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Epistemic Challenges Faced by Non-native English Speakers in Philosophy: Evidence from an International Survey

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Abstract

The widespread use of English in the field of philosophy facilitates international collaboration but may also pose significant challenges in understanding, analyzing, or producing information for both native (NES) and non-native English speakers (NNES). These challenges have not yet been systematically investigated. We conducted an international survey of philosophers ($N = 1{,}615$), comparing NES and NNES, while controlling for their academic position (e.g., student, staff, etc.) and other relevant variables. Responses indicated that NNES needed up to twice as long as NES to read English articles and nearly twice as long to prepare English presentations. Additionally, even NNES with the highest English proficiency reported significantly more English manuscript rejections, greater avoidance of attending or asking questions at philosophy events in English, and more frequent feelings of ridicule for their English use. No statistically significant difference was observed in the reported time required to complete an English draft, but NNES tended to report shorter times, possibly reflecting greater reliance on external assistance to detect linguistic errors. Finally, while extensive use of English may help NNES overcome difficulties with English, 88% of NNES respondents reported that it also reduced their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language. This study provides the first systematic, quantitative evidence of English-related epistemic challenges that many NNES may face in philosophy, highlighting significant linguistic inequities.

Keywords Epistemic challenges · Non-native English speakers · Philosophy

Uwe Peters is the main author and primary contributor. All other names are listed alphabetically by last name, and not by order of contribution.

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1 Introduction

The English language is currently ubiquitous in academia. In some fields, 98% of all publications are in English (Ramírez-Castañeda 2020). Functioning as the shared language that people with different mother tongues use to communicate with each other, English provides academics with extensive benefits, fostering knowledge exchange, collaborations, and diverse social criticism.

However, for those working in academia (students, staff, researchers), the dominance of English may also come with significant challenges. These challenges might, for instance, be ethical ones, referring to issues related to fairness, justice, discrimination, or dignity (e.g., being denied jobs, grants, or recognition due to English skills) or *epistemic* ones,[1] referring to obstacles in understanding, analyzing, producing, or sharing information in English (Woolston & Osório 2019). Notably, only 7.3% of the world's population are native English speakers (NES) – individuals who learned and predominantly used English during childhood (Bahji et al. 2023). Given the global nature of academia, it is thus likely that most English users in this context are non-native English speakers (NNES), who began routinely using the language later in life alongside one or more other languages, potentially limiting their English proficiency (Lopez Lloreda 2023).

Even NES may face difficulties with English in academia, as academic English often differs significantly from everyday English in style, complexity, and technicality (Velliaris & Coleman-George 2015). Hence, since "academic English is no one's first language," effectively using it requires deliberate learning by both NNES and NES alike (Hyland 2016, p. 57).

Do both groups therefore encounter the same epistemic challenges (i.e., obstacles that impede their ability to understand, analyze, produce, or share information) related to English in their discipline? While several theoretical contributions have addressed this question (e.g., Van Parijs 2011; Contesi & Terrone, 2018; Flowerdew 2019; Gobbo & Russo 2020; Catala 2021; Peters 2023), empirical studies quantifying the difficulties of both groups have focused predominantly only on scientists and STEM fields (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) (Hanauer et al. 2019; Amano et al. 2023). In these studies, NNES scientists reported an average increase of 24% in difficulty, 10% in dissatisfaction, and 22% in anxiety when writing in English (Hanauer et al. 2019). Additionally, scientists from countries with low English proficiency spent a median of 29.8% more time drafting English texts and 90.8% more time reading scientific articles than NES (Amano et al. 2023).

These findings are often generalized from NNES in the sciences to NNES across academia. However, the challenges faced by NES and NNES may vary

[1] While the challenges discussed here may also be ethically relevant (in general, ethical and epistemic concerns often overlap; Rooney 2017), our focus is on difficulties in information processing, not primarily on questions of justice or morality. We use the qualifier 'epistemic' to highlight this focus.

significantly between academic fields due to differences in how writing, speaking, and research are conducted. In the humanities, where textual interpretation and verbal argumentation are often central, international academic communication may demand higher levels of English proficiency than in the sciences, where formalism, mathematics, and other universal symbolic systems can often help mitigate language barriers (Gnutzmann & Rabe 2013; Leong 2024). Consequently, the difficulties faced by NNES may be more pronounced in the humanities.

Philosophy, a core humanities discipline, stands out as especially relevant for at least two reasons. First, much academic philosophy requires linguistic precision and the analysis of word meanings (Hacking 1975), making high proficiency in the field's dominant language crucial to research and career (Catala 2021), potentially exacerbating the challenges for NNES compared to fields wherein linguistic analysis, precision, or style are less central (Contesi 2023).

Second, while scientists can often use empirical testing to verify each other's claims, much philosophical theorizing (e.g., normative work) cannot be vetted in this way, as it does not concern how things *are* but instead how they *ought* to be, implicating judgments especially vulnerable to biases (Schwitzgebel & Ellis 2017). In philosophy, a standard approach to mitigating these risks is to seek critical feedback from a diverse range of individuals (Peters et al. 2020). However, if NNES face obstacles to fully participating in debates, their ability to provide and receive social criticism is diminished, weakening the social check on the reliability of collective belief formation in the field.

While these points suggest that it may be particularly important to examine how NNES and NES are affected by the dominance of academic English in philosophy, and linguistic justice has received increasing attention in the field (e.g., Ayala 2015; Contesi 2023; Finocchiaro & Perrine 2024; Peters 2024), to date, no study has tried to quantify the epistemic hurdles faced by these two groups in philosophy. Analyses of citation practices, publication trends, and linguistic diversity in philosophy suggest that English dominates the field and work in English receives more uptake (Schwitzgebel et al. 2018; Yen & Hung 2019). However, the extent to which NNES or NES face greater epistemic challenges in writing, reading, or presenting philosophy in English remains unknown.

To examine these challenges – measured through publication rates, content processing times, and manuscript acceptance or negative feedback rates – we conducted an international survey of NNES and NES in philosophy, including students, teaching staff, and researchers (henceforth 'philosophers'). We compared both groups,

while also analyzing NNES by English proficiency levels. The goal was to investigate the following five main sets of research questions (RQs).[2]

RQ1. Do NES and NNES differ in the number of philosophy publications in English and the time they need to complete a draft, read an article, or prepare a presentation in English?
RQ2. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have faced (a) manuscript rejections from philosophy journals due to the standard of English in their manuscripts or (b) requests to improve their English writing?
RQ3. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have avoided (a) asking questions at philosophy events (workshops, lectures) or (b) attending such events due to lack of confidence in English?
RQ4. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have received negative feedback on their philosophy teaching in English, have felt ridiculed for their English proficiency, have struggled to understand NNES in philosophy, or use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to comprehend philosophical texts?
RQ5. Do NNES ever feel their frequent use of or extensive exposure to English may reduce their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language(s)?

In the following sections, we outline our methodology, present the results, and discuss their implications. We conclude with recommendations to help reduce the language barriers we identified.

But first, two clarifications. The dichotomy between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers has been criticized because variations and overlaps in linguistic competence prevent a clear demarcation between these groups (Cheng et al. 2021), and the dichotomy may perpetuate bias against NNES by obscuring the roles of practice or context in shaping language proficiency (Dewaele et al. 2022). Acknowledging these concerns, we use both terms only to ensure survey accessibility, as they remain the most widely recognized designators for both groups of English users (Isaacs & Rose 2022).

Furthermore, different people may have different understandings of 'native language'. To mitigate the risk of respondents using different notions, we specifically defined the term for them in the survey upfront (using Amano et al.'s (2023) broad description) as "the language(s) you predominantly used as a child)".

[2] We had four additional RQs. These questions were (1) whether NNES publish more in their native language or in English, and need the same amount of time to complete a draft, read an article, and prepare a presentation in their native language as they do in English; (2) whether NES and NNES equally often themselves reject a manuscript due to an author's poor English; whether (3) NES and NNES equally often seek help to improve their academic English writing; and whether (4) NNES working in the analytic tradition differ from those working in the continental tradition in the relevant domains of English use. For space reasons, details on the analyses and the results for these RQs are in the Online Supplementary Material.

2 Methodology

Study design. We collected quantitative and qualitative data from philosophers through a cross-sectional online Qualtrics survey. The survey contained 30 questions, asking respondents about their native language, English proficiency level (using descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)[3] levels, i.e., levels A1–C2), and views on the topics described in *RQ1* to *RQ5*. The survey and all data are publicly available on an Open Science Framework (OSF) platform (https://osf.io/5kcvr/), where the study was also preregistered. Ethical approval was obtained from Utrecht University, Netherlands.

Participants. Over 6 weeks (15 September–November 2024), we recruited individuals who had studied, are studying, or are teaching or doing research in philosophy. Recruitment was conducted internationally via established mailing lists (e.g., Philos-L), philosophy blogs (e.g., Daily Nous), and nationally through associations (e.g., Australasian Association of Philosophy), mailing lists, and social networks in 17 countries (Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Israel, Iran, Netherlands, South Africa, Turkey, UK, and the US). These countries were selected using the EF English Proficiency Index (2024) to ensure diverse representation of English proficiency levels (e.g., "very high" (Netherlands) and "low" (China)). For inclusivity, the whole survey was translated (validated by a native speaker) and distributed in seven languages: English, Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, and Turkish (for further details, see Online Supplementary Material).

For a ballpark estimate of the minimum sample size needed to detect a medium effect, we conducted a power analysis using G*Power,[4] finding that 85 participants per language group were recommended. During the recruitment, a total of 2,022 people responded, with the seven language groups having between 88 to 298 participants each (Table 5).

