Re-signifying my *cultured self* as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction

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Bogotá, D. C., Colombia

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis goes over the phenomenon of online EFL cross-cultural interaction between a teacher (researcher) and her students (co-researchers) in order to account for the way in which my (inner) cultured self is re-signified, as a result of said interaction and autoethnographic reflection around it. Through observation and analysis of critical-cultural episodes, and retrospection into my experiences as an EFL teacher, learner, and researcher, as well as my students' experiences, I was able to find that an individual's cultured self is a layered construction. The study led me to conclude that, in situations where (collective, individual, corporate, academic, etc.) culture plays a key role, a teacher's cultured self is flexible enough to adapt to contextual demands, exerted by factors such as personal (research, pedagogical or ideological interests) and interpersonal (rapport with students) motivations, school's corporate rules (teaching methods, customer service, quality control), which are all linked to broader cultural values.

Nonetheless, the principles that individuals are brought up with, as well as turning points and experiences that we have had throughout our lives, exert a very considerable –at times unconscious– influence on our cultured selves, too. Even when our more recent affiliations and convictions clash with these 'elemental' tenets. The autoethnographic exercise also revealed that some of the cultural biases that have shaped our cultured selves respond to historical relations of subordination, exclusion, and discrimination of oppressed groups by dominant ones, based on social and economic aspects (race, gender, class, nationality, or religion.)

Keywords: Online ELT, autoethnography, *cultured self*, cross-cultural interaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problem Statement

My name is Carolina Pérez Bonfante, I am almost thirty years old and between 2019 and 2021, most of my professional and academic development was taking place on and thanks to online communication platforms. In the mornings, I used to teach EFL online to adults located in a variety of Latin American countries. My afternoons were devoted to academia, as I was studying a research-focused master program, which I completed almost entirely online, due to restrictions adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I can confidently say that, with the exception of my significant other and my closest family, most of all meaningful socialization I engaged in during this period, happened online. I communicated with my students, coworkers, classmates, and professors exclusively through digital platforms, and even though I have never met some of them face-to-face –and I probably never will–, my relationships with them are of great importance to me, as they make for a big part of my identifying and presenting myself as a teacher, a student, and an inhabitant of the online world.

Years ago, I worked face-to-face as an EFL teacher at the same private language institute I work for now, so, when I started teaching online, my everyday practices and strategies were challenged by the new environment. I found myself working from home, in front of a computer, teaching people from different cities and countries; some whose native language may not even be Spanish (my first language). Such a significant change of setting meant that my already-well-established ideas about my everyday practice, among which I count pedagogical and relational strategies, were contested. The realization that that disruption had been taking place is what motivated the present research project.

The idea of virtuality having an effect on the type of relationships that are built between teachers and students has been the focus of research before. For instance, Aboud (2020) found that the teachers who participated in her study on the matter, expressed some reservations about the transition from a face-to-face setting to a virtual learning environment. Bearing in mind that these teachers claim to worry about becoming mere facilitators as a result of the transition, and that they are afraid that students may see them as computer illiterates, I dare to say these teachers were used to holding a position of power in the face-to-face classroom. Usually, these conditions are related to unequal teacher-student relationships where the former is the one and only knowledge-holder, and the latter is no more than a passive recipient of that knowledge, which is quite common in traditional educational environments. What the thoughts above tell us is that status, a.k.a. social capital, plays a key role in understanding power relations within human groups, offline and online; and that it may be the social capital associated with their position that these teachers are reluctant to let go of. Such changes could have repercussions in language teachers' perceptions of self, as they demand we develop new teaching practices and ways to relate to students (White, 2007).

Externally, it is the online nature of the setting, and the participants' cultural backgrounds that have an impact on what our behavior is like. In the context I carried my research within, since students and I (the teacher) come from different countries and have lived diverse realities, a space for cross-cultural encounters, motivated by the learning/teaching of EFL, is created. Internally, personal ideals, beliefs, motifs, etc., which are linked to external factors but are ultimately the result of individual –conscious or unconscious– reflection, play a big role. Our relationships, rapport, and our *cultured self* –or the representation we make of our personas during socialization processes where cultural factors are key– are re-shaped while online, setting

the phenomenon apart from what could be called 'traditional' learning environments. In summary, relationships and identity building shape and are shaped by the mediation of online communication technologies and –both unique and shared– cultural traits among the participants.

Regarding the first impactful set of factors mentioned above, Gunawardena et al. (2009), talking about Wenger et al.'s (2002) ideas, state that users of online communication technologies, such as my EFL students and I, need and are able to adjust to new interactive technological environments for collaboration and communication. In theory, we will do so by either revealing our "native cultural values" or by engaging in "the creation of new cultural norms and conventions" (p.7), a necessity that is arguably enhanced by the multicultural essence of participants' cultural backgrounds in this particular setting.

The mediation (Vygotsky, 1978; Joinson, 2003) of technology changes the very essence of the interaction between us, because there is a re-signification of the communication process and our social roles. Hence, if my students and I were to meet face-to-face to try and recreate the same kind of interaction we have when communicating through Zoom, it would not be the same. How we learned to behave and to understand the interaction is attached to the online setting; the very "nature of the tool that mediates communication, impacts and alters our perception of the communication process as well, and how [we] perceive [our] social roles" (p.7-8). Not only do online communication tools facilitate the task, but they also change our understanding of it and even "the nature of the task itself" (as cited in Gunawardena et al., 2009; p.8).

I stand by the idea that social interaction as a whole is meaningful for humans, but each one of us engages in specific instances, some of which we grant more significance to than others. Part of this is related to the settings, or better, spaces of practice (hereinafter SoPs) that interaction takes place in. Within them, there are particular sets of practices, signs, and roles,

linking or separating these spaces from others, and determining their degree of transcendence for individuals and collectives (Gee, 2005). SoPs are not limited exclusively to physical places, for they can also be entirely virtual –or blended, even–. This is the case for online communication technologies such as the video conferencing application that makes my interaction with my EFL students possible: Zoom. Thanks to Zoom, my students and I are able to get together in order to learn and create new knowledge, while we build relationships and ultimately, feelings of belonging and mutual commitment.

The phenomenon consists of synchronous social interaction among my EFL students and me, struck up from commonly shared interests, concerns, or passions, generated by exchange and interpretation of the signs within this SoP, on the one hand, and acting of particular roles, on the other. Larger social structures, such as participants' cultural backgrounds and the cultural contexts SoPs are situated within, also contribute to the complexity of SoP, and if there has ever been a concept that seems to resist every attempt at being undisputedly defined across scholars, theoreticians, and researchers, it is –without a doubt– culture.

Bates & Plog (1980) say that, in the field of intercultural pragmatics, culture is a set of several kinds of knowledge structures which are socially constituted; "a system of shared beliefs, norms, values, customs, behaviours, and [artifacts]" (as cited in Kecskes, 2014: p.114). Individuals, as members of society, turn to and use this system "to cope with one another and with [our] world and with one another (Bates & Plog, 1980; as cited in Kecskes, 2014; p.114). An important feature of culture is that it is not homogeneously distributed across all of society's diverse walks of life, meaning that members of a cultural group do not necessarily interpret, "adapt, live, or reflect [our] relatively common culture in a similar way in every moment and every life circumstance" (Kecskes, 2014; p.114); not all of us feel equally identified with the

values or customs that the culture represents. Also, not only the extent to which we subscribe to given cultural traits is re-signified in interaction, but also what we consider acceptable or unacceptable; desirable or undesirable; appropriate or inappropriate behavior is re-signified and agreed upon through socially situated interaction.

I shall not leave out the impact that the reflection exercise demanded by the autoethnographic research process has in the re-signification of my *cultured self*, my relationship with my EFL students, and the dynamics of this SoP, too. I argue that the systematic observation, retrospection, interpretation and narration of the events and all thoughts around them, made the whole phenomenon something it would not have been had I not engaged in these tasks. This is mainly what I aim to dive into through this research project.

1.2. Rationale

The present study is aligned to two of the master's research lines. When it comes to the line titled "Discourse studies within educational contexts", it accounts for how and to what extent discourses about our practice, about the languages we and our students speak, the learning process, the expected behavior of participants, and the societal values we are brought up with, have significant consequences in us as social subjects who build our ideas of the self through contact with others in different contexts. As far as the "Processes of Teacher Education and Development" line is concerned, the contribution of this project lies in the reflection it provides around my stories as a language teacher, from my life, my language acquisition path, my everyday practices and my ongoing journey towards empowerment and transformation. The relevance of a research focused on the researcher has been neglected for too long, and its potential within the field of ELT is now starting to be recognized, as it helps researchers, teachers and learners alike to see themselves reflected in the stories of other who, like them, are

full of contradictions but at the same time are aware of them and do not allow them to hinder their empowerment and transformation processes.

Moreover, this thesis looks into a space that we are driven to more and more every day: cyberspace. Not only has it come to be part of our daily realities, but also it has been proven to impact relationship building and identity formation processes (Aspling, 2011; Enli & Thumim, 2012; Liu, Rau & Wendler, 2015; Popova & Nenasheva, 2016; Xiao et al., 2012). Culture being the target of academic inquiry in applied linguistics to EFL is surely not *sui generis* either, and many researchers around the globe were interested in it before me. Be it focused on a singular – yet not simple or homogenous– cultural system, or focused on the encounter of various cultural systems, the topic has proven to be worth researching. However, what I propose here, the study of online cross-cultural EFL interaction needs more attention than it received so far; and it certainly should be explored from the perspective of the teacher-researcher ourselves. In an era when demand for online communication tools continues to grow, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which forced us all to limit face-to-face interaction as much as possible, the impact of such types of human connection should gain more relevance among researchers interested in understanding the nuances of EFL learning processes.

Consequently, I argue for the need of academic approaches to the cultural element of the phenomenon from a critical perspective; ones that problematizes the power dynamics that cross-cultural exchange entails and how individuals re-signifie and set their own rules of interaction. Pennycook (2001) clearly says it when he posits the need for applied linguists to adopt "a resistive problematization [...] [regarding] questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse. And crucially, it [should become] a dynamic opening up of new questions that emerge from this conjunction" (p.9).

This critical stance implies recognizing that phenomena do not happen in a vacuum, the online context does appear to facilitate alternative ways to distribute power among participants, but it is still affected by those questions listed by Pennycook (2001). Bearing in mind Walsh's (2010) ideas about intercultural exchange, critical interculturality is a process that implies "acknowledging that difference is built within a colonial structure and matrix of racialized and hierarchical power" (p.4), and it can only be achieved if it is constructed bottom-up by the very people who have been historically dominated. "It braces and requires the transformation of the structures, institutions and social relationships, and the construction of different conditions of being, thinking, knowing, learning, feeling and living" (Walsh, 2010; p.4). I believe the phenomenon I am dealing with requires fostering of this critical process so that the unequal and oppressive power relations that are already predominant in the offline world, are not reproduced nor imprinted in its social pillars beyond redemption. Then, with this thesis I aim to shed light on this phenomenon through an autoethnographic (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017) approach, in order to account for my own experience interacting and building relationships within the context of online SoP. In order to do so, I propose the following research question and objectives:

1.3. Research Question

- How is my *cultured self* re-signified as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction?

1.4. Research Objectives

- To identify the relation between the online EFL cross-cultural setting and the re-signification processes of my *cultured self.*
- To describe the transformations of my *cultured self* triggered by online EFL cross-cultural interaction.

- To interpret the re-signification of my *cultured self* through autoethnographic reflection.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Being a socially active person in this day and age is almost inevitably linked to being connected to the web, especially for people located in urban areas –though rural areas are not excluded–. This relation soared due to some of the biosecurity measures that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as temporary isolation, lockdowns, and quarantines. The internet and online communication technologies became useful alternatives for subjects to maintain our personal, academic, and professional relationships, in spite of those barriers. Before this latest boost, people's virtual presence had been steadily increasing alongside the growth of tools like Google, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and many more. They provided access not only to immense amounts of information, but also to people or collectives which were not easily reachable otherwise. Muros (2011)[1] says in that regard that "not belonging to the virtual community [...] excludes the subject [...]. Even more, not belonging to a social network nowadays almost makes you a *freak*" (p.51. Translation and italics are mine).

Even though in my life this shift unfolded in a different order, I still consider this a reality that many can relate to, and it has proven to be of significant importance to our worldviews, at least to some extent.

2.1. Hitting the right research mark

Since I started my master's in Applied Linguistics to TEFL my objective was always to research the context I work in, mainly because it used to be the only one I knew but also because I was aware that it was complex and unconventional. The context I am referring to is ELT in an

[1] "La no pertenencia a la comunidad virtual [...], excluye al sujeto [...]. Aún más, no pertenecer hoy en día a una red social casi te convierte en un bicho raro".

international private language institute, first working in a face-to-face environment, and most recently, in a virtual one. By early 2021, I was trying to figure out an appropriate approach to develop my thesis project, which I had been working on for two semesters but, until then, had failed to find a perspective from which to understand it that seemed satisfactory for my interests and the master program's lines of research. I had been told repeatedly that my proposal lacked a critical view (Pennycook, 2001; Walsh, 2010); and I agreed to these comments, I just did not know how to achieve that. Hence the pickle I found myself in back then.

This critical interest led me to consider alternative research approaches, and it was then that I learned about autoethnography, which is a methodology that provides those whose ideas and stories have historically been ignored, neglected, misrepresented, and only told through others' voices, with opportunities take control of their own narratives and research. Prior to this moment, I had not even entertained the possibility of telling my own story, and this disattention was highly due to the dominant idea across academia that research ought to avoid being personal and subjective, and distancing the researcher from the phenomenon of study has been said to be a way to assure that. Fortunately, learning about autoethnography (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017) helped me reassess this way of thinking.

As an online EFL teacher, my interactions with my students take place through video-conferencing applications like Zoom and Google Meet, which means that they mostly consist of videoconferences where we communicate with synchronous audio, video, screen sharing, and more. In addition, our meetings are not open to just anybody, so participants are limited and relatively regular. The reason why it happens this way is because I work for a multinational corporation that is in the business of language-teaching, and access to the classes is reserved to students and some administrative workers of the company. These features make for interactions

that differ from the type of online interaction that has been extensively researched in the field (Miller, 1995; Hafeez & Alghatas, 2007; Farias & Obilinovic, 2009; Vásquez Bronfman, 2010; Enli & Thumim, 2012); meaning, mainly written, more or less open, asynchronous communication tools like Blogspot or Messenger, and so on, as well as synchronous ones like video-gaming websites.

The previous clarifications are relevant here because they give the reader some ideas as to why I aim to analyze this topic through the present research endeavor. The experiences that I lived as an active inhabitant of the online world have triggered both my reflective and my critical thinking, as I noticed that my self-representation is constantly being re-signified and re-built as a result of the influence of factors such as the online environment, the role I play in a given situation, my and other participants' perceived cultural backgrounds or even the topic of discussion. The idea is so intriguing to me so that I decided to engage in a process of autoethnography, where I observed, identified, analyzed, reflected upon, and explained my own interactions online; how I present myself to my interlocutors, why I do it, and what that says about me as a *cultured self*. A rather complex venture if you ask me.

2.2. Understanding the problem in all its complexity

There is a famous internet meme that preaches "modern problems require modern solutions"[2], which is clearly inspired by the common saying –with its many variations along those lines– that goes "complex problems require complex solutions". I quote this saying and, therefore, propose a multi-edged approach to account for this multi-edged research problem. My

[2] As knowyourmeme.com explains, "*Modern Problems Require Modern Solutions'* refers to a reaction image taken from [Dave] Chappelle's Show in which Chappelle says the line. The still began growing popular in December of 2018" (italics are mine).

understanding of the phenomenon tells me that the main factors influencing the way my *cultured self* is re-signified and presented in online interaction are:

- **a.** The remote, digital environment provided by the online communication technologies we use to meet and with each other.
- **b.** Participants' cultural backgrounds, which make for many of our beliefs, customs, values, and so forth.
- **c.** The dynamics predetermined by the language school I work for, whose business model – from my consideration– has been shaped by neo-capitalist principles, which have turned education, knowledge, and culture into commodities to be traded.

Based on this problematization, in the present Literature Review chapter of this thesis, I explain how relevant theory and previous research help my understanding, analysis and interpretation of the research problem I posed above; one that I find worth studying both from an academic and a personal point of view.

A quick search through a library, a database, or a university repository, will let anyone realize that 'distance', 'virtual', 'computer-mediated', 'digital', 'web 2.0', or 'online' technologies and their relation to communication, education, culture, and identities has been extensively researched, dating from decades back (Warschauer, 1996; Albirini, 2006a-2006b; Lamy & Hampel, 2007). In the literature these concepts have their own distinct implications, which makes sense considering that communication technologies now are not what they were ten, twenty, or thirty years ago.

Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen (2011) took on the task of defining these terms regarding their linkage to education and learning. According to them, what differentiates these concepts from each other are the mediums used to move the information around among learners and

teachers, and whether the chosen technologies allow for this or that functionality (synchronicity, text, audio, or video exchange, etc.).

These authors conceptualize 'distance learning' as a title that "[...] often describes the effort of providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant" (p.129). It can be delivered using print and/or electronic media and it "included an instructor who was physically located in a different place from the learner, as well as possibly providing the instruction at disparate times" (p.129). 'e-Learning', on the other hand, is often understood as "strictly being accessible using technological tools that are either web-based, web-distributed, or web-capable" (p.130); whereas 'online learning' can be identified in the literature as the evolution or a more recent version of distance learning which improves access to educational opportunities for learners described as both "nontraditional and disenfranchised" (p.130). In other words, the terms distance learning, e-learning and online learning are, basically, stages in the evolution of remote communication and education, which developed as the technologies and practices around them became more accessible and interactive.

Another important concept to understand is 'web 2.0', which Carmona Fernández & Ibañez Luque (2011) define as:

> A way of conceiving the use of the Internet that, with the help of new tools and technologies, favors that the organization and flow of information depend on the behavior of the people who access it, which allows us an easier access focused on the contents, as well as the participation both in their classification and in their own construction, through increasingly easy and intuitive tools to use [...] (p.82).

I base my problematization on the idea that the aforementioned concepts actually make for a development of the phenomenon that is now 'online communication technologies', which I

understand as synchronous or asynchronous resources that have been made available to facilitate contact among people for business, social, or educational purposes, etc. Nowadays, users access online communication technologies like social networking sites, video-conferencing platforms, online videogames, websites, or chatting applications, through smartphones, computers and tablets. Through this paper, I understand and employ the terms 'virtual' and 'online' to refer to online communication technologies and online environments, and these are used interchangeably, as my review of the literature leads me to understand them as stages in the evolution of a single phenomenon. Other terms I will use to refer to different aspects of the online world are 'cyberspace', 'web', and 'digital'.

With these technicalities having been taken care of, let us move along with this literature review, as throughout the following sections, I will be discerning how the most relevant academic constructs that make up the theoretical foundations of my research have been developed along with our understanding of reality, becoming more nuanced and critical. The discussion revolves around the theories and conceptualizations currently available in academia, whether these may have been originally thought out to regard offline realities exclusively, or they leave some room for further exploration in relation to alternative and emerging perspectives, such as online phenomena. The constructs I am referring to are:

2.3. Online and offline worlds: distinct but not detached, as in how human behavior online resembles, differs from, or challenges behavior offline.

2.4. Cultural values: where identity and alterity intertwine, which goes over the way we understand culture differently across time and contexts (both as social individuals and as scholars).

2.5. Collectives online: social capital and cooperation, that is, the importance and influence of groupings and socialization for individuals, even when physically distanced from one another. In turn, this construct comprises two sub-constructs, these being:

2.5.1. *Spaces of practice: our territories, our rules*, referring to the extent to which specific (physical or not) social settings shape and are shaped by the practices individuals engage in, and the roles we play within said settings.

2.5.2. *New Capitalism: designed to maintain the status quo*, alluding to the phenomenon by which capitalist elites overextend their influence beyond the economic realm and subdue as many other domains of (offline and online) society as possible.

2.6. Self-representation: online and offline personas, pertaining to the choices made by individuals, as users of online communication technologies, in regard to how close to or far from our offline personas we find appropriate to present ourselves as, in online settings. Its sub-construct is:

2.6.1. *Cultured self: a layered and dynamic construction*, concerning the ultimate –yet constantly re-signified– representation of ourselves that we portray in situations where all the factors above come into play, which I argue happens in the context of online cross-cultural EFL interaction I aim to study through the present research project.



Figure 1: Layers of a cultured self

These are the major constructs that this Literature Review addresses in the subsequent paragraphs, starting from the outer layer of the phenomenon. The graphic above is a representation meant to illustrate the complexity of an individual's *cultured self*, in this case, mine. It is layered but these layers are not totally independent or separated from one another. Its borders are blurry and are constantly interacting with one another.

2.3. Online and offline worlds: distinct but not detached

Online environments are frequently looked at by scholars regarding their impact on construction of collectives, interpersonal relationships, and individual identities; and research shows that online life holds similarities and differences compared to the 'real', 'physical' world; or as the literature calls it, the 'offline' world (Xiao et al., 2012; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Julien, 2014; Barden, 2016; Qin & Lowe, 2021).

Chin (1998) and Chiu et al. (2006) think that a virtual community is "a kind of social networks that exists online, where members with common interests, goals or practices interact via computer-mediated way[s] to share or exchange information and knowledge, and further engage in social interactions" (as cited in Xiao et al., 2012; p.4). I consider this a good point from which to start my discussion, as this definition provides a basic understanding of some of the fundamental characteristics of online collectives. Those features are shared interests, knowledge exchange, and social interaction. Nevertheless, these authors fail to address the nuances of such a complex phenomenon, leading to a naive conceptualization of online inhabitation.

This is the mistake that Julien (2014) points out when assessing the interpretations made by some sociologists subscribed to the American Communitarian current, who, he argues, "misunderstand the nature of many interactions online" (p.361). Julien (2014) critiques Lin (1999), for instance, when he says that online communication technologies make for a situation where "information is freer than ever before because there is no longer any authoritarian control over access to information and resources" (as cited in Julien, 2014; p.361); or Coleman (1999), who claims that online networks represent "a new era of democratic and entrepreneur networks and relations where resources flow and are shared by a large number of participants with new rules and practices, many of which are devoid of colonial intent or capability" (p.45, 2001, as cited in Julien, 2014; p.361). Wellman et al (2003), also, think that "in online communities there is less social control, as people can easily leave communities that have confining restrictions" (as cited in Julien, 2014; p.361).

Julien's (2014) critiques seem very valid to me because, although online interactions do make for alternative ways to build social and interpersonal relationships to traditional offline

ones, they are not inherently devoid of internal or external power relations, hierarchies, or traces of colonialism. This is a conclusion I have come to after having worked on this thesis for almost two years.

My initial problematizations of the research phenomenon could be considered just as naive as the ideas Julien critiques in his 2014 article. I used to think that my online EFL classrooms were spaces that naturally encouraged students' empowerment, broke with the tenets of traditional schooling contexts, and allowed for collaborative knowledge-construction; which would mean that my students and I possessed equal power within this space. Nonetheless, after taking a deeper look at our dynamics, and having done a lot of reading, I noticed details that contradicted said assumptions.

First, there are particular beliefs and behaviors participants display in relation to age differences, gender, or cultural backgrounds, and even roles within corporations that lead to power-loaded relationships among us. This happens because online communities do not exist in a void, they are not part of a parallel reality where individuals can transport to and detach ourselves from all traces of our offline lives.

It is certainly not my intention to demonize online collectives or individuals who belong to them; quite the contrary. As I explained above, they are a significant part of my current life and my identity. What I, and other critics of the idealistic view on online communities, intend to do is to acknowledge internal nuances of these new social spaces, so that transition into more egalitarian practices can commence. Though it is true that online groups are the result of individuals –at times intentionally, but often rather intuitively– gathering around shared topics of interest, while gradually building and agreeing upon distinct dynamics that help guide and regulate interaction and exchange; still,

> What we find in many online interactions is exclusion and conflict [...] Participation and exclusion in online interactions do not primarily refer merely to access or inaccess to ICTs, but rather to the ability or inability to act in particular ways online; in other words, to be able to differentiate and achieve distinction within online culture (Helsper, 2012)" (Julien, 2014; p.361).

Social capital plays a key role in understanding power relations within human groups, offline and online, and according to Julien (2014), both the definition of the concept and its implications for the 'internet age' inspired a wide range of discussions. Scholars wonder: What is it? How can it be measured in research? How do people attain it online? And what effect does it have on the whole phenomenon? (p.356).

The reader may have noticed that, up to this point, this Literature Review did not reference any attempts at forging new theories that exclusively explain online phenomena; all the sources I found base their understanding of the online world, and its users' behavior within it, on theories that were originally thought out to explain offline ('real world') phenomena. And, despite that, their interpretations do not appear irrelevant or far-fetched. Why could that be? I believe it is related to what I stated earlier, about online spaces being influenced by offline factors as well. In the words of Muros (2011)[3]:

> [...] The construction of our identity, both in the real world and in the virtual one, depends on social, cultural, physical, psychological agents, etc. But also we can understand that the virtual identity is nothing more than an adaptive result of the individual to the new

[3] "[...] La construcción de nuestra identidad, tanto en el mundo real como en el virtual, dependen de agentes sociales, culturales, físicos, psicológicos, etc. Pero, además, podemos entender que la identidad virtual no es más que un resultado adaptativo del individuo a las nuevas circunstancias y a la naturaleza del contexto –la red, las redes sociales, las comunidades virtuales marcan sus propios protocolos–".

> circumstances and the nature of the context –the network, social networks, virtual communities, they set their own protocols– (p.54. My translation).

This author and I believe that many of the dynamics, power relations, or economic interests that permeate our online spaces come from the offline world. Our behaviors on the internet "are also deeply influenced by local norms and cultures. More importantly, cultural differences that motivate people toward interpersonal behaviors have important implications for online social behaviors" (Morio & Buchholz, 2009; as cited in Xiao et al., 2012; p.5). I delve into the implications of culture on the context of study further down the chapter. For now, I continue elaborating on the implications of social capital.

Social capital can be described as an intangible asset embodied in social relations between individuals, community networks or societies (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1990, as cited in Julien, 2014). Subjects engage in interpersonal connection hoping to get return on our investment in the form of a sort of currency or "resource, particularly [worthwhile] insofar as it can become a source for other resources such as emotional support, information, and even money" (Lin, 2001; as cited in Liu et al., 2016) within the social marketplace. More than simply having a wide network of acquaintances,

> [social capital] consists of having relationships with people with whom one can count on to provide benefits in the future […] Having people to whom one can turn when in need or from whom one can receive help and benefits is somewhat like having money saved in the bank that can be used when necessary (hence the "capital" metaphor in the term). Building a social network of friends is akin to storing resources that can be helpful in some way in the future (p.370).

These notions might remind the reader of one of the most appealing aspects of being active in social media sites and becoming an online inhabitant: building, curating, managing, and maintaining a network of acquaintances that one may reach out to at any given moment, regardless of geographical location[4]. Contemporary authors such as Cummings et al. (2006; as cited in Julien, 2014), write that an important factor that motivates individuals to engage and share knowledge in online networks is the high levels of social capital that doing so can grant us. Nevertheless, the trend set by American Communitarianism's disciples seems to neglect how this very fact leads to power-struggles. Many of these scholars, so say Julien (2014), see in all forms of social capital, "a public good which contributes to the formation of human capital" (p.358), disregarding that there must be a reason why individuals are willing to contribute their own personal resources to the collective: self-interest, beyond just selfless interest in the sake of the collective.

One premise that challenges this naive view on social capital, even for the online inhabitant, is the idea of reciprocity (Putnam, 1993; 2000), which claims that "there is an expectation that anything done by a person will be repaid in the future either by another individual or through group membership" (as cited in Julien, 2014; p.359). Lin (2001) states, "one does favors for others in one's network and on that basis can anticipate receiving benefits from them in the indeterminate future" (as cited in Liu et al., 2016; p.370).

[4] The debate around this idea, however, consists of whether intimate and actually 'useful' relationships can be formed online (Liu et al., 2016; p.370). Apropos of that, scholars differentiate between two forms of social capital, both of which humans benefit from: bridging, or weak ties lacking emotional attachment, most likely among members of large networks; and bonding, or close, strong, intimate social relationships, common within small social circles. The latter kind provides intense emotional satisfactions and is essential for optimal reproduction. Social capital obtained from bonding relationships offers benefits without necessarily expecting reciprocation (p. 370). The former kind, that is social capital gained through bridging relationships, connects people to large networks, which can provide informational and economic benefits (Putnam, 2000. Cited in Liu et al., 2016; p.370). As Granovetter (1973. Cited in Julien, 2014) explicates, it is through weak ties, whose role and strength is in disseminating information and ideas effectual for action, that information can most effectively reach a large number of people.

There is one more issue that the above-referenced depictions of communities –offline and online– ignore, and it is the possible conflicts of interest that are bound to arise within them. Siisiäinen (2003) lists three kinds of conflict that are ignored by the aforementioned current in the field of sociology (italics and bullet points are mine):

- [...] *First*, there are conflicts between those associations that are functional in creating and supporting social consensus, and those associations and movements that are critical of the dominant political values (and of the values represented by [some collectives]) (conflicts between different parts of civil society).
- [...] *Second*, [this current has] nothing to say about conflicts between civil society and the political society (and the state). [Since it] is not dealing with conflicts or new challenges presented to the political system, [t]his theory can be seen as a kind of wish to escape politics.
- [...] *Third*, [this current, neglects] the vertical dimension of voluntary associations and the power relations that are inherent in all modern associations (at least as a potential tendency) (p.7).

Siisiäinen (2003) concludes critiquing Putnam's propositions by citing Weber, Rousseau and Michels like so (emphasis is mine):

> As Max Weber has remarked, voluntary associations [offline and online] are relations of domination (Herrschaftsverhälnisse) in two respects: first, within the association (domination exercised by the leadership upon rank-and-file members), and second, in relation to the outside world (by the organization towards the outsiders) (Weber, 1911) [...] [This current] has little to say about the problems of internal democracy in existing voluntary associations, and their internal power structures. As we know, from Rousseau to

> present-day discussions of (and in) new social movements, problems of oligarchy (Michels) and bureaucratization (Weber) are still among the most serious obstacles to the development of democratic voluntary organizations and civil society (p.7).

Considering that critical studies encourage researchers to take off the blindfold of the 'givens' (Pennycook, 2001), it is necessary to acknowledge that online groups are not the sole result of selfless motivations, which completely disregard all the power imbalances that humans face in our offline world. A preliminary conclusion to draw from this reflection is that there is sound logic supporting the critique made by (among others) Julien (2014), Liu et al. (2016), Siisiäinen (2003), and myself regarding the naive view of online collectives as radically different from –and, to some extent, better than– offline associations.

Now that I have established what online communities are not, I shall tackle those characteristics they do display, so that I can go on with my task of trying to concoct a comprehensive depiction of the kind of online space my students and I have built around our shared interest in EFL.

Liu et al. (2016), citing Baumister & Leary (1995), find in online communities "a modern, technological solution to [a] deeply rooted human tendency [...] the human need to belong, which has long been recognized as a powerful and basic drive" (p.369). As any human association grows, other necessities arise within it, such as the need to provide structure to the everyday dynamics and connections that collectives are built around. Both offline and online structures come with social roles, agreements on individuals' rights, duties, behavior, collective ideals and so forth. In the online world, "the representational construction that is made with respect to different dimensions of life, diverges from the input or representations available in society and

non-virtual culture, but are contextualized in the world of cyberspace"[5] (Bonilla Medina & Álvarez Valencia, 2010; p.65. My translation).

Nowadays, the internet and the online world are widely spread around the globe, allowing for the encounter of individuals whose cultural backgrounds make them different from each other, while common interests bring them together to build associations; resulting in these phenomena growing in popularity among anyone interested in human practices. However, similarly to what happened with the concepts of globalization or interculturality, a superficial understanding of this trait of online inhabitation may lead to uncritical exaltation of the 'wonders' of cyberspace. This issue is reminiscent of Walsh's (2010) problematization of the apparent acceptance of interculturality when it is utilized as a functional asset for the dominant systems. This is a mistake I shall avoid making myself, since one of the purposes of my research is to reflect about my interactions online with my EFL students keeping all these theoretical ideas in mind, to try and figure out whether and to what extent some of them can be identified or contested.

Before I go on, I think it is crucial to acknowledge that, even though I am aware that factors such as language, nationality, or race do not make for a human group's entire cultural system, I still know well that they do play a huge role in it, at least as far as structures, communication, affiliations, and differentiations are concerned (Kecskes, 2014). With this idea in mind, I would like to concentrate on culture and the role that cultural factors play in our little online collective. It will be easier to agree with this decision once I point out that, for instance, although my students and I come from different countries, we share Spanish as our first

[5] "La construcción representacional que se hace respecto a diferentes dimensiones de la vida, parte de los insumos o representaciones disponibles en la sociedad y la cultura no virtual, pero se contextualizan en el mundo del ciberespacio".

language, yet we communicate almost exclusively using English. That is because we get together due to a common goal: English as a foreign language; they aim to learn it and I aim to teach it –and I am not even mentioning all the other cultural factors that are important, too–. Bearing this in mind, the first thing I must talk about is the very concept of culture, and from there, build up to its relevance to this study.

2.4. Cultural values: where identity and alterity intertwine

In 2005, author William Sewell devoted a book chapter to a quest I know very well to be not as simple as it may look: diachronically exploring definitions of culture across contemporary academic discourse, which he starts by "distinguishing two fundamentally different meanings of the term" (p.79). These two broad uses can be summarized as follows: (a) culture as a category of social life, and (b) culture as system and practice. The first use can be broken down into more specific conceptualizations, and below I explain the ones I deem most influential in contemporary academia.

The first conceptualization trend understands culture –notice the singular grammatical number– as a category of social life in different ways. When understood as learned practice, for example, culture is all that is not natural or biological; it is what makes us different from other animals. Basically, it is all human "practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths and so on, built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation" (p.80). Sewell (2005) clarifies that this definition was especially relevant when anthropologists first realized that 'race' –understood as biological differences between human groups– was not the reason behind the differences between societies. Nevertheless, since the racial differentiation argument has long been overcome in the discipline, this definition has lost its accuracy, as it can be deemed too vague and broad to help its current theoretical and research objectives.

When culture is seen as an institutional sphere, focused on the making of meaning, scholars refer to it as a social formation "devoted specifically to the production, circulation, and use of meanings'' (Sewell, 2005; p.80). It itself is subdivided into smaller spheres (e.g., art, fashion, religion, media, education). Sewell (2005) appropriately remarks two drawbacks of this conceptualization that make it outdated for current times: first, it helps to reproduce the hierarchizing subtext of culture belonging only to 'high level' intellectual and artistic activity; second, it assumes that meanings produced in alternative 'noncultural' spheres are unimportant in comparison.

The third approach looks at culture as a system of symbols and meanings, or "a particular "level of abstraction" of social relations"; contrasted with both the "social system" –norms and institutions– and the "personality system" –motivations–" (Sewell, 2005; p.82). Unfortunately, by understanding culture in this sense, theoreticians "abstracted a realm of pure signification out from the complex messiness of social life and specified its internal coherence and deep logic" (p.82). This structuralist conception of culture also fails to account for the complex nuances that culture involves, according to Sewell (2005).

The fourth and last approach to culture from the first broad use is culture as practice. Supporters of this definition believe culture is "a sphere of practical activity shot through by willful action, power relations, struggle, contradiction, and change" (Sewell, 2005; p.83), and they vouch for a performative aspect of the concept. Gradually, with time, the definition turned to stress the contradictory and malleable nature of cultural meanings, bringing it closer –though not quite there just yet– to the conceptualization of culture under the second broad use: culture as system and practice.

As I understand it, a characteristic that this former idea lacks is the plurality that authors such as Hamelink (1989; as cited in Alsina, 2001) highlight for the concept. Hamelink suggests that even using singulars to talk about this construct is unnecessarily restrictive and misleading. We should be talking about cultures, in plural; doing otherwise gives an impression of clarity and unanimity that does not represent the concept accurately, whether it refers to the individual or to the collective level of analysis. Even though I agree with this problematization, in this thesis I refer to culture in singular, when I am discussing the construct, that is, when I bring up theoretical definitions or implications (see Chapter 2: Literature Review). Whereas, when talking about the particular sets of beliefs, values and behaviors of my students and myself, I use the term 'cultural backgrounds', meaning, when I point out or interpret our actual deportment and what we say based on the context we have grown up within (see Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion).

Despite this last clarification, before we actually reach a final decision of what culture means in the context of this chapter, I want to introduce other ideas around the concept of culture, which, I am convinced, contribute to a thorough comprehension of its complexity.

An alternative way to account for this complexity is to try and open the definition to more than one exclusive view of it, to acknowledge that culture might as well be a little bit of all the ideas mentioned above. Bates & Plog (1980) assert that in the field of intercultural pragmatics, culture is a set of several kinds of knowledge structures that are socially constituted. Social individuals resort to it and put it to work in order to "cope with [our] world and with one another […] a system of shared beliefs, norms, values, customs, behaviours, and [artifacts]" (p.114; as cited in Kecskes, 2014). Seen from this standpoint, culture is not homogeneously distributed all over society's diverse walks of life. In other words, members of a cultural group do not

necessarily interpret, "adapt, live, or reflect [our] relatively common culture in a similar way in every moment and every life circumstance" (Kecskes, 2014; p.114); also, not all of us feel equally identified with the values or customs that 'our' culture represents.

Kecskes (2014) further points out that the defining boundaries of culture are inherently fuzzy, and this system is neither fully static nor fully ever-changing; it is both things at once. "It has both a priori and emergent features. Culture changes both diachronically (slowly through decades) and synchronically (emerges on the spot, in the moment of speech)" (p.114). This view slightly differs from conceptualizations by scholars such as Bloommaert (1991), Gumperz (1982), Gumperz & Roberts (1991), and Rampton (1995), as Kecskes says it himself. He claims that these mainstream views on culture overplay its "contingent, situational, and emergent nature of cultural phenomena in speech" while underplaying how it may impose "ethnic or cultural characteristics onto the communicative behaviour a priori" (as cited in Kecskes, 2014; p.114).

The last perspective I would like to bring up is the multileveled, multilayered, multifaceted essence of the notion, which authors such as Nieto (2009) and Levy (2007) subscribe to. Nieto (2009), for instance, puts forward a set of six characteristics that culture possesses, these are:

- Culture is *dynamic*: not static, stagnant, or sterile values; so much so, theoreticians should contemplate the possibility of understanding it as a verb, rather than as a noun (Arvizu, 1994; as cited in Nieto, 2009). It has both a superficial and a deep structure, which I argue are displayed through individuals' self (Goffman, 2001) and identity, respectively. It is layered as our *cultured self* is.
- Culture is *multifaceted*: thus, it cannot be limited to just ethnicity, race, language, or nationality; it is all of that and more, constantly being mixed together.

