and one group (first year ab initio) where the native speaker was the majority (see fig. 9). Similarly to the listening skills section, there were only two subgroups overall that had a majority preference of over 50%. The figures in the first year ab initio group and third year advanced group were quite close: 46% of first year ab initio chose native speaker as opposed to 43% choosing no preference; and 43% of third year advanced chose native speaker as opposed to 50% choosing no preference. As mentioned above, the non-native speaker was the clear minority, for both reading skills and listening skills.

Fluency is another area with a clear minority (for the non-native speaker) where not all of the subgroups had the same majority preference, and so it is not easy to name one particular response as the preferred one for this field. In both the first year groups and the third year advanced group the native speaker was preferred, however in the third year ab initio group the majority chose no difference (see fig. 10). The figures in the first year advanced group were also very close, with only 3% separating the native speaker and no difference.

The area of learning strategies was even closer in terms of the preferences chosen (see fig. 11), and so it was difficult to see a clear majority. The first year ab initio and third year...
advanced groups had no difference as the majority option, while the first year advanced group had the non-native speaker as a very slight majority compared with no difference – only a 3% difference in figures. The third year ab initio group was completely split down the middle, with 50% each choosing the non-native speaker and no difference. As stated previously, the clear minority was the native speaker, although it cannot be considered a “non-preference” since so many students selected no preference.

In terms of grammar, three of the four subgroups showed a preference for the non-native speaker (both first year groups and third year advanced), with the biggest majority coming from the third year group (see fig. 5). The third year ab initio group, however, showed a slight majority for no preference, with the second highest option as non-native speaker following quite closely at only 5% less. Again, though, only one figure came above the 50% mark.

The area of vocabulary followed a similar pattern as grammar, in that three of the four subgroups showed a preference, in this case for the native speaker (in both first year groups and third year advanced); however the third year ab initio group was completely even between the native speaker and no difference, at 44% (see fig. 6). The three groups that did choose the native speaker as their preferred option did it quite decisively, with the figures all above 64%.

4.4 Comments made

This item appeared in the questionnaire as such -

Q. 21: If you wish to make any comments regarding the topic of native and non-native speaking teachers please do so:

This final question was the only item in the questionnaire that was optional; the respondents were not obliged to write any comments and could skip this question if they wished. This means that those students who did leave a comment felt strongly enough about that particular issue to make the effort to write one. Overall, 54 out of 142 respondents wrote comments (approximately 38%). There were 25 comments from the first year ab initio group
(17.6% of the total), ten comments from the first year advanced group (7% of the total), ten comments again from the third year ab initio respondents (7% of the total), and nine comments from the third year advanced group (6.3% of the total). These comments provide further information about the students’ perceptions as well as identify trends, and as such they have been analysed as further evidence. Again, it needs to be noted that as this is a mixed cohort of students who have been taught by one type of teacher and students who have been taught by both, these are perceptions that are based on both belief and experience.

In the following section I have grouped the comments into various themes or topics. Some comments only addressed one topic, while others addressed several issues in the same comment. The three biggest topic areas overall involved the issues of empathy, grammar and teaching skills. The wording of the comments quoted below has not been changed at all, but appears exactly as it did in the original questionnaire.

**Empathy**

Out of the total number of comments, thirteen (24% of the total number) were concerned with the issue of empathy on the part of the non-native speaker; that is, the fact that a non-native speaking teacher understands what it is like for the students to learn Italian as they themselves have also had to learn Italian as a second language, and therefore they can empathise with their students’ difficulties. The notion of empathy was not addressed specifically in the questionnaire, and so represented a new line of data to be analysed. This was an issue that was also reflected quite strongly in the student interviews, which I will discuss in further detail later in the chapter. Some examples include:

“The non-native teachers have a better idea of how Italian relates to English and which areas confuse students when they start to learn because they themselves have gone through the process of learning Italian” (1st year advanced student).

“A non-native teacher has the prior experience of learning the language, i.e. they have experienced similar struggles as we have” (3rd year advanced student).
Grammar

Eleven comments (20% of the total number) were related to the issue of grammar teaching. From the comments, nine of the respondents said that they preferred having a non-native speaker teach them grammar; one respondent said there was no difference between having a native or non-native teach them grammar, and the other respondent expressed negativity towards their native speaking teacher in the field of grammar, but as the respondent had never been taught by a non-native speaker he/she did not feel able to comment on whether a non-native would be better. Some examples include:

“I feel that a non-native teacher would better understand the things we students struggle with as we’re learning a new language, in particular grammar, as for a native speaker these things are inherent so it’s difficult to fully explain this to someone and understand how they are trying to understand, in the way a non-native speaker would have been through that before and would therefore be able to relate to the students better” (1st year ab initio student).

“I believe that non-native speaking teachers understand the difficulties of non-native speakers learning Italian better and therefore they are able to explain grammar concepts better” (3rd year ab initio student).

Teachers’ competence and teaching skills

Twelve comments (22% of the total number) involved the teaching skills and abilities of the teachers, regardless of their linguistic background. The respondents making these comments felt that being able to teach the language well was the most important thing, and that teaching skill was not necessarily related to whether the teacher is a native speaker or a non-native speaker. Some examples include:

“As long as the teacher understands the language, is able to speak/write/listen fluently and is enthusiastic about teaching, then to me it doesn’t matter whether they are native or non-native speakers” (1st year advanced student).

“It totally depends on the quality of the teacher, and so whether they are native or non-native isn’t a concern at all. I’ve had both native and non-native teachers and they’ve both been brilliant” (3rd year advanced student).
Other topics

Another popular topic for comment in the questionnaires was the notion of the benefits of having both a native and a non-native speaking teacher. Seven of the comments (13%) overall were related to this. These respondents felt that they could benefit from being taught by both types of teachers at some point in their language learning experience. Some examples are:

“So far this year I have had both native and non-native teachers and they both have their strengths and weaknesses. Overall a combination of both would be the most advantageous!” (1st year ab initio student).

“I do feel students can benefit by being taught by both native and non-native speakers as they offer different perspectives” (3rd year advanced student).

Other areas that were commented on included: pronunciation, conversation and speaking skills, and vocabulary (four comments each); cultural knowledge, feelings of intimidation, communication skills in English, preference for the non-native speaker in the beginner stage (two comments each); an overall preference for the native speaker (three comments); and listening skills, not much difference between the native and non-native speaker, preparation for class, and different expectations and teaching methods from the native speaker (one comment each). Some examples include:

“Perhaps in the beginning stages it is better to have a non-native teacher as well in order to explain the Italian in the context of English as it can be hard to grasp some concepts” (1st year advanced student) – preference for non-native speaker at beginner level

“In general I would prefer a native speaker to teach me vocab and speaking skills, but a non-native speaker to teach me grammar and listening skills” (1st year ab initio student) – vocabulary and listening skills

“At a beginners level I think having a non-native speaker can be beneficial; however beyond that it doesn’t make a difference in my opinion. To me, more important factors include level of experience and preparation. These are unrelated to native language” (1st year advanced student) – not much difference between the two/ preparation for class

“I have had both native and non-native speaking teachers and don’t think that there is much difference in the way I have learned, but I did have more trouble with one native speaker because she had different teaching methods and expectation of our class that are usual for Italian schools/universities, and that made it difficult for me to understand and learn. I also felt intimidated by their teaching methods and
enthusiasm and wasn’t as comfortable speaking as I was with the non-native speaking teacher” (3rd year advanced student) – different expectations and teaching methods/feelings of intimidation

“Some of the native speaking Italian teachers have below average English communication skills” (1st year advanced student) – communication skills in English

4.5 Student interviews

The second phase of the data collection, as stated in section 3.2, involved a qualitative method, so that the reasons why students felt the way they did could be explored in greater depth. Ten university students were interviewed in total. This figure was decided upon as it was a manageable number for one person to carry out and analyse, and would yield enough data to draw some conclusions. At the end of the online questionnaire the students were asked to indicate if they would be interested in participating in follow up interviews at a later date, and it was from those students that the interviewees were chosen. It was decided to make the sample as even as possible, so with that in mind five of the students were from first year level and five were from third year level. In addition, three of the first year students were beginners and two were post-year 12, and again with the third year students three of them were post-beginners and the other two were post-year 12. In the first year group, three of the students were 18 years of age, one was 19 years old, and the other was 29 years old; and they were all female. In the third year group, four of the students were 20 years of age, and the fifth one was 56 years old; there was one male student (a 20 year old), and the rest were female (see Appendix E for a list of the students, their year levels and ages). At the time of the interviews I had been teaching several classes in a first year unit, and I deliberately chose not to interview any of my current students. All of the students except one had been taught by both native and non-native speaking teachers, with one of the first year beginners students having been taught by native speakers only, although she did attend one class which was taken as a relief by a non-native speaker.

Of the first year students, only one of them (an ab initio) had any Italian background, and they were all born in Australia. The native language of all of them was English, except for one student (an ab initio), who was bilingual in English and Spanish. With the third year students, again they were all Australian born, with English as their native language. One had
no Italian background at all (an ab initio), one other (an ab initio) had an Italian grandfather but she never knew him, and the other three (one ab initio, two advanced) came from an Italian background.

Before recording began I told the students that there were no right or wrong answers, and that what I was interested in was their personal experiences and perceptions. The interviews were semi-structured, in that there were a number of set prepared questions (see Appendix C); however the approach taken was that the interview would take the form of a conversation as much as possible, and be fairly informal. For this reason the order of information given in each interview was not exactly the same each time, as sometimes something a student would say would then trigger something else. At the end of the interview I asked them if they had any other comments to give or observations to make, something that they felt was quite important or that I had not asked about directly, and eight of the students did so. The interviews themselves varied in length from fifteen minutes to forty minutes.

In order to analyse these interviews I have selected a number of major themes that emerged across all ten interviews, and which were also reflected in the online questionnaires. These themes were also widely reported on in the literature on native and non-native speaking teachers of English, and which I discuss in Chapter One. The following section is a discussion of each theme as it was discussed in the student interviews. All names used are pseudonyms to protect the students’ identities. It must be noted that the wording of the students’ quotes has not been changed, and so it reflects the natural, conversational manner in which the interviews were undertaken.

4.5.1 Teaching the language

The themes gathered in this section are all related to the teaching of various aspects of the Italian language and culture, including grammar, speaking skills, vocabulary, Italian culture, and the correction of mistakes.

4.5.1a Grammar and Empathy

I have chosen to group these two themes together as very often the students talked about them together in their interviews. All ten students were asked about the topic of grammar, and how they felt being taught it by a non-native speaker, and by a native speaker. All of the
students stated that having a non-native speaking teacher with the same linguistic background as them; that is, being native English speakers like their students, was definitely an advantage.

“With the non-native speaker I found it a lot easier to understand the grammar, the grammar point of view, because say if I was confused or something he just sets it out and compares it to how I've learnt English” – Penny, 1st year advanced.

It was also noted that the teachers, like the students, are also second language learners of Italian; they have been through the same learning process as their students and so share this in common too –

“I think it helps with understanding grammar because they themselves [native speakers] have had to learn from English to Italian, whereas a native speaker is probably, well they've had a different experience because they know the grammar, it's not a foreign concept to them at all; so I think it's much easier learning [grammar] from a non-native speaker” – Lisa, 3rd year ab initio.

These aspects are all seen by the students interviewed as an advantage for the non-native speaking teacher in teaching grammar. Even Kate, who was the only student to have been taught by native speakers only, stated that it would be good to have a non-native speaking teacher for grammar:

“I think maybe just level of understanding that one [non-native speaker] could have with me or anyone else in the class, because they've learnt it out of the environment so maybe they could help us, like to teach in a way that would help us understand how they learnt as well”.

This shared linguistic background, and shared background as learners of Italian as a second language, also led the other nine students to state that their non-native teachers explained the grammatical concepts in a way that was easier to learn from them –

“often I find that I understand it more when they [i.e. non-native speakers] teach it to us, simply because I think it comes down to the theory that when you’ve learnt something yourself you can teach it easier to others” (Tom, 3rd year advanced).

Two of the third year students, both ab initio, and one 1st year ab initio student, also stated that their non-native speaking teachers had more structure in their grammar classes, which in turn made it easier to learn. Jane had a non-native teacher in her second year and she was extremely complimentary when speaking about him, and said,
“because all of second year our grammar was very, like very structured, ... I found that to be great”.

Sarah stated, like Jane, that she had been taught by a non-native speaking teacher in her second year, and said that her marks were the best in that year, which she believed was,

“to do with the way I was taught grammar; there was just so much more structure”.

And Louise commented,

“I think they [i.e. non-native speakers] just broke it down for us a lot better”.

Another topic within the theme of grammar/empathy was a criticism of native speaking teachers, who were described as having a tendency when teaching grammar to just say “it is because it is”. Three third year students (two ab initio and one advanced) and two first year students (both advanced) all made mention of this in their interviews. They felt that for the native speaker, because Italian is their first language, a language that they have grown up speaking, that perhaps this made it more difficult for them to give adequate explanations to their students about certain grammatical aspects –

“I think that I found it easier to understand for grammar a non-native speaking teacher because a lot of the time native speaking teachers, when it comes to grammar, their answer is ‘well it’s like that because it’s like that’, and it’s the same in English, like if someone asks me why a particular grammar point is the way it is I just would say, ‘well, it’s just like that, and that’s it’, you know, whereas it’s easier for a non-native to explain why because they’ve had to go through the same process and learn it from scratch” (Sarah, 3rd year ab initio);

“sometimes I find with native speakers it’s just something that you’ve, there’s no actual explanation for the rule so they just say, ‘oh you just learn it’, whereas X [non-native speaker] would kind of explain it. I found that to be the main difference, that with non-native speakers they generally seem to know how to [explain it], they’ve had to go through it before” (Jane, 3rd year ab initio);

“because they haven’t had to learn it [i.e. Italian] the second time [i.e. as a second language] they just, it was a little bit more confusing to learn from a native speaker” (Penny, 1st year advanced);

“with native speaking teachers sometimes they can find it hard to explain concepts to you that they were, obviously they just know from birth; it’s hard to get your head around those kinds of concepts, and I suppose with non-native speaking teachers they’ve learnt it as well, they’ve had the tools, they know how to understand things themselves ... they’ve taught you how to learn it, not just taught you” (Amy, 1st year advanced).
4.5.1b Conversation/ Pronunciation skills

The students were asked about their experiences in being taught conversational and pronunciation skills from their native and non-native teachers. They all stated that they felt it was beneficial to be taught these skills by a native speaker, because it was more authentic:

“conversational skills I’d prefer a native speaker, especially with things like vocabulary, they have, you know, it’s natural to them” (Lisa, 3\textsuperscript{rd} year advanced);

“pronunciation is my number one thing, cause I find that that was really difficult for me to grasp when I was first learning, ..... and I think just being around the native speaker and hearing them speak you just kind of, without knowing, learn from it” (Louise, 1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio).

Several of them mentioned that the accents of the native speakers were excellent, although Jane (3\textsuperscript{rd} year, ab initio) made the point that her non-native teachers also had excellent accents and she really could not tell any difference between their pronunciation and that of her native teachers.

Three of the students (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio, 1\textsuperscript{st} year advanced and 3\textsuperscript{rd} year advanced) also said that they felt that their native speaking teachers gave them good feedback on their pronunciation and made sure it was perfectly correct. Interestingly, Jill (3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio) felt that her native teachers knew what she was saying, even if she made mistakes:

“they’re [native speakers] a lot more generous with conversation I think, the people I’ve come in contact with they, you attempt to form sentences and make yourself coherent and they basically, they do seem to understand a lot easier”.

Sarah (3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio) made the point that, while she preferred having a native speaking teacher for conversation, she did sometimes feel intimidated speaking Italian to them. Related to this, Jane (also 3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio) stated that she felt more comfortable being “bad” at speaking with a non-native speaker because

“you sort of know that they had to, they had to start somewhere”.

Two students, Tom (3\textsuperscript{rd} year advanced) and Sarah (3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio), also observed that sometimes it was easier to have a conversation with a non-native speaking teacher because they were easier to understand, and tended to speak more slowly:
“the best experience you can get without being in Italy is having native speakers and that, but sometimes, sometimes it is better to have a non-native speaker because you can understand them more, I find, once again because it’s their second language, but it’s invaluable to have native speakers” (Tom).

Jill and Sarah (both 3rd year ab initio) also drew attention to the fact that different native speaking teachers can have different accents when speaking Italian, but did not say that this necessarily made it more difficult to understand them.

4.5.1c Vocabulary

In terms of being taught vocabulary by a native or non-native teacher, half of the students stated that they tended to learn more colloquialisms and slang words from their native speaking teachers, explaining that having lived in Italy for a considerable time it was only natural that they would be very familiar with these forms. Of these five students, two of them further stated that their native teachers were better able to expand on the various meanings of words, and add on items like prefixes and suffixes. Native teachers were also better able to provide synonyms and alternative ways of saying the same thing. Lisa (3rd year advanced) mentioned that she had a non-native teacher who sometimes had to refer to a dictionary in class, which she said

“really took away from the learning experience, .... you want to just be able to ask your teacher and they should know the answers”.

Four of the students (two first year advanced and two 3rd year ab initio) maintained that they learnt just as much vocabulary from their native and non-native teachers; although two of these stated that it was interesting to learn some dialect words and phrases from their native teachers, which is something they did not get from their non-natives. Two students also mentioned that the reason why their non-native tutors were so knowledgeable in regards to colloquialisms and slang was because they had travelled to Italy fairly often.

One student (Tom, 3rd year advanced), in contrast to the other students, stated that most of the vocabulary that he had learnt was through his own rote learning, rather than being taught it in class. In addition, he had picked up a lot of colloquial Italian when travelling in Italy. One other student (1st year ab initio) also stood apart from the others when she affirmed that the reason she learnt more vocabulary from her native speaking tutors was
because they tended to use more Italian in class, and they also used different words. She
stated that her non-native tutors

“would usually stick to the words that we’d already learnt, as opposed to building new vocabulary that
wasn’t in the textbook yet” (Linda, 1st year ab initio).

She went on to say, however, that one of her native tutors did not have a very strong grasp
of English colloquialisms and slang, which made it difficult for him to translate from English
into Italian.

4.5.1d Culture of Italy

The students were asked about being taught about cultural aspects of Italy, and how this
might differ between a native and non-native teacher. All of the students pointed out the fact
that to be taught by a native speaking teacher who has grown up in Italy and lived there for a
period of time is very beneficial for them. Some of the comments made were:

“I find that the native speakers get a lot more excited about teaching Italian, especially the cultural
aspects; like some of the tutors I’ve had, you get them started on talking about one part of Italy and
they just will not stop… because it’s obviously very important to them and (they’re) very passionate
about it, and they’re talking about their own personal experiences, and I really like that” (Linda, 1st
year ab initio).

“I think the native teacher’s perspective is more from like a first person, like they say ‘when I went to
school it was like this, and nowadays it’s like this’” (Penny, 1st year advanced).

“I think the fact that you can get stories about like X (native speaking teacher) growing up in Sicily or
whatever, that kind of thing, is really great in that it’s just like a window into Italian culture” (Jane, 3rd
year ab initio).

Some of the students also made the point, as mentioned in the previous section, that
their non-native speaking teachers often had a lot of cultural information to offer their
students, due to the fact that they travel there quite often, and show a lot of enthusiasm for
sharing this information to their students. And as this information is from a foreign or
outsider’s point of view, it could actually be quite useful for second language learners of
Italian. Sarah (3rd year ab initio) states it quite succinctly in the following comments:

“I had a native speaking teacher that used to get quite angry when we used to make these
generalisations (about Italian culture) but never used to really give us a true perception of it, … whereas
I had a non-native speaking teacher who had, goes to Italy regularly, and he used to tell us what it was really like, like in Italy they do this, in Italy they have this .... which is surprising cause I would have thought that I would learn more about the culture from the native speaker, but, and because it’s just natural to them, the culture is just something normal to them, you know, they don’t pick out peculiarities, or things that are a bit strange to native Australians, so that might be why non-native speakers pick up on certain aspects of the culture that are different”.

**4.5.1e Correcting mistakes**

The students were asked if they had noticed any differences between native and non-native speaking teachers in the way they corrected their mistakes. Kate (1st year ab initio) felt that it was probably more down to the individual personalities of the teachers, whether they were particularly pedantic or not, rather than whether they were native or non-native speakers. Jane (3rd year ab initio) stated that all her teachers were quite strict on pronunciation, and the same with written grammar, however they differed somewhat in how much they would penalise you for mistakes when marking work. She felt, though, like Kate, that this was more related to the personality of the teacher, and perhaps the context of the lesson, rather than their linguistic background.

All of the other students had some opinions about the differences between their native and non-native teachers, and these were quite varied. As far as native speaking teachers were concerned, Tom (3rd year advanced) made the comment:

“I think in a way with the native speakers you feel that if you make a mistake sometimes you might offend them, but whether they are offended, I don’t think they are. Yeah, so I suppose receiving feedback from a non-native speaker is less harsh than from a native speaker”.

When it came to speaking skills/ pronunciation, Lisa (3rd year advanced) stated that native speaking teachers were more pedantic about errors in pronunciation, while for Penny (1st year advanced) the feedback she received from her native speaking teachers when making pronunciation errors was useful. Sarah (3rd year ab initio) observed that when she was speaking Italian native speaking teachers tended to cut her off when she made a mistake, interrupting her and making her lose her train of thought. This was in contrast to her non-native teachers, who she felt were more likely to let her keep going, and keep the flow of the conversation. Sarah also stated that the native speaking teachers tended to mark grammar much more strictly, and that when they gave corrections they would write them in Italian,
which she found to not be very helpful to her. Linda (1st year ab initio) said that often her native speaking teachers would correct a mistake but then not tell her how to fix it. She felt that there was an expectation from the native speakers that a student should

“go away and learn how to do it and then come back; it was more like you had to learn independently a lot more”.

Louise (1st year ab initio) commented that was not a lot of difference between the two types of teachers in correcting mistakes, but that perhaps, in contrast to Sarah and Lisa above, native speaking teachers were a bit more lenient.

In regards to their non-native speaking teachers, Jill (3rd year ab initio) felt that they were “possibly a little bit stricter in getting things right”, which dovetails with Louise’s perception above of the native speakers being more lenient. Penny (1st year advanced) thought that the feedback she received on grammar was particularly good from her non-native speaking teachers. Lisa (3rd year advanced), on the other hand, felt that there was no difference in how native and non-native speaking teachers corrected errors in grammar. Linda (1st year ab initio), in contrast to her comments about native speaking teachers’ attitudes to correcting errors, stated that

“non-native speakers would tell you what was wrong, give you an opportunity to fix it, and if you couldn’t fix it then they would help you fix it”.

Amy (1st year advanced) echoed these thoughts, saying that while there was not a lot of difference between the two,

“a non-native speaker might comment more on things I can improve, instead of just like correct the test then give it back”.

In contrast to this, Tom (3rd year advanced) remarked that all of his Italian teachers, regardless of their linguistic background, provided lots of feedback on tests and assignments, and he was happy with it.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section there was quite a lot of variation in the perceptions of the students regarding their native and non-native teachers correcting mistakes. There is not an overall pattern, and so perhaps, as Kate and Jane observed, this
aspect of teaching is linked more to the personality of the teacher, and the context of the teaching situation, rather than the fact of their being native or non-native speakers.

4.5.2 The teacher in action

This section groups themes that are related to teaching methodology, and classroom management.

4.5.2a Classroom atmosphere

An item that the students were asked about was whether or not they felt that the classroom atmosphere was influenced by whether the teacher was a native speaker or a non-native speaker. I clarified this by asking if it was a relaxed atmosphere or more formal, do you feel comfortable asking questions, is the teacher approachable. Four of the students – Louise (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio), Amy (1\textsuperscript{st} year advanced), Tom and Lisa (both 3\textsuperscript{rd} year advanced) – stated that they felt that the classroom atmosphere was not necessarily related to the teacher’s linguistic background, but rather was more to do with the teacher’s personality. Jane (3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio) felt that it was largely due to the personality of the teacher, but did admit to feeling more comfortable being wrong with a non-native speaker. Penny (1\textsuperscript{st} year advanced) and Jill (3\textsuperscript{rd} year ab initio) gave views that dovetailed quite neatly, with Penny stating that she felt more relaxed with a non-native speaker, and more comfortable asking them for help; and Jill saying that,

“it’s a little more formal [the atmosphere] with the native speakers I think because again from the background that they come from because teachers are regarded in a different way in Europe than they are here”.

Linda (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio) felt more intimidated with a native speaking teacher,

“because I felt like there was more expectation to get it right, and I felt like whenever I made a mistake that it was less forgivable”.

