Language learners' identities in EFL settings: resistance and power through discourse*

Las identidades de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera: resistencia y poder discursivo

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Abstract

This research project aims at identifying and analyzing different identities students construct as learners of a foreign language when interacting within an EFL classroom, and how this identity construction might have possible effects on students' language learning process. This study, which was carried out with undergraduate students from a private university in Bogotá, was the product of permanent observation to the development of students language learning process (specially speaking skill) and how the implicit or explicit student-teacher interaction might constitute an important element to this development, relies under the principles of CCDA (Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis). The idea of implementing this research methodology has to do with the need of looking beyond fixed categorizations and rather listen to how learners negotiate different identities as they employ diverse cultural and linguistic resources to construct knowledge in classrooms. Throughout the process of data collection, with transcripts of oral interactions undertaken in the classroom and interviews to students as main sources of analysis, a new perspective of pupils as social actors who hold multiple social identities was discovered. The results show that issues such as the use of L1 in the EFL classroom, the teacher's conception of language learning and teaching and the silent fight for power among teacher and students constitute important elements in the struggle of students when constructing their social and individual identities as learners within a given classroom community.

Key words: Identity, classroom interaction, language learners' identities, language teacher's identities.

Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación está encaminado a identificar y analizar las diferentes identidades que construyen los estudiantes como aprendices de una lengua extranjera cuando interactúan en el salón de clase, y como esta construcción de identidad puede tener efectos en su proceso de aprendizaje. Este estudio, que fue llevado a cabo con estudiantes de pregrado de una universidad privada de Bogotá y que fue el producto de una observación permanente del proceso del desarrollo del proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera(especialmente la habilidad de habla) y cómo la interacción estudiante –profesor de manera implícita o explícita constituye un elemento importante en este proceso, está basado en los principios de, Análisis Crítico del Discurso en el Salón de clase (CCDA). La idea de implementar esta metodología de investigación tiene que ver con la necesidad de ver más allá de las categorizaciones para comenzar a escuchar como los aprendices negocian diferentes identidades al emplear diversos recursos culturales y lingüísticos para construir conocimiento en el salón de clase. A través del proceso de recolección de datos, con transcripciones de interacciones habladas y los estudiantes como principales fuentes de análisis, se descubrió una nueva perspectiva de los estudiantes como actores sociales que desarrollan múltiples identidades sociales.

Los resultados muestran que aspectos como el uso de la lengua materna en la clase de Inglés, el concepto del maestro acerca del proceso de enseñanza – aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera, y la lucha silenciosa por el poder entre maestro y estudiantes constituyen elementos importantes para los estudiantes a la hora de construir sus identidades social e individual como aprendices en una comunidad constituida por el salón de clase.

Palabras clave: Identidad, Interacción en el salón de clase, identidades de los aprendices de lengua extranjera, identidades del maestro.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language has become a must in this globalized world which acknowledges the importance of how knowing a different language implies knowing a different culture. There is no secret in saying that for political, economical and ideological reasons, English has become not only the language to learn, but also, the language to use.

However, the process learners have to go through in order to reach this goal is not an easy one. Despite the increasing use of technology reflected in virtual platforms in order to learn languages, which helps students save time and even money, it is also suitable to say that the main place and source of learning is still the classroom.

The main concern of this research project has to do with the way students have been conceived as "language entities", able to comprehend and thus, communicate in a new language, previously stimulated by an input that may vary according to students ability to capture information for further reply (as depicted by Krashen (1981) in his natural approach). Nevertheless, thanks to a sociolinguistic movement that takes into account more complex aspects of language learners as multidirectional beings that express their thoughts as the result of permanent interactions with other and their environment (As Mackey, 1999 states), an urgent call to consider learners as social beings whose learning process can be affected by different variables that come into play into different dimensions is started to be considered. The problem is, then, to think of learners one dimensional being that exclusively produces language because of language stimuli.

All the things that happen in this little universe the classroom represents are strongly related to the experiences that individuals live every day: the way they relate to others, the way they communicate and the way they perceive and are perceived by others. This fact entails that the interactions developed and constructed by the inhabitants of that universe in which language is being learned are supposed to be carried out in certain ideal way, in order to make effective learning and teaching happen. According to Tsui (1995), the language classroom requires interactions that promote meaningful communication in the target language, probe learners´prior learning and interpretations of new concepts about language and culture, engage learners with texts and resources that reflect language and culture in context, engage learners in tasks that deepen their experience and understanding of the target language and culture and above all, promote reflection on language and culture learning and use. (p.81)

However, this ideal scenario certainly changes across contexts, preferences and needs of learners, and it is at this specific point that interactions start to re accommodate in order to serve the purpose of a specific learning situation. What we must take into account is who participates in the interactions and in which way these are constructed in order to somehow, guarantee effectiveness in the language learning process. These interactions, then can be intertwined through two different layers: the visible one in which the roles of students and teachers are established by clear rules, and the invisible, informal one, in which what it is left unsaid, reflected in attitudes behaviors and language usage says even more about who we are as language learners.