- Culture is *embedded* in context: "invariably influenced by the environment in which it exists" (Nieto, 2009; p.139). Hence, it cannot be fully understood out of context.
- Culture is *created* and socially constructed: it evolves through everyday interaction with others, as individuals change our realities (p.142).
- Culture is *learned:* a recurrent idea that means it is not genetically inherited but handed down through interaction from generation to generation (see Sewell's (2005) ideas above).
- Culture is *dialectical*, made of complex man-created systems. It is influenced by social, economic, and political factors; it is conflicted and full of inherent tensions.

So far, Kecskes (2014) and Nieto's (2009) premises manage to find the right balance when problematizing culture as the complex concept it is, and on these grounds, I support the cultural qualities of my phenomenon of research. I suggest wrapping up this theoretical discussion with Levy's (2007) ideas on culture's complexity, an author whose multidimensional approach to the conceptualization is composed of five qualities, as I cite below:

- Culture as *elemental*, since individuals, consciously or not, start to learn a system of values and beliefs from the moment of our birth, through contact with people and the world around us.
- Culture as *relative*, not absolute. A different culture is understood in contrast with one's culture. Individuals tend to generalize and assume that what 'we' do, and what 'they' do is common to all members of the two groups, respectively.
- Culture as group *membership*, understood as a way of participating in a certain speech community and related to group identification.

- Culture as contested, linked to 'culture shock'. When individuals have contact with other cultures, one's values and systems of beliefs may be contested.
- Culture as *individual (variable and multiple)* because each individual's interpretation of culture is subjective and variable. Cultural knowledge varies from person to person and operates at many levels and individuals are selective in how we represent our culture (Zakir, Funo & Telles, 2016; Levy, 2007).

I can see these ideals reflected in Levy's preferred definition of culture, adopted from Kramsch (1998) and Skelton & Allen (1999), as fruitful soil for me to plant the seed of reflective autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction. In summary, culture is not only a manifestation of a group, or a collective, but also "an individual's experience within it, or apart from it" (as cited in Levy, 2007; p.105).

For the purposes of this study, my working definition of culture agrees with Levy (2007), Nieto (2009) and Kecskes' (2014) vision. Culture is a dynamic multilayered, multifaceted, multileveled, multidimensional system of beliefs, norms, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts, individuals resort to and adapt as a lens through which to understand reality. It is inevitably contested in relation to others' cultural systems; it changes diachronically over longer periods of time, but also synchronically as a result of contact with others and the world. It is not reducible to geography, ethnicity, race, nationality, or language; because, although these elements may have significant influence in the system, culture can be re-signified and built even in circumstances where not all of these features are shared by all individuals.

Levy (2007) recognizes that "as [part of] a group, members engage with one another in a shared social space" (p.105), which is why he argues that non-geographical territories, such as cyberspace, can also work as places where new/different cultures are born and developed. I agree

with this scholar when he states that "a common social space [does] not [necessarily] mean a shared physical space, of course, as [proven by] the communities and cultures that have made a virtual space for themselves online" (Levy, 2007; p.105). We see, then, that his perception of culture also welcomes collectives that, despite lacking some of the stereotypical characteristics attached to this notion, such as shared nationality or geographical location, have still developed into more or less cohesive entities in terms of practices, values and so on. This is the case mainly due to the fact that one of the consequences of interaction among individuals, especially when it is frequent, is the natural emergence of groups or collectives, regardless of whether they are circumscribed by physical or virtual territories.

Collectives are essential to the survival of the human species, but, apart from survival, there are other secondary needs that drive humans to get together and build groups, including cooperation around common goals or interests and even socialization itself. In many cases, it may happen that a collective initially motivated by one or a limited group of needs, gradually evolves and either deviates from its original goals or expands to new ones. Likewise, the growth and development of collectives may lead to its members becoming more and more involved in its dynamics, and in turn, the group may grow in significance regarding how its members relate to it, to each other, to the larger social context, or to reality itself.

In the digital era we live in, largely thanks to communication technologies, it has become a lot easier and more common for people to form collectives in spite of geographical, linguistic, or cultural barriers. This is what I aim to discuss next.

2.5. Collectives online: beyond physicality and membership

"The people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality"; this is how Cambridge Dictionary[6] defines the word community. However, what looks like a simple and straightforward definition, actually hides some etymological challenges for the understanding of this kind of phenomena, which have been pointed out in previous research.

For Gee (2005), the notion of community is usually linked to membership and belongingness, ideas whose meanings not only vary across different contexts, but may not necessarily fit every grouping or collective in existence. This author explains that, attempting to label a group of people might bring issues over which, how far, and when we are in or out. From his perspective, "it is often issues of participation, membership and boundaries that are problematic" (Gee, 2005; p.215), and he gives examples for his readers to consider.

Take, for instance, the example in regard to a high-school class that he uses to debate the uncertainties of group-labeling. In a high school science class, apart from the teacher, who are and who are not for sure members of the community? All students or only those who are actually engaged with the dynamics and goals of the class? Moreover, beyond the classroom's four walls, are parents, the principal, other teachers, guest speakers, curriculum specialists, or policy-makers part of the community or not? It is impossible to provide an unquestionable answer. This problematization in particular, takes place around the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), one of the most commonly used titles when it comes to naming groupings based on their common goals and interests, rather than on shared geographical locations.

[6] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/community

But this is not the only time that Gee has criticized the conceptualization and application of communities of practice (hereinafter CoPs). In his 2000 article called "Communities of Practice in the New Capitalism", he explains how, driven largely by business, CoPs "are new and ideal forms of tacit indoctrination, replacing the brute force of direct orders and coercion [since] in them, people may form value-laden identities through immersion in practice without much overt reflection and critique" (p.519). My interpretation of Gee's problematization tells me that CoPs tend to be more intentionally/artificially built nowadays, and that their configurations might not represent/be the result of the desires of the 'active' members. Rather than respecting and appreciating members' autonomy as to what their CoPs' values, goals, or tasks should be, powerful groups are prone to encourage their development so long as their existence helps support these groups' particular goals.

As a way of contributing to the field, and helping solve these obstacles, Gee (2005) proposes another concept in respect of human groupings; he suggests we understand them as spaces, so the focus will not lie on the people (members), but on the meanings that people get and give to signs within these spaces, physical or not. Video conferencing technologies, to cite an instance, are not placed physically or geographically speaking, but they do provide a virtual kind of space where interaction happens, and subjects give and get meanings from different signs that circulate here. They may even be considered a mixture between the real and the virtual, considering all the functionalities users have access to, including synchronic video and audio, as well as chats, screen sharing and emojis. It is true that Gee elaborates more on this alternative approach to the phenomenon, but my research instinct tells me that this much will work just fine for the present study, because I agree with Gee, but only to some extent.

Delimiting the idea of membership could be difficult, to say the least, when we focus on the bigger picture. Then, why not have the problematization revolve around specific situations of interaction? Could we consider that every interaction is in itself its own 'collective'? As social beings, all interactions that humans engage in mean something. What changes is the level of significance each of them has to processes of identity and affiliation. The thing is that, unless we take the time to find out how meaningful each and every interaction is to each and every individual, there is no way to know whether what we see as 'of high importance' or 'mundane', means more or less to all of us. Spaces, however, have particular signs within them, which either relate them to or set them apart from other spaces. The practices that occur, the roles that individuals take, and the signs that circulate within these spaces is what determines their significance.

Thus, based on ideas by Gee (2005), Lave & Wenger (1991), and Goffman (2001), I argue that, for the purposes of the present study, it will be more fruitful to focus on the concepts of practice, role, and signs to understand what I call spaces of practice.

2.5.1. *Spaces of practice: our territories, our rules*

Spaces of practice (hereinafter SoP) are physical or non-physical territories where certain practices take place. Practices are the activities to engage in, or steps to follow in order to achieve a particular goal, which is related to both the space where it happens and the role that each individual agrees to play as part of the interaction. Roles are the sets of rights, duties and self-representations that come with taking part in an interaction within a SoP. Signs are all perceivable cues and usable resources that individuals engaging in practices and playing roles within SoPs employ to communicate meanings in order to achieve whatever goal that motivates

us to take part in the practice. In this regard, Muros (2011)[7] points out the weight of intrinsic signs to the web, as "virtual structures, codes and meanings [that] give rise to a virtual identity that develops its own language" (Labov, 1983; as cited in Muros, 2011; p.51. My translation) and patterns that will ultimately become part of our own identity without our realizing it.

I recognize, also, that these 'elements' are interdependent and have influence one over the other. For example, the roles that individuals play are partially determined by the spaces we find ourselves in and the practices we participate in. Likewise, the practices in which we take part depend, to some extent on the two previously mentioned elements. The signs we have access to also depend on the spaces and the practices, and vice versa (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.5.1). Not only that, but broader social structures such as cultural values and ideals have an effect as well; and when the space is used by cultured subjects with diverse backgrounds, cross-cultural relations are commonplace.

Commonly, such relations imply power asymmetries and social inequities, a perspective that gains more relevance in the context of this study, because here I deal with issues of dominance of some cultural groups (Native-English-speaking/Inner-circle/global-North countries) over others (expanding-circle/global-South countries) (Kachru, 1985; Santos, 2007). The differences among groups can be rooted in a variety of factors, including social and economic aspects. About that, Castells (2004) affirms:

> [...] The expression of the social relationships, ultimately power relationships, that underlie the evolution of the multimodal communication system [...] is most apparent in the persistence of the digital divide between countries and within countries, depending on their

[7] "[...] las estructuras, códigos y sentidos virtuales [que] dan origen a una identidad virtual que desarrolla su propia lengua".

> consumer power and their level of communication infrastructure. Even with growing access to the Internet and to wireless communication, abysmal inequality in broadband access and educational gaps in the ability to operate a digital culture tend to reproduce and amplify the class, ethnic, race, age, and gender structures of social domination between countries and within countries (p.57).

In other words, those differences that result from a long tradition of inequity, predominantly related to social aspects, are even further enhanced by unjust wealth distribution. Nonetheless, dominant elites have tried to underplay the legitimacy of these critiques by adopting behaviors that, when examined only superficially, might give the impression of social change or improvement. Among them, I highlight the exploitative use of nonwhite cultural and racial identities as institutional flags. Walsh (2010) problematizes this situation, by focusing on the notion of interculturality, and arguing that its mere recognition does not make for actual restructuring of oppressive social structures and vertical distributions of power, as 'functional interculturality' dismisses consequential critique. Walsh (2010)[8] explains this concept as follows:

> Recognition and respect for cultural diversity [have] become a new strategy of domination, which aims not at the creation of more equitable and egalitarian societies, but at the control of ethnic conflict and the preservation of social stability in order to promote economic imperatives of the (neoliberalized) capitalist accumulation model, now "including" historically excluded groups within it (p.3-4. My translation).

[8] "El reconocimiento y el respeto a la diversidad cultural se convierten en una nueva estrategia de dominación, que apunta no a la creación de sociedades más equitativas e igualitarias, sino al control del conflicto étnico y la conservación de la estabilidad social con el fin de impulsar los imperativos económicos del modelo (neoliberalizado) de acumulación capitalista, ahora "incluyendo" a los grupos históricamente excluidos en su interior".

Along the past few decades, the rise of the internet in terms of use and influence in society, has led to dominant groups adopting notions of racial diversity and interculturality in such a way that makes them serve the neo-capitalist agenda, which ultimately "displaces measures that would lead to meaningful social reform" (Leong, 2013; p.2153). This idea is named racial capitalism and it is a widely spread systematic practice, (mainly) carried out by white individuals or majoritarily white institutions who, by associating with nonwhite or racialized individuals, obtain benefits in the form of social or financial capital. As Leong (2013) defines it, racial capitalism commodifies racial identity and therefore degrades it by reducing it to yet "another thing to be bought and sold" (p.2153).

Another problematic characteristic that authors point out about the kind of interaction that concerns me here, is the great power garnered by corporations running social networking sites –e.g., Facebook and Twitter–. These not only have access to and do business with people's personal information; said corporations have "generated an infinity of mechanisms to guide and control users' actions [online and offline], although [these corporations] make [the users] think that [we] are being free in [our] choices"[9] (Bonilla Medina & Álvarez Valencia, 2010; p.63. My translation). According to Castells (2004):

> Freedom of expression and communication on the Internet and in the global/local multimedia system is often curtailed and surveilled by government bureaucracies, political [/economic] elites, and ideological/religious apparatuses. Privacy is long forgone in a flurry of "cookies" and personal data-retrieving strategies, with the partial exception of those users with a high level of technical sophistication (p.57).

[9] "[...] La internet ha generado una infinidad de mecanismos para guiar y controlar las acciones de los usuarios, aunque les hace pensar que están siendo libres en sus elecciones".

Strangely enough, the internet and its dynamics are the center of debates around points of view that should be mutually exclusive but seem to coexist in the online world. Marcoccia (2012) finds that the internet facilitates cultural diversity and expression by reducing distance, misunderstandings, and stereotypes; while it also, to a degree, hinders variation by contributing to cultural globalization and standardization.

There is something else that really calls my attention about life online, specifically in regard to cross-cultural interactions. James Paul Gee quotes Rober Reich (1992), whose past work as Secretary of Labor made him realize that:

> In the new capitalism, the well off [...] (largely professional people) feel much greater "cultural" affiliation with other people like themselves across the country and the world than they do with less-well-off people in their [own] local areas or countries. Thanks to technological and social changes [such as the massive spread of the internet], [well-off people], who are, in any case, quite mobile, regularly communicate and interact with each other across the globe. In turn, they come to share a new capitalist and cosmopolitan set of values and lifestyles (Gee, 2000; p.517).

It seems we have reached another essential turning point in the present Literature Review. I am arguing here that culture –in its traditional sense– is not the only external influence impacting online dynamics; there is also a strong force shaping it: Neoliberalism; accompanied by The New Capitalism (Gee, 2000; Fairclough, 2002). Something to highlight is that, from my perspective, the neoliberal, neo-capitalist enterprise has double the influence in the context I am interested in for the purposes of this study. Let us discuss this more in depth now so that I can explain what I mean by that.

2.5.2. *New Capitalism: designed to maintain the status quo*

In the words of Shin & Park (2015), neoliberalism is "an economic doctrine that valorizes individual entrepreneurial freedom and marketization of society" (p.443). It emerged in the 1970s and has some key differences from 'the old industrial capitalism'. According to Gee (2000), in the old capitalism, economic control was top-down, centralized, and largely held by nation states. Its main pillars were mass production, mass markets, and standardization. In the 'developed[10] world', nation states were expected "to protect their own workers from having to compete with lower wage workers elsewhere in the world" (p.515-516). The new capitalism, on the other hand, as high-tech and global as it is, attenuates the power of nation-states over the economy. It consists of flexible, customized production of goods and services "dovetailed to specific consumer identities in a global economy" (p.516).

The neocapitalist enterprise is characterized by its adaptability to the new times and "a well-documented capacity to sustain itself through major [contemporary] transformations" (Fairclough, 2002; p.163). It has thrived thanks to, first, a re-structuring 'colonization' by the economic domain over other fields of social life; and second, a re-scaling shift among local, national, regional, and global scales of social life. This latter feature, which Fairclough (2002) makes equivalent to what is usually named 'globalization' in the literature, has been significantly boosted throughout the past few decades with the rapid development and spread of ICTs.

In the New Capitalism, the economic field has 'colonized' the political, educational, and cultural fields, and it was able to do so by permeating them with its neomanagerial discourse (Stecher, 2014); a rhetoric that treats every institution, regardless of the social domain it belongs

[10] This is, of course, an ironic use of the titles of 'developed' and 'developing' countries, which has been harshly and fairly criticized in academia.

to, as a business unit. As such, it "must permanently [...] generate continuous improvement processes and increase productivity"[11] (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002; as cited in Stecher, 2014; p.24. My translation). One goal of this colonization is to justify the re-signification of culture, knowledge, and education as products. This way, the dynamics and discourses that make up their respective fields will align with the aspirations of the new capitalism, and the relationship among the formerly distinct fields will appear only 'logical'.

Here, I would like to go back to my previous argument about the often-overlooked impact that the decisions made by those who control and run the logistics of the web have on how individuals behave online and offline; and nowadays, to some extent, on the direction in which societies move toward, as well. From my point of view, this new reality I just highlighted is nothing but another instance of the neocapitalist agenda taking over other domains of social life which in the old days used to make for their own distinctly separate dynamics and functions. I am referring to the realm of socialization. Castells (2004) understands this and explains that "while the Internet is an autonomous network of local/global communication, private and public corporations also own its infrastructure, and its most popular social spaces and web sites are fast becoming a segment of multimedia business" (p.71).

Socialization is necessary for processes of personal identities/alterities and group affiliations/differentiations. The former is related to individuals' self-representation and the latter to community building, and these are the next two edges of the phenomenon I address here.

[11] "[...] debe [...] permanente [...] generar procesos de mejora continua e incrementar la productividad (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002).

2.6. Self-representation: online and offline personas

There is one slant present in great part of the existing literature on the matter of online inhabitation, and it is that the web is characterized by users' anonymity (Marcoccia, 2012; Xiao et al., 2012) and/or alternative identities (Qin & Lowe, 2021; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013); which is mainly founded on the limited resources online platforms used to offer –e.g. asynchronicity, text-based communication, lack of visual cues–. Making such claims, though not far from what can be observed on the web, might cause misunderstandings about identity construction processes in both online and offline realities. One may think that offline self-representations are natural and authentic, whereas online ones are planned and artificial.

I opine that in recent times things have notably changed in regard to the links between our online and offline lives, even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced us to move most of our daily activities to cyberspace. What we probably were not expecting is that a great deal of them would either remain there, even after things slowly start to go back to 'normal'. The interconnectedness and interdependence of the two worlds I have been talking about throughout this study has increased significantly.

I have stated above that both worlds are not carbon copies of each other; they do differ in some traits. However, my Literature Review tells me that such a marked dichotomy is not supported by research. What social theory suggests is that identity construction processes always entail –either conscious or unconscious– planning, and that there is one set of principles that, despite having been proposed decades ago, still looks to be appropriate to account for the presentation of self in everyday online and offline life. I am referring to Social Dramatic Theory (hereinafter SDT) (Goffman, 2001). In the words of Qin & Lowe (2021; p.2-3):

> According to Goffman's Social Dramatic Theory, Life is more like a drama, there [is] the front region and backstage of it. In the 'front regions', performers are observable by their different public (audience), while, in the 'back regions' where the impression fostered by the performers is knowing contradicted as a matter of course (Goffman, 1959, p.114), the performers act in a relatively informal, familiar, relaxed way.

Qin & Lowe (2021) single out three hypotheses that try to explain online representations of self, considering Goffman's dramatic approach, which I list below:

- *Online world = backstage:* SDT understands that performing our 'self' offline is comparable to wearing a mask to hide our true identity, in order to comply with social norms. Some scholars propose that the presumed 'anonymity' of cyberspace allows for mask-free interactions.
- *Online world = same front stage:* this thesis holds that users log onto the online world with our offline 'self' masks, just like transitioning from one reality to the other, without major changes in our representations.
- *Online world = new front stage:* do we, perhaps, create a new self-representation to access the web? That would imply that we get the chance to experience different, 'alternative', modified or enhanced selves within the boundaries of cyberspace.

With respect to the above hypotheses, Qin & Lowe (2021) ask themselves and their research participants the following questions: "How many online identities do you have? Is each of them different from your offline identity or different from other online identities? In which way? Is it a 'truer' or 'hope-for possible' [...] self of you?" (p.4). They conclude that online identities change according to different online situations. They are 'situational selves' that shape and are shaped by the particular use that individuals make of them "to fulfill [our] certain needs

which have not been met or fully met offline" (Qin & Lowe, 2021; p.16). In other words, their study showed the third hypothesis (online world = new front stage) to be true; people tend to selectively modify and/or enhance some personal attributes which are perceived as positive by us and others, depending on the 'stage' (social situation) and the 'audience' (other individuals) we are performing for.

Notwithstanding, the reader shall not forget what was stated in the paragraphs above about the influence of the offline world over the online one. One major influential factor of is individuals' cultural backgrounds. Xiao et al. (2012), for instance, focus on one aspect of this factor: culture orientations. These refer to tendencies that subjects display which are tied to their upbringing within a particular cultural group and context in the offline world. Castells (2009) postulates that "the processes of cultural transformation in our world evolve along two major bipolar axes: *the opposition between globalization and identification and the cleavage between individualism and communalism* [a.k.a. collectivism]" (p.117. Italics in the original). Castells elaborates on these notions in this manner (Emphasis in the original; bullet points are mine):

- Cultural globalization refers to the emergence of a specific set of values and beliefs that are largely shared around the planet.
- Cultural identification refers to the existence of specific sets of values and beliefs in which specific human groups recognize themselves. Cultural identification is largely the result of the geography and history of human organization, but it can also be formed on the basis of specific projects of identity-building.
- Individualism is the set of values and beliefs that gives priority to the satisfaction of needs, desires, and projects of each individual subject in the orientation of her/his behavior.

- Communalism is the set of values and beliefs that places the collective good of a community over the individual satisfaction of its members. Community is defined, in this context, as the social system organized around the sharing of a specific subset of cultural and/or material attributes (2004, p.117).

This problematization ties back to the edges I have been discussing in this Literature Review: cultural implications on online inhabitation and new capitalism, too. There is no doubt that the online world has its own dynamics that separate it from the offline world, in part set by the functionalities offered by specific spaces or websites –e.g., synchronous or asynchronous interaction through text, pictures, audio, video, and so forth–. This logistic aspect is controlled by those entities that run the web, and at times rules of behavior and functionalities are set in such a way that they ease the way and enable the achievements of the neocapitalist enterprise. On the other hand, the uses that online inhabitants make of these functionalities, the demands that stem from these uses, and the meanings the users grant to them, also play a huge role in terms of how these resources evolve. At times, they may deviate or go beyond what the original intentions of the creators and runners of the online spaces were. Neither party –users or runners– are passive players, there are instances of both conformity and power struggles constantly fluctuating. Citing Castells (2004, p.28):

> [...] If profit-making is the supreme value under capitalism, military power ultimately grounds state power [...] [which] largely depends on the beliefs of people, on their capacity to accept the rules, or, alternatively, on their willingness to resist. Then, the media system, and other means of communication, such as the Internet, could precede state power, which, in turn, would condition the rules of profit-making, and thus would supersede the value of money as the supreme value.

When Castells (2004) touches on the first pair of opposite cultural orientations mentioned a few lines above –globalization vs. identification–, he makes note of these power struggles when he asks the question: "Are we in a world of cultural homogeneity?"; and answers it with this statement: "Yes and no" (p.117). For the most part, according to this author, national and regional identities prevail over the global cosmopolitan that only a small minority of the world's population has adopted. But this global identity does indeed exist and this small minority, who see themselves as citizens of the world, can be very influential.

Additionally, "there is a *multicultural global culture characterized by the hybridization* and remix of cultures from different origins" (p.118. Italics in the original), which is characterized and fostered by the culture of consumerism and the formation of a global capitalist market. Lastly, Castells claims that "*the existence of diverse sources of cultural identification* creates a complex pattern of interaction between global consumerism, cosmopolitanism, and global hybridization, on one hand, and diverse sources of cultural identification (national, religious, territorial, ethnic, gender, self-selected identities) on the other" (Inglehart et al., 2004; as cited in Castells, 2004; p.118. Italics in the original). Nowadays, the widely spread presence of ICTs boosts multicultural exchange and interaction.

As a result of the cultural change processes, individuals –especially those privileged enough to have access, literacy, and time to engage in the online world– have an extensive variety of cultural 'sources' to build their group and personal identities upon.

Concerning the second set of cultural differentiations –individualism vs. communalism/collectivism–, the literature is prone to opposing the West to the East, in order to illustrate how these two tendencies influence subjects to a personal level, as far as values, beliefs, and behaviors are concerned (Kashima et al., 2004; DeAndrea et al., 2010; Marcoccia, 2012;

Haas & vanDellen, 2020). The two bipolar axes are actually not mutually exclusive of one another, and what we see subjects do is create combinations to different degrees and make their own decisions; of course, specific contextual situations and social factors surrounding them along the process will also have an impact on these –conscious or unconscious– decisions.

Castells (2004) remarks that "four cultural configurations emerge from the interaction between the two major bipolar cultural trends that characterize the global network society" (p.119). They are:

- *Globalization + Individualism = Consumerism:* as the individual form of relationship to a process of globalization dominated by the expansion of capitalism, mainly signified by branding; understood as both the cultural dimension of the global market, and the process by which individuals assign meaning to our consumerism.
- *Identification + Individualism = Networked individualism:* as the form in which individuals expand their sociability, construct their cultural world, and modify it according to the evolution of their personal interests and values. We do so by selectively using the wealth of communication networks at our disposal in the age of the internet and virtual reality.
- *Communalism + Globalization = Cosmopolitanism:* as the project of sharing collective values on a planetary scale and building a human community, beyond borders, boundaries, and specificity for the sake of superior (ideological, political or religious) principles.
- *Communalism + Identification = Multiculturalism:* as a trend that leads to the recognition of multiple identities in a world constituted by a diversity of cultural communities.

We see, then, that building one's personal identity is a continuous process that involves many different and equally significant variables. It depends on cultural, situational, economic, communal, and individual factors. The literature has quite an array of titles to name this reality, but for the purposes of this study, I refer to it as *cultured self*, because I believe this title encapsulates all of the aforementioned elements. Allow me to elaborate on this idea now.

2.6.1. *Cultured self: a layered and dynamic construction*

The ideas I have discussed so far paved the way for my understanding of the implications of cultural, social, economic, and technological factors in the ongoing construction of identities and collectives. Both constructions are interrelated, as they shape and are shaped by each other; they make for individuals' relation with social realities. At the personal level, someone's idea of self is the result of both conscious and unconscious decisions about what we consider meaningful, representative, and desirable. What I call here a subject's *cultured self* is the representation we make of our personas which we show others during socialization processes, a set of ideas that are constantly being re-evaluated and re-signified in a situation where cultural factors play a key role. Cross-cultural interaction, I believe, is one example of that. Either experienced internally –backstage– or expressed externally –front stage– (Goffman, 1956), contact, interaction, and socialization with (people from) other cultures foster processes of comparison, conflict, rejection, acceptance, confusion, and so on, which directly affect our cultural views and, therefore, our *cultured self*.

Online communication has a similar effect on our identities, as the mediation of computers and all the other technologies that make it possible, also influence how the interaction actually takes place. Joinson (2003) and Vygotsky (1978) conceptualized that 'mediation' is of high significance to the interaction through online communication tools, as they do not only facilitate

the task, but also change our understanding of it, and even "the nature of the task itself" (as cited in Gunawardena et al., 2009; p.8). I will let Muros' (2011) remarks, about two crucial notions to keep in mind in relation to subjects' online personas, work as a conclusion to this Literature Review. She tells us that:

> One: some of the factors involved in the construction of our social identity may be recognizable in the formation of our virtual identity. Therefore, it is possible to draw parallels between real and virtual life that lead to common patterns of identity in the individual. Two: virtual identity is fluid; it will be based, like the social one, on adjustments caused by the nature of the circumstances. The fluidity of identity, and of our society, as well, [...] is a way of adapting to the world (p.52. My translation)[12].

2.7. Conclusion

The online world and everything that comes with it, makes it what it is, makes it meaningful to our lives, and leads us to behave one way or another within it, about it, and so on, is a manifestation of our very social nature. We are used to adapting ourselves to new and different realities, and then we tend to shape those realities, as well. Engaging in this autoethnographic endeavor has helped me understand that my practices and experiences as an online EFL teacher are influenced by the online setting, participants' cultural backgrounds and other factors, such as the values that pertain to business organizations my students and I work for. In the following chapters of this thesis, we will see in detail how this re-signification took

[12] "Una: puede que algunos de los factores implicados en la construcción de nuestra identidad social sean reconocibles en la formación de nuestra identidad virtual. Por tanto, se pueden establecer paralelismos entre la vida real y la virtual que conllevan a patrones comunes de identidad en el individuo. Dos: La identidad virtual es fluida; se basará, al igual que la social, en ajustes provocados por la naturaleza de las circunstancias. La fluidez de la identidad, así como de nuestra sociedad (sobre la cual hablaban Bauman o Beck), es una vía de adaptación al mundo".

place between two students of mine and me, and how it even transcended the boundaries of the *space of practice* and showed its influence in our *cultured self* in the offline world.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Introduction

The present research inquires about the experience of my students and myself as we engage in interaction in the context of a synchronous cross-cultural online EFL course; where the digital setting, our diverse cultural backgrounds, and our ideas of the 'self', influence our behavior and lead to the creation of Spaces of Practice (SoP). Views proposed by Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001), Critical Interculturality (Walsh, 2010), New Capitalism (Gee, 2000; Stecher, 2014), inform and support the socio-critical stance I propose to approach the research phenomenon in this study.

The aim of this qualitative research is to explore the ways in which positions and opinions regarding cultural values, self-representation and shared practices are re-signified during class interaction between my EFL students and me –their online teacher–; how that affects our relationships and the types of *cultured self* that result from the process. I start this section by stating social critique as the epistemological current I stand by. From this fundamental principle, the methodological decisions I made regarding autoethnography, participants as characters, self-reflexivity, and co-interpretation as the foundations that hold the study together and make it a coherent and sound piece of qualitative research.

3.2. Social critique as a form of activism

In this research, I aim to account for a complex phenomenon of interaction that involves not only cultural exchange, but exchange mediated by communication technologies and the constant re-signification of participants' practices, affiliations, and self-representations, too. Bearing in mind that all of these are issues that entail the (often unequal) power dynamics that regulate social relationships among individuals and human groups, this study is framed within

the current of Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2010): a call for "a resistive problematization [...] [regarding] questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology, and discourse. And crucially, [...] a dynamic opening up of new questions that emerge from this conjunction" (p.3).

This, in turn, demands the discipline to take academic interest in vindicating the values and realities built by those actors who have historically been silenced and oppressed in favor of the privileged white, European, heteronormative, ableist, male-centered paradigms. Furthermore, scholars who align with this critical turn in the applied linguistics field, are encouraged to embrace the moral responsibility of fighting the "ideas through which the world is defined (the givens, the assumptions, the generics) as well as the inequalities these maintain" (Pennycook, 2010; p.4).

One of those taken-for-granted assumptions that grow quickly in popularity, to the point where even governmental institutions adopt them as part of their official discourses and policies, is the concept of interculturality. However, a critical look at many of the conceptualizations done around this idea –and many others, for that matter–, reveals its undercover foundations, laid on the basis of inequality and injustice (Walsh, 2009). From a Critical Intercultural perspective, it is crucial that conceptualization always "depart from the problem of power, its pattern of racialization and the difference that has been constructed around it"[13] (p.13). Problematization must identify and expose those underlying values that reproduce and work to benefit dominant social institutions; we ought to challenge them as we fight for the deconstruction and reconstruction of oppressive social structures by and from the actors who have endured historical, systematic subjugation and subordination.

[13] All translations are mine.

The importance of the critical task proves to be ever renewing since the dominant social powers continue to resist their decline by adopting new and 'innovative' ways to reproduce their discourses. They do it in such a way that their intentions get to permeate all types of communication while going undetected to many of us who do not always take the time to think twice about the propositions we are exposed to. The bundle of discourses, sub-discourses, and strategies I am referring to is known in the academic field as the new capitalism, and in particular the idea of knowledge (of a language, for instance) as a marketable commodity, with the aggravating fact of treating culture as 'added value' to make an educational offer more attractive and competitive in the market (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.5.2 for an in-depth explanation of the concept).

In this research, it is understood that "the new capitalism is creating new types of workplaces [...] new types of people" (Gee, 2000; p.517), as well as new types of relationships among subjects. Moreover, it is clear that Communities of Practice (CoP) are "a core notion of both the new capitalism and of recent school reform efforts inspired by educationally relevant cognitive science" (p.517). This is the critical perspective I take regarding the conceptualization of the seemingly selfless concept of CoP, especially relevant for this study, since the language institute I work in, and within which this study is framed, holds these neocapitalist views as core to its corporate culture. Hence, my proposal of the concept of *space of practice*, instead; not only due to the previously stated links between the idea of CoP and this system I critique, but because it describes better the interaction context this research is focused on (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.5.1).

With the support of these diverse but interconnected ways of understanding complex social issues, I develop in this study a socio-critical problematization of the phenomenon of

synchronous online cross-cultural EFL-centered classroom interaction, in order to account for the effects it has on the construction of my own *cultured self* and vice versa. This is my way of doing activism. The following figure is a visual representation of the proposed research design for the present study. It comprises the main tenets of the investigation, including its main approach (autoethnography), the kind of data (CCEs, thick description), and how it was collected (observation, introspection, self-analysis, and self-reflection).

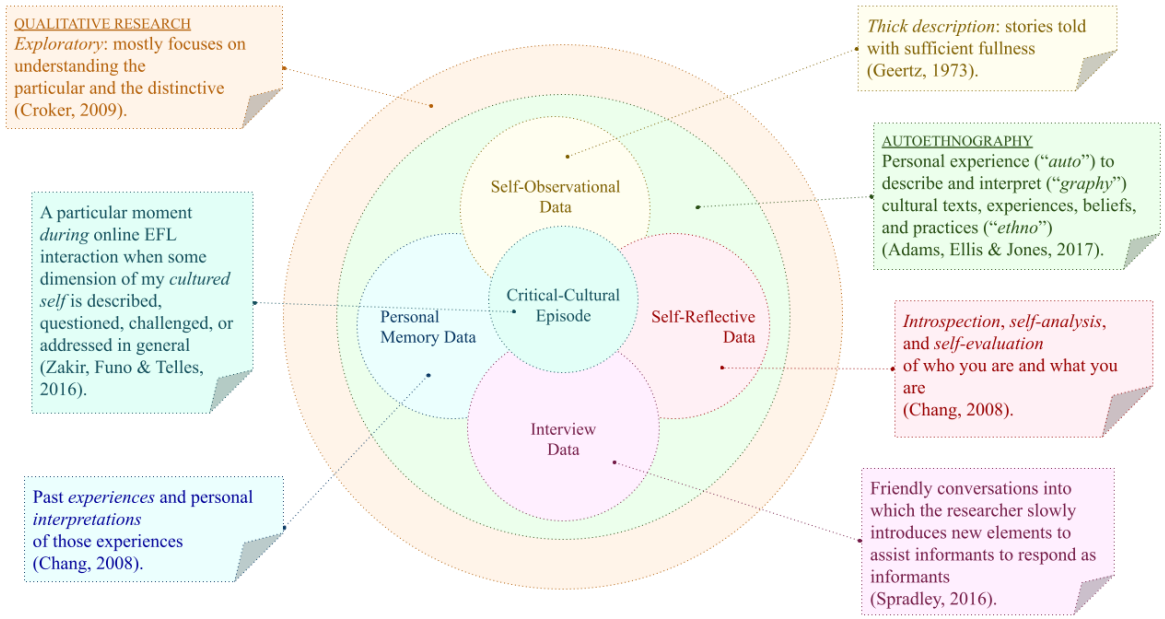


Figure 2: An autoethnographic research design

3.3. Autoethnography as a form self-reconciliation

After enrolling in the master program, I started going through a process of inner conflict between my identity as an EFL instructor and my identity as an EFL teacher-researcher. Bearing in mind that my workplace does not provide the kind of environment that fosters critique and debate, I felt limited and constrained by its rigid corporate culture. Nonetheless, I began to feel the need and the responsibility to reflect upon and problematize both my everyday practices and my inner identity conflicts. This is mainly what this research study means to me.

Born from a mix between autobiographical narrative and ethnographic approaches with methods for qualitative research, autoethnography, as Adams et al (2017) see it, is "a research method that uses personal experience ("auto") to describe and interpret ("graphy") cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ("ethno")" (p.1). These authors claim that "autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, and they engage in rigorous self-reflection –typically referred to as "reflexivity"– in order to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life" (Adams et al, 2017; p.1). As I see it, autoethnographers' rigorous self-reflection is a process that implies self-critique, self-interpretation, self-empathy, and ultimately self-reconciliation. This nontraditional paradigm is an empowering research alternative inasmuch as it recognizes that researchers' own stories, beliefs, experiences, etc., are not an obstacle to the construction of valid knowledge (Wall, 2006). Quite the contrary, they are valuable data, worthy of being accepted as a tool for understanding both particular and broad social practices.

Unfortunately, according to Poerwandari (2021), "the way of thinking and closed attitude [of the autoethnographer] may invite bias" (p.315), which is why not only reflexivity is to be considered, but also intersubjectivity, which according to this author "entails the interchange of thoughts and feelings between individuals, while reflexivity refers to the researcher being aware of their effect on the process and outcomes of research" (p.315) Alvesson (2003) says that "while a challenge for the ethnographer is to avoid 'going native,' the self-ethnographer must make strong efforts to avoid 'staying native'" (p.189; as cited in Poerwandari, 2021; p.315); that is, neglecting the academic purposes and standards of our research activity. In autoethnography, intersubjectivity is about seeing the self (researcher), through the other (co-researcher), to understand the us (society).

Luckily, this autoethnographic research counted on the contributions of two (2) more characters/co-researchers: my students, whose opinions and interpretations I rely on to account for 'the other side' of the story and achieve a balanced rendition of the events and interpretations. The point to be made here is that researchers keeping in mind these two notions while engaging in autoethnography, results in reliable and scientific studies whose conclusions contribute to the field of qualitative research. As Poerwandari states:

> Reflexivity as an intersubjective reflection focuses on "the situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter" (Finlay, 2002, p.215). It is with the awareness that processes that are not fully in the consciousness might influence the construction of understanding. As such, reflexivity and intersubjectivity move to bring understanding, knowledge, transformation, and discursive deconstruction (2021; p.316).

With these ideas in mind, I frame this study within Chang's (2008) principles of autoethnography as a method, which identify its benefits in the following three areas: "(1) it offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and (3) it has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building" (p.52).

On the other hand, the virtual nature of the research phenomenon also demanded appropriate methodological decisions that allowed me to obtain ethnographic data without doing observation 'in-person' or meeting the participants 'face-to-face'. Auto-netnography (Villegas, 2018), combines traditional ethnographic paradigms (interest for fairly unknown contexts, observation of everyday practices, in-group relationships, values shaping the community, etc.) (Heigham & Sakui, 2009), with autobiographical narratives and reflexivity (Chang, 2016), and netnography as "participant-observational research based in online fieldwork" (Kozinets, 2010;

p.60). Having stated the reasoning behind this methodological decision, I turn to spell out further aspects of the research design devised for this study.

3.4. Co-researchers as characters

In order to justify how the population to develop my research with was selected, let us consider the following circumstances:

- The major role I play within this context is that of an EFL instructor, while the other participants play the role of EFL learners.
- For this study, I am interested in accounting for how my interaction with students, in relation to our diverse cultural backgrounds, values, worldviews, etc., influences not only the construction of online spaces of practice (SoP), but also the constant re-signification of our *cultured self*.

