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Exploring identities in the ELF class : a critical proposal

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Exploring Identities in the ELF Class: A Critical Proposal

Abstract

This article critically discusses the extended role of English as a global language and the subsequent impact on the teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF). It is pointed out that, in ELF contexts, culture cannot be ignored and that the analysis of the language of literary narratives in class could contribute to the development of students' critical literacy and identities, as well as to the investigation of the identities put forward in literary narratives. The approach proposed goes beyond the traditional focus of language teaching on exclusively linguistic goals: the analysis of a narrative example as well as some tentative teaching proposals based on it are intended to underscore the importance of a sociolinguistic and critical orientation to ELF teaching denaturalizing the dominance of English language and culture and leaving space for the negotiation of students' identities in class.

Keywords

Critical literacy; English as a lingua franca; literary narratives; identity; language teaching

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1. Teaching English as a lingua franca

Considering the role of English in global communication, Firth (1996: 240) states that English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions are those in which English is used as "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication" (emphasis in the original). The global status of English is fully developed when English language reinforces

mutual understanding and a sense of convergence, and creates a meeting point within a global framework of multiple and even divergent values, with simultaneous respect for the multi-faceted ways of expressing attitudes and cultures.

Such conditions and goals cannot but affect the domains of English language learning and teaching. The dominant model of literacy teaching in ELF favors text comprehension as the main goal of reading tasks, without further inciting readers/students to interpret the texts and detect and question their ideological meanings, premises, and assumptions (Wallace 2003: 3, 10, 22–25, 36, 42, 165, 189–190). It could therefore be suggested that teachers have a responsibility to use a critical lens, so that they empower their students through reflective dialogue and a curriculum that mirrors students' goals and interests (Fredricks 2007: 24). In this respect, English language teaching can neither be simply viewed as the fulfillment of a set of linguistic targets nor detached from ideological or sociocultural implications. ELF teaching and learning, best serve their purpose when they do not exclude teaching materials or situations that are linked to students' interests and cultural backgrounds. They also best serve their purpose when they view the teaching/learning situation as an opportunity for both teachers and students to teach, be taught, and fully unfold their identities. In this sense, a critical approach to teaching literacy in ELF could be proposed involving "moving from initial response, to analysis and interpretation" (Wallace 2003: 24) so as to turn reading into a "social interpretative process" (Wallace 2003: 25).

In what follows, our perspective is a sociolinguistic one, as we take into consideration not only the international prestige assigned to ELF, but also ELF students' own linguocultural identities and backgrounds. It is exactly in this context that we argue for the importance of teaching about culture(s) and identities in ELF classes. The emphasis usually placed on the target cultures (i.e. the British and American ones) could be enhanced to include students' cultures and hence to exploit materials reflecting their own sociocultural backgrounds. This, we suggest, can be achieved within a critical literacy framework which helps students undig latent ideological meanings in texts and allows for the emergence and negotiation of diverse identities in class. In this sense, the dominance of English language and culture could be denaturalized in ELF classes, as students will have the opportunity to share their own sociocultural experiences and interpretations of discourse.

Our teaching proposal involves the exploitation of a narrative excerpt coming from a literary text, which is analyzed with Labov's (1972) structural model for narratives and Bamberg's (1997; 2004) model for tracing narrative identities. The analysis is complemented with tentative questions and activities which are based on the preceding analysis and are intended to assist students in critically investigating not only the identities emerging in the narratives but also their own. This proposal is meant to demonstrate how teachers and students could work with similar material coming from their own sociocultural communities.

2. The element of culture in teaching ELF

It is a truism by now to say that foreign language students should not be exclusively focused on the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar in the target language. Learning about the target culture has for some time now been recognized as a significant teaching goal as well. This has often been interpreted as, and resulted in, imposing elements of the target culture on students. In the teaching of English in particular, such an imposition has been framed and criticized as linguistic and cultural imperialism (Phillipson 2011), as without a strong power-base of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication (Crystal 2003: 7).

Nowadays, however, teaching ELF comes together with different goals and challenges, since English often brings students into contact with contexts and cultures which are not necessarily related to what is perceived as the English and American cultures. Hence, through ELF students and teachers could be encouraged to be receptive to diversity, different perspectives, and new ideas. More than this, as Blell and Doff (2014: 83) put it, "due to mobility and globalization, students should be enabled to critically reflect on modern cultures as constantly renewing global and local living environments, which again may cause new social or cultural differences".

To this end, models of teaching about culture in the language classroom would rather conceive culture as an open, fluid ('hybrid') and individual construct (Blell and Doff 2014: 81). In this sense, the language-culture relationship would rather be envisaged from a broader perspective that reaches the cultures of individual people as well as the cultural practices within societies. The culture of individuals and that of the specific community they live in, as well as potential clashes between the two, could be traced through a critical approach to the language of the teaching materials used in an ELF context.

In an ELF classroom with a strong sociocultural orientation, teachers acquire a non-traditional role: "the teacher plays the role of facilitator, rather than inquisitor, and if deemed desirable, can even participate in the group discussion" (Correia 2006: 17). Teachers could approach the everlasting strong connection between language and culture in a more sophisticated and critical way by using teaching materials which show an attitude of inclusion of different interests, stances, and cultural backgrounds, as well as a simultaneous distance from static, monolithic ideologies. Such an approach is most compatible with the goals and practices developed within the framework of critical literacy, to which we turn our discussion in the next section.