This echoes her comment from the previous section, where she mentions feeling an expectation from her native teachers that she had to learn more independently. By contrast she felt that with a non-native speaker it was “ok” to make a mistake. Sarah (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio) indicated, in line with Penny and Jill, that she felt her classes with a native speaking teacher were more formal, whereas with a non-native speaking teacher she found it more relaxed.
and, like Linda, felt more comfortable in making mistakes. As Kate (1st year ab initio) had only been taught by native speaking teachers I asked her to simply describe the classroom atmosphere rather than compare it, and in contrast to Penny, Jill and Sarah, she described the atmosphere as quite easygoing, and that the teacher was friendly and approachable.

4.5.2b Use of Italian and English in class

One of the questions asked of the students was whether or not they felt there was a difference between their native and non-native teachers in the amount of Italian they used in conducting a class. Kate, who had only been taught by native speakers, was not able to give a comparison as to whether one type of teacher used more Italian than the other; however she did say that her tutors used more Italian in second semester compared to first, and that she liked the fact that they used Italian in class and did not find it intimidating at all. One student stated that the amount of Italian used in class was pretty even between her native and non-native teachers, and another two stated that the it was really down to the individual teacher and their own preferences in class, in conjunction with their assessment of how much Italian the students as a whole could understand, which determined how much Italian they used.

A clear pattern emerges, however, with six of the students (two 1st year ab initio, one first year advanced, two 3rd year ab initio, one 3rd year advanced) stating that their native speaking teachers definitely spoke more Italian; that is, gave more explanations and instructions in Italian during class. According to Linda, for the native speaking teachers

“their default was to speak in Italian to you, and then if you didn’t understand they would try to prompt you to get it, and then give you the English, whereas the non-native speakers were more likely to give you the English quicker”.

These six students’ reactions to the amount of Italian used in class, however, did differ somewhat.

Three of the students (one 1st year, two 3rd year, all ab initio) indicated that they actually felt that it would be better for them to be taught a grammatical concept in English first, and then once they had been taught it and understood it sufficiently, then to have further instruction and examples regarding that point in Italian.
“my pet hate was learning a new grammar point and having it explained to me in Italian” (Sarah, 3rd year ab initio).

“I sort of needed it explained to me in basic English terms to be able to understand it properly first off. ....the non-natives will probably think, oh they [the students] think in English, I’ll explain it to them in English first” (Jane, 3rd year ab initio).

This was another reason why these students preferred to be taught grammar by their non-native speaking teachers, as they felt that the non-natives were much more likely to use English initially, and they felt that it was beneficial to their learning process. Another two of these six students, both advanced (one 1st year and one 3rd year), stated that they quite liked the fact that their native speaking teachers used a lot of Italian in class; that it was challenging but that they liked and appreciated listening to as much Italian as possible in class.

Another aspect related to the amount of Italian used by teachers in class was the feelings of intimidation that this sometimes triggered in the students. Jane (3rd year ab initio) spoke about it being very “stressful” to be in a class where only Italian was spoken. She also noted that as an ab initio student, even at third year level, being grouped in a class with advanced level students who had been studying Italian since high school, and several native speaker level students, could also be quite intimidating. Amy (1st year advanced) stated that she felt more comfortable asking a non-native teacher to repeat something in English, rather than a native one. In contrast to this, three other students stated that they were comfortable to ask a question in English, even to a native speaking teacher. They all stated that this was probably due to their level of confidence at university in general being quite high, as two of them were in third year, and the other, while studying Italian as a first year unit, was actually in her second year at university.

4.5.2c Teaching strategies

In the course of the interviews the students were asked if they had observed any differences in the teaching strategies that native and non-native speaking teachers employ in the classroom; that is, in the way they explained things, particularly grammatical concepts. As mentioned previously in the section on the use of English and Italian in class, the students all noted that Italian was used a lot in classroom instruction, particularly in the second semester, and six of the students felt that their native speaking teachers were more likely to use Italian
in class when explaining various concepts. Some of the students expressed how difficult it was to be taught a new concept in Italian, and expressed a desire to be given instruction in English first, however there were three students (two first years and one third year) who stated that they saw the benefit in being given instruction in Italian and appreciated the challenge of it.

Eight of the students, four from first year and four from third year, felt that their non-native speaking teachers were better able to explain grammar concepts in different ways, particularly if it was a difficult concept and they were having trouble grasping it. The reasons given for this were: that the non-natives were better at setting out and explaining all the grammatical rules rather than just giving examples; that as native English speakers they were better able to explain things to their native English speaking students; and that, in contrast, the native speaking teachers perhaps had a bit more difficulty in explaining concepts that were innate to them. Some comments include:

“with the native speaker that I have had for grammar they just kind of use examples and put it into context a lot more instead of just showing you all the rules, like just having it there set out for you” (Penny, 1st year advanced).

“a lot of the time non-native speakers will be a lot better at that (i.e. explaining a grammar point) because it’s probably a problem they’ve had before when they were learning, ... most of the time they can explain it to you in a different way and not just repeat the same thing over and over again” (Amy, 1st year advanced).

“you know a grammar point in your own language and, like it’s the way it is because that’s the way it is, and I think that’s kind of the response from some native speaking teachers. ... whereas I suppose a non-native speaking teacher was able to explain more, give you a different example. ... And you know to have that English speaking brain I guess makes it easier for them to explain to English native speakers” (Sarah, 3rd year ab initio).

“but yeah I guess the main difference is that the native speakers will probably divert to Italian if they want to explain something whereas the non-natives will probably think, oh they think in English, I’ll explain it to them in English first and then force them to do Italian examples or something after. I guess that’s probably the big difference” (Jane, 3rd year ab initio).

Tom (3rd year advanced) related the question back to the theme of empathy, and the fact that non-native speaking teachers are second language learners of Italian just as their students are. He claims that this helps him to learn better, at least from a grammar point of view, from a non-native speaking teacher. He stated:
“learning something from a peer is easier than learning it from someone else, and I feel like that I can understand that if I’m having trouble understanding something then chances are I’ll understand it more from a non-native speaker when they explain it to me, because they’ve had to learn that and they’ve had the same syntax problems every student in the class has…. the method they use to explain it may be the method they’ve used to learn it, …. whereas the native speakers picked it up over time, and we can’t relate to that”.

4.5.3 Personal attributes

The following section includes the personality traits of native and non-native teachers as described by the students, and the qualities that they would like them to have, as well as their general preferences for a certain type of teacher.

4.5.3a Preference for native or non-native

The students were asked if, at the beginning of their Italian studies at university, whether or not they had a particular preference for a native or non-native speaking teacher. Six of the students overall stated that they did not have a particular preference when they first started.

Amongst the first year group, Kate (ab initio), and Penny and Amy (both advanced) stated that they did not really have any particular preference one way or the other, that it was not something that they had really thought about. Louise and Linda (both ab initio), however, stated that they did want to have native speaking teachers. As Linda put it,

“...I would be learning real Italian as opposed to somebody who’s just learnt it from a book”.

Then when asked if they have a particular preference now, after having studied Italian for a year, Linda, Louise, Penny and Amy all stated that they really liked having a mix of both native and non-native teachers, that there were benefits to having both. Linda, Louise and Amy specifically mentioned that they like having native speaking teachers for conversational/speaking skills, pronunciation and culture, and non-native speaking teachers for writing skills and grammar. Penny remarked that

“I think it’s good to have at least one of each teacher so you can get a full experience of learning instead of just from one perspective or one point of view”.

Kate, the student who was taught by native speaking teachers only, stated that in terms of preference, for her native and non-native was not a priority, but rather teaching ability, that her preference would be for a good teacher regardless of their linguistic background.

In the third year group the results were very similar. When asked if they had any particular preference when they first started Italian studies at university, Jane, Sarah and Jill (all ab initio) stated that they did not have any particular preference, or that it had never occurred to them. Lisa and Tom, however, (both advanced) said that they definitely had a preference to be taught by native speaking teachers. For Tom this was because he had never had the opportunity of being taught by a native speaker in high school, and for Lisa she just felt it would be better. When asked how they felt now at the end of their third year of study, all of the students said that they liked and appreciated being taught by both native and non-native speakers. Sarah and Lisa, like the first year group, both specifically mentioned that they liked being taught pronunciation/speaking skills by a native speaking teacher, and grammar by a non-native teacher. Jane, echoing Kate’s observations, also made the point that for her it was important that, native or non-native, her teachers are effective in the classroom. Tom made this observation:

“I think having both is really important, especially for grammar, and I really don’t think you should put all your eggs in one basket, I think that you should learn from people who have undergone the same sort of journey as you, and that’s why it’s really important to have non-native speakers as a teacher, and really important to have native speakers as well, … have some real Italian culture and Italian lived experience, … a combination of both is really important I think”.

4.5.3b Qualities that an Italian teacher at tertiary level should have

Towards the end of each interview, one of the final questions the students were asked was what they thought the requirements are for an Italian teacher at tertiary level. These requirements could be related to the teacher’s level of education, their experience and/or training as a teacher, and their personality traits.

Two of the first year students (one ab initio, one advanced) and three of the third year students (two ab initio, one advanced) stated that a teacher should be engaging with their students, enthusiastic, outgoing and passionate. Sarah (3rd year ab initio) said that her teacher’s passion helped to ignite her enthusiasm for learning Italian. Linda (1st year ab initio)
went further, saying that a teacher “should actually want to teach”, and that she would want to have a teacher who cares about her doing well in the course, rather than giving the impression that they are only there because they have to be.

Another important aspect that was mentioned by eight of the ten students was that they believed it was important for their teachers to have at least been to Italy, as this helps them to maintain their link to Italian culture. The teachers who have been to Italy have firsthand knowledge of Italy and the Italian people that they can then pass on to their students. Of these eight students, only one (Lisa, 3rd year advanced) stated that they should have lived there for a number of years, rather than just visiting. Lisa further stated that she felt it would be beneficial for a teacher to still have current ties to Italy, as this would help them to keep “up to date with what’s going on, and what’s changed”.

The ability to teach well, particularly in regards to grammar, was also seen as an important requirement by the students. Three of the first years (one ab initio and two advanced) and four of the third years (three ab initio and one advanced) drew attention to this aspect. According to Linda (1st year ab initio), a teacher,

“definitely need[s] to have some understanding of grammar and how to teach grammar, not just in Italian but in, because there’s so much linking between Italian and English, the ways that you would do it with both languages”.

Penny (1st year advanced) stated that a teacher should

“know how to teach a foreign language not just teach, because if a native speaker, ok they know how to speak Italian but that doesn’t mean that they’re going to be a good Italian teacher, so they need to know how people acquire second languages and how people are going to learn foreign languages better”.

Jane (3rd year ab initio) also felt strongly about the teacher’s ability to teach well, stating

“I would rather have a good teacher who is non-native, than have an Italian who can’t teach. ... having exposure to an Italian person won’t get me my degree, won’t make me able to speak it, if I don’t know the grammar”.

Other students felt the same way:
“I think they [teachers] need to have some understanding of grammar and how to teach grammar” (Linda, 1st year ab initio).

Jill (3rd year ab initio) also mentioned that a teacher should have a good grasp of English, as this will help them to teach grammar to their students, who may not even understand English grammar to start with.

In terms of the educational background of teachers of Italian at tertiary level, half of the students made no mention of this at all. Two of the students, both first year ab initio, stated that it did not particularly matter to them what degree, or educational background their teachers had: “I don’t think having a degree makes you a better teacher” (Linda). Two third year students – one ab initio and one advanced – stated that they should have a degree in Italian; and another third year student (advanced) said that a teacher at university should have a PhD.

Another quality that was seen to be important for teachers of Italian was that they have a competent understanding of Italian and be fluent. This would seem to be quite an obvious trait, and yet only six of the students mentioned it explicitly; although perhaps this was seen by the others as a given aspect for anyone teaching a language at tertiary level. Overall these students expected that their teachers would be confident in speaking Italian, be familiar with all registers of Italian, and be able to correct their student’s mistakes.

There was one particular aspect mentioned by only one student – Louise, first year ab initio. She felt that it would be beneficial for a teacher to have studied a foreign language as a beginners student at tertiary level, so that they would know what it is like for their students. She stated:

“I know the difference from learning French in high school to learning Italian at university, we’ve covered so much more in the one year and it’s so, you know, you don’t have as many contact hours and it’s a lot more self-motivated”.

This relates back to the theme of empathy discussed earlier in this section, and shows again how students appreciate it when their teachers can relate to how they are feeling because they have been through the same journey themselves.
4.5.3c Expectations of teachers in class

Another question the students were asked was whether or not they felt that the expectations a teacher had of them in class was influenced by whether the teacher was a native or non-native speaker of Italian. Linda (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio) was very emphatic that her native speaking teachers expected her to do a lot more work than her non-native ones; she felt that they believed Italian should be her main focus, whereas in her words

“the non-native speaking teachers seemed to understand a bit more that yes you’re doing this unit but you’ve also got other units. I mean there was still an expectation to work but it didn’t seem as intense”.

Echoing these perceptions were Amy and Penny, both first year advanced students. Amy felt that native teachers, particularly those who had taught in Italy, had much higher expectations of their students, and

“sometimes that’s not a good thing, the expectations are too high as, like, we’re being compared to students in Italy because they have a lot of pressure placed on them”.

While Penny did initially state that there was not a big difference in her teachers’ expectations, she went on to say that

“native speakers assume that you will just work really fast through things, ... whereas with the non-native speakers they understand that they’re not all the same, you have to, it takes time to work through things and understand a concept, you can’t just understand a concept straight away”.

Kate (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio), the only student who had only native speaking teachers, stated that the amount of work she was expected to do for class “felt a bit overbearing”, in that, as Linda also mentioned, she had other units as well that sometimes had to take priority over Italian. When asked about the expectations a non-native teacher might have of her, she said

“it’s kind of like maybe they know how much we should be doing, or how much, how many exercises we should do”.

This also links to the concept of empathy discussed previously, in that as former students themselves non-native teachers are perceived as having a better understanding of the amount of work needed to learn a language.

When asked this question Louise (1\textsuperscript{st} year ab initio) gave an example where she felt her native teachers expected a bit much from her in class. She stated that in first semester her
native tutor told her class to not use subject pronouns with verbs as they were commonly not used in Italian; whereas her non-native tutor had more of a flexible approach, and said that they could still use them if it helped when writing Italian, but that they should just put them in brackets. She claims that she would have struggled if she had not followed her non-native tutor’s advice, and been confused. She went on to say that “I think they (i.e. native speaking teachers) kind of expected more from us”, which echoes the perceptions of Linda, Amy and Penny.

All of the third year students, however, had different responses to these when asked this question. Jane (ab initio) and Lisa (advanced) stated that any differences in expectations were due to different personalities of the teachers rather than their linguistic background. Jane mentioned that some teachers are a just bit more lax than others in what they expect of a student. Tom (advanced) also did not notice any differences in teacher expectations relating to whether they were native or not; in his words “I know both native and non-native teachers get pissed off if you don’t do the homework”. Jill (ab initio) felt that expectations differed more so according to the type of unit rather than the teacher’s background; so whether it was a grammar unit or cultural unit, how many tutorials there were and how many tests and assignments you were expected to complete.

Sarah (ab initio) was the only third year student who had a somewhat similar response to any of the first year group. She believed that as her native speaking tutors tended to give a lot more instruction in Italian, particularly when teaching new grammatical concepts, that it was expecting a bit too much of students, particularly those students like her who had been beginners in their first year of study.

The next chapter (Five) corresponds in structure to this one, as it will discuss and analyse the online questionnaire and follow up interviews undertaken by the teachers. And then in the final chapter (Six), the results from both the students and teachers will be analysed, compared and contrasted, as well as looking to see what links there are, if any, from this data to the previous literature.
The purpose of the teacher questionnaire and interviews was to gather data in order to create a detailed picture of how teachers of Italian at universities in Australia perceive their own experiences in the classroom, particularly in relation to their status as either native or non-native speakers of Italian. As with the student questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire was designed to discover what the teachers thought, and the interviews to discover more about why they felt this way. I will begin this chapter in sections 5.1 through to 5.6 by giving a general description of the teachers who completed the questionnaire, and then go on to examine the data from the teacher questionnaire in detail. In section 5.7 I will go on to analyse the issues that were raised during the interviews with the teachers.

5.1 Teacher questionnaire – general profile

The online questionnaire was sent to teachers of Italian at tertiary level in Australia, and in all there were 32 questionnaires completed (see Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire). Of these, 23 were completed by teachers who defined themselves as native speakers of Italian, eight by teachers who defined themselves as non-native speakers, and one by a teacher who defined herself as a bilingual Italian/English speaker.

Native speakers

Amongst the native speaking group of teachers eight were male and fifteen were female. Two of them were born in Australia, and 21 were born in Italy. Their ages ranged from 29 to 61 years old. In terms of their educational background, at the time of completing the questionnaire the majority, twelve, stated that they had a PhD, and a further three were currently PhD candidates. Another three teachers had Masters degrees, and the remaining five had Bachelor degrees and/or diplomas in modern languages. The respondents were also asked about whether or not they had ever undertaken any teacher training, and if so to specify what kind it was. Six of them claimed to have never had any training, and out of the remaining 17 respondents the amount and type of training they had done varied, from
relatively short intensive courses to more substantial certificates or diplomas. The number of years that the respondents have been teaching Italian again varied quite significantly, from three years to 30 years; and more specifically teaching Italian in Australia, from two years to 30 years. The teachers were also asked what their average weekly teaching load over the past two years was, and this figure ranged from just two hours, to as high as 25 hours a week, however the average was around nine hours.

**Non-native speakers**

The non-native speaking teachers were split down the middle with four males and four females, and their ages ranged from 25 to 60 years old. Six of them were born in Australia, one was born in the UK and one other was born in Italy. They all stated that their native language was English. In terms of their educational background, seven of them had all attained PhDs as their highest academic qualification, and at the time of filling in the questionnaire the eighth teacher was in the process of completing a PhD. When asked whether they had completed any teacher training, four of the respondents said that they had not done any, and the other four had all done some, ranging from a three day course in academic teaching to ESL training in the UK. The number of years that they had spent teaching Italian ranged quite widely, from two and a half years to 40 years; and when asked specifically about teaching Italian in Australia the range was two and a half years to 30 years. Their average weekly teaching load over the past two years ranged from two hours to 18.5 hours, with five of the respondents teaching six to ten hours a week on average.

**Bilingual speaker**

There was one teacher in the group that defined herself as bilingual, stating that although she was born in Australia the first language she spoke was Italian, and she spent several years in Italy as an adult. She states that currently her dominant language is English, which makes it difficult for her to define herself as a native speaker of only one language. She is 46 years old, and her highest academic qualification is a Master of Education in TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). In terms of teacher training, she highlights her postgraduate degree as a teaching qualification in and of itself. She has taught Italian for ten years, with all of that time being in Australia, and states that her average weekly teaching load over the past two years has been 14 to 16 hours.
It is interesting to note that for several of the teachers birth was not necessarily an important factor when defining themselves linguistically. Two of the self-ascribed native speakers of Italian were born in Australia, and one of the non-native speakers was born in Italy. This suggests that there are most certainly characteristics other than birth which the teachers consider important when defining their linguistic identity, and which were described in detail in Chapter Two.

After asking questions regarding the background information described above, the next part of the questionnaire asked the teachers to rate what they felt were their biggest strengths in Italian language teaching, and also their weaknesses. First they were given a list of eight aspects of language teaching, and asked to number their top four strengths in order of preference. These aspects were: grammar, vocabulary, understanding the language (teaching speaking skills/fluency and listening comprehension), reading comprehension, writing (essays etc.), Italian culture, classroom management, and teaching strategies. In the following section I will describe in detail the answers given for each item in the question from each subgroup, beginning with the native speaking teachers.

5.2 Strengths in teaching

Native speaking teachers

The native speaking teachers perceived their two biggest strengths as teaching Italian culture, and teaching grammar, with 16 out of the 23 respondents listing both of these as strengths. For Italian culture, 39.1% of the total number of respondents chose it as their number one strength, 4.3% as number two, 8.7% as number three and 17.4% as number four. With grammar, 13% of the total number of respondents put it at number one, 34.8% as number two, 13% as number three and 8.7% as number four. Italian culture, therefore, had a higher percentage of respondents who rated it as their number one strength, compared to grammar. The next biggest strength was understanding the language (teaching speaking skills/fluency & listening comprehension), with 15 respondents selecting it as one of their strengths in teaching. 17.4% of the total number of respondents chose it as number one, 30.4% as number three, and 17.4% as number four. The fourth biggest strength overall was teaching strategies,
with 11 total responses. 4.3% of the total number of respondents put it at number one, 21.7% at number two, 8.7% at number three, and 13% at number four.

The results can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian culture</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the language (teaching speaking skills/fluency &amp; listening comprehension)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Strengths of native speaking teachers

Non-native speaking teachers

For the non-native speaking teachers it was clearly evident that they saw their biggest strength in teaching grammar; every one of the non-native teachers (eight in total) chose grammar as one of their strengths. 50% chose it as their first preference, and then 12.5% each put it as either their second, third or fourth preference. The next biggest strength was Italian culture, with five teachers in total choosing this as a strength in their teaching. Overall, 12.5% of the total number of respondents chose it as their first preference, 25% as their second, and 25% again as their third. The third and fourth biggest strengths chosen were understanding the language and reading comprehension, both with four responses each. With
understanding the language, 12.5% of the respondents overall chose it as their number one strength, 25% put it at number two, and 12.5% put it at number four. With reading comprehension, overall 12.5% chose it as their number one strength, another 12.5% as their number two, and 25% put it as their number four strength.

The results can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italian culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding the language</td>
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<tr>
<td>(teaching speaking skills/fluency &amp; listening comprehension)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 – Strengths of non-native speaking teachers*

### 5.3 Weaknesses in teaching

**Native speaking teachers**

Using the same list of eight aspects of teaching as stated above, I then asked the respondents to rank, in order from one to four, what they perceived as their biggest weaknesses, or challenges, in language teaching. The weaknesses, as one would expect, are a basic mirror image of the strengths they were asked to rank. The biggest weakness was writing, with 17 respondents selecting it – 17.4% of the total number of respondents put it at number one,
26.1% at number two, 26.1% at number three, and then 4.3% at number four. Vocabulary and reading comprehension were the next two weaknesses, and they were very close in numbers with 14 respondents selecting each. For vocabulary, 8.7% of the total number of respondents put it at number one, 17.4% at number two, 8.7% at number three, and 26.1% at number four. For reading comprehension, 8.7% of the total number of respondents chose it as number one, 13% as number two, 21.7% as number three, and then 17.4% as number four. The fourth biggest weakness was classroom management, with 13 of the respondents choosing it. 17.4% of the total put it at number one, 17.4% at number two, 13% at number three, and 8.7% at number four.

The results can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the language</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teaching speaking skills/fluency &amp; listening comprehension)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian culture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Weaknesses of native speaking teachers
Non-native speaking teachers

As with the native speaking group, the non-native speaking teachers also showed some mirror images between their weaknesses and strengths. The biggest weakness for the non-native speaking group, with six of the respondents choosing it, was classroom management. Overall 25% of the respondents put it as their number one weakness, 25% put it at number three, and 25% again at number four. The next biggest weaknesses were close, with five teachers each choosing writing and teaching strategies as a weakness. With writing, 37.5% of the respondents overall put it as their number one weakness, and then 12.5% each put it as their second and their fourth weakness. In regards to teaching strategies, 37.5% overall chose it as their number two weakness, and 25% as their number four weakness. Reading comprehension was the fourth weakness chosen overall, with four teachers selecting it – 12.5% of the total number of respondents chose it as their number one weakness, and 37.5% put it at number two.

The results can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading comprehension</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teaching speaking skills/fluency &amp; listening comprehension)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian culture</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Weaknesses on non-native speaking teachers
Strengths and weaknesses in teaching – bilingual speaker

As there was only one teacher who defined herself as bilingual, one can see her top four perceived strengths and weaknesses in teaching quite clearly. In order from one to four her perceived strengths were: understanding the language, grammar, reading comprehension, and teaching strategies. Her perceived weaknesses, as she ranked them from one to four, were: Italian culture, vocabulary, teaching strategies, and classroom management.

5.4 Competence in the Italian language – non-native speakers

After asking all of the respondents to rank their top four strengths and weaknesses in Italian language teaching, the next two questions required only the non-native speaking teachers to respond. In each question they were given a list of six skills in regards to competence in the Italian language, not to do with teaching it, and then asked to rank their three strongest and three weakest. It was assumed that a native speaker of Italian would have equal competence in the various aspects of the Italian language. The skills were knowledge of grammar, knowledge of vocabulary, competence in speaking skills/fluency, competence in reading comprehension, competence in listening comprehension, and knowledge of Italian culture.