To ensure data quality, we excluded participants based on four prespecified criteria: (1) no dependent variable question was answered, (2) no native language was indicated, (3) responses were outliers, and (4) respondents failed attention checks.[5] Outliers included (a) respondents stating A1 Beginner or Elementary English proficiency but reporting three or more English publications, (b) respondents stating B1 English proficiency (limited to understanding main points of clear standard input) and reporting more than 10 English publications, and (c) undergraduate or Master's students below 25 years old claiming five or more publications in English or their native language. Attention checks involved asking respondents twice (at different points in the survey) about their native language, and whether they had written a paper in English. Respondents claiming NNES status but later indicating NES status

[3] For details on the CEFR, see https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97

[4] Input parameters were 'Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero'; type of power analysis = 'A priori: Compute required sample size—given α, power, and effect size'; effect size (f^2) = 0.15 (medium); α = 0.05; power = 0.80; and predictors = 4.

[5] Attention check failures and outliers are documented in the OSF data spreadsheet.

or indicating an English publication but later stating they had never written an English paper were excluded.[6] Exclusions led to a final dataset of 1,615 responses.

Statistical analysis. Following a related study (Amano et al. 2023), we used a generalized linear models framework, allowing us to include multiple variables simultaneously, control for confounders, reduce multiple testing risks, and perform analyses robust to data normality violations and unequal group sizes. For the main analyses, the following two approaches were applied, tailored to our data and research questions.[7]

(1) For analyses pertaining to *RQ1,* the outcome variables were measured in count data (publication counts (0 to 65+ papers), drafting time (<1–24+ months), reading time (<1–10+ hours), talk preparation time (<1–24+ hours)). We therefore used generalized linear models (GLMs) with a negative binomial distribution and log link function for examining differences between NES and NNES, as the data showed overdispersion.
(2) For the analyses pertaining to *RQ2* to *RQ5*, our outcome data were ordinal (e.g., 5-point Likert scale responses for avoiding questions, receiving negative feedback, etc.). We therefore used ordinal regression analyses with a cumulative logit link function.

Each GLM for *RQ1* incorporated one of three main predictors to provide both broad and detailed insights into NES–NNES differences: (1) NES versus NNES status (all NNES levels combined), (2) English proficiency level (EPL), categorized into four CEFR-based groups – "low" (A1–B1), "intermediate" (B2), "high" (C1–C2),[8] and NES – or (3) the English distance score (EDS) of respondents' native language. The EDS indicates how genetically related a given language is to English and was calculated using an algorithm developed by comparative linguists based on phonetic similarity (Beaufils & Tomin 2021, Appendix, Table 8).[9] The EDS is useful because EPL captures primarily only individual-level language differences. There might be linguistic group-level inequalities due to dissimilarity in (e.g.) phonetics between respondents' native language and English (Cysouw 2013) (e.g., since Chinese and English are less phonetically related than German and English, Chinese NNES may struggle more with English than German NNES; Chiswick & Miller

[6] Some respondents first indicated that they were English native speakers but on the subsequent question about their English proficiency stated a level below 'native English speaker'. We retained them because these NES may have chosen this proficiency level to flag their own English language difficulties (learning disability, dyslexia, etc.), as suggested by some of the 'free responses' that we discuss below.

[7] For the additional analyses to test our additional four RQs (see earlier footnote), we used two more techniques. See Online Supplementary Material for details and results.

[8] The original CEFR groupings are A1–A2 = "basic user"; B1–B2 = "independent user"; C1–C2 = "proficient user". While based on the CEFR, our groupings differed from the original because the number of A1–A2 respondents in our survey was too low for robust analyses, leading us to include B1 respondents in the "low proficiency" group also. We used the terms "low", "intermediate", and "high" (versus "basic user", etc.) for brevity.

[9] The algorithm is available here: http://www.elinguistics.net/

2005). Hence, we performed additional analyses with the EDS. Which main predictor was included per GLM is specified in the Results section.

The same applies to the covariates, which included academic position (14 levels, from undergraduate to full professor), English publication count, native language importance for career (5-point scale), and English use frequency (7-point scale). These variables were controlled for because whether one is a student or professor, has published in English, judges one's own native language to be more important for one's career (e.g., than English), or uses English daily may significantly affect one's perception of English-related challenges. Moreover, countries may differ in academic systems, cultural attitudes, and institutional pressures potentially influencing respondents' difficulties with English. We therefore also included respondents' country of residence as a covariate in all GLMs, grouping individual countries into ten categories according to regional, cultural, and linguistic similarities to mitigate sparse country counts (see Online Supplementary Material). Initial mixed models with individual countries as a random effect showed limited convergence, leading us to replace them with GLMs using country group as a fixed effect to improve model stability.

For the ordinal regressions, we included the variables specified in the Results section. In general, since including too many covariates can undermine power (Bernerth & Aguinis 2016), only factors that we viewed as highly likely to influence results were added (e.g., academic position, number of English publications, etc.). For all quantitative analyses, α was set to .05. Since the analysis plan was preregistered, the study was theory-driven, and no omnibus null was tested, adjustments for multiple comparisons were omitted (García-Pérez 2023). Analyses were conducted with SPSS 29.

For the qualitative data (collected via a free-response option in the survey), we conducted a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006). A classification scheme with 20 topics (e.g., linguistic bias, networking problems, financial concerns) was developed (see OSF material). To ensure analytical robustness, two researchers independently coded the dataset using this scheme, and inter-rater agreement was assessed via Cohen's kappa. Agreement values (κ) ranged from 0.63 to 0.89, consistently indicating 'substantial' to 'almost perfect' agreement (Landis & Koch 1977). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion before final classifications were quantified.

3 Results

We first describe the sample and then introduce the findings of the quantitative analyses before turning to the qualitative data.

3.1 Descriptive details and quantitative analyses

Among the 1,615 respondents, 81.5% were NNES, with 62.8% of them reporting high English proficiency (C1–C2), followed by intermediate (14.2%), and low

(4.4%) proficiency levels. Collectively, respondents spoke 80 native languages and resided in 68 countries. The five most common native languages were English ($n = 298$), Japanese ($n = 163$), German ($n = 161$), Chinese ($n = 153$), and Spanish ($n = 121$). The five most common countries of residence were the US ($n = 231$), Japan ($n = 158$), Germany ($n = 139$), the UK ($n = 119$), and Netherlands ($n = 111$).[10]

Most respondents were male (56.9%, female = 37.5%), aged between 25–44 (63%), with either student (undergraduate to PhD = 40.8%) or professor positions (assistant to full professor = 40.8%), working in the analytic tradition (70.5%, continental tradition = 17.2%). Regarding specializations, philosophy of science (all subfields combined) was most common (14.3%) followed by social and political philosophy (10.9%), history of philosophy (10.4%), epistemology (9.1%), and applied ethics (5.8%). The distribution of these demographic features was similar between NNES and NES. For details, see the Appendix, Tables 5, 6, 7.

RQ1. Do NES and NNES differ in the number of philosophy publications in English and the time they need to complete a draft, read an article, or prepare a presentation in English?

We first asked respondents how many main-authored, peer-reviewed English philosophy articles they had written (for the proportions, see Appendix, Fig. 3).

Overall, NNES ($M = 3.02$, $SE = 0.23$) had fewer publications than NES did ($M = 4.65$, $SE = 0.55$) (for proportions by paper count, see Appendix, Fig. 3).[11] Comparing NNES versus NES and controlling for academic position, native language importance, and country group, NES versus NNES status had a significant effect ($\chi^2(1) = 19.02$, $p < 0.001$), with NNES showing a 35.1% lower publication rate than NES. Analyses by English proficiency levels revealed that even C1–C2 level NNES still indicated 27% lower publication rates (Fig. 1, Table 1; for marginal means, see Table 2).

Turning to the time needed to write in English, we asked respondents how long it took them (months) to complete the research and writing of the first draft of their most recent philosophy paper (incl. student essay) (12–15 pages) in English. While the adjusted means indicated NNES (all EPLs combined) ($M = 4.78$, $SE = 0.30$) needed slightly less time than NES ($M = 5.24$, $SE = 0.56$), controlling for academic position, country group, and native language importance, the difference between NNES and NES did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2(1) = 0.92$, $p = 0.34$) (for details by months, see Appendix, Fig. 3). The analysis using EPL with the same controls also provided no evidence of a group difference ($\chi^2(3) = 2.62$, $p = 0.45$), though the means suggested that B2–C2 level NNES reported shorter times than NES (Table 1). We will revisit these surprising findings below.

[10] Gaps between the most common native languages and most common countries might suggest that many respondents were academic migrants. For discussion of academic migration, see Catala (2022). We did not control for migration status and welcome future research on this.

[11] All means reported in the Results section are estimated marginal means, adjusted for the variables included in the GLMs.

We also asked participants how long it took them (hours) to read and understand the most recent philosophy article (10–15 pages) that they had read in English (without translation tools). With the same controls as before, overall, NNES ($M = 2.02$, $SE = 0.14$) needed longer than NES did ($M = 1.51$, $SE = 0.18$) (for details by hours, see Appendix, Fig. 3). The effect of NES versus NNES status was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 7.74$, $p = 0.005$), with NNES, overall, reporting about 34% longer reading times, compared to NES. EPL analyses showed that all NNES levels needed significantly longer than NES. In A1–B1 level NNES, reading times rose to twice as long as those of NES (Fig. 1; for marginal means by group, see Table 2).

Next, we examined the time needed for working on English presentations, asking respondents about the hours they had spent preparing their most recent (30–45 min) talk. Overall, NNES ($M = 7.96$, $SE = 0.50$) needed longer than NES did ($M = 6.67$, $SE = 0.69$) (for details by hours, see Appendix, Fig. 3). Controlling for academic position, country group, and native language importance, the broad NES versus NNES difference did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2(1) = 3.56$, $p = 0.059$). However, when using EPL as the main predictor instead, the overall difference was significant ($\chi^2(3) = 34.06$, $p < 0.001$). NNES at A1–B2 levels (versus NES) reported needing up to 94% more talk preparation time, though C1–C2 level NNES and NES did not statistically differ (Fig. 1).