3. Critical literacy in ELF classrooms

Critical approaches to language are based on the premise that the language of texts is not neutral but freighted with social meanings, which readers can discover and

agree with, object to, or differentiate themselves from. Gee (2004: 25) becomes even more specific by claiming that what students need to understand is not just the language but what he calls *Discourse*, that is, the "multiple ways of acting-interacting-speaking-writing-listening-reading-thinking-believing-valuing-feeling with others". This means that students' contact with texts does not leave them unaffected: what is communicated by the text creator each time could lead to students' identity-building or identity-reinforcement parallel to their meaning-building process. As a result, the critical reading of texts can create shifts in understanding and social structures (Janks 2010), while respective changes in the identities of readers could be reflected in their attitudes. In Norton's (2010: 10) words, "literacy is not only about reading and writing, but also about relationships between text and reader, student and teacher, classroom and community".

Critical literacy in particular is an application of Critical Discourse Analysis to language teaching, placing strong emphasis on the usually implicit relationship between language and power (see among others Fairclough 1992; Wallace 2003; Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 125; Felipe Fajardo 2015, and references therein). It could therefore be employed to put into question the dominance of English even within ELF classes, so long as students and teachers are eager to juxtapose their own sociocultural experiences and those brought to class by the teaching material. More specifically, critical literacy focuses on values and identities emerging from a text through exploring or questioning its meanings. In this sense, a text becomes a reservoir of valuable direct or indirect messages waiting to be (re)constructed and analyzed in depth. For Morgan (1998: 157), "critical literacy teaching begins by problematizing the culture and knowledge in the text – putting them up for grabs, critical debate, for weighing, judging, critiquing". A critical literacy perspective thus does not so much depend on the aims of the text producer, but mostly on the way an audience accepts and explores it. This could lead to critically discussing and perhaps undermining the values and identities imposed by the material used for ELF teaching, and could eventually reduce the power imbalance between ELF and students' own languages and cultures. From a sociolinguistic and critical perspective, this is indeed a desirable goal:

> English as an international means of communication invites critical reading. […] [T]he very world dominance of English invites –indeed requires– a critical response. Just as […] texts cannot be a neutral medium for the exercising of reading skills, English as a language cannot act as a neutral medium for the exercising of foreign language reading abilities. It carries too much baggage both from its colonial history as well as through its current global dominance (Wallace 2003: 47).

Given the above, it is of prime importance to point out the crucial role of linguistic choices in the creation of texts, as such choices reflect the perspectives of texts, their viewpoints, and the identities constructed therein. Common pedagogical practices of critical text analysis comprise not only tracing and reconstructing

authors' intentions and ideologies, but mostly challenging them and exploring different perspectives. In this sense, critical literacy could contribute to challenging the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development (Shor 1999; Felipe Fajardo 2015).

In an ELF teaching environment, texts fulfilling such goals can be found, among other domains, in the domain of literature, a field that students become familiar with as part of their school and/or home literacy, but needs to be further approached and explored in a non-traditional, non-typical, and broader manner. In our view, this is exactly the challenging point in using literature in the framework of a socioculturally sensitive ELF classroom: the exploitation of a familiar field in an innovative way which goes beyond what is generally accepted, and underlines the critical point of view of the reader. Furthermore, literary texts are "social issue texts" as they address social or political issues that students may face in their everyday lives, and are built on "systems of meaning", namely widely held but usually implicit assumptions and stereotypes about how the world operates (Vasquez et al. 2013: 51–52). We therefore consider a critical approach to literary texts as beneficial to both students and teachers despite the fact that curriculum restrictions and the limited time dedicated to teaching ELF in contemporary schools may discourage students and teachers from engaging in critical discussions in class (see among others Wallace 2003: 45; Curdt-Christiansen 2010; Felipe Fajardo 2015).

In addition, in the context of a globalized, culturally diverging but geographically converging world, not only is there a need for a broader approach to ELF teaching through the use of literary texts, but it also seems that there is an educational demand "to update our literature selections" (Bean and Moni 2003: 640). Such an update of literature selections would rather comprise literary texts beyond the ones referring to the British and American cultures, which are almost exclusively used nowadays. Literary texts that refer to students' cultures, or emanate from them, could be very important for a number of reasons, such as a potentially deeper interest in the teaching/learning procedure on the part of ELF students, the adoption of a sociolinguistic and critical orientation and focus, or these texts' potential for a perspective promoting social change. Such a prospect could give students the opportunity to construct their own sociocultural identities in the ELF classroom and/or to trace the identities narrators put forward in their texts.

4. Identity-building and identity-tracing in literary narratives

Identity matters because "it is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with reading and writing" and also because "people can be understood by others in particular ways, and people act towards one another depending on such understandings and positionings" (Porto 2010: 46). Following the above, the term *identity* is here understood in terms of *who people are to each other,* hence relevant research concentrates on

how different kinds of identities are constructed in spoken interaction and written texts (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 6).