Given these arguments, I conclude that the first source of data shall be the result of self-observation, self-description, self-analysis, and self-interpretation; thus, I shall be the first selected participant. However, seeing how the interaction does not only involve me, and does not influence only me, I conclude that the other actors of the SoP can provide insightful data, too. Consequently, the other members –a.k.a. my EFL students– shall be the secondary (though not less significant) source of data for the study.

If I am to position myself as an 'academic activist' advocating for the vindication of those whom the dominant paradigms have historically oppressed (Pennycook, 2010; Walsh, 2009), I must not ignore the power imbalance which has traditionally characterized the relationships between the researcher and the research subject/participant. In the words of Hall & Callery (2001), "researchers [...] have a moral obligation to emphasize equity in their power relationships with participants" (p.268). This is known in the academic field as the relationality principle, and

it accounts for (1) reciprocal relationships between researchers and participants; (2) the effects of the scholar's discipline; and (3) the expectations from participants about reciprocal relationships in the research process (Hall & Callery, 2001).

So, summing up, not only participants impressions, opinions and narratives in regard to the research problem will enrich the data and, in turn my comprehension of the phenomenon; but also granting them their deserved place as co-researchers responds to the epistemological stance I take here, that is social critique, reconciliation, activism, relationality and equity.

One of the characteristics of an autoethnography is that it "allows the author to write in a highly personalized style" (Wall, 2006; p.1), which usually tends to favor a narrative yet academic approach to the presentation of the ideas that make up the study. Therefore, I find it appropriate to see my autoethnography as a story, where participants are characters; not only because it goes well with the narrative style, but because we all play an important role in the development of the phenomenon I study here. In that order of ideas, I think it is important to describe my co-researchers, as a way to wrap up this section devoted to them, as the essential support they are.

Nonetheless, instead of resorting to random pseudonyms, I have chosen to refer to all participants by the original names of characters from Michael Ende's children's novel Momo[14], a book about how domination over the significance, use, and allocation of people's time, is what the logic and system of capitalism fundamentally rely on (Shippen, 2014; Polster, 2016), and whose message marked me as a kid. It is a clear critique to capitalism, and I make these

[14] About the characterization of the participants, something must be clarified: I am aware that, as real human beings, none of the individuals I talk about here are one-dimensional, and our *cultured self*, personality, affiliations, etc., are complex and fluctuating. It is not my intention to ignore that in favor of my research, nor is it to judge them or their opinions; however, based on my academic analysis data and provided by all participants, I am able to identify certain traits in our *cultured self* that allow me to make connections with the ideas and characters of Ende's book.

connections based on the fact that both my and Ende's story's main characters' lives are shaped by the doings of the capitalist system, embodied in our antagonists, called the men in gray. They are

> [...] the perfect personification of the corporation in late capitalism. Existing solely for and on the profit generated by resources stolen from people who have "bought into" them, these creatures quite literally vanish into thin air if prevented from capitalizing on people's time (Polster, 2016; p.3).

In the autoethnographic narrative, the researcher's character is called Gigi, a character that "embodies the creative potential in a leisurely life" (Polster, 2014; p.3). For the original Gigi –passionate about storytelling–, as well as for myself –whose passion has always been the English language–, giving into the dynamics of capitalism made a passion turn into a job, with all the demands and restrictions that entails. I also rely on the cooperation provided by other two characters[15], who took part in Critical-Cultural Episodes[16] (CCE) and constantly showed investment to both their own learning process and the SoP, by willingly engaging in discussions and expressing their thoughts when the situation called for it. Throughout this document, I refer to them as Fusi and Nicola, after the characters in the aforementioned novel. I met Fusi and Nicola when their course started in mid-April 2021, and by the end of May 2021, I personally explained what my study was about, asked them to participate in the project, and sent them a written consent form for them to review and sign[17] (see Annex 1).

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[15] Who, in real life, work together in the same department of a major multinational corporation's Mexican branch, and they enrolled in this intermediate-level Business English course at the language institute I work with encouraged by their company superiors.

[16] A particular moment of interaction when some dimension of my *cultured self* or the agreed practices within the SoP is described, questioned, challenged, or addressed in general (see section 3.5).

[17] I did so due to the reasons I stated above, as well as because I felt the rapport among all of us facilitated the type of CCE my analysis is focused on.

Fusi's character "enjoys his work and lives to serve his customers. The men in gray use [his] occasional doubt about living a fulfilled life to sell him a time-saving plan" (p.3). Sadly, once he is convinced by the capitalist discourse, he is "put "on the clock" of industrial time" (Polster, 2016; p.4). In this autoethnographic narrative, Fusi is a manager with a strong sense of identity, who cares for his family, friends, and coworkers, but he also worries much about productivity, efficiency, and agility (see Annex 11).

Lastly, the character of Nicola is one who, despite being more sensitive, drifts away from his quiet lifestyle towards a stressfully fast paced one influenced by capitalist ideals. In my autoethnography, Nicola is a manager too, but expresses less concern with results and more with the feelings of his peers, trying to find common ground with everyone despite there being cultural differences setting them apart (see Annex 12).

3.5. Self-introspection as a form of data collection

Just as Mendieta tells us in her 2012 article on narrative inquiry, "in the last decades, narratives and, in particular, stories people tell about their lives have become the focus of the evolving field of narrative research [...] There is an increasing interest in narratives in fields like [...] education and in other areas in linguistics, like language teaching, L1 and L2 acquisition and sociolinguistics" (Mendieta, 2012; p.138). Not only has this approach made its way into a variety of academic fields, but it has been adapted and adopted by researchers as an instrument for collecting rich data, too, regardless of whether they are conducting narrative inquiry per se, or grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, etc. This trend is known as the narrative turn in qualitative research (Mendieta, 2012). From my point of view, narrative data's main opportunities are Retrospection, Introspection and Prospection (Quintero Polo, 2016), mental processes that help humans make sense of the information we obtain from experiencing life,

interaction, and knowledge construction to create our own individual understanding of reality. These were the elements that I highlighted and engaged in as part of my data collection exercise. They helped me achieve the goal of the research, which is by nature introspective: understanding how, when, and why my *cultured self* is re-signified as a result of interaction with my EFL students in the synchronous cross-cultural SoP. The basic argument here is that in order to obtain data that represents people's views and inner discussions, introspection is highly valuable. This is when narrative inquiry becomes relevant. Adhering to this sequence of ideas, I propose to observe, describe, analyze, and interpret what I call critical-cultural episodes (hereinafter CCE); a term I adapt from Zakir, Funo & Telles' (2016) concept of culture-related episodes. As my unit of analysis, a CCE is a particular moment of interaction when some dimension of my *cultured self* or the agreed practices within the SoP is described, questioned, challenged, or addressed in general. As co-researchers, Nicola and Fusi were involved in the stage of interviews and co-interpretation. With them I conducted semi-structured ethnographic interviews, or as defined by Spradley (2016), "friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants". Although I do not see them as informants but as characters and co-researchers, the idea of friendly conversations is what I looked for in this study. The interview took place when data collection reached redundancy, as a preliminary step to analysis and interpretation.

3.6. Theme identification and interpretation as data analysis

According to this model, autoethnographic data collection, analysis, and interpretation are developed by following a series of systematic activities, which I describe now. The first step of my research journey started when I videotaped, transcribed, described, and reflected about some of my interactions with a couple of EFL learners from Mexico, who I taught for around five

months; all this after having collected their written consent, which they provided voluntarily and in an informed manner. This research project was designed so that I could gather and analyze four kinds of data, three of which were the result of my personal introspection as Gigi, and the fourth kind came from the other main characters of this narrative, my two EFL students: Fusi and Nicola. The data are divided like so (Chang, 2008):

- Self-observational data, which make for the ethnographic component of this process and its characteristic thick description. I watched the video recordings of my interactions with Nicola and Fusi, transcribed them, and lastly, described them by answering what happened, when, where, and how. The ethnographic depiction includes a short explanation of what the effects of the online setting in the interaction are, too.
- Self-reflective data, which cluster my reflections and interpretations of the impact that these interactions have on different layers of my *cultured self*. I collected these data by asking myself about how I behaved and why, what feelings I experienced during and after the online interactions, and what kind of *cultured self* I believe I presented in each one of them.
- Personal memory data, which reveal the correlations between the various dimensions of my *cultured self* and my personal/professional narratives. In other words, these data go deep into my life stories and pick out key episodes, characters, and ideas that I grew up with, which I argue have had significant repercussions in the construction of my *cultured self*.
- Interview data collected from discussions with participants, which revolved around the ideas I problematize throughout the analysis so that their perspectives can be compared and contrasted with mine.

The last kind of data serves two purposes. First, they contribute to a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of research, because they consist of the compilation of

insightful ideas from the other participants of the interactions. Second, their incorporation works as a way to triangulate the data, so that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the analysis process can be robust and trustworthy from both an academic and a narrative stand. The next graphic shows how the data analysis and interpretation was carried out in a constant cycle of collection, analysis, and interpretation, informed by relevant theory.

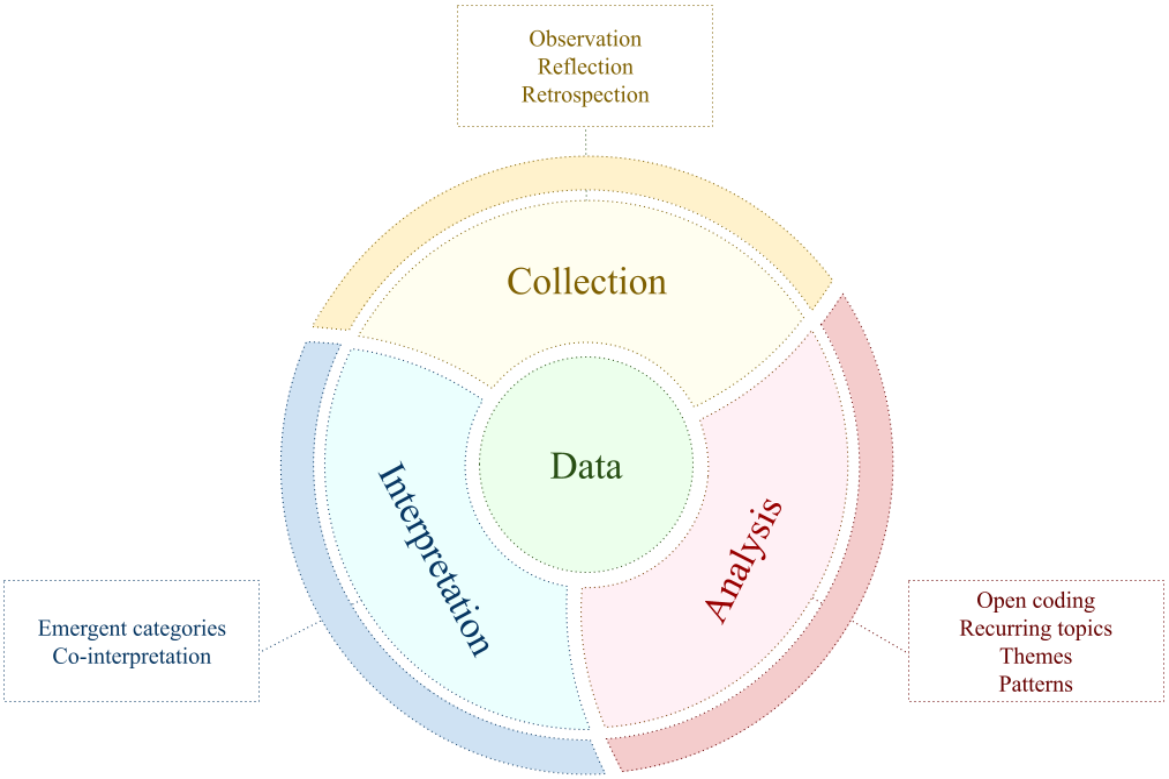


Figure 3: A cyclic analytic process

This study is supported by Ellis et al (2011) claims about the principles of credibility and transparency in qualitative research and autoethnography. These authors argue that "when terms such as reliability, validity, and generalizability are applied to autoethnography, the context, meaning and utility of these terms are altered" (p.10). According to this discussion, trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for autoethnographers, relies on the effect that the final product produces on the readers; we must get the readers to perceive that what is being told is

"lifelike, believable, and possible, [and that the] story is coherent'' (Ellis et al, 2011; p.10). Trustworthiness equals verisimilitude in autoethnographic studies.

Notwithstanding, I recognize that the representations I make of the phenomenon, especially when it comes to the private language institute I work for, might be interpreted as biased and one sided when only seen from my perspective, without providing proof to back my claims. Finally, the last element included in the matrix (see Annex 2), though it is not deemed as data, is the theoretical considerations: a brief but insightful reflection about the ideas discussed in the previous three boxes of the matrix and their relation to theoretical elements discussed in the Literature Review chapter. These connections work as preliminary interpretation and are developed further in the interpretation phase of the research project.

3.7. Conclusion

Throughout this document, I have introduced, explained, and supported the main epistemological and methodological decisions taken apropos of my master thesis' research design. I have stated that I account for the phenomenon of synchronous cross-cultural online EFL-centered interaction from a socio-critical stance. This decision responds to my personal and academic conviction to problematize and challenge dominant power paradigms that have historically oppressed and silenced the voices of so many human groups, whose vindication we now have the moral responsibility to fight for. All methodological decisions, regarding the research approach (autoethnography), population selection (co-researchers as characters), data collection (self-reflection), and data analysis and interpretation (co-interpretation) stem from this basic moral principle. The relevance to the research question was also an element that I always kept in mind during the decision-making and the justification explanation.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

My analysis rendered three categories that address each of the research objectives and by delving into their implications, I am able to understand what I think the different layers of my *cultured self* are. For starters, the category titled curating a repertoire of practices suitable for the perceived demands of the online cross-cultural setting, encompasses the list of habitual strategies I put into play when in class. I propose that these practices respond to the fluctuating impact of several factors that characterize the setting, and the participants (myself included); always keeping in mind the seemingly ubiquitous influence of neocapitalist ideologies.

With the second category, trying to fit my *cultured self* and accommodating to ideal otherness, I discuss how my assumptions and concerns about my interlocutors' thoughts and needs, and how I think I may be perceived by them, might result in contradictions between my behavior and my personal convictions. Lastly, reconciling my current *cultured self* with my personal and professional narratives, deals with the deeper layer of my *cultured self*. This final category contains reflections about the repercussions of key life experiences –how I was brought up and what I have lived beyond the CCEs I analyze for this thesis– for my present *cultured self*.

In summary, the categories account for explanations regarding how external and internal factors shape my teaching practice and my relations with my students in an online EFL cross-cultural *space of practice*. Their influence can be both rather situational and short-lived or lengthier, dating back to defining moments of my life and the visible effects of their fluctuating impact are the result of constant re-signification of my multi-layered *cultured self*. With the figure below, I try to illustrate the interrelation between the three categories of analysis, each of which responds to different layers of my *cultured self*, a construction that is also made of interconnected layers. This being an autoethnographic study, the analysis focuses on my own

descriptions, reflections, and narrations of the cultural experience. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn here, which are meant to provide an answer to the research question of how my *cultured self* is re-signified as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction, are complemented by input provided by the other characters of this story: my students, Fusi and Nicola.

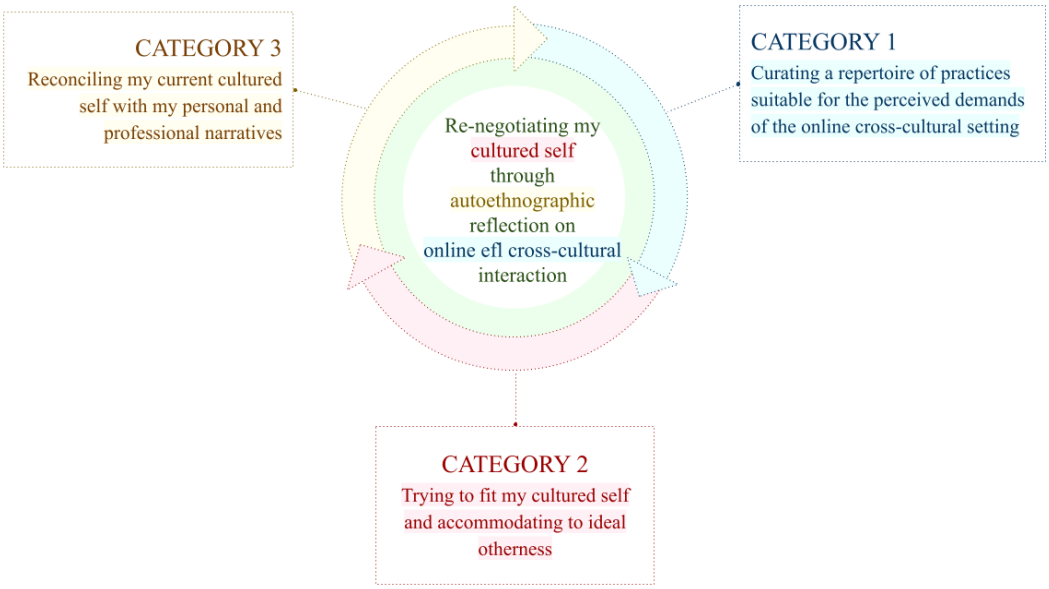


Figure 4: An interrelated set of categories

4.1. Curating a repertoire of practices suitable for the perceived demands of the online cross-cultural setting: finding the right balance between compliance and resistance

After working as an EFL teacher for over three years, I have developed a repertoire or range of practices, things I usually do in order to satisfy the demands of different external and internal factors shaping the SoP, our interactions, and our cultured selves. These factors are:

- The rules and standards implemented by the international language institute I work for, characterized by being rather rigid when it comes to what they call their "learning

method", which all instructors are told and expected to comply with across branches and modalities.

- The kind of communication that the online SoP allows, in terms of synchronous and asynchronous text, audio, video, and screen sharing. This is a crucial part of what sets online interaction apart from or brings it close to offline communication.
- The cross-cultural nature of the interaction, considering that participants' cultural backgrounds are the result of local, national, regional, and global elements that shape and are shaped by the interaction with other cultures and *cultured selves*.
- Personal motivations of mine, including desire to learn about my interlocutors' realities and their cultural backgrounds, as well as my research interests regarding the present study, which I made certain decisions based on.

I argue that, in the end, the ultimate struggle happens between an obedient and challenging *cultured self*, in regard to the strict rules of the language institute, in order to satisfy personal and interpersonal convictions. Therefore, the next station in this autoethnography journey is the identification of and explanation of the practices I have come to curate a repertoire of, along with data samples that illustrate and support my claims about the influence of the aforesaid factors.

Bearing in mind that I have been working with this language institute ever since I started my career, and not having had any prior experience or formation on pedagogy, my teaching practices, as well as my *cultured self*, have been greatly sculpted by their principles. That influence, which still remains and will be hard to eradicate, affects not only the methodological decisions I make or the resources I employ while teaching, but also my relationships with students and how I understand the very learning process. However, as I acquire more diverse experience and explore my academic and ideological interests, being compliant has started to be

less of an unquestionable priority when teaching. Over the past few years –even though the school's rules have not been changed or loosened–, I have found that I tend to assess –sometimes unconsciously– whether and to what extent following each of the steps and instructions is actually necessary. Then, and I was able to see this in the data, I can behave differently from one class to another, or during the same class, depending on how the school's rules hold up against the influence of the other factors.

Most of the time, my non-compliance consists of –more or less– disregarding guidelines in respect to language use, teaching methodologies, pace-management, and topics to discuss, and the repertoire of practices I have curated helps me in that endeavor. The excerpt below (see Annex 3) shows an instance of one of the 'riskiest' practices I engage in, that is, defying the institute's rules regarding which language instructors and students are allowed to use in class. The rule says that we ought to only speak in English –the target language–, and never Spanish –our native language–, which is an idea that has been discussed in the field of Second Language Acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2006; Rohmah & Pratawati, 2015), but in the following CCE, I dared to disregard that rule.

Table 1: *20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS (TRANSCRIPTION)*

20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS
Gigi: What do you think about this expression? 'Water under the bridge'? Have you heard it before? **Fusi:** Mm hmm. **Gigi:** Yes? **Nicola:** Yes. **Fusi:** Yeah. **Gigi: What does it mean?** **Fusi:** It is like ah... Ahmm... How to translate this? It's like a... **Nicola:** When the water is like here? *(Puts his hands in front of his nose bridge to illustrate the level to which water would be, as if someone were about to drown).* **Fusi:** Yeah, it's like something... some action is under... under pacing? or... **Gigi:** Actually, **I can compare this to the words of a very famous philosopher called… Daddy Yankee**. **Fusi:** *(Laughs).* **Nicola:** Yankee? **Fusi:** *(Still laughing)* Come on! **Gigi: Who says "Lo que pasó, pasó"**.

Nicola: He's not a... *(laughs)*.
(We all laugh).
Gigi: OK? *(laughs)* Yes? "Lo que pasó, pasó". It's a... **It already happened, we cannot change the past**, we can just learn from the... from the mistake, I suppose. No?
Fusi: *(Laughs)* Yeah.
Gigi: That is what that means *(laughs)*.
Fusi: *(Laughs)* Alright.
Gigi: OK.
Fusi: *(Still laughing)* **It's clear. Thank you for this expression**.
Gigi: Sure. Go ahead, continue Mr. [Fusi].

As I explain in the reflective matrix for this CCE (see Annex 3), rather than complying with the demands of the school's teaching methodology, I am more concerned about achieving my pedagogical goals while, simultaneously, showing a bit of my personality to build rapport with my students. Thus, my reasoning tells me that utilizing shared cultural referents such as our native language (Spanish) and alluding to Latin American popular culture referents (Daddy Yankee's music and song lyrics) to make sarcastic comments (a pop singer being a philosopher) would help me accomplish all objectives I prioritized. Instead of implicitly tagging our mother tongue as inferior, undesirable, or obstructive to the second language learning process, I embrace it in the classroom as a useful and valuable 'tool'; this is exactly what Vogel & García (2017) argue when talking about Translanguaging. Based on students' reaction, I can conclude that my reasoning was right.

It is important to recognize also that the globalization of media and entertainment is what made the existence of transnationally known cultural products possible for Fusi, Nicola, myself and many more people across our region, and even the world. As said by Castells (2004), globalization has developed a global entertainment industry that both supports and is supported by advertising. Through it, a consumerist branded culture can be built and spread all over the world. Exposure to this kind of entertainment triggers individuals to construct a more cosmopolitan, consumerist *cultured self*, whose dominance amongst the global middle-class

furthers the identification between my students and me, regardless of our differences in other aspects of our *cultured selves*.

This is one of the main ways I have to 'legally' relate to my students through common ground, since I am always expected to abide by the 'target language' rule, and had this class been evaluated, my performance would have been scored poorly. In spite of being fully aware of this possibility, I deem it appropriate to say just a few words in Spanish to explain the meaning of this idiom. I am not too rebellious, though, because I use it ever so slightly and immediately switch back to English. Rapport with my students and the desire to have fun in class with them was stronger for a brief moment and, as short as the joke lasted, I felt it allowed me to show my personality to them. When I used to teach face-to-face, I would have never dared to defy this rule like I did here, without students asking me to do it, and I presume this new working environment is somehow involved in this change.

Observing myself and reflecting about my practices, I identify that transitioning from a face-to-face setting to a virtual one may have had an impact on my practices, too, because working from the 'privacy of my home' made me feel more independent, even if each one of my classes was being recorded and randomly evaluated, like they have always been. When being observed, teachers tend to become more conscious about following the protocols of the language institutions we work for. But when not, we adopt another, more relaxed position, truer to ourselves. We "let that inner teacher out" (Rendón Alfonso, 2019; p.66). We act differently depending on the context we are exposed to, which is what Goffman names the theory of several selves (1959; as cited in Rendón Alfonso, 2019; p.66). In my case, being physically within the facilities of the school, surrounded by colleagues and bosses, makes me more aware of the

surveillance I am constantly under; whereas working remotely makes me forget about that fact and feel freer to apply practices that I consider appropriate.

Another common practice from my repertoire that subverts school's expectations is allowing myself to digress from the topics of discussion that the institute has already pre-established, in favor of satisfying personal interests of mine (curiosity about my interlocutors' cultural realities or information I predict could be useful to achieve my research objectives) and my students', instead. In other words, there are instances when the chance to focus on matters of participants' lives, opinions, and doubts comes up, and I allow the discussion to be about that, as long as I do not detect that it means pace-management issues later on. My *cultured self* has this effect on my teaching persona and practices, because rather than knowledge construction being one-sided, it is more important for me to foster multi-sided conversations where all participants' contributions are equally relevant. Additionally, it shows that both the students and I are aware of the fact that not only grammatical aspects are influential to the language learning process, but cultural, political, and other social issues play a key role, as well.

I have embraced these challenging practices after reflecting on the ramifications of such a rigid setting, and I have come to conclude that one of its chief causes is the influence of the New Capitalism's most discreet tool: neomanagerial discourse (see Chapter 2: Literature Review chapter, section 2.5.2 for a more in-depth discussion). Within the educational domain, this strategy evens out schools and institutes alike to private businesses whose ultimate function ought to be turning profits for their shareholders. Firstly, by "permanently and individually [evaluating] their staff in order to generate continuous improvement processes and increase productivity" (Stecher, 2014; p.24. My translation); and secondly, by employing the same jargon

used in businesses[18] (quality control, audit, performance appraisal, collaborator, etc.), to describe educational dynamics. The strategy subtly teaches us to get used to linking ideas from these previously distinct domains.

As time passes, the lines between the formerly separate realms of society become progressively blurry, until capitalist ideals have taken over education (Stecher, 2014). Once these ideas have been instilled in our culture, it is almost inevitable that institutions' –such as the language school I work for– and individuals' –including my students and myself– understanding of many –if not most– things education be seen through neocapitalist lenses. Standards and audit processes being implemented in schools, universities and institutes is now part of the culture and it shapes our behavior, decisions, and our *cultured selves* as learners, teachers, and citizens. As also seen in the excerpts, although there are instances during interaction with my online EFL students where I challenge these rules and stray more or less far from the route I am supposed to follow in class, I still argue that both me and my students are affected by this discourse.

For example, during one of our classes Fusi and I were discussing our experiences learning foreign languages, which was a digression from the topic we were supposed to go over in that class, according to school standards. Then, I mentioned that I wanted to learn a third language but did not know which one to learn, and he told me his opinion about that (see Annex 4):

[18] "More recently Holborow (2007) has referred to the re-semanticization of the lexical field of business to include more and more areas of life, such that in modern Ireland even asylum seekers are positioned as customers of the Irish state in official documentation" (Gray, 2010; p.717).

Table 2: 20210623 - LEARNING LANGUAGES (REFLECTION)

20210623 - LEARNING LANGUAGES
Gigi: [...] I would like to learn a third language. I don't know if I should learn Portuguese or... maybe an Asian language. What do you think? **Fusi:** Depends. Depends of the, well... **I learned Portuguese because I need... I needed to learn, because when I start working at [company] I start working with a Brazilian project. (sic)** **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Fusi:** And **the first time that I traveled to Brazil, I didn't speak anything about Portuguese**. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Fusi:** And my English was not very good in this moment. So, **the communication was complicated. So, I decide to start learning by myself**. I only take... take. Well, I took three levels at [language school]. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Fusi:** But to be honest with you I was better than the level that I was... I was training. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Fusi:** But was nice. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Fusi:** To structure my... my... my Portuguese. **But, was a need, not really a wish.**

Fusi seems to understand foreign languages as job requirements; tools to facilitate business-related communication. I believe that this idea comes from his language acquisition process and other experiences within neocapitalist contexts, where profit-turning is the ultimate priority and knowledge, culture, etc., are seen either as instruments or obstacles to this endeavor. In the new capitalism, the worth of humans is weighed in terms of how much 'added value' we can bring to business processes, and its focus on financial gain tends to "co-opt all spheres of private and public life in the name of commitment to economic productivity" (Gee, 1999; p.66). In Fusi's case, a process as relevant to the construction of his own *cultured self* as it was to live in Brazil and learn Portuguese, has been heavily influenced by neocapitalist ideals.

When it comes to my conduct as a teacher, I interpret that occasionally ignoring the demands of the school and instead focusing on my own interests, as well as what I perceive are the interests of my students, is a way to rebel against neocapitalist ideals, which see education, knowledge, language, and culture as products to be sold and bought in the market in exchange for capital. Building this opinion through experience, reflection and research reinforces my conviction that resisting, subverting, and challenging these expectations is important and

necessary to transform the neocapitalist view of education, knowledge, and culture they help reproduce and maintain.

Profit-centeredness, however, is not the only aspect of the new capitalism that shapes the *cultured selves* of the participants of this study, as I was able to identify what Fairclough (2002) calls 're-scaling'; shifts between different scales of social life: locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. On July 20th, 2021, the students and I met and when I first greeted them, I let them know this day is when Colombians celebrate our independence. Then, we had the following exchange (see Annex 5):

Table 3: 20210720 - COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210720 - COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE
Gigi: Another interesting fact about Colombia is that **today we celebrate our independence, but actually... I mean... It wasn't our independence**. It's just one day that a person in our history… ehh…did some... How can I say?... Something important in the history and started the fight for independence. But not the day that the independence was declared, or anything. Actually, in Colombia **we don't have a day that's specific for, "Okay. Today we... we confirm the independence"**. No. **Fusi:** Buuut... **I think that it is... it is the normal process, right? I mean, for example, for Mexico, the Independence Day is the... is exactly the same**. It's the day that an special people start the independence. **Gigi:** But I thought that, for example, **for the United States, the 4th of July was the day that they signed the declaration of independence**. No? **Fusi:** Yeah, for July 4th. Yes. Yeah, but... **Gigi:** Well, **it depends on the country.** **Fusi:** Yeah, exactly. **And the culture**. **Nicola:** From... from... **from which country... Colombia independence?** **Gigi:** From Spain. **Fusi:** Spain. **Nicola:** From Spain. Oh! **Similar in Mexico**.

Table 4: 20210720 - COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE (REFLECTION)

20210720 - COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE
[...] National symbols can be a very influential force that shapes people's collective identities. Still, **it's contradictory that while I was talking about my country's history, and therefore presenting myself as a proud Colombian, I was assessing our national symbols by USA's standards** [...].

What I can notice from this CCE and my reflections around it, is that my assumption that Colombia's history would be deemed odd by my Mexican students because it is not similar to the history of the United States, may be an effect of this plexus between global and local/national processes. Castells (2004) also touches on this matter, and states that multicultural exchange and interaction make for fluctuating relations between national and regional identities, on the one side, and global cosmopolitan ones, on the other side. From his perspective, the former kinds tend to prevail over the latter, which only a minority of the world's population has adopted.

However, this global identity does indeed exist and there is a group of individuals who see themselves as citizens of the world. I agree with these claims and understand that "there is a multicultural global culture characterized by the hybridization and remix of cultures from different origins" (Castells, 2004; p.118. Emphasis in the original). This results in (some privileged) individuals having an extensive variety of cultural 'sources' to build our group and personal identities upon (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.6 for a more in-depth discussion of these ideas). However, like Castells (2004), I also understand that this phenomenon is characterized and fostered by the culture of consumerism and the formation of a global capitalist market. Speaking languages that connote power, such as English or Spanish, contributes to this identity shift, too, due to the possibilities this represents in terms of access to information and communication with other individuals across borders.

This problematization indicates that my *cultured self* and my personality could be constantly influenced and being redefined by my contact with (people from) other cultures, not

only through my interaction with my students – which is more recent–, but also throughout my life and my second-language acquisition experience. And, interestingly enough, mine does not seem to be an isolated case. According to Gee (2000), this is one of the current dilemmas of our world under the new capitalism (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.5.2 for a more in-depth discussion of these ideas).

Then, the similar privileges that Fusi, Nicola and I enjoy –as professionals who live in metropolitan cities and work for capitalist enterprises–, and the kind of practices we engage in, influenced by new capitalism, have a strong influence on how we relate to others. Fusi, Nicola and I are drawn closer to identifying with each other and with others who lead comparable lives across the globe, such as their colleagues in different countries, or other students of mine (in my case).

Concurrently, we are driven farther from empathizing with people with whom we share more typical "cultural" aspects but live different economic realities. Such influence appears rather self-enforcing, since as we relate more and more to the neocapitalist way of life, the more we lose empathy and understanding toward anyone whose reality differs from that and may even disregard their struggles or worldviews. Instead, we may favor the ideas presented by dominant neocapitalist groups and institutions, even when the reproduction of these ideas negatively impacts or neglects the realities of less privileged collectives. However, for Fusi, Nicola and myself this identification with one or another group seems to fluctuate, as global (middle-class privileged) and local (cultural) values fight to gain dominance.

This claim is supported by the data, as the students and I have occasionally behaved and spoken according to said tendency. More than once have I been unable to empathize with ideas presented in the school's textbook because I could not recognize that they did not portray

experiences of underprivileged peoples, and this is what happened in the CCE which I present an excerpt of below. On this day, Fusi and I were discussing vocabulary related to feelings that either very good or very bad customer service experiences may produce in people, and I told Fusi I did not think that "sorrowful", "sad" or "miserable" were relevant words to include on that list. Like this (see Annex 6):

Table 5: 20210610 – DISCRIMINATION (REFLECTION)

20210610 - DISCRIMINATION
I'm going to give you an example, right? **With the people from Mumbai, in India.** Well, **they definitely have beliefs, customs, and ways of seeing life in a very different way** [...] sometimes even **a little difficult to understand**, right? [...] based on my way of seeing life, right? [...] Although they were on the other side of the world, **I think that sharing a global situation**, in a certain way, **helped to raise everyone's awareness** a little. Regardless of whether you were from China, from Japan, from the United States. Finally, **I think it's the first time in my life that I see that we all share the same feeling**, which is fear of losing someone, right? [...] I think that helped, at least in this period of time, to connect and, above all, to get to know people better. I mean, **before the pandemic I saw the people from Mumbai as work machines**, right? **After the pandemic** [...] **I can no longer continue to demand the same from him** that I demanded of him before the pandemic [...] So, in some way that helped a lot to break down those cultural barriers. I think that at that moment, or during this period of time, [...] as human beings, we connected in an incredible way.

In this CCE, my *cultured self* is more prompt to relate to the point of view of a privileged 'customer'[19], able to do business without having to worry about anything else other than the transaction itself, than to the point of view of a lower-class, probably racialized person, which is the kind of person that, according to Fusi, may be subjected to discrimination and feel sorrow, misery or sadness as a result (see Annex 6). This is the neocapitalist and cosmopolitan set of values and lifestyles that, says Gee (2000), is influencing our identities. In other words, not only did I fail to think beyond the perspective of people whose socio-economic privilege keeps us 'safe' from experiencing discrimination, but I also expected Fusi to agree with my questioning of the relevance of the aforementioned words. This assumption is based on the fact that our similar

[19] As described a few paragraphs above, belonging to that privileged group I described earlier.

circumstances in life, firstly; and that our understanding of the ideas of the book must, 'obviously' and 'exclusively' be business-focused, considering that this was a course on business English.

The data also shows instances where participants declared that, even though the cultural differences between them and people from other cultural groups separated them, and neocapitalist views turned their relations to them into power-laden, profit-centered exchanges, situations that (for some time we thought) went beyond money-making, helped humanize these relations more. When students talked about their practices at work, the theme was brought up again. During our ethnographic interview, Nicola told me how going through a pandemic that affected almost the entirety of the world, helped him change his perspective about his coworkers on the other side of the globe (see Annex 12):

Table 6: 20220321 - INTERVIEW WITH NICOLA (TRANSCRIPTION)

20220321 - INTERVIEW WITH NICOLA
I'm going to give you an example, right? **With the people from Mumbai, in India.** Well, **they definitely have beliefs, customs, and ways of seeing life in a very different way** [...] sometimes even **a little difficult to understand**, right? [...] based on my way of seeing life, right? [...] Although they were on the other side of the world, **I think that sharing a global situation**, in a certain way, **helped to raise everyone's awareness** a little. Regardless of whether you were from China, from Japan, from the United States. Finally, **I think it's the first time in my life that I see that we all share the same feeling**, which is fear of losing someone, right? [...] I think that helped, at least in this period of time, to connect and, above all, to get to know people better. I mean, **before the pandemic I saw the people from Mumbai as work machines**, right? **After the pandemic** [...] **I can no longer continue to demand the same from him** that I demanded of him before the pandemic [...] So, in some way that helped a lot to break down those cultural barriers. I think that at that moment, or during this period of time, [...] as human beings, we connected in an incredible way.

The excerpt above shows how the pandemic made Nicola realize that privileged class global values were not appropriate to comprehend and behave during such a situation, and that the kind of empathy this circumstance required should not be based on neocapitalist ideologies. Once again, participants show the ability to adapt not only how we behave, but also the way we relate to others when the situation demands it or allows it.

Lastly, there is one more feature of my *cultured self* that I could identify, and it was my interest in learning about other cultures. One of my common practices in class, as the data shows, is taking advantage of the cross-cultural nature of this SoP to inquire about my students' personal cultural backgrounds, as well as what they know regarding other cultures. As the content of the courses rarely involves explicit discussion about cultural matters, I consider that addressing such topics is also a digression from the established standards of the language school. When I detect an opportunity to talk about culture in class –whether it is because students bring it up, or because I introduce the issue myself–, I tend to take it and discuss it with students. The following CCE (see Annex 7) can help me illustrate this point, since it contains an instance where the topic of culture was naturally raised during our conversation; more specifically, we talked about work culture in different countries:

Table 7: 20210630 - NORTH AMERICA VS LATIN AMERICA (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210630 - NORTH AMERICA VS LATIN AMERICA
Nicola: [...] What is important to say that the culture, **the Latin American culture is very different versus the American culture**. **Gigi:** Mmm. **Nicola:** Because, believe it or not the, the, **the North Americans, let's say USA, Canada, when is five o'clock pm, they disconnec**t. **Gigi:** Ooohhh. **Nicola:** Not matter if there is an emergency, no matter if there is an urgency, they say "OK, I'm done. See you tomorrow!". **And the Latin Americans**… *(laughs)*. **Gigi:** *(Laughs)*. **Nicola:** Is more the, I won't, I, **I don't have permission to leave my, the office**… **Gigi:** Nooo! **Nicola: If I don't finish this**, this, this, this. Wow. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Nicola:** And it's kind of complicated, because they are, they, **they use to work six, seven, eight pm.** **Gigi:** Oh my god! **Nicola:** Right, Fusi? **Fusi:** Yes! That's correct. **Gigi:** So, that means that Mr. Fusi works until later. **Fusi:** Yeah. Yes. **Gigi:** Ahhh. **Fusi:** Yeah, yeah, no. The operation is, is, different. **Nicola:** Yes. **Fusi:** *(Stutters)* And **Nicola explained the key point. It's the culture. Because not only for, for [company], it's for the rest of the companies**. Here, at Latin America if you have an issue is because the customer is waiting something, or the transportation company is waiting for, waiting something, so

you need to answer quickly.
Gigi: Mmm.
Fusi: Because if you don't, if you wait for one day, the sales are in risk,
Gigi: Mmm.