Besides, a combination of theoretical considerations and studies carried out on the topic of this study that will give a complete picture of what the constructs of this research project rely on. The first part had to do with the concept of identity in the field of social science, the second one with the relation between language and identity, bearing in mind its importance as to how

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one contributes in the construction of the other, and how this relation in even more evident in the field of language teaching and learning; and finally the importance of classroom interaction, depicting through some studies on the matter, its nature and implication in both social and individual construction of identity of students as language learners.

Under the light of Classroom critical discourse analysis, this research project was aimed at helping both teachers and students restate the processes of interaction undertaken in EFL settings, in which interaction is sometimes limited to receiving information with no further result.

Finally, another aspect worth taking into account is the fact that most of the studies carried out in this subject of identity construction have been developed in ESL cross cultural settings. Thus, the idea of having a study of this nature in a university EFL context is quite relevant. The way students perceive themselves as language learners, and the way they actually perform their identities in a given language learning situation might contribute to the way teachers conceive teaching language process. Discovering the real role teachers play as active participants who have a direct influence on students´ choices and decisions related to the way they learn a language that, depending on the context and students´ interests and motivations, might or might not represent a meaningful step in their educational lives.

As a result of this reflection, I decided to pose the following research questions in order to have a better understanding of this phenomenon.

What does classroom interaction unveil about students' identity construction as language learners in an EFL university classroom?

What does this identity construction inform us about students' views on teaching and learning a foreign language?

Literature review

Taking into consideration the research questions proposed for this project, the theoretical framework was based on several studies that give account of the different experiences researchers have had with regards to identity construction in different contexts, and how this construction might have an effect on the way students conceive their learning process. The three key aspects that were developed are, *Identity* as a general construct, *Identity of students as language learners* and *Classroom interaction* that represents one of the multiple faces identity should have.

Identity

Within this literature review, along with the presentation of the constructs that conform my research project, I consider important to highlight the fact that it is also intended to show why is it necessary to study and do research on the concept of identity in EFL settings and its possible effects on a further reconstruction or at least awareness of the dynamics in the process of foreign language teaching and learning.

I consider important to start by stating the way identity is understood and undertaken within the framework of this research project. This approach has to do with the concept of the nature of identity as a dynamic entity that can be negotiated, transformed and achieved (Bernstein, 2000) being discursively constructed (Le Page,1986). In other words, identity is constructed and co- constructed by one- self and others bearing in mind the way social dynamics are developed and what the different roles individuals assign or are assigned according to specific situations are. Regarding Wenger's (1998) words, identity is constructed in relationships with others, extending from the past and stretching into the future. Identities are malleable and dynamic, a permanent construction of who we are and who we might become as a result of our participation

with others in the experience of life. It is an ongoing process of negotiating the self engaging in a community of practice (1998).

This concept of identity within the field of social sciences has gained a remarkably favorable position since for humanists, sociologists, cultural theorists and of course educational researchers. They have constantly wondered about the new ways in which human beings relate to each other and how this bidirectional dynamic between the individual and their relation to others can be analyzed and understood. As a consequence, identity is a concept that groups traditional terms and puts all of them beyond biological features or even behaviors that can be imitated and learned through the same social interaction. These terms that go from individual to social features raise a question as to how they had been studied separately given the complexity of human nature and its relations.

How is identity constructed?

Along with the importance of the study of identity, and having acknowledged that the nature of identity goes beyond static determining factors and becomes a dynamic entity mediated by individual and social interactions, the term identity construction comes into play. How are these interactions produced? What are the different aspects that influence the position of an individual within the interaction with his/her environment? From a theoretical perspective, the concept of identity construction has evolved from sociological to postmodernist perspectives.

That being said, the complexity of identity construction is condensed as Egan- Robertson (1998) claims, "in an intersection of a myriad of complex sociological factors within a historical moment" (p. 455). The process of identity construction has to do, therefore, with the experiences individuals live within a specific social environment. It is the one that determines

a game of identities that would have not been the same if the context were different.

Since the purpose of this research was to unveil the hidden meanings of classroom interaction, it would be suitable to recall Bakhtin's ideas (1981), on how human beings engage in internal dialogues that are the result of many voices and how through these dialogues we are able to construct and reconstruct ourselves. These internal voices could be expressed through what we say, in other words, through discourse. The issue is that, most of the times, the dynamic organization in which different identities can align or even conflict with each other can go unnoticed. The identity as language learners is one of those that is part of a multidimensional space, that has to do not only with the roles, positions and voice of students as part of the community that the classroom represents, but also as individuals in the process of understanding a language that is different from their own. Thus, the relation between language and identity is a key aspect in the comprehension of the ongoing process of identity construction of the students who are the participants of my research project.