The two strongest skills perceived by the non-native speaking teachers were knowledge of grammar, and competence in speaking skills/fluency, with six respondents choosing each of these. For knowledge of grammar, 50% of the respondents overall put it as their number one area of competence, 12.5% as number two and 12.5% as number three. With competence in speaking skills/fluency, 12.5% overall chose it as number one, 25% as number two, and 37.5% as number three. The third strongest skill chosen was competence in reading comprehension (four total responses), with 37.5% overall putting it as number two, and 12.5% as number three.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of grammar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in speaking skills/fluency</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in reading comprehension</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Italian culture</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in listening comprehension</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of vocabulary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 – Strengths in Italian language skills*

In terms of weaknesses in the Italian language as perceived by non-native speaking teachers, the results were not surprising given the perceived strengths as described above. The biggest weakness selected was competence in listening comprehension (seven total responses), with 12.5% of the total number of respondents choosing it as number one, 37.5% as number two, and 37.5% as number three. The next biggest weakness was knowledge of vocabulary (six total responses), with 12.5% overall putting it at number one, 25% at number two, and 37.5% at number three. The third weakness, chosen by five respondents, was knowledge of Italian culture – 50% overall listed it at number one, and 12.5% at number two.

The results can be summarised as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence in listening comprehension</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of vocabulary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Italian culture</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in speaking skills/fluency</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in reading comprehension</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6 – Weaknesses in Italian language skills*

### 5.5 Preference for teaching certain levels

The last item in the questionnaire asked the teachers if they had a particular preference for teaching a certain level of students. Overall, sixteen of the teachers (50%) claimed that they had no preference for teaching a particular level of students; eight (25%) preferred teaching advanced level students; five (15.6%) preferred teaching intermediate level students; and three (9.3%) preferred teaching beginners level students. The graph below breaks down the percentages amongst the native and non-native speaking teachers, and the one teacher who identified herself as bilingual.
As can be seen from the graph, there is not a considerable difference between the native and non-native teachers in terms of their preferences, with 52% of the natives and 50% of the non-natives having no preference for the level of student that they teach. The main differences were in regards to teaching beginners level students, with 0% of the non-native teachers as opposed to 13% of the native teachers choosing this option; and intermediate level students, with 25% of the non-native teachers and 9% of the native teachers selecting it. The bilingual teacher also stated a preference for teaching intermediate level students.

**5.6 Comments**

After each section the respondents were given the opportunity to make a comment about the previous question that they had answered, and then to make an overall comment at the end of the questionnaire. There were eleven comments made directly about the question regarding ranking strengths in teaching; fourteen comments made regarding weaknesses; and four comments from the non-native speakers regarding the ranking of their strengths and weaknesses in the Italian language. Several of the teachers commented that they found it quite difficult to choose strengths and weaknesses, and in some cases that it was difficult the rank them from one to four. Some examples include:
“I am strong in all these areas, i.e. 1-4 should not imply much of a difference”. (non-native speaking teacher)

“Too hard to answer; I don’t see my teaching compartmentalised this way, so my answer above is just a guess and probably not reliable, I’d answer it differently each day”. (non-native speaking teacher)

“Sometimes the issue is not so much that I am not capable of teaching this particular aspect, but that I may need to give priority to the others, as I consider them more crucial considering the low number of face to face teaching hours”. (native speaking teacher)

At the end of the questionnaire there were only seven comments made in total, although some of these were quite long. Some examples include:

“Non-native speakers of Italian make very effective teachers of the language to beginners. For instance, to a native speaker the verb piacere presents no difficulties; a non-native speaker knows differently!” (non-native speaking teacher)

“I find students are often interested in finding out the ‘right’ or ‘expected’ way of saying something in Italian – and so are inclined to prefer a native speaker. But this often leads to discussion of linguistic ‘correctness’ and translation of our native English words and ideas into Italian, which is, in turn, best explained by an experienced non-native user of the language”. (non-native speaking teacher)

“My only comment would be that I believe that I have certain advantages as a native speaker of Italian, and especially because of my long experience. However I notice that a non-native speaker can sometimes be aware of certain difficulties that I don’t necessarily anticipate”. (native speaking teacher)

After gathering quantitative data through the questionnaire, the next phase of this study involved eliciting more detailed information from a group of teachers regarding their perceptions of themselves in the classroom. The following section highlights in detail the data gathered from the interviews.

5.7 Teacher interviews

There were six teachers interviewed for this study, which was determined to be a manageable number to analyse within the framework of this study. In order to get an even distribution of answers I chose to interview three native speakers of Italian and three non-native speakers. Two of the native speakers and two of the non-native speakers were female, and the remaining one from each group were male. The native speaking teachers ranged in age from
29 years old to 55 years old, and the non-native speakers were aged from 28 years old to 56 years old. The native speaking teachers were all born in Italy and had completed their schooling and undergraduate degrees there. Two of them completed their postgraduate degrees in Australia, and the third one is in the process of completing her PhD, also in Australia. Of the non-native speaking teachers, one was born in Australia and completed all of his schooling and degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate) in Australia. Another was born in the UK and began her schooling there, before coming to Australia and completing high school and her university degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate). The third teacher was actually born in Italy to Australian parents, however she returned to live in Australia as a baby, and while spending a year in Italy again as a five to six year old, completed the majority of her schooling in Australia, as well as her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Only one of the non-native speaking teachers had any Italian background, an Italian-born grandmother.

The number of years that each teacher has spent teaching Italian in Australia does vary significantly, from approximately three years to around thirty years.

In terms of structure the teacher interviews were very similar to the student ones. There was a prepared set of questions (see Appendix D), however the interviews took on the form of a conversation as much as possible. I allowed the teachers to speak as much or as little about the related topics as they wished, and it was not uncommon for a topic to be brought up again later in the interview. The length of the interviews varied from around 30 minutes to just under an hour.

All of the names used below are pseudonyms (see Appendix E for a complete list), and I have deliberately chosen fairly common Australian names for all the teachers, even the Italian ones. As I did with the student interviews in Chapter Four, in order to analyse the data I have singled out some key themes that were common in the interviews, and will discuss each of these in turn in the following section.

5.7.1 Teaching the language

In this section the themes discussed are all concerned with aspects of teaching the language, such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, and also the perceived strengths and weaknesses in teaching that the teachers have.
**5.7.1a Perceived strengths**

One of the first questions asked in the teacher interviews was what they believed were their strengths in teaching. Amongst the three native speaking teachers, they all listed teaching grammar as one of their strengths. Elaine, who has been teaching Italian for thirty years, says that she feels that teaching grammar is definitely one of her strengths as over the years she has been able to develop strategies to anticipate any difficulties that her students may have. She went on to say that when planning her courses:

“I always take into account the learning progression of certain grammatical structures and I know that unless they get something, a particular point clear, they won’t be able to understand something else”.

Charlotte, a native speaker who has been teaching Italian for three years, while listing grammar as a strength, then goes on to clarify it further:

“I also think grammar is one of my strong points, because of course I know grammar, the hard thing is the way I teach grammar, the way I explain grammar to an English speaker, because I realise that it’s very different and sometimes I can really see them struggling to understand my way of thinking and my way of explaining grammar”.

Charlotte also listed “everything that has to do with speaking” as a strength she has in teaching, so conversational skills and pronunciation skills in particular. Similarly, James mentioned speaking skills as one of his strengths, particularly “communicative, playful situations, situations in which I interact with them and we only speak Italian”.

The three non-native speakers also shared some similarities in their perceived strengths. Both Michelle and Sharon talked about how they enjoyed using reading comprehensions and other texts in class to teach different points of the language. Sharon stated that reading is one of the “best and most efficient” ways of learning a language, as in a text you can learn vocabulary as well as seeing how various grammatical structures work. Michelle also picked up on this point when describing working with students on a short story or novel:

“you can have a lot of fun with examples of vocabulary and lexical phrases and metaphors and stuff, but also it can be really good working on examples of grammatical structures in context”.

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Patrick also nominated written expression as one of his strengths in teaching, as well as grammar: “the written expressions and grammar, because that’s the kind of education that I’ve had in learning Italian myself”.

5.7.1b Perceived weaknesses

The teachers were also asked if there were any areas in teaching where they felt weaker, or perhaps less comfortable. Charlotte (NS), as mentioned in the previous section, while viewing grammar as a strength because she is a native speaker and has an excellent knowledge of it, also acknowledges that in some ways it is also one of her areas of weakness. She states:

“When I prepare classes it’s mostly about finding the right examples and finding the right way to explain the concept, trying to think with their minds, so try to think with the mind of someone who knows very little about grammar and has a totally different mindset about language”.

Another area where she finds some difficulty is with translation. She remarks that whenever she does a translation in class with students, or even if it is just showing them a video in Italian, she has to make sure beforehand that she knows how to translate every single word. She says that this is slowly getting better as time goes on and her competence in English improves, but recalls that, especially when she first began teaching, she “would get very stressed if I didn’t know how to translate a word or a slang word or a concept or an idea”.

James (NS) also highlights the area of translation as a weakness of his in teaching. He states that while his spoken English is good, he does still find it difficult when translating from Italian into English during class, especially when there is Australian slang involved, and sometimes even when trying to understand his students’ Australian accents. He says that it is not uncommon for him to ask his students to wait for the next lesson while he finds the appropriate translation.

When asked about any possible weaknesses in her teaching, Elaine (NS) did not mention any one area specifically. She explains:

“I’ve always kept up with teaching developments in a bit of an informal way let’s say, because my area of research is in a different area, so I haven’t really, I’ve never really embarked upon serious research in language teaching, I’ve only done small studies, and therefore in a way I can’t say that I’m an expert in teaching writing, or I’m an expert in teaching grammar, or I’m an expert in teaching speaking. At the
From the point of view of the non-native speakers, both Patrick and Michelle stated that their weaknesses would be in spoken Italian. Patrick states that,

“speaking is always a challenge, so if students ask what is the right way of saying something, what is the wrong way of saying something”.

He feels that as a non-native speaking teacher he is expected to

“give them [i.e. students] a perfect kind of Italian, whereas there isn’t that expectation with native speakers because they’re giving you perfect Italian anyway”.

In other words, there is a perception that from a native speaker the Italian is going to be more authentic, and so there is less room for him, as a non-native, to make any errors that may occur naturally in speech anyway. He makes the observation too that he has often heard his native speaking colleagues making minor grammatical errors.

Michelle (NNS), like Charlotte mentioned previously, feels the need to be very well prepared before class and make sure that she has looked up all the relevant vocabulary. She finds it challenging when students ask for different variations in a conversational context:

“to some extent you can find yourself at a loss in some cases where students are speaking and they’ll say, how can I say this or how can I say that, and you think you’re not necessarily going to be able to come up with options in different registers or, you know, idiomatic expressions for something”.

She says that often it is just a momentary lapse, when one cannot quite think of the word or phrase at the time a student is asking, “but it is there, that feeling of making sure I look up anything that I think I maybe just want to have more prepared”. Michelle also makes specific mention of slang words and colloquialisms, particularly parolacce (i.e. bad or swear words), saying that “it’s a lifelong thing, like everything else, understanding what expressions belong to what register”. She says that like many teachers, “you develop tricks when you teach”, and so when certain words or phrases come up in class, rather than showing uncertainty because she is not quite sure of the best way to translate them, she will open up a discussion in the class so that it becomes “a problem for language learners” that perhaps they can all solve together, rather than an issue of her competence at giving answers.
Sharon describes the area where she feel less confident in teaching as advanced writing skills, where the students are writing longer essays in Italian and where, as a teacher, “you’re really teaching the techniques of writing”. This is an area where she says she has not had that much experience, which is why it is a little bit more difficult for her.

5.7.1c Vocabulary and translation

The teachers were asked how they felt about translating words and sentences in class for their students, and teaching them new vocabulary, particularly when it involved colloquialisms and slang words. Regardless of the direction of the translation, or whether the teacher is native or non-native, all the teachers acknowledged the challenges that can arise from providing translations and new vocabulary. It was an area that can often prove to be difficult, and requires careful preparation on their part.

Elaine and Charlotte (both NSs) were similar in that they both, if they had difficulty in translating a particular word or phrase, had no qualms about admitting this to the class and getting the students to help with the translation. Charlotte states that it was not always easy to translate or provide new words that the students may ask for; she said that particularly when she first began teaching “I didn’t have a clue on how to translate certain things”. She goes on to say:

“Sometimes I tried to explain to students what the concept is and then maybe they would come up with a word, with a translation, and I’m still doing that, if I don’t have a translation ready maybe I try and work one out with them”.

A side effect of this is that even though Charlotte is teaching Italian to her students, her own knowledge of English is constantly expanding; and as her competence in English improves so does her confidence.

Like Charlotte, Elaine affirms that translating is still a challenge. She will openly admit to her students when she is having difficulty finding the appropriate translation, and one of the strategies she uses in class is to first of all remind her students that, even though she has lived in Australia for many years English is still her second language, and will seek their help in finding the right answer:
“come on, let’s see what you think, is there anything that it can come closer to this, so I try to the best of my effort, you have to sort of convey the meaning and then get them to make the effort”.

Other times she will tell her students that she will make a note of their question, then consult with her colleagues and give the students the correct answer in the next class. She says, “I’m pretty relaxed in the classes, if there is something I don’t know I tell them very openly”. Elaine also feels that it is important for the students to understand that even though she is a native speaker of Italian, she is not infallible:

“I’m here, I live here, certain things you forget, certain things that you don’t practise, you don’t use, etc., so that’s perfectly normal, and language is such an open system that you can’t necessarily know everything”.

And she does not feel that admitting this diminishes her credibility as a teacher with the students. She even uses her own example as encouragement for the students, reminding them that learning a language is very hard, and so they should not get discouraged when they find things difficult.

James (NS) acknowledges the difficulties of translation like Elaine and Charlotte. He claims that he finds it “impossible for the way my brain works, I am completely unable to translate, and that’s not only for slang, often it’s for very basic stuff”. He says that while his spoken English is decent, translation is a “nightmare”. Like Elaine, there are times when he asks his students to wait for the next lesson for him to give them an appropriate translation, “especially if it’s about slang, it gets very difficult for me and I certainly don’t like Australian accent and Australian slang”.

Sharon (NNS) likes to have her students try to come up with the right translation if there are slang words or colloquialisms involved, as she feels that it is a good learning exercise. She says,

“generally wherever possible I try and explain things in other words in Italian rather than just give it in English, unless it’s something that there’s just only one word for and it’s really obvious; … often they come up with it, like I’ll explain it and they’ll go, oh you mean ‘blah’, not realising why I didn’t just come out and say it, that there might have been a particular pedagogical purpose to explaining it the long way around”.

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She goes on to say that on occasion there are instances when a student may ask what a word means in Italian and she draws a blank, but that

“usually it sort of comes at the last minute, unless sometimes they ask the most outlandish things and it’s like, I really don’t know how you say that, or they’re just neologisms that there isn’t really a word for in Italian that have to be paraphrased anyway”.

Sharon then gives a statement that is remarkably similar to Elaine’s above, where she remarked that she is quite comfortable letting her students know that she does not know everything, and that even as a native speaker she sometimes has difficulty in remembering or translating particular vocabulary. Sharon states:

“I’m happy for them to realise that I don’t know absolutely everything about Italian, and what I can bring to the classroom is something different from someone who has a complete 100% knowledge of Italian, I mean no one really has 100% knowledge of even their native language but I mean I think they, they sort of realise it’s not quite the same thing, and hopefully they see the flipside of that which is that you can reach a really high level even without, I mean I had a slight advantage in I learnt it really young but still, it still requires work and you still are always working to maintain it”.

Patrick (NNS) finds it useful to go through various synonyms of different words with students. He states that,

“because Italian has so many different ways of saying the same thing, usually I try and list as many as I can if we’re doing a particular translation of a particular sentence, and sometimes I like to start off the class by doing that as well, so it’s a good way to get people talking”.

He says that the students are often fascinated by this variety of vocabulary and find it quite interesting. He also remarks that there are certainly some words that he does not feel so confident in providing different translations for, words that he does not use very often and consequently “I find I have to look them up in the dictionary or in a grammar book before I do that particular expression, say before class”. He believes that the focus of language classes in recent times has been mostly on grammar, and he claims that he is

“often conscious that we don’t teach the students enough vocabulary, and so I’ve tried to introduce, I like doing translations with the students because it means that there’s so much word use and different words that come up”.

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Patrick also acknowledges that for him this increased focus on vocabulary and translation is “particularly challenging”, as there is always something new that comes up, and almost every day he learns new words, although they are “usually peripheral”, rather than “core words that you might need to teach a class”.

Michelle (NNS), like many of the other teachers, feels fairly comfortable in telling her students if she is unsure how to translate a certain item, or saying “I’m not sure if that’s a dialect expression or influenced by dialect or whether that’s used all around Italy”. She maintains that “once you get comfortable saying that kind of thing it gives you the confidence to say it more generally as well”, that is, in other areas of language teaching. She mentions that as a non-native speaking teacher students will sometimes compliment her on how well she speaks Italian, however as Michelle puts it, “they don’t know what the gaps are”. She also gives an example from a class the previous year, where there was a discussion taking place in Italian and a student asked her how to say a certain word, which she gave the translation for. In the meantime another student looked up the particular word on an online dictionary using his i-phone, and verbally confirmed that she had indeed given the correct translation. Michelle said at the time she was not quite sure whether this action on his part was showing that he had some doubts about her ability to translate the word correctly, or if he was “acting in solidarity, good on you, you did get it right on the spur of the moment”. She observes, however, that “it didn’t seem to be worrying him that I might be fallible”.

5.7.1d Grammar

The teachers were all asked to comment on how they felt about the way that they specifically teach grammar. All three of the non-native speaking teachers indicated that they are aware of and use their native English speaking linguistic background, and the fact that they are second language learners of Italian like their students, to help them teach grammar.

Patrick (NNS) states that, while it was somewhat difficult when he first began teaching, now he finds it fairly easy to give grammatical explanations in class, and to find different ways of explaining the same grammar point if the students have had trouble understanding. He remarks that as a student he “wanted to know different ways of how grammar worked”, and so he recognises that this is important for his students. He also makes an effort to be well
prepared with lots of examples, as he says that before classes he often looks up particular examples from grammar books and sometimes even checks grammatical rules.

As mentioned above, Patrick tends to use English most often to explain grammatical points to his students, although he acknowledges that some students do like to have the grammar explained to them in Italian. He always stops to ask the students if they are following the lesson; however a problem arises, he feels, when the students feel too shy or embarrassed to admit to him in front of the class that they have not understood the grammatical explanation. He remarks:

“and so in the end it’s kind of worth nothing in a way, it’s a successful learning outcome in the sense that they’ve followed some part of your explanation and it’s totally in Italian, but, and I know some other teachers in the department seem to prefer doing that, but it doesn’t seem to be particularly, or have any particular advantage if then the students don’t learn anything, which is the essential goal for being there”.

Sharon (NNS) also likes to use lots of examples when teaching grammar, and will sometimes even highlight the contrasts with English “if there’s a parallel case or if there’s an interesting difference, so they realise the difference between [English and Italian]”. She feels that at times it is an advantage for her to be teaching grammar from the perspective of an English native speaker as most of her students are also native speakers of English and “I can see it from their perspective and I can see what looks weird to them”; although she does acknowledge that that that can also come from experience, even if the teacher is not a native English speaker. She observes:

“but yeah I do sort of draw on those things and try and kind of empathise with them about the things that are weird or the things that are hard, and try and show them how to, how to bounce that off their English, but also how to avoid confusion when there is an overlap between the two languages”.

When discussing grammar Michelle remarks that it can be a useful learning tool in class to ask the students how they would translate a particular sentence into English, and “then they realise things like one form in Italian that can have several different meanings in English”. She says that she uses translation into English in that way during grammar classes “considerably”, and gives the example of teaching the imperfect tense of the verb in Italian. She states:
“you might say ‘Arturo would get up each morning’, or ‘Arturo used to get up’, and they started to look at the different shades of meaning that imperfetto can relate to and I imagine that I was more comfortable doing that than someone who’s not a native speaker of English. But the reverse would so often be true ... in terms of the subtleties of Italian and stuff”.

As described previously, Elaine (NS) listed grammar as one of her strengths in teaching, feeling that after so many years of teaching Italian that she has become especially proficient at anticipating students’ difficulties. She also holds the same view as Patrick regarding the use of English when teaching grammar:

“this is the area where if need be I would without any worries turn to English, because I feel that it’s more important that they understand the point. So let’s say that even at the highest level where I would basically speak Italian all the time and I expect the students to use Italian all the time, I would be flexible enough to say, look I really am going to tell you this in English because I want to make sure that this is clear, it’s a particularly complex point in the grammar however you really have to understand it because it’s important”.

When asked about teaching grammar, Charlotte (NS) affirmed that even when the students are having difficulty understanding a particular point, most of the time she is able to find different ways to explain it and to help them understand. She also uses a lot of examples in teaching grammar and says that for her it is fairly easy to think of examples.

James (NS), like Elaine, will revert to English to explain a grammatical point if it is particularly complex, for example the subjunctive. He states that if the students are having trouble understanding a particular point he tends to ask his tutors for advice about other ways in which he could explain it. He also mentions that the students use a book about English grammar for Italian students, and observes that this book offers quite good grammatical explanations. Like Charlotte, James uses a lot of examples, particularly in the grammar lecture, and confirms again that he gives instruction mostly in English during the lecture. He also makes this observation regarding students and grammar:

“My impression is that apart from complex topics such as the difference between adverb and adjective, there are a few topics that are very complex for the student but mostly it’s more about memorizing than problem of understanding”.
For the native speaking teachers then, they definitely recognise the importance of using English when teaching grammar, and believe in using various examples in different contexts in order to help the students understand.

5.7.1e Reaction to student errors

Another question that was asked was in regards to how the teachers felt they reacted to student errors – did they feel that they were quite strict when correcting mistakes, or perhaps more flexible, or did it depend on the situation. All of the teachers stated that it definitely depended on the context in which the errors were made. All six of the teachers, regardless of their native or non-native background, said that with an oral activity, or in a conversation class/discussion setting, they would not necessarily interrupt or correct an error immediately, as they feel that it is more important to let the conversation flow. James (NS) describes a typical conversational setting in his class:

“when we do communication activities I am much more flexible, and I want them to enjoy, have a little bit of an illusion that they are in Italy, that they are talking to an Italian, ... so in those situations I usually don’t correct mistakes, I let the activity finish and then we go through the mistakes that were made, but not all of them just the ones that are more frequent and repeated, I don’t want them to feel always stressed about making mistakes so we try to make it very clear when they are supposed to use proper grammar and when it’s more about being able to deliver an idea, to get an object, to ask a question”.

Charlotte (NS) also claims that she is less strict on errors when the activity is conversationally based and the focus is not specifically on grammar. And Elaine also believes this, stating that she never interrupts the flow of a conversation, even if the students are making a few mistakes, as long as they are getting the main point across. She describes a technique that she uses in class discussions where she will paraphrase a sentence that someone has just said which contained an error, but “in the meantime I’m actually correcting her so she gets the gist but it’s not picked on”. In this way the student does not feel singled out or embarrassed.

Michelle (NNS) tries not to “explicitly correct people when they’re speaking in public, in class”, but will try to raise it later on without specifically referring to the person who made the mistake. She says that often she will do some “brainstorming work” with the class to
discuss any areas of difficulty that have arisen, perhaps some common errors that have come up in the class, “trying not to link it to a certain person who said this and it was wrong”.

Like the others, Patrick (NNS) does not like to interrupt the flow of a conversation – “if they’re giving it a shot and they’re kind of getting a bit of a conversation going, ... then I won’t correct much”. Patrick also acknowledges that students can feel “extreme anxiety in doing any kind of work with Italian”, and so particularly feels the need to be sensitive to the students’ feelings when correcting any kind of error in class.

Sharon (NNS) echoes this view, saying that

“you don’t want to disrupt their flow and I try and encourage them so much to speak Italian I don’t want them to feel like the minute they open their mouths they’re getting jumped on”.

If there is a keyword that they do not know, or if they express doubt in their voice about whether or not they have said something correctly, then she will help them out with the appropriate vocabulary; however if it is

“a smallish grammatical thing I won’t always stop them just because I don’t want them to lose the thought, particularly if it’s in the more advanced level where really it’s the content that we want to focus on as much as the language, then I sort of don’t want to potentially lose both by stopping”.

Like Michelle, Sharon will also take the opportunity at the end of a class or once they have finished their conversation to write a keyword on the board or correct a mistake that has been made. In that way the students are “getting that kind of reinforcement without being interrupted”.