As the excerpt shows here, the students and I allow ourselves to engage in a conversation about their impressions regarding the management of work schedules in North America (understood as the United States and Canada) and Latin America, and how they see this as a facet of each regions' culture. Students here understand that culture is multifaceted, it is not to be limited to just ethnicity, race, language or nationality; it is all of that and more (Nieto, 2009); even those practices we carry out every day at work are part of our culture.

However, what calls my attention is the way our *cultured selves* are shaped in relation and contrast to those of others' who we interact with, in this case, thanks to the use of online communication technologies. Take Fusi and Nicola as an example; for them there does not seem to be a clear-cut exclusive identification here, with neither the North American region (which Mexico belongs to, geographically speaking), nor the Latin American region (seen as a linguistic-cultural region, which Mexico also belongs to). This reminds me of the contributions of scholars like Levy (2007), with his vision of *culture as individual* (see Literature Review chapter, section 2.4); or Castells' (2009) words on the constant power battle between globalization and identification within subjects' *cultured selves*. In my personal case, this has had another effect on my *cultured self*, because for a long time, I have been infatuated with learning about these topics, and, as I explained above, I have done it mainly by consuming media and entertainment products manufactured in other countries.

Of course, I am aware that these products do not necessarily represent faithfully what social life, values or customs are in all of their complexities. In fact, their production is often permeated by dominant ideological agendas that power holders try to impose on viewers. Taking this into

account, I am able to accept that my knowledge of other cultures' realities is probably not actually comprehensive as it has been nurtured mostly by the conceptions of dominant power elites. Therefore, I enjoy and consider it necessary to implement strategies that point to this characteristic of my *cultured self* and help me broaden my understanding of my students' and others' realities.

With data collected for the present project I can exemplify my claims, and I choose the CCE that happened on July 21st, 2021, to do so. On this occasion, after our short exchange where I mentioned Daddy Yankee, students and I were digressing by talking about holidays celebrated in Mexico and Colombia and how that affects people's perception on the passage of time (see Annex 3):

Table 8: 20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS
Nicola: [...] What is important to say that the culture, **the Latin American culture is very different versus the American culture**. **Gigi:** Mmm. **Nicola:** Because, believe it or not the, the, **the North Americans, let's say USA, Canada, when is five o'clock pm, they disconnec**t. **Gigi:** Ooohhh. **Nicola:** Not matter if there is an emergency, no matter if there is an urgency, they say "OK, I'm done. See you tomorrow!". **And the Latin Americans**… *(laughs)*. **Gigi:** *(Laughs)*. **Nicola:** Is more the, I won't, I, **I don't have permission to leave my, the office**… **Gigi:** Nooo! **Nicola: If I don't finish this**, this, this, this. Wow. **Gigi:** Mmm hmm. **Nicola:** And it's kind of complicated, because they are, they, **they use to work six, seven, eight pm.** **Gigi:** Oh my god! **Nicola:** Right, Fusi? **Fusi:** Yes! That's correct. **Gigi:** So, that means that Mr. Fusi works until later. **Fusi:** Yeah. Yes. **Gigi:** Ahhh. **Fusi:** Yeah, yeah, no. The operation is, is, different. **Nicola:** Yes. **Fusi:** *(Stutters)* And **Nicola explained the key point. It's the culture. Because not only for, for [company], it's for the rest of the companies**. Here, at Latin America if you have an issue is because the customer is waiting something, or the transportation company is waiting for, waiting something, so you need to answer quickly. **Gigi:** Mmm.

Fusi: Because if you don't, if you wait for one day, the sales are in risk,
Gigi: Mmm.

Before this CCE, I was already aware that Christmas was celebrated in Mexico, as well as the dates of their independence and 'Día de muertos'; I was aware that their country and mine have both shared and distinct national holidays. However, I had never considered that the different distribution of celebrations on the calendar could shape how communities understand how (quickly) time passes, in this case, at the end of the year. This conversation broadened/deepened my understanding on the influence of these factors on our perception of time and left me thinking what else it can affect. I now know that this is an idea that some Mexican people may have, and I might be able to corroborate it by asking other Mexican students later on; I could also understand more easily whenever other Mexicans I encounter make similar remarks about the passage of time, regardless of whether they explain what they mean. I might even bring up the topic myself when I find an opportunity.

Finally, something I am mindful of is that just as I am not ashamed or afraid to recognize my limited cultural understanding of others' realities, I also try to share the little I do know as much as I can. In other words, I avoid looking either uninformed or overconfident regarding cultural matters, and I think this is a very significant feature of my hybrid/remixed *cultured self*, as I believe Castells (2009) would call it.

4.2. Conclusion

So far, with the analysis and reflection around these CCEs I can fathom that, when interacting with my EFL students within an online cross-cultural SoP, my *cultured self* is constantly trying to find the right balance between obedience and rebellion against neocapitalist values, on the one hand, and local/national and global/cosmopolitan identification. In order to do

this, I employ a variety of practices which my teaching experience has allowed me to test and ultimately curate a repertoire of. Depending on the factor whose influence I prioritize at different moments of interaction, I choose amongst these practices, while also adapting my *cultured self* to the demands of the specific situation; and I argue that this is also what happens with Fusi and Nicola, the EFL students who took part in this study, too.

The conscious decisions I make regarding my behavior are expected to cater to those strings pulling my *cultured self* into re-signification, so that I can show a desirable image to my audience, whom I judge tend to have cosmopolitan and transnational affiliations, linked to their socio-economic status. Nonetheless, I may be surprised by their own critical views, not because I am unaware of the social issues they sometimes tackle, but because my assessment of their *cultured selves* has led me to deem addressing such topics in an open manner as counterproductive for my relationship with them. The neocapitalist values that have been instilled in our culture throughout the years –with the aid of tools such as neomanagerial discourse– shape the vision institutions and individuals have of education and knowledge –on culture and languages, for instance–, which is now seen as a marketable product to be sold and bought. Even though my and my students' *cultured selves* are tainted with this conception, there are moments when both personal and interpersonal factors allow us and/or lead us to challenge these values and focus on our own or on our interlocutors' goals and interests.

Furthermore, another issue closely related to capitalism is the phenomenon of globalization, one of the effects of which has been the development and expansion of cross-cultural relationships. In our exchange in a cross-cultural setting, teachers and learners are able to identify and take advantage of shared cultural referents and common knowledge in order to facilitate understanding and rapport building. However, the exposure to media and other products

from dominant cultural groups (Global North nations), from an early socialization stage, seems to shape even the way we make sense of all kinds of cultural expressions. As a result of this, our *cultured selves* are faced with the need to choose between identification with our home (local/national) cultural groups' traditions, on the one side; and foreign (global/cosmopolitan) ideals, on the other side. Through the use of the practices compiled in my curated repertoire, I am able to re-signifie my *cultured self* and find the right situational balance between the aforementioned forces and achieve my communicational and teaching objectives.

In the following paragraphs, the focus is going to be shifted towards the second category, titled trying to fit my *cultured self* and accommodating to ideal otherness, which goes over the deep motivations that I reconstruct by going inside my own mind in order to explain and make sense of my inner *cultured self*. What I think and what I reflect in my behavior may at times disagree, because of discrepancies between my convictions and what I perceive would be the ideas that either my direct interlocutors or the very context we interact in expect that I hold.

4.3. Trying to fit my *cultured self* and accommodating to ideal otherness: professional values and imaginaries

Going through the descriptive and reflective stages of the present autoethnographic study, as I analyzed CCE by CCE, I started trying to figure out what thoughts and feelings my actions provoked in me, as well as what feelings motivated these very actions. I was able to dive deeper into my mind and 'discover' that there are many ideas about my teaching practice, the English language, the relationship with my students, the school I work for, and so much more, which I tend to keep to myself. Be it because I consider sharing them irrelevant, inappropriate, uninteresting, controversial; or because I do not see myself to be capable of supporting them with strong enough arguments in case they escalate into a more serious debate; I show a tendency to

please others' (presumed) desires and prioritize concord over polemics. Realizing that I tend to hide so much of what I opine just for the sake of comfort and quiet was very important for me to understand my *cultured self*, mainly because I think that awareness is a crucial prerequisite to deconstruction and, hopefully, subsequent transformation. I devote this section to the analysis and interpretation of CCEs from the collected data where I could reconstruct my train of thought during and about my actions and discourse and why I may have behaved the way I did back then.

In the previous category that I analyzed, one of the points I went over was my desire to build rapport with my students, having fun and presenting myself as a friendly person. Well, my reflections regarding the present category exhibit that this goal is so important to me, that occasionally, my *cultured self* is willing to sacrifice/neglect some of my most important values to preserve students' 'good' image of me; and I write this in quotation marks because it is largely based on my own assumptions of what a 'good' image might be in their eyes. I will take one of the CCEs that I collected as data for this project to exemplify and elaborate these claims. In 2021, besides the COVID-19 pandemic, Colombia went through a period of political unrest, with massive protests and demonstrations happening all over the country. Fusi happened to be on vacation in Cali at that moment, which was one of the epicenters of the social movement; regarding this situation, we had a brief conversation at the beginning of one our lessons (see Annex 8):

Table 9: 20210504 - CALI PROTEST (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210504 - CALI PROTEST
Gigi: We have some protests and demonstrations going on, ah, all over the country. So, that's why (laughs). **Fusi:** Yeah. **Nicola:** So, it's not a good time, then. **Gigi:** But, but, **but you know, you are used to that. Because I heard in Mexico people protest all the time.** **Fusi: The point is that in Mexico we have special places for that** *(laughs)***. Not for all the… the streets.** **Gigi:** Really?

Fusi: Yeah, yeah. Normally the, the, the mani... the...
Gigi: Demonstrations.
Fusi: Demonstrations, occurs into the Mexico City we have an special street called 'Reforma'.
Gigi: Ahhh. Don't say that word right now. I hate that word.
Fusi: Yeah, yeah. I know *(laughs)*.
Gigi: Reforma, reform, I hate it *(laughs)*.
Fusi: Well, it's a name of the street. But it's where the people...eh, perform the demonstrations. But, mmm, it's not in every place. That's the point.
Gigi: OK, **that's a little strange, for me**.
Fusi: Yeah *(laughs)*.
Gigi: Actually, there's a, there's some pa..., **some politician proposed**.
Fusi: Mmm hmm.
Gigi: To have like a place, called the, the... *(trying to say the word right)* **protes... 'protestódromo'**[20] or something like that.
Fusi: *(Laughs)* Protestódromo *(laughs)*.
Gigi: I'm like "OK?" (laughs). **I'm going to protest in my house better, no?**
Fusi: *(Nods)* That's correct.
Gigi: Less inconvenient, right? OK.
Fusi: Exactly *(laughs)*.
Gigi: *(I notice the topic has died)* OK, my friends. Did you have time to do homework this weekend?

To anyone who does not know me this interaction should not appear odd in any particular way, it is only small talk about current events, is it not? Pretty harmless, I would say. Nonetheless, and I reflected about it in this CCE's autoethnographic matrix (see Annex 8), this is not how I usually behave when political issues as the one being discussed here are brought up in a conversation. In that regard, I say:

Table 10: 20210504 - CALI PROTEST (REFLECTION)

20210504 - CALI PROTEST
In the beginning I acted a little apologetic, almost ashamed of the way the problems of my country were affecting Fusi's leisure trip, which is both surprising and expected. **I tend to be rather judgmental when I hear fellow Colombians referring to protests, demonstrations and other types of democratic instruments citizens employ to express our disappointment with social injustices, as if they were nothing but a burden or an annoyance to the normal flow of life**. When I converse with a person who is expressing these kinds of feelings, **I tend to be openly critical**. I am not good at oral debate, and so I often make just a couple of comments only to state my position and not much else. The point is that the feelings I express, hardly ever are of liking nor support for them. I tend to be biased towards the side which is closer to my political affiliations. **In this case, since my interlocutor is a foreigner, I feel pity and shame for how my country's problems affect him and what kind of image he might form of Colombia. Even though my opinions about the issues don't change, my shown attitude does adapt to the interlocutor's characteristics.**

[20] Molano, D. (2019). EL PROTESTODROMO

In the beginning I acted a little apologetic, almost ashamed of the way the problems of my country were affecting Fusi's leisure trip, which is both surprising and expected. I tend to be rather judgmental when I hear fellow Colombians referring to protests, demonstrations and other types of democratic instruments citizens employ to express our disappointment with social injustices, as if they were nothing but a burden or an annoyance to the normal flow of life. When I converse with a person who is expressing these kinds of feelings, I tend to be openly critical. I am not good at oral debate, and so I often make just a couple of comments only to state my position and not much else. The point is that the feelings I express, hardly ever are of liking nor support for them. I tend to be biased towards the side which is closer to my political affiliations. In this case, since my interlocutor is a foreigner, I feel pity and shame for how my country's problems affect him and what kind of image he might form of Colombia. Even though my opinions about the issues do not change, my shown attitude does adapt to the interlocutor's characteristics.

There are several reasons why my conduct here is not as, I claim, usual or expected; an idea arguably connected to the view held by Reeves (2018) and other critical scholars that "neoliberal educational settings, exerting powerful external forces on curriculum and assessment, may bring the dualities of external pressures and teachers' values and beliefs into conflict" (p.5). My odd demeanor is shaped by the attributes that I ascribe to the language school and the students; that is to say, those whom I interact with, the other (Staszak, 2008); or rather, the characters that I have constructed as different from me. Firstly, and this connects to some of the characteristics of this online SoP that I described in the previous category, there are some rules instructors working for this school must follow, including two key ones here: avoiding controversial topics and maximizing student speaking time. The former directive is not as 'official' as the other one, but it

is aimed at preserving cordial relationships among students and teachers at the expense of what academy and I deem meaningful discussions on culture and other social aspects, which are also important for the language learning process (Genc & Bada, 2005).

The latter rule is definitely officially imparted and assessed, and, I believe, is comprehensible to some extent; it advocates for a student-centered educational process, which is, in principle, what I also look to achieve. In spite of that, what look like common pedagogical goals, actually come from very different views on education. I agree that learners need to be able to express themselves as much as possible, not only to practice the language, but also to construct knowledge by asking and answering questions, explaining, correcting each other and themselves, etc[21]. This is actually one of the most criticized features of traditional educational environments where teachers are seen as the ultimate knowledge-holders, whereas students were empty and passive recipients of that knowledge. Yan (2012) talks about teachers' performance being traditionally assessed based "on the amount of knowledge he or she crammed into the students' head: the more, the better. The teacher is [an] unquestionable knowledge-giver" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), who dominates the class from the beginning to the end" (as cited in Yan, 2021; p.558-559).

However, it is also important to recognize that, in this setting, the aforementioned rule ends up being a teacher-silencer. As much as it tries to 'empower' students, it 'disempowers' EFL teachers by making us feel as if we have little to add to the knowledge construction process apart from formal aspects of the target language. Gee (2000) sees this as another characteristic of the new capitalism, designed to prevent workers from "using [our] [...] knowledge and status to

[21] Authors like Yan (2012) think that teachers' role in an autonomous learning model ought to be that of managers, organizers, and facilitators.

critique the company, or, indeed, the new capitalism itself" (p.518). Moreover, if we take into account that under the new capitalism education is a vendible product/service (Fairclough, 2002), we should be able to notice there is a view of the students as customers and the teachers as service providers; "[in] the new neoliberal business-model [education] depends on students as clients (for many institutions, a main source of income)", says de Souza (2019; p.17). This shapes our relationships and interactions, making them power-loaded and, in theory, leaning towards the customer.

Within the SoPs related to this language school, my *cultured self* appears to have a constant need to overprotect students' 'good' opinion of me. I wish to always be seen as a pleasant, agreeable teacher and, for some reason, I seem to associate stating my political views –which is what I would have done in a situation like the one presented in the CCE above, had it taken place elsewhere– while chatting with people who I deem hierarchically higher to me with a 'bad' or undesirable image. Considering students are to be seen as paying customers, therefore, higher in hierarchy in relation to me, in one way or another, I predict that showing my true political *cultured self* will make them form a 'bad' image of me. In other words, not playing along to the service provider-customer dynamic could be seen as me refusing to conform to the hegemonic group; basically, othering myself (Staszak, 2008). I discuss this idea more in depth further down the present chapter.

In addition, as a teacher, I want to put students' needs and thoughts before my own, and I do not want to make them feel judged if their opinions and mine do not match. It seems that I mistake stating my personal convictions with imposing them onto my interlocutors or being 'preachy', and that goes against students' preferences, in my mind. This may be related to those teacher identity authority sources that Reeves (2018, p.7) explains like so:

> Authority sources of teacher identity [...] are the external sources that a teacher finds compelling and relies on for validation of who a good teacher is (Clarke, 2009). Such sources might include particular learning theories, religious or ethical values, or political ideologies [...] Teachers may 'value discourses of teaching as service and sacrifice, reflected in exhortations to always consider students and their needs first' (Clarke, 2009, p.191). Differences between the authority sources that a teacher values and the authority sources that others in their context value may spark teacher identity re-signification or even an identity crisis (Ball, 2003).

On top of that, maybe as a result of lack of opportunities that encouraged the practice, I consider myself incompetent at debate. This feature of my *cultured self* –whose depth and origin I discuss more thoroughly in the next category– is relevant to the present analysis inasmuch as it can, I think, affect both my 'good' image as a person and as a teacher, especially when I suspect my interlocutors will not agree with what I opine. I fear that not being able to defend my points of view could make me look like an ignorant person, or what is even worse to me, an incompetent teacher.

In that regard, Aboud (2020) tells us that teachers' fear of being seen as incompetent in front of students is a cause of anxiety and an influential identity-shaping factor. In the past I have had experiences where serious debates have arisen during my EFL classes within this language school and I feel I was incapable of getting my point across as I would have liked; I also think I failed as a moderator at instances where the discussion was among students. The good news is that my experiences as a master student and as a university professor have helped me improve substantially on this skill; the bad news is that I still seem to assess this kind of debates mostly as

inappropriate[22] and counter-productive for myself within this *space of practice* –unless, of course, my interlocutors clearly show disposition to discuss or, preferably, affiliations with my own views–. In summary, the sad reality is that my *cultured self* tends to neglect or avoid engaging in meaningful discussion during my online EFL lessons in order to (1) comply with school principles; (2) put students' needs first; and (3), protect my image as an agreeable and competent professional, which are disempowering and uncritical practices.

A further angle of my *cultured self* being internally challenged is tied to my thoughts and attitudes towards the English language and the cultural groups it originates from. To develop this problematization, I would like the reader to see the following CCE from July 2021, where Fusi and I were discussing euphemistic ways to say that someone has been fired from their job. The book suggested that in the USA, they say 'layoffs' and in the UK, they call it 'redundancies'. This is what we said back then (see Annex 9):

Table 11: 20210714 – REDUNDANCIES (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210714 - REDUNDANCIES
Gigi: Do you understand 'layoffs'? **Fusi:** No. **Gigi:** Ehh… Well, layoff… **To lay somebody off is to fire them.** **Fusi:** OK… **Gigi:** It's to… A layoff is a person getting fired. **Fusi:** OK… **Gigi:** It's kinda like the... the noun. **Fusi:** Mmm hmm. **Gigi: And, in the United States it's called a layoff, and in England, redundancies**. **Fusi:** Ahhh… OK, OK. **Gigi: I don't like this word** *(laughs)*. **Fusi:** *(Laughs)* No. **Gigi:** I think it's insulting; I don't know. Like, if you say "Oh, there were redundancies"; **the people are redundant, so people are unnecessary?... Not important?** I don't like that word! **Fusi:** It's like when you say *redoondant*, rehh… **Gigi:** Redundant, yes. **Fusi:** Redundant. **Gigi:** Exactly. Like, when you say "well, that is redundant", it's like "you already said that. You didn't need to say that twice"...

[22] Or even a waste of time, depending on how willing to debate I assume my interlocutors may be.

Fusi: Mmm hmm.
Gigi: That, I understand, **if somebody is redundant, somebody is not necessary**. No?
Fusi: Right.
Gigi: And I don't like that.
Fusi: *(Laughs)*.
Gigi: *(Laughs)* I think that's insulting.
Fusi: Yeah.
Gigi: *(Laughs)* I mean, if they were firing me and they said "at the moment, the budget is really ehh… So, we have to… We don't want to, but we have to", OK. But "you are redundant right now". Mmm…
Fusi: Your position is redundant.
Gigi: Yeah, your position is redundant. So…
Fusi: OK.
Gigi: I think that's insulting, but I mean… It's not my culture. It's not my language either (laughs)
Fusi: I don't like, as well.

My negative attitude towards the word 'redundancy' acts as a window through which to see further into the kind of feelings my *cultured self* has regarding the others, in this case, the UK, the English language and euphemistic jargon employed by neocapitalist enterprises. A part of my reflection goes like this:

Table 12: 20210714 – REDUNDANCIES (REFLECTION)

20210714 - REDUNDANCIES
[...] **My criticism goes to those imagined powerful businesspeople who have created this euphemistic lexicon around business practices and ideals, and –at least to some extent– the 'inventors' of the English language** (as I often refer to them), the British.

In this CCE I express my contempt for what historically have been dominant groups, meaning the inner-circle English speaking countries (Kachru, 1985), on the one hand, and the neocapitalist corporations, on the other. Both these groups have had a profound weight in the construction of my *cultured self*, either as a bilingual person, as a professional, as a global citizen (see my analysis on local vs. global affiliations and Castells' ideas section 4.1). First and foremost, and like I say in the paragraphs above, a great deal of my second language acquisition process occurred thanks to my consumption of and special liking for Hollywood films and other media made in the United States and England. Long story short, not only did I learn the standard variations of English, but also, I learned to understand that this language is almost inevitably

bound to these cultural groups. It is definitely not a coincidence that these countries –along with other Global North countries (Kachru, 1985)– also hold economic and ideological power over the EFL industry ¬–such is the case with the British Council (De Mejía, 2011)–, education, and most businesses around the world.

The reason I make these clarifications is that engaging in this reflective research project made me notice that my, prior to this, apparently passively accepting *cultured self*, had been developing some critical ideas regarding said power-laden, unequal relationships between dominant and dominated groups. Firstly, amongst inner, expanding, and outer circle English speaking countries; secondly, between neocapitalist elites –usually based on or aligned with the Global North and its values– and the subordinate groups –which often have underprivileged origins or are from the Global South–. As far as my attitude toward the English language is concerned, I did the following retrospection (see Annex 2):

Table 13: 20210714 – REDUNDANCIES (REFLECTION)

20210714 - REDUNDANCIES
[...] Once I explained [the meaning of 'to flat-line'] to the students, **I said "in English, anything can be a verb"**, and that was the end of it. After class, though, I thought about how **as a non-native speaker, I am so preoccupied with trying to learn as much vocabulary as I can, and with using it 'correctly'**. But do I ever stop to think about who came up with these words and expressions? It may have been regular people, just like me. And, **how come they can create new elements of the language and I feel like I cannot? Why do I feel like whatever 'alternative' or 'out-of-the-norm' use of the language I come up with is a mistake and not an innovation?** I think this is exactly the feeling I was expressing when I said "it's not my culture, it's not my language either" in this CCE [...] **I see myself as a foreigner to the English language, and that my only duty as a teacher is to spread what others' created, but I have no right to comment on it, or power to influence it whatsoever**. I want to come as close as I can to it, not necessarily to resemble a native speaker, but to understand them, so that I can then transmit that to other non-native speakers like myself. I accept that, I guess, but **my reaction in this CCE may be a hint of my resentment or my desire to be more than what I feel I am allowed to be or do more than what I feel I'm allowed to do**.

Even though in this reflection, as well as throughout this section of the data analysis, I emphasize on the fact that many of my thoughts and decisions regarding my behavior are based on my own assumptions about others' needs and desires, I do not think that these suppositions are exclusively of my making. Certainly, there are struggles happening among the different

groups that come from an elongated history of oppression and resistance to that oppression. Educating myself about these disputes and engaging in autoethnographic reflection prompted me to realize that I, my students, the school, etc., are all part of larger social structures whose influence settles in our subconscious and shapes our views about the issues mentioned a few lines above. In the words of Siisiäinen (2003, p.6):

[In every society] there are conflicts between those associations that are functional in creating and supporting social consensus, and those associations and movements that are critical of the dominant political values (and of the values represented by [some communities]) (conflicts between different parts of civil society).

Keeping in mind that group membership is one of the main ways culture is understood, as stated by Levy (2007), it is crucial to point out that the collectives we are affiliated to –either because of our own will or social conventions– are important to our *cultured self* construction and re-signification process. In this case, membership generates tensions between people with or without power within the group of English speakers. The collectives that I feel I am tied to, do not necessarily represent what I consider is my role in the English-speaking community; or it may be that I do not agree with how we –the non-native English speakers (NNESs), the expanding circle, the Global South– continue to be treated as inferior and, therefore, allowed almost no decision-making power in the larger scale of things. Analyzing this identity discontentment, I can identify traces of discussions that have taken place in the humanities and social sciences fields of knowledge, including of course, the field of ELT (Simoneli & Finardi, 2020). I am referring to the ideas around otherness/othering/other (Staszak, 2009).

The hierarchy that the two main groups I refer to have, is a discursive construction developed by the West, the self –mainly Europe, before the 20th century; known as the Global

North in our days– in order to justify their domination and discrimination of what they defined as the other –Africa, América, Asia; the Global South, nowadays–. In the words of Staszak (2008), this is achieved via othering, the process through which an in-group gains and keeps a position of power above an out-group, by stigmatizing the stereotypical characteristics of the latter.

In ELT, one of the strongest manifestations of this subjugation is the dichotomy between native English speakers (NESs) and native English speaking teachers (NESTs), on one side –from predominantly white communities in the Global North–, and non-native English speakers and non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), on the other side; not only in terms of how the language is to be used, but also how it is to be taught. Through my experience in the ELT field, I have come to notice that there is a widely spread misconception that NESs are inherently good, or even better teachers than NNESs, just because of where they come from. Actually, this analysis, as well as many other scholars', indicates that NNESTs tend to perceive ourselves as unfit and anxious about our non-nativeness, a concern that is nonexistent in NESTs; rather, they are seen as the 'owners' of the language (Silva, 2009; as cited in Simoneli & Finardi, 2020).

I had not realized that my *cultured self* had been harboring this belief prior to engaging in this autoethnographic reflexive exercise, but now, I am aware that I internalized it throughout my English language acquisition process. It was then reinforced when, during my experience teaching EFL alongside NESTs, I could notice the differential treatment towards them, by both management and students. Like myself, many fellow NNESTs, "feel the need to prove [ourselves] incessantly as [we] see NESTs as being superior to [us]" (Silva, 2009; as cited in Simoneli & Finardi, 2020; p.6). However, authors such as Silva (2009) and Bhowick (2014), who know that the aforementioned ELT stakeholders' attitudes are one of the chief causes of anxiety and low confidence in NNESTs, challenge this discursive hierarchy by clarifying that "it

is not necessary to speak the target language as a native speaker in order to be a proper teacher, though pedagogical preparation and practice are required" (Simoneli & Finardi, 2020; p.6).

Judging by the way I expressed myself in this CCE, I can deduce that I recognized this power imbalance but took a pessimistic attitude towards it, fully aware of my and Fusi's powerfulness in the matter. Mind you, I do not miss the chance to –with my tone of voice and gestures– hint at how unfair or 'ridiculous' I think this reality is. Additionally, I also show implicit contempt for the economic system within which Fusi and I are situated, because it allows this kind of power imbalances to thrive, often camouflaging them with neomanagerial rhetoric. Not only do certain groups hold power due to their country of origin, but also, they are able to maintain it through economic and ideological domination.

When Siisiäinen (2003) tells us that "problems of oligarchy [...] and bureaucratization [...] are still among the most serious obstacles to the development of democratic voluntary organizations and civil society" (p.7), he refers to people with power within the neocapitalist system. The context I find myself in while teaching my online EFL classes, though one I have been working within for many years, does not seem as ideal as in times past, before I began embracing and fleshing out a more critical *cultured self* that led me to look at it with new eyes; my *cultured self* is being re-signified.

Apropos of this, Levy (2007) alludes to the contested nature of culture, which is another one of its most prominent facets, and it is linked to what is colloquially known as 'culture shock'. Having contact with other cultural groups or being situated in a culturally different context is bound to trigger an internal disturbance of our *cultured self,* and the way we understand either –others', or our own– set of cultural values will need to be re-signified. My culture shock here is related to the reflections I have recently been able to make thanks to my

master studies, where students are encouraged to take a critical stance toward ELT. These ideas are contested with the values I learned unconsciously while having my first working experience, which happened within –what I believe is– a neocapitalist environment.

This economic approach has been designed to aid neoliberal corporations and conglomerates to maximize their profit margins by finding ways to adapt to –or rather appropriate, take advantage of– the demands of the markets in terms of social values, ideologies, and so on. In current markets, enterprises are expected to comply with political standards that have been developed by the dominant elites themselves in order to avoid resistance from consumers and the workforce thanks to them showing a 'socially aware' and fair corporate image –e.g., diversity, inclusion, equality, environmental consciousness–. It is a whole cultural movement (Holliday, 2007; Waters, 2007) and it is here that politically correct, euphemistic, corporate jargon comes into play.

Having had built the early foundations of my professional *cultured self* within a school where this instrumental approach to education and culture is so prominent, I got rather accustomed to seeing these discursive strategies as something harmless, natural, or even necessary. Nevertheless, autoethnographic reflection, research and further professional experience, broaden my comprehension of the implications of discourse and how it is utilized by powerholders to legitimate the uneven distribution of power and resources (van Dijk, 1993). My critique of the euphemistic word 'redundancy' correlates to ideas I have about companies treating and using workers as tools to make money while trying to hide this fact by 'updating' their jargon to expressions that sound less aggressive when there is little to no significant improvement to our working conditions, or society as a whole, that will accompany these superficial discursive modifications. The essence of the new capitalism (Gee, 2000), whose main

ideological function is "establishing the market as the model for all interaction in the public sphere" (Cameron, 2000; as cited in Gray, 2010; p.717), demands a reconfiguration of the world of work; and a change of such magnitude requires nothing short of a reconfiguration of the very self, in the words of Gray (2010).

4.4. Conclusion

While and after interacting with my students in this online EFL SoP, my previously acquired ideas about what my conduct should be like, and about the kind of reactions and thoughts it may generate in my interlocutors are disrupted and re-signified. The influence of my parallel processes of research and other pedagogical experiences have contributed to the construction of a more inquisitive and critical *cultured self* in regard to power distribution among groups that have historically had relations of domination and subordination. My second-language learning process was greatly shaped by the influence of these dominant groups, and the same goes for my professional development in its early stages, which is why –without minimizing the weight of the changes I mentioned above– it still has a significant effect on my *cultured self*, both as a teacher and as a global citizen. This results in arguably contradicting demeanor in circumstances where I fear that my personal, critical views could be not well received and work against me, instead of in my favor.

The conflict arises when, despite being conscious of all these social issues around ELT practices, I cannot help but to refrain myself from openly expressing and discussing my true feelings regarding them in this SoP or with these interlocutors. I tend to mistakenly associate stating my ideological and political views with imposing and pushing my own convictions onto my students. Therefore, I am preoccupied with the assumption that my students may think ill of me, that they will see me as 'preachy', 'resentful' or incapable of supporting my arguments

correctly, which would not make me the type of teacher I want to be. I also worry that school management will be displeased with my behavior in class and punish me in some way for it. In summary, there are inner tensions and deliberations going on in my mind during my interactions with EFL students in this –I argue– neocapitalist SoP; and also later on, while I engage in autoethnographic reflection, both resulting in constant re-signification of the different facets of my *cultured self*. I can fathom that, even though at times I want to share, or I accidentally let what my *cultured self* really thinks slip out my mouth, the idea that there is much more to lose than to gain from doing so in this context, does not leave my mind and shapes my behavior.

Staying in the same path that I have been walking down for the length of this analysis chapter, the next and last category tends to the deepest layer of my *cultured self*, the one that originates from my upbringing, as well as my early educational and professional experiences, which left entrenched marks on me as a person. During the process of autoethnographic reflection, I was able to make connections between my conduct in online EFL classes with these important aspects of my *cultured self* and finally understand its profound complexities and contradictions in order to, at some point down the line, reconcile them with my current self. Below, I report my findings in this regard.

4.5. Reconciling my current *cultured self* with my personal and professional narratives: coming to terms with my biases

One of the steps of autoethnography is to understand the researcher's locus of enunciation in order to identify and appropriately deal with our biases throughout the process (Chang, 2016); hence, my far back, deep down, and wide-ranging exploration across every linkage or discrepancies I could make among (1) my behavior in this online EFL SoP; (2) my life stories and experiences; and (3) what I consider to be my current, true ideological, political, cultural

convictions. This would help me get to know myself better, a necessary prerequisite to self-deconstruction and, ultimately, informed transformation. What I was able to fathom is that there are occasions where my reflection about a –seemingly easy to figure out type of– demeanor, triggers a serious process of self-discovery and problematization by bringing back memories of key episodes or characters of my life narratives that, in spite of hardly ever producing positive feelings in me, appear to have marked me more than I had realized. In other words, I argue that it is a more intimate but still relevant category to the thorough depiction of my *cultured self* and its re-signification dynamics.

It has already been established that my *cultured self* is not only constantly adapting to the situation, but also that it can be very self-contradictory in terms of discourse and conduct, and that some of the reasons tie back to my assumptions about what my students and my supervisors expect me to say or not to say; to do or not to do. I also stated that many of these assumptions are the outcome of long historical power struggles between, on the one side, the elites, and on the other side, groups they exclude and oppress. In the present section of the analysis, I want to focus on other cultural factors that constitute a chunk of my worldview and also influence my decisions and actions, as I try to reconstruct what particular ideas guided my behavior in the CCEs I discuss. To start, I want to share with the reader a lengthy but very interesting episode where Fusi, Nicola and I conversed about the kind of tips they would give a new employee of their company so that they can adapt well and easily to this corporate environment. Here is what we said (see Annex 10):

Table 14: 20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE
Gigi: So, **what important things do you think I should do, or I ought to do, I must, I must not, I don't have to, or something like that. What do you say**? **Fusi:** You ought to…

Nicola: Mmmm…
[...]
Fusi: Try first, Nicola.
Nicola: First of… Yes, first of all, you have to… to… Gigi, **first of all, you have to ensure that you won't unrespect anybody**, like…
Gigi: Uh huh.
Nicola: You have to avoid unnecessary comments, like *rahcims*. Is correct?
Gigi: Racism. Or racist comments.
Nicola: Ehhh, **you have to avoid... Race... Eh, racist comments. Also, avoid the jokes with the male and female**. **We don't want to have issues**…
Gigi: Mmm hmm. **Sexist jokes**.
Nicola: Sexist! Yes. Ehh…
[...]
Gigi: Ohh, OK, OK. Yes.
Nicola: Aside that, I guess the, the last, the last recommendation is… ehh… be Gigi. That's it.
Gigi: *(Laughs)* Be yourself. *(Silence)* Right?
Fusi: *(Laughs)* Yeah!
Nicola: Yes, be yourself.
[...]
Gigi: That was very good, Mr. Fusi. I must say, my friends…
Fusi: OK…
Gigi: That every time that I do something similar to this, **I never hear anything like "Oh, you should respect everybody". Mmm, mmm, mmm. Never** *(laughs)***. People always say like "Oh, you must be on time. You must wear the uniform. You must not drink in the office"**, or something like that. But **about respect, it's the first time that somebody mentions that. So, it's very good. I like this company culture that you said that you have in [company].**
Fusi: Yes! It's very nice.
Gigi: Sounds very good.
Nicola: It's part… **It's part of the… mm… ff... main**… Mmm, how can I say?
Fusi: Values?
Nicola: Values for [company]. Manage…
Gigi: Mmm hmm. **Values or principles**.
Nicola: "Manage with respect".
Gigi: Mmm "Manage with respect". Is that what you said?
Nicola: Yeah!
Fusi: It's Ma… **"Managing with respect"**.
Nicola: "Managing with respect".
Gigi: "Managing with respect". Ohhh! OK. **That sounds very good**.

Just a few paragraphs above I talked about how I am aware and also disapprove of these strategies that the new capitalism utilizes to placate possible social power struggles and stop them from 'getting in the way' or hindering the hegemonic flow of things; meaning, to preserve the unequal social order and prioritize profit-turning over everything else. In this particular case, the tool on duty is 'political correctness' (PC), an ideology that, in theory, "seeks to redistribute power from the powerful to the powerless" (Browne op. cit.: 9; as cited in Waters, 2007; p.355).

Similarly to what happens with the language school I work for, I argue that the company Fusi and Nicola are employed by, matches the neocapitalist use of this strategy: adopting the features of socially vindicating discourses to make it seem like they compromise and 'improve' their policies. This way, corporations get to maintain their business model, which is one of the main reasons social systems stay unequal, and shield themselves from criticism and other kinds of negative repercussions. Inequality both results and benefits from neoliberal new capitalism (Ferge, 2002). Unfortunately, even though I know and agree with this critical view on the matter, I cannot help but feel sort of envious of Nicola and Fusi's –depiction of their– work environment. I elaborate on this topic in the reflection below (see Annex 10):

Table 15: 20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE (REFLECTION)

20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE
[...] **My behavior may have been motivated by envy and an understanding of the standards of political correctness as the bare minimum I aspire to be surrounded by at work and at home**, [...] **The lack of social awareness in my family, which also reflects the sentiment of a large part of Colombia's society, is one of the aspects I feel we need to work a lot on**. And we, teachers of every kind, have a huge responsibility to contribute to this process. Now that I think about it, to be honest, **one aspect I used to look up to about the USA's values was this 'social awareness' that I used to think they had**, back when I was a teenager [...] Products made in the 90s, 00s and 2010s were shaped by, what I know now is actually, political correctness. **It was through entertainment media from the USA that I first learned about the existence of power struggles in the present day, and these ideologies had such an impact on me that, up to this day, I sometimes judge my and others' reality based on these standards**.

Reflections of the kind shown above are proof not only of the complexity and fluidity of an individual's *cultured self*, but also of how different ideas can be from their real-life applications. My critical stance tells me that my students' company is just doing the bare minimum, but I still wish I could, at least, have that in the circles I am part of. When Holliday (2007) and Waters (2007) have discussed the pros and cons of PC, especially in regards to ELT, the latter author criticizes the forced imposition of this approach, mainly on the basis that "despite a healthy concern with opposing the abuse of power, the PC-based ELT stance is itself prone to the very same problem" (Waters, 2007; p.353), as it ends up creating "its own, alternative hegemony, and,

as a consequence, promotes a number of unbalanced and distorted views" (p.359). This point, which even the former scholar agrees with, adds to what I explained above, because it unveils this ideology as yet another instance of the chauvinistic, professionally-dominant anglophone West placing itself at the top of the moral and intellectual hierarchy, called on to educate and, ultimately, liberate everyone else from our chains of cultural deficiency (Holliday, 2007).

