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Chapter 5

Metalinguaging ELF: The transformational power of students' critical dialogic talk

5.1 Introduction: Towards ELF-informed classrooms

As global interconnectivity keeps growing and influencing the lives of a large portion of the world's population, we continue to see how English resources mediate complex processes of transcultural and translingual interaction. English is often a gatekeeper to a range of opportunities, and a source of challenges for millions of people globally. For a few decades now, it has become clear that 'this thing' we call English (Seidlhofer 2011) is being transformed by multilingual speakers who use it as a lingua franca in relatively quicker and highly variable ways (Jenkins 2015; Jenkins, Baker, and Dewey 2018). Thus, in this chapter, ELF is understood as a social, emergent, variable, translingual and power-mediated communicative practice where English resources are used among speakers with different linguistic repertoires. With this definition I seek to align with theorisations of ELF communication as translingual practice (e.g., Jenkins, 2015), but also with decolonial proposals that foreground even more the role of power and inequalities in interaction at a range of scales (e.g., Jordão 2023 or Siqueira and Duboc, 2020 on *ELF feito no Brasil*).

While our ways of defining and understanding ELF communication have evolved throughout the years (see Chapter 1, this volume), ELF research has also shaken other long-standing concepts and assumptions in Applied Linguistics. The empirical data and theory accrued since the mid-90s has questioned the nature and explanatory currency of constructs such as 'variety', 'variation', 'learner error', 'proficiency' and the 'native' and 'non-native' speaker (NS and NNS) divide (e.g., Baird, Baker, and Kitazawa 2014). Crucially it has also highlighted the need to rethink English language education. The suitability of monolithic and native-speaker oriented representations of English that are still hegemonic in 'mainstream ELT' globally has been heavily called into question. These models are no longer thought to adequately prepare students for the complex, diverse and dynamic ways in which English is actually used beyond the classroom. There is also growing consensus in the field about the need to make ELT a more inclusive, socially-just, multilingualism-friendly and student-responsive educational experience, and ELF research

contributes to such aims by exploring alternatives to decentralise native-speakerist learning objectives and evaluation models (e.g., Hall, Gruber, and Qian 2022; Rose and Galloway 2019; Fang and Ren 2018). This aim becomes particularly urgent when we understand that current approaches to language may be limiting the expressive and identitarian possibilities of teachers and students (Morán Panero 2019), and therefore potentially incurring in forms of linguistic discrimination.

As part of this endeavour, numerous scholars have pointed out the need to go beyond teaching ‘the language’, or defined varieties of it, to also begin to teach ‘about’ it (e.g., Jenkins 2006). This suggestion entails moving beyond English as a system of features and linguistic rules, towards actively engaging English users in learning about the complex processes of variability, identification, symbolic meaning-association, and power and agency negotiation that are embedded in ELF communication. By promoting the development of reflexivity over matters of diversity, inclusivity and meaning negotiation, ELF research connects with the aims of extant critical educational work, such as Freirean dialogic approaches to pedagogy (Freire 1970; Cogo and Siqueira, this volume) or Critical Language Awareness research (e.g., Fairclough 1992). ELF researchers extend these debates to address the linguistic variation, identity, power and agency of multilingual ‘non-native’ users of English that have historically been denied re-appropriation potential (e.g., Jordão 2023), and whose diverse uses have been automatically and a-contextually delegitimised when departing from NS models.

Although ELF scholarship has been criticised for highlighting the need for educational change without specifying how to do so for quite some time (e.g., Dewey 2012; Siqueira 2020), the relative ‘slow’ start to make specific pedagogical proposals is not surprising, if we consider how fast conceptualisations and theorisations of the nature of ELF have evolved in the past twenty-five years (e.g., see Jenkins 2015 and the introduction of this volume for a review of ELF1, ELF2 and ELF3). Making educational proposals needed to be taken with caution because, as Sifakis reminds us, ELF is ‘*non-teacheable*’ due to its fluid nature (2022: 200). At the same time, its variability should not preclude efforts to reimagine ELT so that we can bring curricular representations of ‘English’ closer to students’ semiotic repertoires and real-world diverse communication.

In the past decade, a number of proposals have come forward under different labels including, among other, *ELF-aware pedagogy* (e.g., Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015), *ELF-informed postnormative approaches* (Dewey and Pineda 2020), *Global Englishes Language Teaching* or GELT (Galloway 2013), *English as a Multilingua Franca* or *EMF awareness* (Ishikawa 2020) and *Transcultural ELT* (Baker and Ishikawa 2021). One of the many common threads in these proposals is the need to address the role of attitudes, ideologies, and (critical) language awareness in ELT. As Cogo (2012: 104) suggests, we need to rethink language teaching “as a much

wider process involving a whole range of communication skills, knowledge, and attitudes”, and this inevitably entails increasing awareness and sensitivity toward social and political aspects in ELT. I also work with the assumption that ELF theorisations of language and lingua franca communication are better placed to contribute to decolonial agendas for education (e.g., Canagarajah 2023; Jordão 2019). They may do so, for instance, by challenging long-established notions of ‘proficiency’ based on the imitation of supposedly ‘superior’ Anglophone English models (i.e., based on narrow descriptions of monolingual native English speakers or NESs), and by working to reduce discrimination against multilingual speakers when their variable uses do not ‘pass’ as native-like.

Much attention has been directed towards developing educators’ ELF awareness in teacher-training programmes (Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015; Cogo and Siqueira 2017; Gimenez, El Kadri, and Calvo 2018; González Moncada, this volume). While engaging teachers is of course a crucial first step, critical approaches to ELT also require a recognition of the active role that students play in constructing, reproducing or challenging ontologies of language in a classroom. It is necessary for both “teachers and students to be always critically reflective and engage in constant questioning of even critical appraisals of existing assumptions” (Kubota 2012: 67). In addition to the intensive production of ELF attitudinal studies that seek to understand and record students’ perceptions of English diversity (e.g., Boonsuk and Ambele, 2020; Jenkins, 2007) researchers have also begun to investigate the effects of directly introducing ELF scholarship debates to English students (e.g., Wang 2015 and section 5.2 below). The chapter contributes to this incipient line of inquiry by exploring the potential transformational power of critical metalinguistic discussion among university students in under-represented Spanish-speaking contexts of Latin America. It reports on a focus group study that sought to promote critical reflexivity around the complex and variable uses of English that emerge from ELF communication, and theorisations of NNS’s diverse uses as *variation* rather than as *errors*.

Drawing from data collected with undergraduates in Chile and Mexico, I examine the extent to which critical talk about language may lead to transformational effects in students’ conceptualisations of (English) language, and what kind of ontologies are produced by participants through dialogic activities. To my knowledge, the study is among the first to undertake an ELF-informed pedagogical intervention in Latin America, with university students who are *not* part of teacher education or (English) linguistics programmes. The examination of such geographical context is not only relevant because of the comparative absence of ELF-informed literature in the continent, but also because students in this region have historical perspectives of coloniality, imposition and variation in relation to another global language (i.e., Spanish), and these may be relevant to how they orient to dominant or alternative

theorisations of English. The study is also informed by dynamic theorisations of student ontologies that have been less dominant in extant studies in the field but that, as I explain next, can better help us understand the variability or ‘ambivalence’ that has for long been an unresolved puzzle in ELF attitudinal research (Seidlhofer 2019). The methodology and analysis also seek to respond to calls for more rigorous research on GE and ELF-aware pedagogical interventions (e.g., Rose, McKinley, and Galloway 2021). The findings reveal the great multiplicity, variability and complexity that mediates participants’ ontological co-construction and ‘transformation’, and it identifies relational, identitarian, political and socialisation-related factors that helped shape students’ conceptual and evaluative practices when ‘critically meta-languaging ELF’.

5.2 Addressing students’ ontologies of English: We need to talk . . .

Despite the growth of ELF publications with an educational focus in recent years, there has not always been agreement on whether ELT should actually respond to ELF studies. Some scholars have argued that students prefer native-speaker models for the classroom and we should therefore meet ‘their desires’, while others have resorted to long-standing claims on the need for (native) standard models to ‘empower’ students in a world hostile to non-standard and non-native-like diversity (e.g., Sowden 2012). A review of attitudinal ELF research shows, nonetheless, that what students ‘want’ and ‘think’ of their English use is more complicated than that and may often seem contradictory (Morán Panero 2019). Although speakers from Expanding Circle settings appear to struggle under hegemonic native-speakerist views of (English) language in various ways, the provision of educational spaces for students to articulate and examine co-existing ontologies of language and their own evaluative stances, still seems to be largely restricted to undergraduate and postgraduate language-related university programmes. There is not enough evidence of students’ criticality, interpretative repertoires or (ELF) ‘lived curriculums’ being actively incorporated into the learning fabric of ELT classrooms at Primary or Secondary education levels, or beyond linguistics or English-major programmes in Higher Education (Ishikawa 2020; Norton and Toohey 2004; Pennycook 2007).