The preceding analyses used either NES versus NNES status or EPL as main predictor. These analyses did not consider the effects of dissimilarity in, for instance, phonetics between native tongues and English, which can exacerbate difficulties with English. We therefore also conducted analyses using the EDS of respondents' native language as the main predictor (Appendix, Table 8). We first tested the relationship between EDS and EPL, using a Spearman's rank-order correlation. A strong negative correlation between EDS and EPL emerged ($r_s = -0.66$, $p < 0.001$): As a respondent's native language became more distant to English, their reported EPL decreased. Given this correlation, to reduce multicollinearity, we conducted models only with EDS as main predictor, not also EPL.

Focusing on publication count, controlling for academic position, country group, and native language importance, EDS significantly predicted publication count ($\chi^2(1) = 26.99$, $p < 0.001$): for each unit EDS increase, the expected count decreased by 0.7% compared to NES (EDS baseline = 0) ($B = -0.007$, $SE = 0.0013$). For instance, Dutch (EDS = 21.8) native speakers experienced a decrease of 14.2% whereas Chinese (EDS = 91.13) speakers experienced a decrease of 47.2%.

Controlling for the same variables, there was no evidence that EDS significantly affected English draft completion time ($\chi^2(1) = 0.063$, $p = 0.80$). However, when focusing on the time needed to read an English article, EDS had a significant effect ($\chi^2(1) = 24.18$, $p < 0.001$). For each unit increase in EDS, reported reading time increased by 0.6% (e.g., Japanese native speakers (EDS = 87.2) indicated 68.7% more time than NES) ($B = 0.006$, $SE = 0.0013$). Similarly, EDS also significantly affected the time needed to prepare an English presentation ($\chi^2(1) = 8.92$, $p = 0.003$). For each unit increase in EDS, the time increased by 0.4% (e.g., for Spanish speakers (EDS = 59.3), the increase was 26.8%, compared to NES) ($B = 0.004$, $SE = 0.0012$).

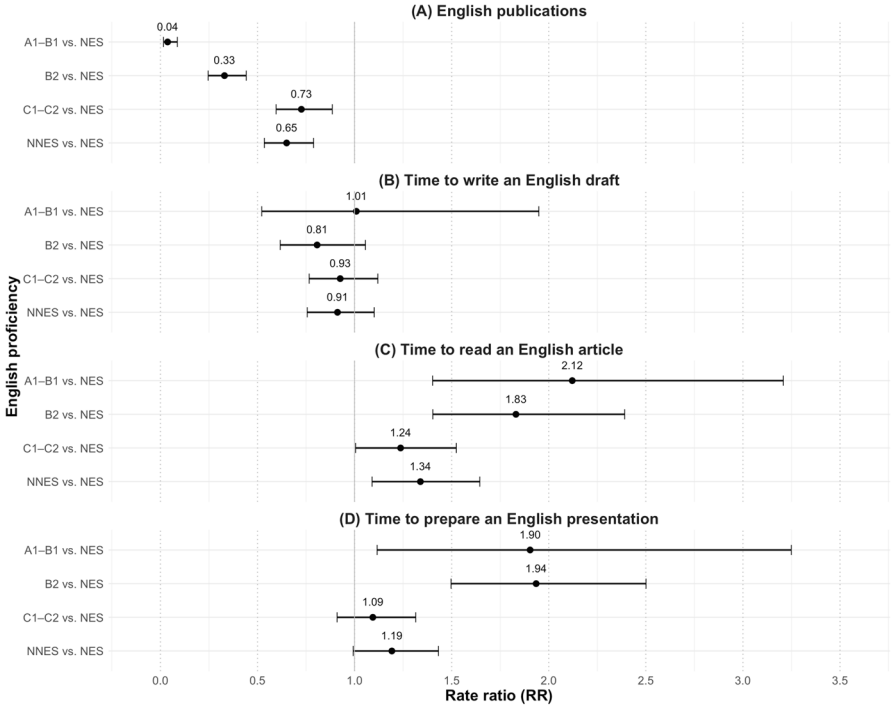

Fig. 1 Forest plot displaying rate ratios (RR) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) from GLMs comparing NES and NNES (overall and by subgroup) across English use domains. An RR of 1 indicates NES as the baseline. (Wide CIs reflect uncertainty due to small samples.)

RQ2. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have faced (a) manuscript rejections from philosophy journals due to the standard of English in their manuscripts or (b) requests to improve their English writing?

Among all NNES,[12] 22.4% reported having faced manuscript rejections from philosophy journals because of their English at least once to very often, compared to 6.8% of NES. Regarding requests to improve their English writing, the differences was between 66.9% (NNES) and 37.6% (NES). The differences remained stark even in the high proficiency NNES versus NES comparison (see Appendix, Fig. 4).

Controlling for English publication count and native language importance, NES versus NNES status significantly predicted the likelihood of having faced English manuscript rejections ($\chi^2(1) = 27.48$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, NNES had nearly five times the odds of rejection compared to NES (even C1–C2 level NNES had more than three times the odds) (Fig. 2, Table 3).

[12] Raw overall proportions for all RQs in the Results section are based on counts that exclude N/A respondents.

Table 1 GLM regression coefficients by speaker groups and English use domain

GLM regression table				
Domain	*B*	*SE*	*Wald χ2*	*p*
English publications				
A1–B1 vs. NES	−3.286	0.4306	58.262	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	−1.109	0.1491	55.385	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	−0.320	0.1007	10.127	0.001
NNES vs. NES	−0.431	0.0989	19.017	< 0.001
English drafting time				
A1–B1 vs. NES	0.009	0.3359	0.001	0.994
B2 vs. NES	−0.214	0.1369	2.439	0.111
C1–C2 vs. NES	−0.077	0.0970	0.635	0.406
NNES vs. NES	−0.092	0.0960	0.916	0.318
English reading time				
A1–B1 vs. NES	0.752	0.2111	12.677	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	0.605	0.1360	19.766	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	0.213	0.1062	4.022	0.045
NNES vs. NES	0.292	0.1051	7.739	0.005
English talk preparation time				
A1–B1 vs. NES	0.644	0.2727	5.575	0.018
B2 vs. NES	0.660	0.1309	25.428	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	0.090	0.0939	0.925	0.336
NNES vs. NES	0.176	0.0934	3.561	0.059

NES versus NNES status was also a significant predictor of being asked to improve one's English in manuscripts (papers, student essays, etc.), controlling for academic position, native language importance, and English publication count ($\chi^2(1) = 71.37$, $p < 0.001$). NNES were more than three times as likely as NES to have been asked to improve their English, and these odds increased up to 16 times as English proficiency decreased (Fig. 2, Table 3).

RQ3. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have avoided (a) asking questions at philosophy events (workshops, lectures) or (b) attending such events due to lack of confidence in English?

Among all NNES combined, 65% reported having avoided asking questions at English philosophy events once or more often, compared to 16.2% of NES (for details on high proficiency NNES versus NES, see Appendix, Fig. 4). Controlling for academic position, native language importance, and English use frequency, NES versus NNES status significantly influenced the likelihood of having avoided asking questions ($\chi^2(1) = 118.23$, $p < 0.001$), with NNES, overall, being ten times more likely than NES to report having done so (Fig. 2).

Table 2 Differences between EPLs in means adjusted for academic position (student, professor, etc.), native language importance, and country group

Estimated marginal means		
Domain	*M*	*SE*
English publications		
A1–B1	0.18	0.076
B2	1.58	0.207
C1–C2	3.48	0.275
NES	4.80	0.572
English drafting time		
A1–B1	5.31	1.727
B2	4.25	0.482
C1–C2	4.87	0.321
NES	5.26	0.565
English reading time		
A1–B1	3.17	0.621
B2	2.73	0.297
C1–C2	1.85	0.132
NES	1.49	0.174
English talk preparation time		
A1–B1	12.41	3.265
B2	12.61	1.372
C1–C2	7.14	0.461
NES	6.52	0.680

Note. Not all NES or NNES provided answers for the EPL question. This led to differences in means in the analyses with NES vs. NNES (reported in the main text) and the analyses with EPL as the predictors (shown in the table)

Turning to event attendance, 34.6% of all NNES (and 25% of the highest EPL group) indicated having avoided attending philosophy events due to lack of confidence in English, compared to 5.1% of NES. Using the same control variables as before, NNES, overall, were about nine times more likely than NES to have avoided events for this reason ($\chi^2(1) = 41.34$, $p < 0.001$ (Fig. 2).

RQ4. Do NES and NNES differ in how often they have received negative feedback on their philosophy teaching in English, have felt ridiculed for their English proficiency, have struggled to understand NNES in philosophy, or use AI tools to comprehend philosophical texts?

Among NNES who have taught in English, 30% reported having received English-related negative feedback on their teaching by students or colleagues at least once or more often, compared to 18.5% of NES. This rate remained at 29% even among C1–C2 level NNES (see Appendix, Fig. 4). Furthermore, controlling for English use frequency, NES versus NNES status significantly predicted the

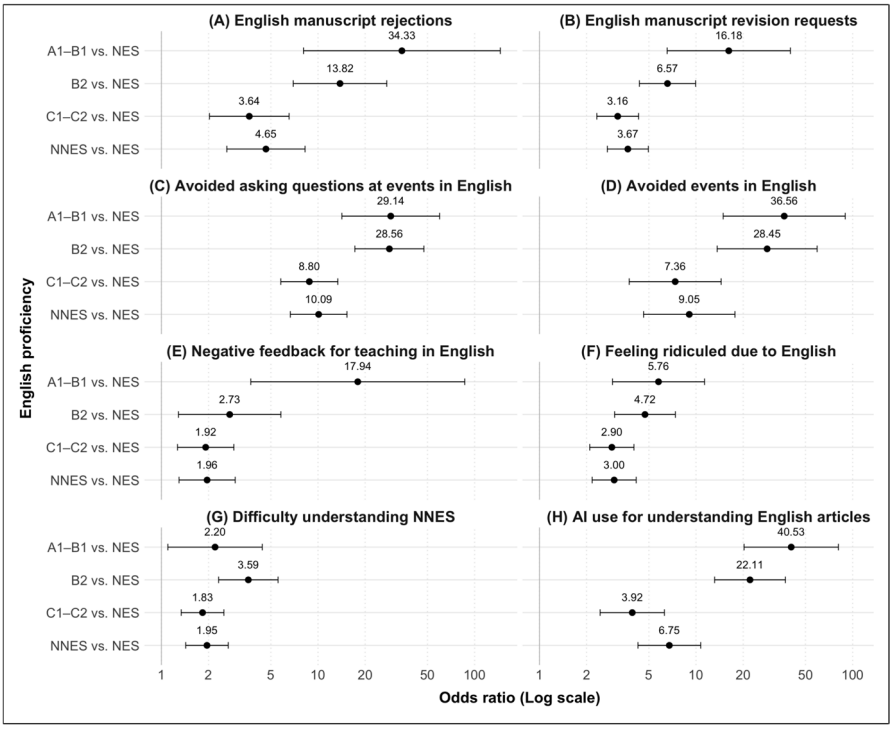

Fig. 2 Forest plot displaying odds ratios (OR) and 95% CIs from ordinal regressions comparing NES and NNES across English use domains. An OR of 1 indicates NES as the baseline. (Wide CIs reflect uncertainty due to small samples.)

likelihood of having received such feedback ($\chi^2(1) = 10.19$, $p = 0.001$), with NNES being about twice as likely as NES to have experienced this (Fig. 2).