Language and identity

The concept of language in this particular study is certainly not limited to a "set of rules for communication" (Gee, 1990). Rather, it is about a view of language as the key element for identity construction. As Belsey (1980) suggests "It is through language that people constitute themselves", it is through language, then, that people define and redefine who they are and who they might become. Language can also be considered as an identity kit that signals membership in particular groups, and given our nature as social beings, the use of this language may vary according to the context that define the way we relate to others and ourselves. We can, therefore, perform different identities. As Gee and Crawford (1998) state we can take on

different identities depending upon the social setting, yet there are relationships between our different selves.

Thanks to Norton's work (1995) on the intertextual analysis of the relation of language and identity, we can unveil its real importance within the language teaching process in ESL settings. Within the expectable differences of the five studies Norton analyzes as to socio cultural contexts and communicative situations, some general conclusions can be drawn and even related to the experiences I lived in the classroom setting object of my study. First of all, the fact of considering identity as "complex, contradictory and multifaceted" (Norton, p. 419) that shows how students go through a permanent process of change that is part of the process of affiliation to a social group, that in this case, is constituted by teacher, students and their surrounding environment. This construction of a social identity which is understood by Norton as the relationship between the individual and the larger social world; this relationship is mediated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, among others. It is also intertwined with the never ending process of finding an individual identity that could be reflected on the need of student to be part of the circle that they create as a classroom community, but it is unfortunately not legitimated by the members of the same community.

Secondly, the fact that all the authors who carried out research projects whose object was students going through the experience of an ESL learning process when moving to a different community from their own, point out that identity both constructs and is constructed by language. Either related to notions of social identity, or the "inseparability" of language and culture, the conclusion we could make is that language embodies acts of identity that are constructed in respect to larger social processes.

Identity as language learners

Regarding identity construction of students as language learners, Luke (1996) suggests that learners have multiple social identities that help them take different positions in daily interactive behaviors and that the positions "offer possibilities for difference, for multiple and hybrid subjectivities that human subjects make and remake…"(p.86)

One example of these issue is depicted in Morita's study (2004), who through a case study in a private university in Canada, shows how the different positions students assume when interacting in a second language classroom setting have to do not only with the way they are seen and perceived by others, but also the background each student has from previous life and learning experiences that make them face situations in different ways.

As part of the findings for this study, analysis suggested that a major challenge for the students was negotiating discourses, competence, identities, and power relations so that they could participate and be recognized as a legitimate and competent members of a given classroom community. Regarding this issue, it is important to take into account the concept of Community of Practice (COP) (Wegner, 1998), conceived from a perspective of learning as a social process in which experiences, thoughts, ideas, opinions and knowledge on a specific subject are shared. The complexity of the classroom as a community of practice deals with the necessity of group members to belong and being legitimated by that community. In Morita's study, this concept of COP was evidenced in a new dynamic of interaction in which newcomers (the new members of the community), tried to fully participate in group dynamics sharing with the most "experienced" members of the same community.

In a different study undertaken by Chavez (2007), the author intents to uncover instances

of convergence or divergence between classroom language-use norms and individual students' task interpretation. Analyzing transcripts of peer interaction in three different classes of a multi-section course in Germany, she finds interesting features of identity construction of language learners, through teacher and student's talk. She found out, for example, that in peer interactions, learners asserted their individual identities depending on the degree and form of participation they might have in the class.

In a transition of the complexity of the process of the construction of students identity as language learners, we go from the individual identity expressed in Chavez' study, to the development of social identity stated by Norton, (and linked to Luke's(1996) perspective on multiple social identities) depicted in her study from 1995, in which she expresses her concern about the lack of development of a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context.

Thus, it would be worth concluding by saying that an adequate theory of learners' identity entails understanding of their subjectivities and how they negotiate different positions using different identities. Luke (1996) argues that learners have multiple social identities that help them take different positions in daily interactive behaviors and that the positions "offer possibilities for difference, for multiple and hybrid subjectivities that human subjects make and remake..." (p. 14). This means that teachers must look beyond fixed categorizations and listen to how learners negotiate different identities as they employ diverse cultural and linguistic resources to construct knowledge in classrooms.

Classroom interaction

The classroom, undoubtedly, is the main scenario for this process of identity construction as language learners. It composes both the social environment and the means through which students build up their individual identity and struggle finding ways to re-create within the community they belong to: the community of EFL students. How does this construction of identity take places within the classroom setting? In order to answer this question, we must start by taking a look at the two elements that certainly compose the dynamics of, not only a language classroom, but the dynamics of life itself: teaching and learning. For the purpose of my research project, it is necessary to consider how the two main actors of an educational community relate to each other, and thus, how teaching and learning are developed within classroom practice.