Although ELF-informed educational interventions with students are still fairly small in number (Rose et al. 2021), investigations seeking to introduce ‘ELF-aware pedagogy’ have begun to flourish in the last decade. Some researchers have embedded ELF research in the classroom by providing EFL students with experiences of

ELF interactions (e.g., Kohn and Hoffstaedter 2017 through telecollaboration), or by exposing students to a range of English ‘varieties’ or uses (e.g., Galloway and Rose 2014 through listening journals). Many of these studies report an increase in the awareness of linguistic diversity, although this does not always seem to translate into students applying alternative views of language and correctness to their own self-judgement. In some cases, the interventions have even helped to reinforce old stereotypes (Galloway and Rose 2014). As a growing number of scholars argue, ‘exposure to diversity’ alone is not enough in the classroom, unless accompanied by *explicit* and *guided* critical reflexivity (e.g., Humphreys 2021 on intercultural awareness development and González, this volume, on how using ‘non-native speaker uses’ as a model in class may be rejected by students).

This understanding motivated my interest in the potential transformational power of ELF-informed metalinguistic dialogic activities, and I decided to explore it with students in Spanish-speaking Expanding Circle contexts who study English as a ‘foreign’ language (EFL) for ELF communication purposes. Metalanguage can be defined as “language in the context of linguistic representations and evaluations” (Jaworski, Coupland, and Galasinski 2004: 4). It includes the implicit and explicit ways in which people define what language is, how it must be used, how language and communication function, or what certain ways of speaking connote or imply. ‘Talk about language’ may sound rather innocent but discussions about language “are always, on inspection, about much more than just language” (Cameron 2004: 319). In fact, metalinguistic commentary is better conceptualised as a form of social practice through which we can, assign social meanings or indexical values to specific ways of speaking and through which we may do or perform different kinds of identity or relational work (Jaworski, Coupland, and Galasinski 2004; see also Rymes, 2020 on ‘citizen sociolinguistics’). As any other social practice, it can also work at an ideological level, with particular linguistic representations being naturalised, modified or challenged (see Pérez Andrade, this volume, on hegemonic ideologies in ELT). Through talk about language, we draw boundaries around linguistic practices, name ways of speaking, define or challenge what resources ‘belong’ to what named languages and so forth. In short, through talk about language we also *make* language. I therefore use the term ‘*metalanguaging*’ to highlight the dynamic and constitutive properties of metalinguistic discourse.

Perhaps more importantly for the purpose of this chapter, ‘talk about language’ is also considered to be an effective educational tool to promote Critical Language Awareness (CLA). In ways that closely resemble Freire’s (1970) criticisms of ‘banking education’, CLA scholars have condemned educational approaches to language that treat its use and learning as sanitised ‘objective’ phenomena (e.g., Fairclough 1992). Instead, they argue, students need to understand the role of language in constructing or preserving the hegemony of specific groups of speakers (e.g., establishing so-

ciolinguistic ‘orders’ or ‘appropriateness’ where there is sociolinguistic complexity and messiness) and how language practices maintain and reproduce patterns of domination and subordination in society (gender, class, race, EFL, etc.). This premise is normally based on an understanding that ‘knowledge’, in this case knowledge about language, is a form of discourse (opt. cit.) which cannot be thought of as neutral, and which therefore needs of constant action-oriented critical reflexivity to advance (Pennycook 2012). Hence, by exercising dialogic revision of taken-for-granted assumptions and new information, students are likely to learn more about their own and other people’s ideas, and these new understandings are expected to inform and perhaps even transform their conceptual, discursive, linguistic and/or evaluative practices too (see Cogo and Siqueria, and Gimenez, this volume on the related notions of *‘conscientização’*).

Although the number of researchers that have explored the potential of such explicit reflexivity is growing, most have done so with students taking their own Global Englishes, ELF or EIL-informed courses in university programmes, or by designing additional workshops and activities with students in their own institutions (e.g., Rose and Galloway 2017 in Japan; Fang and Ren 2018 in China). Once more, the results of these studies appear to be mixed, with some evidence of reducing students’ preferences for native speaker (NS) norms and reporting more confidence in their own use (Galloway 2013), whereas in other cases students still constructed deficit discourses around their own English even if their awareness of diversity had increased. For instance, Rose and Galloway (2017) report the results of a single activity with 108 Japanese students who were taking a GE course (different cohorts over the course of four semesters). Students were introduced to academic and lay discussions of the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) in Singapore through curated materials in preparation for a debate on the subject. The data analysed consisted of written reflexive pieces where students discussed their beliefs and position following the debate on the acceptability of Singlish. The analysis revealed that “76.5% were against the SGEM, with only 9.5% for it and a further 14% undecided. This seemed to refute previous research on ELT in Japan, which noted a strong attachment to standard English” (Rose and Galloway 2017: 298). Although the activity showed that many students challenged the suitability of standard language ideology for this Outer Circle context, the majority seemed to tie acceptability of variation to English being an intra-communal language for these users, and only two Japanese students were prompted to question their own English use or models.

Similarly, Fang and Ren (2018) reported on interview data and reflexive reports from 50 students of a GE course, identifying growth in confidence, and tolerance towards intelligible non-standard use. Ishikawa (2020) also analysed post-semester questionnaire responses from 106 English major students at two universities in Tokyo, after completing a module where the researcher provided published exam-

ples of English as a Multilingua Franca interactions to raise EMF-awareness. The findings suggested that students learned about the value of translanguaging – including multimodal accommodation, the need to approach EMF interactions without pre-established judgements about interlocutors, and some gained confidence to engage in EMF interactions. A few respondents indicated that English was seen as a language for identity expression for Expanding Circle users.

While extant studies help us imagine how ELT may be practiced otherwise to narrow the gap between the fluidity of English and how it is represented in the classroom, there are still various shortcomings. For instance, Rose et al. (2021: 176) conclude from their systematic literature review that, in most studies, it is difficult to attribute change in attitudes or ideas to the intervention itself because data collection takes place *after* the awareness-raising activities have been delivered. However, some speakers can operate with ‘ELF-friendly’ views of variation and English use without having learned about ELF research before (e.g., Morán Panero 2019). Another important limitation is that many of these studies are carried out by teacher researchers who are directly working with their own students and, as Rose et al. (2021: 173) indicate, “students may have told the teacher researchers what they wanted to hear” because of the power dynamics entailed in teacher-student relations. There is therefore a lack of ELF-informed intervention research with student populations of non-language related disciplines, and where the participants were not the researchers’ own students. Moreover, Rose et al (2021) highlight that no Latin American studies were identified in their systematic review, although their methodology did not include book (chapter) publications nor, presumably, publications in Spanish or other Latin American languages (see González and Ronzón-Montiel, this volume, on work undertaken with Mexican university EFL courses).

The study here presented helps address some of the above identified gaps. I worked with university students from institutions different to mine, and who studied degrees other than English or language-based majors. That is, I researched students who would have not otherwise come across ELF scholarship as part of their journey through Higher Education. This presented the added benefit of me not having direct assessment influence over the students. While our ‘one-off’ dialogic focus group activities on ELF did not officially constitute a classroom, the pedagogical suitability of focus groups has been noted in methodology literature before (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011). In addition, rather than collecting views after an intervention, I examine the *processes* of inter-subjective engagement with ELF theory that students undergo during the awareness-raising task. In this sense, my approach aligns more with that of Wang (2015, 2020), who used focus groups with different groups of Chinese speakers to explore the attitudinal changes and reactions towards ELF theory of users of English as lingua franca from China. Wang (2015), for instance, presents the attitudinal development of one participant in particular,

as she critically discusses information gathered from various ELF-informed publications. The participant, who Wang positions as lacking ELF awareness to begin with, is then seen beginning to question status quo beliefs around the need for homogeneous linguistic norms to communicate in ELF interactions, as well as the authority of NSs in everyday ELF communication. Although standard language ideology and native-speakerism seem to be challenged through the intervention, they are also partly reinforced in discussions of education, as the idea that native-speaker norms should be ‘the’ model for ELT continues to be reproduced in Wang’s data.