Focusing on feelings of ridicule, we asked participants how often they had felt ridiculed, criticized, or taken less seriously in philosophy (e.g., by students, colleagues, etc.) because of their English (e.g., their accent, word choice, etc.), either currently or in the past. Even among C1–C2 level NNES, 49.8% still reported having had such feelings once or more often, compared to 29.2% of NES (Appendix, Fig. 4). Controlling for academic position and English use frequency, NES versus NNES status significantly influenced how often respondents have felt ridiculed due to their English proficiency (χ^2 (1) = 44.33, $p < 0.001$), with NNES being about three times more likely than NES to have felt that way.

When people give negative feedback on an NNES's English, this might derive from difficulties in understanding them, which may vary between NES and NNES. Relatedly, when asked how often they have struggled to understand what a NNES said or wrote, controlling for English use frequency and native language importance, the two groups differed in this respect ($\chi^2(1) = 17.69$, $p < 0.001$), with NNES, overall, being nearly twice as likely as NES to have had difficulties understanding NNES (Fig. 2).

Table 3 Ordinal regression results displayed by English speaker group and English use domain. Reference for *Reduced native language ability* is English use 'rarely'

Ordinal regression table				
Domain	*B*	*SE*	*Wald* χ^2	*p*
English manuscript rejections				
A1–B1 vs. NES	3.536	0.7380	22.959	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	2.626	0.3509	56.012	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	1.292	0.2985	18.734	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	1.537	0.2932	27.481	< 0.001
English manuscript revision requests				
A1–B1 vs. NES	2.784	0.4621	36.287	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	1.883	0.2108	79.814	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	1.151	0.1567	53.906	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	1.300	0.1539	71.366	< 0.001
Avoided questions at events in English				
A1–B1 vs. NES	3.372	0.3664	84.706	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	3.352	0.2590	167.564	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	2.175	0.2138	103.491	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	2.312	0.2126	118.233	< 0.001
Avoided events in English				
A1–B1 vs. NES	3.599	0.4577	61.804	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	3.348	0.3747	79.820	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	1.996	0.3449	33.485	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	2.203	0.3426	41.336	< 0.001
Negative feedback for teaching				
A1–B1 vs. NES	2.887	0.8024	12.950	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	1.004	0.3842	6.835	0.009
C1–C2 vs. NES	0.651	0.2113	9.483	0.002
NNES vs. NES	0.672	0.2105	10.192	0.001
Feeling ridiculed				
A1–B1 vs. NES	1.751	0.3451	25.740	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	1.552	0.2279	46.337	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	1.065	0.1658	41.226	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	1.099	0.1651	44.330	< 0.001
Difficulty understanding NNES				
A1–B1 vs. NES	0.789	0.3539	4.973	0.026
B2 vs. NES	1.278	0.2229	32.849	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	0.605	0.1602	14.279	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	0.67	0.1593	17.685	< 0.001
AI use for understanding articles				
A1–B1 vs. NES	3.702	0.3536	109.585	< 0.001
B2 vs. NES	3.096	0.2655	135.984	< 0.001
C1–C2 vs. NES	1.365	0.2412	32.021	< 0.001
NNES vs. NES	1.91	0.2353	65.892	< 0.001

Table 3 (continued)

Ordinal regression table				
Domain	*B*	*SE*	*Wald* χ^2	*p*
Reduced native language ability				
All the time	1.750	0.2288	58.488	< 0.001
Most of the time	1.559	0.2212	49.690	< 0.001
Frequently	0.959	0.2108	20.683	< 0.001
Sometimes	0.766	0.2294	11.160	< 0.001
Occasionally	0.583	0.2571	5.141	0.023

Finally, examining whether NES and NNES equally often use AI to understand English articles, controlling for academic position and native language importance, NES versus NNES status significantly predicted reported AI use (χ^2 (1) = 65.89, $p < 0.001$). Overall, NNES were about seven times more likely than NES to have used AI for this purpose.

RQ5. Do NNES ever feel their frequent use of or extensive exposure to English may reduce their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language(s)?

Frequent use of or extensive exposure to English likely reduces NNES's difficulties with English. However, it may also lead to a decline in NNES proficiency in their native language, for instance, due to forgetting or not learning relevant terms – a phenomenon known as "native language attrition" (Schmid & Köpke 2017). Relatedly, we found that among NNES philosophers, 88% reported that they had experienced this at least once (Table 4).

Controlling for EPL (excluding NES), NNES English use frequency predicted a reduction in native language ability to discuss philosophy ($\chi^2(5) = 83.08$, $p < 0.001$). Compared to NNES who rarely used English in everyday life, those who used English most frequently were about six times more likely to have experienced such effects (OR = 5.75, 95% CI [3.68, 9.01]). This likelihood decreased progressively as English use frequency diminished (Table 3). Declines in native language proficiency associated with increased English use also emerged as a recurring theme in our qualitative data. We now turn to them.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

Participants provided a total of 578 free responses on their personal experiences with academic English in philosophy. We categorized them into 20 topics (Appendix, Table 9), and will here briefly introduce comments on five themes that help further elucidate our quantitative findings. These themes are (1) psychological and cognitive costs, (2) linguistic bias, (3) networking disadvantages, (4) linguistic trade-offs, and (5) proofreading costs. We will limit our interpretation and let the

Table 4 Proportions of NNES indicating whether frequent use of or extensive exposure to English reduced their native language ability to discuss philosophy

Reduced native language ability	A1–B1	B2	C1–C2	All NNES
Never experienced this	31.7%	19.5%	9.1%	11.9%
Experienced this in the past but no longer	1.6%	2.2%	5.0%	4.5%
Rarely experience this	19.1%	20.4%	13.3%	14.7%
Occasionally experience this	19.1%	28.3%	30.1%	29.3%
Often experience this	20.6%	20.3%	24.7%	23.7%
Consistently experience this	7.9%	9.3%	17.8%	15.9%

comments speak for themselves. Readers are encouraged to explore the full set of free responses available on our OSF platform (https://osf.io/5kcvr/).

To begin with, many NNES noted that using English in academia sometimes affected their ability to contribute to philosophy by lowering their self-confidence, increasing their mental load, or causing interference from their native language:

> "I think the most significant aspect for me is that it increases my lack of confidence, multiplying the 'impostor syndrome', so to say." (300)[13]
> "When I'm among people who are native English speakers or extremely proficient, I'm self-conscious which takes a lot of my cognitive resources (so I'm less "smart" when it comes to the topic of the conversation, because I'm simultaneously thinking about the phrases I'm using, etc.)." (194)
> "When my brain is in stress mode, it seems to want to return to my native language, and it becomes more difficult to think of the right English words, expressions, grammar structure etc., even though these normally come to me without much or even any effort." (12)

Some confidence issues that NNES face may be natural aspects of language learning.

However, anxiety about using English can become amplified when one also encounters linguistic bias, ridicule, or inappropriate comments on how one uses English. Several respondents shared experiences of this kind, writing:

> "A student once said I should apologize for my accent." (19)
> "When I started my undergrad (in the UK) I was ridiculed quite often for my Italian accent and whenever I brought it up, they would respond that they weren't ridiculing me, they just thought it was 'cute' when I 'tried' to speak English." (350)
> "I get objectified because of my French accent; many senior male philosophers have told me they find it 'sexy'." (399)

Negative effects on confidence related to one's English use in academia may also occur in NES. For instance, some NES reported psychological and cognitive costs of using academic English due to learning disabilities or mental health conditions:

[13] Numbers in brackets are the identifiers of the responses in the OSF spreadsheet (qualitative data).

> "I am a native English speaker, but I am dyslexic, and I very much feel like I struggle to write like a 'proper' philosophy academic." (161)
> "Much of the trouble I have had with academic English has come from having learning disabilities (dyslexia, ADHD). My written English is below average in many respects for someone at my level […]." (34)

These concerns, too, remain largely unexplored in philosophy.

Respondents also frequently remarked on linguistic bias in paper reviewing, with some journal editors sharing:

> "As an associate editor for journals, I have encountered several referees who recommend rejection of papers for stylistic reasons, which disproportionally affect papers written by non-native speakers." (270)
> "I noticed these barriers predominantly in my capacity as journal editor, as good papers which are however written in less fluent English have a harder time being accepted for publication." (156)

Several participants, in fact, acknowledged being biased against NNES:

> "I have realized that I often take more seriously or pay more attention to or agree more likely with people who are native speakers or who speak very good English." (75)
> "I definitely find myself having to deal with the impulse of taking less seriously (deeming less competent, less smart) non-native speakers who struggle to speak fluently in English, and I have to consciously correct that – despite being a non-native speaker myself." (33)

Notably, some NES in our sample, too, highlighted similar linguistic biases against themselves, albeit based on social class or regional accents:

> "While studying [in the UK], I often felt intimidated and ridiculed by the fact that I speak American English. Moreover, I am a first-generation college student from a working-class background. I have a thick regional accent that I have learned to hide because I have been told that my accent sounds 'unintelligent'." (38)

These responses (for more, see our OSF qualitative data sheet) again indicate that epistemic difficulties related to academic English (e.g., when contributing to knowledge exchange and production in the field) are not limited to NNES.