According to Tudor (2006), it has been always complex to set agreements as to what teaching is, what it involves, and what the most effective way to teach a second language would be. It also depends on the vision of language and the vision of learning that both teachers and students hold. The classroom constitutes a constant stage of debate in which whether in an explicit or implicit way (most of the times), teachers and students are adapting their approaches, methodologies and strategies in order to set and environment that allows students to learn. Therefore, it is suggested by Tudor that "classroom teaching is strongly negotiative in nature" (p. 181)

Nevertherless, there is another aspect that has not been fully considered when talking about classroom interaction: power. This concept of power and its important in the language learning process goes way beyond pre established roles given in the classroom where the teacher is the one who hold the power both socially and pedagogically. According to James (1993), it is vital to take into account the way language works or how it fails to work and the reason why this happens. Through the use of discourse, a

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learner can assume either a powerful or powerless position within classroom environment. If, as Foucault (1983) states, power circulates trough individuals, it is interesting to notice how it goes back and forth; teachers and students then, can be in control through words, gestures and even silences that no longer define the teacher as the politically powerful figure in the classroom setting.

To conclude, one single identity dimension of a person, that is represented in identity as a learner, and more specifically as a language learner, embraces a whole set of identity faces that, just like a reflected light crystal, are highlighted while others are diminished but always being part of the same complex piece.

Method

This research project is embodied in the principles of qualitative research, which uses a multiplicity of methods and involves an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the phenomenon under study. As a researcher, I studied a phenomenon in a natural setting, attempting to make sense of it. Besides, the paradigm, approach and methodology for my research project were all interrelated and closely connected. More than a hierarchical order, they link to one another relying on the line and principles of discourse analysis.

That being said, the approach I took into consideration as my framework for data analysis was the one proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1999), Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis. Classroom discourse, like all other discourses, is socially constructed, politically motivated, and historically determined; that is, social, political, and historical conditions develop and distribute the cultural capital that shapes and reshapes the lives of teachers and learners. At this point it is important to highlight the fact that this approach has not been widely used in our particular educational settings. The idea, therefore, was to start breaking ground by exploring the ways this approach might work in particular EFL settings in our country and how its use can contribute to a more acute analysis of the different factors that teaching and learning English in the Colombian context might entail.

Taking into account that Kumaravadivelu has not yet proposed a detailed methodology for data analysis, and given the fact that I combined it with ethnography, I decided to use grounded approach whose purpose, recalling the words from Glasser and Strauss (1960) is to develop theory about a phenomena of interest, rooted in careful observation. This is a well established method and fits my data and its needs. According to Canagarajah (1993), under Critical Ethnography principles, the researcher should approach data analysis and findings through an inductive and recursive process: expect patterns, categories, or themes to evolve as data collection proceeds rather than imposing them a priori.

The context in which this research project took place is a private university in Bogotá. It is an institution that offers students a wide variety of majors from Economics to Arts; divided in the two branches the university has. In the northern branch, for instance, most of the majors are related to arts: Social Communication, Advertising, music among others. In the downtown branch, on the other hand, students can find majors such as Accounting and Engineering.

The conception of English as an official and mandatory subject in this private university's curricula is the reflection of the permanent concern of the university about broadening students perspectives towards international issues and as well as knowing the foreign scenarios in which their profession might take place. Taking this fact into consideration, a new department was conceived and created ten years ago: the languages department. This department has

been in charge of the creation, implementation, and development of processes in English as a foreign language as well as other languages such as French, German and Italian. The courses are offered for people who do not belong to the university (Continuing education courses), taking into account the communicative approach as the body of the courses in all the levels. For undergraduate students, English is a mandatory subject which has to be undertaken throughout the program, in four different levels: Basic I, Basic II, Basic III, and Pre intermediate I. The schedule, which is basically the same for all the majors (16 hour per month), can be freely chosen according to the student's needs and availability.

This specific research project was carried out in the north branch in the Journalism major, which was the one I was assigned to teach at the university, with a population of 18 students (7 men and 11 women) aged between 18 and 23 years old, who willingly signed the consent form and decided to be part of the project (appendix 2),and a male teacher, who has about five years of experience. Currently, they are taking level Basic III in their English course, four hours per week: Wednesdays and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00p.m. The environment within the course is nice and the relationship among the students and the teacher as well as among the students is kind and respectful.

I decided to choose this particular group since they were willing to participate in the project. Both teacher and students expressed in a preliminary interview their opinion about the class, and how important it was to students to learn a second language in order to fulfil the needs of a globalized world. That is the reason why I chose this group in order to discover how their dynamics were undertaken and if their objectives and expectations towards the class were achieved.