According to comments by Fusi and Nicola themselves, in their company (but I suspect for many more companies like it) this PC corporate culture is achieved through training and constant reminders by Human Resources and upper management, who take on the task of sensitizing employees to the corporate principles. Nevertheless, and this was said by my students, too, it is not an easy task, for not all employees are as receptive to the ideas as they are expected to be. We had a discussion about this matter that I will now share with the reader (see Annex 10):

Table 16: 20210713 - COMPANY VALUES (TRANSCRIPTION)

20210713 - COMPANY VALUES
idea is not suppress the people. **Gigi:** Sure, yeah. **Fusi:** So, the idea is only express this, **"these are the important points that we have here. Eh, managing with respect is basically here. The idea is that you be yourself"**. **[...]** **Fusi:** But **you should adapt to with this kind of, with this culture** [...] To be honest with you I remember one case, the one people that never adapt with the [company] culture [...] So, And we talk with the people, we express the situation. They certificate beca.., well.. I remember that **there was a people that express the points that you need to express, but was not like ah... natural**. Was something like... **Gigi:** Mmmm hmmm. OK, it was like... **They were pretending**. **Fusi:** Exactly, pretending. So, at the end it was complicated for these people, because the rest of the company are working with the same culture. [...] at the end he decide to live and get another opportunity out of [company]. But this is the situation, for example in my case, I have been working at [company] by eight years and I have received a lot of proposal to work out of [company] [...] At the end I declined the offer. Because **we don't only want money**. We check for other benefits. But, **when you are listening at the out of the market it's because you're not comfortable**, right? So, that's the situation [...] from my point of view, the main reason is that he never adapt to the [company] culture. **Gigi:** OK, ok, yes, yes. Ok, I understand. I suppose, because, I mean, not everybody... **It's impossible that everybody agrees 100% with the values of the company**. **Fusi:** Right. **Gigi:** But, I suppose that, well, **people try to adapt but sometimes pretending it's not enough**. **Fusi:** Exactly. **Gigi:** And **they are not comfortable enough**, and, well. It's a situation, no? **Fusi:** I think that **it is a balance**, right? **Gigi:** Uh huh.

Fusi: Because, for example for me is.. some... uh... For example, sometimes, **some points are not exactly in the same way that I think. But I can adapt with this situation and say 'ok**, it's not problem with me'. Other, other. For example, **for other case some points are not agree, but I don't fight about these situations, I only adapt and keep working**.
Gigi: Ok, ok. I understand what you're saying.

However, he also makes a remark that I believe correlates to my train of thought in the CCE under discussion; Holliday (2007) states: "people [...] may be fully critically aware of how ideology works in their non-professional lives, in such as advertising, the media, and political spin; but this awareness may be subdued by professional 'truths' in their professional lives" (p.364). Personally, my critical awareness seems to be fully fledged and operating as long as my academic and political lives are concerned yet subdued or less demanding in my professional and familial lives. These are the two realms where I feel disempowered, and that is why it is hard for me to manage a more consistent *cultured self*. I need to yield in order to preserve cordial relations with my relatives and avoid conflicts with my students and supervisors at work. Actually, it is my experiences with my family that have made me more afraid or weary of ideological debate, since whenever I have engaged in this type of discussions at home, they have not brought about the results I expected. In other words, these debates have not ended well. Need I say more? I do not think so.

Anyway, I worry that without any familial ties nor history keeping our relationships afloat, students might not want to put up with my preachy or judgmental[23] *cultured self*, which would not only get in the way of their learning process but could result in discrepancies with my company that put my job at risk if they complain about it. The struggle among internal and

[23] This, among other things, is what I have been called by my relatives from older generations. And it affects me a lot because we are a pretty close-knitted family, and we love each other very much, but we take everything personally, unfortunately. A discussion of this sort will and has created distance and resentment among us, which is why I need to feel that I am in a truly open-minded environment to dare to debate political and ideological matters.

external forces trying to dictate what my behavior as a teacher ought to be like results in a sort of identity values schizophrenia, in the words of Ball (2003; as cited in Reeves, 2018). With this, the scholar means to depict a situation where teachers' identities "are likely to feel pulled in competing directions" (Reeves, 2018; p.8), causing them to split in halves: one half that strives for the teachers' inner personal values; and another one that demands compliance with outer institutional processes and purposes. The outcome of this schizophrenia is teachers who feel inauthentic, fabricated, and even terrorized by our own lack of agency.

Surely, one of these institutional goals is standardization, be it of curriculum or of performance in class, which "has been observed to deprofessionalize teachers by restricting [our] use of [our] own discernment before and during instruction" (Buchanan, 2015; Stoten, 2013; as cited in Reeves, 2018; p.5). Based on my circumstances, I would argue that beyond deprofessionalization, at least in the work setting, standardization also dehumanizes teachers, in the sense that we are turned into mere representatives of our companies who are not to have personal convictions; our top priority must always be protecting the interests of our employers; and we may feel that, at least from time to time, what is in the school's best interest, is not in our students' or our own best interest. In other words, neocapitalist/neoliberal institutions' telos (Clarke, 2009; as cited in Reeves, 2018) –control, standardization, 'academic achievements (high performance on test scores)– differs from teachers and students' telos. My reflection tells me that this is an aggravating factor to my already insecure *cultured self*, which is struggling more and more every day to stay true to its own beliefs about what is right and fair, and what is 'acceptable' family and workwise.

As I said a few lines above, not only do neocapitalist work environments tend to deprofessionalize teachers, but they also dehumanize us, and sadly, this is not an issue only

teachers face; it is a more broadly spread reality across many occupations. Let us take Fusi and Nicola's company, whose established dynamics were challenged by the alternative work conditions that had to be adopted due to the COVID-19 pandemic; that is, remote work. In our first interview, I asked Fusi how the experience of meeting and interacting with people online had been for him, to which he replied (see Annex 11):

Table 17: INTERVIEW WITH FUSI (TRANSCRIPTION)

INTERVIEW WITH FUSI
[...] Obviously there are things, in my particular case as a People Manager, **with a team in my charge, it is usually more difficult**, right? Because we had to throw and break down those mental barriers that we had, right? **As a leader you were used to being present, looking at them, listening to them**, right? What are they doing? Where do they come from? **What time did they arrive? What time do they leave? Things like that, and now you don't have that control anymore**. It's much harder now because you know they're there, but... You also know they're doing other things [...] The hard part was with the people we hired during the pandemic. There it was much more complex. Because it is very difficult. In the case of [company], **it's a very paternalistic company**, isn't it? It is a company that cares a lot. **It's very easy… Like… To get involved or get into the pace of the company, but by being there**, right? Knowing its culture, sharing with people. Simple things like going to eat, using the services that the very office, this building has. **So, for new people who don't have that interaction it's more difficult**, right? It is more difficult to explain to them how it works, to explain to them, to share with them that kind of thing. So, we had to, for example, come up with things that would allow us to have that interaction.

The previous extract helps me see that Fusi is aware that one way control over the activities of the employees can be achieved is by businesses getting them to join and embrace their corporate culture. And, since many new workers hired during pandemic times were never physically present in the company facilities, surrounded by colleagues and superiors, it had not been possible to exercise the level of control over them that they would like. This is not exclusive to Fusi and Nicola's company, it is a characteristic of neocapitalist organizations, shared by the language institute I work for, as well. According to Gee, Hull, & Lankshear (2018), "the new capitalism puts a great deal of faith in creating goals, core values, a vision, a 'culture' [a Discourse] and communicating it to workers (partners)" (p.19). In my students' case, due to the fact that they are in managerial positions, their involvement is expected to be even

higher than that of rank-and-file employees, as they ought to help instill these ideas in their subordinates' minds.

My situation is different from Fusi and Nicola's, because the main strategy the school I am employed by uses is surveillance, that is recording every single lesson instructors have with students on the online platform and evaluating a randomly selected one every so often in order to guarantee the 'quality' of the service.

Champy (1995; p.40), Gee, Hull, & Lankshear (2018) also say that this 'indoctrination', in neocapitalist ideology, "takes leadership, of course, but a leadership of a new kind […] the capacity to articulate the reasons –the motivating explanations– why this business and its people must do what they're being called on to do" (p.20). This is the reasoning behind the emphasis on corporate values and culture: profit cannot be the sole goal, vision, or purpose of a successful business, as it takes more to motivate full commitment, hypercompetitiveness and over-the-top effort in all workers/partners (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 2018). The institute that employs me does not seem to put much emphasis on these 'corporate culture' ideas, but rather focuses on standards and compliance; there was no explicit interest in PC and teamwork[24], unlike at my students' company.

Considering that the new capitalism is known for having infiltrated most of the realms of social life, these are ideas that most individuals have been familiarized with, from the very start of our socialization and schooling processes. For this reason, though the problematization that I had been developing prior to this section of the analysis pointed to a straight-forward criticism of new capitalism's hypocritical or instrumental use of PC, the feelings I expressed in this CCE are not entirely false. It is a subconscious part of our *cultured selves* and not even the self-reflective

[24] At least, not at the time this study was being carried out.

and deconstructive process I am currently engaged in has been enough to fully eradicate these ideas from my deepest needs; that is just how strongly rooted in my *cultured self* these neocapitalist notions are.

In the CCE around which this reflection revolves, there is some sincerity to my comments when I praise Fusi and Nicola's company values, as they portray them; there is no doubt, since, when they were talking about it, I was actually pleasantly surprised they chose to share these ideas as examples of advice they would give a new hire as key things to keep in mind. Having at least the minimum degree of explicit regard for an equal and respectful work environment is better than having none, and it is something I can appreciate, based on my current situation. As an individual whose life has been developed under this system, I see a fair, decent, and inclusive work environment as the least employees can demand from our employers; and though I know the discourse these businesses adopt is unlikely to transform the core and main pillars of the system significantly, I still feel that there is a speck that we are entitled to demand. That would be legal and 'politically correct' conditions. Citing Reeves (2018) again, my values both converge with and diverge from neoliberal values of the context I carry my job at, which might happen to many other teachers under this system.

Lastly, I feel the subconscious desire to find a kind of motivation to my work that goes beyond a monthly payment, because my transition from face-to-face to online teaching was also a switch from daily socialization with colleagues and students that was not exclusively limited to the short time our lessons or meetings lasted, to what now is almost complete isolation from anyone once off-the-clock. Consequently, and much to my dismay, that appeal to the job has been somewhat harder to find lately. Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi (2016) explain the issue of teacher isolation and define it as this unpleasant experience we tend to feel when our "network

of social relations at work does not work properly in some significant way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (p.197). I yearn for that connection that I cannot get from fellow instructors, students or superiors working online at this school and, considering Gaikwad & Brantley's (1992; as cited in Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016) research ideas on how isolation could result in feelings of extreme helplessness, burnout, frustration, and other negative attitudes, I argue that it taints the pedagogical process, both for the students and myself.

4.6. Conclusion

Saying that engaging in a process of epistemological, ideological, and even pedagogical deconstruction, working for and towards transformation, while simultaneously coping within a neoliberal society, and working for a neocapitalist educational institution whose principles have been sculpted by neomanagerial discourse is not easy for me, or for any teacher who is trying to follow a similar path, is certainly an understatement. One of the things I can be sure of, after going through this autoethnographic journey, is that it has been worthwhile, not only from an academic point of view but from a personal perspective, too.

As its name, reconciling my current *cultured self* with my personal and professional narratives: coming to terms with my biases indicates, with the reflection around this final category I have been able to go deeper into my most subconscious drives, instilled in my *cultured self* as a result of my upbringing, formal education, English language acquisition process and professional experience. Many of these 'instincts' do not go hand in hand with the kind of values I agree with and actively advocate for nowadays; but being aware of this fact has just not been enough to uproot them from my psyche as they were planted there through strategies that the new capitalism enterprise has applied, developed and tested for decades now. Not to mention how these tools keep being reevaluated and updated on the regular. I am referring

to methods such as a (rather shallow)¬ implementation of political correctness, or the idea of corporate culture as a bait to hook workers and customers into engaging and making 'over' the top efforts in order to help it reach it.

Understanding this background of mine, which includes all the factors I mentioned a few lines above, was essential in order for me to conciliate them with my current ideologies, and somewhat forgive myself for having what I consider to be inconsistent behavior in relation to my discourse outside this online SoP. This most certainly does not mean I am justifying my conduct, when I do something that, I think, goes against my values; rather, it means that I understand why these discrepancies would happen from time to time, and that I need more time and more deconstruction to achieve my ultimate goal of transformation.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to account for the conclusions drawn from the development of an autoethnographic research on the phenomenon of online EFL cross-cultural interaction and its effects on re-signification processes of ELT teachers' self-representations, which, as the term autoethnography indicates, was carried out from the vantage point of the teacher-researcher that conducted it herself. The relevance of this study is grounded on the need to appreciate the valuable insights that researchers ourselves can contribute with to the field of applied linguistics and EFL. Being a fact that research has historically been done by members of the elites (white, wealthy, heteronormative men located in the global north) following their perspectives on the members of subordinated communities (racialized, impoverished women or queer people located in the global south), it is now our responsibility to allow for those voices that were long silenced, ignored, or heard only through others' words to speak for ourselves. When it comes to understanding the implications and ramifications of the phenomenon at hand, who is better fit to reflect about it than those who experience it firsthand?

In addition, I see engaging in an autoethnography as a fruitful exercise for those who, through education and research, seek to achieve informed change. Though this latter motivation would have been disregarded by traditional scholarly standards, one of the challenges that the qualitative paradigm and critical research approaches –such as critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001)– pose to the dominant values of academia is the dismissiveness towards these perspectives, regarding them as subjective, and therefore, inconvenient to the research endeavor. Nonetheless, based on the notions advocated by these paradigms, if we are to achieve actual structural change, we ought to address and assess those 'givens' that have been instilled so

soundly in our subconscious. Diving into the depths of our complex *cultured selves*, facing our own contradictions, and coming to terms with them could be seen as a prerequisite to deconstruction and transformation.

This thesis went over the interrelated effect that cultural backgrounds, the online nature of the setting, and other internal and external factors has on processes of relationship and identity construction and re-signification. I developed the project based on the foundation that culture is much more than the (stereo)typical notions we have considered for the longest time in academia; meaning, it does encompass nationality, ethnicity, language, and customs, but it is not limited to that. It is also neither homogeneously embraced by each group or individual, nor static or monolithic (Nieto, 2009; Kecskes, 2014, Levy, 2007). The much broader conceptualization of culture we went for along the study I report here –which included dynamics at work, at school, within our household, and even with media, as influential forces to people's construction of self– allowed for a more thorough analysis of the phenomenon of *cultured self* re-signification (see Chapter 2: Literature Review, section 2.4).

Similarly, in the present paper I also proposed centering the discussion not around the concept of identity, but instead concentrating on the *cultured self*, a title inspired in Goffman's (1956) notion of self that pertains to the "superficial" layer of our identities, though not because of its lack of transcendence, but because of its flexibility and impressionability when in contact with cultural expressions. I found that an individual's *cultured self* is complex inasmuch as it is malleable to the influence of contextual factors, and still persistent in its core values; not precisely because of how fervently we believe in them, but because of how we acquired them. In other words, the elemental nature of culture (Levy, 2007) explains why these tenets are so

soundly rooted yet can still be adapted at the surface level of the self, because culture is embedded in context (Nieto, 2009), too.

The unspoken values we attain from experiences we have during our lives as workers, relatives, students, language learners, and EFL teachers, are at times as influential as those ideological affiliations we are more conscious of. Even when educational, personal, and professional processes lead us to re-evaluate these elemental cultural notions, or fight against them because we consider them dated, problematic or downright wrong, the aforementioned unconscious principles might still unknowingly drive our *cultured selves*' worldview and conduct.

These biases have implications on the decisions we make in the different realms of our lives, and when it comes to our classes, they affect our pedagogical practices, as well as our relationships with students, with fellow teachers, superiors, and even with the English language itself. Self-observation, self-recollection, self-assessment, and self-reflection of our own narratives, present themselves as meaningful tasks for EFL teachers and researchers alike to undertake, in order to identify these biases and deal with them accordingly –if and when necessary–. Walsh (2010) suggests that systemic change into oppressive social structures is to be brought about by the very peoples who have suffered historically from that oppression. This is an opinion that I relate to the way in which the autoethnographic approach I chose to develop my project focuses on such experiences and provides insightful views into both the phenomenon of study and the people living it, whose voices and stories have often been overlooked, and then are discouraged from talking about them when we become the researchers, under the excuse of avoiding unscientific subjectivity. If there is something that the autoethnographic research exercise can help researchers and teachers realize is that the kind of change that scholars have

been rooting for will not come about by focusing only on doing academic work; or even from adapting our pedagogical practices at the school and the classroom. The values of this unequal, oppressing and excluding social order are deeply seated in our collective imagination, but can be uprooted with disciplined, informed and openminded self-introspection.

Now, before delving into the core of this section, I would like to take a moment to remember that throughout the development of a research project there are various key elements that give structure to it and help guide it, and the research questions and objectives are, without a doubt, at the top of that list. No conclusions chapter would be complete without a reminder of those ideas, so that the reader can assess whether they have been thoroughly accounted for; therefore, that is what the following lines are devoted to.

5.2. A layered *cultured self* and its implications to learners, teachers, and researchers

The main purpose of this study was to answer the question of how my *cultured self* –as an EFL teacher, learner, NNES, master student, etc.– is re-signified by cause of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction, and in order to find what I think are the multiple answers to it, I broke this question down into three objectives that account for three categories of analysis, which, in turn, make for each of the three layers of my *cultured self*, understood as the representation individuals make of our personas that we show others during socialization processes, mainly when cultural factors play a key role. The research objectives were:

- To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my *cultured self*.
- To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-signification of my *cultured self*.

- To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-signification of my inner *cultured self*.

By observing my everyday teaching practices, depicting them as faithfully as possible – thoughts, feelings and impressions included–, linking them with some of my most weighty life experiences, and, finally making sense of this all with the aid of scholarly perspectives, I was able to abstract from the data three major categorical themes for discussion. They boil down to:

- The discussion about the repertoire of practices suitable for the perceived demands of the online cross-cultural setting that I believe I have been curating since I first transitioned from face-to-face teaching.
- The reflection around my personal need to fit my *cultured self* and accommodate to ideal otherness by repeatedly prioritizing this desire and sacrificing many of my own convictions for the sake of avoiding any undesirable opinions others may have of me.
- The quest to go far back and deep down into my history in order to reconcile my current *cultured self* with my personal and professional narratives, so that I can acknowledge their influence, bridge gaps between my past and my present, and ultimately, accomplish deconstruction and transformation.

5.2.1. Influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self

The repertoire I am referring to here is a compilation of strategies and behaviors, ranging from pedagogical to interpersonal decisions I make use of while interacting with my students in our online EFL *space of practice*. The analysis of these repertoires, contained in the first category of analysis titled curating a repertoire of practices suitable for the perceived demands of the online cross-cultural setting, led me to the realization that I will make constant evaluations concerning what I say or do in front of them, bearing in mind there are both internal and external

factors influencing my conduct. In other words, factors that influence the presentation of my *cultured self* while in online class with my EFL students. External factors include the cross-cultural nature of me and my students' relationship, the language(s) we use to communicate, and the online nature of our encounters; since they determine the sort of practices we engage in, especially when it comes to relationship building and rapport. Our affiliations to different collectives and cultural groups, and the possibilities granted by the features of the technologies we rely on for our communication, frame the interaction within a particular SoP.

The neoliberal principles that have shaped the business model of the language school I work for, based on which its teaching methodologies are designed, play an important role, too. Bearing in mind that the new capitalism is yet another cultural influence, one that has transcended the borders of the economic field and instilled its views in our societies' collective imagination and all its domains. In the case of education, I am referring, of course, to the emphasis there is now on standardization, quality control –realized in constant surveillance and assessment–, customer satisfaction, 'added value', and other business-like underpinnings that have transformed education into a product to be sold and bought. In the EFL field, language is a product/service, learners are clients, and teachers are service providers. Under these criteria, culture is presented as a complement to the language learning process, giving it that 'added value', but not really attending to crucial cultural discussions. This leads EFL educators to build dual teaching personas, where one is compliant to these neo-capitalist demands, and the second one, often hidden, neglected, and relegated to off-the-clock scenes, is the true-to-self one (Rendón Alfonso, 2019).

As far as internal factors are concerned, I feel the need to prioritize what I presume are my students' needs. To achieve that, I tend to be more flexible with the application of the guidelines

set by the language school, mostly by occasionally allowing our conversation to deviate from pre-established topics, in favor of conversations that are more interesting for them or whose discussion might contribute to rapport construction. I appeal to shared cultural referents – available to us thanks to the effects of globalization (Castells, 2004)–, or even, communicate with them in Spanish instead of in English, like what happened in the CCE "20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS", when the lyrics of a popular reggaeton song in Spanish helped me explain the meaning of an expression in English (see Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion).

I also avoid all kinds of discrepancies that may arise between my students and me as a result of expressing my opinions and lead them to have a bad opinion of me. This is burdensome to me, since while I am going through the process of conducting my master research project, this educational journey along with other professional experiences, I have more recently been pushing in the very opposite direction: informed pedagogical decisions, self-empowerment, deconstruction, and transformation. I could notice this happening in CCEs such as "20210610 - DISCRIMINATION", where a student and I talked about discrimination, and he was able to notice the social implications of the ideas proposed by the book but I was not (see Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion); as if my critical senses got switched off as soon as I enter this particular online SoP. In the end, teachers' *cultured selves* are constantly being re-signified due to the fluctuating influence of these external and internal factors (see Annex 5, Colombian independence; or Annex 8, Cali protests), depending on teachers' assessment of what topics, thoughts, reactions, etc., we are expected to either share openly or keep to ourselves.

5.3. Impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-signification of my *cultured self*

Pondering of the second layer of my *cultured self*, I came to the conclusion that my prolonged presence and interaction within this particular online cross-cultural EFL SoP had left lasting traces in me, which is why so much of my conduct responds to assumptions I make regarding the needs, preferences, and beliefs of my students, first –since it is their reactions that are going to impact me immediately–, and of my employers, second –my supervisors, the language school as a whole–. A negative reaction from the latter would come later and might actually arise from or be influenced by the actions of the former.

In the second category, trying to fit my *cultured self* and accommodating to ideal otherness, I argue that both the actual structure of the institutions and social groups we belong to, and my assumptions about what each one of us is supposed to be –our authority sources (Reeves, 2018) –, stem from a historically established social order that perpetuates and reproduces inequality, discrimination, exclusion, and other forms of oppression. I am referring to the Global North and Global South, Native English speaker and Non-native English speaker dichotomies, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the resourceful, ever-evolving, not-so-hidden puppet master's hand, a.k.a. the new capitalism (Gee, 2000; Fairclough, 2002). I made assumptions about the place/role within the English-speaking community that I perceived I was assigned, considering my status as a non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST). This role implies that I have no saying on how the language evolves or is taught, even. That is for them (the native speakers of English) to figure out.

However, as seen in the CCE "20210714 - REDUNDANCIES" (see Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion), where I expressed my contempt for the values I link to both British and

corporate cultures, I was able to see that NNESTs do not necessarily accept submissively this assigned place in the order of things. We have the ability and conviction to resist and fight inequality and oppression by empowering ourselves through (further) individual and collaborative education, practice, and research.

Another powerful influence I try to challenge is the new capitalism, whose insertion in the educational realm has led schools to regard students as customers and teachers as service providers who must serve these clients and guarantee their satisfaction with the service. In this order of ideas, and based on my experiences and academic analysis, my ideas about prioritizing students' needs connect back to the aforementioned customer service, which explains my fear of them disliking me: if they do not like me, they may complain, and if they complain, I may get punished or dismissed.

Nonetheless, these thoughts do not clarify why I think that showing a more political *cultured self* would be, without a doubt, unwanted and rejected. What I could conclude from my analysis is that I make up an idea of what my students might think in relation to politics, ideologies, and topics of that nature, based first of all, on my conversations with them regarding both similar and not so similar topics. Furthermore, I tend to stereotype them on the basis of their social and professional status, and said stereotypes are in turn founded on both my interactions with other students with characteristics alike and the historical power distribution schemes and dynamics in society. Bearing that in mind, I assume that a person working in a managerial position at a big corporation would not agree with progressive political views, so expressing my support for them would only hinder our rapport. In other words, through a process of othering where a social in-group gains and keeps a position of power above an out-group, by stigmatizing the stereotypical characteristics of the latter (Staszak, 2008), an EFL teacher's *cultured self*

responds to ideas about the other, assuming that a someone who we are supposed to see as a customer, would not want their ideological preferences to be questioned or contrasted.

On the other hand, I argue that my restraint is equally driven by what I think are the ideal characteristics of a 'good' teacher, who I see as competent, selfless, and not imposing. Working under conditions as strict and limiting as the ones the school I work for allows, pushes teachers' personal values and principles to be in conflict with the role we are assigned at our workplace (Reeves, 2018), due to concerns regarding possible undesired relationships with students, disapproval from superiors, and even our image as knowledgeable and confident people (Aboud, 2020). The last preoccupation might be a little more personal to me, as I do not consider myself capable of supporting my arguments in (formal or informal) oral debate, and this is what the final category of analysis goes over, so I will summarize that next.

5.4. Effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-signification of my inner *cultured self*

The depiction of my *cultured self*'s hindmost layer, which can be found under the category reconciling my current *cultured self* with my personal and professional narratives, where the discussion revolves around those key life experiences and stories that shaped my worldview and how, even though my current views clash with many of the tenets I was raised by, their influence still seems to exert power on my *cultured self*. I am referring to my family background, my education, my first work experience, and the process through which I acquired English as a second language. Their influence manifests itself in the shape of 'instincts' or subconscious biases that make for many of my initial reactions to different kinds of stimuli, as was the case in the CCE "20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE" (see Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion), when students described their company's corporate culture.

The analysis shows that my early reactions are driven by these subconscious views, but when I take more time to reflect about the situation, which is what I did throughout the autoethnographic process, I realize that there is more to consider than what first meets the eye. In the case of the CCE cited above, it is not that at the moment of my reaction I am unaware of the complexities of the issue of political correctness, for instance, it is just that my *cultured self* has not been completely detached from the principles I was brought up with, mostly because I am still surrounded by them. At home, bigotry persists; at work, neo-capitalist and neo-managerial discourses have not been unmasked, only revamped, and it remains the main doctrine by which business is run. Hence, I will welcome the slightest trace of possible improvement and see it as praiseworthy. Nevertheless, when I really have time to analyze my true stance on the matter, I understand that my deconstruction process needs to and has already gone past that level, and society cannot settle for this kind of lip-service changes.

If I am to propose how these conclusions correlate to the ELT field, to learners, teachers, and researchers alike, I will say that it is important and helpful to recognize that the journey towards empowerment, informed deconstruction, and transformation is not limited to scholarly debate, nor even to classroom practices; it is also an introspective process, which, I would argue is the most complex realm to challenge. Critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) and other critical paradigms should acknowledge the necessity that the awareness of our most deeply rooted biases is a prerequisite for deconstruction, while reassuring researchers, teachers, and learners that inconsistencies between ideologies and behavior may occur along the way, due to our unconscious biases. It is our goal to forgive ourselves for that and continue working to bring about change.

As a first time autoethnographer, this endeavor was more intricate than I had originally anticipated it would be, and it made me relearn most of the ideas I held in relation to conducting research. It had me make a significant effort to truly get to understand the complexities of the human psyche, as well as the nuances of our behavior. This is another outcome allowed by autoethnography, that is, the reflection about the research process itself, which is often left behind in more traditional approaches, where the research methodology and design is portrayed as simpler and more straightforward than it usually is. This concealment is, at the very least, misleading to up-and-coming researchers, who may feel disheartened or overwhelmed when things do not go as smoothly as their readings on research had made it seem. I admit that trying to find the right balance for the introspective yet academic style that autoethnography demands; incorporating personal information while complementing it with relevant theory and literature; and, explaining my experiences and insecurities without presenting myself as a perpetual victim, was challenging. Nonetheless, I wrap up this journey feeling I am not who I was when it first started.

Lastly, I would like to remark that by exploring the phenomenon of *cultured self* re-signification as closely as autoethnography allows, I was able to understand it like no one else would have; knowing myself helped me understand the phenomenon more thoroughly, and developing the project also helped me get to know myself better. As ELT teacher-researchers, these kinds of approaches empower us inasmuch as they give us the opportunity to appreciate our own stories and provide insights to issues many of us have encountered in our personal, professional, and educational lives; sending the message that subjectivity is not inherently harmful to research or academia. We must embrace it and learn how to handle and take

advantage of it by learning vicariously through others' experiences just as much as through our own.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the things that would have enriched the general understanding of the phenomenon of re-signification of a teacher's *cultured self* during online EFL cross-cultural interaction is the perspective of the students. Being an autoethnography, in the present study the main focus was on the researcher herself, and though students did provide very telling insights into the analysis, further research should consider expanding on the exploration of the issue through their narratives. Collaborative autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjuri & Hernandez, 2013) is a fledgling research approach that could be an excellent option to carry out such an endeavor. Additionally, most of this project was developed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet, it did not delve deeply into the impact of this global event had in the ELT field, in terms of the reactions of teachers and students, their pedagogical practices, the relationships among them, the stress caused by the situation, etc. In my case, since I had started teaching online prior to the pandemic, the transition experience was not the same as what so many teachers around the world had to go through at the beginning of 2020. Further autoethnographic research should be conducted to explore those stories.

Another crucial point of this research was the discussion around the meddling of neo-capitalist ideologies and discourses in the educational domain, but most of it was from my perspective –with the support of previous research and theory, of course–. It would be of significant value if said matter were talked about from the vantage points of other stakeholders, such as the learners, the management, the policymakers. Are they aware of the influence of neo-capitalism in educational affairs? What are their stances on the matter? These are questions that further research may provide answers for.

Other autoethnographic projects could be developed around the idea of *cultured self* re-signification in face-to-face cross-cultural interaction with teachers who are going through some sort of turning point in their personal, professional, or academic lives, such as continuous education, new work experiences, or transitions from one teaching modality to another. The notion that setting and context where the interaction and re-signification take place shapes both the process and the outcome was also argued in this project, so further research should tackle that alternative avenue towards the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

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8. ANNEXES

8.1. Annex 1: Consent form

UNIVERSIDAD DISTRITAL
FRANCISCO JOSE DE CALDAS

MLAEI

Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta acerca del programa educativo en el que se le ha pedido participar, por favor contacte a:
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El propósito de esta carta es brindarle la información a considerar antes de decidir su participación en este estudio.

Título del Proyecto
PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN DE MAESTRÍA: NEGOCIANDO MI YO CULTURAL EN UNA COMUNIDAD DE PRÁCTICA EN LÍNEA PARA EL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA: UNA AUTO-NETNOGRAFÍA

Me gustaría invitarlo a participar en este proyecto de investigación, el cual forma parte de mi investigación de maestría. Usted debe participar solo si así lo quiere; si decide no hacer parte, esto no representará ninguna desventaja para usted. Antes de decidir si quiere participar, es importante que entienda por qué la investigación se llevará a cabo y lo que conlleva su participación. Por favor, tómese el tiempo de leer la siguiente información cuidadosamente y discutirla con otros, si así lo desea. No dude en preguntarme si algo no le queda claro o si desea más información al respecto.

Descripción del Proyecto
Este proyecto busca dar cuenta de mi experiencia como profesora de inglés como lengua extranjera en una comunidad en línea, donde individuos provenientes de diferentes culturas nos encontramos e inevitablemente negociamos la manera en que presentamos nuestro 'yo' o nuestra imagen personal para adaptarnos, o desafiar las dinámicas de interacción, las cuales también se renegocian constantemente. En particular, me interesa detallar cómo la negociación y renegociación son el resultado de decisiones (conscientes e inconscientes) que tomo con respecto a mi 'yo', y qué efecto tiene en las relaciones que se construyen con los y las miembros de la comunidad en línea.

Confidencialidad de los Datos
Los participantes de este estudio serán estudiantes de cursos en línea de inglés como lengua extranjera provenientes de diferentes países de Latino América. Su participación es voluntaria. Usted no está obligado a participar y no habrá ningún tipo de represalias en caso

8.2. Annex 2: Autoethnographic reflective matrix

Negotiating my Cultured Self as a result of EFL-motivated online cross-cultural interaction						
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of EFL online cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of online EFL cross-cultural interaction on the negotiation of my cultured self. • To describe the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultural views.						
TRANSCRIPTION						**CODING**
SELF-OBSERVATIONAL DATA (ethnography)						
WHAT	**WHERE**	**WHEN**	**WHO**	**HOW**	**WHY**	**CODING**
SELF-REFLECTIVE DATA (autoethnography)						
KIND OF EPISODE IT WAS	**HOW I BEHAVED AND WHY**	**KIND OF CULTURED SELF PRESENTED**	**EFFECTS OF ONLINE INTERACTION**	**FEELINGS DURING INTERACTION**	**FEELINGS AFTER INTERACTION**	**CODING**
PERSONAL MEMORY DATA (autobiography)						

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONNECTIONS	

8.3. Annex 3: Shared cultural referents

20210721 - SHARED CULTURAL REFERENTS	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: What do you think about this expression? 'Water under the bridge'? Have you heard it before? AM: Mm hmm. CP: Yes? CG: Yes. AM: Yeah. CP: What does it mean? AM: It is like ah... Ahmm... How to translate this? It's like a... CG: When the water is like here? (puts his hands in front of his nose bridge to illustrate the level to which water would be, as if someone were about to drown). AM: Yeah, it's like something... some action is under... under pacing? or... CP: Actually, I can compare this to the words of a very famous philosopher called **Daddy Yankee**. AM: (Laughs). CG: Yankee? AM: (Still laughing) Come on! CP: Who says **"Lo que pasó, pasó"**. CG: He's not a... (laughs).	• Resorting to shared cultural references • Challenging school rules by using Spanish
(All laugh). CP: OK? (laughs) Yes? "Lo que pasó, pasó". It's a... It already happened, we cannot change the past, we can just learn from the... from the mistake, I suppose. No? AM: (Laughs) Yeah. CP: That is what that means (laughs). AM: (Laughs) Alright. CP: OK. AM: (still laughing) It's clear. Thank you for this expression. CP: Sure. Go ahead, continue Mr. (AM). --- CP: And... Another thing that's important... I wanna change this color (referring to the words written on the digital whiteboard, to mark a difference between examples) But not red, it's going to look like Christmas. AM: (Laughs) Christmas is coming. CG: Yes CP: No, it's still far. AM & CG: No! CG: Near AM: We are finishing July CP: Yeah, but... AM: We're practically starting August. CP: But, come on! (laughs). AM: **Here in Mexico** is... OK. October. Is August is obviously that is, is... Piece of cake. October. We receive November with the 'Día de Muertos'... CP: Uh huh... AM: And the year ends. CG: No... CP: I know.	• Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture

AM: Ah... I'm sorry... CG: Once we reach September. AM: September. CG: Once we reach September... AM: Independence day. CG: (Makes a hand gesture to express that everything is done). The falls starts. AM: It is because **we start with several holidays**. CP: Mm hmm... Yes. The thing is that... AM: September, November... CP: **In Colombia** it's similar. Eh... We call the last few years of the month the 'Bres', you know? CG: The 'Bres'? CP: Yes, because 'septiemBRE, octuBRE, noviemBRE... AM: Ahh... The 'Bres'. CG: Mmm. CP: But, the thing is that, **in Cartagena**, before Christmas; well, we have Halloween and everything, but in November we celebrate the independence of the city. Yes? AM: Mmm. CP: So, before the Christmas **we have like** a carnival. So **for me, Christmas** is only in December. Yeah? CG: Mmm. CP: The 'Bres', only 'diciembre', December, is the, the Christmas. So, **for me, it's far**. I don't know (laughs). CG: So, probably (stutters) next week you will see our trees (makes a gesture with his arms to show where in the background his tree would be located). Christmas trees (laughs). CP: Oh, yes. Oh my God! Yes, yes. AM: Absolutely, yes. CP: **I do have a question** that just came to my mind right now. **Is it common** to see in some houses... For example... you... Do you put decorations, like, Christmas lights outside the house, in Mexico? AM: Yeah.	• Associating with a cultural group • Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture • Explaining cultural particularities • Associating with a cultural group • Explaining cultural particularities
CG: Yes. CP: Yes? But, the thing is that, **in Colombia**, sometimes, Christmas finished, it's already March or something and you still see the lights... AM: (Laughs). CP: (Laughs). CG: Yes. CP: Outside the houses. CG: Yes, **it's similar here in Mexico**. You see all the year (laughs) That, that... AM: But, but, turned on? CP: No, no, no. They're just there hanging. AM: OK. CP: They're never turned on. But, they don't take them down, I don't understand. Why is it so difficult to just take them down? You still have to change them, for the next Christmas. CG: (Stutters) They think: "OK. It's March. Six months, seven months *mch* That's OK" (laughs). CP: (Laughs) Yes. OK, OK. So, what I was going to say, my friends...	• Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture • Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture

8.4. Annex 4: Learning languages

20210623 - LEARNING LANGUAGES

Negotiating my Cultured Self as a result of EFL-motivated online cross-cultural interaction

RESEARCH QUESTION:

- How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self.
- To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self.
- To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.