When it comes, however, to correcting written work, grammar exercises or assessments, all of the teachers emphasise that they are very careful to correct errors straight away, and to give detailed feedback if necessary. Charlotte (NS) observes that while she may not be so strict on errors in conversation, “if we are doing a grammar exercise and the student doesn’t get the point of the exercise of course then I will stop him or her straight away and correct them”. She also notes that she tends to correct errors in pronunciation and accent because “that’s one of the things they expect me to do, especially being a native speaker, probably”. Elaine (NS), like Charlotte, corrects errors in grammar exercises when they arise.
James (NS), like the others, describes himself as being quite strict about mistakes when they occur in grammar activities or when the students are practising for assessments.

Patrick (NNS) feels that overall he reacts fairly “moderately” to student errors. He says that when correcting grammatical exercises from the textbook

“there’s a way to be pedantic but in a flexible way, in a fun kind of way, to correct them, and point out what the error is, but not to be too fussy about it because everybody makes mistakes, in a way it’s good that they make mistakes because then you can figure out what it is and go back over the explanation or other students will say, hang on that’s what I’ve got too”.

So while Patrick acknowledges that it is important to correct grammatical errors carefully, he also believes that being “too heavy in correcting mistakes is a bad idea”, as he knows that students can feel quite anxious when giving answers in class.

Sharon (NNS) states that with written work she will go through it and write corrections or rephrase sentences if need be, that way the students can reflect on it in their own time. Similarly, Michelle (NNS) tries to give “as much detailed feedback as possible” to her students when they make errors on a piece of work, particularly if it is an assessment item.

For all of the teachers, therefore, whether they are native or non-native, they see it as particularly important in the context of grammar exercises and written pieces that students are given corrections and made aware of any errors either as they happen in class, or in a written form for the student to read and reflect on in their own time. The teachers also believe that it is essential in a conversational/oral setting, when students are speaking Italian and the focus is primarily on communication and not necessarily on finer grammatical points, that the students are not interrupted constantly but are allowed to continue the flow of their conversation for as long as possible.

5.7.1f Pronunciation/ accent (with regards to regional varieties of Italian/dialect)

This question was in regards to the teachers speaking Italian in class to their students. They were asked if they were conscious of making sure that their pronunciation and accent was completely correct at all times, and if they were native speakers whether or not they moderated any regional accent they might have in order to make their spoken Italian as close to the standard as possible. They were also asked if they were conscious of how quickly they
speak Italian to their students, and whether or not they used some dialect or colloquial words in class, given that they are teaching standard Italian.

When asked about the speed of her speech, Elaine (NS) stated that she was “absolutely” conscious of how quickly she speaks Italian to her students. She says,

“that’s the very first thing that I say to students, that I’m a fast speaker, that I try to slow down a lot, and I do slow down a lot in class, and that they can really tell me if, please stop me if I’m going too fast”.

At the same time she points out to the students that the quick pace of her speech can also work in their favour: “I tell them that if they understand me they can understand anybody else in Italy, in a way it’s an advantage for them”.

In terms of regional variation in her spoken Italian, Elaine is aware of it and quite openly talks about it with her students –

“whenever the opportunity arises I actually tell the students about regional variation, that I’m from the south and therefore this particular vowel I would pronounce it with an open vowel instead of a closed vowel”.

She says that if the class is having a discussion about the north of Italy versus the south she might ask them if they have noticed any differences between her accent and that of her colleagues who are from different areas. She concludes that she does moderate her speech somewhat in that “I would never use words that are typically regional in the class or I would say, this is what we would say in Sicily, just as a joke or something like that”; however in terms of her accent she says that she does not really change it much at all. Often in the advanced classes where there are students from different Italian backgrounds she will point out differences in pronunciation between the north and the south in an effort to make sure that the students are aware of their own pronunciation habits. Elaine also highlights that this regional variation also comes out in grammar classes, even in the beginners stream, where some students write “la mia mamma” rather than “mia mamma”, and she tells the class “this is perfectly acceptable, half of the whole centre part of Italy says this so I’m not going to consider this a mistake”.

Charlotte (NS) states that when speaking Italian to her students she is not aware of any regional accent she might have and so “I don’t take any particular measure to keep control
on my accent or on my language”. She says that she does not speak any dialect so that has never been an issue to deal with in the classroom. While she does not “usually change my language when I’m teaching”, she does remark that often,

“I mention to students that either something I say or something that I read in a book or in an article [during class], that we’re hearing in a video, I mention to them that’s very typical of one region rather than of another one, because I think it’s important for them to realise all these differences that are there in Italian”.

Charlotte is aware of differences in how much Italian she uses with different class levels (as was discussed in more detail in the section on use of Italian in class), stating that with the first year beginners students she would tend to use more Italian in conversation classes but not so much in the language tutorials, however in higher levels she would try to use more Italian in each class. She notes that with first year students they may sometimes read a word or a phrase in class,

“that is particularly old-fashioned, then I tell them, well this word is not really used anymore in Italy, so that’s not a geographical thing but it’s more like a chronological thing”.

James (NS) states that at his university he makes sure that each year level has at least two or three different teachers taking the classes, with a view to making sure that the students:

“get [a] different accent, also different speed, we try to control it depending on the level but obviously some of us go faster than others, but I think it’s good that they get different speeds from different teachers. ... I try to keep almost, not a natural flow but try to get a good speed and then if I see they haven’t understood I tend to repeat more slowly”.

He feels that as he is from Rome his Italian is relatively close to the standard, but like Elaine he also talks to his students about regional variation and “how actually people talk in Italy”. He says that he does use a few regional words in class, for example “boh”, which in Rome means ‘I don’t know’, and the students have really liked that, and even say it themselves when they do not know the answer to a question. He explains:

“there are I think a few words that are more expressive in either dialect or regional Italian and I think here and there you can introduce some of them just to give them a sense of the complexity of the actual way Italians speak; so we try to be conscious of that and we try to teach standard Italian but we also
invite guests and so they will also be exposed to different accents, from an Italo-Australian accent to regional Italians”.

Patrick (NNS) also feels a need to slow his speech down depending on the year level of the students. For the first year beginners and second year post-beginners students he tends to speak quite slowly and use simpler words as he is aware that they have not “acquired a good competence of spoken Italian”, whereas with the third year level students he feels able to speak more “conversationally” and at a more natural pace. He observes about these advanced students that they

“seem to like the fact that when you speak quicker then it’s an unaffected Italian, so you’re not slowing it down, it seems more authentic, and they can see that you as a teacher have that competency to be able to speak Italian as you can English, you appear more authoritative I suppose, more authentic”.

Patrick is also quite conscious of his accent and pronunciation, and has had people comment to him when he is speaking Italian outside of class that he has a somewhat Tuscan accent, which he puts down to the fact that he spent some time in Tuscany conducting research for his PhD. He finds, though, that

“in the classroom it’s actually a different kind of Italian for me, a different variety of Italian, so I try and give the students my best standard Italian I can, and even though it seems more natural to sometimes say a Tuscan word or if there’s a word that’s a bit more slang with friends, then I’ll have to correct it, so to speak, in the classroom”.

Sharon’s (NNS) experience is similar in many ways to Patrick’s. She also varies the pace at which she speaks Italian to her students, with a “very sort of slow and emphasised and repetitive Italian with the beginners, and then almost completely natural with the later year students”. Again like Patrick, Sharon has a “slightly Tuscan accent”, which is due to the fact that she learnt Italian there as a child, but says that she does not really know any dialect and does not particularly use words that would only be used in Tuscany. She goes on to state, “there are some vernacular words but they don’t tend to come up [in class], so it’s fairly standard, and I don’t sort of have to negotiate that as some people might”.

Like all the other teachers, Michelle (NNS) does take note of how quickly she speaks Italian to her students in class, however she acknowledges that she is not often aware of it at the time. She says, “outside class and in general I sometimes think, I bet I was talking very
slowly in that class”. She manages to automatically moderate the pace of her speech to suit the needs of her students without necessarily consciously thinking about it. Unlike Patrick, and Sharon, Michelle did not mention that she has any particular regional accent when she speaks Italian.

For all of the teachers, then, regardless of linguistic background, there is an awareness of how they use Italian when they speak to their students. In terms of their pace when speaking Italian, Elaine and James (both NSs), and Patrick and Sharon (both NNSs) all affirmed that they were particularly aware of the speed of their speech and consciously tried to speak more slowly to their students, especially those in the beginners levels. For Michelle (NS), however, this is not something that she is consciously aware of at the time, but does acknowledge that she will slow down her Italian for her students. Interestingly, when it comes to having a regional accent and/or using dialect words, it was not only the native speaking teachers who were aware of this in their speech. Patrick (NNS) highlighted the fact that he has a slight Tuscan accent when speaking Italian, and that in class he tries to use standard Italian as much as possible without using any particularly Tuscan words or slang words that he might use with his Italian friends. Elaine and James (both NSs), however, like to point out regional variations to their students, and highlight aspects that are examples of the way people actually speak in Italy. Charlotte (NS), while stating that she does not really speak any dialect or see herself as having a particularly marked regional accent, like the other native speakers also likes to point out words or phrases to her students that are typical of a certain part of Italy.

5.7.1g Italian culture

The teachers were asked how they felt about teaching and answering students’ questions about various aspects of Italian culture. The native speaking teachers in particular were asked if they used examples from their own personal experiences, and if they ever felt pressure from students to be a complete expert on anything to do with Italy. Charlotte (NS) states that she definitely uses a lot of personal examples for her students, particularly the third year ones. She says:

“with them [i.e. third year students] it happens more often to have this kind of conversations about cultural things, or, you know things about Italian society; so I often use examples from my own
experience, and also with beginners students even if a bit less, but yeah I remember when I was teaching conversation classes I would use a lot of examples”.

Charlotte claims that she does not really feel any pressure from students or feel unable to answer their questions because they are very young, and using the example of Italian politics, she says that most students are not really that interested in politics in general –

“I remember when all the Berlusconi thing was on sometimes I happened to make a joke or mention something about Italian politics but they didn’t even know who Berlusconi was”.

With other aspects of Italian culture and society Charlotte feels that, while certainly not knowing everything, she is able to get by. She states: “I’m not an expert on Italian history and art and politics but I think I know enough to satisfy their curiosity”.

Elaine (NS) states that most of the time she feels quite comfortable and confident answering questions about Italian culture. She goes to Italy on a regular basis, up to three times a year, and still has family there. She does admit, however, that “there are a lot of things about young people [i.e. in Italy] that I don’t know”. Even some of her students who have been to Italy recently, perhaps as exchange students when they were in secondary school, sometimes know more about youth culture in Italy as they have firsthand experience. Elaine says that she is quite happy in class to hear from them, otherwise she will tell her students “I really don’t know, I’ll have to check with my daughter who has got her friends in Italy and see what she says”.

James (NS) assigns around ten to fifteen minutes in each lecture to talking about various aspects of Italian culture, and says that also when doing role play activities sometimes a cultural aspect will emerge as well. He explains:

“I don’t really like stereotypes, and so to transmit the complexity of Italian culture in Italian especially with beginners and intermediate students it’s very difficult, and so we often have, before the lesson starts or at the end of the lesson they will ask me questions and I will address those questions in English trying to give them a bit of an idea of the complexity”.

He also uses his love of Italian soccer as a way of engaging with the students, saying that they “ask me a lot of questions about football [i.e. soccer] and we use football to talk about politics and other aspects”, and the students will often joke with him if his soccer team loses. Italian songs and excerpts from Italian films are also used in classes, which provide other
opportunities to discuss Italian culture and society. Like Charlotte, James states that if a question is asked of him regarding Italian culture, “it’s very, very unusual that they ask me a question I don’t know how to answer”. He feels that with his background and education, his knowledge of Italian history and society are more than sufficient to provide the students with the information they need. Interestingly he remarks that:

“It’s more common that they ask me a question about grammar or translation that I cannot answer but very unusual with society, with history, so I guess yeah, they see me as an expert and in a sense I am more an expert of that than language”.

Even as a native speaker of Italian, then, James does not necessarily see himself as an authority of the language itself; but as an individual who has grown up in Italy and still has ties there, and with his academic background, he does see himself as an expert in Italian culture, and he believes that the students do as well.

Patrick (NNS) feels that talking about aspects of Italian culture with students is extremely important, and enjoys talking about it in class. He says that he is

“feeling more and more confident in speaking about those aspects, the topics that I do cover I feel very confident, either because I’ve experienced them myself in Italy or it’s something that I’ve read a lot about”.

He often will talk about a cultural aspect of Italy at the beginning of a lesson as a way of getting things moving. He does acknowledge, however, that while there may be some things he feels less comfortable talking about, “whether it be aspects of history, or how Italians think or how they live”, in grammar classes this is usually not crucial. Students will, he believes, acquire the pieces of cultural knowledge naturally as they progress through a course.

Patrick also draws attention to the fact that as a non-native speaker who has not grown up in Italy that he is able to “teach them and tell them aspects that I find fascinating about Italy to kind of inspire them”. He goes on to say,

“it feels like that if you were a native speaker then you’d have a closed set of perfect cultural items and that’s the right way that you see Italy in the world, that’s the correct version of Italy that you want to present to students here in Australia”.
Following this logic, he says, a non-native speaker must then be giving a “corrupted” or “outsider’s” point of view; however for Patrick “that seems an extreme fallacy to me and I find it extremely frustrating”. He states that he has heard native speakers give opinions on cultural aspects of Italy that he believes are “totally flawed or wrong, or inappropriate”, and he says he would not want students to “acquire an incorrect version of events in Italy”. He feels that non-native teachers are able to “explain better to our non-native counterparts, our students” certain aspects of Italian society and are less likely to give them a false impression.

Sharon (NNS), like Patrick, is also fairly comfortable with discussing aspects of Italian culture with her students and answering questions about it. She also highlights the fact that she has spent a lot of time in Italy and travels there quite frequently, as well as reading a lot and interacting with other Italians regularly. She does mention that there are perhaps some “aspects of regional stuff” where she is not familiar and perhaps might not feel as comfortable; however in this case she is quite willing to draw on any experiences her students may have: “many students have dialect backgrounds so they can always bring something that is not part of my experience”.

When asked about teaching Italian culture, Michelle (NNS) says “I feel confident about the light stuff, anecdotal observations about friends and families and so on, but obviously they are me talking about what I’ve observed in Italy”. She goes on to say,

“I guess I take for granted that the students understand that I can’t talk like an insider as far as those things are concerned, but I draw some confidence from the amount of reading that I do, like I try and read a lot of Italian fiction, see a lot of films, and I do a lot of academic reading”.

Michelle gives an example of youth unemployment in Italy and how she has read a lot that has been written about this issue, and the fact that these writings are the

“result of research conducted properly and is not anecdotal like say a student who’s been to Italy, stayed with their rellies and comes back saying stereotype, stereotype, generalisation, generalisation, although that might look more real to the students”.

She says again that she takes it for granted that students will realise this, that while she may not have an insider’s view like someone who lives there, but that what she can do is pass on knowledge about “what’s being researched, and what the bureau of statistics in Italy says”, and that this is very useful too. This view is very similar to the point that Patrick was making.
above, about the fact that even native speakers, people who live in Italy, might not necessarily have a clear or balanced idea about certain aspects of Italian culture and society, and that the advantage of a non-native speaker in this case is the ability to step outside and be able to judge the situation more objectively.

5.7.2 The teacher in action

The themes grouped together in this section are concerned with teaching methodology and classroom management.

5.7.2a Use of Italian and English in class

Another aspect of teaching that the teachers were asked to reflect on was how much Italian they used during class, and how often they would address the students in Italian. Across the board all of the teachers said that in many cases it would depend on the context; that is, the level of students they were teaching, what exactly they were teaching in that particular lesson, and whether or not they felt that the students were able to understand what was being said to them.

All three of the native speaking teachers remarked that particularly when teaching grammar they are conscious of using English to explain certain points, especially to beginners level students. James states that the lectures for beginners are completely in English as the focus is on grammar; however in the tutorials he tries to use as much Italian as possible, as he feels that having had the explanatory lecture in English the students should be able to follow the Italian instruction. This is not a strict rule, though, and he says that there are sometimes situations in which a “little bit of English” is used. Elaine says that she would “definitely explain” grammar points in English to her beginners students, but will also try to use some Italian as well. She gives an example from the previous semester where she taught a beginners stream class for two hours a week (out of a total of four hours), and, as she explains, “out of the two hours I would say about a good hour and a bit was totally in Italian”. Charlotte claims that with beginners students she only uses English; however in the first year post-year 12 stream she tries to use both English and Italian, and will use some Italian even when explaining grammar points.
Elaine believes that even when she conducts the class primarily in Italian the majority of the students are able to follow the lesson, but admits that there are some, the weakest ones, who do struggle. With these students she uses several strategies to make sure that they do not fall behind. She tries to “go close to the desks to make sure that they’re doing what I’ve just told them to do”. She also tries to give them the instructions for the activity in English, “particularly if I see there is a bit of confusion before activities”. She is also conscious of giving the students words of encouragement during class: “I always tell them, look, try to get the gist of it you know, ok it will give you a headache for a while but then it will get better”. And then there is always the option for her to switch completely to English if necessary, “particularly at the beginners level” as she puts it, implying that the more advanced students are expected to be able to understand more Italian.

The majority of Charlotte’s teaching experience has been with first year students. As mentioned before she uses mostly English with the beginners, and both Italian and English with advanced students. She also makes the point that, in regards to explaining grammar points,

“of course most of the time with like post-WACE [i.e. year 12] students I realise that they don’t get much from the Italian version, so the English one is still fundamental at that level; maybe with third year students it would be different but with post-WACE the English is still essential”.

So even though Charlotte tries to use Italian with the first year advanced stream, she feels that it is necessary to use English explanations as well.

Another question asked of the teachers was whether or not they answered their students’ questions in the language that they are addressed in; that is, if a student asks a question during class in English would they automatically answer in English or try to answer in Italian. Charlotte responded by saying, “if it’s a really easy question with an easy answer then I might use Italian, but if it’s something more complicated then I will use English”. For James it depends on the context:

“From the second semester I would expect them to ask most questions in Italian, but obviously there are complex questions that have to be asked in English. If the question is simple and they are supposed to be able to ask in Italian then I will ask them to repeat the question in Italian, and then I will answer in Italian if possible. If I see that they don’t understand the Italian explanation sometimes we move to English, but we try to keep it in Italian as much as possible”.

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Like James, Elaine feels that it depends very much on the context. If the student is asking a question to do with administration as opposed to a point of language then she would definitely reply in English. She goes on to explain that,

“if we are in the middle of an activity where the purpose is to try and encourage Italian then I would answer in Italian and I would encourage that student to say, ok, how about trying to say it again in Italian”.

With the non-native speaking teachers, they all stated that they tried to use as much Italian as possible in class, although, as with the native speaking teachers, grammar was an area where they were more likely to use English. Sharon states that she teaches grammar “pretty much entirely in Italian”, however with the first year beginners stream she does use some English, particularly in the first semester, otherwise she acknowledges that the students would be “lost”. Even with this group of students, though, she says “certainly by the end of the first year I’m pretty much only speaking Italian in class, even by halfway through”.

Sharon also describes conducting classes with her higher level students to whom she teaches translation studies. She states that even more so with these levels she tries to use as much Italian as possible in class because they are at a higher level, but it is sometimes a little bit harder because “English is kind of in the room, because you’re translating into or out of”. She also mentions a class that she teaches on contemporary Italian writing where there are some English-language reference texts used, and said that she has been very pleased with her students in that they have all tried very hard to use Italian as much as possible in class. She does say that she makes an effort to check if the students are understanding, and if she feels the students are struggling then she would switch to English, but that would tend to be more with beginners students, and if a student comes to see her outside of class then English is more likely to be used. Sharon also remarks that she believes that the students mostly seem to like being taught in Italian, and gives the example of feedback forms that she has received from first year beginners students where there are some responses that say, “I love how it’s all in Italian, I love how the teachers always speak in Italian, it’s really good”, and then there will be several other students who say, “I can’t understand everything you say, you’ve got to speak less Italian because how am I supposed to understand if you’re speaking Italian”. Sharon feels that this is a good sign that she has created a kind of balance where there are a
number of students who appreciate being given instruction in Italian, and that certainly in the higher levels she has not received any criticism in this regard. She states that,

“I think by about second year it’s not the understanding that’s their problem, they’re still worried about production, they’re worried about speaking, they’re worried about their writing, they might not be getting their head around the grammar but I think they find me pretty easy to understand”.

Sharon encourages the use of Italian as much as possible in class, and states that if a student asks a question in English she would generally answer in Italian.

For Patrick, in terms of grammar, it is very important to him as a teacher to make sure that his students have fully understood the concepts being taught. He says:

“I don’t see any particular intrinsic value in teaching it [i.e. grammar] in Italian, and so most of the explanations, in fact almost all the explanations I would give for my grammar classes would be in English, and so that way I’m absolutely certain that they’re understanding what I’m talking about”.

He goes on to say,

“if you start explaining the grammar in Italian as a first off type thing then it immediately creates a state of tension, so to speak, in the classroom, and the students feel uncomfortable because they’re thinking, what is he talking about?”

Patrick states that he will always begin a class by saying a few words in Italian to “get the ball rolling”, and that, while he will give grammatical instruction in English, for the rest of the class he would use Italian,

“particularly for kind of informal things that are said during class, or going around the room, or saying a few short sentences, ... that way they’re still getting some Italian in their class, which is what they’re there for, and they can kind of speak Italian as well”.

Patrick says that if a student asks a question in English he will tend to answer it in English, but if they ask in Italian he will answer in Italian, but will make sure they have understood it as well, which may mean some clarification in English.

Michelle states that she does try to use Italian when teaching grammar, but will revert to English “when it becomes handy”, as she puts it, to make sure that the students have understood. She says that it is the same when giving instructions for an activity – “if it can be really quick in English then I don’t see the point of wasting time making understanding
instructions into a language activity”. She would prefer that the students start the activity more promptly and knowing exactly what they are supposed to be doing.

As Sharon said when describing teaching higher levels, Michelle observes that “certainly by second year we try not to speak in English”, and English is really only used if students are having a particular difficulty, or if, again, it would enable the students to move on efficiently and promptly with their work. She states:

“I suppose it happens particularly when you see they’re doing pair work or small group work and you’re circulating to be on hand and somebody asks something, then sometimes you can deal with it very quickly by doing it in English; ... it pays to answer in English to be able to move on to the next group”.

If a student asks her a question in English Sharon says that she will sometimes answer in Italian, but it does depend on the context, and her “level of distraction”; she remarks that sometimes she is very “closely monitoring how [she is] speaking and using Italian in class and other times less so”.

There does not appear, then, to be a lot of difference between native and non-native speaking teachers in terms of the amount of English and Italian they claim to use in class. All of the teachers felt that particularly when teaching grammar it was important to use some English; however depending on the context of the lesson and the level of the students they would also try to use as much Italian as possible in class. The teachers all try to be sensitive to their students’ needs and encourage them as much as possible, and are also conscious of the need to switch to English if their students are having great difficulty following the lesson.

5.7.2b Classroom management skills

The teachers were asked about their classroom management skills, in terms of how they felt they were able to keep the class moving, and keep the students focused and on task. All of the non-native speaking teachers felt quite comfortable with their classroom management skills, and felt they were able to keep things running smoothly, with a few strategies on hand to help them. Sharon (NNS) states that she generally has a fairly good sense of how long activities will take and how much work the students will be able to get through in class, and that she often has “an extra thing up my sleeve” to ensure that there are no gaps in the lesson. She also acknowledges the fact that in every class there are going to be a range of ability
levels, and so as a teacher it is important to find a balance between spending more time on a

topic than was planned, and keeping things moving in order to cover what needs to be
covered. She says that she is happy to go back to an earlier topic if needs be if the students
are having trouble, and “explain it in a different way”.

Michelle (NNS) remarks that she is not afraid to stray from the lesson plan if necessary.
She explains that,

“occasionally there are people who are quite difficult in terms of personality and so on, and I know that
I’m consciously making sure that they’re not getting upset and they’re not going to cause trouble”.

For Patrick (NNS), while remarking on the fact that he feels very comfortable in keeping
the class running smoothly, he also mentions his experiences as a student at university and
having native speaking teachers who had a different approach to their teaching which he
describes as “in some cases very Italian, and didn’t quite work well here”. He goes on to say
that as a student he felt that it created some tension in the classroom “that nobody wanted”,
and “made you uneasy to want to give an answer”. Patrick also states that he believes that
students use how well a teacher sticks to the lesson plan as “an informal criterion for judging
a teacher’s competency”. He says,

“certainly deviating from it unexpectedly at the start of class say is not a good idea, especially when
students have come prepared with certain work that they expected to go through during the class”.