The process of designing the instruments was not an easy one. It was an evolving process that led me to draw on final interpretations and conclusions, in which the primary source of data (transcripts from video recordings), has to be compared and contrasted in a parallel way with other instruments (field notes and interviews) that support and give account for what has been observed and interpreted from the transcripts. This instrument, taking into account the kind of data that was going to be analyzed (spoken), as well as my unit of analysis, give account of how students construct their identities as learners. The objective when designing the transcriptions was trying to adapt a model that allowed me as researcher to have easy and clear access to the data in order to facilitate the further process of categorization.

Here, I consider important to show the way I carried out this process in its preliminary stages, before reaching the establishment of categories and sub categories.

The first stage in the analysis was assembling the data, in which my task as a researcher was to pull together all the data collected through a specific period of time. Then, I started a process of "scanning" of that data in order to get preliminary ideas and impression from it. In this stage, broad patterns started to emerge and they certainly helped me in order to come up with commonalities among the information collected in the different instruments.

In this research project, this process of assembling was undertaken by gathering the information collected through the use of two instruments: transcripts and interviews. After scanning all the information produced by both, I figured out some general reflections that were very helpful when defining the categories of analysis. These reflections were presented in the preliminary categorization. (Appendix 1)

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Secondly, I started a process of data "coding" in which I gave specific names to the patterns previously found in the data. The purpose was reducing the large quantity of data in to more specific concepts or categories in order to get to interpretations in the clearest way possible. This process of coding in the process of analysis consisted on giving names to the events described in the data in order to find further common characteristics.

As a third step, I started to establish connections and relationships among patterns regarding the different data collection instruments. At this point, all the information was organized and displayed in order to get clear and supported interpretation of the data analyzed. (Appendix 3)

Finally, I moved from the description phase to what Burns (1999) calls "make sense of the data". It demands the articulation of concepts and the development of theories. As stated before, this interpretation should be supported by the data itself and should also let some room for reflection and further questions, always keeping in mind my research questions and their possible answers.

Findings

For this section of my research project, I included 4 sessions (one hour and a half each), out of the nine I recorded. After examining in a very detailed way the video recordings and transcripts, I selected this sessions under the figure of telling cases (Mitchell, 1984) which were the most significant cases to my perspective as a researcher. Taking into account the principles of grounded approach under the light of critical ethnography (Kumaravadivelu, 1999), each one of the five transcripts have gone through a process of coding and establishment of patterns in order to find the category and sub categories.

All of them are the product of a careful analysis of spoken interactions undertaken in an EFL university classroom, and complemented under the light of theoretical support that closely relates to the findings of this project.

Students as passive resistants

Within the micro universe the language classroom can represent, the student finds him/herself in permanent struggles related to the way he/she is conceived as a language learner. In this first category, there are three subcategories that depict the way students try to discursively fight for a negotiation that either positively or negatively contributes to the process of identity construction.

L1 vs. L2 strategies for understanding

The use of the mother tongue becomes an essential resource for classroom interaction in the context of this project. Each one of the actors (students and teacher), makes use of L1 with different purposes and in different occasions, but definitely with an evident effect on identity construction through the interaction process.

First of all, students' use of L1 is directly related to two main purposes: the first one is to check for understanding on the contents being taught in class, when the interaction is different from the one of giving the answer requested by the teacher. This purpose can take many different directions according to what the student's intention is or what s/he wants to express. These different directions are related to express full ideas on what is being discussed in class, to check and show understanding on what the teacher is saying, to prove that they might have more knowledge on the subject than the rest of their classmates, to talk to each other when undertaking group activities, and when addressing the teacher for individual questions. This fact is illustrated in excerpt 1, where the teacher and one of his students are trying to figure out the definition of passive voice and its relation to a specific field, art.

Excerpt 1 Context: English class with students who belong to level basic 3. Observe the use of the L1 one the teacher makes in his turns.

T: how do you define that? ¿que sería la voz pasiva?, according to those examples…it was taken, it was designed, it was created, it was taken? (S2 SIGUE HABLANDO CON S9) *how do you define that? What would be the passive voice? it was taken, it was designed, it was created, it was taken?*(S2 KEEPS TALKING TO S9)

T: excuse me? Las cosas hablan por si solas…can you expand more, what do you mean *excuse me? Things speak for themselves…can you expand more, what do you mean?*

S2: No es que hablen por si solas, el arte también necesita el ruido para expresar, o sea…la fotografía *(…)It is not that they speak for themselves, art also needs noise to express, I mean…photography (…)*

*Given the fact that the excerpt provided in the data analysis are a mixture between English, broken English and Spanish, an English translation is provided in all of them (in italics) for a better understanding of the reader.