Linguistic bias (against 'non-standard' NES or NNES) can exacerbate yet another challenge in academia, namely forming international connections with colleagues, which can be crucial for advancing research. Many NNES touched on this problem, writing, for instance:

> "Academic networking is also extremely hostile to non-native speakers because being a non-native speaker doesn't just mean linguistic barrier but also (pop) cultural barrier, which is actually a much harder barrier to overcome than the pure linguistic barrier. Without a shared cultural reference

point, networking is a daunting task, e.g., there is no way to join in many casual conversations in academic events." (152)
"My use of academic English is better than my use of informal English, and this makes social interactions on the fringes of academic events – coffee breaks, dinners, etc. – more difficult." (506)

Perhaps NNES can address these challenges by immersing themselves more in English and using it more frequently. However, consistent with our quantitative results, several respondents highlighted that this had the side-effect of decreasing their native language ability:

"After 20 years living in the US, I don't have any problem expressing myself in writing or speaking in English. […] I suffer more from having lost my capacity to speak in French about my work." (125)
"Because in South Africa we are taught in English from primary school (unless you are in the rural areas) we lose our command in our own native languages. Also, what is strikingly concerning is that we are not proficient in English, and we are worse in our native languages." (236)
"I find it unfortunate that all of my professional technical vocabulary is in English. I recently went to a bilingual (French & English) conference, and I had to present in English because I have not written in French in over 15 years." (162)

This linguistic trade-off may affect personal identity and risks diminishing the diversity of philosophical discourse, as native languages can convey distinctive concepts (for examples, see Glock 2018). To mitigate this, NNES may use English less frequently to maintain their native language proficiency. But doing so can, in turn, increase the likelihood of errors in English. In writing, NNES often attempt to address this issue by using proofreading services. Yet, this approach also presents disadvantages that NES may not face:

"Professional proofreading typically costs between 50,000 to 100,000 yen (around $710). I often feel it's unfair that I have to pay native speakers to make my paper easier for them to read." (76)
"I do feel pressured to enlist professional help by native speakers […] each and every time I submit a new or revised draft for anonymous review. This can cost up to 400E per paper, not including revisions, for papers that might not even result in publications." (427)

Identifying an important additional epistemic cost, one NNES wrote:

"Professional proofreaders not only misunderstand the text but can even make grammatical errors in their proofreading. I find it highly unfair that native English speakers do not need to spend this time, money, and effort to submit their papers." (330)

NNES may therefore often need to check proofread material, taking extra time not available for philosophical theorizing.

4 General discussion

While English offers many benefits to NNES academics, our survey reveals significant epistemic challenges that they may face related to its use in philosophy. We will summarize and discuss what we consider our four most interesting sets of findings.

(1) Compared to NES, NNES had significantly fewer English publications and faced greater difficulties contributing to philosophy in English across most academic domains. Overall, NNES reported 35% fewer English publications than NES. This disparity may disadvantage them in hiring and collaboration contexts, where English publications and citations often serve as proxies for academic performance (Di Bitetti & Ferreras 2017). This disparity can also perpetuate global imbalances in philosophical contributions, as the lower representation of NNES voices could produce an overreliance on perspectives from Anglophone contexts (Wolters 2016).

Moreover, NNES reports indicated that NNES, overall, needed over 30% longer than NES to read an English article and, among those with middle to low English proficiency, over 90% longer to prepare an English presentation. Assuming these findings generalize, the currently equal standards applied to NES and NNES (e.g., at universities, international conferences, etc.) imply that NNES philosophers may undertake more epistemic work without recognition, highlighting a case of "distributive epistemic injustice" (Finocchiaro & Perrine 2024). Importantly, these group differences were exacerbated for speakers of mother tongues more distant from English (e.g., Spanish, Chinese), indicating that alongside individual-level English proficiency, efforts to mitigate linguistic inequities should also consider differences between NNES language groups.

Additionally, across EPLs, NNES had significantly higher odds than NES of having avoided asking questions during or attending philosophy events in English, having received negative teaching feedback, and having felt ridiculed for their English proficiency. Avoiding questions or events in English may be unsurprising for speakers whose English proficiency is too low to follow and sustain English conversations. However, we focused on respondents who did sometimes attend philosophy events in English and were therefore presumably capable of understanding and contributing to them. Moreover, the explicit focus in the survey was on recent past events (not distant events when one might still have had only basic English proficiency) and even among NNES with C1–C2 English proficiency, about 60% reported having avoided questions and about 25% reported having avoided events specifically due to concerns about their English (Appendix, Fig. 4). Hence, even when NNES have reached an English proficiency that is clearly high enough to contribute to workshops or conferences in English, psychological barriers to participation, such as foreign language use anxiety may persist (Hashemi 2011).

Furthermore, while receiving negative feedback on one's teaching in English (e.g.) by students may be understandable if one's English proficiency is insufficient for teaching, NNES are unlikely to be placed in teaching roles requiring English unless their proficiency is deemed adequate by the relevant decision-makers based on evidence (e.g., test scores). Yet, we found that even NNES with sufficient English

proficiency to be given an English teaching position were still twice as likely as NES to have received negative English-related teaching feedback, raising concerns about indirect disadvantages in recruitment contexts, as student evaluations – often used in hiring decisions – may reflect linguistic biases against NNES and in favor of NES, potentially leading hiring committees to unfair assessments (Heffernan & Harpur 2023).

NNES's higher rates of having felt ridiculed for their English usage amplify this concern, suggesting that many NNES philosophers may have experienced credibility deficits in the field due to their English use (Lev-Ari & Keysar 2010). Since feeling ridiculed based on language use can be particularly harmful in academia, leading (e.g.) students to hide and hold back academic effort (Dietrich & Hofman 2019), our finding that almost 50% of NNES even with C1–C2 level proficiency (and around 29% of NES) philosophers reported having had such feelings is alarming, raising questions about the social norms in philosophy, which may tolerate such behaviors, despite the field's professed commitment to inclusivity (APA 2025). These dynamics can impose substantial epistemic costs on the discipline by stifling the diversity of voices and limiting the critical engagement that a more welcoming environment could foster.

(2) NNES did not statistically differ from NES in self-reported time to complete a first draft of an English paper and tended to report needing less time. That we did not find a group difference in this domain and that NNES tended to indicate shorter mean times than NES is surprising, as most other findings consistently suggested NNES struggled more than NES. Moreover, a previous study using the same approach but focused on scientists, i.e., Amano et al. (2023), found that those of nationalities with low English proficiency did spend 6.6% to 59.3% more time writing a paper in English than NES.

However, Amano et al. report that this disadvantage was "not found in those at a later career stage", and in their study, NNES English draft writing time dipped below that of NES with NNES publication count of 50 (2023, p. 3). Hence, even in their study, there was some indication of NNES, at some stage, needing less time for English draft writing than NES.

Several factors may help explain the unexpected trend that we found in our data (setting aside random variation, etc. that may explain null findings but not trends). But first a note of caution related to "survivorship bias" (the tendency to misinterpret a successful subgroup as representative of the whole by overlooking those who dropped out (Miller 2020)). NNES who experienced greater challenges with English draft writing may have been more likely to leave academia earlier, resulting in a sample that disproportionately includes faster drafters.

Second, as mentioned above, in their free responses, some NES indicated having learning disabilities (being dyslexic, having ADHD, etc.). Since such conditions were primarily reported by NES but not NNES, these conditions among NES could explain NNES's relatively shorter mean drafting times.

Third, NNES are likely often aware that their English drafts may also receive critical feedback on linguistic issues, not only content. They may therefore prioritize quick draft completion to leave time for external feedback on their language use (e.g., proofreaders) alongside their philosophical contribution. In contrast, NES

likely feel more confident in their ability to refine the language of their drafts themselves, potentially reserving the soliciting of feedback for the purpose of refining the philosophical content. Relatedly, our finding might be due to NES and NNES understanding the term 'draft' in our survey differently. NES may have interpreted it as referring to a more polished, potentially publishable paper ready for journal submission, whereas NNES took it to refer to an initial rough full draft far from being ready for journal submission. NES may also be more sensitive to nuance in English and more invested when writing in English, their "mother tongue", as it reflects a deeper personal and emotional connection (Caldwell-Harris 2014). Higher investment in expressing their 'personal voice' may lead NES to set a higher threshold for satisfaction and revise more. NNES, by contrast, may often struggle, for instance, with appropriately using certain expressions (e.g., literary devices, epistemic markers ("hedges", "boosters"; Hyland 1998), with recognizing whether one English sentence sounds better than another (more certain, etc.), or with retrieving alternative formulations (Holmes 1982; Chen & Zhang 2017). This may lead NNES to view English primarily as a tool for communication, with less concern for how it reflects their personality or how natural it sounds. They may believe achieving a 'natural sound' in English is impossible for them anyway and instead rely on proofreaders or AI tools for polishing.

Since these points suggest that NNES more readily outsource or distribute their reasoning about English writing (e.g., error correction) to their environment, we refer to them collectively as the *distributed drafting hypothesis.* This hypothesis is compatible with NNES needing more time than NES for preparing English talks, because there are unique demands of oral performance, including clear pronunciation and effective intonation, which cannot be outsourced to proofreaders or AI. Unlike writing, speaking also involves immediate audience feedback, potentially increasing accent anxiety leading NNES to spend more time than NES rehearsing talks to avoid mispronunciation and memorize expressions to prevent stumbling during delivery (Coppinger & Sheridan 2022). This may help explain our findings of shorter drafting but longer presentation preparation times among NNES.