TRANSCRIPTION

AM: It's because, we... As you know, we attend some different countries, and sometimes the timing is complicated. Because... CP: Do you know what time it is in India right now? AM: Yes, now... In India is... 6pm. CP: Ohh, OK. So, they're having a late meeting over there. AM: Yes. It's late for them. And, for example, when we try to... The problem is that, if you wait more time, you lose one additional day. CP: Ahhh... AM: Because they are going to sleep. And, tomorrow they start working at 8pm from Mexico time. And if you don't attend a meeting or talk with them at... at... during the night, they... Because, I prefer work with them at my night. Because they can work during they working day. And at the end of the day you receive an update or something. If you don't, they normally... because they are... pfff. How can I say... They're like a... tricky? CP: OK... AM: Because if they say: "Oh, well. I don't understand", and they respond your email with some additional doubts and they lose an additional day. It is complicated work with these... these guys.	• Sharing one's own cross-cultural experiences • Making generalizations about cultural groups • Avoiding potentially 'politically incorrect' language • Showing interest in cross-cultural experiences • Implying traditional ideas about Outer-circle countries • Challenging traditional ideas about Outer-circle countries • Adding nuance to cultural generalizations
CP: Mmmm. OK, OK. AM: Yeah, it's interesting. CP: Yes, yes. Uhhhh. I have never met a person from India, I would like to know what it's like. For example, teaching Spanish to a person from India. AM: Ah, the problem is the, the accent. It's complicated. CP: It's not complicated for me, at all. I don't know why. AM: Really? CP: Yeah, the other day I was listening, eh, to an Indian professor speaking. And I was like eating at the same time and listening. And my sister, she speaks English as well. She's not a teacher, but she also speaks English. She's like: "I don't understand anything" (laughs) And I was like: "It's so easy for me", I don't know why. I don't know. AM: Maybe , it's better. But, depends. We have some people that speak slowly. CP: Uh huh. AM: And is very nice to understand and they try to... to... speak correctly. But we have another, oh, well, more people that speak very, very complicated. And, actually sometimes between themselves... CP: Uh huh. AM: They speak... it is complicated (laughs). CP: (Laughs). AM: To understand them. CP: (laughs) They don't understand themselves. AM: It's very common that, for example, one... one... person speak five languages. For example. CP: Yes, yes, yes. Well, that's... AM: Because they speak, uhhh... Like a... CP: Indian languages. AM: Indian language. This is for my mother, this is for my father, this is the place where I live, and additional, I speak English, and I start to learn Portuguese, for example, or something. CP: Yeah...	• Implying traditional ideas about Outer-circle countries • Adding nuance to cultural generalizations

AM: So, sometimes I attend meetings with people that only speak English, and I speak with them and then translate to Portuguese, and it is (laughs). CP: Ohhhh. AM: Very, very strange. CP: Oh, my God! Wow. AM: Yeah. CP: Wow, wow, wow. Oh, my God. AM: Yes. Very nice. CP: Uh! That sounds so hard. Oh, my God. AM: But, Portuguese is nice, I like the accent. CP: You like it? Yes. AM: Yes. CP: OK, OK. I see. AM: Actually, I was located in Sao Paulo. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: And I love to travel, so, sometimes I was, for example, Rio de Janeiro. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: And, I was speaking with the driver, for example. And, they say: "Wow, you are from Sao Paulo, right?". "No, no. I'm from Mexico". "Ah, it's because you have an accent from Sao Paulo". I said: "Alright". But is... (laughs). They say: "Well, I know that you are foreign, but you have an accent from Sao Paulo". He said: "Well, it is very nice". CP: Mmm. OK, OK. I know what he's saying because, for example, there is... I have a friend who is from the United States... AM: OK. CP: But, he speaks Spanish. However, he's been living in Cartagena, in my city for many years now. And he has like a... a gringo but a costeño type of accent that we have here in the city. AM: (Laughs) Yes. Yeah (laughs). CP: OK, OK. Wow. I would like to learn a third language. I don't know if I should learn Portuguese or...	• Describing one's own multilingual experience • Expressing opinions on languages • Describing one's own multilingual experience • Describing one's own multilingual experience • Comparing others' multilingual experiences • Expressing opinions on

maybe an Asian language. What do you think? AM: Depends. Depends of the, well... I learned Portuguese because I need... I needed to learn, because when I start working at [company] I start working with a Brazilian project. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: And the first time that I traveled to Brazil, I didn't speak anything about Portuguese. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: And my English was not very good in this moment. So, the communication was complicated. So, I decide to start learning by myself. I only take... take. Well, I took three levels at [language school]. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: But, to be honest with you I was better than the level that I was... I was training. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: But, was nice. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: To structure my... my... my Portuguese. But, was a need, not really a wish. CP: Mmm hmm. Yes, yes. I understand what you say about learning by yourself. And (stutters) I mean, in the institute it's kinda like you have some ideas, no? AM: Yes. CP: And sometimes it's kinda like "Oh. I already know this". But, also the structures you don't have them because you learned them, like, by instinct. AM: Yeah. And, actually, we learned on the street. Or, we learned with the real live... CP: Yeah. AM: And, sometimes they say: "You should speak like this". No, no. Tsk, tsk. I don't remember... CP: That's not what people say. Mmm mmm mmm, no. you're wrong. AM: Yeah, exactly. It is not common. And, for example, the Portuguese is very different when you speak and when you write. CP: Mmmmm. AM: For example, if you are writing with... In a chat, for example, with someone, It is different when... than you are speaking with them.	languages • Understanding Portuguese as a tool to be used • Describing one's own multilingual experience • Understanding Portuguese as a tool to be used • Comparing one's own multilingual experience to others' • Sharing linguistic knowledge

CP: Ohhh. AM: So, that is important. **They use some words that sound strange if you speak. But, it sounds nice if you write** (laughs). CP: Uhhh. OK. AM: It is strange, yeah. CP: Well, just to conclude this conversation here, mister. **Now I understand you used to have the Mexican, the Colombian and the Brazilian flags**. No? AM: (Laughs) Yes. CP: What happened to them? Did you wash them? Are they, like, in the washing machine? Or are they...? AM: No. It's because we are moving. CP: Ohh, you're moving. AM: Yes, and now is into a box.	• Relating information on multilingual experiences to other aspects of people's lives

8.5. Annex 5: Colombian independence

20210720 - COLOMBIAN INDEPENDENCE

Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction

RESEARCH QUESTION:
- How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:
- To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self.
- To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self.
- To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.

TRANSCRIPTION

CP: Did you know that today is the independence of Colombia? AM: Ahhh, no, no. I was not aware. CP: It is. It is. AM: But, congratulations! It should be a holiday, right? CP: It is a holiday. AM: Oh, my God! CG: Yeah. CP: It is a holiday, yes. CG: Why we are here? CP: Ahh (jokingly) If it wasn't me... if it weren't me, you would have another teacher. But, you (pointing at the screen) would have class. Regardless of... CG: Oh, Come on! CP: You only have time off when it's a holiday in (stressed) Mexico (laughs). AM: Mmmm. (With his teeth, in sign of disappointment) Tsk, tsk, tsk. CP: Yes. AM: So sad.	• Showing identification with national symbols • Making assumptions about cultural practices // Generalizing
CP: Another interesting fact about Colombia is that today we celebrate our independence, but, actually... I mean... It wasn't our independence. It's just one day that a person in our history... ehh... did some... How can I say?... Something important in the history and started the fight for independence. But not the day that the independence was declared, or anything. Actually, in Colombia we don't have a day that's specific for, "Okay. Today we... we confirm the independence". No. AM: Buuut... I think that it is... it is the normal process, right? I mean, for example, for Mexico, the independence day is the... is exactly the same. It's the day that an special people start the independence. CP: But, I thought that, for example, for the United States, the 4th of July was the day that they signed the declaration of independence. No? AM: Yeah, for July 4th. Yes. Yeah, but... CP: Well, it depends on the country. AM: Yeah, exactly. And the culture. CG: From... from... from which country... Colombia independence? CP: From Spain. AM: Spain. CG: From Spain. Oh! Similar in Mexico. CP: Yes, exactly, yes. It's a funny story, because is one... You know that in Latin America we had the Spanish people and we had the *criollos*, no? The creoles. CG: Yes. CP: So, one person... I don't know the story very well... I don't know. I think it was a *criollo* and a Spanish person. And the Spanish person insisted to have a flower pot. You know what a flower pot is? AM: No, no. CP: It's a glass thing for the flowers. AM & CG: Ahh. Yeah, yeah. Okay. CP: Yes?	• Showing identification with national symbols • Adopting foreign standards • Making assumptions about cultural practices // Generalizing • Adopting foreign standards • Recognizing cultural particularities • Differentiating country from culture • Making assumptions about cultural practices • Recognizing lack of knowledge

AM & CG: Mmm hmm. **CP: (Dramatizing the situation) -"Gimme your flower pot, I need to use it for a... for a lunch". -"No, no. I won't give it to you" -"Gimme your flower pot" -"No, no, no" -"Oh, okay". So, because the person said "no" to give the Spanish person the flower pot. In the marketplace, in the market, many people: -"Oh! The Spanish are so oppressive! Rrrr!" (Claps once) Independence! (laughs).** **AM: (laughs).** **CP: Yes. It's... The story's called *El florero de Llorente*. Llorente was the person who said "No!". Okay? Now you're learning Colombian history.** **AM: Yeah, absolutely.** **CG: Yes, thank you for that.** **CP: Okay.**	• Showing identification with national symbols

SELF-REFLECTIVE DATA (autoethnography)

KIND OF EPISODE IT WAS	HOW I BEHAVED AND WHY	KIND OF CULTURED SELF PRESENTED	WHY	FEELINGS DURING INTERACTION	FEELINGS AFTER INTERACTION	
This episode was similar to others I've had with these students, and others students, for that matter, inasmuch as describing or talking about characteristics of a person's home country ends up turning into a comparison with the other's country. In this case, the discussion revolves around independence celebrations, before it was about Christmas celebrations or protests practices. Comparing, identifying differences and similarities seems to be a strategy that	The way I behaved is very typical of me. I like to talk about topics that are not necessarily contemplated in the school's textbook as long as I find the right moment to do so. For example, if there's a relevant event recently happening or affecting the students' lives, if someone brings up a topic they'd like to discuss or if the very situation calls for it. Here, it was the timing of the class that allowed for a smooth introduction of the topic into the conversation. The story of	I can perceive a strong sense of identification from my cultured self toward national symbols like the independence day and the legend of Llorente and the first cry for independence. Nevertheless, why is it that I take the USA independence celebration as the standard based on which to judge other countries' practices? The more 'logical' thing to do would be to take my own country as the standard. I don't know the history behind any other country's independence, apart from my own and the	Back in 2019, when I first started teaching English to international students on a regular basis one of the biggest struggles I had was relating the ideas of the textbook to students' real lives. When I was a face-to-face teacher, the vast majority of learners I worked with were from my city, or had been living there for very long. Therefore, it was easy for me to connect or exemplify the simplest things with places, people, names, and all kinds of realia that both them	When I told the students it was Colombia's independence that day, and they were surprised to see me working I was a little embarrassed to tell them that in this school, we are contractually expected to work on holidays; and that even though I had the choice to not do it (since I have a special permission because I'm studying a master) I chose to do it because I need that extra pay we get for working on holidays. Hence, my reply to their questions was evasive because I felt the	This interaction has made me reflect about how national symbols can be a very influential force that shapes people's collective identities. Still, it's contradictory that while I was talking about my country's history, and therefore presenting myself as a proud Colombian, I was assessing our national symbols by USA's standards. I've been reflecting about other CCE's where I adopt what I claim are this country's standards, but then, the	

both the students and myself find useful in order to establish common ground and build our relationship from there. It also, I think, helps us avoid misunderstandings and cross-cultural conflicts.	Llorente also came naturally to the conversation. First, I started talking about it and then I realized that I had to explain something I didn't really remember how it had happened. It's a story I had never had to tell in English, and the language barrier made my depiction a little more difficult to convey faithfully.	USA's, so this bias is not supported by identified patterns. Just as AM said, it's probable that what is celebrated in the majority of countries is closer to Colombia. In other episodes, in terms of politically correct language, I also take this country as the standard. Could it be because I was communicating in English when these interactions took place?	and myself were familiar with. Working online with people whose realities are so distant and different from my own was difficult and often frustrating. The best solution I was able to find was to encourage them to tell me, to share with me, to teach me what they know. In that order of ideas, now students were in charge of providing realia, for instance, or connecting the	motivations for my working on that day were too personal to address in class with them. Nonetheless, I'm not quite sure they understood what I said when I responded "if it weren't me, you would have another teacher. But, you (pointing at the screen) would have class. Regardless of... You only have time off when it's a holiday in Mexico". This assumption is based on the	standard was at least related to language use, which makes sense to some extent. What I mean to say is, if I'm speaking English, and I learned most of my English from USA's media and cultural products (movies, music series, social media), it's understandable that my language choices would be heavily influenced by this country's established norms. However, my	
			textbook ideas with their realities, their life experiences. Surprisingly enough, many students show interest in what my reality is like and that is when comparisons come naturally. These exchanges help us understand each other and learn about our cultures together.	way AM and CG reacted, a little confused, from my point of view. Anyway, I still decided to move on from that particular conversation topic. Later, when I was describing the historical episode involving Llorente and his 'flower pot', as I named it, I felt insecure once again, because not only I didn't remember the details of the story as every kid is told in elementary school; also,	knowledge regarding the cultural meaning of indepence celebrations does not come from this country. To date, I am only familiar with two country's independence history: my own country, Colombia, and the United States of America (and very poorly, for that matter). So, there's no reason for me to assume, based on comparison with other countries'	

				some time ago, I remember reading or listening or watching a more critical and historically accurate tale of the episode that explained the implications that the social groups each character of the story had in the independence movement. So, all these ideas came to my mind, but very vaguely. In the end, I was incapable of providing a solid, understandable	history, that the USA ought to set the standard based on which to judge the rest of the countries. Is the context of interaction, the language my students and I are using, influencing this decision of mine?	
				description of the event so I doubt students could catch the meaning of it for Colombian history.		

8.6. Annex 6: Discrimination

20210610 - DISCRIMINATION	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: Eh, so, did you ever feel, mmmm. Well, I, ah, these words are similar. Of course. But, I ah, I don't know if in any *customer service* experience you would feel sorrowful.	• Challenging the textbook
AM: (laughs).	
CP: Or sad, or miserable. Mmmm, maybe if you are working for the company and they treat you very bad, you feel miserable or sorrowful, but if you're the customer, I'm not so, not so sure.	• Implying that the corporate world is merciless
AM: Oh, it depends, if for example, eh, eh... If you, well. It's not common, maybe for us, but, sometimes there have people that depends of how their looks, maybe the attendants can decide not attend or...	• Taking distance from the issue
CP: Yes, yes (nods). Discrimination.	• Openly naming taboo topics
AM: Discrimitation, right. And this is impacting seriously the... the emotions, not only the... the situation, right?	• Problematizing
CP: You are right. I never thought about it, maybe because it hasn't happened to me or I haven't noticed.	• Taking distance from the issue
AM: Mmm hmmm.	
CP: But, it is a problem, yes. Definitely, definitely. OK, OK, I see. However, if it were me, probably I would feel offended or mad, frustrated. But, sorrowful? Well, depends. Depends...	• Imagining alternative realities

AM: Depends of the people, yeah. Because, oh, OK. You understand and you, mmm, you can identify that the people or the person that are attending you... is, is a bad person.	• Pointing out relative reactions
CP: Yes.	
AM: But if, if your, mmm... How can I say? If your personality...	
CP: Mmm hmmm.	
AM: Is more, more, eh, simple or you...fff.	
CP: Or a little, maybe you're little... you have low self-esteem.	
AM: Mmm hmm, exactly. Low esteem. That's the point.	
CP: Mmmm. Oh, wow. I never considered that. It hasn't happened to you, right?	• Taking distance from the issue
AM: Eh, no, no. Not for me but I have see this in... in the past...	• Sharing past experiences
CP: Oh, you have seen it?	
AM: Mmm hmmm.	
CP: What happened?	
AM: I remember one time in an, in a... store in US, in New York.	
CP: Uh huh.	
AM: And one person tried to... to go into the... Apple store.	
CP: Mmm hmmm.	
AM: And one attendant say "No, you... you can't go. You can't go in"?	
CP: Get in.	
AM: And say "Why'" "Because you don't have money" And say "But,What? Pff. How do you know that I have not money?" "Because I can see". And I start to fight, I said "Wait, wait. What are... what are you talking about this person here?" I talked with the manager. And, the... the... the person go... get into... into the store and buy an iPhone.	• Getting involved in the issue
CP: Ahh.	
AM: Was very interesting.	• Expressing disbelief
CP: Oh, my god!... Yes. I have actually this in like, eh, mch., old TV and I always say "Oh, this is so exaggerated'.	
AM: Uh huh, exactly.	• Acknowledging the issue

8.7. Annex 7: North America vs. Latin America

20210630 - NORTH AMERICA VS LATIN AMERICA	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: No, my question was because I was thinking if you, if [company] has two associate managers, for example, do you, like, ehh, divide or distribute the tasks? For example, like Mr. AM, because I have noticed that you mention more the regulations and the taxes and things like that. And Mr. CG not so much. So, I was thinking maybe you were more focused in this kind of, ehhh, I don't know, requests? And Mr. CG another type? Or, or I'm wrong. **AM: Officially, we have a division from regions. CG support North America and I support Latin America. The key difference between both con... well, both regions are that, for example, North America has not, ahh, regulatory requirements.** **CP: Ah, OK.** **AM: Ehh, And, and Latin America, ehh...** **CP: Does.** **AM: Does. Because, emmm, the government are implementing electronic invoice and many, many regulations for electronic regulations to, to avoid some... ehh... Well, problems or, how can I say?, mmm, with, with the, when, when the companies try to avoid pay for, for the taxes. Right? But not...** **CP: Mmm hmm. Tax evasion.**	• Acting driven by curiosity • Justifying one's curiosity • Assuming others' practices • Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture
AM: Ta... exactly, tax evasion. And in North America is not, is not common, is not a problem. **CP: Mmm.** **AM: So, that, that, that's the reason. And, we work for the same team but we... we divide in both, ehh, divi... divisions, in both regions. And, each one of us has an special team.** **CP: Ahh, OK, ok. You want to say something, Mr. CG?** **CG: Yes! And I [unintelligible words] what is important to say that the culture, the Latin American culture is very different versus the American culture.** **CP: Mmm.** **CG: Because, believe it or not the, the, the North Americans, let's say USA, Canada, when is five o'clock pm, they disconnect.** **CP: Ooohhh.** **CG: Not matter if there is an emergency, no matter if there is an urgency, they say "OK, I'm done. See you tomorrow!". And, the Latin Americans... (laughs).** **CP: (Laughs).** **CG: Is more the, I won't, I, I don't have permission to leave my, the office...** **CP: Nooo!** **CG: If I don't finish this, this, this, this. Wow.** **CP: Mmm hmm.** **CG: And it's kind of complicated, because they are, they, they use to work six, seven, eight pm.** **CP: Oh my god!** **CG: Right, AM?** **AM: Yes! That's correct.** **CP: So, that means that Mr. AM works until later.** **AM: Yeah. Yes.** **CP: Ahhh.** **AM: Yeah, yeah, no. The operation is, is, different.** **CG: Yes.** **AM: (Stutters) And CG explained the key point. It's the culture. Because not only for, for [company],**	• Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture • Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture • Making assumptions

it's for the rest of the companies. Here, at **Latin America** if you have an issue is because the customer is waiting something, or the transportation company is waiting for, waiting something, so you need to answer quickly. CP: Mmm. AM: Because if you don't, if you wait for one day, the sales are in risk, CP: Mmm. AM: Or... many, many, many problems. And, in North America no, because the, the [company] people are leaving... Well, are stopping to work CP: Mmm. AM: And the rest of the companies, as well. So that's the reason that it's (stutters) complicated. CP: Mmm. OK. OK, I see. I don't know (laughs). AM: Yeah... CP: But, **have you ever thought of switching** (acts out the hypothetical scenario) "Oh, OK, CG. How about we switch this month? You help me with Latin America for one month, and"... CG: We tried, **we tried**, right, AM? AM: Yes, we **tried, but it's complicated** (laughs). CP: OK, OK. CG: Yes, yes. I remember, I (stutters) **I raised the hand**, like two years ago to my boss on that time. CP: Mmm hmm. CG: The "Hey, I want to"... CP: Rotate. CG: "To learn more. **I want to, to take Latin America. Or learn about Latin America**'s process". "Oh! Le't see, let's try" (laughs). CP: Mmm hmm. CG: And at the end. I'm still with North America. CP: But, what you're saying... I had understood, that, I mean, **if they stop working, it's fine because you can stop working, as well, and you go to bed**. CG: (Laughs).	about cultural practices // Generalizing • Suggesting possible solutions to a problem • Justifying one's behavior/status quo • Justifying one's behavior/status quo • Assuming others' realities
CP: No? Or you go home. No? CG: Mmm... Yeah, I mean, it's fine because you (stutters) don't have to worry about new queries, let's say. CP: Mmm hmm. CG: But, you know, **you have to take care of administrative tasks**, to (stutters) plan the projects, to prepare, to, to give some status, but, yes, I mean. At the end, that give yous, that gives you time to, to perform your own activities. CP: Mmm hmm. CG: Without pressure. CP: Yes, yes. That's why, **it would be like a vacation for Mr. AM** if he... (laughs). AM: (Laughs). CP: He can take care of North America for a month. AM: Yes! CP: Maybe (laughs). **I'm not saying that you don't work as hard, Mr. CG. But, you know what I mean**. CG: Yes! No, I understood.	• Justifying one's behavior/status quo • Judging others' realities • Apologizing for my behavior • Justifying one's behavior

8.8. Annex 8: Cali protests

20210504 - CALI PROTEST	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: Good morning, Mr. Aldo. **AM: Hi, Caro. Good morning. Hi, Chris.** **CG: Hi, my friend. Good morning.** **CP: How are you? How was your weekend?** **AM: Was really nice! A little bit complicated here in Colombia, but... (laughs)** **CP: (laughs) In Cali, it's kinda hot!** **AM: Yeah, it is.** **CP: Wow. I don't know... I, I, I want to tell you that, maybe... You're a little unlucky with your trip (laughs).** **AM: (laughs) Yes.** **CP: 'Cause it's not only pandemic, but also political... eh...** **AM: Troubles?** **CP: Problems in Colombia right now.** **AM: Right, right. Yeah, well it's the reform... then the transport manifestation. Yeah (laughs) It is interesting.** **CP: Yeah, yeah. If you didn't know Mr. Christian, we have some protests here in Colombia.**	• Tacitly looking for understanding and trust • Tacitly granting understanding and trust • Explicitly bringing up taboo topics • Involving others in the discussion
CG: Why? **CP: Because the government... Well, you know that everybody has a bad situation because of the pandemic, no?** **CG: Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh** **CP: And the government proposed a tax reform, that basically... eh... I don't know... puts taxes to everything. To everything, food... and everything. So, people are angry.** **CG: Oh, really?** **CP: Yeah.** **AM: Yeah.** **CP: So, we have some protests, we have some... Actually, it's not 'manifestation', it's 'demonstrations'.** **AM: Demonstrations.** **CP: We have some protests and demonstrations going on, ah, all over the country. So, that's why (laughs).** **AM: Yeah.** **CG: So, it's not a good time, then.** **CP: But, but, but you know, you are used to that. Because I heard in Mexico people protest all the time.** **AM: The point is that in Mexico we have special places for that (laughs). Not for all the, the streets.** **CP: Really?** **AM: Yeah, yeah. Normally the, the, the mani... the...** **CP: Demonstrations.** **AM: Demonstrations, occurs into the Mexico City we have an special street called 'Reforma'.** **CP: Ahhh. Don't say that word right now. I hate that word.** **AM: Yeah, yeah. I know (laughs).** **CP: Reforma, reform, I hate it (laughs).** **AM: Well, it's a name of the street. But it's where the people...eh, perform the demonstrations. But, mmm, it's not in every place. That's the point.** **CP: OK, that's a little strange, for me.**	• Explaining/justifying my bringing up taboo topics • Tacitly choosing a position • Explaining taboo topics • Assuming others' characteristics • Explaining cultural particularities// Equating country to culture • Judging others'

AM: Yeah (laughs). **CP: Actually there's a, there's some pa..., <u>some politician proposed.</u>** **AM: Mmm hmm.** **CP: To have like a place, called the, the... (trying to say the word right) protes... 'protestódromo' or something like that.** **AM: (Laughs) Protestódromo (laughs).** **CP: I'm like "OK?" (laughs). <u>I'm going to protest in my house better, no?</u>** **AM: (Nods) That's correct.** **CP: <u>Less inconvenient</u>, right? OK.** **AM: Exactly (laughs).** **CP: (I notice the topic has died) OK, my friends. Did you have time to do homework this weekend?**	realities • Explaining cultural particularities • Tacitly choosing a position • Tacitly choosing a position

SELF-OBSERVATIONAL DATA (ethnography)

WHAT	WHERE	WHEN	WHO	HOW	EFFECTS OF ONLINE INTERACTION	
The interaction in this episode revolves around the political situation in Colombia during the middle of the year 2021, when citizens held major protests	We communicated using the Zoom application, as we always do. I connected from my bedroom in Cartagena and CG joined the	It was the beginning of May and we were starting unit 9 of the textbook, so the first quarter of the level was almost complete. We	CG, AM and I were all present and participating in this interaction, although only AM's and my camera were activated. We represented	I greeted my students as usual, asked them how they were and how their weekend had been. When AM remarked that things were complicated in	This episode wouldn't have happened the way it did if online communication technologies hadn't allowed it. The fact that AM was able to travel abroad	
across the country to show disapproval with the recent decisions made by Ivan Duque's government. Big cities such as Bogotá, Medellín and, mainly Cali, where AM was staying at the time of the conversation, were experiencing demonstrations and often violent riots that involved civilians and the police. AM is a Mexican citizen, born and raised in this country, whose wife has Colombian	class from his home in Mexico and his camera was deactivated. However, this time AM's location wasn't his home in Mexico. He was in Cali, traveling with his family. He seemed to be located in a living room, judging by the object surrounding them shown by his camera frame. These were a window covered by drawn curtains, a TV, a picture on a wall, and a	met at 7 am and had this interaction on a Tuesday (first class of the week), as soon as the class started, while I greeted the students as I do every single class. On the other hand, the protests in Colombia had started a few months prior, but were still very strong when we talked about them in class.	different points of view from which to understand the political situation Colombia was going through then. CG wasn't even aware of what was happening, so his point of view was the one of somebody who is completely foreign to the situation and what led to it happening. His only knowledge of the issue came through AM's and my explanations. AM played the role of a	Colombia, I immediately understood he was referring to the protests in Cali, which were the most important thing going on in My country at that moment. So, I answered back, implicitly seconding his assessment of the situation. Then, the next thing I said was to try and sympathize with him, letting him know that I understood how the political unrest Colombians	and still attend his EFL lessons was thanks to these tools we have nowadays. Also, most of the information I had from the events that occurred and goals of this movement came from online sources, such as newspaper websites, as well as posts, comments, videos, pictures, and memes I saw that were related to the protests came from YouTube or SNS that others let me	

relatives. Then, the motivation of his trip, which wasn't his first time in the country, was to visit these relatives with his family.	table. Also, he seemed to be sitting in a chair from a dining set.		foreigner who is linked to Colombia, though not really when politics are concerned. He was experiencing the manifestation very close to him, geographically speaking, considering that Cali was one of the epicentres of the social movement, but not really ideologically. Lastly, I was experiencing the protests from up close. I didn't attend	were going through was a burden or an obstacle for him and his travel expectations. Also, I clarified what I meant to say by explicitly naming the aspects I thought hinder the enjoyment of his trip. Then I noticed that AM and I had been talking freely about a topic which CG was probably not up-to-date with, since he had kept quiet until then. So, I decided to let him in the loop	see (I no longer own accounts on these sites). I think that if I had detected a little more interest in the students, I could have suggested we look up information and videos so that they (especially CG) could have seen what things were like during protests (abuse of power, police brutality). And I think I really need students' buy-in to get into the issue without the fear or	
			any of the protests that happened in my city, but I identified with the causes the demonstrators were fighting for. Therefore, the closeness to the situation was different for each one of us, both geography and ideology wise.	by briefly explaining what AM and I were discussing. He showed due interest and asked us why. Both my explanation and my answer to his question were rather short and superficial, but they seemed to satisfy CG's curiosity, as he made a short comment summarizing what he had understood and said nothing else. Later, the conversation focused on explaining how	inhibition I would feel if I addressed these topics at my own will (see the 'KIND OF EPISODE IT WAS' section to understand the reasons why).	

				protests take place in AM and CG's country, Mexico, and comparing their practices to Colombian practices. I wasn't able to keep my opinion to myself and remarked how odd Mexican practices seemed to me, while linking them to an idea proposed by the famous Colombian politician Diego Molano[1] in reaction to the discomfort of some privileged		

[1] EL PROTESTODROMO

				sectors of Colombian society regarding the prolonged duration of the protests across the country. He basically proposed that protests ought to be restricted to particular limited spaces in order to minimize their negative impacts on everyday life. I tried to imply with a sarcastic response, tone of voice and facial gestures that I considered this a ridiculous idea, but AM's		

				reaction didn't seem to express agreement or even understanding. So, I just left the topic behind and moved with the class.		
SELF-REFLECTIVE DATA (autoethnography)						
KIND OF EPISODE IT WAS	**HOW I BEHAVED AND WHY**	**KIND OF CULTURED SELF PRESENTED**	**WHY**	**FEELINGS DURING INTERACTION**	**FEELINGS AFTER INTERACTION**	
This episode was a rare one, as politics is one of the subjects I tend to avoid addressing in class, for different reasons. First of all, the school I	My behavior here oscillated between carefree, careful, and somewhere in the middle, as well. First, when AM brought up politics I	In the beginning I acted a little apologetic, almost ashamed at the way the problems of my country were affecting AM's leisure trip,	The topic of the protests was very alive when AM traveled to Colombia and it made me feel a little apologetic towards him because due to these events,	In the beginning, when AM brought up the topic, I felt encouraged and confident to talk about it, even if that's not what I'd normally do in	Since the interaction took place, I can't help but think that the way I explained the situation and how I felt about it was too superficial and vague, and	
work for discourages teachers from talking about controversial topics such as politics, religion, and so on. Second, I do not feel comfortable debating complex topics orally, especially when the situation demands I choose and support a particular position. This episode is a proof of that, seeing how my understanding of the social issues in Colombia	agreed to discuss it with him (carefree) but I was very cautious to test the waters first, and double check that he really wanted to talk about the topic by using implicatures (careful). Once I was sure, I openly named and addressed the issue, even explaining it to CG who was rather clueless about what AM and I were discussing (carefree). Lastly, I expressed disagreement	which is both surprising and expected. I tend to be rather judgemental when I hear fellow Colombians referring to protests, demonstrations and other types of democratic instruments citizens employ to express our disappointment with social injustices, as if they were nothing but a burden or an annoyance to the normal flow of life. When I converse with a person who is	and the COVID-19 pandemic, he hadn't been able to enjoy his trip the way he and his family had anticipated. Nonetheless, I didn't show willingness to accept his ideas about protests in Mexico, considering how I was quick to point out that I found them weird and gave examples of similar ideas I do not support. I am not sure, however, whether AM was able to	my EFL classes. Then, when I identified the need to contextualize CG on what AM and I were discussing, I felt a little insecure and afraid I wouldn't convey the seriousness of the issue accurately. I tried to justify it by relating it to the poor state everyone was already in, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which would have been terribly worsened by	didn't really help them understand how it all came to be and how complex it is. It sounded like yet another protest because "people don't want to pay taxes". Similarly, when AM said that in his city demonstrations are constrained to that one avenue, apart from showing how shocked I was, I believe I wasn't able to show the extent to which and just why I disagree with	

others to agree and/or reconsider their own positions.		this case, since my interlocutor is a foreigner, I feel pity and shame for how my country's problems affect them and what kind of image they might form of Colombia. Even though my opinions about the issues don't change, my shown attitude does adapt to the interlocutor's characteristics.				

8.9. Annex 9: Redundancies

20210714 - REDUNDANCIES

Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction

RESEARCH QUESTION:
- How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:
- To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self.
- To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self.
- To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.

TRANSCRIPTION (25min)

CP: Do you understand 'layoffs'? AM: No. CP: Ehh... Well, layoff... To lay somebody off is to fire them. AM: OK... CP: It's to... A layoff is a person getting fired. AM: OK... CP: It's kinda like the... the noun. AM: Mmm hmm. CP: And, in the United States it's called a layoff, and in England, redundancies. AM: Ahhh... OK, OK. CP: I don't like this word (laughs). AM: (Laughs) No. CP: I think it's insulting, I don't know. Like, if you say "Oh, there were redundancies"; the people are redundant, so people are unnecessary?... Not important? I don't like that word! AM: It's like when you say *redoondant*, rehh... CP: Redundant, yes.	• Making assumptions about cultural practices // Generalizing • Challenging foreign standards
AM: Redundant. CP: Exactly. Like, when you say "well, that is redundant", it's like "you already said that. You didn't need to say that twice"... AM: Mmm hmm. CP: That, I understand, if somebody is redundant, somebody is not necessary. No? AM: Right. CP: And, I don't like that. AM: (Laughs). CP: (Laughs) I think that's insulting. AM: Yeah. CP: (Laughs) I mean, if they were firing me and they said "at the moment, the budget is really ehh... So, we have to... We don't want to, but we have to", OK. But, "you are redundant right now". Mmm... AM: Your position is redundant. CP: Yeah, your position is redundant. So... AM: OK. CP: I think that's insulting, but, I mean... It's not my culture. It's not my language either (laughs) AM: I don't like, as well.	• Interpreting implicatures in euphemistic expressions • Imagining alternative realities • Making alternative interpretations • Showing detachment from particular cultural views • Openly expressing agreement

SELF-OBSERVATIONAL DATA (ethnography)

WHAT	WHERE	WHEN	WHO	HOW	EFFECTS OF ONLINE INTERACTION	
The topic of	Our discussion	Taking place in	Only AM and I	The	I have been	

our class here was setting proper goals and objectives when planning business projects. We had just completed a textbook exercise where a project was outlined in three statements, which AM was supposed to classify into goal, objective and reason. There were two examples, and the last one included the word 'layoffs'. Also, there was a small tip box below it that	took place through the Zoom online platform while both AM and I were located in our respective residences in Mexico city and Cartagena. I showed my usual white wall as a background while AM showed that one corner of his bedroom next to the big window that allows us to see the city landscape. Apart from the view, I can also see his bed and a night stand with some	the middle of July, this was our second class of the week (Wednesday) and we were developing unit 32 out of 40, just starting the last third of the level. We had been focusing on the content of the textbook for about 25 minutes, when we completed the first exercise of the unit and our CCE occured.	participated in this CCE, as CG was absent this time. Additionally, there was no mention of any other people in particular, because the interaction was focused more on my interpretations, opinions and imaginary situations I could be involved in; nothing or no one real was addressed in our discussion, actually.	conversation happened quite naturally, and because I perceived my rapport with AM to be good enough for me to share these feelings with him. I shall not forget that this was not the first time this idea about the word 'redundancy' had come to my mind during this exercise, but I don't recall saying what I thought to anyone, let alone to my EFL students. Anyway, I did it	thinking lately that interaction with people located in other cities or countries might influence my behavior, because I know that the probability of me running into any of my EFL students outside of our online classroom are relatively low. So, I feel like the social consequences I would face if I were to make any kind of mistake would be lesser compared to what would	

stated that the word 'layoff' was used in the USA, while its equivalent in the UK was 'redundancy'. Considering layoff is, in my opinion, a word English learners don't usually see very often, I assumed that AM was likely not acquainted with its meaning. Thus, I proceeded to ask him if he knew what it meant, to which he responded with a 'no'. I explained it by using a	objects on it which I can tell what they are.			and it was straight to the point. The fact that I was in some way challenging the contents of the textbook (and, by extension the decisions of the school's higher-ups) or that I was criticizing the language choices of the 'inventors/creators' of the language didn't seem to have enough influence to make me think twice about what I was going to say. In the beginning, AM seemed to	happen if I could run into my students while out and about, or in other social circles I take part in. This used to happen when I was teaching face-to-face in Cartagena. It used to be so awkward meeting learners outside school that I didn't even know what language to speak with them. This feels almost ironic, since I used to behave in a very outgoing manner in my	

synonym I consider is more frequently used among learners, 'fired', and immediately after, I addressed the vocabulary tip presented in the small box below the exercise in the textbook. As I did this, I felt the urge to share an idea that although I had thought of it before, while developing the same exercise with other students, I had never brought myself to share				have been a little surprised by my remarks and he even tried to soften up my disapproval of the expression, but he ultimately agreed with me.	face-to-face EFL lessons. I still keep in mind the repercussions my behavior can have for my job stability if I ever do something deemed improper, but the social pressure, I believe, is a lot less heavy on my shoulders. Even students may feel the same way, regardless of whether they're aware of this or not.	

with anyone else (as far as I can recall). I told AM that I didn't like the expression 'redundancy' used as an euphemism for 'firing' and that I found it insulting because, to me, it implied that the person whose contract is getting terminated is unnecessary and unimportant for whoever they had been working for. I told AM that if I were ever told something like that while						

getting fired, I'd feel insulted. I believe he tried to lighten the negative load of this expression by redirecting my interpretation of it from 'a person is redundant' to 'a position is redundant'; trying to make it more business less personal. I agreed with his interpretation, but I didn't change my mind on the matter, so he just politely agreed with me after I expressed						

some resignation or impotence by saying 'not my culture, not my language', as if my opinion were worthless or could change nothing. And that was the end of it.						
SELF-REFLECTIVE DATA (autoethnography)						
KIND OF EPISODE IT WAS	**HOW I BEHAVED AND WHY**	**KIND OF CULTURED SELF PRESENTED**	**WHY**	**FEELINGS DURING INTERACTION**	**FEELINGS AFTER INTERACTION**	
This episode was relatively short, and triggered by one of my usual practices, which is challenging the content of the	In this episode, I did something I tend to do from time to time, when I feel comfortable enough with my students:	My cultured self here, I believe, had two main features. First, I made sure to express my disagreement with the use of	I think the negative feelings I get thinking about the connotations of the word 'redundancy' and what I	During the interaction I felt comfortable enough to share my personal opinion with AM, but also, I	In hindsight, I feel like my response made me look like I was bitter or that I was carrying some resentment, as if I had ever	

textbook. This usually implies challenging the choices made by the school's decision-makers. However, this time I interpret that my criticism goes to those imagined powerful business people who have created this euphemistic lexicum around business practices and ideals, and -at least to some extent- the 'inventors' of the English language (as I often refer to	challenge the ideas about language proposed in the textbook. My 'comfort' does not only refer to rapport, but also to language proficiency, because I suppose I need to be sure my comments will be understood when I make them in English, and that I will not have the need to explain my point more than I would like to. In this particular case, I'm challenging the suggestion	the euphemism 'redundancy' as a less direct way to tell someone they're fired. I'm inclined to see this as a manifestation of my criticality, which I seem to feel free to share without any previous perceived 'encouragement' from my students. I wasn't afraid to challenge the ideas of the 'inventors' of English, or whoever was responsible for what I was challenging.	would think if I was ever said it as my contract was being terminated led me to generalize my despise for the whole set of imaginary people who had anything to do with the creation and implementation of it, as well as all the culture that laid the foundations on which this expression raises. Thus, I understand why I emphasized disassociation	think I felt the need to get him to agree with me. I felt my claim was fair and so I wanted to explain my point the best way possible as to make AM realize if he hadn't before, or change his mind if he differed with my views. He made a slightly contesting remark but not even that had me go back on what I had said. It could be said that my efforts paid off, because I was able to get him to verbally	been told this word as I was getting fired. This has definitely not been the case, but I must admit that I do have a special kind of disdain for what I see as a neo-managerial strategy implemented in businesses through human resources departments. This strategy where (usually exploitative) realities are renamed instead of being improved or changed altogether. The	

them), the British. Also, it's the first time that I express such a detachment from the English language, as if I had no right to question it in any way, due to my not being a native British English speaker. On other occasions, I take a similar stance regarding this language anytime students ask me why some aspects of it are the way they are. For	of the word 'redundancy' as a synonym, or rather euphemism for 'firing' or 'dismissal'. My discontent with this expression comes from the connotations or implicatures I interpret are attached to the word. I complain about the value that a company would implicitly give to an employee if they (or their position, as AM suggested) was referred to as a 'redundancy', which implies being unnecessary	Also, I could read that my statement criticized the neo-capitalist practices, too; in particular its euphemistic lexicum, which only tries to avoid or hide latent tensions instead of actually dealing with them. On the other hand, with my closing comment I explicitly take distance from the language, but implicitly, I distance myself from all accountability that might be linked to the existence and	with it all. I could also interpret that my own frustration and impotence regarding my self-imposed insignificance as a lowly non-native English speaker who lacks the power to have even the smallest change in this language might have also made me a little bitter.	express agreement with my notion. Nonetheless, achieving this goal didn't turn out to be as gratifying as I had been expecting, neither were the comments I made while trying to disassociate myself from the culture responsible for giving shape to the English language and the language itself. I draw this conclusion based on how quickly I ended the conversation,	school I work for, for instance, refers to teachers as 'instructors', especially in legal documents. However, I've noticed that recently, they've started calling employees 'collaborators'. So, there's been a change in the jargon but our working conditions (salaries, working hours, constant surveillance) or the low trust they grant us in terms of autonomy to	

example, they ask me why it's considered incorrect to say "I will can" or something like that, I always answer that I didn't invent English, so it's not my place to say why English evolved that way (this is a fictitious example, because I cannot recall a real example, though I say this all the time). Nonetheless, I do not think ever before did I make myself so insignificant in regards to	and almost a nuisance to the company. Of course, this is all my perception, and I know very well that it is not only subjective, but also irrelevant, considering I'm not even a member of the culture which uses and invented this expression, but the English language as a whole. This is what I communicate right before we end this interaction and move on with the class.	use of this expression. In some way, I dare say, it's like I disown English and the culture that brought it to life.		which I presume I could have been lengthened a little more, considering I already had AM's explicit agreement.	make pedagogical decisions hasn't changed. And, as pathetic and sad as that may be, some resentment and mistrust live within me. It seems to be the aspect I feel more strongly about, considering I disregarded any factor or concern that would have made me think twice before or after sharing my personal opinions with students.	
my second language, which makes for a very important part of my identity as a teacher, as a master student, as a bilingual person.						