T: so you are associating passive voice with art…so you can use passive voice when you are talking about art…mmmm

The use of L1 in this university classroom unveils a process of identity construction that works towards a common goal which is the learning of a foreign language, but it is undertaken using the L1 nonetheless. In the development of each class, there are two dimensions being constructed simultaneously in one single student-: the learner who uses his/her knowledge about the language to answer teacher's questions, and the learner who uses his/her mother tongue in order to relate his background and life experience with the purpose of giving meaning and understanding to what s/he is being taught about the foreign language. This situation, that is due mostly to a serious language constraint, could shape students' vision of language as an instrumental one, which coerces the negotiation of the self that allows students to position themselves as "more" or "less" powerful   within interaction, unless Spanish is used. The language constraint is acknowledged through short entries in the mother tongue, and the struggle of Spanish use is resisted by the teacher by speaking in English no matter if the students address him in Spanish. They are constructed as subjects able to comprehend rather than subjects being able to use and produce language.

The concept of L1 as a strategy in this specific classroom setting might differ from the purpose L1 one is supposed to entail. Thus, I find a kind of mismatch between what it is evidenced in the data, and what studies and scholars state about the role of L1 in EFL classroom, especially in the code switching phenomenon evidenced in the teacher's talk. According to Turnbull, (2009), the target language must be understood by students. In order to accomplish this goal, the first language use can facilitate intake and thereby contribute to learning. In regards to this issue, code switching arises as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982), that organizes and structures talk.

This phenomenon can also serve important identity related functions as a means to construct interactants as either bilingual or as a way to struggle with the learning of a second language from a monolingual perspective, as a means to display relationships between language and social categories. Recalling Turnbull's words (2009), if we consider the language learner not as an imperfect monolingual speaker of the second language but as a budding, incipient, multilingual whose model is the multilingual speaker, it seems reasonable to expect and allow code switching and in general, the use of the first language, to emerge naturally within second and foreign language classrooms.

Circulating power: struggles for knowledge

Throughout the analysis of the data, power struggles for who holds knowledge were observed.

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Taking into account teacher's long entries compared to the short answers provided by students, one might think that the teacher is the "holder of knowledge" and students' role is either a "translator" or "reproducer" of language rules. Nevertheless, a deeper look at the data made evident some patterns that give account of a process of "power circulation" (Foucault, 1980), that makes knowledge an object of a high value in order to position both teacher and students as active members of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998), that represent this EFL classroom.

Excerpt 2, in which both the students and the teacher are arguing about the past tense of the verb "take" within the correction of one of the grammar exercises students were doing, serves to illustrate this point

Excerpt 2 Context: English class with students who belong to level basic 3. Observe the comments students make after the questions and answers provided by the teacher.

> T: What can we use here?
> S3: took
> T: yeah, take?
> S3: mmm (hesitates)
> T: what do you say?…
> S4: no, pero es…took *no, but it is …took*
> T: ok
> S4: no es el present, es past *it is not the present, it is the past*
> T: ok I know…yes, yes…but took?
> S: (…)
> T: can you please spell it?
> S4: In Spanish teacher? (Ss laughs)
> T: come on!
> S5: Yes T-O-O-K
> T: or take?I'm going to write it in the present, ok?…take…another one?
> S5 to his group: pero no se supo cual era (2 s) por qué take?to his group: but we didn't know what it was (2s)why take?

These struggles for knowledge among students and teachers are undertaken in two different scenarios. The ones about the language and the ones about the previous experiences that students hold, that might contribute to the development of the class.

In the struggles about language, students sometimes position themselves as knowledge holders, since they are giving the teacher instruction on what should or should not be used regarding a specific grammar structure. Since the teacher depends on their answer to continue with the exercise, he cannot avoid the fact of having students telling him the steps he has to follow. In these cases of power circulation, laughing seems to be the reflection on students' reaction of being the ones who tell the teacher what the correct grammar form is, and more so, when the teacher seems to get confused about students' comments. However, the teacher resists this loss of control by ignoring what students are suggesting him to do. Although students do not reply or argue the teacher's final decision, which acknowledges students are right in the answer, they certainly transform the vision they hold about the teacher as the "know it all" that is privileged in the class.

Students as "answerers"

The fact of having students positioning themselves and being positioned by the teacher as the ones who answer have several implications depending on two main aspects.

Students are "free" enough to speak at any moment, given the fact there is no nomination or pointing from the teacher; however, the "choral responses" give account on how the teacher expects students to have the right answer, assuming general understanding of the grammar contents being taught in class.

Excerpt 3 Context: English class with students who belong to level basic 3. Observe the way the teacher elicits for specific information and the strategy students use to respond to it.

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T: I have some sentences that we are going to distinguish (…)hope so; so, just on the right you have these sentences, ok?...so, that's it, the first sentence is: "I can't stop loving you." Do you understand it? You understand it?

Ss: (Speaking in a low voice) yes

T: Sorry?

Ss: Yees! (Ss Laugh)

T: What does it mean? What does it mean in Spanish?