Consequently he always tries to stick to the lesson plan wherever possible, while
acknowledging that at times there are certain aspects that may require more time if the
students are having difficulties, as he does not see the benefit of moving on just for the sake
of moving on if the students have not correctly understood a point.

Charlotte (NS) states that she feels that she does “pretty well” with classroom
management, however she does remark, “the only thing is that not having had any kind of
study in Australia or in an English speaking country I don’t have the vocab to talk to students”. She goes on to explain that if the students are chatting amongst themselves she is sometimes unsure how to address them, and that this was particularly a problem when she first began teaching:
“I wasn’t quite sure how to address them so I didn’t sound either too rude or too soft, or if everyone is speaking, is chatting, like how to get the class under control again, so what words to use is one of my issues when teaching and when trying to manage a class”.

At the time of the interview Charlotte was just completing a teaching internship, which she says has helped her a lot in this regard, as she was given a lot of advice, and also the opportunity to observe other teachers in the classroom, which was very helpful as they were native English speaking teachers. As a result she claims that she now feels “a bit more comfortable with that”. Charlotte says that she always sticks to the course outline, but acknowledges that most of the time there are too many activities planned, so when she plans the class she picks “the things that I think are more appropriate or more interesting for the students”.

Elaine (NS) says that she always has a plan for the lesson, and that she always goes into a class knowing what she wants to do. She states that she frequently plans too much, but feels that “in a way that’s good” because it gives her a bit of leeway in class. She also acknowledges that at times she will digress from the planned lesson. If she sees that an activity is taking longer than planned or that the students are really enjoying it and getting a lot out of it then she is prepared to stay with it and not move on. Conversely, Elaine states that she has “dropped activities” if she sees that it is not really working or that the students seem bored. With her many years of experience Elaine is prepared to be adaptable in class in order to keep things moving and keep the students engaged and interested as much as possible.

Like Elaine, James (NS) also stresses the need to have a detailed lesson plan for each class. As the co-ordinator he makes sure that he prepares plans for all the classes as every class has at least two different teachers, and he feels that it makes it easier for everybody, including himself, if there is one plan that every tutor has to follow. Again like Elaine, James also acknowledges the need for there to be flexibility in the classroom. He advises the other tutors that they can move through one activity more quickly if they feel the need, or devote more time to it or something else if necessary, and that there is time for a short conversation in Italian where the topic can be open to anything the tutor or the students wish to discuss. He says that this is “so we kind of have spaces of freedom but the lesson is structured quite strongly”.

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5.7.2c Ideal Italian department

The teachers were all asked what their ideal Italian department would look like – would it have native speaking teachers only, non-natives only, or a mixture of both. All six of the teachers said that a mixture of both native and non-native would be best. Sharon (NNS) stated that she thought the department should be made up of whoever the best people were to cover a wide range of areas of research, as well as being good language teachers, and with that she felt you would automatically end up with a mix of native and non-native speakers. Michelle (NNS) remarked that as well as having a mix of native and non-native speakers, a mix of ages amongst the teachers would also be ideal. According to Patrick (NNS), it is crucial to have a mixture of both kinds of teachers in an Italian department. He stated:

“I don’t think a department with all non-native speakers would be a good idea because at the end of the day we’re teaching Italian and the cultural fact of Italy, so to speak, that always has to start with a direct experience, a firsthand reality of Italy”.

He goes on to say that having an Italian department with native speakers

“who don’t have a very good understanding of our students but want to do things their way, no questions asked, has caused no few problems with our students”.

James (NS) highlights the benefits of having non-native as well as native speaking teachers by mentioning the example of a former colleague he had who was a non-native speaking Australian:

“I think she played a very important role, she had an understanding of Australian institutions, Australian culture that was very, very important for the life of the department and also for the interactions and discussions about Italian culture, Italian society, how it relates to Australia, I think it was a very, very important function that she had”.

Charlotte (NS) stated that before beginning her PhD in Australia and teaching at university level she found it quite “funny” to see non-Italian surnames in an Italian department. At the time she felt that you had to be a native speaker to teach Italian, particularly at tertiary level. She understands now after having been in the academic system for several years that,

“a non-native speaker can be as good a teacher as a native speaker, and actually there has to be someone who is not a native speaker because it helps connect to the students, it may be a little bit
maybe intimidating for the students to have only native speakers as teachers. And also yeah, I think the mix between native and non-native speakers is the best way to go because it kind of gets the best of both worlds”.

Elaine (NS) touches on the theme of the feeling of empathy that comes from the non-native teachers and students having a shared background, which was discussed in detail in the student interviews. She makes the observation that a mixture of both types of teacher is ideal, because if the students only have native speaking teachers then the students may feel frustrated that they will never be able to emulate these Italian speakers;

“whereas to have a very good Australian who had learned Italian here from scratch and speaks superbly and to the extent that he can actually teach the language I think that’s a very good model for the students, and for him or her to say to the students, ... I was like you, I was learning Italian as a beginner in this department, I think that’s a very good thing to do”.

5.7.2d Native and non-native speakers teaching certain levels

As part of the question regarding what the teachers thought would be an ideal Italian department, they were also asked if they thought that a particular teacher was more suited to teach a particular level of Italian. Charlotte (NS) stated simply that in general, probably a native speaking teacher would be better suited to teach advanced level students, however she followed this by saying that she did still think that a mix of native and non-native teachers at all levels would be the best thing for students.

James (NS) said that his impression was that students in general tended to prefer having native speaking teachers, at least for language courses. He mentioned that with the Italian history courses he sometimes teaches his experience is that at times the students might prefer a teacher who has very good English language skills, so perhaps a native speaker is not as crucial in this area. He stated that with their advanced courses they have always had native speaking teachers, due to the complexity of the language at these levels. He believes that in this situation “it’s easier and preferable to have a native speaker”. For beginners courses, though, he says “I don’t think it matters so much as long as of course the non-native has a very good control of the language”. And then for courses regarding Italian culture or society he thinks that “at times (it) can be good for students to be exposed also to the perspectives of non-native speakers”.

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Elaine (NS) did not mention in her interview if she thought a certain type of teacher was better suited to teaching a certain level.

Patrick (NNS) does not believe that certain teachers are necessarily better suited for teaching certain levels, although he acknowledges that

“certain people might feel more comfortable teaching certain year levels, so if you feel particularly uncomfortable for whatever reason, whether you were native or non-native, then you might want to teach beginner levels”.

He does not believe that native speaking teachers should be automatically relegated to teaching the more advanced levels of Italian, although he concedes that some students may feel that by that stage they would prefer to have a native speaking teacher, as they themselves are “getting closer and closer to having a more native competence in Italian”, and so a having a native speaker teacher is seen by them as more beneficial. Patrick maintains that what the students really want is to have a good knowledge of modern Italy and Italian, and that this knowledge can equally come from a non-native speaker. He says:

“I think it depends on the person, it depends on the teacher, whether they know how to give a fresh and modern and enthusiastic picture of Italy to students, whether they’re native or non-native is kind of irrelevant”.

Sharon (NNS) believes that it can depend on the individual teachers involved and their personalities, however she does sometimes find that “it’s more difficult for a native speaker to teach the complete beginners, and often they’re a great resource at the higher levels”, as they have “really detailed writing skills” which are extremely useful to teach at an advanced level. From the students’ perspective she also finds that

“the students are not as scared of listening to, of sort of having the native speaker because they’ve committed by then to a few years of Italian studies so they’re not intimidated by the fact that someone’s a native speaker”.

In Michelle’s (NNS) words, she “hope[s] it doesn’t matter” which particular level is taught by a native or non-native speaking teacher. She does concede, however, that

“It may be that a native speaker makes a certain impression day one week one, that is, it may be worth a lot in terms of student’s first contact, ..., this is the real thing”.
Michelle highlights the fact that people’s attitudes about native speakers in general can sometimes “reflect ignorance” about “what language learning is about and what’s effective in language pedagogy”; so that students may feel that the best option is to have a native speaking language teacher, but that does not necessarily mean that that is always the case.

5.7.3 Personal attributes

This section discusses themes that are related to the personality traits of the teachers, as well as their personal background and how this affects them in the classroom.

5.7.3a Sense of empathy/ shared background & bridging the gap

All of the teachers made comments regarding the issue of empathy with the students; that is, for the non-native speakers, the fact that they share a common linguistic background with the students and that this can help them in the classroom; and for the native speakers the fact that their knowledge and experience of Italian is different from that of second language learners. Some of the teachers also commented on their shared background, or lack thereof, from a cultural perspective. This issue has been briefly touched on in other parts of this section of the chapter, however there are other more explicit comments and observations that are worth exploring here.

Elaine (NS) makes the observation that as a native speaker of Italian for whom English is not her first language she sometimes feels that “I cannot even now, even though I’ve been teaching for so long I cannot anticipate problems”. She states that there are times when “certain things that maybe with a different cohort have been extremely easy, for some [other] students it just doesn’t get through”. A strategy that Elaine employs is to use the fact that all of the students in the class are approaching Italian as second language learners, and so where there may be an aspect where she as a native speaking teacher is struggling to make certain students understand, a fellow student may be able to take a different approach in order to get the point across. She explains that she asks the class,

“is there anybody else that can try and explain to the others because I’ve tried but I really think that I can’t understand what the difficulty is for Anne, so can somebody else try to explain it to her; and I find that very often another student can maybe switch because she can see the perspective of the students much more.”
James (NS) feels that the lack of a common linguistic background need not always be seen as a disadvantage by students or teachers. He asserts that he believes that students who are taught by native speaking teachers, particularly those teachers whose command of English is not perfect, should understand “that they should not use their language skills and ability to impose power”. Rather he believes that it is important “that they understand that a person coming from a different culture and a different language, and that’s in both directions, if you have a non-native teacher teaching Italian or if you have a person like me teaching a history course in English, in both directions I think the non-native speaker can give, certainly has language limitations sometimes, but can give perspectives and knowledge and understanding that are different and are very important”.

James goes on to say that students studying languages “should understand that rather than criticising small limitations in language they should take the opportunity to discover different perspectives on life, on society, and so on”.

Charlotte (NS) recalls when she first began teaching, and how she felt “very disconnected with students”, as she was not able to “really share much with them because of the language barrier that was there”. She feels now, however, as her English has improved that she is getting better at creating a connection with the students. She adds, “also too the fact that I feel more part of the Australian society, I know a little bit more about Australian society and about Australian culture in general, so I can mention footy, something that happened with the footy or other sports or whatever, while before I had no idea of anything that was going on outside uni”.

Patrick (NNS) observes that as a second language learner of Italian he is quite aware of different aspects of grammar that particularly catch students out “and cause them to make certain errors”. He goes on to say that as a non-native speaker of Italian, “you have that same relationship or connection with the students because you’re walking in their shoes”. He says that he particularly admires his other non-native speaking colleagues as they “require such proficiency and such mastery of Italian despite not being a native speaker, that you can reach that kind of level of Italian if you keep going and kind of work at it”; and this is something students can strive for as well. Patrick also talks about his native speaking colleagues, and how sometimes their expectations of their students and the courses that they teach do not always match up with the reality of the Australian system:
“they don’t understand where our students are coming from, not just in terms of their linguistic competency, but their formation here in Australia, and their high school, and what kind of family situations they might have. ... some colleagues have remarked to me that they find it disgraceful that certain courses we have here in Italian don’t have exams, whereas all Italian courses have exams”.

He goes on to say,

“native teachers want it to be like that [i.e. Italy] here, and so it impacts on the way that they deal with the students and the classroom management skills they have, they always seem to be much more formal in class”.

He acknowledges that the students in a certain sense like and appreciate this “because they have an Italian teacher there teaching in the Italian way”, so in a way it is almost like being in Italy; however he also believes that treating an Australian classroom situation with Australian students like a classroom in Italy is not so beneficial for their learning “if the classroom runs less smoothly”, which it may do if the students do not feel as comfortable as they should.

As previously mentioned in the grammar section, Sharon (NNS) has acknowledged that she does feel that she has somewhat of an advantage as a teacher because she has a common linguistic background with her students and can see things from their perspective. She also states that from the students’ perspective, often in the beginning there is a perception, particularly from the Italian-Australian students, that as a non-native speaker who has no Italian background “that there’s something that you don’t quite have, something’s slightly lacking in a teacher who isn’t Italian”. She goes on to say that this perception usually does not last as the students continue learning the language because they

“realise that there’s a lot more to learning a language at university than an identification with the culture at a sort of day to day level which is what they undoubtedly have”.

Sharon concludes that the students appreciate what she has to offer as a non-native teacher, and look upon her as an example:

“because in the end they’re all learning Italian as non-native speakers regardless of whether they have some Italian background, so it’s something that they can look towards, aim towards”.

Like the other non-native teachers, and as discussed in the section on grammar, Michelle also uses her English speaking background as a teaching tool, knowing that the majority of her students are native English speakers as well. She also recounts an incident that
happened in the previous semester, when she had made a small error on a power point slide. She corrected the slide and put it up on the course website as soon as possible, as well as sending an email to all the students from that class explaining that the slide had been wrong and what it should have said. A few of her students mentioned it to her in class, saying “we saw your mea culpa”, however Michelle observes that they were saying it in a way that was quite gentle, “as if to say, you know, everybody’s power points in every course are full of errors, why shouldn’t you make one slip in Italian. There’s a lot of typos in most people’s English”. There is that feeling, then, from Michelle that a mistake from a native speaker is seen as a slip of the tongue or just one of those things, whereas a mistake from a non-native speaker is somehow less acceptable. The students, however, seem to be much more forgiving in this regard than perhaps teachers are to themselves. Michelle says that she will sometimes receive compliments from her students on how good her Italian is – “wow that’s great that you can speak Italian so well when you’re not [a native speaker], but they don’t know what the gaps are”. The students are not experienced enough to be able to detect any errors in Michelle’s speech, so for them it is as close to a native speaker, the ideal, as possible. And Michelle, like Sharon, is seen by the students as an example to strive for.

5.7.3b Growing up in Italy

The teachers were also asked their thoughts about the fact that native speaking teachers have grown up in Italy and whether they thought this was a particular advantage, culturally and/or linguistically, for them, or a disadvantage for non-native speakers who had not. Charlotte (NS) stated that she believed that having grown up in Italy was a definite advantage for a native speaking language teacher. She said,

“It’s not just from a language perspective cause of course from the language perspective having grown up in Italy gave me the fluency and also confidence in my language, but also from the cultural point of view and historical, political, yeah I feel like I, as I said I know most of the things that I’m expected to know as a language teacher, language and culture teacher”.

Elaine (NS) answered the question at first by saying that she believed that at university level she believed that students generally preferred to have native speaking teachers who have grown up in Italy. She states:
“They prefer to have somebody that is Italian because it’s, particularly at the higher levels, because they can see that, they can see I’m different, I’m not like them culturally, in pragmatics, in the way I do things and all the rest of it, so I think generally speaking they like this element”.

Having said this, she then goes on to give the example of a non-native speaking colleague she once had who taught with her at university for a year. This colleague was American and had studied Italian in the US and England. Elaine describes her thus:

“Her Italian was superb, her teaching skills were excellent, the students absolutely adored her. And she knew a lot about Italy because she, when she was living in England she used to go to Italy a lot”.

She comes to the conclusion then that teaching skills play a big part in how successful a teacher is, and this is irrespective of the teacher’s linguistic background. She points out that even a native Italian teacher has the potential to be a “disaster” in the classroom if he/she is unable to teach effectively. She further states that “I think that the way of teaching is so much more important for students than who you are, your background and all the rest of it”.

James (NS) remarked that linguistically speaking most of the non-native speaking teachers that he has known have been excellent, however there are two major limitations that he has observed. The first one is to do with the “authority of the tutor in the classroom”; he feels that students tend to,

“trust more native speakers and there is a bit of this stereotype, that we only use native speakers and so on, and I think that has an impact on students, they kind of expect to have native speakers and so that has an impact on the authority of the tutor, unless the tutor is exceptionally good and also have a very strong personality”.

The other limitation that he feels non-native teachers have is to do with nuances of the language that they are perhaps not always aware of. He talks about how students these days have access to many different resources, particularly on the internet with online videos and YouTube, and so some students will pick up on different words and expressions from outside the classroom. James observes that,

“what I found is that at times tutors who are non-native speakers will correct expressions that are actually commonly used in Italy but are perhaps not, you know, standard, but are perfectly fine, and students … get those expressions from this incredible amount of sources that we have, so I found that has been a bit of an issue and in some instances I had to re-mark especially writing tasks because non-native speakers had marked as errors expressions that were perfectly fine”.

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James links this back to the first point he made, in that the authority of non-native tutors can be undermined if students feel that the tutor has made a mistake in marking a piece of work, or has failed to recognise a word or expression as acceptable in the Italian language.

None of the non-native speaking teachers felt that they were necessarily at a disadvantage because they had not grown up in Italy. Sharon acknowledges that a non-native speaker has a different knowledge of the language, and it may not in some instances be as deep as the knowledge of a native speaker, but claims that this is not a major disadvantage, particularly if the teacher has come to know the Italian culture quite well through frequent trips to Italy. She observes that for the non-native teacher,

“I think there’s something there about having made that active choice to get to know the culture that you don’t actually have if you just happen to grow up with it, so I guess that’s the other side of it”.

For Michelle there is no disadvantage in not having grown up in Italy, rather it is a question of working with the strengths one has: “at some level you are what you are and everybody adapts to that don’t they”. She also highlights the fact that there is more of a focus in today’s world on,

“understanding (of) the importance of developing intercultural awareness and ability to appreciate differences between your own behaviours and expectations and beliefs and those of Italians or whatever country and language you’re studying”.

As a non-native speaker, therefore, Michelle feels that she has a heightened awareness of cultural differences and can use this knowledge to her advantage. She also very interestingly points out that “a lot of Italians these days are people who didn’t necessarily grow up in Italy”. In Australia there are many second and third generation Italians who feel a strong sense of Italian identity, passed down through their parents and grandparents, and yet they themselves were not born there.

Patrick states that not having been born in Italy is not a disadvantage, but rather “in a way it’s an advantage because you can explain clearer the culture and the language to non-native students”. He goes on to talk about the different approaches to teaching that native and non-native speaking teachers have, saying that either approach can be equally beneficial for students. He explains that students seem to like having non-native teachers
“because they’re [i.e. the teachers] more interested in Italy and Italian as a cultural phenomenon as opposed to just the boring language work and the explanations that you give”;

although he acknowledges too that students also appreciate the fact that native speakers have a more direct link to Italy.

5.7.3c Growing up in Australia

After being asked to consider the possible advantages of having grown up in Italy, the teachers were then asked to consider the other side of the argument; that is, whether or not having grown up in Australia and therefore sharing the same cultural background as the vast majority of their students can be viewed as an advantage for non-native speaking teachers, and a disadvantage for native speakers.

For Charlotte (NS), she does feel that not having grown up in Australia is a disadvantage for her from some points of view, particularly in terms of grammar. She explains:

“we think of the language in very different ways, and we are taught the language in different ways. In Italy there is a strong focus on grammar while here they know very little about grammar”.

These differences create challenges for Charlotte in the classroom in seeking to find the best and most effective ways to teach grammar to her mostly Australian born and educated students. She also described how, especially when she first began teaching, she struggled somewhat to connect with the students, which in a large part was due to her language skills, as she says “because my accent and my English was really, really poor three years ago”. Another reason for her difficulty in connecting with students was the fact that she was so unfamiliar with the Australian culture, so much so that she “couldn’t even make a joke about things that we would come across in the book”. And while her language skills and knowledge of Australian culture have improved in the last three years of teaching, Charlotte says that “sometimes I still feel that there is like a gap that I can’t really fill between me and them”. She finishes by observing, however, that it can also be a good thing for the students to have contact with someone from a different background, even if they find her a bit strange or the things she says a bit strange.

Elaine (NS) also acknowledges that not having grown up in Australia can be a disadvantage at times. As she states, “there are a lot of things that I cannot share with my
students”, although she does point out that some of this is also due to the generational gap between her and her students, and not just the lack of a common cultural background. She also says that there are certain things now that she perhaps understands more as she has had a daughter who has passed through the Australian educational system; whereas “maybe eight years ago, ten years ago there were certain things that I just could not understand, I’d say oh my God these students, they don’t know this, they don’t know that”. This echoes the observations made by Charlotte above, when she highlighted the different ways that Italians and Australians learn about grammar. Elaine goes on to say:

“But I think that deep down the issue is that we are together in a room sharing that time because they want, they have this passion or they’ve decided to study a particular language, and my task is to really facilitate that task in a way, their learning”.

She concludes, therefore, that in the end the issue of her background versus the students’ background is not necessarily of “enormous importance” as after so many years teaching in Australia she feels that she does “understand a fair bit of their context and so it does not become a big obstacle I think”.

James (NS) does see his different cultural background from his students as a disadvantage in some ways, and from the very first lesson tries to help his students to feel more comfortable and to make them aware of his cultural differences. He states that one of the first things he tells his students is not to get upset or anxious as he always starts off “with a very full-on first lesson that is completely in Italian”. Even though they are only covering very basic material at that point, his experience is that the students find it a bit intimidating to be spoken to only in Italian. He goes on to say:

“the second or third thing that I say is, look I’m Italian so I’m not going to remember your names for the first eight or nine weeks, I try very hard but there is no way that Italians can remember names. ... it’s certainly a very Australian thing that you are supposed to remember names and call people by names”.

James, like Charlotte, also highlights the issue of grammar, and the fact that his students do not have the same background in grammar that he has had, and he has needed to make allowances for that in his teaching – “many of them don’t understand grammar at all”. He also states that at times he might say things that the students do not consider appropriate, and at
times he does not understand their questions, so there are some “limitations” as he puts it for him as a teacher. He goes on to say, however,

“but I also think that the most important thing that studying a language does for students is to put them in a position of inferiority in which they don’t have control of the language, and also to face misunderstandings and linguistics misunderstandings”.

He maintains that this can actually be an advantage for the students in having a native speaking teacher, as when they actually go to Italy they will be faced with potential cultural and/or linguistic misunderstandings, and they will have to do so with native speakers who are less “aware and sensitive” than James is in the classroom, so dealing with some of these situations in a classroom setting first is good practice for them.

Another point that James mentions is the relative informality of the classroom atmosphere in Australia as compared to Italy. He describes when he first began his current job:

“I bought two jackets and I went in my jacket at the University ... where most of my colleagues at times don’t even wear shoes so, and the students certainly don’t expect you to be very formal, sometimes they arrive directly from the beach with their surfboards, so, you know, you have to adapt a little bit to that”.

James states that he has known some native Italian teachers who have had a lot of difficulty in adapting to this less formal atmosphere, and some of them have really not liked it at all; however James feels that “it’s particularly important for teachers of other languages and cultures that they embrace cultural difference and they enjoy that”.

Later in her interview Elaine (NS) also discussed the topic of the informality of the Australian classroom, particularly when compared to how classes are conducted in Italy. She says that now, after thirty years of teaching in Australia, it is something that she is used to and able to manage; however she recounts some of her first experiences, which were remarkably similar to James:

“of course I found it very strange, I remember when I started teaching here I was very young, I was 25, and I was teaching at night, beginners course, so the students would arrive with bare feet, and literally they’d just finished surfing and they were coming to class”.
She maintains that while for her she has adapted to the more relaxed atmosphere in an Australian classroom, she has had other native speaking colleagues who have not been comfortable with it at all:

“once one particular one came to me and she was shocked, she said, oh the students here are so rude, they actually eat in class, and I said to her, look I have my lunch when I teach because if I’ve got a class at 1 that’s what we do, ... she was totally shocked”.

Elaine is so used to these things now that she claims she does not even notice it if a student is eating in class, or if she does she just thinks “she has to have lunch otherwise she can’t go to the next class”. So for Elaine these different expectations about what is acceptable in class do not bother her anymore, however she acknowledges that for other native speaking teachers it has been and can be a problem.

Patrick (NNS) does believe that having grown up in Australia like most of their students can be an advantage for non-native teachers. He says,

“in that sense you [i.e. NNS teacher] are probably or were probably interested in the same aspects about Italy that they [i.e. students] are interested in now, and so you can point out certain aspects to them that will surprise them or will encourage them the most that you’ve discovered about Italy, and certain things that you find, or certain things that surprise you about Italy that might not surprise a native speaker”.

He relates it back to his own experience as a student, where he felt that his non-native teachers would really emphasise and attempt to explain those cultural differences that “we would find surprising as Australians”, but that the native speaking teachers just took it for granted that that was the way things were in Italy and would not always make mention of it or highlight those differences to their students. Patrick believes,

“part of the point of having language and cultural teaching here is to explain those facts, not to explain them away but to give them a reason, so to speak, which are kind of obvious for native speakers but for non-native speakers they’re, that’s the good stuff, that’s the fascinating aspect of Italy”.