(3) NNES who frequently used English reported a decline in their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language, and NNES, compared to NES, experienced greater difficulty understanding other NNES. Strikingly, almost 90% of NNES felt that increased use or extensive exposure to English had diminished their native language proficiency. Those who used English more frequently were also much more likely than those who used it rarely to report reductions in their ability to philosophize in their native language. To our knowledge, this is the first evidence of native language attrition among philosophers, contributing to previous research that has identified this phenomenon among others in academia (e.g., Turkish university students studying to be English teachers or interpreters; Ayçiçeği-Dinn et al. 2017), highlighting a largely overlooked epistemic cost for NNES philosophers: the risk of declining proficiency in their own language due to extensive English use.

Finally, despite the common intuition that NNES (especially low proficiency speakers) may understand each other more easily (Morrison 2016), in our study, NNES were more likely than NES to have had difficulties understanding other NNES. While other research suggests that this difficulty is reduced for non-native

listeners who share their first language with the non-native speaker (Lev-Ari et al. 2017), our result adds yet another layer of comparatively higher epistemic challenges for NNES (versus NES) and aligns with prior findings that unfamiliar foreign English accents reduced NNES' understanding more than NES accents did, leading to a "native-accent advantage" across groups (Rovetti et al. 2023).

(4) Some NES also experienced epistemic challenges related to academic English. Our qualitative data indicates that even among NES, adapting to academic English can create significant epistemic difficulties because their nonstandard English accents, or underlying learning or mental health conditions may make them subject to linguistic bias or disadvantage through causing psychological (anxiety) or social (networking-related) costs. While this theme did not emerge as a strong or systematic pattern across the data and we therefore could not analyse it quantitatively or foreground it in our discussion, we think this issue (and the related topic of challenges faced by "first-gen" philosophers)[14] deserves more attention among researchers working on linguistic injustice.

In sum, our results are disconcerting. While many academic fields rely on social criticism to enhance the reliability of their knowledge production, philosophy is particularly dependent on it, as empirical methods are often not viable options (Schwitzgebel & Ellis 2017; Peters et al. 2020). Our findings suggest that a significant portion of the philosophical community, i.e., NNES, may often be systematically disadvantaged in contributing to the field. This can reduce the diversity of social criticism, raising serious concerns about a substantial epistemic loss to philosophy at the group level. Relatedly, while most of the challenges we identified (e.g., longer English reading times, avoidance of asking questions, networking difficulties) primarily affect individual philosophers (limiting their academic progress or visibility), these harms may aggregate over time at the group level. Depending on their magnitude, number, and frequency, they can contribute to systematic credibility deficits or to the marginalization of the perspectives of a class of individuals (e.g., Latin American or Asian philosophers), a people, or a culture. Hence, initially seemingly only individual linguistic challenges with English may contribute to collective epistemic injustices, especially when they interact with or exacerbate other structural (e.g., racial) inequalities.

5 Recommendations

Based on our findings, we offer five strategies that might help mitigate English-related difficulties faced by NNES in philosophy.

(1) Raise awareness. Institutions and individuals in philosophy (journal editors, conference organizers, and instructors) could explicitly acknowledge that some NNES philosophers may need more time to read, think, and respond in English. Editorial policies, for instance, could note this, encouraging editors to offer more flexible revision deadlines to NNES (when appropriate). More broadly, greater awareness among NES scholars could lead to small but meaningful adjustments, such as moderating speech

[14] For interesting discussions on the topic of first-gen philosophers, see https://www.firstgenphilosophers.com/

rate in seminars. For NNES philosophers, being open about English-related challenges can help normalize these experiences and reduce self-censorship or foreign-language anxiety in seminars, workshops, etc. (Young 1991).

(2) Avoid undue focus on style. It can be challenging to determine when the focus on linguistic style, fluency, etc. becomes disproportionate ('undue') with respect to contents. However, philosophy reviewers, editors, and instructors should critically assess whether they are overemphasizing these factors in evaluations of manuscripts (etc.) and strive to avoid doing so (see also the "Barcelona Principles for Globally Inclusive Philosophy").

(3) Open peer review. Since NNES reported higher rates of paper rejection and English-related revision requests, philosophy journals could consider adopting open peer review, a model in which reviewer reports are published alongside the manuscript. This practice, already used successfully in several leading science journals (Bravo et al. 2019), increases transparency[15] and so may encourage reviewers, knowing their reports will be public, to focus on the substance of a paper rather than superficial English language issues, while also fostering more collegial exchanges and providing public recognition for reviewers' contributions.

(4) Consider funding language service and AI tools. Since many NNES may rely on distributed drafting strategies, which can pose an additional financial burden, educational institutions may consider providing NNES with access to proofreading services. Relatedly, many of our NNES respondents reported that they frequently use AI writing tools (ChatGPT, DeepL, Grammarly) to overcome linguistic barriers (e.g., free responses 118, 138, 194, 259). While the risks that such tools pose deserve more attention (e.g., plagiarism, deskilling (Kosmyna et al. 2025), environmental costs, or chatbot overgeneralizations (Peters & Chin-Yee 2025)), these tools may also empower NNES philosophers to contribute to and help resolve debates on these very issues. It might therefore be worth considering providing NNES philosophers (students, etc.) with appropriately licensed access to specialized AI writing tools, while ensuring the integrity and originality of philosophical writing are maintained.

(5) Publish translation. Most NNES philosophers reported that increased English use had at least once diminished their ability to discuss philosophy in their native language, and free responses often highlighted a lack of translations of English texts into local languages. Philosophy journals may therefore consider allowing NNES to write in their native languages and use (sustainable) machine translation tools (Moorkens et al. 2024) to make articles available in multiple languages online, an approach also recently recommended for science journals (Arenas-Castro et al. 2024).

6 Limitations

This study has several strengths (e.g., large sample, global recruitment, rigorous methodology) but also limitations. First, we relied on self-reports. While respondents may not always be reliable, this is a common challenge in survey research

[15] For critical discussion on transparency in open peer review, see Bianchi and Squazzoni (2022).

(Demetriou et al. 2015). Future experimental studies that measure English writing, reading (etc.) times more directly are desirable. Second, low English proficiency NNES were underrepresented in our sample, potentially leading to oversights or underestimates of their struggles. Third, although we recruited participants globally, responses from many non-Anglophone regions (e.g., the Middle East) were limited. Fourth, we did not ask respondents about learning disabilities or other conditions potentially influencing information processing in English. Additionally, we did not factor in academic socialization (i.e., the institutional contexts in which individuals are trained), which may be a key factor in that NNES who complete their degrees at highly prestigious, English-dominant institutions may face fewer epistemic challenges due to language immersion, structured exposure to academic writing, or "prestige bias" (De Cruz 2018). Also, participation was self-selected, and individuals with strong views or experiences related to academic English may be overrepresented. Hence, while our sample includes philosophers from a variety of regions and linguistic backgrounds, it may not be representative of the global population of academic philosophers. Finally, our survey focused solely on the challenges faced by NES and NNES. Follow-up studies could take a more comprehensive approach, examining both the challenges and benefits of academic English for both groups.

7 Conclusion

As a bridge language, English undoubtedly benefits academics. But both NES and NNES need to learn how to use academic English effectively and may encounter obstacles in understanding, analyzing, or sharing of information in English. Previous studies comparing NES and NNES in this respect focused on scientists. Shifting the focus to the humanities, specifically, philosophy, we found a range of underexplored distinctive difficulties for NNES philosophers related to academic English.

Compared to NES, NNES reported significantly fewer English publications, longer times to read and prepare presentations in English, and a higher likelihood of having received English manuscript rejections, revision requests, and negative English-related teaching feedback. They were also more likely to have avoided asking questions and attending events in English, to have felt ridiculed for their English usage, and to have had difficulties understanding other NNES. Although not statistically significant across the main groups, the time NNES reported for completing an English draft tended to be shorter than that of NES, which may be due to their more limited 'feeling' for English, leading them outsource their draft development to their social environment earlier than NES. Finally, while NNES may increase their proficiency in English through more frequent English use, most NNES reported that this also reduced their native language skills to do philosophy. Given these sacrifices, effort imbalances, and their likely group-level epistemic costs, both NES and NNES may benefit from breaking the relative silence in the field regarding the struggles that NNES (and some NES) philosophers face due to the dominant use of academic English across many areas of the discipline.

Appendix

See Tables 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.
See Figs. 3 and 4.

Table 5 Demographic details, academic position, and area of specialization of the sample

Demographic and academic characteristics of the analyzed sample			
	N (% of total)		N (% of total)
Overall survey participants		**Native language(s)**	
Respondent number (after exclusions)	1615 (100.0%)	Has 1	1493 (92.4%)
Sub-surveys participants		Has 2	100 (6.2%)
English survey	1268 (78.5%)	Has 3	19 (1.2%)
Japanese survey	57 (3.5%)	Has 4	2 (0.1%)
Chinese survey	50 (3.1%)	Has 5	1 (0.1%)
French survey	108 (6.7%)	**EPL 7 levels**[1]	
Spanish survey	78 (4.8%)	A1 Beginner	5 (0.3%)
Turkish survey	42 (2.6%)	A2 Elementary	13 (0.8%)
Italian survey	12 (0.7%)	B1 Intermediate	53 (3.3%)
English speaker type		B2 Upper Intermediate	230 (14.2%)
Native	298 (18.5%)	C1 Advanced	478 (29.6%)
Non-native	1317 (81.5%)	C2 Proficient	536 (33.2%)
		Native English[2]	298 (18.5%)
		Missing	2 (0.1%)
Characteristics by NES and NNES			
	N (% of NES)	N (% of NNES)	N (% of total)
Gender			
Female	110 (36.9%)	495 (37.6%)	605 (37.5%)
Male	163 (54.7%)	754 (57.3%)	917 (56.9%)
Non-binary	16 (5.4%)	35 (2.7%)	51 (3.2%)
Prefer not to say	9 (3.0%)	31 (2.4%)	40 (2.5%)
Missing			2 (0.1%)
Age			
18–24	23 (7.7%)	154 (11.7%)	177 (11.0%)
25–34	82 (27.5%)	480 (36.5%)	562 (34.8%)
35–44	98 (32.9%)	358 (27.2%)	456 (28.3%)
45–54	42 (14.1%)	197 (15.0%)	239 (14.8%)
55–65	21 (7.0%)	90 (6.8%)	111 (6.9%)
65 +	32 (10.7%)	36 (2.7%)	68 (4.2%)
Missing			2 (0.1%)