Much of the ELF and GE scholarship reviewed above has often sought to establish whether participants have ‘replaced’ problematic views of English by an ELF- or GE-friendly orientation. I, however, see transformation as a matter of ‘expanding’ the sets of interpretative repertoires of these actors through chronic questioning, de-construction of already-available conceptualisations and explicit learning through critical reflexivity. This is motivated by previous evidence suggesting a lack of linearity and stability in relation to people’s conceptualisations and evaluations of (English) language use (Morán Panero 2019), and additional warnings against assumptions of linearity in knowledge and attitude change in relation to intercultural awareness (e.g., Humphreys and Baker 2021). I therefore work with dynamic and sociocultural views of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs (Li 2020), and see language conceptualisations and evaluative responses or ‘positions’ as dynamic sets of co-existing *interpretative repertoires* (e.g., Wetherell 1998) that may contradict each other, and which can be reproduced variably by speakers according to communicative, material and indexical demands of different contexts. It is this set of Interpretive Repertoires (IRs) that is always under construction and susceptible to transformation, and this complicates even further the task of making assertions about what our participants’ ontologies and evaluative tendencies may be outside of our research and data sets. Although sociocultural approaches to Teacher Cognition have begun to focus on the situated construction of beliefs and to refine attributions to ‘contextual factors’ in Teacher Cognition models (e.g., Li 2020), more research looking into *students’* conceptual and evaluative practices is needed. In this chapter, I therefore seek to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What conceptualisations of ELF communication and theory are produced by participants through engagement with academic texts and each other?
- 2) What evidence emerges of variation in individual positions through critical metalanguaging and how far can it be attributed to a process of transformation in participants’ interpretative repertoires?
- 3) What factors mediate the ontological and evaluative construction of students in the critical metalanguaging task?

5.3 ‘Critically metalanguaging’ ELF in Chile and Mexico: The study

The data presented here comes from a broader interview and focus group (FG) study that sought to elicit the co-construction of ontologies of English with university students from Chile, Mexico and Spain (see Morán Panero, 2019). In particular I present the analysis of the four FGs carried out in university settings in Cancún, Mexico City, Santiago de Chile and Viña. A total of 22 undergraduate full-time students participated in Latin America, with each FG ranging between 4 to 7 participants.¹ None of the students were specialising in any language or linguistics-related degree and they are therefore ‘lay’ students working in different disciplines (e.g., civil or chemical engineering, law, architecture, business, design, psychology, mathematics, economics, gastronomy). I welcomed students who reported to speak Spanish as a ‘mother tongue’, as well as those also speaking local minoritized languages (e.g., Nahuatl in Mexico). Half of the students had gone on a semester or year study abroad programme as part of their studies whereas the other half enjoyed a domestic-focused university life. While the interviews were non-interventionist, the focus groups study directly introduced the students to ELF scholarship and prompted their critical reflections.

Focus groups are deemed particularly useful for eliciting conceptual, emotional and evaluative data around a topic, object or process that may be either well-known or newly introduced to the participants. As Barbour (2008: 134) indicates, they “allow the researcher to invite participants to ‘problematize’ taken for granted assumptions”, and they can be used to “encourage people to collectively address topics which as individuals, they may have previously devoted little attention to” (ibid). The method is often seen as middle ground between observation and interviews and is particularly suitable for the analysis of inter-subjective processes of knowledge co-construction that we also see in classrooms (Kambarelis and Dimitriadis 2011: 20).

To introduce ELF scholarship and elicit discussion, I designed a short two-page academic text that introduced ELF as a communicative phenomenon and insights emerging from ELF theory (e.g., aspects of the spread of English and key debates on the nature, use and evaluation of English use in ELF communication). To ensure appropriate balance between length, focus and lay reader accessibility, I designed a ‘collage’ using different introductory sources, and edited the quotes to facilitate understanding and/or text coherence. I then translated it into Spanish

¹ Participants were anonymised by replacing their name for a number and a letter indicating the city of data collection (e.g., S=Santiago de Chile; V=Viña de Mar; C=Cancún; DF=Mexico City).

for students to discuss in this language (see Appendix 1 for link to text). This strategy allowed me to gain some distance from the text, so that students would not feel that arguing against ELF scholarship would entail arguing against me. Students read the Spanish text in silence, highlighting anything that was new, unclear or shocking, before discussing the text as a group.

The Latin American FG data set amounted to 9.93 hours of discussion recordings. These were transcribed in their totality (see Appendix 1 for conventions), generating a total of 101,145 words, with each line and interaction being carefully analysed and coded through qualitative content analysis (Berg 2007) via NVivo 11 computer software. The qualitative content analysis entailed the generation of top-down and bottom-up codes. Since I set out to examine the potential for knowledge transformation that is attributed to metalinguistic discussion, I identified topics or themes that were highly debated, the kind of discourses constructed around them and the elements that appear to influence such construction. The coding was organised into: a) language-related conceptualisations (*e.g.*, *ELF communication*); b) content positioning (*e.g.*, *Pro NESs as true norm-makers*); c) factors influencing ontology construction and evaluation (*e.g.*, *speaking from a NS or NNS position*); and d) transformational evidence (*e.g.*, *evidence of adding/processing new information*). The first cycle of coding produced 145 codes, which were then revised for consistency, accuracy and merged where there were obvious overlaps. Due to space constraints, I focus only on a selection of key findings that help answer the indicated research questions of the chapter.

5.4 Emerging conceptualisations of English as a Lingua Franca

Conceptualisations of the nature of ELF communication were all coded under a single item called '*ELF as . . .*', including comments based on interpretations of the text and students' previous ideas and experiences. I then generated subcodes that reflected emerging patterns of understanding. It was not the case that each student produced a complete definition of ELF in one single turn, but instead they used to co-analyse, assess and co-construct different partial interpretations, usually going through different conceptual dimensions (*e.g.*, linguistic, meaning-making, symbolic) as they emerged throughout the FG. Hence, not all FG participants always weighed in every single debate or dimension, although I was often careful to elicit turns from quieter participants. The analyses led to the identification of 30 distinct ontological codes that sought to explain the nature of ELF in relation to a range of conceptual dimensions that patterned into 5 main categories, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Results from NVivo Crosstabulation Query between ‘ELF as’ subcodes set and participants/cases.

ELF as . . .	Participant conceptualisations	Number of entries coded ²
Communicative scenario	The use of English to communicate with the entire world	15
	NNS to NNS communication only	35
	ELF is L1 use of English	1
	A practice of ‘superdiverse’ Europe and Asia vs. Spanish-speaking Latin America	21
	Communication in NNES’s geographical contexts	6
	An informal style (not in formal/professional domains)	13
	Geographically ‘neutral’ communication (in contexts that are not ‘local’ to any of the interactants)	2
	A spoken practice (not writing)	3
Linguistic natures	Dynamic variation by NNES and NES alike	83
	Shared norms and features with variation	14
	Real-world English usage (versus EFL class models)	32
	Spanglish	4
	Non-legitimate NNES dynamic language use	17
	A fixed new international English	2
	NS-like or disfluent, interlanguage, (failed learner language)	13
Mostly the same as ENL	4	
Political dimension	Dynamic evolution of usage norms made locally by all speakers	32
	Emancipation from native-speakerist models of English	16
	Non-regulable chaotic dynamic practice (anything goes)	22
	Geopolitical power struggle	16
	Institutional dependent practice (i.e. in need of regulation)	16
	A set of speech community dependent varieties (WE geographical nature)	7
	Native-speaker dependent change	13
Intelligibility	Accommodation territory	60
	Harder to understand, effortful	5
	The start of unintelligibility across WE varieties	9
Identity/cultural dimensions	Indexicalised inequal practices (whether conscious or subconsciously)	13
	Intentional identity-driven variation	7
	A (global) culture making practice	3
	Identity-free neutral tool for communication	18

² NVivo calculates entries in Crosstab Queries by quantifying the number of participants’ individual turns that contribute to a particular code.

An initial significant finding is therefore the diversity of ways in which the students interpreted the same text they had just read. It became clear that, before we can conclude if a student incorporates ELF theorising to their interpretative repertoires or not, we need to consider *what* kind of ideas of ELF theory they might be operating with and, in the case of a pedagogical intervention, how far these correspond to the exact ideas that were presented to them in the materials. However, rather than treating conceptualisations of ELF that do not match predominant theorising as ‘misconceptions’, I simply reflect on how close or far students’ discourses were from the materials presented, as if in a continuum. This was motivated by the fact that judging what may count as a ‘erroneous understanding’ depends on the researcher’s own theoretical position at a point in time. Also, Decoloniality Theory warns against the dangers of uncritically reifying divisions between ‘valid’ and ‘invalid’ knowledges across hegemonic academic/non-academic lines (e.g., Mignolo 2018). Many of the conceptualisations coded are motivated by participants’ own subjective experience and, although I personally find some of their views problematic, these might be very ‘accurate’ to students.

In subsequent sections I present these conceptualisations in depth and illustrate them with FG data, although there is no space to provide data extracts for every single code presented in the table. I also begin to highlight *factors* that mediate the ontological construction of students.