For social constructionism, identities "are implied as social achievements in the frame of linguistic -and other semiotic- interactions of individuals" (Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 20). This means that here we do not perceive identities as predetermined, social categories or attributes of individuals (as the essentialist approach to identity suggests), but as dynamic, *ad hoc*, discursive or semiotic constructs through which individuals position themselves towards widely circulated social Discourses (see section 3). Emphasis is therefore placed on how individuals use discourse and on what linguistic (or other semiotic) choices they make to create an image of themselves and to position themselves towards the others. It is also taken into consideration that identities are not of equal power: in contemporary multicultural communities and contexts, non-dominant (e.g. minority) identities may still be undervalued (Chryssochoou 2011: 94).

In this context, it has often been suggested that narrative genres are a suitable and common means for constructing identities for ourselves and other people (see Archakis and Tsakona 2012 and references therein). Since different uses of language lead to the formation of different identities, it is particularly interesting to enable students to realize the complex and multiple identity constructions. A critical perspective towards such multiplicity (and the ensuing inequality) could foster respect and a willingness to preserve and engage in cultural diversity. In the ELF class in particular, (dominant) identities emerging from English texts could be critically discussed and juxtaposed to students' own identities or other identities emerging from their own sociocultural environments.

In this study, in order to show how the linguistic choices of literary narratives contribute to the emergence of various identities, we exploit two models of narrative analysis: Labov's (1972) model on narrative structure and Bamberg's (1997; 2004) model on narrative identities. The combination of these two models follows the approach adopted by Archakis and Tsakona (2012; 2013), aiming at the analysis of both micro- and macro-parameters in the investigation of identities. More specifically, the above mentioned combination takes into account macro-factors such as widespread ideologies and (more or less latent) sociocultural assumptions which affect individuals, that is, Discourses (in Gee's 2004 sense; see section 3); and, on the other hand, it carries out microanalyses bringing to the surface individuals' construction of identities through discourse (Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 34).

4.1 Labov on narrative structure

Labov's widely accepted structural model suggests that the temporal ordering or sequencing of past experiences from a certain evaluative perspective forms the core of narrative structure (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1972; for a detailed presentation of the model, see also Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004; Archakis and Tsakona 2012). Central to Labov's model is the distinction between *narrative*

clauses and *free clauses*. Narrative clauses represent the temporal sequence of events, that is, the *complicating action*. In contrast, free clauses fulfill many functions and fall into one or more of the categories: *abstract, orientation, evaluation, resolution,* and *coda*, all of which frame the narrative core, that is, the complicating action. More specifically:

Abstract: The narrator announces his/her intention to tell a story by summarizing its purpose and content. Thus, this category answers the question "What is it about?". In order to intrigue the audience and elicit their consent, the narrator may use opening expressions, such as "Just listen to this", "Hey, you, listen!", "Something terrible happened", "I remember something awesome", as well as questions such as "Did you hear about what happened at the concert yesterday?", "Have you heard the story about…?".

Orientation: This part of the narrative provides general or specific information regarding the characters, their actions, the time, and the place of the narrated events, thus answering the questions "Who, what, when, where?" Elements of orientation can be spread throughout the narrative and are often given in past tenses (i.e. past continuous, simple past, or present/past perfect).

Complicating action: The complicating action consists of the presentation of a sequence of past events in the form of at least two narrative clauses answering the question "Then what happened?". The events chosen to be narrated usually deviate from the expected norms and/or established routines. Through specific narrative choices, such as constructed direct speech and narrative present, the complicating action makes the plot move forward.

Evaluation: Evaluation answers the questions "Why are you telling me this?", "Why are you mentioning this succession of events?". Elements of evaluation can be traced within all the narrative structural categories and allow the narrator to express his/her feelings towards, and assessment of, the narrated events. Evaluation can be *external* or *internal.* In external evaluation, the narrator interrupts his/her narration to define its aim, describe his/her feelings, and/or explicitly comment on the narrated events. In internal evaluation, the commentary is not explicit but takes the form of evaluative lexicon, expressive phonology, repetition, etc.

Resolution: Resolution answers the question "What happened in the end?". Here presented are the repercussions of disrupting the usual, conventional balance, and/or how the complicating action was resolved, that is, how balance was restored.

Coda: Coda appears at the end of the narrative and stops the narrator from giving additional information. The narrator shows that s/he has completed the story by using phrases that summarize – often evaluatively (see above) – what s/he has said.

Labov's structural model captures which events are considered reportable each time, and represents the context of these events. It therefore contributes to recipients' realizing what different sociocultural groups perceive as usual and expected, and what they consider to be a deviation from this, depending on specific sociocultural values and assumptions each time. In this sense, we view narrative texts as a means of identity construction. Moving on to Bamberg's (1997; 2004) theoretical model, emphasis is placed on the examination of *positionings* in narrative discourse.

4.2 Bamberg on narrative identities

Bamberg (2010) points out the importance of narratives for building identities and for investigating them in the field of identity research. Here, we draw on Bamberg's (1997; 2004) proposal which involves *three levels of positioning:* firstly, positioning of characters in the story world vis-à-vis each other; secondly, positioning of the narrator vis-à-vis the audience of his/her narrative; and the narrator's third and central positioning vis-à-vis various beliefs and assumptions in the wider socio-ideological context, that is, vis-à-vis the Discourses in social circulation, in Gee's (2004) conceptualization of the term (see section 3). In other words, what is investigated is

how the development of characters' action and interaction in the narrative world (that is, their positionings vis-à-vis each other), as well as the positionings of interlocutors during the narrative interaction, contribute to the narrator's total positioning with respect to ideological standpoints and values in social circulation (Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 47).