Michelle (NNS) highlights the fact that for the native speaking language teacher, the experience of migrating to a new country and “finding your place in a different culture” can be really useful, however with this there can certainly be some difficulties and potential misunderstandings with students. She gives the example of a native speaking colleague about
whom the students began gossiping because she did not shave her underarms, and explains that if it were her in that position

“I would never dream of going into class and showing them, I know not to do that to a whole bunch of 17 year old Anglo-Australians; so things like that can happen that can be really hurtful and have nothing to do with language and learning but everything to do with cultural assumptions”.

Like James, Michelle also mentioned the classroom atmosphere, however focussing on how the teacher’s sense of authority with the students can be a difficult thing to negotiate, particularly for a native speaker who lacks the shared cultural background of the students and perhaps has not taught in an Australian university before. She comments on how it important it is to be able to respond to the students’ expectations:

“when that [i.e. level of authority] maybe doesn’t appear at the right point of the spectrum, your behaviour doesn’t appear at the right point of the spectrum, on the authority spectrum, for the students and they react possibly uncomfortably, it would be tricky”.

For Sharon (NNS) she does believe that a shared cultural background with her students helps her in the classroom. As she explains:

“it means sometimes just even humour or the fact that there are certain references you can make to lighten the mood or things you can relate it to in Australian culture, and I’ve always taught here in Australia so it’s the Australian not just the English-speaking culture that I share with most of them”.

Like James, Sharon also comments on the relative informality of the Australian classroom setting as opposed to Italy, saying that it is something she is quite comfortable with and has been easy for her to deal with, whereas for a native speaker coming from an Italian system it would be more challenging as “you’d either have to get used to that or your students would have to; well probably you’d meet somewhere in the middle”. She remarks that if it were the reverse and she went to Italy to teach English then the challenge would be for her to work out the best way of managing a classroom atmosphere that the students would be comfortable with. She goes on to make the observation:

“We’re in this weird intercultural space because .... we’ve always used ‘tu’ in the classroom, particularly when I first started out I couldn’t have anything else, it would’ve been ridiculous, but we use first names, we use ‘tu’, now even my older colleagues have pretty much always done that which is completely, well not artificial but it’s Australian, you wouldn’t do that in Italy, you wouldn’t be using ‘tu’ with teachers, you wouldn’t be calling them by their first name unless you got to know them really well”.

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Sharon states that in a sense, by using Italian that way in class and addressing teachers informally, “we’re kind of in a small sense speaking it like Australians”, and she hopes the students realise that when they go to Italy that it is actually very different and one cannot be so informal.

**5.7.3d ‘Native speaker’ as a selling point**

Michelle (NNS) recounted an interesting event that occurred recently at the university she teaches at which reflects a theme that has been discussed in the literature on native versus non-native speaking teachers, but which none of the other interviewed teachers openly alluded to. She describes how at her university they were going to have a summer intensive course for Italian, which had never been done before, so the web designer (who had nothing to do with teaching languages) put together some advertising material to put on the school’s website. Michelle’s two colleagues, both native speakers, were running the course. She describes the webpage thus:

“get ready for an Italian summer, blah blah, and it said, you will be taught by native speakers, and I thought, that’s the villa in Tuscany way of advertising an Italian course, it’s nothing to do with Australian academia, and of course he’s not a language academic, he’s a web publisher, he’s a marketing person, uses slogans”.

Michelle says that when she saw it she asked for it to be removed, and as a little joke told the web designer that it could end up being false advertising if she, a non-native speaker, ended up substituting a class for one of her native colleagues. She goes on to say,

“I did find it interesting that my colleagues themselves hadn’t vetoed that bit, and they of course don’t think that a native speaker is a better teacher, ... and they don’t think that that’s what’s the significant factor”.

For her native colleagues it had not occurred to them to object to the wording of the website, but for Michelle as a non-native speaker it perhaps stood out more starkly. She knows that advertising only native speaking teachers is used as a marketing tool, but feels that in a university setting it is not appropriate. She goes on to describe how the very next day she noticed on the website of the Dante Alighieri Society that they had also written that they only employ native speaking teachers. She explains that she herself had taught for many years at the Dante Society, and that even now she does “a lot of stuff with everybody [at the Dante]
organising cultural events”, so she still maintains a link with them. She says after reading that she “thought, what’s going on here, you know, it’s the latest thing”. There seems to be this trend in Australia of using the native speaker as a selling point, a marketing tool to attract students. Michelle observes:

“that’s about that huge market for tourists to go to Italy and, or stay for a month and do a language course while you’re there, it’s about the business of language for tourists and that’s fine by me, absolutely fine, but it’s not what learning a foreign language in Australia is, the education system is about”.

For Michelle there is much more to learning a foreign language than only being taught by native speaking teachers, and as a non-native speaker she rightly feels that she has a lot to offer her students as well.

In the following, and final, chapter, these perceptions from the teachers will be compared and contrasted to those of the students, and it will also be seen what, if any, corresponding links can be found between this data and that discussed in the literature review from Chapter One.
Chapter Six – Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the results from both the student questionnaires and interviews and teacher questionnaires and interviews. In section 1.4 of Chapter One I outlined a number of research questions that emerged from the literature, and in this chapter I will answer these questions in light of the data gathered for this study. Being able to draw on qualitative data proved to be very important as sometimes the findings from the questionnaires were not clear-cut, and the interview data allowed for a more in-depth, ethnographic interpretation.

This chapter will provide some insight into the perceptions of the students and teachers that have been explored in this study, as well as seeing how the student and teacher perceptions match each other, or indeed if they do at all, and whether these results are supported by the previous literature, or whether they diverge at all. I will refer back to the literature review in Chapter One, and the previous studies that have been carried out on native and non-native speaking teachers of English, in order to revisit the main findings that were discovered.

Some of the issues discussed in this chapter emerged from the interviews only, and were not specifically investigated through the questionnaires; although in many cases these issues were commented on at the end of the questionnaire, which led to further investigation through the interviews. These issues include, for example, the areas of empathy, the use of Italian and English in class, and correcting mistakes.

The chapter is divided into four major sections, which correspond to the four research questions given at the end of Chapter One. Section 6.1 will address the reasons why students perceive native and non-native teachers to have certain advantages in the classroom. Section 6.2 will then highlight in detail the perceived characteristics of teachers in relation to their status as native or non-native speakers. In section 6.3 the various aspects of language teaching have been broken down and the perceptions of students and teachers discussed in relation to them. The final section, 6.4, will then discuss various aspects related to teaching
style, and how the students perceive these in relation to their teachers’ linguistic background, and how the teachers view themselves in this regard.

6.1 Perceived advantages of native and non-native speaking teachers

The following section will examine some of the reasons why a student feels that having a native or a non-native speaking teacher is an advantage to them, and will explain the reasoning behind these perceptions.

6.1.1 Preference for native vs non-native

One of the major issues to arise from the literature in this field was the simple, and yet also complex, issue of what kind of teacher students prefer to be taught by. This study reveals that the students’ preference is not for either the native or the non-native teacher, but for a combination of both. When asked directly if they would prefer to be taught by both native and non-native teachers, the majority agreed with the statement, particularly amongst the third year group, and this was confirmed in the interviews. The teachers in the interviews also expressed views on this topic, indicating that, in general, students seemed to like being taught by both native and non-native speakers, although there were some specific views in regards to the level of students being taught. Two of the native speaking teachers believed that it was better for advanced level students to be taught by a native speaking teacher, but that it did not matter so much in the lower levels. As far as the non-native speaking teachers were concerned, they stated that it should not matter which type of teacher takes a certain level; however it was noted by one of them that native speaking teachers find it more difficult to teach the beginners level students, and are often a particularly good resource for the students at the more advanced levels. One of the other non-native teachers also observed that she believes students of any level may feel that having a native speaking teacher is the best option, but this is not always necessarily the case.

Breaking it down further, the students were asked in the questionnaire three separate questions about whether, if they could choose, they would prefer to have a native speaking teacher, a non-native speaking teacher, or both a native and a non-native speaking teacher. In response to the first question, the majority chose agree or strongly agree, however there
were also a considerable number who were neutral, which suggests that while some students have clear views in regards to who would make the better teacher, many others do not have a preference, or approach language learning with no particular preconception. When asked about their preference for a non-native teacher, the clear majority were neutral. These two questions suggest that if it is down to one choice, if they can only have one teacher, then the majority of students would prefer to have a native speaking teacher, which I believe may be explained in terms of the emphasis students place on acquiring speaking skills, and that the native speaker is seen as an authentic example of the way Italian should be spoken. Then when asked whether, if they could choose, they would prefer to have both a native and a non-native teacher, within all of the subgroups the majority of students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This reflects the fact that students are also aware that there is more to learning a language then speaking and pronunciation skills, and they recognise how important it is to have a solid foundation in areas such as grammar. What is particularly interesting is that the figures in both of the third year groups for this question increase significantly, implying that the longer the students study Italian the more they come to appreciate the benefits of being taught by both native and non-native teachers. It also suggests that as students progress from first year level to third year level they become more aware of the process of learning a language; they have had more experience and so their attitudes are perhaps shaped more by those experiences than by their general, and possibly subjective, perceptions.

My findings contrast with Lasagabaster & Sierra (2002), who concluded from their study that the preference for a native speaking teacher increases as the level of the student increases; that is, an advanced student is more likely to prefer a native speaking teacher than a beginners student. Alseweed (2012) was able to go further as there was a qualitative element to his study. The general view from the students in his study was that while a non-native teacher would be helpful to have for beginner levels as they need a teacher who is able to speak to the students in their native language, at higher levels a native speaking teacher would be more helpful (p. 49). My findings are more in line with the studies conducted by Moussu & Braine (2006), and Cheung & Braine (2007), who found that the attitudes of students towards non-native speaking teachers became more positive as the students progressed to higher levels. Through my interviews I was able to establish that students view
having access to both kinds of teachers as the best of both worlds, as an opportunity to make the most of the unique qualities that both native and non-native teachers bring to the classroom.

Another very interesting aspect of this question was the fact that among the first year ab initio group, only 46% claimed that they had been taught by both native and non-native teachers, and yet a higher number, 57%, said that they would prefer to be taught by both. The same can be seen with the third year ab initio group – 67% had been taught by both kinds of teachers, but 84% would prefer to have both. This means that there are a number of students who have only had the experience of being taught by one kind of teacher, and yet still believe that there are potential advantages in being taught by both native and non-native speakers.

The students in the interviews were also asked about their general preferences concerning which teacher they would like to have. Initially they were asked whether they had had a particular preference for a certain type of teacher when they first began studying Italian, and then whether that has changed at all now that they had been at university for some time. Six of the students said that they did not really have any particular preference, or had not really considered it before starting at university. The other four students stated that at first they had really wanted to be taught by native speakers. This desire to be taught by a native speaking teacher is described in the literature and discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One. It appears that some of the students subscribed to the “native speaker fallacy” as described by Philipson (1992).

The literature also describes, however, how after having been taught by a non-native teacher for a period of time, students often come to the realisation that there actually are a lot of advantages in being taught by a non-native teacher. This was certainly the case amongst the students interviewed for this study. Nine of the ten students stated that their preference was to be taught by both native and non-native teachers, as they felt that they each had different attributes which meant that the students benefitted from being taught certain aspects of the language by a particular teacher. The tenth student felt that for her native or non-native was not a priority. Her preference would be for a good teacher who was competent in the classroom, regardless of his/her linguistic background.
The teachers interviewed also matched this perception. The non-native speaking teachers clearly believed that they had a lot to offer students in terms of knowledge and experience, and that the fact of their not having Italian as a mother tongue did not necessarily put them at a disadvantage. For the native speaking teachers too, they recognised that having access to non-native speaking teachers can also be of benefit to their students. None of the six teachers envisaged an ideal Italian department staffed with solely native Italian speakers, but rather containing a mixture of native and non-native speakers. This was true even of the one teacher who came from an Italian department where there were only native speaking teachers. There were some differences that emerged amongst the teachers in the areas where they saw themselves as having strengths, and areas where they felt more challenged, which will be discussed further in section 6.3. The students and teachers, therefore, share the same view of an ideal situation where students would have access to teachers from different linguistic backgrounds and gain the benefits that they all have to offer, and teachers can use their personal linguistic and cultural experiences as a further teaching tool in the classroom.

While it appears that students overall do not have a specific preference for one teacher over the other when given the choice, there are attributes that have clearly emerged in my data that can be associated with the background of the teacher. I have discussed some of these in the following sections regarding empathy, and common linguistic background.

### 6.1.2 Empathy

A significant issue identified in the literature is the empathy that non-native speaking teachers are perceived to have for their students, based on the fact that a non-native speaker has firsthand experience of being a second language learner of the target language. This is an aspect that has been observed by both students and teachers. In the present study this theme has also emerged, and closely linked with it the issue of grammar which will be discussed further in section 6.3.1.

The empathy of the non-native speaking teacher was clearly observed and well-regarded by the students in this study, through their comments at the end of the questionnaire and through the interviews. The non-native teachers were appreciated for the fact that they had been through the same learning journey as their students and therefore knew how difficult it was to learn Italian as a second language. This also helped them, from
the students’ point of view, to better explain certain grammatical points. The fact that they
and their non-native teachers shared the same native language was also seen as an advantage
by the students when being taught grammar. This is in accordance with the literature, as
shown in Chapter One.

Many scholars have demonstrated the link between the non-native speaker’s linguistic
background and the empathy that the students feel that they have because of this (Braine,
1999; Liu, 1999; Cheung, 2002; McNeill, 2005; Alseweed, 2012). These observations from the
literature regarding the empathy of the non-native teacher are all corroborated in the present
study, and confirm that where the non-native speaker is preferred, empathy plays a large
role.

6.1.3 Common linguistic background

The fact that the non-native speaking teachers have common linguistic backgrounds with the
majority of their students was an important aspect that was commented on in this study, by
both the students and the teachers. The students in the interviews all remarked on how it
was an advantage to be taught grammar by a non-native teacher, as they had not only learnt
Italian as a second language themselves and therefore understood the difficulties associated
with it from a student’s perspective, but also the fact that as native English speakers they had
the same baseline, the same point of reference as their students. Most of the students also
felt that a non-native teacher was more likely to give them explanations in English, and they
were more comfortable asking non-native teachers questions in English; although the
teachers themselves, both native and non-native, claim to have no qualms using English in
class if they feel it is necessary (see section 6.4 regarding teaching style for further discussion
on the use of Italian and English in class). All three native speaking teachers acknowledged in
their interviews that not sharing the same linguistic background as their students is a
disadvantage to them as it makes teaching them grammar somewhat more challenging.

Coombe & Al-Hamly (2007) showed in their research that students appreciate being
able to communicate with their language teachers in their native language, rather than always
in the target language. This common linguistic background is shown to be a major factor that
draws students towards having a preference for a non-native speaking teacher, as for both
these teachers and their students they share the same native language, and students find it
easier to have difficult items explained to them in their native language. Alseweed (2012) also touches on this point when he notes that many of the students in his study appreciate the fact that their non-native teachers share their native language, which means that they understand them even if they ask a question in Arabic. This was a definite advantage perceived by the students in this study.

6.1.4 Expected qualities of teachers at tertiary level

As well as commenting on their linguistic backgrounds, the students made other observations regarding what they perceived as advantages for any teacher of Italian at tertiary level to have. None of the students said that the teacher necessarily had to be a native speaker of Italian. What seemed to be the most important aspect for the students was that their teachers had to at least have been to Italy, with eight of the ten students mentioning this. All six teachers interviewed are consistent with this perception, having either lived in Italy for a significant period of time, or visited there fairly regularly, and these visits have occurred quite recently, within the last few years.

Another important aspect mentioned by the students was the ability to teach well, particularly in regards to grammar, and this is regardless of linguistic background. Seven of the interviewed students referred to this explicitly. They did not say, however, if they thought that a teacher should have to undergo any particular training or professional development, like those mentioned by Medgyes and Braine later in this section, as they probably assumed that the teachers would do so. The interviewed teachers from this study had all gone through some form of professional development at their current universities, with most of these being relatively short and running for a single day or several days. The exception was Charlotte and Patrick, who had both undertaken a year-long teaching internship while completing their PhDs.

Five of the students highlighted certain personality traits. They believed that a teacher at tertiary level should be engaging and enthusiastic and have a desire to teach, which helps to motivate their students.

Only five of the students made any reference to the academic background of teachers at tertiary level. Of these five, two of them stated that it did not particularly matter to them
what kind of educational background their teachers had; another two believed that the teachers should have a degree in Italian; and the fifth student was the only one to mention a postgraduate qualification, stating that an Italian teacher at tertiary level should have a PhD. It is not clear from the data if the students disregarded this as a necessary qualification, or simply did not mention it. Of the teachers interviewed, five of them have a PhD and the sixth one at the time of the interview was in the process of completing her PhD. All of these postgraduate degrees are in the field of Italian studies.

Medgyes (1999) places a great deal of importance on teacher education and training, regardless of the teacher’s linguistic background. Learning how to be a good teacher, how to employ meaningful strategies in the classroom in order to keep their students engaged and focused is imperative. For the non-native teacher, he feels that striving to improve their proficiency in all aspects of the target language will also be of great benefit to them in the classroom. Braine (1999) also draws attention to his own teaching qualifications, which include both an MA and a PhD in language education, and the fact that some native speaking teachers do not have these qualifications. Ustunluoglu (2007) points out that, while the native speaking teacher has an advantage in teaching cultural aspects of the language, very often they have not received any formal teacher training and have been hired solely because they are native speakers of the target language. This can make it difficult for them to effectively teach other important aspects of the language, such as grammar. The majority of the students from this study recognised and commented on the importance of a teacher being skilled in teaching, however without specifying how this should be achieved, although from their perspective it is really not up to them to decide this. And as stated, all of the teachers in this study, both native and non-native, have shown an awareness of the importance of this aspect by choosing to undergo some form of teacher training in order to improve their skills.

6.2 Characteristics of teachers in relation to native vs non-native

The following section will discuss the characteristics of both native and non-native speaking teachers in terms of their linguistic and cultural background, and the significance of such characteristics for both teachers’ and students’ perceptions.
6.2.1 Language proficiency of the non-native speaker

In the literature it is generally presumed that the language proficiency of native speaking teachers is not disputed, but that of the non-native speaker is at times called into question. Many studies, in particular Medgyes’ (1999), have looked at the issue of the proficiency of the non-native teacher. In this study too the non-native speaking teachers were questioned about their perception of their proficiency in Italian.

In the teacher questionnaire the non-native speaking teachers were asked to rate their competence in Italian by listing their strengths and weaknesses. When rating their competence in Italian, the non-native teachers put knowledge of grammar at number one as their strongest skill, which shows a parallel with Medgyes’ (1999) study discussed in Chapter One. He also found that non-native teachers rated grammar as their strongest area of proficiency. My findings support his suggestion that grammar is an area of language which has more concrete rules and is therefore much more learnable for the non-native speaker, as opposed to areas such as vocabulary and pronunciation. In addition, the teachers from this study listed knowledge of vocabulary at the bottom of their list of strengths in the Italian language, which again shows a parallel with Medgyes, as the non-native teachers in his study rated vocabulary as their second most difficult area.

Competence in speaking skills/fluency was listed fairly high at number two of their strengths in Italian language, and competence in reading comprehension at number three. In terms of speaking skills this does not match the teachers from Medgyes’ study at all, who rated speaking skills as their most difficult area of all. For the non-native speaking teachers of Italian in this study, perhaps this confidence in regards to their speaking skills comes from the fact that at tertiary level most, if not all, teachers have postgraduate qualifications in addition to their undergraduate degree, or are in the process of completing a postgraduate degree. A postgraduate qualification is usually a condition for employment in Australian universities. This was not always the case in Medgyes’ study, where a number of the teachers taught in primary and secondary schools.

The other areas were, in order, knowledge of Italian culture at number four, listening comprehension at number five, and finally, knowledge of vocabulary at number six.
None of the students in their interviews made any mention of their non-native speaking teachers lacking in their language proficiency in any particular area; although one student, a third year advanced, noted that in terms of vocabulary she had the experience of having a non-native teacher who sometimes referred to a dictionary in class because he/she did not know the particular word she was asking about. The student felt that this took away from the experience somewhat, and that she wanted her teachers to be able to answer any of her questions without having to look it up.

The non-native teachers who were interviewed, while they talked about their strengths and challenges in teaching, made no mention of feelings of inadequacy or not having a strong enough proficiency in Italian. They readily acknowledged that they did not know everything, but did not believe that this made them disadvantaged in any way as teachers. And in fact the native teachers too were quite willing to acknowledge that they did not always know everything as well, noting that at times they have difficulties with translation, which is described in detail in section 6.3.2.

6.2.2 Cultural background of teachers

The cultural background of non-native teachers was shown in the data to be an advantage as it is the same background shared by the majority of their students. The cultural background of native teachers, however, was also seen as an advantage in that they have insider knowledge of Italian culture.

From a cultural perspective students felt that their non-native teachers have a better understanding of what is expected of them in the classroom (an aspect which will be explored further in section 6.4). A common cultural background also helps teachers to develop a more personal connection with their students.

The lack of knowledge of Australian culture sometimes makes it more difficult to connect with students. Charlotte in particular noted that her lack of a common cultural baseline made it a bit more difficult to connect with students, especially when she first began teaching in Australia. It was also acknowledged, however, by James that this can be of benefit for students, in that while the experience of being taught by someone from another culture can be challenging, with potential for misunderstandings, it can also be a learning experience
for them, in that students can learn from encountering a different culture, and that learning a language also means learning about its culture.

The literature has also shown that sharing the same cultural background as their students was seen to be an advantage for non-native teachers teaching in their home country. Ustunluoglu (2007) notes that for these teachers they know what is expected of them in class and how strict they need to be with students; whereas a native speaking teacher working in a foreign country may not know this, which can be challenging. In this study several of the interviewed teachers commented on this, particularly in relation to the lower level of formality in an Australian classroom as compared to an Italian one. Like Ustunluoglu, these teachers acknowledged that for a native Italian speaker coming into an Australian setting this can be a difficult adjustment to make, although certainly with time and experience it is possible to overcome any difficulties.

On the flipside, the native speaking teachers all believe that having grown up in Italy gives them a definite advantage in teaching Italian; both linguistically with fluency and pronunciation, and certainly in terms of cultural knowledge. Charlotte says that she knows all the things that the students expect her to know; James comments that as a native speaker he is proficient in all the nuances of the language; and Elaine believes that the students, particularly those in higher levels, really appreciate having a native speaking teacher. This is certainly corroborated by the students, who recognised the high degree of cultural knowledge possessed by native speakers, and their intimate knowledge of day-to-day living in Italy.

6.3 Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of various aspects of language

In the following section each aspect of language teaching, from teaching grammar to teaching cultural knowledge, will be discussed in turn.

6.3.1 Grammar

Grammar is an area of language teaching that was discussed in great detail by the students in the interviews, and commented on frequently in the questionnaires. It was clearly seen as a
very important aspect of language learning, especially in relation to the linguistic background of teachers, and for this reason it is given importance in this section.

In the student questionnaire there was a general preference towards being taught grammar by a non-native speaking teacher, with 43% of the first year students overall and 48% of the third year students overall selecting it; however in only one of the subgroups, the third year advanced, did the number preferring the non-native teacher climb over 50%, while there were a considerable number who chose no preference, particularly in the third year ab initio group where that was the most selected option. In this area, however, the least selected option was clearly the native speaking teacher, particularly amongst the third year students where the number preferring the native speaking teacher never reached higher than 17%. The comments that were left at the end of the questionnaire also show a strong preference for the non-native teacher in the field of grammar, with nine out of the eleven comments made explicitly stating that they felt it was better to have a non-native speaking teacher to teach them grammar.

These results are also reflected in the student interviews (as already mentioned in section 6.1.2), the difference being that the preference for a non-native teacher in the field of grammar was even more clearly evident. Nine of the interviewed students stated overtly that they preferred to be taught grammar by a non-native speaking teacher, as they felt that these teachers were better able to explain certain grammatical concepts due to their linguistic background as second language learners of Italian, and that also because of this they tended to be more empathetic to their students’ needs in the classroom. In addition to this, the students felt that their non-native teachers had a tendency to use more English when explaining grammatical points. The tenth student, who had not been taught regularly by a non-native teacher, acknowledged that she believed it would be beneficial to be taught grammar by a non-native speaker, as they could teach Italian the way that they had learned it themselves. It can be concluded, therefore, that the overall perception of the students in this study is that the non-native speaking teacher is better suited to teaching grammar than the native speaking teacher.