5.4.1 Delimiting ELF as a communicative scenario

Participants produced a number of distinct conceptualisations of ELF as a ‘type’ of communicative scenario, as they debated the kind of functions and the contexts that can count as ELF communication. Even though the FG stimulus text clarified that ELF communication relates to the use of English to make meaning among speakers of different linguacultural backgrounds, highlighting that ELF communication does *not* exclude NESs, a majority of students –especially in Cancún’s FG (Mexico) – articulated conceptualisations of ELF as ‘*the use of English among NNEs alone*’. For some participants, ELF and EFL were therefore constructed as two co-existing but completely distinct communicative scenarios. In Cancún, for example, students talked about being in an ELF context when they used English with other NNEs, thus conceptualising ‘EFL interactions’ as NNE-NES communication. Interestingly, they kept constructing such a view of ELF even after I had highlighted the theoretical nature of the paradigm comparison in the text, or the fact that NS exclusion was explicitly rejected.

It is worth noting that some participants struggled to discuss English or ELF communication without invoking the NS as an imagined ‘judge’ on all matters related to

English language. It is therefore possible that when the FG text indicated that NESs should no longer be expected to be the ‘norms providers’ in ELF communication, some students concluded this would only be possible if ELF communication is characterised by the absence of NES entirely. This would help explain their insistence of ELF communication equating NNES-NNES talk. In contrast, fewer students constructed views of ELF that corresponded more closely to the theorisations presented in the FG text, situating ELF as *‘the use of English with anyone in the world’* without discriminating according to speaker status. In Mexico City’s FG, for instance, students debated whether English was predominantly seen as a foreign language to communicate with the USA (EFL paradigm) or as global lingua franca (ELF paradigm), aligning eventually with the latter and making no distinctions according to the presence of NESs.

Taking a slightly different direction, some participants talked about ELF as a kind of communication that is restricted to certain contexts. A few students constructed views of ELF as *‘European and Asian communication practices’* due to the close co-existence of people with very diverse linguacultural backgrounds that they perceive to exist in these continents. This discourse of ELF being ‘a European and Asian thing’ seemed to be motivated by 1) living in a region that widely speaks Spanish as a shared language, and 2) by the complex history of USA influence in the region indicating that speaking to northern NES neighbours is ‘the goal’ of English use. Moreover, some FG contributions distinguished ELF from communication that takes place when NNESS are in an Anglophone context (*‘ELF as communication in NNESS contexts’*), and 24DF and 23DF even discussed that ‘true ELF’ only takes place when none of the interacting ELF actors are in ‘their’ national territory or context. Finally, some students appeared to conceptualise ELF as *‘informal style’* or restricted to *‘spoken practice’*.

5.4.2 The linguistic natures of ELF

In this section, I present the conceptualisations that students made of ELF alongside a linguistic dimension. On one end of Table 5.1’s continuum, we have ontologies that clearly described ELF communication as *‘dynamic variation produced by NNESS and NSs alike’*. Table 5.1 indicates that this code received the highest number of entries in the group, thus seemingly making it the most popular. The extract below illustrates how participants in Viña’s FG (Chile) co-constructed the conceptualisation of NNS’s diverse use as ‘valid variation’, although acknowledging that this variation faces a societal acceptability issue.

Extract_5.1

- 50V and it's just like what happened (.) for instance with english in the united states i mean: colonisers trying to keep it the best the most similar to english from england right? and the: the others started changing and starting mixing loads of cultures and each generated their own version of english (.) so but it is a question of (.) in the end the dynamics occur for this reason too due to the type of relationships that emerges outside of the language (.) their consequences can be seen in the language
- R mhm ok so (.) if we think about this debate {we are just having}
- 52V {it is exactly what is happening} now with english po yeah it's the same (ah no xxxxx) @@@@
[. . .]
- 52V but they must understand that these are totally different countries with a different origin (.) no no (.) it's impossible that they can maintain the same language in general for everyone and that people speak the same it's illogical it's not possible it's like a utopia
[. . .]
- 52V yes and (not even xxxxx) the changes things change constantly
- 50V yes it's a problem of not adapting to change

As Table 5.1 shows, some similar sub-conceptualisations of ELF communication highlighted that linguistic variability is also characterised by some '*sharedness of linguistic norms*' or '*agreements*'. The second highest scoring conceptualisation simply defined ELF as '*real world English*'. In other words, these conceptualisations defined ELF in direct opposition to class based EFL models. Comments under this code often highlighted the inevitability of NNES diverse use and conceptualised it as a 'natural' result of learning a second language. However, in the instances coded it was not possible to ascertain whether this process was seen as sociolinguistic variation or as inevitable 'deficiencies'. By contrast, other FG contributions explicitly described the use of English as a Lingua Franca as '*illegitimate or erroneous dynamic use among NNEs*'. For instance, in Santiago de Chile's FG, student 41S drew from his experience of study abroad in Asia to corroborate the dynamic co-construction that took place in ELF interactions he experienced, but he evaluated them negatively as 'derivative' uses and 'weird hybrids'.

Another interesting example was provided by student 25DF in Mexico. While this participant had argued in favour of diverse NNES uses and she had condemned US model imitations at the start of the FG, she later begins to conceptualise departures from NS standards as a reality that should not be legitimised. Interestingly, the factor that appears to motivate her strong ontological change is the specific situated identity she is commenting from in each moment, that is, whether she is '*speaking from a NNES position*' that allows her to defend diversity, or whether she is '*taking a NS position*' (of Spanish) that makes her empathise with NESs' interests. This change

foregrounds the relevance that a perceived sense of privileges and power can have in the defence of native-speakerist ontologies and their continued hegemony:

Extract_5.2

25DF [. . .] i mean (.) i've been thinking i mean now this xxxxx because **i am against it to be honest** against a chinese person meddling with my language because it's my language i mean the chinese person will never in a lifetime have the cultural heritage that spanish brings and wouldn't even i don't know maybe i mean (.) unlike the chinese no? in general i am against but if suddenly
23DF poor chinese person

As Table 5.1 shows, the fourth highest scoring conceptualisation of ELF gathers FG contributions that unequivocally conceptualised ELF communication as '*NS standard-like or error*' (see 32C below). Some participants also argued that they did not see major differences between ELF communication and English as a Native Language models (i.e., '*ELF is mostly like ENL*'), probably also pointing to a lack of recognition of difference as variation. A minority of participants produced additional distinctive conceptualisations, with 30C equating ELF to '*Spanglish*' and 25DF hypothesising that ELF represents '*a fixed international standard*'.

I also observed how participants processed the legitimacy of frequently observed linguistic features as opposed to more abstract theoretical discussion. While participants tended to conceive the omission of 3rd person present tense -s as an 'error', the use of 'no?' as an all-purpose question-tag was accepted as a linguistic innovation across FGs. The factors that appeared to influence such decision making included: 1) how likely they thought the feature would be to lead to unintelligibility; 2) how much emphasis their ELT education had made on each feature as a blatant error; 3) whether the participants perceived this change to support folk theories of the 'economy of language' (i.e., language evolving towards simplification to promote efficiency); 4) whether the feature was thought to be caused by L1 influence, which was surprisingly deemed an example of innovation by 24DF, or an erroneous cognitive lapsus; and 5) whether participants thought that NSs produced such linguistic practices too. However, when analysing different features, participants did not apply the 'economy of language' and 'intelligibility-friendly' criteria consistently. While they drew from these to justify the validity of the all-purpose question tags, these criteria were not applied when assessing the omission of the third person present tense -s, even though it does not threaten intelligibility either and it can thus be seen an effort-saving exercise or morphological simplification. This indicates that socialisation in the correctness of a feature played a stronger role. The FG data also suggests a hierarchy of acceptance of NNES innovations depending on the linguistic level discussed. While some participants included NNES' changes

in morphosyntactic structures as valid variation, some appeared to make more explicit connections between ‘variation’ and pronunciation, vocabulary and idioms alone (see Cogo and Siqueria, this volume on the saliency of pronunciation).

5.4.3 ELF and intelligibility

Another dimension that received high-level traffic in coding entries is that of ELF communication alongside matters of intelligibility. A great majority highlighted that ELF can be thought of as *‘accommodation territory’*. Whether drawing from personal experience of communication across diversity in ELF or SpaLF (Spanish as a Lingua Franca) interactions, imagining norm-negotiation scenarios, or discussing the VOICE examples of recorded real-world ELF communication, student discourse coded under this entry conceptualised ELF intelligibility as not only possible, but usually successful through accommodation efforts with interlocutors. For instance, drawing from his own study abroad experience, 41S talked about ‘the big pardon’ (perdonazo) between NNEs as a strategy to promote flowing interaction, in a way that much resembles the ‘let it pass’ principle (Firth 1996). Other students discussed additional strategies for meaning and norm negotiation, including the collaborative co-construction of talk and the helpfulness of non-verbal resources in transmodal meaning-making (e.g., gestures, facial expressions).