It should be noted here that not only narrators but also recipients process narratives in the light of embracing, negotiating, or rejecting certain identities, values, and beliefs. More specifically, narrators decide on what elements to choose to build their narratives (or to omit from them), so that they promote their communicative intentions and aspects of their value systems in a more or less direct manner. Recipients, on the other hand, approach the communicative intentions of narrators according to their own cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs. In the context of ELF classrooms, which is the focus of our study, students could learn how to read between the narrative lines and, more specifically, how to trace multiple aspects of identity construction. This will allow them to (re)negotiate diverse and often opposing positionings. As a result, they could adopt a critical stance towards their own value systems and identities as well as towards those value systems and identities emerging from the (ELF) narratives.

To sum up, taking into account that "narrative does not simply *represent* reality but offers the opportunity to *constitute* it" (Bruner 1991: 5, emphasis in the original), the present work acknowledges the significance of *voice* (Bakhtin 1984) in the narratives, which is expressed through the represented actions and interactions, so that narrators can evoke emotions, give vent to feelings, and forge or question identities. This assumption forms the basis of our teaching proposals promoting a critical literacy approach to literary narratives through activities/tasks that will encourage and enable ELF students to explore and negotiate various identities in class.

5. The data of the study

The present study is part of a larger project aiming at promoting the use of literary narratives to cultivate students' critical literacy in ELF classrooms (Deliroka 2017). More specifically, the example analyzed here refers not only to the British culture but also to cultures different from the British and American cultures which are usually portrayed in ELF classes. Given that the first author is currently a teacher of English in a High School of Intercultural Education in the area of Thrace, Greece, the intended ELF student audience includes students of Greek and Muslim origin - the latter speaking Turkish as their home language. This makes narrative examples involving all such ethnic groups and identities relevant to the purposes of ELF teaching. In classes with students from different cultural backgrounds, the inclusion of narrative examples with different cultural references and cross-cultural encounters would definitely be more meaningful.

Our choice of material is expected to have a three-fold positive result. First, it acknowledges that text materials referring to non-British and non-American cultures are also worth exploiting in ELF classes. Secondly, the text under scrutiny has been chosen for its emphasis on culture-specific practices and meanings, which is the prerequisite for critical text analysis and critical discussions in class (see among others Archakis and Tsakona 2012; 2013 and references therein). Thirdly, the inclusion of texts with various cultural references relevant to students' sociocultural backgrounds gives the opportunity to ELF learners to trace the construction of identities either *from within* or *from outside* the represented cultural reality each time. As a result, their points of view and their approaches are expected to vary, depending on whether they consider themselves related, or not related, to the specific sociocultural references and contexts. As Koupaee Dar et al. (2010: 469) suggest, the texts selected for teaching should not be just informational. It is therefore expected that ELF students will gradually become able to trace social, cultural, and/or political dimensions of the literary texts they study, and that they will become able to see their own social realities in relation to them. Thus, they could build their own argumentation and positionings towards the challenging issues emerging in classroom discussions.

6. A narrative example analysis

The excerpt analyzed here comes from "The Sweet Spring" in *My Family and Other Animals* (Durrell 2006: 102) and includes a dialogue between an English mother, who is a widow and lives on the island of Corfu with her four children (Larry, Leslie, Margo, and Gerry – the latter being the author/narrator of the novel), and Spiro, a Greek man who lives on the island of Corfu now, but spent eight years in Chicago in the past. Spiro's familiarity with the mother seems to reside in his being one of the first people who offered to help her and her family settle in and find a house to live, as well as in his imposing personality, as constructed in the book. The narrated event evolves around Margo's relationship with a Turkish young man. Spiro is suspicious of him and believes that Margo's mother should become, too.

As our analysis and teaching proposals will try to show, the excerpt could contribute to discussing in class how the identities constructed within literary narratives may support or question ethnic stereotypical beliefs and assumptions. We acknowledge that the excerpt could also be analyzed in terms of the gender/sexist stereotypes (including, among others, the patriarchal identity attributed to Spiro in lines 16–19; see below). However, due to space limitations we will concentrate on ethnic identities and respective stereotypes about the Turks, the Greeks, and the British. Please note that, in the example, the italics used come from the original text, while we use underlining to mark the evaluative utterances (to be discussed in detail below).

      Mother <u>had by now become quite used</u> to Spiro's <u>conspiratorial air</u> when he came to deliver some item of information about the family, and <u>it no longer worried her</u>.
'What's the matter <u>now</u>, Spiro?' she asked.
5   'It's <u>Missy Margo</u>,' said Spiro <u>sorrowfully</u>.
'What about her?'
Spiro <u>glanced around uneasily</u>.
'<u>Dos you knows shes meetings a *mans*</u>?' he inquired <u>in a vibrant whisper</u>.
'A man? Oh … er … yes, I did know,' said Mother, <u>lying valiantly</u>.
10   <u>Spiro hitched up his trousers over his belly and leant forward</u>.
'But <u>dids you knows he's a *Turk*</u>?' he questioned <u>in tones of blood-curdling ferocity</u>.
'A Turk?' said Mother <u>vaguely</u>. 'No, I didn't know he was a Turk. What's wrong with that?'
15   <u>Spiro looked horrified</u>.
'<u>Gollys, Mrs Durrells, whats wrongs with it? He's a *Turk*. I wouldn't trust a sonofabitch Turk with any girls. He'll cuts her throats, thats what he'll do. Honest to Gods, Mrs Durrells, its not safe, Missy Margo swimmings with hims.</u>'

20   'All right, Spiro,' said Mother soothingly, 'I'll speak to Margo about it.'
'I just thoughts you oughts to knows, thats all. Buts donts you worrys …
if he dids anythings to Missy Margo I'd fix the bastard,' Spiro assured her
earnestly.

