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Learners' identities at stake: Digital identity texts in the EFL classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the study of identity in digital identity texts produced by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners within a specific subject of the Teacher in Primary Education (English) degree at a Spanish university. To this end, 51 digital identity texts were analysed following a "positioning perspective", which views identity in terms of "reflexive" and "interactive" positions (Davies & Harré 1990). Results show that learners constructed non-unitary identities whose subject positions were often contradictory. They also associated certain positions with silencing identities, transition identities and identities of competence within the reflexive and interactive categories (cf. Norton & Toohey 2011, Manyak 2004), while ascribing others to their viewers interactively. In general, students discursively presented themselves as competent actors through diverse semiotic and linguistic resources they deployed in an affective narrative style characteristic of some forms of digital communication (Jones & Hafner 2012, Page 2012).

Keywords: *EFL teaching and learning, identity, position, identity texts, digital discourses*

I. INTRODUCTION

In spite of its centrality to language education (De Costa & Norton 2016), the notion of identity and its relation to academic success has been largely ignored in mainstream pedagogical practices and curricular policies (Cummins et al. 2005a, 2005b, Cummins & Early 2011, Cummins et al. 2015). The use of digital identity texts (DITs) with English language learners (ELL) has proved highly efficient in this regard, since such texts address identity affirmation, on the one hand, and literacy engagement, on the other, which has resulted in the development of students' multimodal and multilingual cognitive and academic language proficiency skills (CALPS) (see, e.g. Bernhard et al. 2006, Cummins 2006, Cummins et al. 2005a, 2005b, Cummins et al. 2015, Giampapa 2010, etc.). Identity texts are individually or collectively created texts that adopt multiple forms (e.g. a poem, a digital story, etc.) and may be established in more than one language.

Although such texts have commonly been employed with ELL from marginalised social groups (e.g. immigrants), they may also benefit other learner populations like

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mainstream college EFL students (García-Pastor, in press). Therefore, we have used DITs in the FL classroom to offer university students the possibility of presenting and building their identities in such a way that allows them to a) link them to "identities of competence" (Manyak 2004) which may further fuel their literacy engagement; or b) reject negative identities that prevent them from expressing themselves freely in the target language. In the DITs under study, students were encouraged to reflect on who they are and/or have become as EFL learners by considering how they have been learning the language, what kinds of learners they think they are (Ellis 1994), and which learning strategies they think they use in their learning (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990). All in all, this paper aims to highlight the relevance of the notion of identity in language education, and the usefulness of identity texts in the EFL classroom by scrutinising learners' identities and their construction in DITs. We believe that such analysis may shed light on which identities are likely to allow students to have a "voice" in the second/foreign language (L2/FL) and help them improve; which can make them feel oppressed and impede their progress (Norton 1995, Norton 2010, Norton & Toohey 2011); and which learners associate with unequal power relations in educational contexts.

II. IDENTITY TEXTS

II.1. Identity texts

Identity texts are to be understood within a theoretical framework that belongs to the critical paradigm in social research, in which power is regarded as ubiquitous; it is conceived as emerging in and through language, and it is defined as a site of struggle in social contexts (Baxter & Babbie 2004, Cohen et al. 2011). More specifically, identity texts are embedded within a theoretical perspective that views societal power relations in educational structures and interactions as unequal, and one of the main sources of underachievement among ELL. In this way, identity texts emerged as part of a large project conducted in schools within the Greater Toronto Area to support the development of literacy in ELL and students from marginalised social groups both in English and in their L1 (Cummins 2006, Cummins et al. 2005a, Cummins et al. 2015). The notion of literacy underlying these texts goes beyond traditional linear text-based

reading and writing skills to refer to technologically and non-technologically mediated literacies that are part of students' everyday writing practices in a variety of languages and contexts in and outside school (see Cope & Kalantzis 2015).