In terms of how the teaching of grammar is perceived by students in other studies, the literature clearly shows that the non-native speaking teacher was preferred by students,
which corroborates the data gathered from this study. As shown above, this preference to be taught grammar by a non-native speaker was shown through the student questionnaire, although not with an overwhelming majority; however it was clearly demonstrated in the student interviews. From the teacher’s perspective Arva & Medgyes (2000) showed that for native speakers teaching grammar was their biggest difficulty, and for non-native speaking teachers it was their biggest strength. Whether this holds true in this study will be discussed below.

In the teacher questionnaire both the native and non-native speaking teachers listed grammar as one of their biggest strengths in teaching. Overall the non-native teachers put grammar as their number one strength, and at the bottom of their list of weaknesses at number eight, which fits together very well with the students’ perceptions as conveyed through their questionnaires and interviews. The native speaking teachers overall put grammar as their number two strength, and towards the bottom of their weaknesses at number seven, which shows a difference in perception between how these teachers view themselves and their grammar teaching skills and how the students view them. The non-native teachers in the questionnaire clearly perceive the area of grammar as one of strength for them, and the native speaking teachers see themselves the same way.

These views were somewhat reflected in the teacher interviews as well. Patrick listed grammar as one of his strengths in teaching; while the other non-native teachers saw their strengths as working with reading comprehensions and texts in class, but also linked this to teaching grammatical structures to students. Sharon and Michelle, when discussing how they teach grammar, mention using their English language skills in being able to give multiple examples to their mostly native English speaking students, and see this as an advantage in teaching. Patrick also reflected on his learning needs when he was a student, and how he tries to fulfil those needs for his students now. All of these perceptions match closely to those given by the students in their interviews.

Charlotte and Elaine both list grammar as a strength in their teaching. Elaine explains this by pointing out that after close to thirty years’ experience teaching Italian she has honed her skills in teaching grammar and is very confident. Charlotte, however, while first affirming that she feels very strong in Italian grammar, also admits that she does have difficulty in
transmitting this knowledge to her students, and in fact lists this as a weakness in teaching, as she realises that as a native speaker she has a different way of thinking about grammar as compared to her students. James does not list grammar as one of his particular strengths, and remarks on how difficult it can sometimes be to explain grammar to Australian students who do not really have a good understanding of grammar, even in their native language. In fact at one point in the interview he stated that he did not necessarily see himself as an authority on the Italian language.

The perceptions of the non-native speaking teachers, then, did correspond with the overall perceptions of the students; while the native speaking teachers, to a degree, did match as well, in that both Charlotte and James recognised the difficulties that they faced when teaching grammar. Elaine, having taught for many more years than the other two native teachers (who have taught for three years and ten years respectively), has had a lot more teaching experience and justifiably perceives this area of teaching as one of her strengths. The views of the native teachers from the questionnaire who ranked teaching grammar so highly on their list of strengths is perhaps linked to Charlotte’s perception, that as native speakers of Italian they perceive themselves to be experts on Italian grammar. The challenge lies, however, in conveying this knowledge to students in class so that they are satisfied that they have understood.

6.3.2 Vocabulary

The issue of vocabulary has also emerged from the literature as an important aspect of language teaching, particularly in the native versus non-native debate, and in this present study it has also proven to be important. The general preference in the student questionnaire was to be taught vocabulary by a native speaking teacher, and in three of the four subgroups this preference was quite considerable, while in the third year ab initio group there was an equal preference shown for the native speaker and no difference. In all cases the least selected option was clearly the non-native speaker, with figures ranging from only 3% to 11% across the board. In addition, there were four comments made at the end of the questionnaire where the students all expressed a preference for learning vocabulary from a native speaking teacher.
This perception was clearly supported in the literature (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2002; Mahboob, 2003), where the students were also shown to prefer the native speaking teacher when being taught vocabulary.

In the student interviews, however, the views were not quite the same. Half of the students believed that they learnt more colloquialisms and slang words from their native speaking teachers, and that they were better at expanding on words and providing synonyms. Four of the students stated that they learnt just as much vocabulary from their non-native teachers as well as their native ones, while acknowledging that it was interesting to learn some dialect items from their native teachers. The tenth student maintained that he had learnt most of his vocabulary through rote learning and personal study. From the interviews, therefore, there is a slight preference for the native speaking teacher, however it is nowhere near as clear cut as was demonstrated in the questionnaire. Rather, the interviewed students seem to appreciate the ability to teach vocabulary in all of their teachers, whether native or non-native. It is possible that the questionnaires reflect a more stereotypical view, the view that a native speaking teacher must be more proficient in vocabulary and therefore would be better at teaching it; while in the interviews the students were given the opportunity to be more reflective, and so were able to acknowledge that many of their teachers, both native and non-native, are highly proficient in this area.

The teacher questionnaire only partially corresponds with the student questionnaire. The non-native speaking teachers listed vocabulary quite low, as their seventh strength in teaching out of a total of eight, which does fit in with the student questionnaire results that showed a clear preference for the native speaker teacher. In contrast, however, the native speaking teachers only put vocabulary at number five on their list of teaching strengths (out of eight), which shows that they do not perceive it as a big strength in their teaching, or perhaps it is not seen as an important priority by them in the classroom. There was a comment made by a teacher in the questionnaire that sometimes due to time constraints some aspects of teaching are given a higher priority than others as they are considered more crucial, and perhaps vocabulary is not seen as a particularly crucial area, or perhaps is seen as an area where students can learn more independently.
The interviews with the teachers match up quite well to the teacher questionnaires, in that none of the teachers view vocabulary and translation as a particular strength in their teaching. Charlotte and James in particular state that translating can be quite a challenge for them, with both of them listing it as one of their weaknesses; and even Elaine, the most experienced teacher, acknowledges that at times she will have trouble finding the right word or phrase. They all get the students to brainstorm in class to help find the right translation if necessary. The non-native teachers also acknowledge that there are times when they have a mental blank or do not know the exact word that a student has asked for. Patrick mentions that sometimes there are words that come up in class that he does not use frequently, and Michelle remarks that sometimes there are colloquialisms or dialectal phrases in Italian that she may find challenging to translate. For the native speaking teachers the challenges arise when translating from Italian to English, whilst with the non-native teachers it tends to be in the other direction, from English into Italian. This perceived difficulty in vocabulary is not surprising at all when one considers that unlike grammar, pronunciation or reading skills, where there are a finite number of rules to be learned, there are quite literally many thousands of lexical items in the Italian language, and to learn them all is an ongoing process.

The overall perception of the teachers is that they all, regardless of their linguistic background, have some difficulties in this area of teaching, and they do not mind letting the students know this and turning the process of finding the appropriate translation into a learning exercise. This perception is contrary to the views expressed by the students in the questionnaires, a majority of whom favoured the native speaker, but is more in line with those expressed by the students in the interviews, who acknowledge a high level of proficiency across the board.

6.3.3 Pronunciation skills /conversation

Another important item identified by both students and teachers in the literature is the aspect of teaching conversation and pronunciation skills. In the present study the respondents in the student questionnaire showed an overwhelming preference in all of the subgroups for the native speaking teacher to teach them pronunciation skills. There were eight comments made overall at the end of the questionnaire that referenced pronunciation and speaking skills, of which seven of them expressed a preference for the native speaking teacher. This shows a
definite perception amongst students of Italian that native speaking teachers are the best ones to teach them in this area.

The data from the student interviews generally support this perception. All of the students highlighted how valuable it was to be taught conversation and speaking skills by a native speaker, as they saw it as more authentic and genuine. Several of the students did make the point, however, that their non-native teachers had excellent accents, and that it was sometimes easier to understand them when they spoke Italian in class.

The views of the students in this study are corroborated by both Lasagabaster & Sierra’s (2002) and Alseweed’s (2012) studies, which clearly showed that the native speaking teacher was preferred in the area of pronunciation and speaking skills. As mentioned above, however, several students in their interviews drew attention to the fact that sometimes non-native speaking teachers were easier to understand, which is a view corroborated by Ustunluoglu (2007). She notes that the ESL students in her study found it easier to understand their non-native speaking teachers when they spoke English than their native ones, and speculates that this may be because the native speaking teachers spoke more quickly or with a particular accent. She also observes that a non-native teacher, having been a student of English in the past, he/she is perhaps more conscious of this difficulty and consequently decides to speak more slowly in class. Liang (2002) also notes that the students in her study, while rating the pronunciation and accent of their native speaking teachers as quite important, were also generally positive in their ratings of their non-native teachers.

The results from the teacher questionnaire had both natives and non-natives listing speaking skills (part of the wider topic of understanding the language) as number three on their list of strengths. For the native speaking teachers this corresponds with how the students perceive them in the classroom, in that both the students and the teachers see it as an important strength. For the non-native teachers, however, this definitely goes against the grain of the results shown in the questionnaire, and also to a certain extent in the interviews. The non-native teachers perceive teaching speaking skills overall as one of their biggest strengths, but it is not necessarily viewed in the same way by the students. This could be due to the fact that at tertiary level most, if not all, teachers of Italian in Australia have some kind of postgraduate qualification. For many teachers obtaining these qualifications could have
involved travelling to Italy to conduct research, or participating in conferences that may take place in Italy. These teachers are also part of a work environment where many of their colleagues are native speakers of Italian, consequently there would be many opportunities to speak Italian on a regular basis throughout the day. Given these conditions it is not surprising, therefore, that these non-native speaking teachers are highly competent in their speaking and pronunciation skills and therefore very confident in teaching them to students.

The overall views expressed by the teachers in the interviews do support the perceptions shown by the students in the questionnaires and interviews. Two of the native speaking teachers stated that speaking skills and pronunciation was a strength for them in teaching; while two of the non-native teachers gave this as a weakness.

The native speaking teachers were also asked about whether or not they were aware of how quickly they spoke Italian to their students, and of any regional variation in their spoken Italian, and if so whether they took any steps to moderate their speech. They all stated that they were aware of these characteristics, and did sometimes draw their students’ attention to it in class; however they were also conscious of the fact that it was good to be able to use some regional variations with their students as this is how Italians actually speak in Italy. This was a feature commented on and appreciated by the students in the interviews.

The non-native teachers all commented on the speed of their language in class, and how they are conscious of this when they speak to students. Patrick and Sharon in particular observe that they slow their Italian down a lot with beginners level students, and also that they try to speak Italian as close to the standard as possible. This corroborates the observation of the students in the interview who maintained that it is sometimes easier to understand their non-native teachers when they speak Italian in class.

6.3.4 Listening skills

An additional theme to emerge from the data in the present study was that of listening skills. In this area the responses in the student questionnaire were more evenly distributed across the board, with native speaker and no preference being the most popular options chosen. While the general preference overall was for the native speaking teacher, in only one of the subgroups did the figure rise above 50%, and in the first year advanced group the highest
number actually chose no preference. This would seem to show, therefore, that the students do not have a strong feeling one way or the other for who teaches them listening skills.

In the student interviews the topic of conversation, listening and speaking skills was discussed together, and as mentioned above this is something that students very much appreciate in a native speaking teacher; however, as noted before, several of the students did comment on the fact that native speaking teachers often have different accents, and that non-native teachers tend to speak more slowly which makes them easier to understand.

With regard to listening and reading skills, Lasagabaster & Sierra’s (2002) study showed that the native speaking teacher was preferred by students. In the current study, as discussed above, in the area of listening skills there was also a general preference for the native speaking teacher, although in the questionnaire this preference was only slight. The area of reading skills will be discussed in the next section.

In the teacher questionnaire listening skills was grouped together with pronunciation/speaking skills, and was listed at number three for both native and non-native speaking teachers, indicating that both groups rate this aspect of teaching fairly highly as a strength. This ties in with the results from the student questionnaires in that there was not a strong feeling shown for one type of teacher over another; so there is not a strong perception from the students that one particular teacher will be better than the other in this area, and all of the teachers perceived themselves at the same level of strength.

An aspect that was spoken about in the teacher interviews was how quickly the teachers would speak Italian to their students. They all did mention that they try to speak more slowly with their students, particularly in first and second year, and that by third year the pace would be as natural and ‘conversational’ as possible. Elaine remarked that she is a particularly fast speaker of Italian, and that while she did try to moderate this for her students, she also lets them know that they could turn this to their advantage, because if they could understand her at her relatively quick pace of speech, then they should be able to understand anyone. Both native and non-native speakers, therefore, perceive themselves as being sensitive to their students’ needs in this regard, even though several students in the interviews specifically mentioned the non-native teachers as being somewhat easier to understand.
6.3.5 Reading skills

The students in the questionnaire selected no preference as the most popular choice to teach them reading skills. This was the case in all of the subgroups except for the first year ab initio students, where the most popular option was the native speaker at 46%, very closely followed by no preference at 43%. The non-native teacher was clearly the least preferred option in all subgroups. This would indicate that for reading skills, generally speaking the students either do not feel strongly about being taught by a certain type of teacher over another, or they would be more likely to want a native speaking teacher.

In the teacher questionnaire reading comprehension was not rated very highly on the list of teaching strengths for the native speaking teachers, who put it at number six, or perhaps again it was not seen as a priority. The non-native teachers, on the other hand, listed it higher at number four. To a certain extent these results go against the perceptions of the students from the questionnaire, who perceive the native speaking teacher as being stronger in this area than the non-native speaker; although as mentioned overall the general consensus was for no preference.

The aspect of reading skills was not a topic that was discussed during the student interviews. During the teacher interviews, however, both Michelle and Sharon highlighted the fact that they liked to use reading comprehensions and other texts in class, and that they found these to be useful tools in demonstrating various aspects of grammar usage to their students.

6.3.6 Fluency

When asked in the questionnaire about whether they would speak Italian more fluently if that had a native or a non-native speaking teacher, the majority of the students chose the native speaker; however this was not an overwhelming majority, and in one of the subgroups, third year ab initio, the majority actually chose no difference. What was clearly evident was that the non-native speaker was the least selected option in all subgroups. This shows a parallel with the results from pronunciation skills, where the non-native teacher was also the lowest option chosen by a substantial margin. This appears to demonstrate that students, as far as
speaking skills in general are concerned, perceive their native speaking teachers to be better able to convey those aspects effectively to their students.

In their study Coombe & Al-Hamly (2007) discovered that for the students who preferred to have a native speaking teacher, one reason for this was that they believed that a native speaking teacher was a better example of pronunciation and accent, and that they would learn to speak the target language more fluently if they had a native teacher. This perception was supported to a degree by the present study, in that the non-native teacher was the least preferred option.

In the teacher questionnaire fluency was grouped with speaking skills, and as such both the native and non-native speaking teachers rated it quite highly on their list of teaching strengths at number three. The perceptions of the native teachers match those of the students; as far as the non-native teachers are concerned, however while the students may not rate them as highly in this area, they do clearly perceive themselves as having a strength in this field.

6.3.7 Italian culture

The teaching of culture is inextricably linked with teaching a language, as language and culture cannot be separated. Learning a new language means learning about its culture and its people, and this aspect of teaching has been particularly commented on in the native versus non-native teacher debate. In the present study this was also a theme that was explored in depth. In regards to learning about Italian culture, the students in the questionnaire overwhelmingly preferred the native speaking teacher to teach them in all subgroups. While some students chose no difference, it was clearly evident that the non-native speaker was the least preferred option, with the highest figure at only 3%, and 0% of all the third year students selecting it. The perception here is definitely that the native speaker can provide a better illustration of Italian culture and is perceived by the students to have a deeper knowledge.

In the student interviews this perception is also upheld to a certain degree. All of the students made reference to the fact that their native speaking teachers have firsthand experience of growing up and living in Italy, which they are then able to share in the
classroom. This kind of information is invaluable to the students, and it is information that they appreciate and enjoy hearing about. Some of the students, however, also acknowledged that often their non-native teachers had travelled extensively in Italy and so had cultural experiences of their own to impart to their students. Their perspective as outsiders was something else that they had in common with their students; so while the students perceived it as extremely important to be taught about Italian culture from the perspective of a native speaker, they also knew that often the non-native speaking teacher had some valuable knowledge to offer, and this is appreciated and valued. Again, as in the area of vocabulary, when given the opportunity to be more reflective in the interviews the students were able to acknowledge their non-native teachers more.

The theme of cultural knowledge was an area examined in depth by researchers in English language teaching. Both Mahboob (2003) and Cheung (2002) found that native speaking teachers were perceived more positively by their students in the area of culture. As shown above, the present study further corroborates this perception. The student questionnaire clearly showed a preference for being taught culture by a native speaker, and all of the students interviewed commented on the fact that they value hearing about their native teachers’ experiences growing up and living in Italy, and that this is an important part of learning Italian. The interviewed students also noted the benefit of having non-native teachers share with them their experiences of travelling in Italy and engaging with Italian people.

In the teacher questionnaire the perceptions of the native speaking teachers match perfectly the results from the student questionnaires. Native teachers put Italian culture as their number one strength in teaching, and at the very bottom of their list of weaknesses; so they clearly perceive this area of teaching to be one in which they excel. The perception of the non-native teachers, however, did not match up to those of the students, with the non-natives ranking Italian culture quite highly on their list of teaching strengths at number two, and towards the bottom of their weaknesses at number seven. As expressed in the interviews, however, the students do acknowledge and appreciate their non-native teachers’ experiences of Italian culture, and clearly the non-native teachers feel that they have a lot to offer students in this regard. As discussed in section 6.5.3, teachers of Italian at tertiary level have often had a lot of experience travelling in Italy and connecting with Italian people as a
result of their postgraduate research. Carrying out research and publishing their work, doing their own personal reading and study, and regularly attending conferences are all things that non-native teachers at tertiary level carry out on a regular basis, and which help them to be confident in their cultural knowledge. They also have contact with their native speaking colleagues on a regular basis, with whom they can discuss cultural items.

The native speaking teachers in their interviews all remarked that they use their own personal experiences of Italian culture as teaching tools in the classroom, which was noted by the students in their interviews. Whilst Elaine did mention that there are sometimes gaps in her cultural knowledge regarding young people in Italy, Charlotte and James both maintained that they know enough about Italian culture to fulfil their students’ needs and answer any questions they may have, which is corroborated by the students. The non-native teachers all referred to the fact that they have travelled extensively in Italy and have many interactions with Italian people, a fact also recognised by the students, and which means that they have their own cultural experiences that they can convey to the students. Patrick mentions that as an outsider looking in he has a unique perspective on Italian culture, and knows what students will find most fascinating. This was a point that was similarly acknowledged by the students in their interviews. He and Michelle also both draw attention to the fact that as non-natives they are better placed to provide more objective, less stereotypical views on aspects of Italian culture and society, which they both see as an advantage. This links in to the teacher questionnaire results, and provides some insight as to the reason why the non-native teachers ranked Italian culture so highly on their list of strengths in teaching.

6.4 Teaching style

In this section I will examine the teaching styles of both native and non-native speaking teachers in relation to the aspects of the use of Italian in class, teaching strategies, correcting mistakes, the classroom atmosphere and classroom management, and how the students also perceived these aspects. The majority of these observations are based on the qualitative data obtained in the interviews.
6.4.1 Use of Italian in class

The perception towards the use of Italian in class varied across the sample of students. Six of the ten students stated that their native speaking teachers definitely used more Italian during class. Of these six students, three in particular remarked that they did not like being taught grammar in Italian, as they found it to be at times stressful, and also felt intimidated to ask a question in English if the teacher had been conducting the class in Italian. Interestingly, even at third year level, there was still an expressed desire to have more English used with grammar explanations. Three other students felt that the use of Italian in class was down to the individual personalities of the teachers, and how much Italian they judged would be appropriate to use in class, and not directly related to the teacher’s linguistic background. The one student who had mainly been taught by native speaking teachers was unable to give a comparison between how much Italian is used in class by a native versus a non-native speaking teacher; however she did make the observation that her teachers used a lot more Italian in class during second semester as compared to first semester. She liked the fact that they used Italian during class and did not find it intimidating at all. While many of the students did not express any positive or negative attitude to the use of Italian, it seems that the use of Italian to teach grammar is perceived by some as a negative element, which is likely related to the students’ proficiency in Italian, and their confidence in being able to adequately understand what is being said.

This is somewhat in contrast to the teachers’ perceptions about their usage of Italian and English when conducting classes. All of the native speaking teachers stated that, while they do try to use Italian as much as possible, particularly with the higher level students, they are also particularly conscious of using English to explain grammar points, and they try to be sensitive to their students when they are having difficulties understanding. The non-native teachers are equally as conscious of using English when necessary, particularly for grammar explanations, but also for giving general instructions in class. Interestingly, and again in contrast to the six students mentioned above, Sharon, a non-native speaker, claimed that there comes a point when she teaches grammar “pretty much entirely in Italian”, which goes against the generally held perception from six of the students that the native speaking teachers use more Italian.
From the students, therefore, is a generally held perception and expectation that a native speaking teacher will, and does, use more Italian when conducting a class as compared to a non-native speaking teacher. The teachers’ own accounts of their conduct in class disputes this perception, however, in that they expect that they will have to use English from time to time in order to ensure that the students have understood and do not fall behind. The students in their interviews have mentioned sometimes feeling intimidated by their native speaking teachers, in that they feel it is less acceptable to make a mistake with them and less acceptable to address them in English. They have also observed that at times it is easier to understand their non-native teachers when they address them in Italian. I would suggest that perhaps it is a stereotypical view from the students that makes them believe that a native teacher would automatically use more Italian in class, that they expect this to be the case, when in actual fact most teachers, regardless of their linguistic background, are aware of using English and are sensitive to the fact that students, in particular beginners, need to have certain things explained to them in English. And the teachers tend to make their own judgements about how much Italian they believe is appropriate to use in class, depending on the year level of the students, and the nature of the class and its subject matter.

6.4.2 Teaching strategies

The strategies that a teacher employs in the classroom have been shown in the literature to be of importance to the students, and this was also an important theme to come out through this study. Medgyes (1999) affirms that regardless of a teacher’s linguistic background, it is essential that they have some training in education, both formal training and personal study that a teacher takes upon themselves. This training is not just about proficiency in the target language, but is also about being engaging with the students and competent in teaching various aspects of the language. This was an aspect that was also raised by the students in this study. There were a number of comments made at the end of the questionnaire where the students expressed the view that for them the most important thing was to have a teacher who was competent and could teach well, and that whether they were native speakers or not was secondary to this. In the interviews as well this was remarked on, with seven of the ten students stating that the ability to teach well, particularly in the field of grammar, was an important requirement for a teacher at tertiary level.
In the questionnaire the top two responses chosen by the students in regards to learning strategies were very close, with no difference being the most popular response for the first year ab initio and third year advanced groups, the non-native speaker for the first year advanced group, and the third year ab initio group choosing no difference and non-native speaker as their top two responses. The clearly least selected option in all of the subgroups was the native speaker, and in fact 0% of the third year ab initio group chose it. It is possible here to draw a link with grammar, as in this area also the native speaking teacher was the least selected option. This connects with the perception that a non-native speaking teacher is better able to explain aspects of language, like grammar, and therefore is perceived to provide better learning strategies to their students.

The responses in the teacher questionnaire, however, do not reflect the student perceptions. The native speaking teachers rated teaching strategies overall quite highly as their number four strength (out of eight), whereas the non-native teachers placed it somewhat lower at number six. The native speakers clearly perceive themselves as being strong in this area while their students, particularly the third year group, do not necessarily share this perception.

From the student interviews it can be seen that the non-native speaking teacher is also perceived to have better teaching strategies, and again in this case the area of grammar was referred to specifically. We can deduce from the interviews that the students interpreted “strategies” mainly as “being able to teach grammar”. Eight of the ten students stated that their non-native teachers were better able to explain grammar concepts in different ways, and the reasons given for this were the fact that as second language learners of Italian they have been through the process of having to learn grammar from scratch and so are better able to explain the process, and that as native English speakers like their students they had the same frame of reference from which to explain the grammar point. The students felt that the non-native teachers were also more likely to use English in their explanations, and this was very much appreciated by them.

In the interviews the non-native teachers highlighted the fact that they would use English when teaching grammar, and Michelle and Sharon in particular (as discussed previously) stated that they often use English examples and multiple translations in English in
order to get their point across. As discussed above, this is an aspect also noticed and commented on by the students in their interviews. Patrick observed that when he was a student he wanted to know different ways of how the grammar worked and to be given multiple explanations, and so he tries to bring that into his teaching now. Charlotte (as described in the grammar section) does find it challenging at times to get the point across to her students, which she attributes to her native speaking background. James and Elaine, however, both state that if a point is particularly complex then they have no problem switching to English, which is somewhat contrary to the views given by the students. These differing views from the students could be attributed to different personalities and teaching styles from teachers, and not be connected to their linguistic background.