The analysis in terms of Labov's (1972) model could form the basis for further
discussion in class.

Orientation

- Mother had by now become quite used to Spiro's conspiratorial air when he
came to deliver some item of information about the family, and it no longer
worried her
- It's Missy Margo
- Spiro glanced around uneasily
- shes meetings a *mans*
- Spiro hitched up his trousers over his belly and leant forward
- Mrs Durrells
- He's a *Turk*
- Missy Margo swimmings with hims

As already mentioned, this structural category helps readers orientate themselves
in relation to the characters, their activities, the time, and the place: orientation
clauses provide background information concerning "who, what, when, where?".
The beginning of the extract (*Mother had… worried her*) contextualizes the inci-
dent and indicates the repetitiveness of such interactions. *Mother/Mrs Durrells*,
Spiro/he/his, (Missy) Margo/shes, and *Turk/mans/he/hims* answer the questions
"who" and "whose". The phrases *some item of information about the family*, *It's
Missy Margo*, *shes meetings a mans*, *his trousers over his belly*, and *Missy Margo
swimmings with hims* answer the questions "what", and "what about". *By now* and
when he came to deliver some item of information answer the question "when".
Finally, *around* and *forward* answer the questions "where" and "where to".

Complicating action
(including narrative clauses where direct speech is marked in bold)

- **'What's the matter now, Spiro?'** she asked
- **'It's Missy Margo,'** said Spiro sorrowfully
- **'What about her?'**
- **'Dos you knows shes meetings a *mans*?'** he inquired in a vibrant whisper
- **'A man? Oh … er … yes, I did know,'** said Mother, lying valiantly
- **'But dids you knows he's a *Turk*?'** he questioned in tones of blood-cur-
dling ferocity

- **'A Turk?'** said Mother vaguely. **'No, I didn't know he was a Turk. What's wrong with that?'**
- **'Gollys, Mrs Durrells, whats wrongs with it? He's a *Turk*. I wouldn't trust a sonofabitch Turk with any girls. He'll cuts her throats, that's what he'll do. Honest to Gods, Mrs Durrells, its not safe, Missy Margo swimmings with hims.'**
- **'All right, Spiro,'** said Mother soothingly, **'I'll speak to Margo about it.'**
- **'I just thoughts you oughts to knows, that's all. Buts donts you worrys … if he dids anythings to Missy Margo I'd fix the bastard,'** Spiro assured her earnestly.

The complicating action includes a dialogue between the mother and Spiro. Direct speech maintains the deixis (i.e. space, time, and person) of the original utterances, thus giving the impression of an authentic reproduction of prosody and wording (Li 1986; Archakis and Tsakona 2012: 60). The fact that Spiro is represented as using a non-standard variety of English adds to the characteristics of immediacy and vividness.

The spark which makes the dialogue begin is the direct question of the mother *What's the matter now, Spiro?*, thus giving Spiro the opportunity to speak. Spiro uses an incomprehensible (to the mother) sentence *It's Missy Margo*. Due to the inexplicitness of his response, the mother continues with a second question *What about her?*, thus moving the action forward. With *Dos you knows shes meetings a mans?*, Spiro answers with a question, trying to be polite at the same time, and giving bit by bit the information he wants to pass on to the mother. In her answer *A man? Oh … er … yes, I did know*, the mother uses minimal responses such as *oh* and *er*, which constitute conversational support indicating listeners' involvement in the conversation (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 198). The use of the auxiliary *did* in front of the bare infinitive form *know* makes mother's answer emphatic. The exchange of questions continues with Spiro's *But dids you knows he's a Turk?*, which continues the gradual revealing of information.

Mother's second question *A Turk?'… 'No, I didn't know he was a Turk. What's wrong with that?* is the climax of the dialogue, as it sounds totally unexpected to Spiro and affects the progress of the conversation. It gives rise to his answer *Gollys, Mrs Durrells, whats wrongs with it?… Missy Margo swimmings with hims*. At this point, Spiro abandons his conspirational style. His direct speech indicates the culmination of his indignation and anger, thus creating a sense of immediacy. Consequently, readers can visualize him discussing with the mother and being extremely expressive. The mother's answer *All right, Spiro… I'll speak to Margo about it* moderates the tension of the discussion. A relative restoration of calmness follows with Spiro's final words *I just thoughts you oughts to knows, that's all. Buts donts you worrys … if he dids anythings to Missy Margo I'd fix the bastard*.

Evaluation

In this example, there is no *external evaluation* as the narrator does not describe his own feelings overtly. Elements of internal evaluation (underlined in the narrative extract above) are, however, dispersed throughout the extract.