Thus, identity texts are bilingual or multilingual artefacts that students produce in written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic or multimodal forms as a result of having invested their identities in them (Cummins & Early 2011). Some examples include e books, picture books, wall-charts, etc. The following is a specific example of an identity text in the shape of a dual English-Urdu book co-authored by seventh graders, who present themselves and describe their experiences in Canada as immigrants from Pakistan.

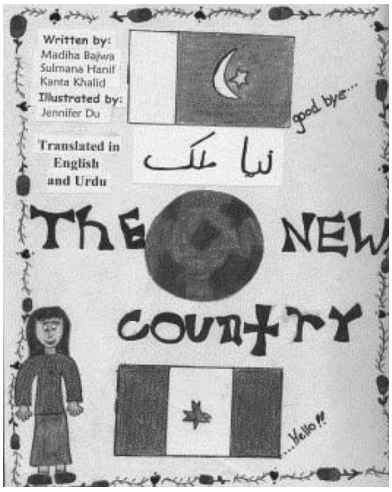


Figure 1. Dual language book from a seventh grade social studies unit (Cummins et al. 2005b).

Most importantly, identity texts "[hold] a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light" (Cummins & Early 2011: 3). The learner's positive self-image is reinforced when they share or jointly create their texts with peers, parents and teachers. This makes the relationship between the learner's daily life and school even more meaningful, and strengthens the link between educational institutions and families (Bernhard et al. 2006, Cummins 2006, Cummins et al. 2005a, 2005b, Giampapa 2010). Learners can thus feel that their cultural and linguistic capital is not excluded from curriculum and instruction, and, in consequence, they are likely to adjust better to the educational system of the foreign community.

As opposed to these general features, DITs in this study were individually created, and produced only in the target language. However, like other identity texts, they are the product of learners' creative work in the context of the classroom. In sum, identity texts help learners consolidate their identities and enhance their language learning (Bernhard et al. 2006, Cummins 2006, Cummins et al. 2005a, 2005b, Cummins & Early 2011, Cummins et al. 2015, Giampapa 2010).

II.2. Identity and positioning

In this study identity is understood as "ego", which is in a continuous dialogical tension with "alter" in and through discourse (Bakhtin in Todorov 1995, Baxter & Montgomery 1996). Ego not only needs alter to come into being, but also cannot be stripped of discourse, in such a way that identity is relational, social, and discursively produced and re-produced in and through interaction with others. Such interactions also need to be understood in the context of past and future conversations. Therefore, identity is a diverse, dynamic, often contradictory, multiple rather than unitary concept, that is jointly negotiated and socially constructed in and through discourse, and that involves a struggle by the learner to achieve identities s/he desires in a society characterised by unequal power relations (Norton 1995, 1997, 2010, Norton & Toohey 2002, 2011).

This view of identity has been advocated by post-structuralist perspectives which generally adopt a social constructivist approach to social reality (cf. Baxter 2016, Block 2013). Among these perspectives, we align ourselves with Davies and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning. This theory emerged as a counterpoint to the classical dramaturgical model in social psychology, which focuses on the static, formal and ritualistic concept of role to account for the enactment of identity. Identity in this theory is thus conceived in terms of "position" and "positioning", which refer to "the discursive production of a diversity of selves" (Davies & Harré 1990: 47), and the discursive process whereby this occurs respectively. Davies and Harré further distinguish between "interactive positioning", i.e. how a speaker's discourse positions the interlocutor(s), and "reflexive positioning", namely, how the speaker positions him/herself in and through discourse.

From this approach, discursive practices provide subject positions from which learners can speak, since they offer the resources (i.e. images, metaphors, story lines and concepts) that enable them to be positioned in the way such discursive practices prioritise. However, learners are also free to choose among the diverse and contradictory subject positions available within different discursive practices, and on some occasions, resist certain positions they are ascribed (e.g. Menard-Warwick 2007). Self-reflection is crucial in this regard, since interlocutors can thus become aware of the fact that they can accept or reject "the subject position[s] that the particular narrative and the related discursive practices might seem to dictate" (Davies & Harré 1990: 48).