Conversely, a minority of students constructed ELF as a place where *‘intelligibility and communication are complex and harder to achieve’*. While this is not inherently in disagreement with the text (and ELF literature in general), all entries except for one based these judgements on the idea that communication that adheres more closely to a native-speaker standard is easier to understand because you will encounter a model you expect. This contrasts with the fact that students also discussed encountering difficulties to understand NS varieties. In addition, 36C produced a more nuanced understanding of the difficulties in achieving intelligibility as highly context- and L1-dependant. A minority of participants also highlighted that ELF communication could be *‘the start of a breakage into mutually unintelligible national varieties’*.

5.4.4 The politics of ELF: On legitimate norm-making, authority and power

Closely connected with the previous section were comments discussing the nature of norm-making in lingua franca communication, matters of speaker authority and power imbalances (i.e., the politics dimension). As shown in Table 5.1, a great deal

of the discussion revolved around who has the authority to regulate variability and make norms in ELF communication. The NVivo Crosstab Query indicates that notions of ELF as *'dynamic norm evolution through locally built consensus'* was the highest scoring conceptualisation in individual participant contributions. This ontology can be evidenced most clearly by student 26DF in Mexico, as he discusses how norms and variation are co-built and taken up or abandoned through intelligibility-mediated 'trial and error'. In the following extract, he conceptualises communication norms as dynamic rather than fixed agreements between all users of English, showcasing how his experience with Spanish is informing his view.

Extract_5.3

26DF i agree with most of what's been said there have to be some (.) well what i disagree with is calling them norms (.) i'd simply call them agreements or consensus because a norm sounds like something fixed or unchanging (.) if that's how things work we'd still be speaking middle ages spanish and we know spanish is (.) has changed it's very different (.) [. . .] it's necessary to have agreements to understand but we have to create the agreements among all of us

Interestingly, the same participant was later seen constructing a competing view of the nature of norm-making in language use. Influenced by peer's fears over intelligibility in ELF communication, 26DF rationalised that norm-making only occurs in communities of practice of close geographical proximity, thus building a view of *'ELF as a set of (national) community varieties'*. This position links with a slightly different conceptualisation of ELF communication as completely *'non-regulable or chaotic dynamic practice'*. Under this code, there were conceptualisations of ELF as a practice that is impossible to regulate at international level. This view would not conflict with ELF literature as conceptualised in ELF2 and ELF3 phases of theorisation, which abandoned hopes for ELF codification. However, contributions coded under this label tended to take a negative conceptual direction, portraying ELF as chaotic norm-less practice that resembles well-known 'anything goes' anti-ELF discourses (see Jenkins 2007).

I also generated an additional category to capture expressions of ELF as *'institutional regulation dependent practice'*. In most FGs, students raised the perceived necessity of an organisation or institution to have the final say around legitimate norms, use and change or at least to record on-going global change emerging from ELF communication. Students often drew from their current experiences with the Spanish Royal Academy of Language (or RAE in its Spanish acronym). This experience is likely to have informed their views of ELF as dependent on a regulatory institution that 'watches over' the variability of English use. While some students argued for Anglophone institutions to exercise this power (e.g., 42S

calling on the Oxford Dictionary to regulate and record ELF's variation), others argued for such an institution to be international, and even imagined a 'Parliament for English' with diverse representation.

It is therefore clear that students often conceptualised ELF communication as a site of power struggle. Within this dimension there was a subcode focusing on the agency of NNSs of English in moving away from NS standard models taught to them, or what I call an '*emancipatory and decolonial perspective*' (see Table 5.1). While the notion of emancipation was not directly mentioned in the ELF stimuli, the idea of NNESSs 'freeing' themselves from obsessive NS imitation was embedded in the text. In the following extract from Mexico City, 22DF presents his EFL experience in Mexico as a colonialisng or imperialistic effort to adopt US 'culture' and imitate 'gringos' (i.e. US English speaker). Earlier in the FG, this student had openly defended ELF perspectives, and in the last contribution of this extract, we understand that he sees an international rather than a US-centric approach as the right way forward to avoid 'becoming too attached to gringos'. While 22DF constructs an essentialising imagined picture of 'US culture', this extract illustrates well an emancipatory desire from native-speakerist understandings of English learning and/or use.

Extract_5.4

22DF {i mean i was taught} they tried to teach it to me like to introduce me into gringo culture? no? there were books that were called like reading books and they had gringo authors to fill me up with the

Speaker xxx

22DF but now my focus is totally international i mean focusing on what i believe it's the most practical focus now which is the international because the more you attach yourself to a gringo: @@ xxx

In addition, conflict often emerged when participants considered a world in which the academic theorising that was introduced in the text would become the 'status quo' approach to understanding language use in ELF communication. Prompted by Brumfit's (2001) quote from the FG text (see Appendix 1), on the possible implications of there being different majority or minority ratios between NESs and NNESSs, some students discussed how a rejection of the hegemony of native-speaker idealised models would open the door to international fighting over the power to become a norm-setting leader. I captured these contributions as conceptualisations of ELF as '*a site for geopolitical and speakerhood struggle*'. Although I cannot include the extract here due to space constraints, student 24DF offered a lengthy turn where he reflected on how it would be impossible to keep geopolitical matters such as politics and economic interests from leading to con-

flict over whose norms should be accepted in ELF communication. Interestingly, the idea of struggle was often mobilised to argue for the continuity of native-speakerism as the hegemonic ontology, in the interest of ‘stability’. Students constructing this interpretative repertoire also seemed to conveniently omit already-existing inequalities and tensions among speakers, nations and institutions in the world. Nevertheless, some students also questioned assumptions of transnational interaction as always having to involve imposition from any group to another (e.g., 26DF).

5.4.5 The nature of identity and indexicality in NNEs’ ELF practice

The ELF text stimulus also drew explicit connections between multilingual ‘non-native’ English speakers and identity. As NNEs from Expanding Circle settings have not been historically granted the same identity potential that has been recognised for speakers from other contexts, I consistently sought to elicit comments on this dimension. Table 5.1 indicates that students in some FGs produced conceptualisations of ELF as some sort of ‘*neutral, identity-free tool*’ for intelligibility and content communication purposes solely. This view of ELF was therefore very distant from the ELF text presented, and from most ELF scholarship, which sees ELF communication as non-neutral (Baker 2015). It was also possible to discern conceptualisations that linked NNEs’ diverse uses in ELF communication with the performance of identity acts, and the creation of cultural groups and new forms of membership. For instance, two participants (22DF in Mexico and 54V in Chile) explicitly discussed ELF ‘*as a global culture-making practice*’, that is, as practice that moved them beyond national groupings and which resembled notions of ‘global citizenship’. Even though the ELF text indicated that identity-driven variation could be either conscious or subconscious, for 33C linguistic innovations in ELF can only be recognised as variation when motivated by ‘*conscious identificational anti-establishment intentional efforts*’ to shape linguistic practices ‘away’ from hegemonic standards. For her, intentional variation was a form of activism, but diverse uses below consciousness levels would be dismissed as errors.

A significant amount of FG discussion was also invested in theorising ELF communication ‘*as indexicalised practice*’. Interactions coded under this label made reference to speakers’ English use as a way to perform different identities (especially in relation to accents). There were also less explicit contributions

that focused on the social meanings that can be seen in multilingual NNEs' ways of speaking. On the one hand, students made indexical links between 'native-like' English use and 'learning or professional competence', 'beauty or pleasantness', 'competitiveness', 'high social class', 'poshness' (especially a standard British English accent) and potential 'inauthenticity' (also in Morán Panero, 2019). On the other hand, 'non-native like' uses of English were said to signal 'anti-establishment' or 'anti-system' identities, or were seen as markers of 'nationality', 'origin', 'migrant status' and 'non-nativeness'. Students also discussed larger consequences of such indexicality and status quo prejudices against multilingual's English use. Several participants discussed how exhibiting any signs of 'non-nativeness' through your English could lead to discrimination in business settings, or mark you negatively as an immigrant in certain nationalist Anglophone contexts.