The deliberate use of evaluative lexicon (*sonofabitch*, line 17; *I'd fix the bastard*, line 22) and the rising intonation indicated in the italicized (in the original) word *Turk* (lines 11, 16) reveal Spiro's quick temper and (over)protective feelings towards Margo and her family. Also, Spiro's *conspiratorial air* (line 1), *vibrant whisper* (line 8), and *blood-curdling ferocity* (line 11–12), and his description as *hitching up his trousers over his belly and leaning forward* (line 10) all contribute to the depiction of tension and potential violence attributed to him. The adverbs *sorrowfully* (line 5) and *uneasily* (line 7) as well as the participle *horrified* (line 15) shed more light on Spiro's embarrassment towards the mother.

The mother is portrayed as level-headed and not easily affected by Spiro's moods (*had by now become quite used*, line 1; *it no longer worried her*, line 2–3; *now*, line 4). Therefore, she confronts him by lying *valiantly* (line 9), in an effort to prevent a further complication or tension in the dialogue, which Spiro seemed to be prone to. Mother's answering *vaguely* (line 13) gives her a temporary solution against Spiro's pressure during their dialogue, but when he expresses himself in an extreme way once again, she reassures him *soothingly* (line 20). However, her sincere question *What's wrong with that?* (lines 13–14) when she asked about Margo's Turkish friend, caused Spiro's eruption, who assured the mother *earnestly* (line 23) that he would *fix the bastard* (line 22) in case he did anything 'bad' to Miss Margo.

While tracing internal evaluation, particular attention should also be paid to Spiro's use of *but* at the beginning of the sentence *But dids you knows he's a Turk?* (line 11): *but* introduces Spiro's negative evaluation of Margo's friend. *Gollys* (line 16) and Spiro's invocation to Gods (*Honest to Gods*, line 18) further underline the gravity of the 'problem'. In addition, the representation of Spiro's non-standard English throughout the dialogue should not be left unnoticed, as it is a significant part of the internal evaluation of the narrative. His non-standard English contributes to attributing him a lower status in relation to the mother who is represented as speaking standard British English. As a result, the emergence of a pattern of contrast between the linguistic performance of Spiro and that of the mother becomes quite perceivable by the readers. Their unequal status is further constructed via their use of address terms: while Spiro shows respect and social distance by calling the mother *Mrs Durrells* (lines 16, 18; and refers to her daughter as *Missy Margo*; lines 5, 18, 22), she does not reciprocate and addresses him in a familiar manner, that is, *Spiro* (lines 4, 20).

In this narrative example, which is part of a longer text, the *abstract* structural category is missing as the narrator does not announce his aim of telling a story; the extract is an episode of a much longer narrative. Also, there is no *resolution*

because readers do not eventually learn if the mother talked to Margo about the Turkish friend of hers. Furthermore, there is no *coda* because readers are not given by the narrator any phrases or comments indicating the completion of the story.

Moving on to Bamberg's (1997; 2004) model regarding the investigation of the narrative construction of identities, at the first level of positioning, we explore the relationship between Spiro and the mother as depicted in their dialogue. The contrasts in their conversational styles and in their language varieties (non-standard and standard respectively) contribute to building two opposing identities. At the beginning, Spiro is represented as adopting a conspirational style which, later on, is developed to a hot-tempered attitude, because mother does not seem to share his perspective and does not talk negatively about Margo's Turkish friend. Rudeness and prejudice are revealed when he talks about this friend of Margo's (lines 16–19, 21–23). Additionally, in comparison with the mother, Spiro is ascribed the identity of a person who wants to impose his beliefs, not to discuss about them. Furthermore, his identity is that of an 'inadequate' user of English who, compared to the British mother, lacks the 'necessary' language skills and social status. Consequently, his contribution to the discussion is implicitly evaluated as odd, incongruous, and hence less significant.

On the other hand, the mother is assigned the identity of a person who chooses to keep a low profile and avoids tensions for the sake of serenity and balance. She is represented as a calm and self-possessed person, who is not easily affected by Spiro's sentiments and behavior. Her spontaneity, which becomes evident when she asks what was wrong with Margo's going out with a Turk (lines 13–14), is balanced by her good judgment, which allows her to lie that she knew about Margo's going out with a man (line 9), as well as by her talking soothingly (line 20), in order to appease Spiro's anger. Moreover, her standard British English frames her reactions as 'more suitable' and 'well-thought'. It could therefore be suggested that opposing identities are attributed to the two characters.

At the second level of positioning, the narrator does not address his readers directly, since there is no first person narration. However, he seeks to establish a close interaction with his audience, mostly via the vividly represented conversational styles adopted by the characters in the dialogue (e.g. Spiro's eruption versus mother's calmness; see above). Does, the narrator conveys a slight mood of irony and denigration towards Spiro. This intention of the narrator is encoded via Spiro's non-standard English, but also via specific linguistic choices, such as *uneasily* (line 7), to indicate his unnecessarily being in a state of tension, as well as via an element of exaggeration in the detailed descriptions of his extremely ritualistic attitude (*Spiro hitched up his trousers over his belly and leant forward*, line 10).