II.3. Identity and technology

In DITs technology "acts as an amplifier to enhance the process of identity text production and dissemination" (Cummins & Early 2011: 3). However, we would argue that technology also contributes to increase students' investment in their language learning, since learners find new opportunities beyond language for the creation of their autobiographical narratives (Darvin & Norton 2014). Learners can thus find a space to claim greater authorial agency (Fong et al. 2016, Darvin & Norton 2014), gain a sense of self-efficacy, and further affirm and legitimise their cultural identities when sharing their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Darvin 2016, Darvin & Norton 2014, Lam 2000, Thorne & Black 2011, Yi 2007). Therefore, the use of technology for the production of their texts contributes to learners' construction of competent identities, since they feel they can use the FL in new and attractive ways that promote their self-perception as multicompetent actors (Fong et al. 2016, Chen 2013, Lam 2000, Thorne & Black 2011, Yi 2007).

Additionally, DITs incorporate digital storytelling, which learners can use both for creative writing and for thinking critically about social issues (e.g. Bernhard et al. 2006, Gregori-Signes 2008, 2014, Gregori-Signes & Pennock-Speck 2012, Oskoz & Elola 2016). Thus, DITs help learners reject self- and other-related stereotypes, whilst promoting a positive perception of L2 writing as a familiar, pleasant and creative process, away from the traditional conception of school literacy (Darvin & Carlton, 2014), which may be alienating for some ELL (Cummins 2006, Lam 2000, Yi 2007). In

sum, DITs help learners link the different subject positions they identify with to real or imagined identities of competence they desire, and hence progress in their academic language development (Bernhard et al. 2006, Cummins 2006, Cummins et al. 2005b, Cummins et al. 2015, Darvin & Norton 2014, Giampapa 2010, Gregori-Signes & Pennock-Speck 2012, Oskoz & Elola 2016, Reyes-Torres et al. 2012).

III. METHODS

III.1. Research questions

In light of the above, the following research questions were established:

- How do college EFL learners build their identities in their DITs, i.e. which subject positions do they identify with and which semiotic and linguistic resources sustain them?
- Which subject positions do they associate with identities of competence, transition identities and silencing identities, and how do they view these in terms of the unequal power relations that characterise social and educational institutions?

III.2. Corpus and data collection procedures

In order to answer these questions, 51 DITs were collected from university EFL students. These texts were produced in the context of a specific course within the Teacher in Primary Education studies at a Spanish university. Learners received specific instructions for the creation of their texts. With regard to content, they were required to offer a description of themselves as EFL learners, and include at least a "dramatic question" in their stories, i.e. a question that fully or partly guides the story and is answered by the end (cf. Gregori-Signes 2008, 2014, Robin 2006). Concerning format, students were allowed to use any video or photo editing program they felt comfortable with to create their texts, and their stories should not exceed seven minutes.

III.3. Participants

The participants in this study were 51 university EFL students, who were pursuing a degree in English Teaching in Primary Education at the time of the study. They include

7 males and 44 females between the ages of 22 and 25 years. They are mostly bilingual Spanish-Catalan speakers with an average B2 level of competence in English.

The teacher is also the researcher in this study, with twenty years of experience in TEFL and twelve years in second language teacher education.

IV.4. Analysis

Data analysis followed the "positioning" perspective outlined by Davies and Harré (1990), which was also informed by three types of narrative analysis related to identity and its negotiation in discourse (Block 2010): "thematic analysis", which focuses on the content of what is said, "structural analysis", which interrogates 'how' such content is produced, and "dialogic/performative analysis", which refers to 'who' an utterance is addressed to, 'when' and for what purposes. Thus, we paid attention to what learners communicated with regard to their EFL learner identities; how, i.e. which semiotic and linguistic resources they used to index such identities; who the addressee/s of their stories was/were at specific points in their discourses; and what for (Block 2010, Davies & Harré 1990, Thorne & Black 2011).