Participants also often discussed social meanings of various English uses in their immediate local contexts. Students in Cancún complained about how 'non-native' accents and ways of speaking would be mocked by other peers, with 32C even perpetrating such mocking himself in the FG. Conversely, students in Viña complained about how 'gringo-like' ways of sounding could also earn students mocking due to a sense of inauthenticity. They claimed this influenced the way they spoke English in school, trying to avoid both highly-localised or highly-nativelike accents. In Santiago, discrimination was also reportedly performed against peers who attempted to sound 'British', for the reason that this kind of 'NS-passing' generated undesirable indexicals of inauthenticity and poshness. Many students also talked about '*discrimination-induced NS-passing*' as an oppressive sense of needing to pass as a NES to avoid being discriminated against, even when this is not your preferred stylistic choice. By contrast, a few students performed '*NS-passing humblebrags*', which correspond to a covert defence of native-speakerist language ideologies. For instance, participant 32C performed a NS-passing humblebrag in Cancún, in response to the contribution of another peer who praised her uncle for actively wanting people to know he is Mexican through his accent when using English as a lingua franca. Then, 32C took a turn to *seemingly* agree with this student too:

Extract_5.5

- 32C yes in part yes i mean it's fine (.) **the ideal would be speaking an english like a really good one no?** which is understood across the world but it is also very good that somehow they could know i don't know xxxx for instance (.) i had this situation which I found very funny when we were at the club at the disco and i met these girls and I said <"where are you from"> [in English] stuff like that and we started speaking in english so yeah (.) well we started speaking like that in english and then later <"where you from" "yes we are from spain? and you?"> [in English]
- Various @@@@
- 32C and i'm from mexico so then <"what?"> [English] <"i am mexican" "ah ok dude thanks"> [in Spanish] @@@
- Various @@@
- [. . .]
- 32C aha i didn't even notice their and that's strange because usually spaniards most of them don't speak english or they have a bad pronunciation or @@@

While 32C implies that indexing your national belonging through your English is 'partly' reasonable at first, he quickly constructs a native-speakerist position by arguing that the most ideal aim is, nonetheless, to speak a 'good English'. With this move, he relegates indexing Mexicanness as a secondary, less-desirable aim (see Jenkins, 2007 for similar results). He then momentarily observes the possible 'benefits' of one's national identity being accurately attributed in ELF communication and proceeds to tell his story about having passed as an NES with other Spanish speakers of English. The comment about how European Spaniards tend to have 'bad' pronunciation, reveals that *not passing* as a NS, or speaking in any way that gives you away as a multilingual 'NNES', is equated with deficiency. It is then clear that his 'complaint' about being mistaken for a NES was in fact a 'humblebrag'. This is further reinforced as the FG unravels, where we see both 31C and 32C expressing their wish to pass as US speakers, to the point that they even engaged in objectionable discriminatory linguistic mocking, and explicit metalinguistic ridiculing of what they saw as 'incompetent', 'ugly' and 'unskilled' non-native (Mexicanised) accents. This situation, which evidenced also signs of classism, generated discomfort and tension with fellow FG students who had positively evaluated their own 'non-NS passing' English (and/or that of their loved ones) as equally valuable use (see turns by 36C, 33C in bold):

Extract_5.6

- 32C i mean i wouldn't like that <"jey guere are yu goinG: are yu going to the parti?">
[imitates a local English accent]
- 30C @@@
- 32C mexican right?
- 30C @@@
- 32C not that right? but now we speak of the xxx of english
- R {why would you not like that?
- 38C {xxxxxxx}
- 33C **but i do like that**
- 32C aha because i mean i know i would be understood and all that but: **aesthetically it's not pleasing** i mean it's
[. . .]
- 38C the man working with tourists in the market
- 30C oh yeah xxxx
[. . .]
- 38C yes that is quite (farmer like) still i don't know
- 31C piii piii pii [just making random mocking high pitch noise]
- 38C **no no no it's not necessarily like that @**
- 36C **well the thing is that i don't have a very similar pronunciation to that those that speak english from birth you**
- 30C but you:
- 36C **it has served me well** the way i speak it has served me to communicate so i don't have {any problem
- 31C {because you get by
- 36C to erm (.) **i don't even like** i don't know like have an **obsession for getting to speak it like them**

Interestingly, participants from Mexico and Chile attributed the 'obsession' to sound like a NES, as 36C puts it, to historically entrenched perceptions of inferiority and national stereotypes attached to Latin Americans from the Global North. In response to this imposed inferiority, NS-passing is seen as a tool to proudly reclaim competence (e.g., 30C: "*you feel proud that as a mexican can you can do things right*"). While some students like 30C and 31C reproduced this idea, Viña students like 50V and 51V problematised having to hide parts of their semiotic repertoire as a strategy to gain validation.

5.5 Understanding ontological and evaluative diversity: A sign of transformation?

So far, I have presented the identifiable conceptualisations of ELF communication that emerged from the analysed FG data. While some participants remained 'consistent' in their construction of ontologies (whether aligning with ELF scholarship

or rejecting it), most showed a degree of variability in their positioning throughout. In this section, I explore the nature and motivators of the recorded ontological diversity and examine whether there is evidence of transformational conceptual experiences as a result of the task. To gain further insights on these issues, I created a code to capture ‘*evidence of expanding ontological repertoires*’. This code included 1) responses to my own explicit elicitation of what was new in the text for participants, 2) evidence of on-the-spot reasoning that seemed to push limits in understanding, and 3) participants’ explicit reflections on their own conceptual transformation. Another Cross-tabulation NVivo Query analysis within this code showed that the topics that pushed students’ understanding the most relate to the correctness of multilingual NNES diverse uses, the apparent causes of their variation, and their possible legitimisation as equally valid ‘norm-makers’ and English users, whether in situated interactions or at a broader macro-institutional.

To understand individuals’ positioning journey in relation to this topic, I analysed two codes recording evaluative expressions of participants in relation to whether ‘non-native’ speakers of English can be considered legitimate in diverse uses or whether only ‘natives’ should be granted such authority: ‘*Pro legitimacy of NNES variation*’ and ‘*Pro NS as true norm maker*’. An NVivo Crosstab Query quantified how many entries were produced by each participant to each evaluative stance. The results, indicate that 16 out of 22 FG participants favoured the legitimisation of NNES variation more frequently than they argued that NSs are the only ‘true’ norms-providers. In all FGs, only a minority of participants aligned more frequently with native-speakerist views except for Viña, where students achieved some level of consensus around the legitimacy of variability produced by ‘NNESs’.

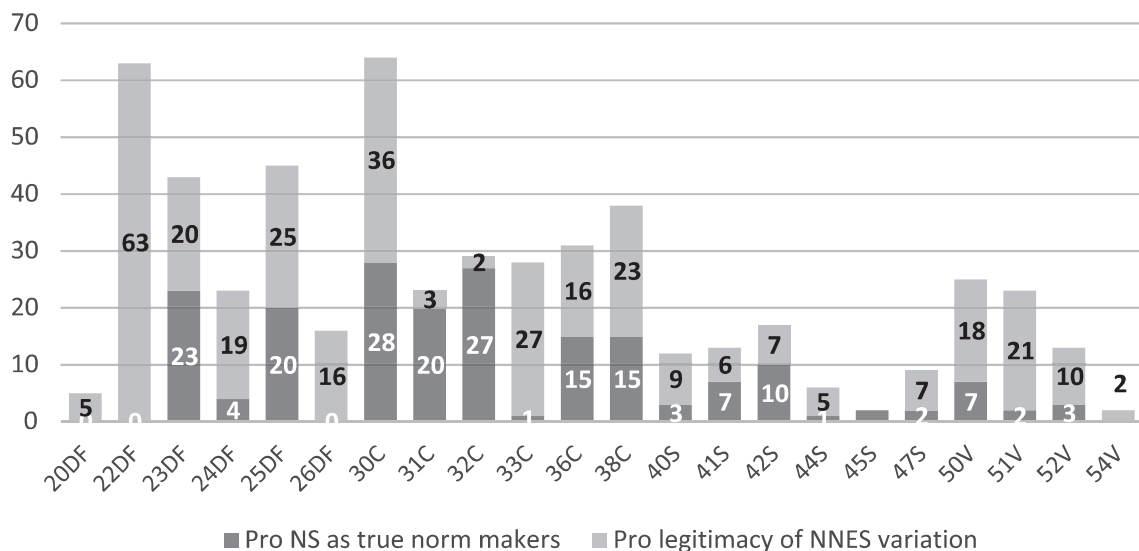


Figure 5.1: Evaluations by individual participants throughout their FG involvement.


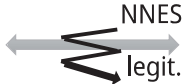

The results from Figure 5.1 also helped distinguish between students who constructed the same position without fail (e.g., 22DF in alignment with the ELF text) or almost consistently (e.g., 32C mostly rejecting the text) and students like 30C or 38C who showed great levels of evaluative variability. In total, only three constructed ‘consistent’ native-speakerist evaluations, while six students produced ‘consistent’ ELF-friendly evaluative patterns in ways that aligned with ELF materials on this topic. However, it would be unwise to always attribute the latter to a transformational effect of the FG activity. The analysis of the pre-FG interview data (e.g., Morán Panero, 2019) confirms that some of these students were already constructing ELF-friendly views of English before encountering the FG stimuli (e.g., 22DF, 20DF and 33C).