At the third level of positioning, the narrator intends to express his assumptions and beliefs vis-à-vis the wider socio-ideological context, through the behaviors represented in the dialogue. This dialogue reflects opposing beliefs and assumptions, since Spiro's behavior is opposed to mother's behavior. Their differences

are directly related to stereotypical characteristics often attributed to the Greek and the British. More specifically, they reproduce and reinforce widely circulating stereotypes concerning the 'quick-tempered' and 'exaggerating' Greeks and the 'level-headed', 'reasonable' British.

The construction of such identities is triggered by the attitudes the two characters exhibit towards the Turks: the mother is represented as having no hostile feelings against the Turks, and hence does not appear to categorize people according to their ethnic origin. On the other hand, Spiro is represented as not being able to move beyond negative stereotypes about the Turks, which were/are often circulated among Greeks. Turks are thus portrayed as unreliable and potentially hostile and violent. As a result, the hostility and suspicion against people only due to their ethnic origin is expressed through Spiro's stereotypical thinking and prejudice, while the equal treatment of, and respect for, people from different cultural backgrounds, is expressed through mother's reasonable thinking. Eventually, in the wider socio-ideological context, opposing characters such as Spiro and the mother do become representative of either bias-endorsing or bias-rejecting tendencies in society.

7. Tentative teaching proposals

This section includes some tentative teaching suggestions based on the narrative example previously analyzed. The implementation of such suggestions in ELF classes could be restricted by a number of limitations and/or difficulties, such as the limited time allotted to the teaching of English or students' skepticism towards the critical reading of (literary narrative) texts (see section 3). In order to overcome such limitations, these teaching proposals can be adjusted to the needs of each student group.

In ELF classes promoting critical literacy, elaborating on the categories of the complicating action and evaluation could help students explore the perspectives and feelings of the two interlocutors and hence the distance between their identities. Questions such as the following could be asked in class:

- *What is the unexpected event of this narrative and how are the characters positioned towards it?*

If narratives evolve around one or more unexpected events (Labov 1972), mother and Spiro's divergence concerning their feelings for the Turks, in particular her level-headed or even distanced way of dealing with what Spiro perceives as a 'serious problem', forms the main point of the narrative. Students could thus focus on mother's words *No, I didn't know he was a Turk. What's wrong with that?* (lines 13–14), which are a deviation from what was expected by Spiro who, as many Greeks were/are, is suspicious or even hostile towards the Turks. Students could also comment on the personal style each one of the two characters adopts.

The tension Spiro emits in comparison to the mother's steady calmness could be perceived as reflections of opposing personalities who adopt different ways to express themselves and their feelings.

- *What do you think about Spiro's reaction to the mother's words* No, I didn't know he was a Turk. What's wrong with that? *(lines 13–14), and why do you think he is so suspicious towards Margo's Turkish friend?*

These questions are expected to lead to a class discussion about stereotyping. As Ellis and McClintock (1990: 21) argue, stereotyping provides a convenient technique for making quick judgments and giving speedy reactions, and leads people to conclusions that are not only wrong but also damaging to interpersonal and intercultural communication. The depth of such a discussion would significantly depend on how much ELF students know, and are willing to share in class, about the tense relations between the Greeks and the Turks in the past because of the Ottoman rule in Greece from the mid-15th century until the successful Greek War of Independence that broke out in 1821. Since 1453, when the fall of Constantinople took place, until the Greek revolution in 1821, the territory currently belonging to Greece was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks who controlled the entire Middle East and the Balkans as far as the gates of Vienna (Barrett 2016). Ever since then, mistrust and tension have prevailed, and are still perpetuated, in the relationship between the two neighboring countries. Hence, students could elaborate on how past experiences may affect present practices and respective stereotypes. Moreover, ELF students could contribute to the discussion by saying if they ever felt being unfairly treated with suspicion only because of their origin or their cultural background. They could even compare and contrast such experiences among them.

- *How are the characters positioned in relation to each other and what identities are highlighted?*

ELF students could focus on the constructed direct speech of Spiro and the mother. During their commenting on the characters' contribution to the dialogue, students could realize the stereotypical ideas reflected on the Greek character of Spiro, who is attributed the identity of an explosive and discriminating person, who tries to have the upper hand in his dialogue with the mother through the intensity of his voice and gestures.

   ELF students could also comment on the fact that, in sharp contrast to Spiro, the mother, who is assigned the identity of a serene and tolerant person, does not talk much, seems to remain unaffected by Spiro's way of presenting his beliefs, but in fact demonstrates the ability to manage his 'extreme' behavior and to bring things to a state of balance. What helps her in this attempt is her lack of an impulsive temperament and her being more reserved (compared to Spiro) in the expression of her feelings.

At this point, ELF students could also understand that the distance between Spiro's vigor and the mother's serenity does not only reflect the distance between stereotypical and non-stereotypical thinking (about the Turks; see above). It also reflects the stereotypical gap between the Greek temperament, which is often represented as involving 'uncontrolled' and/or 'unreasonable' practices, and the British temperament, which does not seem to favor impulsiveness, but instead appears to be based on 'balanced reasoning'. Consequently, this gap between the two types of temperament could also become the subject of further critical discussions among students.

- *Through what linguistic means does the narrator attempt to construct the characters' identities and to communicate them to the readers?*

ELF students are expected to elaborate on the fact that the narrator communicates his messages through the characters' constructed dialogue and through their styles, as well as through the evaluative language of the narrative (see section 6). The narrator might not address his readers directly, but the vividness of the constructed direct speech and the power of internal evaluation establish a strong channel of communication between the readers and himself.