6.4.3 Correcting mistakes

The issue of correcting mistakes was one that has emerged clearly in the literature, and consequently was also asked about directly in the interviews. The students had quite varied views on how their teachers corrected their mistakes and whether this was related to their linguistic background. Eight of the students made various comments about certain types of teachers being stricter in different areas of language, while the remaining two students felt that it was more related to the personality of the teachers and the context of the lesson, rather than being associated with their native or non-native status. Several of them also made comments regarding the kind of feedback that they received from their teachers.

In contrast to these mixed and somewhat diverse perceptions from the students, the teachers themselves gave quite uniform responses. All of the teachers maintained that their reactions to student errors depended on the context in which the errors were made. All six of the teachers, including the native speakers, said that in a conversational setting where a student might make an error, they would not interrupt the student straight away, but rather would wait until the end of the discourse before drawing attention to it, as they believed that it was important to let the conversation flow. Michelle and Sharon mentioned specifically that later in class they would often brainstorm with the students about any errors that were made, which also meant that no student in particular would feel singled out or embarrassed about a mistake that they had made, which all of the teachers were conscious of. When it comes to grammar exercises or any kind of written work the teachers all stated that they would correct
According to Sheorey (1986) and Medgyes (1999), a non-native speaking teacher tends to be stricter on grammatical errors than a native speaking teacher. Medgyes attributes this to the fact that non-native teachers tend to have a stronger proficiency in the area of grammar as opposed to other aspects of the language, and so this makes them much more aware of these errors. This position, however, is not necessarily supported by this study, as shown by the lack of consensus in the perceptions given by the students, and in contrast the very similar self-perceptions given by the teachers.

Comparing, therefore, the student and teacher perceptions in this aspect of language teaching, it would appear that the students’ perceptions are the result of the diverse personalities of the teachers that they have encountered, who employ different methods in class, and not necessarily related to the fact of whether the teacher is a native or non-native speaker of Italian.

6.4.4 Classroom atmosphere

In terms of whether or not students felt there were any differences in the classroom atmosphere when being taught by either a native or non-native speaking teacher, mixed perceptions have emerged. While some felt that the classroom atmosphere was not connected to the linguistic background of the teacher, others made various observations about the atmosphere being more relaxed with a non-native teacher and more formal with a native teacher, although this view is contradicted by another student. There does not appear to be a strong view one way or the other, and so, like the area of correcting mistakes described above, these different perceptions are most likely due to differing personalities rather than the linguistic background of the teachers, and also different expectations from the students. Several of the students believed their native speaking teachers to be more formal and to be less accepting of errors, which is in contradiction to what the literature says (in section 6.4.3) regarding the fact that non-native teachers are seen to be more strict with errors.

An awareness of the students’ expectations in class is an area touched on by Millrood (1999). In his study he drew attention to the fact that native speaking teachers working in a
foreign country often have a “missing link” in that they do not share the same cultural background as the students, and they have not attended an educational institution in that country. This often means that they are not aware of what the students expect of them in class, and what is a socially acceptable classroom experience for the students.

This was observed by the teachers interviewed for this study. One particular factor that may affect the classroom atmosphere from a native speaking teacher’s perspective is the level of formality in the classroom, which several of the teachers remarked on in the interviews. Elaine and James in particular drew attention to the fact that compared to an Italian setting, the atmosphere in a classroom in an Australian university is much less formal, with examples given of students coming to class barefoot, or eating their lunch in class. It can take some time for a native speaking teacher to adjust to this difference in the level of formality, to realise that it is considered normal and is not an example of the students being disrespectful. This has the potential of creating some tension in class between the teacher and the students. Patrick, as a non-native speaker, states that he has observed native speaking colleagues attempting to conduct a class exactly as they would in Italy, and that often this is not successful. Establishing the right level of authority in the classroom can also be difficult for a native speaker, which Michelle in particular draws attention to. The students may feel uncomfortable in class if they feel that a teacher is being more strict than they are accustomed to, or expects too much of them.

6.4.5 Classroom management

The way native and non-native teachers manage a classroom and interact with their students can have a significant impact on the overall perceptions that students have of them. This has been noted in the literature and was examined in the present study. When asked about classroom management skills the students in the questionnaire chose no difference as their most selected option across all the subgroups, and it was a clear majority in all instances. It is important to note, however, that there were very few students who chose the native speaking teacher, with figures for the first year group only reaching as high as 10%, and none of the students selecting it in the third year group. And in the third year group, close to a third of the students believed that the non-native speaking teacher displayed better classroom management skills. While the prevailing perception, then, is that the students do not seem to
think any one group overall has better classroom management skills, it would also appear that the native speaking teacher is not viewed very highly by some students in this regard. This is likely due to the lack of a common cultural background between native teachers and their students, which was explored further as a theme in the interviews and was examined in greater detail in section 6.2.2.

From the interviews, three first year students commented that their native speaking teachers expected so much more of them in class, in that they expected students to do more work than they thought was fair, which put pressure on the students. Kate, another first year student who had only been taught by native speakers, also felt that a lot more was expected of her in class than she was comfortable with. Sarah, a third year student, like the others, claimed that her native speakers expected too much of her, especially as she was an ab initio student and had only been studying Italian for three years. None of the students commented that their non-native teachers had unrealistic expectations of them.

In terms of classroom management, Ustunluoglu (2007) claims from her research that non-native speaking teachers have an advantage. This is because they have an understanding and knowledge of the institution where they are teaching, they understand the goals of the students, and they know what the appropriate classroom atmosphere should be. The native speaking teacher, coming from a different country with different cultural norms does not have this instinctive knowledge. The results from this study seem to support these assertions. While the student questionnaire did not give an overall preference to the non-native speaker, the native speaker was very clearly the least selected option in terms of classroom management in the interviews. In regards to classroom atmosphere the native speaking teachers in the interviews acknowledged challenges in being able to connect with students when being unfamiliar with their culture.

In the teacher questionnaire the native speaking teachers put classroom management fairly low on their list of teaching strengths at number seven. The non-native speaking teachers, however, put it at the bottom of their list of strengths at number eight, which matches up with the students’ perceptions to a certain extent, while remembering that there were a number of third year students who chose the non-native speaker. Perhaps from the teachers’ perspective there is a view that at university level the students should be more
responsible for themselves, and as a consequence there is not seen to be a great need on the teacher’s part to have to actively manage the classroom.

The non-native teachers in the interviews all stated that they felt comfortable in terms of their classroom management skills. All three of them have attended university in Australia and so have an understanding as to what is expected of a teacher in an Australian university setting. The native speaking teachers also stated that they feel comfortable in keeping a lesson running smoothly, although Charlotte did remark that she has had difficulty in the past with knowing the appropriate vocabulary with which to address her students, and attributes this to the fact that she has never attended university in Australia (as an undergraduate student). The self-perceptions of the non-native teachers to a certain extent connect with the views expressed by the students in the questionnaire, however those of the native speaking teachers deviate somewhat.

It can be seen, therefore, that there are many identifiable trends that have emerged in the data collected for this thesis, and in many cases these trends correspond to those identified in the literature regarding the teaching of English. It can also be seen that while there are some areas where the perceptions of students and teachers match each other, there are also other areas where they diverge.
Conclusion

This study represents a first examination of the perceptions that students of Italian at Australian universities have towards their teachers as native speakers, or as non-native speakers, as well as the perceptions that these teachers have of themselves. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in methodology has enabled this study to collect a wide range of detailed data through online questionnaires and one-on-one interviews, and certain trends have been identified.

Answering the research questions

It has been shown through the data that there are definitely differences in the way students perceive their native and non-native teachers, and that students have certain preferences in being taught various aspects of language by a particular teacher. The non-native speaking teacher is particularly valued for their own experience of learning Italian as a second language, and the empathy that they have for the students’ learning journey. Linked to this is a preference for having a non-native speaker to teach grammar, as students feel that they are better able to explain concepts from the perspective of Italian as a second language. The non-native teachers also share the same native language as the majority of their students, which helps the students to feel more comfortable in asking them to explain things in English, which is again linked to the teaching of grammar in particular.

Native speaking teachers, on the other hand, are particularly valued for their conversation and speaking skills, as they are seen to represent a more authentic model of the Italian language. Linked to this, the native teacher is also generally preferred in the area of vocabulary, and also in the teaching of Italian culture. The firsthand accounts that native speaking teachers are able to provide of growing up and living in Italy, attending school and working in Italy are all greatly appreciated by students.

The students also noted some differences in the teaching style of native and non-native speaking teachers. Many of the students felt that native speaking teachers tended to use more Italian in class than non-natives; and there were some who felt that non-native speakers
were better able to employ different teaching strategies, particularly when it came to teaching grammar. Some students also observed differences in the way their mistakes were corrected, and in the classroom atmosphere when being taught by native and non-native teachers. It was noted by the teachers in the interviews that there can be difficulties for native speaking teachers when teaching in an Australian classroom as compared to an Italian one, in that students often expect different things from them, and the level of formality is quite different.

The students have also noted through this study the importance of a teacher being able to teach well, regardless of their linguistic background. Through both the questionnaire and interviews, observations were made that ideally teachers should be engaging and enthusiastic about teaching Italian, be knowledgeable about the topic, and have good teaching skills, regardless of their native vs non-native status.

Ultimately, however, what the students have shown through the questionnaire and interviews conducted for this study is that there is no overall ‘better’ teacher in terms of linguistic background. Both native and non-native teachers are equally valued by their students, while simultaneously recognised and esteemed for the different strengths that they possess. In fact, many students, while initially preferring to be taught by a native teacher, after a period of time come to appreciate the qualities that a non-native teacher also possesses. In other words, students with less experience of learning Italian, those who are still in first year, are much more likely to subscribe to the native speaker fallacy; however this changes once they have gained more experience, which is the case by the time they reach third year. A clear majority of students, if given the choice, would prefer to be taught by both a native and a non-native speaking teacher.

The teachers as well recognised and appreciated that they have different strengths and challenges in the classroom, and that in many cases these are linked to their linguistic background as either native or non-native speakers of Italian. They also observed that their diverse cultural backgrounds can have an effect on the way that they engage with students, which in turn affects the classroom atmosphere. What the teachers have demonstrated through this study is that they have the ability to play to their strengths when teaching, and that often, through teaching experience and personal study, any challenges that they may
have do not end up being an obstacle in the classroom. The teachers also acknowledged the different qualities that their peers bring to the learning experience for students, and that ideally a university department in Australia should have a mix of both native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian.

What both the students and teachers have recognised and observed through this study is that native and non-native teachers represent two different experiences of the Italian language. Native speakers have innate knowledge of the language, while non-native speakers have acquired knowledge. This not only means that both sets of teachers have different strengths, which has been demonstrated in this study, but that they also have unique insights to offer their students; and for the students it is equally valuable to have access to both unique points of view of the Italian language.

**Theoretical and practical implications**

The aim of this study was not to make a judgment about who is a better language teacher – a native or a non-native speaker. Rather the idea was to shine a light on how students and teachers felt about their learning and teaching experience, what their perceptions are and how these perceptions differ or coincide. In this way too the various characteristics of native and non-native teachers were also explored and discussed.

The results from this study could be helpful in many ways. They could be used as a tool for teachers, both native and non-native, to see in which areas students have the most difficulty and the reasons why this is so. For example, the students from the study have pointed out that they prefer to have complex grammar points explained to them in English rather than Italian, even at an advanced level, and they feel that a non-native speaking teacher is more likely to do this. Students also feel that it is important for teachers to have current links to Italy, as they feel that this helps the teacher to provide a more authentic and realistic view of Italy and modern usage of the Italian language. This explains why the native speaking teacher is preferred to teach Italian culture.

**Research limitations**

In any study there will be certain limitations and aspects that are beyond the researcher’s control. The response rate of the online questionnaires was an aspect that could not be
predicted, as one cannot force people to complete them. There was an incentive provided, in that the participants were put into a draw to win a prize, in an effort to encourage as many people as possible to complete the questionnaire.

There are also limits to how many interviews a single person can do, which was discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. A reasonable and manageable number of interviews were carried out given the limitations of this study. Undertaking interviews with students at other universities, as well as interviewing more teachers, may have added extra depth to the data, however this was not physically or financially possible within the confines of this study.

It is also worth noting that the teachers were asked to self-designate as either native or non-native speakers of Italian, and while the students were asked if they found it easy or difficult to identify their teachers as native or non-native speakers, they were not asked to reflect on how exactly to define a native speaker. The students in this study, therefore, are going by their own definitions of what a native speaker is, and these may or may not differ from those of the teachers.

It must also be remembered that a number of the students who participated in this study had only been taught by one type of teacher, and so their perceptions were based not only on their experiences, but also on their expectations and beliefs about native and non-native speaking teachers, and this study does not differentiate between those different kinds of perceptions.

**Directions for further research**

This study could be extended in several ways. Firstly, a larger sample of students and teachers could be asked to complete the online questionnaires, and a larger group of them could be interviewed as a follow-up. The students could also be taken from all academic year levels, not just first and third year as in this study. In addition to this, the same student could be interviewed periodically over the course of their Italian studies; for example, an interview could be done at the end of their first year at university, then at the end of their second year, and if they continue on with their studies, at the end of their third year. In this way one could see a natural progression to the student’s feelings and perceptions towards being taught by native and non-native speaking teachers. This study could also be extended to include other
foreign languages taught at university level in Australia. Another way of improving the quality of the findings could be to analyse the data separately for groups of students taught by both native and non-native teachers, and those taught by one type, in order to distinguish between perceptions based on belief from perceptions based on experience.

This study is all about perceptions, how the students and teachers perceive their learning and teaching, and as such the data has been collected through self-reported experiences from the classroom. A different approach to this same topic, and one suggested by Braine (2010), would be to use a classroom observation methodology, whereby an investigator would spend time in various language classes and observe what actually happens. For example, to use the case noted above, it could be observed whether or not non-native teachers actually do use more English in class during grammatical explanations than native speaking teachers, or if this is perhaps a more stereotypical perception from the students, who expect that a native Italian speaker would use more Italian in class. This type of methodology would provide a different focus for the research on native and non-native teachers, one that steps away from the perceptions of students and teachers and focuses more on the actual classroom experience, and what happens in terms of the native/ non-native setting. This thesis, however, hopes to fill a gap in the literature by directly asking students and teachers what they think.

The students who participated in this study acknowledged and appreciated the benefits of being taught by both native and non-native teachers precisely because of their specific differences, and the teachers themselves acknowledged their differences. Furthermore, it was recognised that there are other factors that can help a teacher to be more effective in the classroom; for example I noted that the native speaking teachers observed in their interviews that with the passage of time their level of experience in teaching has increased, and as a consequence they have become much more confident and comfortable in an Australian classroom setting. Teacher training is another area that is equally important. This thesis, however, is about the native vs non-native debate, and so the main focus has always been how this particular aspect impacts on the learning experience for students, and on the teaching experience for teachers. I believe this study shows that the native/ non-native issue has not yet been solved and still needs to be clarified and resolved before we can confidently move beyond it.
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Appendix A

Student questionnaire

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Academic year: 1\textsuperscript{st}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} (please indicate)
4. Were you a beginner student in your first year of studying Italian at university: yes/no (please indicate)
5. Degree currently studying:
6. Your native language:
7. Have you been taught at university by:
   - Native-speaking teachers only
   - Non-native speaking teachers only
   - Both native and non-native speaking teachers (please indicate)

Please answer the following questions by indicating the appropriate answer for each one.

SA = Strongly agree
A = Agree
NAND = Neither agree nor disagree
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly disagree

8. In general, I would prefer a native speaker as a teacher:

 SA  A  NAND  D  SD

9. In general, I would prefer a non-native speaker as a teacher:

 SA  A  NAND  D  SD

10. If I could choose, I would prefer to have both a native and a non-native teacher:

 SA  A  NAND  D  SD
Please answer the following questions by choosing one option.

11. In general, I would prefer to learn grammar with a:
   - Native speaking teacher
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - No preference

12. In general, I would learn more vocabulary from a:
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - Native speaking teacher
   - No preference

13. In general, I would prefer to learn pronunciation skills from a:
   - Native speaking teacher
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - No preference

14. In general, I would prefer to learn listening skills from a:
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - Native speaking teacher
   - No preference

15. In general, I would prefer to learn reading skills from a:
   - Native speaking teacher
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - No preference

16. In general, I would speak Italian more fluently if I had a:
   - Non-native speaking teacher
   - Native speaking teacher
   - No preference

17. In general, I would receive better learning strategies/ideas to learn better from a:
Native speaking teacher
Non-native speaking teacher
No difference

18. In general, I would learn more about the culture of Italy from a:
   Non-native speaking teacher
   Native speaking teacher
   No preference

19. In general I believe that better classroom management skills come from a:
   Native speaking teacher
   Non-native speaking teacher
   No difference

20. In general, I can identify a teacher as either a native or non-native speaker of Italian:
   Easily/most of time
   Sometimes
   With difficulty/not often

21. If you wish to make any comments regarding the topic of native and non-native speaking teachers of Italian please do so below.

I am also hoping to conduct one-on-one interviews with some students regarding their views on native and non-native speaking teachers. These interviews will take no longer than an hour, and you will be paid $30. If you are interested in taking part in an interview please leave your e-mail address below and you may be contacted soon.

Thankyou for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Appendix B

Teacher questionnaire

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Place of birth:
4. Educational qualifications:
5. Have you ever undertaken any teacher training? If so, please specify.
6. Do you define yourself as a:
   - Native speaker of Italian
   - Non-native speaker of Italian
   - Neither/other (please specify)
7. If you are not a native speaker of Italian, please state your native language(s):
8. How many years have you been teaching Italian?
9. How many years have you taught Italian in Australia?
10. What has been your average teaching load in the past two years?
    ____ hours per week.

For both native and non-native speakers

11. Out of the following aspects of Italian language teaching, which would you rank as your top four/strongest skills: (please number 1 – 4)
    Grammar
    Vocabulary
    Understanding the language (speaking skills/fluency & listening comprehension)
    Reading comprehension
    Writing (essays etc.)
    Italian culture
    Classroom management
Teaching strategies

12. Out of the following aspects of Italian language teaching, which would you rank as your **weakest** four/ weakest skills/ preference: (please number 1 – 4, with 1 indicating the lowest)

- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Speaking skills/ fluency
- Reading comprehension
- Listening comprehension
- Italian culture
- Classroom management
- Teaching strategies

For non-native speakers only

13. Out of the following aspects of the Italian language, which would you rank as your **top** three/ strongest skills: (please number 1 – 3)

- Knowledge of grammar
- Knowledge of vocabulary
- Competence in speaking skills/fluency
- Competence in reading comprehension
- Competence in listening comprehension
- Knowledge of Italian culture

14. Out of the following aspects of the Italian language, which would you rank as your **weakest** three/ lowest skills: (please number 1 – 3, with 1 indicating the lowest)

- Knowledge of grammar
- Knowledge of vocabulary
Competence in speaking skills/fluency
Competence in reading comprehension
Competence in listening comprehension
Knowledge of Italian culture

15. When teaching Italian I prefer to teach:
   Beginners level students
   Intermediate level students
   Advanced level students  (please number in order of preference 1 – 3)
   or
   I have no preference

If you have any other comments to make regarding your experiences teaching Italian in Australia, particularly related to how you define yourself as a native/non-native speaker, please do so below.

I am also hoping to conduct one-on-one interviews with some teachers regarding their perceptions of themselves in the classroom, and how they feel that students perceive them. These interviews will take no longer than an hour. If you are interested in taking part please leave your e-mail address below and you may be contacted soon.

Thankyou for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Appendix C

Interview questions – students

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; purely your own thoughts and feelings.

Please give name (just for me, pseudonym will be used in thesis)

Age, place of birth, native language.

Current year level at uni; beginner at 1st year?

What made you choose to study Italian? Do you have an Italian background/ just thought it would be interesting/ career opportunities?

Have you been taught at university by native speaking teachers only, or both native and non-native speaking teachers?

In your view, what do you think are the differences between native and non-native speaking teachers; what is distinctive about them? Can you give some examples?

What do the native speaking teacher do that the non-native speaking teacher don’t do, or vice versa? Examples?

If we break it down into different aspects of the language – what is your experience in being taught grammar by a non-native speaking teacher? Or a native speaking teacher?

How about conversational/ speaking and listening skills?

What about vocabulary/ learning new words?

What about learning about the culture of Italy?

Do you think that the classroom atmosphere is influenced by the type of teacher (i.e. whether N or NN)? Examples? (is it a relaxed atmosphere or more formal; do you feel comfortable asking questions; is the teacher approachable)

Do you think that the expectations a teacher has of you in class is influenced by the type of teacher (N or NN); e.g. discipline, amount of work you have to do.

Are there any differences between your native and non-native speaking teachers in terms of the way they correct your mistakes? Is one more strict on errors than the other? (being pedantic about certain things or more flexible)

Are there any differences in the teaching strategies that native and non-native speaking teachers employ? Examples? (if you’re having trouble grasping a particular concept do they have different ideas about what to do?)
When you started learning Italian did you have a preference for one type of teacher over another? Has that changed now?

What do you think are the requirements for an Italian teacher at tertiary level?

Are there any other comments that you would like to make; anything that I haven’t asked about or that you feel is important?
Appendix D

Interview questions – teachers

This research is an ethnographic study – through this interview I’m trying to understand your experience. There is an assumption that teaching your native language as opposed to teaching your second language is different, and I’m hoping to find out how teachers experience that difference.

Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your background? Where were you born? Where did you go to school? Did you get your degree there? What’s your degree(s) in? What did you do once you had finished university?

When did you come to Australia? How long did you live here before you began teaching? Have you ever taught Italian or English in any other country? Have you ever taught English in Italy?

How do you define yourself – native English speaker, native Italian speaker, bilingual etc.? Where did you learn English/Italian? What made you decide to learn Italian/English?

Professionally speaking, do you see yourself primarily as a linguist, a language teacher, or something else?

Have you taught a range of year levels? Do you have any preferences in the year level that you teach? (specifically Italian language classes)

Out of the various aspects of language teaching, are there any areas where you feel the stronger/ more comfortable? Why? [aspects of language teaching include: grammar – if a student asks a question about a certain aspect of grammar that you’ve already explained do you find it easy to explain it in a different way, do you use lots of examples; conversation/speaking skills; listening skills – do you feel conscious of how quickly you speak Italian, if you think the students aren’t understanding you do you slow down the pace or use different words, what do you thing about accent and pronunciation, for NS – do you moderate your regional accent for students (conscious of teaching ‘standard Italian’); vocabulary – are you confident translating Italian words into English or vice versa, are you able to easily give synonyms, are you able to easily translate colloquial Italian or give examples of colloquialisms/ slang in Italian/English, do you feel your knowledge of Italian/English vocabulary is constantly expanding. If a student is really not getting something will you switch to English or do you persist in Italian? Cultural aspects of the language – NSs – do you use a lot of examples from when you lived in Italy, do you feel confident talking about/answering questions about the history of Italy, or politics, or art? How do you react to students’ errors?}
NNSs - Out of the people who have studied native and non-native speaking teachers, some scholars have suggested for the non-native speaking teacher, not having grown up in the target country can be a disadvantage - what do you think about that? NSs - Some scholars have suggested that for the native speaking teacher, not sharing the same cultural background as their students can be a disadvantage – what do you think about that?

Are there any areas where you feel less confidence/ less comfortable; aspects of language teaching that you feel you have to prepare more for than others? Why?

How do you feel in regards to your classroom management skills? Do you feel that you always have control of the class; that you keep the class moving easily; that you get through all the elements that you have planned for that lesson? Do you always stick to the lesson plan or do you sometimes change things or do something different in class?

Do you conduct the class completely in Italian, or do you use English sometimes? What about when you’re explaining grammar points – do you use Italian predominantly or English? Is it different depending on the year level that you’re teaching?

What would be your ideal Italian department, how do you think it would look – would there be all native speaking teachers, all non-native speaking teachers, a mixture of both? Who would be teaching which levels?

Are there any other comments you’d like to make?
Appendix E

1st year students

Amy, advanced, 18 years old
Kate, ab initio, 19 year old
Linda, ab initio, 29 years old
Louise, ab initio, 18 years old
Penny, advanced, 18 years old

3rd year students

Jane, ab initio, 20 years old
Jill, ab initio, 56 years old
Lisa, advanced, 20 years old
Sarah, ab initio, 20 years old
Tom, advanced, 20 years old

Non-native speaking teachers

Michelle, 56 years old
Patrick, 28 years old
Sharon, 35 years old

Native speaking teachers

Charlotte, 29 years old
Elaine, 55 years old
James, 39 years old