Table 5 (continued)

Demographic and academic characteristics of the analyzed sample			
	N (% of total)		N (% of total)
Academic position			
Undergraduate	9 (3.0%)	96 (7.3%)	105 (6.5%)
Graduate (MA, MSc)	19 (6.4%)	152 (11.6%)	171 (10.6%)
PhD student (funded)	54 (18.1%)	264 (20.1%)	318 (19.7%)
PhD student (not funded)	7 (2.3%)	58 (4.4%)	65 (4.0%)
Postdoctoral researcher (w/o paid position)	8 (2.7%)	31 (2.4%)	39 (2.4%)
Postdoctoral researcher (fixed term)	19 (6.4%)	136 (10.3%)	155 (9.6%)
Postdoctoral researcher (permanent)	0 (0.0%)	13 (1.0%)	13 (0.8%)
Lecturer or assistant professor (fixed term)	16 (5.4%)	75 (5.7%)	91 (5.6%)
Lecturer or assistant professor (permanent)	48 (16.1%)	116 (8.8%)	164 (10.2%)
Associate professor (fixed term)	6 (2.0%)	16 (1.2%)	22 (1.4%)
Associate professor (permanent)	36 (12.1%)	137 (10.4%)	173 (10.7%)
Full professor (fixed term)	1 (0.3%)	16 (1.2%)	17 (1.1%)
Full professor (permanent)	43 (14.4%)	148 (11.3%)	191 (11.8%)
Other (e.g., retired, between jobs, etc.)	32 (10.7%)	57 (4.3%)	89 (5.5%)
Missing			2 (0.1%)

[1]While respondents had 7 levels of English proficiency to choose from, since A1–B1 respondents were only below 5% of the sample, we combined them into one category for our analyses, resulting in a 4 level EPL variable (i.e., A1–B1, B2, C1–C2, and native English speaker)

[2]Any respondent indicating English as their native language on the native language question was automatically coded as EPL 4. However, we also isolated NES indicating an EPL lower than 'native English speaker'. These were 45 NES respondents (C2 = 34, C1 = 10, B2 = 1). One NES did not answer the EPL question

Table 6 Overview of the philosophical background of respondents

Philosophical background of the sample			
	% (N) of NES	% (N) of NNES	N (% of total)
Philosophical tradition			
Analytic	221 (74.4%)	912 (69.6%)	1133 (70.5%)
Continental	41 (13.8%)	235 (17.9%)	276 (17.2%)
Other	35 (11.8%)	163 (12.4%)	198 (12.3%)
Missing			8 (0.5%)
Area of specialization			
Aesthetics	11 (3.7%)	35 (2.7%)	46 (2.9%)
African Philosophy	0 (0%)	4 (0.3%)	4 (0.2%)
Applied Ethics	12 (4%)	81 (6.2%)	93 (5.8%)
Asian Philosophy	4 (1.3 %)	31 (2.4%)	35 (2.2%)
Decision Theory	2 (0.7%)	5 (0.4%)	7 (0.4%)
Epistemology	25 (8.4%)	122 (9.3%)	147 (9.1%)
Experimental philosophy	1 (0.3%)	6 (0.5%)	7 (0.4%)
Feminist Philosophy	12 (4%)	34 (2.6%)	46 (2.9%)
General Philosophy of Science	10 (3.4%)	69 (5.3%)	79 (4.9%)
History of Philosophy	37 (12.4%)	131 (10%)	168 (10.4%)
Logic and Philosophy of Logic	10 (3.4%)	53 (4%)	63 (3.9%)
Meta-Ethics	10 (3.4%)	37 (2.8%)	47 (2.9%)
Metaphilosophy	5 (1.7%)	8 (0.6%)	13 (0.8%)
Metaphysics	20 (6.7%)	52 (4%)	72 (4.5%)
Normative Ethics	13 (4.4%)	56 (4.3%)	69 (4.3%)
Phenomenology	11 (3.7%)	43 (3.3%)	54 (3. 4%)
Philosophy of Action	5 (1.7%)	18 (1.4%)	23 (1.4%)
Philosophy of Biology	5 (1.7%)	25 (1.9%)	30 (1.9%)
Philosophy of Cognitive Science	7 (2.3%)	43 (3.3%)	50 (3.1%)
Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality	6 (2%)	22 (1.7%)	28 (1.7%)
Philosophy of Language	3 (1%)	9 (0.7%)	12 (0.7%)
Philosophy of Law	10 (3.4%)	74 (5.6%)	84 (5.2%)
Philosophy of Mathematics	1 (0.3%)	12 (0.9%)	13 (0.8%)
Philosophy of Medicine	4 (1.3%)	9 (0.7%)	13 (0.8%)
Philosophy of Mind	3 (1%)	19 (1.4%)	22 (1.4%)
Philosophy of Physical Science	13 (4.4%)	66 (5%)	79 (4.9%)
Philosophy of Religion	4 (1.3%)	25 (1.9%)	29 (1.8%)
Philosophy of Social Science	3 (1%)	20 (1.5%)	23 (1.4%)
Philosophy of Technology	5 (1.7%)	21 (1.6%)	26 (1.6%)
Philosophy of the Americas	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.2%)	3 (0.2%)
Social and Political Philosophy	38 (12.8%)	138 (10.5%)	176 (10.9%)
Other	7 (2.3%)	42 (3.2%)	49 (3%)
Missing			5 (0.3%)

Table 7 Overview of the distribution of native languages and countries of residence in the sample. Due to sparse distribution of many countries, for the analyses, ten country groups were formed, see Online Supplementary Material for details

Native languages and location of respondents

Native language (respondent N)				**Country (N (% of total))**			
Afrikaans	4	Norwegian	6	Argentina	6 (0.4%)	Luxembourg	2 (0.1%)
Albanian	1	Nyanja	1	Australia	22 (1.4%)	Malaysia	1 (0.1%)
Arabic	4	Persian	12	Austria	21 (1.3%)	Malta	1 (0.1%)
Armenian	2	Polish	22	Bangladesh	1 (0.1%)	Mexico	6 (0.4%)
Bengali	3	Portuguese	46	Belgium	27 (1.7%)	Morocco	1 (0.1%)
Bulgarian	3	Punjabi	1	Brazil	24 (1.5%)	Namibia	2 (0.1%)
Catalan	8	Romanian	17	Bulgaria	2 (0.1%)	Netherlands	111 (6.9%)
Chinese	153	Russian	17	Cambodia	1 (0.1%)	New Zealand	3 (0.2%)
Croatian	5	Serbian	9	Canada	56 (3.5%)	Nigeria	1 (0.1%)
Czech	6	Shona	1	Chile	3 (0.2%)	Norway	13 (0.8%)
Danish	51	Sindhi	2	China	97 (6.0%)	Pakistan	3 (0.2%)
Dutch	75	Slovak	5	Colombia	27 (1.7%)	Philippines	1 (0.1%)
English	298	Slovenian	2	Croatia	5 (0.3%)	Poland	17 (1.1%)
Estonian	21	Spanish	121	Cyprus	2 (0.1%)	Portugal	11 (0.7%)
Filipino	2	Swedish	17	Czech Republic	9 (0.6%)	Romania	6 (0.4%)
Finnish	7	Tamil	1	Denmark	60 (3.7%)	Serbia	2 (0.1%)
French	88	Thai	1	Ecuador	1 (0.1%)	Singapore	6 (0.4%)
Galician	2	Tibetan	1	Estonia	26 (1.6%)	Slovakia	4 (0.2%)
Georgian	11	Turkish	76	Finland	5 (0.3%)	Slovenia	2 (0.1%)
German	161	Twi	1	France	61 (3.8%)	South Africa	20 (1.2%)
Greek	15	Ukrainian	4	Georgia	10 (0.6%)	South Korea	4 (0.2%)
Hebrew	16	Urdu	2	Germany	139 (8.6%)	Spain	57 (3.5%)
Hindi	4	Welsh	1	Greece	5 (0.3%)	Sweden	19 (1.2%)
Hungarian	4	Zulu	3	Hungary	3 (0.2%)	Switzerland	25 (1.5%)
Icelandic	1			Iceland	1 (0.1%)	Tanzania	1 (0.1%)
Igbo	2			India	12 (0.7%)	Thailand	1 (0.1%)
Indonesian	2			Iran	3 (0.2%)	Tibet	1 (0.1%)
IsiXhosa	1			Ireland	3 (0.2%)	Turkey	60 (3.7%)
Italian	116			Israel	11 (0.7%)	Uganda	1 (0.1%)
Japanese	163			Italy	59 (3.7%)	UK	119 (7.4%)
Korean	10			Japan	158 (9.8%)	Ukraine	2 (0.1%)
Latvian	2			Kuwait	1 (0.1%)	USA	231 (14.3%)
Lithuanian	3			Latvia	2 (0.1%)	Zimbabwe	1 (0.1%)
Luganda	1			Lebanon	1 (0.1%)	Missing	15 (0.9%)
Malayalam	1			Lithuania	1 (0.1%)		

Table 8 Overview of the EDS of the native languages in our sample. Score indicates relatedness of a language to English. Higher scores mean greater distance (Beaufils & Tomin 2021)