Additionally, students could elaborate on mother's 'impeccable' British English and Spiro's non-standard English. The narrator thus aims at hinting that Spiro's linguistic contribution is 'less important', 'less correct', and 'inappropriate' compared to that of the mother (since he does not speak standard English but she does), and by extension at doubting the validity of his reasoning.

- *In what way does the narrator put forward his attitude(s) towards ethnic bias and discrimination?*

At this point, students are expected to point out once again the contribution of the constructed dialogue to this end. By juxtaposing two contrasting characters, Spiro and the mother, the differences between their positionings are emphasized. These differences are part of a wider range of discrepancies, or clash of ideas and worldviews, often attested in cross-cultural encounters. In this context, students could consider the fact that the narrator seems to go beyond the mere pin-pointing of such differences. Through his evaluation of the characters, the narrator appears to believe that such contrasting stances and practices are premised on contrasting principles, such as stereotypical and non-stereotypical thinking, and ethnic bias and lack of it. However, although the narrator implicitly puts forward a tolerant, unbiased view of the Turks (supported by the mother), he does not refrain from stereotyping as his portrayal of the (British) mother is remarkably more favorable than that of (the Greek) Spiro.

Relevant topics for discussion in class could involve the ways ethnic stereotypes and identities influence our behavior and how our socialization within

a specific sociocultural community contributes to this effect. To this end, further activities could be proposed:

- *A dramatization of the previously analyzed narrative example in ELF class-es would give students the opportunity to activate their imagination and creativity so as to present and supplement the narrated events from their own points of view. Students would thus be given the opportunity to adjust the narrator's intended meanings to their own perspectives, as well as to put forward their own identities and opinions.*

- *Students could be asked to comment on the following quotes, in order to ex-amine if and how these relate to the issues and social practices represented in the narrative example examined*:

  It is the nature of humankind to idealize, to indulge in excessive praise, as well as unjust condemnation (Peter Ackroyd; *Goodreads* 2017a).

  Reality confounds image (Peter Heather; *Goodreads* 2017b).

In the context of discussing these quotes, ELF students are expected, among other things, to share their views on how judgments based on prejudice or a superficial consideration of facts can lead to a biased conception of social reality. In relation to the narrative example examined, it is expected that students will connect such a biased conception to Spiro's prejudice against the Turks, as well as to the narra-tor's ironical attitude towards the 'unreasonable' and 'exaggerating' Greek man.

- *Students could also be asked to watch the YouTube video 'The danger of a single story' (Ngozi Adichie 2009) highlighting the need to cultivate lit-eracy through material relevant to, and coming from, students' cultures,[1] as well as to deconstruct the biased perceptions and representations of the 'Other' in mainstream culture. It is expected that students will comment on the importance of one's contact with his/her culture, as well as the impor-tance of multiple facets inherent in one's identity.*

8. Concluding remarks

Given that teaching English nowadays takes into account the fact that English is often used as a lingua franca among speakers from diverse linguocultural back-grounds, the significance of teaching about cultures besides the British or the American ones is highlighted in the present study. Students' own cultures could infiltrate and become the focus of ELF teaching, thus allowing students to (re)ne-gotiate their own identities and to critically explore the differences between their

own culture and those of others. It will also enable them to denaturalize the dominance of ELF and to mitigate the ensuing cultural imposition on ELF students.

To this end, we suggest that (excerpts from) literary narratives could be exploited to enhance students' critical literacy in ELF classes. The material used could involve cross-cultural encounters bringing to the surface differences in the assumptions, values, practices, and identities of the individuals. Such differences could be discussed in class and give students and teachers the opportunity to express their own positionings and to interact with the meanings emerging from the texts.

Such a methodological proposal is premised on sociolinguistic and critical perspectives of ELF and literacy teaching, and deviates from traditional, formal approaches to ELF teaching. Hence, it may not be easy to apply for a variety of reasons. Among other things, students and teachers are often unfamiliar with critical literacy goals and practices in class and may be suspicious as to their effectiveness. Due to focusing on closed curricula, exclusively linguistic goals, and testing for language certification, ELF students and teachers may consider the construction of identities and the relevant discussions in class to be unnecessary and time-consuming tasks, especially in the context of the limited time allotted to ELF teaching in schools (see also section 3). In any case, the present teaching proposal is intended to be perceived as indicative of how students and teachers could approach "social issue texts" (Vasquez et al. 2013: 51–52; see section 3) involving diverse identities, both dominant (e.g. ELF) and non-dominant ones (e.g. students' own). Due to space limitations, here we have presented a single literary narrative example to illustrate our theoretical and analytical points. The analysis of more examples would definitely bring to the surface more and more diverse identities, and would foster different comparisons and critical discussions on them (see Deliroka 2017).

Finally, we argue that such activities could foster students' and teachers' involvement in ELF teaching, and provide an opportunity to understand how more or less subtle sociocultural differences in assumptions and practices result in communication problems and mistrust. In our view, bringing to the fore rather than pushing under the carpet students' and teachers' diverse identities could not only increase their motivation for learning English but, most importantly, could cultivate mutual respect and strengthen their motivation for exploring different cultures.

Note

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