PERSONAL MEMORY DATA (autobiography)

This CCE came to my mind today after I finished my EFL classes, as I wondered about one of the ideas proposed by a particular textbook I'm supposed to follow for advanced levels. The vocabulary section contained the verb 'to flat-line', meaning when something doesn't improve but doesn't worsen either. Once I explained its meaning to the students, I said "in English, anything can be a verb", and that was the end of it. After class, though, I thought about how as a non-native speaker, I am so preoccupied with trying to learn as much vocabulary as we can, and with using it 'correctly'. But, do I ever stop to think about who came up with these words and expressions? It may have been regular people, just like me. And, how come they can create new elements of the language and I feel like I cannot? Why do I feel like whatever 'alternative' or 'out-of-the-norm' use of the language I come up with is a mistake and not an innovation? I think this is exactly the feeling I was expressing when I said "it's not my culture, it's not my language either" in this CCE. This particular reflection is making me think that I see myself as a foreigner to the English language, and that my only duty as a teacher is to spread what others' created, but I have no right to comment on it, or power to influence it whatsoever. I want to come as close as I can to it, not necessarily to resemble a native speaker, but to understand them, so that I can then transmit that to other non-native speakers like myself. I accept that, I guess, but my reaction in this CCE may be a hint of my resentment or my desire to be more than what I feel I am allowed to be, or do more than what I feel I'm allowed to do.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONNECTIONS

This suppressed sentiment, that I didn't even know I had before I engaged in this reflection, could be related to ***social capital*** and power-loaded relationships, not between my students and me, but between native and non-native speakers; or between neo-capitalist corporations and rank-and-file employees. Basically, there's a latent tension between me and those I imagine are above me, whose ideas are more valuable than mine, or who have the right to make decisions about aspects that not only affect them, but also me. My feelings show that there are inner tensions affecting human associations, and that in one way or another we all crave for social capital, especially when our involvement with the association becomes of high importance to us as individuals. Siisiäinen (2003) says that "there are conflicts between those associations that are functional in creating and supporting social consensus, and those associations and movements that are critical of the dominant political values (and of the values represented by [some communities]) (conflicts between different parts of civil society)". This idea relates to the tensions between people with power within the group of English speakers. Also, Siisiäinen (2003) tells us that "problems of oligarchy (Michels) and bureaucratization (Weber) are still among the most serious obstacles to the development of democratic voluntary organizations and civil society (2003; p. 7)". This refers to people with power within New Capitalism.

8.10. Annex 10: Corporate culture

20210617 - CORPORATE CULTURE	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: So, you need to tell me the basics, OK? **AM: Mmm hmm.** **CP: The basic things about how to communicate, maybe not only with customers, but with the rest of the team, or I don't know. Some basic rules to make my, my, my performance in the company as good as possible. OK?** **AM: OK.** **CP: So, what important things do you think I should do, or I ought to do, I must, I must not, I don't have to, or something like that. What do you say?** **AM: You ought to...** **CG: Mmmm...** **AM: Has...** **CP: But, can I say something? Can I say something?** **AM: Sure.** **CP: Not to make it like, just like sentences, kinda like, make it more natural, you could say "Well. OK, Carolina so, the first thing you should know is to, you must la la la". Something like that, no?** **AM: Mmm hmm, OK.**	
CP: So, what do you say? **AM: Try first, CG.** **CG: First of... Yes, first of all, you have to... to... CP, first of all, you have to <u>ensure that you won't unrespect anybody</u>, like...** **CP: Uh huh.** **CG: You have to <u>avoid unnecessary comments, like *rahcims*</u>. Is correct?** **CP: <u>Racism. Or racist comments</u>.** **CG: Ehhh, you have to avoid.. Race.. Eh, racist comments. Also, <u>avoid the jokes with the male and female</u>.** **CP: Mmm hmm. <u>Sexist</u> jokes.** **CG: <u>We don't want to have issues</u>... Sexist! Yes. Ehh... For sure, as a recommendation, if you want to have a meeting with a new partner, take a look in the intranet and validate what is the, her or his role.** **CP: Mmm hmm.** **CG: So, you can have an idea what kind of topics you will see, you will discuss. And what kind of communication you have to, to be prepared.** **CP: Ohh, OK, OK. Yes.** **CG: Aside that, I guess the, the last, the last recommendation is... ehh... <u>be CP</u>. That's it.** **CP: (Laughs) Be yourself. (Silence) Right?** **AM: (Laughs) Yeah!** **CG: Yes, be yourself.** **CP: OK. Yes, yes. I think there's a slight delay with Mr. CG's communication.** **AM: Mmm hmm. Uh huh, yes.** **(Silence)** **CG: Really?** **CP: Yes (laughs). It's like, uh, two seconds or something; but it's OK. OK, that's very good Mr. CG.** **CG: (Low, in the background) Oh, my God!** **[...]**	• Adopting political correctness standards. • Openly naming///addressing taboo topics. • Trying to soften///offset the imposition of standards.

CP: That was very good, Mr. AM. I must say, my friends... AM: OK... CP That every time that I do something similar to this, I never hear anything like "Oh, you should respect everybody". Mmm, mmm, mmm. Never (laughs). People always say like "Oh, you must be on time. You must wear the uniform. You must not drink in the office", or something like that. But, about respect, it's the first time that somebody mentions that. So, it's very good. I like this company culture that you said that you have in [company]. AM: Yes! It's very nice. CP: Sounds very good. CG: It's part... It's part of the... mm.. ff... main... Mmm, how can I say? AM: Values? CG: Values for [company] Manage... CP: Mmm hmm. Values or principles. CG: "Manage with respect". CP: Mmm "Manage with respect". Is that what you said? CG: Yeah! AM: It's Ma... "Managing with respect". CG: "Managing with respect". CP: "Managing with respect". Ohhh! OK. That sounds very good. And, I mean, was the... Was it always like this, or did you have like a, a process of, of change during your period in [company]? Did you experience this change or it was there when you arrived? Mmm? AM: It is part of the, of the, ehhhh... Well, you should... We have a certification about this. CP: Mmm. Yes, yes. But, I know, I know. The thing is that, I think it's... it's obvious that, maybe in the past companies didn't really worry about this so much. No? AM: Mmm hmm. CP: I know that this is a process that, that has been happening... AM: Yeah! CP: In the past decades. No? So, I was thinking if you experienced the moment when [company] was	• Referring///comparing to previous experiences • Taking a position in regards to political correctness. • Encouraging students to share more by asking further questions • Justifying my persistence • Rephrasing and
going through this transformation, or, when you... entered the company or joined the company it was already there. That was my question. AM: It (stutters) It's a complete process, and the process start when we, when you attend the interview, for example. CP: Ahhh. OK. AM: And, during your first call, your first contact, the Human Resource, ehhh... executive explain these values, explain the culture, explain everything. And, during the interviews it is part of the process. We perform some questions related with this. CP: Mmm... AM: And, during the first day, it is part of the, of the intro... the... CP: Uh huh, like the introduction. Yeah. AM: Yeah! The introduction. It's part of the onboarding process. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: Yes. It is a complete change. And it's part of... It is a... like a progress. Yeah. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: You start, you realize you start applying this, this process. At the end, you... you are complete... If you, for exam... If... For example, if you don't understand or you can't follow this culture, you are... you, you, you have not place in [company]. CP: There's no, there's... Uh huh, there's no place for you in [company]. AM: Yes. CP: Wow, wow. You want to say something, Mr. CG? CG: Yes, Can you hear me now... CP: Yes! CG: On real time? CP: Yes, real time. AM: I say one and your say... CG: Two. AM & CP: **Yes! (both laugh simultaneously). Perfect!**	insisting on my question • Giving up to student's reply despite them not satisfying my curiosity

CP: What would you like to say? **CG: Ehh. I mean on (stutters) on my experience, when I arrived to [company], the culture was already there...** **CP: Uh huh.** **CG: But, also, I have, I have seen a transformation in this culture. I mean, Human Resources, every single year are improving the culture...** **CP: Mmm...** **CG: So, I guess is a continuous improvement process, and, yes! That has been part of my... of, of my experience on [company] since I started.** **CP: And, maybe this question, <u>I need to be honest, is interesting for me because, you know I'm doing a thesis</u> (laughs).** **AM: (laughs) Yeah.** **CP: With you, my friends. But, I would like to know, <u>has this affected your, your... The way that you act or that you think outside of [company]</u>, as well? Yes?** **AM: Yeah! Absolutely.** **CG: Yes.** **CP: Yeah.** **AM: You, you should have a balance in your... Well, it is another, another important point for [company]. You, you should have a balance between your, ehh... your job and your job and your life.** **CP: Uh huh.** **AM: So, yeah. At the be... At the end, you... you act, act the same...** **CP: Yeah.** **AM: Working and living, in your family, and your personal activities; your personal projects, as well.** **CP: Yes.** **AM: It's very nice.** **CP: I like it, I like it. I mean, maybe sometimes, I don't know, <u>it takes somebody to tell you "this is, this is, maybe the best thing to do", for you to realize "OK, maybe", yeah?</u>. Maybe it's always been there but you haven't noticed. When somebody says "look at this", maybe you, you realize and... <u>I don't</u>**	• Justifying my persistence • Encouraging students to share more by asking further questions • Reflecting about the nature of ideological change
<u>know. I don't know what I'm trying to say</u>, but I think that... Even if you already graduated from university and you're working, I still think that <u>your workplace is a place for learning</u>, no? **AM: Mmm hmm. Absolutely.** **CP: So, <u>I think it's good that the workplace is also, ehh, I don't know, encouraging this type of relationship with the coworkers</u>, and like...** **AM: Yeah! And, actually, the, the people that work, uhh, to us, for example intern** **CP: Mmm hmm...** **AM: Or consultant that [company] contract, ehh...** **CP: Mmm hmm...** **AM: <u>Immediately they identify this culture and say "Wow! This is amazing!</u> I never, eh, experienced, exper... this, ex"...** **CP: Mmm hmm...** **AM: Experiment, or...?** **CP: Experienced.** **AM: "Experienced this in my life".** **CP: Mmm hmm... Yes, yes.** **AM: And, yes, it's very, very nice.** **CP: OK.** **AM: Everybody say "I want to work at [company]" (laughs).** **CP: (Laughs). OK, sure, sure. Yes.** **AM: Yeah, it's very... And, for example, for the interns, ehh...** **CP: Mmm hmm...** **AM: They start their, ehh, their careers here at [company], and sometimes [company] contract these people.** **CP: Ahhh...** **AM: And we have a lot of the, of, ehhh... Cases when was the... was an intern, was contract by [company], and was the only job in all their, their life.** **CP: Really? Oh, my God!**	• Doubting my own ideas • Taking a position in regards to political correctness • Referring to others' experience

AM: Yes, yes, yes. **CP: Yes, yes, yes.** **AM: It's amazing!** **CP: I have never met a person who has worked in one place all their lives.** **AM: Mmm hmm.** **CP: I would like to, to, to see what, what that is like.** **AM: It's pretty common here in, at [company].** **CP: OK, <u>that means that [company] is a good place for working</u>. Yes, definitely.** **AM: Yeah, it is.**	• Taking a position in regards to political correctness

PERSONAL MEMORY DATA (autobiography)

Considering there's a possibility that my behavior may have been motivated by envy and an understanding of the standards of political correctness as the bare minimum I aspire to be surrounded by at work and at home, has made me think of a recent situation that has left me deeply disappointed in myself, for not being able to make my case soundly enough to make some of the people in my family see the consequences of these harmful comments they constantly make (despite how much I tried).

This is a very private story, but a distant relative, with whom everyone in my family had always been very close to us all growing up. This person's sexual orientation was always assumed to be non-heteronormative, although this person never addressed their privacy with anyone from my closest familial circle (at least no to my understanding). Sadly, this person recently passed away from a disease whose diagnosis used to be -and seems to still be- accompanied by prejudice and discrimination. Due to the pandemic, this person and their direct family had been distant from the rest of the extended family. This had been the case for all nuclear households, so unfortunately, almost no one knew when this person was diagnosed and not even when the symptoms started undermining their health, until it was already too late for any of us to do anything to help.

Here's where my shame is rooted. I do not discard the possibility that this person chose not to share this news outside their household motivated by other reasons; but I can't get out of my mind the idea that this person could have felt that disclosing the diagnosis would have meant disclosing their sexual orientation and this would not have been well accepted by many of the members of the family. This is not something that I can confirm, because unfortunately this person passed away, but it's just that every time I imagine what this person could have felt at the moment of the diagnosis, and while their health slowly deteriorated, that their biggest worry was the possible rejection or judgement of their own family, and that this could have been the reason this person not only kept it a secret, but also refused to be taken to a hospital where they would have received the necessary treatment to help them live an active live just makes me feel sad, disappointed and ashamed of the environment I grew up in.

8.11. Annex 11: Company values

20210713 - COMPANY VALUES	
Negotiating my cultured self as a result of an autoethnography around online EFL cross-cultural interaction	
RESEARCH QUESTION: • How is my cultured self re-negotiated as a result of an autoethnographic reflection around online EFL cross-cultural interaction? **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:** • To identify the influence of the online EFL cross-cultural setting on my cultured self. • To describe the impact of the online cross-cultural interaction in the processes of re-negotiation of my cultured self. • To interpret the effects of the autoethnographic reflection on the processes of re-negotiation of my inner cultured self.	
TRANSCRIPTION	
CP: OK, OK, And I wonder, since (stutters) when you start working at [company] **it's so different from other companies**; I imagine there is a lot of asking "Why?", no? No. So: "In [company] you need to do this" "Ahh. Why?". AM: Yeah. CP: Yes? (laughs). CG: Yes. CP: **Do you have to explain?** "Ah, because this is what is..." I mean, **what kind of explanation do you need to do?** It's just "because" or do you say "No, it's important", for example, ehh... Maybe something, ehh, not too technical. But, for example, talking about the company culture, the corporate culture, like "Oh, we need to respect each other. We need to do this and that. So, you can't, for example, you can't make this type of comments". No? I don't know. And then (stutters) **people say "Why? It's nothing. I'm joking**. I'm (stutters) not trying to offend anybody". But, maybe the other, you need to explain "Well, because (mumbles)..." I don't know. Does this, has this happened to you? AM: Yes. CP: Yes?	• Explaining cultural particularities • Guiding the discussion • Asking further information • Assuming others' behaviors

AM: It is part of the training that we explained before, but, yes. It (stutters) is part of this. We should to talk with them. Say "hey"... CP: Mmm hmm. AM: "You can't" Ehmm "talk about these topics. You should, ehmm..." For example **"this kind of jokes"** CP: Mmm hmm. AM: "Are not (shakes his head side to side) are not availa... or are not fff...". CG: Allowed. AM: Allowed. Thank you, [CG]. CP: Mmm hmm. AM: "Are not allowed here...". Yeah, yeah. **This kind of, of situations**. And, they're, they're part of the process. For example, when we attend like a... mmm.. informal meetings... CP: Uh huh. AM: We should explain this before starting the meeting (laughs). CP: Ahhh... Like when the person is... AM: We have like, like a happy hour. CP: Uh huh. A happy hour? AM: Yes. CP: OK. And you like... "OK, so we're going to have a meeting, but... **We still need to respect each other**...". AM: Exactly. CP: **We cannot be joking about these things**...". Ahhh... AM: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. CP: I don't know. Just the last question. **Excuse me, this is interesting for me**. AM: OK. CP: Ehhh... Do you remember a particular experience that you were saying to, to a person "this is not what you should do. Because [company] is different. But, maybe it was difficult to, to, to make this person understand? Or... people adapt very easily. I mean, after you explain they adapt more or less easily or maybe some people are more difficult to adapt?... What do you think?	• Openly naming taboo topics • Tacitly naming taboo topic • Assuming others' behavior • Assuming others' behavior

AM: Mmm. What do you think, [CG]? CG: Depends on their personality, [CP]. CP: Mmm hmm. CG Probably, <u>the person it's already</u>... how can I say?... It's (stutters) the <u>essential of that person</u>... CP: Mmmmm. CG: To, to be, probably... CP: (laughs) CG: No... CP: Uh huh. CG: You know what? <u>I (stutters) like to do jokes</u>. Everyday, everyday, everyday. But, you have to, to, <u>you have to think what kind of joke</u>... CP: Sure. CG: Probably, we say "remember, <u>here in the team we have womans, we have mens... So you, you have (stutters) you have to think about that</u>, right? (laughs). CP: Yes, yes, yes. No, because, I'm thinking, well, maybe this is an exaggeration, but... When , for example, <u>my grandfather is making jokes</u>... CG: (Calls my name) [CP]? CP: Yes? Hello? CG: I need to leave. Sorry. CP: Ah, you need to leave. Ah, yes. CG: Yes. CP: No problem, Mr. [CG]. Go ahead. CG: Thank you. See you tomorrow. AM: Thank you, [CG]. CP: OK, bye bye. CG: Thank you, my friend. AM: See you soon. (AM & CP start speaking simultaneously).	• Tacitly naming problematic behavior • Tacitly naming taboo topics • Exemplifying

AM: Yeah I, I think, I think... /// CP: So, Mr. AM, I was saying... AM: Uh huh. /// CP: Yes. Go ahead, please. No, no. AM: No, just building about the same comment. It is different. Any people is different and obviously <u>the idea is not suppress the people</u>. CP: Sure, yeah. AM: So, the idea is only express these, "these are the important points that we have here. Eh, managing with respect is basically here. <u>The idea is that you be yourself</u>". CP: Mmmm hmmm. AM: But you should adapt to with this kind of, with this culture. CP: Mmmm hmmm. AM: To be honest with you I remember one case, the one people that never adapt with the [company] culture. CP: Mmmm hmmm. AM: So, And we talk with the people, we express the situation. They certificate beca.., well.. I remember that there was a people that express the points that you need to express, but was not like ah... natural. Was something like... CP: Mmmm hmmm. OK, it was like... They were pretending. AM: Exactly, pretending. So, at the end <u>it was complicated for these people</u>, because the <u>rest of the company are working with the same culture</u>. So, I remember I talked with [CG] or I asked to [CG] because was a resource that report to him. And, I think he worked at [company] by three years, at the end he decide to live and get another opportunity out of [company]. But this is the situation, for example in my case, I have been wor|king at [company] by eight years and I have received a lot of proposal to work out of [company]. Sometimes, obviously, I analize the proposals. Eh, I remember in 2016, I attend a process, I worked in a process. At the end I declined the offer. Because <u>we don't only want money</u>. We check for other benefits. But, when you are listening at the out of the market it's because you're not comfortable, right? So, That's the situation. He received this opportunity, he decide to took this opportunity and he got out, get out from the company. But, from my point of view, <u>the main reason is that he never adapt to the [company]</u>	• Clarifying potential problematic behavior • Expecting assimilation • Expecting assimilation • Justifying decisions

culture. **CP: OK, ok, yes, yes. Ok, I understand. I suppose, because, I mean, not everybody... It's impossible that everybody agrees 100% with the values of the company.** **AM: Right.** **CP: But, I suppose that, well, people try to adapt but sometimes pretending it's not enough.** **AM: Exactly.** **CP: And they are not comfortable enough, and, well. It's a situation, no?** **AM: I think that it is a balance, right?** **CP: Uh huh.** **AM: Because, for example for me is.. some... uh... For example, sometimes, some points are not exactly in the same way that I think. But, I can adapt with this situation and say 'ok, it's not problem with me'. Other, other. For example for other case some points are not agree, but I don't fight about these situations, I only adapt and keep working.** **CP: Ok, ok. I understand what you're saying.**	• Acknowledging obstacles • Passively accepting corporate values

8.12. Annex 12: Interview with Fusi

Gigi: Como te decía, yo estoy haciendo mi proyecto de maestría y pues se trata de… es una autoetnografía, en la que yo estudio cómo es mi desempeño y mis relaciones con mis estudiantes. Considerando que, pues estamos… interactuamos básicamente en línea, ¿no? es la única opción que tenemos. Y además que pues cada quien tiene sus experiencias culturales diferentes, ¿no? Ustedes y yo somos muy diferentes hablando... Somos diferentes y parecidos al mismo tiempo. Hablando de la cultura, ¿no? Sí. Entonces, con respecto a eso, yo quería hacerte unas preguntas.

Fusi: De acuerdo

Gigi: Bien. OK. Listo. Entonces voy a empezar. Te preguntaba. Entonces. ¿Sigues trabajando desde casa o ya volviste a la presencialidad?

Fusi: Ahora estamos en un modelo híbrido en el cual vamos cinco veces por mes a la oficina y el resto del tiempo es desde casa. Pues el promedio es una vez a la semana y el resto desde casa.

Gigi: Ah, OK, OK. Ya veo. Sí, ya, ya. Y ¿qué tal? ¿Cómo te va con eso? ¿Ya has ido?

Fusi: Sí, ya van tres semanas. Esta fue la tercera semana, la verdad. Muy bien. Es un cambio drástico. La realidad es esa, en comparación a como estábamos acostumbrados a trabajar... La verdad, me parece que somos mucho más eficientes trabajando desde casa que invirtiendo ese tiempo en desplazarnos. A mí me gusta. Digo, creo que también es más eficiente ahora el tiempo, porque en esas sesiones, por ejemplo, yo invierto tiempo en trabajar con mi equipo en las sesiones *one-on-one*, en cosas que normalmente son preferibles hacerlas de manera presencial, no, versus lo que hacemos de manera remota.

Gigi: OK, ya veo. Y entonces te pregunto antes de la pandemia que nos obligó a la virtualidad. ¿Ya trabajabas desde casa o trabajabas siempre presencialmente?

Fusi: Sí, ya trabajábamos. Era un día, todos los lunes hacíamos *home office*.

Gigi: Ah, es lo opuesto.

Fusi: Sí, exactamente. Era opuesto, exacto.

Gigi: Ah, OK. OK. Ya veo. Entonces quiero preguntarte si me puedes decir un poco, ¿cómo fue tu experiencia o cómo ha sido tu experiencia, conociendo y comunicándote con personas en línea?

Fusi: Pues, bueno, es un... Es un modelo diferente. Es una manera diferente. Al principio sí representaba un reto porque… Porque obviamente hay cosas, en mi caso particular como *People Manager*, con un equipo a mi cargo suele ser más difícil, ¿no? Porque tuvimos que tirar y derribar esas barreras mentales que teníamos, ¿no? De como líder estabas acostumbrado a estar presente, a mirarlos, a escucharlos, ¿no? ¿Qué están haciendo? ¿De dónde vienen? ¿A qué hora llegaron? ¿A qué hora se van? Cosas por el estilo, y ahora ya no tienes ese control. Es mucho más difícil ahora porque sabes que están ahí, pero... También

sabes que están haciendo otras cosas. Entonces, ¿no? Creo que nos volvió mucho más estructurados en el sentido de poder programar sesiones específicas, tratar de ser más eficientes en que una reunión valga la pena. ¿No? Un tiempo también se creó este fenómeno de las juntitis, ¿no? Como de reunión tras reunión, y muchas veces eran reuniones que podrían haber sido un correo, que podría haber sido un chat, algo muy rápido. Entonces creo que eso nos ha ayudado a cambiar, pero ha sido un proceso, ¿no? Definitivamente, si tú me preguntas cómo iniciamos hace dos años, cómo estamos hoy, fue una madurez y un proceso muy complejo.

Gigi: OK, OK, ya veo. Y ¿cómo ha sido tu experiencia? Pues hablando de este cambio, de interactuar… Pues un poco, ya lo dijiste, pero me puedes decir, puedes elaborar… interactuar con esas personas que ya antes conocías cara a cara, pero ahora tenías que interactuar con ellas en línea.

Fusi: Entiendo. Mira, básicamente fue una transición un poco más fácil porque ambas partes vivíamos la misma situación. Lo duro fue con las personas que contratamos durante la pandemia. Ahí sí fue mucho más complejo.

Gigi: Caramba.

Fusi: Porque es muy difícil. En el caso de [company], es una empresa muy paternalista, ¿no? Es una empresa que cuida mucho. Es muy fácil… Como… Involucrarte o entrar al ritmo de la empresa, pero estando ahí, ¿no? Conociendo su cultura, compartiendo con la gente. Cosas simples como el ir a comer, utilizar los servicios que la misma oficina, este edificio tiene. Entonces, para las personas nuevas que no tienen esa interacción es más difícil, ¿no? Es más difícil explicarles cómo funciona, explicarles, compartirles ese tipo de cosas. Entonces, nos tocó, por ejemplo, idear cosas que permitieran tener esa interacción. Por ejemplo, se me ocurrió crear los *happy hours*. Entonces, cada 15 días, cada dos semanas, los jueves en la tarde creábamos ese *happy hour*. Entonces, la idea era poder llegar un poco más informal, con un traguito, una cerveza, un refresco quien quisiera, platicar cosas fuera del trabajo. Osea, conocernos un poco más. Y, entonces, ese tipo de dinámicas nos permitieron conectar mucho más como personas, más que como colaboradores. Otra cosa que nos funcionó mucho, por ejemplo en noviembre… Normalmente nosotros en fin de año hacemos una reunión de equipo, no como la reunión, ya sabes, de fin de año, hacemos un intercambio y cosas así. Y los dos años anteriores no se había podido hacer. Entonces, este año que finalizó lo revisé con mi director, le propuse el plan… Ya hubo ahí requisitos, de "tienes que llevar unas pruebas negativas de COVID", pero logramos hacer una la comida presencial y ahí conocimos a los miembros nuevos del equipo, ¿no? Bueno, eso fue un poco diferente, pero creo que en resumen nos obligó a idear cosas nuevas para poder conectar con las personas. Te decía, con la gente que ya conocíamos, pues vivían más o menos la misma experiencia que tú, ¿no? Sabían lo raro que era, por ejemplo, ahora tener que trabajar así, a veces trabajar solo, ¿no? Porque no es lo mismo, a veces, tener una duda que te levantes y hablas con el vecino y sigues trabajando, que ahora no sabes si tu vecino está en reunión o no… Entonces,

se fue como convirtiendo, te decía, más en una manera eficiente de conectar, de que lo que le preguntes sea rápido, esté resumido y que la respuesta sea igual, ¿no?

Gigi: OK. Ya veo, ya veo. Y sí, ¿qué te parece si nos enfocamos ahora un poquito también en el asunto de las clases de inglés en línea? ¿Cómo fue tu experiencia aprendiendo inglés en línea?

Fusi: Muy buena. Yo ya tenía un poco de experiencia con clases en línea. Yo tomé un diplomado un tiempo antes de empezar las clases de inglés. Y también ese diplomado comenzó presencial y después con la pandemia tuvimos que mudarnos a virtual y fue un poco duro, ¿no? Porque en clases también se vuelve diferente, sobre todo porque a esos niveles lo que realmente cuenta es la interacción con los compañeros, ¿no? Más que escuchar el profesor que te de cátedra es más bien escuchar las experiencias de las demás personas. Entonces, en el tema de inglés creo que fue muy bueno porque permitió estar enfocados realmente en la clase, en poder dar tiempos. Creo que también eso de saber que había que callar para escuchar también permitió ser más eficiente, ¿no? En esa manera. Al saber que todos vivíamos la misma situación, mis compañeros, este NICOLA, por ejemplo, que era que ahora es mi *peer*, OV, , ¿no? En su momento y contigo como que fue una dinámica muy buena. Porque sabíamos lo que teníamos que hacer, Osea, sabíamos que había un tiempo específico, había actividades específicas que terminar. Entonces para mí fue raro, pero creo que tomamos... En mi caso tomé la dinámica muy rápido, me adapté y me gustaba. La verdad. Yo disfrutaba mucho esas clases.

Gigi: Qué bueno, me alegro. Está bien, pero fíjate que yo desde la perspectiva de la profesora, tengo una opinión diferente. Porque yo pienso que a pesar de que, sí, estábamos concentrados en la clase, no era solo la clase, ¿no? Era como… También íbamos ahí conversando, hablando de nuestras experiencias, nuestras vidas. Y, de hecho eso fue lo que más me interesó de este grupo y por eso decidí hacer el trabajo con ustedes, porque yo sentía que, sí éramos profesora y estudiante, pero como que iba un poquito más allá. ¿No piensas tú?

Fusi: Si es lo definitivo, definitivo. Osea, mi punto era nos manteníamos enfocados en: "Estoy en mi clase". Osea, estoy con con el equipo, estoy con las personas. Sí, claro, habían interacciones que nos ayudaban cada vez más a ser más, a ser más fluidos. Conectábamos, creábamos confianza. Yo pienso que ese vínculo de confianza fue lo que nos permitió quitarnos miedos, quitarnos esas barreras, ¿no? Y sí, coincido contigo, fue un grupo bastante dinámico, bastante este animado, ¿no? Pocas veces yo sentía un ambiente como aburrido, no como ya fastidiado. Claro que había días más eficientes que otros, ¿no? Pero en general, como tú bien dices, sí. Esa relación permitió que fuera mucho más llevadero, todo el módulo

Gigi: OK, vale, vale, muy bien. Otra pregunta ahora si… no sólo con respecto a aprender idiomas, sino relaciones en general, ¿cómo ha sido tu experiencia interactuando en línea con personas de otros países y con otras visiones de mundo diferente? ¿Otras ideas culturales?

Fusi: Bueno, es una pregunta muy interesante porque es algo que yo disfruto mucho. Una de las cosas que amo de mi trabajo es, bueno, amaba de mi trabajo, porque ahora con esto disminuyó, es viajar. Era viajar, conocer personas, conocer lugares, conocer culturas diferentes. Afortunadamente esa experiencia de aquellos años que llamamos acá, cuando eran "las vacas gordas", ¿no? Cuando había presupuesto, cuando había tiempo, cuando había todo eso, yo viajé. Yo creo que fueron unos cuatro años de viajar con mucha frecuencia, ¿no? Entonces eso me permitió conocer a mucha gente, a muchas personas en diferentes, literalmente diferentes latitudes. Osea a gente de Latinoamérica que sí como, como tú y yo hablamos español, pero también en Brasil, por ejemplo, otro idioma que tuve que aprenderlo también. En la India, por ejemplo, ¿no? Que también es un idioma que, a pesar de que hablan inglés, es un acento muy especial y es una cultura muy impactante. Entonces ese *background* me permitió llevarlo a la manera virtual de una manera mucho más natural, digámoslo así. Entonces, el poder llegar, por ejemplo, yo soy una persona muy… Me considero muy cultural, osea, me gusta aprender de todo. No soy una persona cuadrada, osea por ejemplo, no me considero una persona religiosa. Por ejemplo, verás tengo aquí un buda y muchos, sobre todo en la India, me dicen "¡ah, eres budista!". No, no soy budista, pero me gusta la cultura y un poco la filosofía de la parte budista, ¿no? Yo, por ejemplo, acá en México soy católico, pero no ejerzo como tal el catolicismo, pero lo sé. Osea, fui a catecismo, conozco mucho esa parte, ¿no? Entonces, creo que es ese poder abrirme a entender y conocer de todo, facilita mucho la interacción con las personas. Entonces, cuando llego a una reunión con un equipo nuevo, por ejemplo, que aunque no tuve esta experiencia anterior, puedes detonar a través de lo que ves. Porque muchas veces… Hay gente que sí, ¿no? No tiene un fondo, osea o Tiene un *background* de estos que pone el propio sistema, ¿no? Pero, a veces como que romper el hielo con preguntas especiales, con interesarte en la persona, ¿no? "Oye, te veo muy alegre. Ese peinado está lindo". No sé, cosas así que ayudan a romper un poco la barrera. Pareciera que estás ahí frente a ellos. Entonces, creo que es una interacción muy natural. Y además, claro, de que las personas también están, están preparadas para eso.

Gigi: Vale, vale. Si yo recuerdo que tú tenías las tres banderas de México, Colombia y Brasil.

Fusi: Aquí están todavía, mira. No es que ahora ya viven aquí al ladito porque ya no caben, pero sí aquí.

Gigi: Sí, claro.

Fusi: Claro, sí, sí.

Gigi: Cada vez que hago un análisis de las interacciones siempre menciono: "y AM tenía sus banderas ahí".

Fusi: Bueno, es que, tú sabes, ¿no? Mi esposa es colombiana, mi hija. No sé si te platiqué, pero tenemos una bebé de 8 Meses.

GIGI: Sí, claro.

Fusi: Entonces [bebé] también vino a cambiarnos muchas cosas. Ella es mexi-colombiana y la cultura que yo adopté de Brasil, el tiempo que viví allá del idioma. Para mí eso complementa muchas cosas. Entonces, sí, esas tres banderas como que representan mucho mis bases.

Gigi: Tu identidad.

Fusi: Mi identidad. Tal cual. Lo resumiste perfecto.

Gigi: OK, muy bien, muy bien. Ahora te pregunto eso que me hablabas de que… Pues te sirvió bastante haber… De pronto no conocido a personas puntualmente, pero sí mucho de su cultura y de esos aspectos. Dices que te ayudó para cuando tuviste que hacer la transición a solamente en línea. ¿Crees que hubiese sido diferente esa relación si no hubieses tenido ese contacto directo, digamos, presencialmente con esas culturas y aún así te hubiese tocado conocerlos, pero solo en línea?

Fusi: ¿Hubiese sido diferente? Sí, definitivamente hubiera sido diferente. Porque sin ese *background*, pues sí hubiera, quizá hubiera tomado más tiempo. Pero, como te decía, tuve casos de personas que no conocía, que no tuve la oportunidad de conocer antes y que me tocó conocer e interactuar con ellos 100% virtual. Y me parece que esa experiencia previa me permitió conectar más rápido. Entonces el resumen es: sí hubiera sido diferente, pero no creo que hubiera sido un impacto muy fuerte, mas no creo que no hubiera podido.

Gigi: Ajá. Muy bien, muy bien. Entonces, eh. Y, ¿qué te parece la experiencia de haber aprendido inglés ¿no?, y no solo inglés, sino por ejemplo portugués, también con personas de otras culturas?

Fusi: Bueno, siempre es mucho más fácil, digamos. Cuando interactúas con diferentes personas. Osea, a veces nos pasa a muchos mexicanos que hablamos el mismo idioma y a lo mejor colombiano, Y mexicano, pero no hablamos el mismo idioma. Osea, muchas palabras muy especializadas que no usamos. Yo conozco por mi esposa, pero muchas de ellas no suelen ser algo habitual. Entonces, se vuelve más enriquecedor, definitivamente, poder aprender. Porque incluso te enfocas a pensar en el idioma nuevo. Osea, no estoy hablando español pensando en español mexicano. Ni tú estás pensando en español colombiano, si no estamos pensando en inglés. Y eso ayuda mucho a poder aprender más rápido. Osea, facilita porque estamos en el mismo lugar, en el mismo canal, ¿no? Digamos, estamos sintonizados en lo mismo y eso facilita las cosas.

Gigi: ¿Antes aprendiste inglés con personas de México también?

Fusi: Sí, yo tomé un curso de inglés por ahí de 2009. Pero, sí era presencial, era en una escuela aquí en México, un poco famosa. Estuve yendo casi 6 meses de manera así como… ¿Cómo le llaman?

Gigi: Intermitente.

Fusi: No, no, intermitente. Al contrario, como intensiva. Cualquiera. Eran dos horas diarias, una hora, una hora 45 diario por seis meses. Pero, sí, todos éramos mexicanos, todos hablamos español. Y sí, la interacción era muy diferente.

Gigi: Y, ¿Cómo se compara?

Fusi: Bueno, se compare la metodología, me parece. Porque es más o menos lo mismo. Es decir, se pone un tópico con base en ese tópico, se ponen reglas y comienza la interacción. Entonces esa parte me parece muy similar. ¿Dónde no se parece? En la interacción. Osea, al final. Tú sabías que cuando, la parte virtual: te conectas, inicia la clase, te desconectas y se acabó. En la parte presencial, desde que llegabas a la escuela te encontrabas con profesores… Porque también no sólo los cambiaban a los profesores. Entonces, antes de que iniciara tu clase ya estabas practicando el idioma. Terminaba la clase y seguías hablando el idioma con los compañeros o con otras personas. Entonces, eso como que permitía practicarlo más.

Gigi: OK, muy bien, muy bien. Ahora te voy a hacer una pregunta muy puntual de un día que nosotros todos estábamos hablando y que ese día NICOLA se fue temprano porque tenía una reunión, se fue el 23 de junio, no sé si recuerdas.

Fusi: Wow.