English distance score (EDS) by native language							
Language	EDS	Language	EDS	Language	EDS	Language	EDS
Afrikaans	22.5	Finnish	85.6	Korean	89.2	Sindhi	77.9
Albanian	72.85	Flemish	27.3	Kurdish	79.3	Slovak	56.3
Arabic	85.5	French	46.9	Latvian	82.3	Slovenian	55.3
Armenian	86.76	Frisian	30.7	Lithuanian	70	Sotho	91.7
Basque	97.2	Irish	78.5	Luganda	86.7	Spanish	59.3
Belarussian	55.6	Galician	56.1	Malayalam	94.4	Swedish	31
Bemba	97.6	Georgian	88.7	Maltese	83.9	Taiwanese	91.13
Bengali	70.6	German	31.3	Marwari	74	Tamil	94.4
Bulgarian	61.8	Greek	72.1	Mongolian	89.9	Thai	89.6
Catalan	56	Greenlandic	92.25	Burmese	90.6	Tibetan	90
Cebuano	83.8	Haitian Creole	64.1	Norwegian	30.95	Turkish	96.3
Chinese	91.13	Hebrew	91.4	Persian (Farsi)	77.3	Twi	87.8
Crimean	96.2	Hindi	68.9	Polish	59	Ukrainian	55.2
Croatian	52.5	Hungarian	88.4	Portuguese	56.5	Urdu	65.5
Czech	61.8	Icelandic	42.8	Punjabi	71.6	Valencian	56
Danish	24.6	Igbo	92.5	Romanian	57.4	Venetian	55.6
Dutch	21.8	Indonesian	86.7	Russian	52.5	Vietnamese	93.3
English	0	IsiXhosa	92.1	Scots	15.7	Welsh	67.7
Estonian	85.6	Italian	52.5	Serbian	52.5	Zulu	87.4
Filipino	89.4	Japanese	87.2	Shona	89.5		

Table 9 Overview of the topic and their distribution in the free responses. (More than one topic classification per response were common.)

Free responses (after exclusions $N = 578$) by topic		
Topic	*N*	*%*
Disadvantages for NNES	420	72.7
Bias and linguistic discrimination	159	27.5
Networking	80	13.8
Lack of everyday/informal English proficiency	34	5.9
Psychological and cognitive costs	80	13.8
Mitigation	55	9.5
Not much of a problem	36	6.2
Linguistic trade-off	25	4.3
Loss to philosophy	38	6.6
Social class	24	4.2
Disadvantages for NES	37	6.4
NES acknowledgment of privilege	20	3.5
Intersectionality	47	8.1
Citation and publication discounting	25	4.3
Difficulty understanding NNES	17	2.9
Learning difficulty or mental health condition	10	1.7
Financial concerns	23	4.0
Benefits of English for NNES	12	2.1
Survey bias	5	0.9
Other	117	20.2

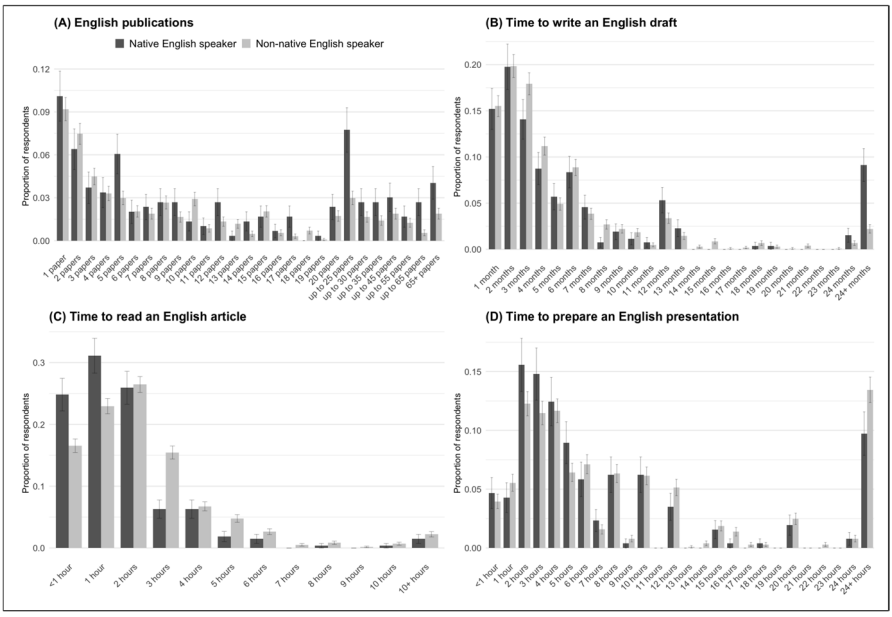

Fig. 3 Proportions of NES and NNES by English use domain (not adjusted for other variables). Error bars indicate standard error. Proportions of 0 publication (NES = 22.6% ($n = 67$), NNES = 40.5% ($n = 515$)) are omitted to keep the figure at scale

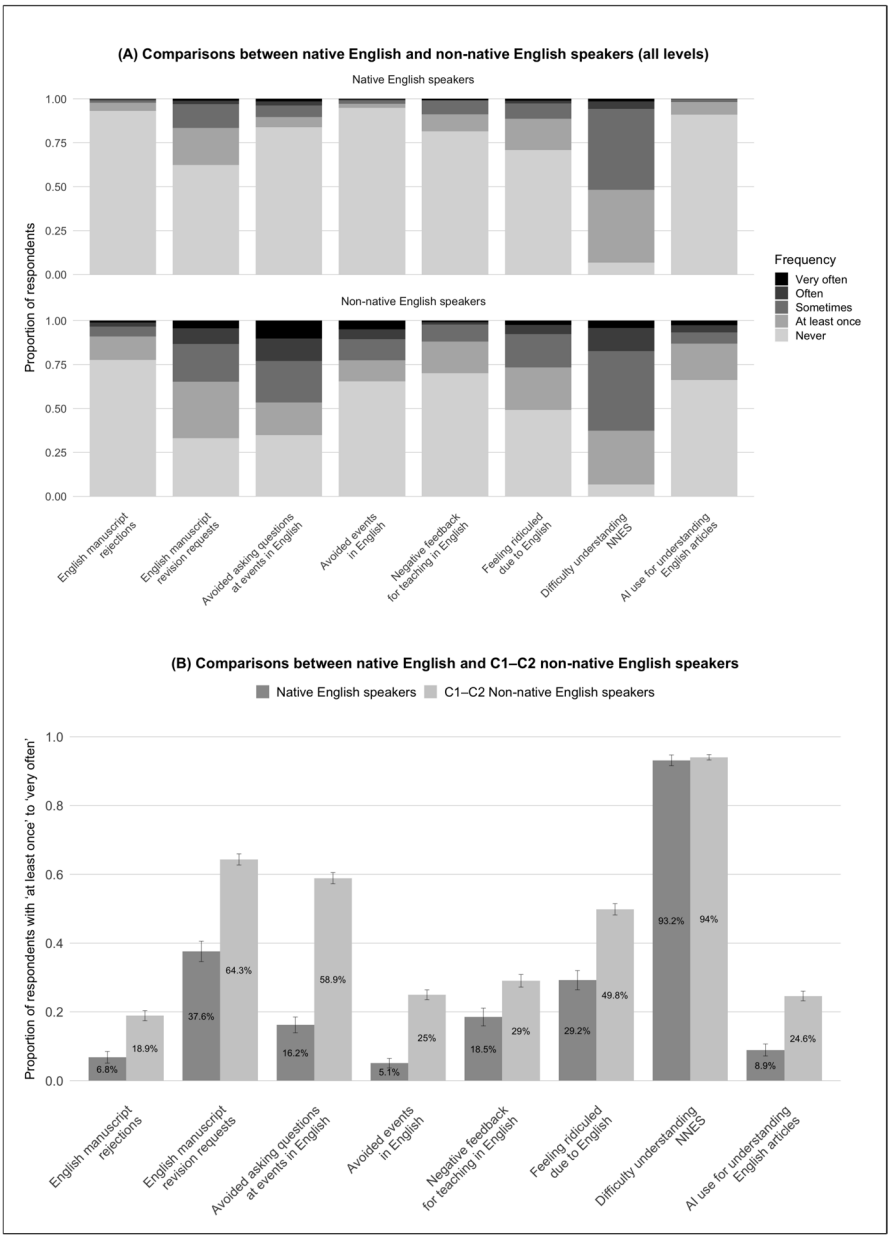

Fig. 4 Raw proportions of responses by NES and NNES. Bar chart A shows reported frequency of experiencing a particular outcome in an English use domain. Bar chart B shows the proportions of NES and of the NNES with the highest English proficiency selecting responses ranging from 'at least once' to 'very often'

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Author contribution UP is the main author. He conceived, planned, designed, conducted, and managed the study. He did all data analyses, data visualization, research for and writing of the first draft, developing the main interpretations and arguments. He also convened the rest of the research team for this project and recruited survey participants from the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Iran, Israel, and Australasia. JSSC assisted in the survey design, reviewed the Spanish DeepL translation of the survey and the Spanish free responses, recruited participants in Colombia, Argentina, Canada, and the US, and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data, result interpretation, and revisions of the first draft. SL assisted in the survey design, reviewed the Chinese DeepL translation of the survey and the Chinese free responses, recruited participants primarily in China, and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data and revisions of the first draft. CG assisted in the survey design, reviewed the French DeepL translation of the survey and the French free responses, recruited participants in France, Belgium, Germany, and Canada, and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data and revisions of the first draft. AD assisted in the survey design, organized recruitment of participants from Central and Eastern Europe, collected the EDS, and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data, result interpretation, and revisions of the first draft. AK recruited survey participants in the UK, Canada, and the US, and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data and revisions of the first draft. FR assisted in the survey design, reviewed the Italian DeepL translation of the survey and the Italian free responses, recruited participants in Italy, and assisted with the categorization of the qualitative data and revisions of the first draft. NN assisted in the survey design, recruited survey participants in Denmark, and helped with result interpretation and revisions of the first draft. YCC assisted in the survey design, reviewed the Turkish DeepL translation and the Turkish free responses, recruited survey participants in the US, Canada, Turkey, and internationally (including through social media, Facebook and Instagram), and helped with the categorization of the qualitative data and revisions of the first draft. KI recruited participants in Japan, reviewed the Japanese free responses, and helped with the qualitative data categorization, result interpretation, and revisions of the first draft.

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