Ss: Yo no puedo dejar de quererte…*(I can't stop loving you..).*

T: No puedo dejar de amarte, ¿cierto? yeah? Good… the second: "I'm afraid of flying" What does it mean in Spanish? *(I can't stop loving you, right? yeah? Good… the second: "I'm afraid of flying" What does it mean in Spanish?)*

Ss: mumbling in Spanish

T: Le tengo miedo a volar, yeah? Good… the next one is "thanks for coming today" *I am afraid of flying, yeah? Good…the next one is "thanks for coming today"*

Ss: gracias por venir hoy*. (Thanks for coming today.)*

T: gracias por venir hoy, good? Here…"we all dislike getting up early, What does it mean in Spanish? *(Thanks for coming today, good? Here…"we all dislike getting up early, What does it mean in Spanish?)*

Related to this position of students "passive" agents of knowledge, when students are able to develop their own strategies and meanings for doing what it is expected from them in the classroom, they learn to view themselves as capable members of a community engaged in learning. According to Wenger (1998), when their ideas and explanations are accepted in a classroom discussion, others also recognize them as members of the community. On the other hand, students who do not have the opportunity to connect with knowledge (in this case language knowledge) on a personal level, or are not recognized as contributors to the classroom, may fail to see themselves as competent at learning and understanding.

The role of "answerers" that reflects a hierarchy in teacher-student relation, might suddenly change when it is the teacher the one who is forced to be the one who answers. In some stages of this particular classroom, the one who questions is the one who has the power.

Even though the role of answerer has different implications depending on who assumes it, this struggle for power definitively shapes the way students identify themselves as part of the classroom community. If the teacher asks, students are expected to give the right answers in order to fulfil a learning goal (as seen in excerpt 2). Therefore, the status quo seems to be saved. On the other hand, if it is the student the one who asks, the teacher is required to give account for the same knowledge he is teaching, and any misunderstanding leads students to, again, change their position from the ones who know less than the teacher, to the ones who can know as much as he does. Interestingly enough, the moments in which this shift was produced, students' participation increased, even using the L1.

According to that, the struggles for power that were mediated through the teacher's and students' discourses are strongly connected to their visions of language as seen in the previous sub-category. The dichotomy between communication and form is explicitly expressed but implicitly fought nonetheless. There is an imposition of a vision of language teaching and learning that does not entirely fit students' interest and capacities as to their learning process. There is a contradiction between what it is said and what

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it is done in this classroom, where it is claimed the importance of communication for learning. It is unveiled in the power exercised in a pedagogical practice based on how language works.

In conclusion, this analysis intended to show the concept of power as a critical standpoint in order to understand what goes on in classrooms. Indeed, the interaction carried out in the setting of my research project allowed me to see that discursive practices are ritually organized in order to produce and reproduce practices which maintain persistent and unequal power relations. Understanding identity construction as a dynamic entity that is socially produced, it can also reveal social arrangements which maintain such power relations. However, they can also be contested and transformed.

Conclusions

The process of analysis of different interactions in this university EFL classroom made me realize about the different ways in which both teachers and students can certainly create environments that facilitate the negotiation and construction of identities despite of the "static" behaviors both actors enroll in a so-called typical English class.

The use of L1 is a valuable strategy for students to get to an understanding of the topics studied in the class, as well as the main way of communication when teacher student interaction is not taking place. It is a way to position themselves as subjects of knowledge that, beyond the constraints in the foreign language, are able to express and give meaning to the interactions that are taking place in the classroom. This phenomenon appears to be an important point when it comes to justify the reasons why students use Spanish in the English classroom, as it was show in excerpt 1 where students were trying to use the L1 in order to provide an answer to the teacher's question. At first glance it seems to be an effective strategy in order to "set the right environment" and get students engaged into the use of the foreign language.

It is impossible, then, to think of an individual construction of identity bearing in mind the social one in which the teacher, with his beliefs and thoughts about teaching and learning, plays a key role. The way he conceives language, its nature and the way it must be taught or used according to the vision, certainly shapes students as language learners. In this particular classroom, for instance, the learning of English as a foreign language is held by communication that uses primarily the L1, but it is resisted by the teacher who just uses it when code switching, shaping the vision and perspective of language learning as an instrumental one that does not certainly relate to the students self as a whole, and an identity of learners who "work for the moment", without any meaningful insight of learning a second language. Just in the way students struggle in order to understand how the language works and how it can be internalized, teachers also deal with issues related to what is the best way to engage students into the learning process. However, it is inevitable that a pattern of teaching that is influenced by teachers' beliefs and background experiences stand out among his clear conscious as to how every student has a different way to learn a language.