To gain clarity on the individual trajectories showing some evaluative variability, I tracked the starting and ending evaluative turns of each of the participants (see Table 5.2). Again, a majority concluded their FG participation with contributions that defended NNES’s equal legitimacy in promoting intelligible linguistic variation (15 out of the 22). The students that showed a ‘dynamic’ trajectory are more likely to have been influenced or affected by the ELF text, even if temporarily. Four students ended the activity defending the same view they had started with, but not without having momentarily rehearsed arguments that went in the opposite direction. For instance, 44S briefly took on peers’ concerns about intelligibility breakdown, before concluding that promoting the acceptance of variability and diversity in ELF communication does not equate communicative doom.

Table 5.2: Representation of students’ evaluative and ontological trajectories on NNESs’ diverse English use.

Trajectory	Participants	Representation
<i>Consistent</i> ELF-friendly position	20DF,22DF,26DF,33C,51V,54V	
<i>Consistent</i> native-speakerist position	32C,31C,45S	
<i>Dynamic</i> , ending back in initial ELF-friendly position	44S,50V	
<i>Dynamic</i> , ending back in initial native-speakerist position	24DF,42S	
<i>Linear</i> , towards ELF-friendly position	47S,52V,40S	

Table 5.2 (continued)

Trajectory	Participants	Representation
<i>Zigzag</i> , from initial ELF-friendly position with native-speakerist ending	23DF,25DF	
<i>Zigzag</i> , starting and ending in ELF-friendly positions	30C,36C,38C	
<i>Zigzag</i> , from initial native-speakerist view to ending in ELF-friendly position	41S	

Following a more ‘*linear*’ pattern in ontological and evaluative construction, three students went from generating native-speakerist positions to aligning with the ELF perspectives shown in the text about diverse NNES use (40S, 47S, 52V). Particularly striking is the case of 40S, who explicitly showed gaining awareness of his native-speakerist socialisation in EFL and is one of the students that most evidently showcases the re-assessment of taken-for-granted ontologies of (English) language and the expansion of his ontological repertoire. As shown in Extract 5.7, while by minute 42.41 the student talks about NNES variation in ELF as ‘degraded’ and less ‘rigorous’ language use, by the end of the FG he argues that such variation is not necessarily ‘wrong’ and links it explicitly with identificational motivations.

Extract_5.7

40S 42:41 [. . .] yes in the end (.) when you learn it in a context a little less formal (.) you always try to return to that structure to more formal structures of pronunciation grammar (.) etcetera (.) so like i see a disconnection because like lingua franca makes me think that it is an english that become distant from the original [. . .]

40S 02:20:01 when you started to show like the description of a new model for education (.) like my first reaction was to say no (.) because i come from the purist schooling experience with a foreign language and i sense we all had the same issue (.)

40S [. . .] giving this second thought i find it a more (.) modern way to understand the subject of language and to teach it (.) because in the end (.) my impression is that what this is suggesting is that we are learning english skills and this will allow you to then learn to speak it like gringos (.) like spaniards (.) like chileans (.) so you then have the identity you want and you speak it the way you want (.) one tends to think that speaking with this or other accent is better or worse (.) but this way you are actually going to decide that yourself because you get the tools you need to learn the language like that rather than as fixed knowledge that you must access and interiorise [. . .]

I have categorised the remaining 6 students as following different kinds of ‘zig-zag’ patterns, meaning that they engaged in high-levels of back and forth in their ontological and evaluative positioning, and often ‘landed’ in a concluding position while holding a range of reservations or conditions (e.g., accepting NNES variation in ELF interaction but not ‘officially’ by authoritative institutions like the ELT classroom or accepting NNES variation as valid for ELT but as ‘secondary’ options to NES models). The performance of 23DF and 25DF deserves mention, as examples of students that started conceptualising diverse ‘non-native-like’ uses favourably, therefore challenging colonialising expectations of imitation and ownership, but ended up defending native-speakerist views of English.

Extract_5.8

23DF 28:26 [. . .] answering your question i believe we shouldn't shouldn't have to duplicate English [. . .]

[. . .]

23DF 50:17 [. . .] i think as i mentioned in the interview we did i think that a language doesn't have a patent

[. . .]

23DF 02:21:24 i think that native speakers are the ones that need to agree among themselves about which are the norms [. . .] not because others speak it they can say “ah (.) i need to be there as an observer (.) without a vote but with voice” NO

These extracts illustrate the change between early and late contributions by 23DF (see time stamps). As the second extract indicates, in the interview data set 23DF actually constructed an ELF-friendly discourse. Yet, it seems that 25DF's sudden and emphatic rejection of NNS's grammatical variations after she started speaking as a NS of Spanish (Extract_5.2) was particularly influential for 23DF's thinking. Eventually, 23DF started aligning with 25DF and he becomes so concerned with maintaining a ‘coherent’ position through the rest of the FG, that he even directly accuses 25DF of flip-flopping, once she begins to consider the usefulness of giving NNES a voice in imagined regulatory institutions of English language (Extract_5.9). The accusation is especially ironic given that he demonstrates similar discursive variability, but this points to *internal relational dynamics* in the FG discussion *and* a concern by 23DF with how he presents his views, as relevant situated factors in shaping the student's ontological construction.

Extract_5.9

- R **02:20:39** and in terms of representation?
 23DF i don't think so (.) because it's not our native language so no
 25DF but you do use it
 23DF let's say they place those who i mean yeah you use it
 25DF out of ten
 23DF **but you are contradicting yourself with what you said earlier**
 23DF {weren't you saying} weren't you saying that they cannot arrive here and
 24DF {trouble time}

As this '*desire to appear coherent*' demonstrates, it is important for researchers and teachers working with student ontologies to identify the factors that mediate students' (non-)linear ontological and evaluative constructions. I therefore coded for situated factors that mediated students' discursive practices, including factors that I observed as acting implicitly and those that students were able to reflect upon explicitly too. I have distinguished two main categorisations of factors, although the division is not always as clear-cut as Table 5.3 may suggest, and these elements do not work in isolation or in deterministic ways.

Table 5.3: Emerging factors in ontological construction and evaluation.

Micro-contextual relational factors	Experiential symbolic, historical, structural factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sub-group member alliances - Seeking group consensus - Individual self-presentation through argumentative coherence - Identity taken during FG turn/interaction and relative interests at stake - Conservative vs. Social-justice-seeking /decolonial stance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of socialisation into ideas of correctness, intelligibility, linguistic efficiency and appropriateness as 'fixed' - Experience of ELF communication - Experience of Spanish variability/standardisation - Historical and hegemonic hierarchies of inferiority alongside speakerhood and/or (supra)national stereotyping

From the set of micro-contextual factors identified, it is worth highlighting the striking impact that speaking from one *situated identity position* or another had on students' ontological construction. For example, opposing conceptualisations of language and variation were mobilised by the same participant depending on whether they spoke as a NS or a NNS (e.g., 25DF, 36C), but also as 'an ELT student' or as 'a company employer' (e.g., 24DF), and what they thought or imagined their 'interests' to be in each scenario. Closely connected was the extent to which students took '*conservative*' or '*social-justice-seeking*' stances in relation to hierarchical systems of language use and speaker stereotyping or discrimina-

tion. Participants 31C and 32C displayed the former, as two of the strongest defenders of maintaining the hegemony of native-speakerist ontologies of language. They showed concern with maintaining the privileges and symbolic capital they believed to have ‘unlocked’ by climbing steps in the current system through ‘NS passing’. Meanwhile, 33C performed a strong commitment to social justice stances in the interview and FG data, seeking to reduce rather than reproduce status quo linguistic discrimination and different forms of inequality and oppression.

Other factors responded to students’ experiential trajectories, their socialisation, and their engagement with various linguistic, symbolic, discursive and material resources. That is, with elements beyond the immediate context of our FG interaction. For instance, extensive *experience of ELF communication* proved highly relevant in terms of whether students recognised the diverse and dynamic language practices that the ELF FG text described. However, while for some experienced students this translated into conceptualising diverse uses as equally valid variation (22DF), as observed also by Kalocsai (2013), others still viewed them as ‘deviant’ (24FD). Similarly, the data uncovered that experience of tensions around *variation and standardisation in relation to Spanish language* were also relevant given the weight these had in their discussions. Students who favoured native-speakerist and standard perceptions of English often constructed similar prescriptivist understandings of Spanish (e.g., students in Cancún’s FG positioned themselves against the ‘non-standard’ use of ‘dijistes’³ in Spanish), and students who argued in favour of NNES’s dynamic uses also often defended non-standard variation in Spanish (except 45S). Finally, I observed differences in ontological and evaluative construction that depended on the specific linguistic *features* being analysed, the linguistic *levels* discussed (e.g., accent vs. grammar) or spoken/written *modalities* and formal/informal *contexts*. However, the overarching factor influencing these was the *degree of socialisation* that students had experienced into a) fixed norms of context-style appropriateness, b) ideas about what is or is not intelligible and ‘efficient’, and c) into recognising specific features as salient ‘errors’ to erase from their language practices.