Gigi: Yo tampoco me acordara, pero como lo tengo aquí anotado, sí me acuerdo. Entonces, ese día tú me dijiste… Yo recuerdo que NICOLA tenía una reunión con personas de la India. Y, tú me decías que tú personalmente has aprendido como diferentes estrategias para, pues hacer esa comunicación con ellos más eficiente o más llevadera. Me hablabas de que: "No, yo prefiero hablar con ellos de noche, pero para ellos es de día y entonces así ya en seguida van trabajando". Algo así me comentaste, ¿no? Pero, entonces me pregunto si tienes alguna otra estrategia de esas que has desarrollado para que esa comunicación en línea sea no solo eficiente, sino ¿cómo puede decir? Bueno si es eficiente, efectiva… No sólo en términos laborales, sino de entenderse el uno con el otro, me refiero.

Fusi: Bueno, ahora que mi perfil me exige y por mi propio deseo, por mi propia elección, trato de pensar mucho más con liderazgo, ¿no? Osea, pensar más en equipo, en cómo inspirar, en cómo ayudar, cómo guiar a las personas. Definitivamente he aprendido, a través del tiempo, que conectar con las personas es fundamental. Osea, no enfocarte solamente al tema del: "necesito esto y lo necesito para tal día". No. Sino ahora es más: "¿Cómo puedo convencer a la persona que lo que le estoy pidiendo lo beneficia a él?" Por ejemplo, ¿no? Osea, no son mis necesidades, sino cómo yo puedo ayudar a que las personas también de cierta manera sientan que su trabajo es no solamente eficiente, sino que también es reconocido. Entonces, de esas estrategias y justo por ejemplo, yo prefiero, como te decía en aquel momento, yo hablar con ellos por la noche, porque: uno, están más… Este… Se acaban de despertar. Osea, o es por la mañana, el día comienza, tienen una actitud diferente. Además, hasta cierto punto, también ellos se sienten más… ¿Cómo decirlo?, como valorados porque saben que es tu noche. Entonces, saben ellos que tú estás haciendo un sacrificio para poder atenderlos y eso

crea cierto… No deuda, pero sí crea cierto compromiso adicional. El siempre tratar de estar disponible y me parece la comunicación. Osea, hay ocasiones en que no puedo estar disponible, pero por lo menos respondo y les digo "no estoy disponible", ¿no? "Te busco más tarde", "te busco mañana". Entonces, eso creo que ha funcionado mucho en esos aspectos. Y, te decía, el involucrarme, ¿no? Osea, el conectar como personas más que como un área de servicio que te atiende y se acabó. Porque al final eso crea vínculos. Por ejemplo, yo trato de no sé, tengo detalles de ver cuándo son sus cumpleaños y les pongo un mensajito. No… Nada así extraordinario, pero podría no hacer nada, ¿no? Pero, esos pequeños detalles van creando esas relaciones a largo plazo y va creando confianza. Entonces, cuando yo trato de no ser una persona molesta. Osea, trato de no… No delego todo lo que tengo que hacer, ¿no? Pero, cuando lo hago la gente lo hace con gusto, por justamente ese vínculo que se ha ido creando a través del tiempo.

Gigi: OK, bien, bien. Y, ¿cómo fue el proceso o cómo fue la experiencia de ir identificando esas estrategias o irlas probando? ¿Te salía así como "bueno, ya esto es así" enseguida, O "Ah no, yo pensaba, pero así no es tanto"? No sé, como ir probando, ir desarrollando hasta llegar ya a la estrategia como ya la tienes definida. ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia?

Fusi: No, no entendí muy bien.

Gigi: Porque bueno… Llevas tiempo trabajando en línea con personas de otras culturas, de otros, otros horarios, cosas. Pero, digamos que, si ya tienes la estrategia de" bueno, es mejor trabajar con ellos de noche por esto". Pero antes de llegar a esa conclusión, supongo yo, que habrás intentado otras maneras, ¿cómo fue esa experiencia de ir analizando y probando y llegando a conclusiones?

Fusi: Justo así como lo mencionas. El poder entender que es un proceso, ¿no? Que puedes y debes equivocarte, ¿no? Creo que es algo que he aceptado en mi vida y yo también como que lo fomento, ¿no? El "equivócate", "inténtalo". Porque si te equivocas justamente es porque estás intentando cosas diferentes, ¿no? Y, se aprende mucho más del error que del éxito. Y claro, el éxito es lo que buscamos siempre. Pero, creo que eso siempre te ayuda a poder tener una mentalidad mucho más fresca, ¿no? El decir "bueno, pruebo algo distinto, aprendo de eso, corrijo". Lo importante, como te decía, hace un momento en la otra pregunta es comunicar. Osea, es decir, aceptar. Por ejemplo, cuando te equivocas, cuando alguna estrategia no te funciona bien. Pedir disculpas, cuando aplique; pedir perdón, cuando aplique, porque no es lo mismo; y aceptarlo. Y, la gente también dice "OK, Fusi. Tranquilo. No funcionó. Intentamos algo diferente". No sé, creo que esa dinámica funciona siempre y cuando exista comunicación. Osea, siempre y cuando la gente sepa que es parte de un proceso. Afortunadamente, en [company] es algo que se busca, ¿no? Estamos ahorita con un modelo que lo llaman *FIT*, donde te piden como… Cada letra de *FIT* justamente como una característica, ¿no? De que tienes que volverte más experimental, tienes que volverte más analítico, más crítico. Y, parte del experimentar es justamente equivocarte. Entonces, sí. Han habido dinámicas, por ejemplo, no sé, cuando yo ponía reuniones, por ejemplo en mi mañana

y yo veía que ya eran las 8-9 de la noche en la India. Y sí, la gente se conecta, pero, te das cuenta que no está enfocada, que no está realmente dedicada. No es lo mismo una persona que se iba a dormir y tiene que atender a alguien que está despertando, ¿no? Entonces, eso fue, por ejemplo, una estrategia que identifiqué. Claro, hay ocasiones en que una emergencia, es una emergencia, ¿no? Yo no elijo el horario. Pero, trato de que sean las menos, ¿no? Trato que no sea una regla, sino que sea justamente la excepción. Y, en ese aspecto, creo que es justo probar, evaluar, porque también creo que lo que no se mide no existe. Osea, si no evalúas el resultado y determinas el beneficio y el costo que generó, no funciona realmente el resultado, ¿no? Creo que así lo resumiría, digamos: prueba y error.

Gigi: OK, muy bien, muy bien. Y ahora te voy a hacer unas preguntas un poco más personales. La comunicación en línea ¿piensas que ha tenido un impacto en tu vida, en ti como persona?

Fusi: Sí, sí, definitivamente me ha impactado mucho. Te decía, me ha hecho una persona más organizada, me ha hecho una persona más eficiente, más concreta. He aprendido, también no solo por la parte en línea, sino por esta parte de desarrollo profesional que te digo que estoy teniendo… Pero, me he vuelto más una persona que escucha, en lugar de una persona que habla, ¿no? Me tocó atender, por ejemplo, casos de mi propio equipo que tenían depresión, donde tenían ansiedad, donde tenían ciertas condiciones psicológicas que impactaron por la misma pandemia, ¿no? El hecho de que la gente estaba encerrada tanto tiempo, que no interactuaba con otras personas. Te toca escuchar y te toca también dar consejos. A veces, no todas las veces, lo sabemos, ¿no? Yo no soy psicólogo de profesión, entonces, me toca investigar, me toca conectar con los profesionales para dar un poquito más de explicación. Entonces, sí. Definitivamente ha impactado de manera benéfica, digamos. Osea, me ha hecho una mejor persona.

Gigi: OK, listo. Y, personalmente, tú también has tenido que comunicarte en línea usando la virtualidad con otras personas que no son tus compañeros de trabajo, tu familia, tus amigos. ¿Cómo ha sido eso?

Fusi: Sí, sí, definitivamente. Al principio, sobre todo el primer año de pandemia, fue de lo más… Osea, obligó a tener llamadas de estas familiares, ¿no? Con las videollamadas. Con mi círculo cercano no cambió demasiado, porque lo mismo que los puedo ver, entre semana trato interactuar, de saludarlos, cómo están, este, etcétera, ¿no? Eso creo que se mantiene. Pero, claro, en aquel momento, siendo la única manera de hacerlo, pues sí, ya se volvió un poco más metódico.

Gigi: OK, listo y última pregunta. Creo que un poco, ya lo mencionaste, pero te lo vuelvo a preguntar. ¿La interacción con personas de otras culturas ha tenido un impacto para ti, personalmente?

Fusi: Sí, sí. Pues mira nada más el resumen que decíamos este parte de mi... ¿Qué palabra utilizaste?

Gigi: Ay, ay, perdón, perdón, perdón. Sorry, perdón. La palabra que utilicé fue identidad.

Fusi: Exactamente. Entonces, ese es el impacto. Osea, mi identidad. Sí se ha visto modificada. Se ha visto impactada de manera positiva a través de las diferentes culturas.

Gigi: OK, listo. Bueno, no sé si tú quieras hacer otro comentario, por ejemplo, no sé con respecto a la experiencia de. Bueno, no sé, es que yo recuerdo muchas… Ahora mismo se me vienen a la cabeza muchas cosas que hablábamos en clase. Cuando estabas en Cali, que hablamos de la situación en Colombia; cuando me contaste todo de tu experiencia aprendiendo portugués. Bueno, que yo estaba así como "¡ay, hablas tres idiomas! ¿Como así?" Estaba impresionada. No sé. Sí. Creo que en esas clases sí hubo bastante... Digamos que ese tipo de intercambio personal, ¿no crees tú? Que encontramos muchas cosas diferentes de México tal, pero muchas en común como latinoamericanos, como…

Fusi: Sí. Pienso que justamente también como dices, reflexionando, todas esas experiencias… Osea, el poder interactuar de una manera estructurada, ¿no? Es decir, horarios, días específicos en los que teníamos que hacerlo, nos obligaba también a adaptar. Fíjate algo muy interesante del tema virtual, ¿no? Normalmente nosotros fuera del tema virtual, cuando todo era presencial, nosotros nos adaptábamos a las situaciones. "Ah, voy a la oficina", me adaptaba a mi *mood:* voy a la oficina. "Voy a ver a mi mamá", me adapto a eso. "Estoy con mi pareja, con mis hijos"... Entonces, tú te adaptas a esa situación. Cuando se cambia, ¿no? Al modelo virtual, las situaciones se adaptan a ti y ahí es donde las cosas cambian un poco, ¿no? Entonces, sin importar dónde estuvieras… Porque, ¿qué ocurría en el pasado? Por ejemplo, si yo estaba en un curso y me tocaba viajar, pues paraba el curso. Fíjate cuando en 2016 fue el año en que viajé más. Osea, yo creo que viajé 10 meses de los 12 que tiene el año. Bueno, ese año estuve en Brasil 6 meses, fui a Estados Unidos… Osea, me tocó viajar bastante. Entonces, yo tuve que parar. Estaba estudiando mi maestría y tuve que parar mi maestría porque me tocó viajar. Osea, no había una alternativa en ese momento. Entonces, ahora con este tema virtual, no importa dónde estés, no importa el horario en el que estés, no importa. Tú adaptas esa situación a tu vida real en ese momento y se vuelve más eficiente, ¿no? Así es como funciona. Claro que también es personalidad. Osea, yo conozco gente que "Bueno, me voy de viaje y me voy de viaje", ¿no? "No me conecto a nada y no hago nada, ¿no? Porque estoy de viaje". Y en mi caso trato siempre por el compromiso que tengo, ¿no? Como, mi cultura en ese aspecto de poder cumplir con ese compromiso ahí. Pero, sí. Definitivamente esas interacciones fueron muy buenas. Osea, muy enriquecedoras. El escucharte a ti también hablar de lo duro que era, ¿no? También, por ejemplo, como dices cuando yo estaba en Cali, lo de las protestas… Como… Osea, teníamos algo en común que era el tema de la pandemia, pero, en ese momento vivimos… También teníamos algo en común yo, estar en Colombia y vivir las protestas.

Gigi: Sí, sí. pero fíjate que yo siempre reflexiono que en ese momento, aunque yo era la colombiana, pues eras tú el que estaba viviendo eso. Porque en Cartagena no se dieron esas protestas como se dieron en Cali, ¿no? Entonces, un poco ahí como estabas tú viviendo más la realidad colombiana que yo, ¿no?

Fusi: Tal cual. Exactamente.

Fusi: Bueno, pues eso era todo lo que te iba a preguntar. Voy a dejar de grabar aquí un momento.

8.13. Annex 13: Interview with Nicola

Gigi: Considering that we come from different cultural backgrounds, and we have had different types of life, and we have lived different experiences, no? So, I just want to know how those different factors that I just mentioned influence the relationship that we have. And, also, how the experience influences me as a teacher and as a person. Very philosophical.

Nicola: I guess one… Yes, we are in different cultures, different countries, even. But I guess we were… We are in the same situation, right? That is a point that join… that we have in common. FUSI, you and me. We are in the same… no matter we are speaking a different language, or this is not our native language. We are Latino… Latin Americans, so we have… We share the language, we share some… How can I say?... Some ideas. I mean, for example, in Mexico we are… We like… We love to be with the family. That's something that, for example, in USA, you don't see that behavior. I mean, the American citizens… They don't like to be… It's not common to see a family together.

Gigi: Yeah, you are right.

Nicola: So… How influence… How influence us, I mean… Again, just summarizing, the pandemic situation where we were… We share the same culture, if you want to say it that way. We share the same languages, I guess… Probably the age, I mean, the range…

Gigi: The generation. The generation.

Nicola:: The generation. Our generation is the same, and probably that also influence that we connect very well during that period of time.

Gigi: Yeah, I agree with you. But, by the way, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. Yes? But… Do you feel more comfortable answering them in Spanish or in English?

Nicola: Yes. Go ahead.

Gigi: I mean, but, what do you prefer?

Nicola: Is… I mean… It doesn't matter. If you want, we can switch to Spanish.

Gigi: ¿Sí? Está bien, pero se me sale el acento colombiano.

Nicola: Y a mí se me sale el acento chilango.

Gigi: Chilango. OK, bien. Y otra pregunta ¿está bien si grabo esta conversación?

Nicola: Adelante. GIGI.

Gigi: Estoy grabando aquí con mi teléfono… Porque este Meet no me deja grabar… Estoy con el teléfono, ¿OK?

Nicola: Dale, dale.

Gigi: Bien. Listo. Entonces voy a hacerle unas preguntas o hacerte unas preguntas en… Sobre lo que discutimos. Bien, entonces la primera pregunta es. Bueno, desde… La última vez que nos vimos, no sé si sigues trabajando así remotamente haciendo *home office*, o volviste a la oficina y estás trabajando presencialmente.

Nicola: El 14 de marzo regresamos una vez por semana. Por semana. Es decir, la mayoría, digo, algo bueno que trajo la pandemia es que ahora podemos trabajar más días desde casa. Entonces, claro, por ahora solamente nos hemos visto una sola vez que fue el 14 de marzo, si mi memoria no me falla. La semana pasada.

Gigi: Ah, OK, listo, listo. Y ¿qué días elegiste tú? Osea, los miércoles o cualquier día o ¿cómo?

NICOLA: La realidad es que ahorita estamos con una fase piloto todo el mes de marzo. Entonces por ahora la compañía nos definió la fecha justo para evitar tener mucha gente en la oficina y la idea es que después de marzo ya nosotros vamos a poder decidir. Tenemos la regla de cinco días por mes, solamente. Nosotros vamos a decidir el día.

Gigi: OK, excelente, excelente. Y pues te pregunto ¿antes de la pandemia, tú hacías home office?

Nicola: Una vez por semana

Gigi: Una vez a la semana. OK, pero ahora más ¿no?

Nicola: Sí. Ahora más.

Gigi: OK, mucho mejor. Bien, entonces puedes decirme ¿cómo ha sido la experiencia de conocer y comunicarte con personas en línea?

Nicola: Te voy a ser muy sincero, GIGI. Para mí no hubo mucho cambio. Ya que mi posición, aunque yo estaba en Ciudad de México, el 95% de mis reuniones era con gente de Estados Unidos o de otras partes del mundo. Entonces en lo personal no, no noté mucho la diferencia en esa parte. La parte de mi día a día, en donde sí se vio el impacto a la mujer fue en el manejo con el equipo, ¿no?

Gigi: Osea, con tu equipo más inmediato.

Nicola: Correcto, correcto. Ahí fue donde sí se... Inicialmente se hizo un poco… Voy a llamarle diferente, ¿no? El conectar; colaborar con ellos. Sí, pero después de ciertos meses de adaptación no, pero creo que lo hicimos y lo hicimos muy bien.

Gigi: OK, bien. De hecho, la siguiente pregunta es sobre eso. ¿Cómo fue la experiencia o, qué me puedes decir sobre la experiencia de interactuar en línea con personas que antes ya conocías cara a cara, ¿no? o con las que interactuabas cara a cara?

Nicola: Sí, fue difícil los primeros meses. Algo que te permite el conversar, dialogar con la persona cara a cara es de alguna manera entender su lenguaje corporal también, ¿no? Algo que a veces en línea no lo podías hacer. ¿Sale? Entonces, esa transición, o esa conexión, si le quieres llamar así, de repente, yo siento que se perdió un poco, al inicio. Fue cosa de empezar a ver tutoriales de cómo se maneja el trabajo de equipo de manera remota… Si, inclusive para nosotros los *People Manager*, nos dieron capacitación en la compañía para mantener conectado al equipo, ¿no? Osea, nos dieron estrategia, nos dieron tips. Bueno, cuando se pusieron en práctica empezó a funcionar. Las famosas… Les llamábamos *happy hours*. Básicamente una hora cada 15 días, ¿no? No se habla de trabajo, inclusive te puedes llevar una bebida. Igual de manera remota, ¿no? Para poder conversar un poquito del día a día. Pero… Y esas fueron algunas de las acciones. De manera individual, pues, yo también tomé la iniciativa de hacer más repetitivas mis reuniones grupales. Pero, sobre todo personales con cada uno de ellos, ¿no? No solamente enfocarme en su parte laboral, sino, pues, también en la parte personal que, finalmente, todo el mundo, nos estábamos viendo impactados, ¿no? Estábamos perdiendo personas, estábamos viendo gente enferma. Pues, de alguna manera, emocionalmente no nos encontrábamos equilibrados, ¿no? Entonces, para mí eso era inclusive más importante que… Digo, el día a día iba a salir si la persona estaba emocionalmente estable… Al revés, no. Al revés me quedaba claro que, si tenía una preocupación en casa, definitivamente los resultados en la oficina o en sus actividades no iban a ser los más óptimos. Entonces, pues fue eso claro. Yo creo que al final se logró, lo hicimos bastante bien y hoy creo que, ahora, va a costar al revés, ¿no? El regresar… El volver a… ¿Por qué? Porque de manera individual tú haces una rutina, ¿no? De tu día. Ya tienes preparada una rutina… Y pues ahora es volverse a reacostumbrarse a regresar a la oficina.

Gigi: Exactamente. Exactamente. OK, muy bien. Y ¿cómo fue esa misma experiencia, digamos, de comunicarte en línea, pero en términos de aprender inglés o aprender el idioma como una clase, no? ¿Qué dices de eso?

Nicola: De verdad? La verdad es una experiencia muy, muy padre para mí. Yo había tenido la oportunidad de estudiar en otras plataformas en inglés online. Sí creo que en esta ocasión

fue diferente… La metodología a mí me encantó mucho, el seguimiento, el cómo se llevaban a cabo, se desarrollaban y se preparaban los temas. Fue algo que a mí me agradó bastante y la verdad creo que si tuviera que hacer un comparativo de mi experiencia con la experiencia que tuvimos aquí con otras experiencias, yo creo que sí la podría catalogar como muy buena. Y sobre todo muy provechosa. Osea, sí creo que aprendí lo que necesitaba aprender durante ese periodo de tiempo, ¿no?

Gigi: Qué bueno, qué bueno, me alegro. Y pues lo que te comentaba al principio sobre esas discusiones o esos temas que tienen que ver, por ejemplo, con nuestras realidades, con nuestros valores, nuestras ideas, desde nuestras posiciones, ¿no?, tú estás en México, yo estoy en Colombia. Pues esas diferentes cosas, no sé qué… cómo te sentiste en esos aspectos.

Nicola: Mmm… Yo la verdad digo… A lo mejor es una forma de pensar muy personal… A mí me gusta mucho tratar a las personas como personas, ¿no? Yo siempre trato de quitarle la etiqueta de "ah, es mi maestra. Ah, es mi gerente. Ah, es mi director". Osea, yo siempre he tenido un dicho: "Todos tenemos dos manos, dos ojos, dos pies", y sobre todo compartimos emociones, que es tristeza, ansiedad, alegría, ¿no? La verdad a mí siempre me ha gustado, y… A lo mejor por esa manera de pensar, creo que siempre he hecho buen *match* con las personas con las que trabajo y colaboro porque las veo como personas, ¿no? Osea, trato siempre de indagar un poquito de su de su vida personal porque, de alguna manera, yo también comparto de mi vida personal y… es lo que un día… Hace poco aprendí. A una persona, si le empiezas a compartir, él empieza a compartir también, ¿no? Pero, no. Si le empiezas a demandar… Como, por ejemplo, yo a mis hijos, ¿no? De: "¿Cómo te fue en la escuela?, ¿qué hiciste? Pues un hijo siempre te va a responder. Yo no voy a llegar contigo: "Carol, ¿desayunaste? Caro, ¿ya hiciste esto?" Pues, ¡no! Creo que el empezar a compartir y creo que algo que le agregó valor es… Pues, bueno, nuestras raíces latinas… De repente el compartir el idioma. Digo, eso es clave. Costumbres. La verdad a mí se me hizo una experiencia muy padre, y… De nuevo, yo creo que influyó mucho el que hayamos sido latinoamericanos los 3-4. 4, aun cuando teníamos a OV. Que esta relación fue *plug and play*, tal cual, ¿no? Muy fácil de llevar.

Gigi: OK. Qué bueno, qué bueno. Entonces, ahora te voy a preguntar eh, sobre tu experiencia comunicándote e interactuando, pues un poco ya lo mencionaste, pero con personas así de diferentes entornos culturales. No solo conmigo, sino que yo sé que tú, en tu trabajo, te comunicas con personas de muchos países diferentes. ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia para ti?

Nicola: Creo que va muy de la mano con el comentario previo… Voy a ponerte un ejemplo, ¿no? Con la gente de Mumbai, de la India. Pues, ellos definitivamente tienen creencias, costumbres y formas de ver la vida de una manera muy diferente. A pesar de que, de nuevo, de que seguimos siendo personas, ellos tienen unas ideas, inclusive a veces hasta un

poco difíciles de entender, ¿no? Difíciles de entender en base a mi forma de ver la vida, ¿no? Y, de nuevo, creo que el hecho de… ¿qué fue lo que pasó? Yo igual tenía sesiones con las personas de Mumbai, pero como personas. No sé. Igual, aunque estaban del otro lado del mundo, creo que el estar compartiendo una situación global, de cierta manera ayudó a sensibilizar un poquito a todos. Independientemente de si fueras de China, de Japón, de Estados Unidos. Finalmente, creo que es la primera vez en mi vida que veo que todos compartimos un mismo sentimiento, que es miedo a perder a alguien, ¿no?

Gigi: Sí.

Nicola: Entonces cuando yo colaboraba… Trabajaba con ellos, a pesar de las diferencias culturales, nuestro sentimiento, nuestra preocupación, era una misma, ¿no? Osea, ¿cuándo va a estar lista la vacuna? ¿Cuándo me va a tocar vacunarme? ¿Cuándo se va a dejar de morir gente de mi familia, de mis amigos. Y, creo que eso ayudó, al menos en este lapso de tiempo, a conectar y, sobre todo, a conocer más a las personas. Es decir, antes de la pandemia yo veía a la gente de Mumbai como unas máquinas de trabajo, ¿no? Después de pandemia yo conocí a muchas personas que a la fecha sigo hablando con ellas y, de nuevo, ¿no? Ellos saben de mi vida y yo sé un poquito de su vida. Entonces eso creo que ayudó mucho el, de nuevo, el abrir un poquito el corazón ¿no? Ponerte en los zapatos de las personas y decir: "Bueno, esta persona sí la está pasando mal. Osea, yo ya no puedo seguirle exigiendo lo mismo que le exigía antes de la pandemia, porque sé que él tiene COVID, porque sé que su madre tiene COVID, porque sé que su papá tiene COVID. Entonces, de alguna manera eso ayudó mucho a romper esas barreras culturales. Creo que en ese momento, o durante este lapso de tiempo, se rompieron las barreras culturales. Y, como seres humanos, conectamos de una manera increíble.

Gigi: OK, ¡vaya! Sí, tienes razón. no lo había pensado, pero sí. Entonces, descubro que no solo, digamos, la situación que era online… Sí, éramos… Pues teníamos cosas en común, cosas diferentes, pero también el entorno del COVID, que también nos influyó bastante, ¿no?

Nicola: Claro, claro. Nos influyó y nos conectó, ¿no? Porque, pues era… Ahora sí que el COVID no entendía ni de idiomas, ni de religiones.

Gigi: Ni nada de nada. Sí, sí, OK, bien. Entonces, te hago otra pregunta un poco más elaborando, también ¿Crees que el haberlos conocido o de interactuar con ellos en línea tiene un impacto en cómo te relacionas con ellos? Osea, ¿hubiese sido diferente si tal vez lo hubieses conocido en persona o, qué crees?

Nicola: La realidad, digo, es… Hay un abismo de conexión entre verlas o verlas en un monitor a verlos *face-to-face*, o cara a cara.

Gigi: ¿Te puedo hacer una pregunta?

Nicola: Adelante.

Gigi: Sí. Osea, porque yo recuerdo que en nuestras clases, por ejemplo, nos veíamos las caras con la cámara, y eso. ¿Cómo es con las reuniones de trabajo?, ¿sí está ese elemento visual o no?

Nicola: Sí lo tenemos, pero es opcional.

Gigi: Ah, claro. Vale, está bien. Y entonces, ¿cómo es la experiencia de conocerlos en línea?

Nicola: Conocerlos en línea… No tienes la oportunidad, a lo mejor, ¿no? De irte al café, a platicar un poquito más de no solamente el tema trabajo, ¿no? El trabajar en línea con ellos o el tiempo que reservabas con esas personas lo enfocabas plenamente al tema laboral que ibas a trabajar y listo. Entonces, de alguna manera, a tu pregunta mi respuesta concreta es el trabajar en línea no me da la oportunidad de conocer a la persona**.** Porque el tiempo que tengo reservado con ella, es simplemente para enfocarlo en cubrir o solucionar mis necesidades o sus necesidades del trabajo. Tal cual.

Gigi: OK, sí. entiendo. Y, ¿piensas que, por ejemplo, la interacción con Fusi y conmigo en clase fue así? ¿Estrictamente educativa o, no?

Nicola: No, no. Creo que nos dábamos ese lapso. Esos tiempos, de repente, para platicar o compartir un poquito más de nuestra vida, de: "¿Qué habías hecho ayer?, ¿qué tal el fin de semana?". Y, de nuevo, creo que. Creo que la diferencia, Carol, es… No quiero decir la institución, sino, a lo mejor, el tema que se está abordando, ¿no? Por ejemplo, en este caso el tema educacional… Pues, yo siempre, desde que soy niño, yo siempre tenía esa experiencia de que con mi maestro no solamente hablábamos de matemáticas y de inglés y español, sino, de repente: "Profe, ¿y su hermano? Profe, ¿y su hermanita? Osea, como que es algo que… Como que la parte de educación te da esa pauta, de repente, de salirte un poquito del… Como decimos acá en México, del carril, ¿no?

Gigi: Claro.

Nicola: En la parte laboral y por el tema de profesionalismo, inclusive hasta por temas de políticas que te pone la empresa… "Sé eficiente. Enfócate en tus resultados. Enfócate en lo que vas a trabajar. No hagas juntitis. No te expandas más del tiempo…". Entonces, sí como que tratamos mucho… Nos impulsan mucho a enfocar el tema, enfocar el tópico a: "trabajo, trabajo, trabajo, trabajo". Pero, te repito, yo creo que es más por el tema o, más bien, la categoría en la que estamos, ¿no? Una cosa es trabajo profesional y otra cosa es

educación, que también es profesional, pero se presta un poquito a hablar o compartir un poquito más, no solamente de la clase, ¿no?

Gigi: Excelente. OK, bien, entonces ahora… Anteriormente me mencionaste que sí habías tenido otras oportunidades o otras experiencias aprendiendo inglés en línea ¿correcto?

Nicola: Hola. Te perdí.

Gigi: Sí, me perdiste. Pero ya regresé. Te preguntaba que hace unos minutos me comentaste que anteriormente habías tenido otras experiencias aprendiendo inglés en línea, ¿cierto? Bueno, ¿esas experiencias fueron también, digamos, en vivo? Porque yo sé que hay, por ejemplo, plataformas en que puedes ver videos o es más, digamos, interactuando con, no sé, con un software o algo así, ¿no? En vez de con una persona. ¿Cómo fueron esas experiencias?

Nicola: Era más una plataforma *self-service* donde yo tenía que prepararme en avanzado tal tema, para, una vez por semana, yo entrar a una clase de 45 minutos, donde entrábamos gente de diferentes, diferentes partes del mundo, diferentes acentos. Y había un profesor, un facilitador de la clase que se encargaba de aclarar dudas puntuales del tema que se haya visto o hayamos preparado durante esa semana. Entonces, sí. Vamos a llamarlo la mitad, esto de "autoayúdate" y un pedacito de "te pongo un mentor a que te explique las dudas que tengas", ¿no? Sí fue un poco diferente.

Gigi: OK, entiendo. Y ese tutor o ese facilitador de la clase de 45 minutos, ¿de dónde era?

Nicola: Igual. Podía variar. De lo que recuerdo, la mayoría de las veces me tocaba gente... Un día me tocó un maestro de Canadá… La mayor parte del tiempo me tocaron maestros de Estados Unidos.

Gigi: OK, ya veo. Y bueno, puede ser un poco porque no estaba ese espacio para, digamos, más relajado para una conversación, sino más al punto de las dudas. Pero, crees que con profesores que vienen de culturas que son muy diferentes a Latinoamérica por ejemplo, o más diferentes que por ejemplo entre Colombia y México… ¿sí ves la diferencia a la hora de relacionarte?

Nicola: La respuesta, sí. Digo, sí. Es abismal. Digo... Pues, yo no podía mucho… Yo no tenía mucho por compartir de mis culturas o de mis creencias con alguien de Estados Unidos, porque ni siquiera conocía las de ellos, ¿no? Es decir, sí. De repente, eso cierra el diálogo y hace que lo enfoques a lo que necesitas platicar o aclarar con él, ¿no?

Gigi: Entiendo, entiendo. Bien, entonces te voy a hacer unas preguntas ahora sobre cosas que hablamos nosotros en clase, que todavía me acuerdo porque lo tengo todo grabado y transcrito y todo.

Nicola: Yo no garantizo recordar, pero lo voy a intentar.

Gigi: Listo, listo. Yo recuerdo una ocasión, el 23 de junio del año pasado, que tú dijiste "Ah, Gigi. Hoy tengo que salir temprano porque tengo una reunión con personas de la India", ¿no? Media hora antes. Y el problema del cambio de horario o la diferencia de horario es como difícil de manejar y esas cosas así. Entonces yo te quiero preguntar si aparte de, digamos, ese aspecto que comentaste de que ahora los ves más como personas, que intentas verlos más como personas... ¿Tienes estrategias específicas para comunicarte con personas de la India o de Estados Unidos? que no sólo sean, por ejemplo, compartir con ellos, sino cosas específicas, por ejemplo. Bueno, se está alargando la pregunta, pero Fusi me comentaba que él ha aprendido a trabajar por ejemplo con ellos de noche en México, pero de día en la India, para que sea, como, más eficiente el trabajo o algo así. No sé. ¿Tú tienes estrategias específicas que hayas desarrollado para obtener tus metas en la comunicación con ellos?

Nicola: Yo creo que la estrategia específica que he tenido con ellos es darles resultados. La mayoría de las veces que ellos me solicitan algo, o me piden ayuda, yo los pongo como prioridad y les doy resultados para poder generar esa confianza. Para convertirme en ese *trusted partner* para ellos, ¿no? Esa ha sido la estrategia, para mí, que yo puedo resumir es: dándoles resultados o desatorando sus *bottle necks*, le llaman. Sus cuellos de botella. Creo que en ese momento yo me convierto en alguien confiable para ellos, y… Te soy muy sincero, la mayoría de las veces ellos buscan adaptarse a mi horario, o buscar espacio en mi horario. Porque ellos saben que con una llamada yo les puedo desatorar, en 10-15 minutos, un tema que ellos tengan. Y, de repente, por ejemplo, el famoso: "Te pongo un correo anticipado para que lo leas y luego lo platicamos en una llamada"... Yo previo a la pandemia, utilizaba mucho esa estrategia, ¿no? "Bueno, sé que ahorita están durmiendo, les voy a poner un correito, que lo lea en la noche y mañana temprano hablamos", ¿no? Y yo quité esa estrategia. Simplemente me enfoqué... Yo sabía que ellos estaban disponibles desde mis 07:00 de la mañana hasta las 10:00 de la mañana... Entonces, yo reservaba ese tiempo para cerrar temas con la India.

Gigi: Ajá.

Nicola: También porque a mí me gusta respetar eso: su vida, la personal, y su horario laboral. Y me gusta respetar mi vida personal y mi horario laboral. Entonces… Sí, la verdad. La estrategia era simplemente dando resultados y enfocándome en las necesidades o el requerimiento, de aquí hacia allá, o de allá hacia acá, ¿no?

Gigi: Ya veo. Y, ¿qué tal con los de Estados Unidos? ¿Lo mismo o diferente?

Nicola: Lo mismo. Lo mismo, Gigi. Fue… Dándoles resultados, yo creo que generas esa confianza. Digo. Yo considero que la gente de India, en Estados Unidos… Igual. Me busca porque saben que les puedo dar una respuesta. Y si no tengo yo la respuesta, sé quién les puedo dar respuesta. Entonces, los redirecciono con la persona apropiada para que puedan solucionar su situación. Entonces, yo creo que dando el resultado y… Siempre respetando las agendas y horarios laborales y personales de cada persona... Creo que, de manera personal, es lo que más ha ayudado.

Gigi: OK, bien. Solo tengo dos preguntas más y terminamos. ¿OK?

Nicola: Sí. Adelante.

Gigi: Te pregunto. La comunicación en línea, aparte de trabajo y educación, ¿ha tenido impacto en tu vida en otros aspectos?

Nicola: La comunicación… Pues con la familia, ¿no? Digo.

Gigi: Puede ser.

Nicola: Sí, sí. Digo. A lo mejor previo a pandemia era más fácil levantar el teléfono y hablarle a mamá, papá, hermano, ¿no? Y, de repente, con la pandemia, como todo el tiempo estaba ocupado mi aparato... En llamadas, en reuniones… Sí, se habilitó un poquito más la conversación con mi familia vía remota, si lo quieres llamar así, Creo que ese sería el factor adicional. Digo. Se agregó a esa: Trabajo, educación; la familia. Porque también, inclusive yo o muchos optábamos utilizar una videollamada en lugar de visitar a la familia pues por el cuidado mutuo, ¿no?

Gigi: Claro, sí, sí. ¿Tú no vives cerca de tu familia?

Nicola: No, no. Digo, yo vivo como a… Desde Toluca son como seis horas.

Gigi: Ummm, OK, ya veo. Y entonces en la pandemia, pues tuviste que adaptarte a eso, ¿no?

Nicola: Sí, sí. Correcto. Sí. Fue una familia online.

Gigi: Exactamente. OK. Bien, bien. Y, bueno, otro aspecto. La última pregunta. La comunicación con personas de otras realidades y de otras culturas ¿tuvo un impacto en tu vida más allá de laboralmente o en el sector de la educación?, digamos.

Nicola: Un impacto en mi vida. ¿En qué aspecto? ¿Cualquiera?

Gigi: Cualquiera. Cualquier aspecto. No sé qué. ¿Cómo te ha cambiado a ti o cómo…? Bueno, no quiero decir cambiar, porque tal vez no, pero… ¿Cómo ha influido? ¿Cómo has reaccionado tú a esa comunicación con personas de diferentes realidades?

Nicola: La realidad es de que a me apasiona. Digo. Me encanta platicar con gente de otras culturas y sobre todo cuando tengo la oportunidad de conectar con la persona más que con el *business analyst* o el *manager* o el director, ¿no? Y de manera personal, pues me ha ayudado a entender que a pesar de las diferencias, de las diferencias culturales, de las diferencias, si lo quieres ver, desde el punto de vista del organigrama, de las diferencias entre religiones. He entendido que todo ser humano tiene un objetivo en común que es: primero, el cuidado personal, y el otro, el cuidado familiar. Algo que he aprendido es que a todo el mundo nos interesa nuestra familia, ¿no? Y si todos trabajamos, es por: número uno, yo estar financieramente bien, estable; y número dos, pues que mi familia inmediata se vea beneficiada con esa remuneración económica. Entonces, yo creo que he aprendido que, pues, todos tenemos ese objetivo de vida, si lo quieres ver así, que es cuidar de nosotros mismos. Mantenernos estables nosotros mismos, tener qué comer, tener qué tomar, tener dónde dormir. Y tener a mi familia, todos calzado, ropa, de cierta manera bien. Digo. Tampoco llegamos al extremo, pero bien. Creo que eso es lo que he aprendido a nivel global. Que ese es nuestro objetivo, no importando en qué categoría o en qué posición te encuentres.

Gigi: Claro, entonces has aprendido... Yo resumo… A ver cosas en común, ¿no?

Nicola: Correcto. Tenemos un objetivo en común que es la estabilidad financiera, personal y familiar.

Gigi: Exactamente. OK, muy bien. Nicola. No sé si quieres agregar algún otro comentario o quieres hacerme alguna pregunta a mí. No sé.

Nicola: No, GIGI. La realidad es que, como siempre, es bastante agradable conversar y charlar contigo.

Gigi: Gracias, gracias. Lo mismo digo. De hecho, cuando me comentabas de que en clase nos sentíamos tan relajados así como en confianza... De hecho me hizo recordar que fue por esa razón que yo quise hacer mi estudio, básicamente, con este grupo, porque yo sentía que teníamos una relación muy amena y como que nos entendíamos el uno con el otro. Entonces, a pesar del contexto o de las diferentes situaciones, siempre sentí como, no sé. Como parte del grupo, no sé. Sí era la profesora, pero, igual… No sé cómo decirlo.

Nicola: Decimos acá en México: “Ya eramos parte del barrio”.

Gigi: Exactamente. Bueno, en Colombia decimos: “Era como una parcera”.

Nicola: “Ándele, parcera”. Me gusta esa frase.