On the other hand, power struggles in the classroom that affect the "regular flow" of this university classroom is directly related to knowledge and how it is constructed, imposed or owed in a community of practice. Since these struggles make the teacher lose face in front of his students, and changes the role of students giving them the power to hold the knowledge, role positioning becomes a cycle that is supposed to be closed when the teacher recovers his discourse identity (Gee, 2001), and students return to their

positional identity (Holland et al, 1998) in which they are supposed to get to the apprehension of their social position in a given community. The fact of having students resisting some of the rules implicitly imposed by the teacher, does not mean, however, that they do not legitimate the teacher as "the one in charge" when it comes to the shaping of the teaching learning process. That is precisely when the struggle for power takes place. According to the data analyzed, students consider him a good teacher, with a good methodology and interesting ways to show the language immersed in real life topics.

Nevertheless, in the undercover dynamics, students claim their right to be rather than structural, communicative beings. The need to keep the status quo is broken by the need to reposition the way students should be considered. According to this, students' identity as learners is constructed in a fragmented way since the persona they represent in their inner and outside world, does not seem to relate to their identity as learners.

In regards to the pedagogical implications, a study with these characteristics would get teachers into a state of reflection and awareness that allows them to evaluate current pedagogical practices and how trough sharing experiences between colleagues, some decision can be made as to the way students are going through their learning process and even the way they are assessed can be modified or restated according to the needs or expectations of students.

Within a transformative view of language and teaching, both actors of this community shall be willing to acknowledge that not everything is written, and that what we say, how we say it and even what we do not say at all is also part of communication circles that account for a better understanding of human communication.

These are valuable reflections that we might start taking into consideration what it is not said and it is hidden in issues of injustice and social inequity, in order to respect and value what students actually say. As Luke (1996) states, learners have multiple social identities that help them take different positions in daily interactive behaviors and that the positions "offer possibilities for difference, for multiple and hybrid subjectivities that human subjects make and remake..." (p. 14). There would not be "perfect recipes" but rather alternative and transformative views of teaching and learning from what it is said and experienced in each EFL classroom.

It is also necessary to highlight the importance that this study might have as to the formation that teachers must have on the research area. Beyond the formal sense of the term, research can be actually done by teachers just observing and reflecting upon what happens in our daily practice. For the teacher who participated in this study, it was pretty valuable the way he could realize about how the things he said can actually affect or modify the way students behave in the classroom. It is important then, to raise awareness on how being language teachers goes beyond using the right methodology for a specific population, to prepare a good class or to create rapport with students, it is a matter of getting some interest in knowing what students really feel and perceive about their learning process in order to make it meaningful. However, this would not be only a teachers' task. Students as "administrators" in their process of identity construction can use strategies in order to start reflecting upon their own process of learning and engage into a process of negotiation with the teacher. In this way, the success or failure could stop being a "teacher's responsibility issue", but rather a teaching learning process with a balanced process in which the fact that we are all different is taken into consideration.

In short, rather than giving account of methodological routes to follow when learning a

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foreign language or learning strategies to lead a successful process in students, the pedagogical concern of a study of this nature is to help teachers and students re think the way they relate to each other in the classroom and how the analysis of such dynamics might optimize the improvement in language learning.

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APPENDIX 1. ASSEMBLING THE DATA

TRANSCRIPTS	• Although most of students show interest towards the new kind of activities undertaken in the classroom, they still rely on what other say in order to fulfil tasks and activities. • Students, who are always for someone's support in speaking activities, are aware of the permanent judgement by their partners. However, in the development of the activities make an effort to contribute to group work and "demystify" that image. • There are two reactions towards the development of group tasks: first, rejection to work with different people and then collaborative attitude among the members of the group. • Women seem to have the "power" as they are the ones who organize and distribute the different missions students are supposed to accomplish within a specific activity. • Power relations are evidence in the level of participation and opinions in the groups.
INTERVIEWS	• Students fell comfortable working with different people as long as their personalities also match. • Students acknowledge the status of power or "dependence" given by others. Nevertheless, they also recognize the importance of other's help in order to reach common goals. • Students recognize the social effect of working with different people and talking about things they all know about.

APPENDIX 2. CODES IDENTIFIED

TRANSCRIPTS	Sharing information/Interest in the activity Interdependence Self image within a group. Reluctance to change Interdependence power relations Turn taking shyness Attitude changing L1 and L2 Participation
INTERVIEWS	Personal interests Attitude changing Construction of self image Role of L1 Commitment to group work Participation Power relations

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APPENDIX 3

CODES	FIRST CATEGORY	SAMPLES
✋ Interdepence ✋ Gender domain ✋ Turn taking	POWER RELATIONS	
	SECOND CATEGORY	
✋ Self image within a group ✋ Personal interests ✋ Attitude change	SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS	
	THIRD CATEGORY	
✋ Knowledge on the topic ✋ Attitude change ✋ Level of participation ✋ Role of L1	LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION	
	FOURTH CATEGORY	
✋ Interest on activities ✋ Commitment to group work	ENAGAGEMENT TO CLASS WORK	

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