While the influence of colonial ideologies in education, professional identities, and experience of ELF communication have been previously highlighted as crucial factors in ELF perceptions research (e.g. Pérez Andrade, this volume; Jenkins 2007; Jenkins et al. 2018; Wang 2015; 2020), this study also evidences the importance of situated stance-taking and other micro-contextual factors. It further supports the

3 While the omission of the third person present tense -s is considered ‘ungrammatical’ in relation to English standards, the addition of a second person -s in the past simple tense is deemed equally problematic and a sign of being ‘uneducated’ according to Spanish linguistic standards (e.g., ‘dijistes’ instead of dijiste).

idea that, rather than working with one single conceptualisation of language or attitude towards NNES variation, which may be ‘changed’ or ‘replaced’ through (ELF-informed) education, individuals can draw from an array of multiple dynamic interpretative repertoires from moment to moment, depending on specific contextual interests. This needs to be considered when we design and evaluate educational ELF-informed pedagogical interventions for students and teachers.

5.6 Conclusions and pedagogical implications

In this chapter I have argued for the value of metalanguage as a constitutive dimension of language that is often overlooked in language education curricula outside linguistics or language related majors. I have emphasised the importance of explicitly examining student language ontologies in the ELT classroom through critical approaches that promote dialogic reflexion and a decolonial gaze. The FG study on the effects of ‘critically metalanguaging ELF’ with Latin American university students shows that even a fairly ‘simple’ two-page text on ELF theory can lead to great diversity and depth of conceptual discussion among students. Despite the introductory nature of the tasks, these ‘lay’ students raised many debates that have been tackled in the field for the past thirty years. This is particularly significant when we remember that, unlike in many of the previously reviewed studies, these participants were *not* undertaking language, intercultural communication or linguistics-related degrees at the time, and had not previously engaged with critical or ELF scholarship on language. The analysis also illustrated the diverse sets of conceptualisations that students constructed alongside five key ontological dimensions (communicative scenario, linguistic nature, intelligibility, politics and power, indexicality or identity), and it highlights the fact that students’ ontological positions did not always ‘fit’ neatly into a pro/against ELF theory dichotomy.

In this study, a majority of participants aligned more frequently, and overall, with ELF-friendly theorisations of (English) language and ELF communication. However, if we consider students ‘starting’ and ‘ending’ positions, there is no evidence of drastic transformations. While 13 students started defending the legitimacy of multilingual NNES’s variable uses (13), the final number only increased by two (15), and the number of students defending native-speakerist ontologies of English ‘only’ went down from 9 to 7. The interview data available in the larger study also indicated that some participants had already constructed ‘ELF-friendly’ views of language *before* they were introduced to ELF scholarship through the FG task. This therefore highlights the need for caution when attributing participants’ alignment with ELF theory directly to the educational intervention carried out,

further validating Rose et al.'s (2021) call for studies to collect pre-intervention data. The findings also alert against making simplistic predictions over what these participants will think or how they will act after the educational intervention. The ontological diversity and dynamicity observed indicate that we ought to go beyond concluding whether students have developed an ELF mindset or not in our research, and actually seek to understand the multiple and changing ways in which ELF theory can be interpreted, taken up, deployed or rejected by students, and how and why they do so in (non-)linear ways (i.e. due to what factors and to achieve what contextual purposes).

Despite the relatively timid levels of transformation observed from a quantitative perspective, the qualitative analysis adds richer insights into the nature of the ontological variability that was performed by students. The FG data showed significant evidence of students processing new information and challenging their sets of interpretative repertoires, as well as numerous examples of questioning dominant monolithic views of the nature of (English) language, and how it used in ELF interactions. The intense ontological and evaluative zig-zagging observed suggests that some students thoroughly tested ELF theory in their interactions, thus making this activity highly worthwhile as a way to promote critical and decolonial approaches in the ELT classroom. Many students were able to dissect dominant and alternative ways of thinking about English and evaluate different language practices produced by multilingual 'non-native' speakers. They reflected on how they tend to conceptualise and evaluate language use themselves, and some explicitly commented on the influence of their EFL socialisation into native-speakerist views of English. 'Critically metalanguaging' ELF also showcased the importance that people's discursive practices can have in the reproduction *or* challenging of unequal social relations. Despite being in a research setting and in the presence of recorders, a few participants felt so confident in the validity of their views on language that they found it appropriate to engage in forms of linguistic discrimination against other NNESSs. The data also revealed how students' ontologies of language intersected with other forms of discrimination (e.g., classism).

From a research perspective, this study therefore helps address Seidlhofer's (2019) call to investigate the motivations behind the 'ambivalence' that is frequently found among 'NNESSs' in ELF attitudinal studies. In addition to the novel mapping of linear and non-linear patterns of conceptual construction throughout the pedagogical task, the data analysis revealed different micro-contextual and interactional factors mediating students' ontological construction. It also locates experiential and more structural influences that go beyond the FG interaction. The relevance of conservative or social-justice stance-taking in students' constructions was particularly striking. Of course, further research is expected to yield ad-

ditional and evolving factors that we should keep track of. From a pedagogical perspective, the insights gained are also of interest for language educators seeking to incorporate ELF and Global Englishes informed approaches to their ELT classroom. In fact, the findings may concern teachers of *any* named language (beyond ELT) that hold a commitment with critical, social justice and decolonial orientations towards on-going unequal relations and forms of language-related discrimination. It is hoped that teachers can adapt and/or design texts to promote critical metalanguaging among their students, and that the table of ontological dimensions (Table 5.1) and the identified mediating factors (Table 5.3) can both be drawn from for lesson preparation purposes and as talking prompts. The more language teachers from diverse contexts take up language ontology explicitly with their students and report on their experiences, the more likely we will be to expand and complement our understanding of the benefits and shortcomings of critical metalanguaging for the classroom, and the nature of student ontological (re)construction.

However, it is not my intention to suggest that opening spaces for critical metalanguaging in ELT classrooms would be a trouble-free task. Making room for reflexivity in already packed curricula poses many challenges and questions (see González, this volume on institutional risks). In terms of material design, crucial decisions would have to be made in terms of which perspectives and topics to introduce and when. While the text I used included publications by European scholars, diversifying the sources of academic input when creating texts for discussion would be important, especially including more local voices where possible. Reflection would also be needed to identify the ultimate goal of introducing this type of dialogical activities. Despite the researcher/teacher-student imbalances, I advocate for inviting students to critically think and decide for themselves how relevant or obsolete different conceptualisations may be in their context and consider the wider societal implications of hegemonic language ideologies, without imposing a theory. Pennycook (2007) warns, nonetheless, of the counterproductive potential of getting caught in a loop of reflection if we want to foster transformative action. In addition, the data shows that students are not likely to arrive to one shared view of ELF communication (see Gimenez, this volume on ELF's polysemic nature). While I see ontological and evaluative multiplicity as potentially enriching for critical discussion, managing it can also pose a challenge, for instance, when deciding how to respond when students reinforce old dichotomies, establish 'unhelpful' ones (e.g., ELF as NNS-NNS communication only and EFL as NS-NNS interaction) or when they engage in mocking and forms of (linguistic) discrimination. Future research is therefore required to explore these on-going tensions and to interrogate how critical metalanguaging can be integrated as a learning objective across diverse and contested (E)LT curricula.

Appendix 1 – Links to resources

- 1) Link to ELF text used for FG task – Click here or go to:
https://1drv.ms/w/s!As8QnV7dDTP_qF8yf3KrTAXUQuzv?e=8PoCMo
- 2) Link to FG additional slides – Click here or go to:
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:9b0a6e4b-dc67-38fe-91d2-74d22f71c965>
- 3) Link to Transcript Conventions: Click here or go to
https://1drv.ms/w/s!As8QnV7dDTP_qGFHORYy3uMGBAHa?e=7bHgLN
- 4) Link to original data extracts as transcribed in Spanish – Click here or go to:
https://1drv.ms/w/s!As8QnV7dDTP_qSKGqWn-O0YxUP0K?e=alnHVP

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