We also considered some of Ivanič's (1998) categories for the study of identity in written discourse, namely, the "autobiographical self" or the writer's self in terms of their roots and previous life experiences, the "discoursal self" or the self the writer constructs based on their semiotic and linguistic choices, and the "self as author", which is an aspect of the discoursal self that foregrounds the writer's authorial agency.

A general analysis of learners' DITs was first conducted to develop an understanding of their content and their structure. A more focused analysis followed consisting in descriptive comments on the content of students' texts; semiotic/linguistic comments on their use of symbolic resources for meaning-making; and conceptual comments related to concepts emerging in their stories that are relevant in the literature. The third step in data analysis aimed to identify identity-related themes and categories, considering already-established macro stereotypical positions, e.g. "learner", "native speaker" (Darvin & Norton 2015), "student" (Fong et al. 2016), and so forth. Specific subject positions within such categories were then identified, and the resulting identities and positions were further related to identities of competence (Manyak 2004), transition

identities (Norton & Toohey 2011) and silencing identities (Norton 1995, Norton 2010, Norton & Toohey 2011). Part of the data was also analysed by another researcher who was familiar with the method of analysis described above, but was not involved in the study. To ensure reliability, comparisons of our independent analyses, and refinements to the identity categories emerging from these were performed.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

V.1. Learners' construction of autobiographical selves: identity texts as personal narratives

Students built their language learner identities mainly in the form of autobiographical selves that were discursively constructed in and through the selection of certain episodes in their lives. These episodes included the learner's first experiences with language within the family and at school, their experiences with languages other than their L1 throughout secondary education and university, especially English, and their experiences related to these languages abroad. The selection of such episodes from the past and their narration in the first person singular to inform the viewer accounts for the shape of learners' DITs as "memoirs", that is, a specific kind of autobiographical genre which "focuses on some aspect of a person's life" (Brisk 2015: 103). However, learners' texts not only had the informational or explanatory purpose of memoirs, students also intended to tell their stories to an audience, so that their texts shaded into personal recounts. Personal recounts or narratives are a story genre in which the author deals with a temporal succession of events from a personal perspective, documents the sequence of events, deals with problematic events, evaluates the significance of events in the story, and provides a resolution (Brisk 2015, Johns 2003, Rothery & Stenglin 2005).

Therefore, learners' texts included not only a sequence of events, but also an evaluation of their relevance, one or more problems constituting the complication stage of the story, a crisis in a few cases, and a resolution. The problems students established in their texts referred to disappointing episodes throughout their learning process commonly framed as anxiety-increasing and motivation-decreasing periods, and issues such as the best age to start learning L2/FL, and the best way and/or method to acquire

it. These problems conveyed "some disruption of usuality" in their stories (Rothery & Stenglin 2005: 233), and were occasionally introduced through dramatic questions posited to the viewer, for instance, "were we motivated in the high school's lessons?". These questions acted as rhetorical devices that aimed to boost dramatic tension and increase the viewer's interest (Gregori-Signes 2008, 2014, Robin 2006). In spite of the problems learners narrated, their DITs were generally cast in a positive light, and were celebratory of their identities as EFL learners (Fong et al. 2016).

These findings also account for the fact that only 13 texts (25%) contained crisis points. These crises consisted mainly of situations in which learners' anxiety had reached the highest level, their motivation was at a minimum, and they were experiencing other frustrations in their learning, like monotonous grammar-oriented lessons and dreadful teachers. The resolutions to these crises were contingent upon learners themselves, who had to start some course of action and change their situation, e.g. a learner isolated herself from the negative learning context she was experiencing at high school, and nourished her intrinsic motivation by attending a language school. Occasionally, resolutions came from external sources like a teacher who crossed the learner's path, a friend who encouraged the learner to enrol in a specific language school or the student's mother, father or both, who changed the learner's educational centre, registered him/her at a language school, or sent him/her abroad.

V.2. Students' identities as EFL learners

Although students' autobiographical selves were ubiquitous in their texts, learners adopted certain subject positions in specific ways that illustrate how they built their identities. There were two macro stereotypical positions students invoked: "language learner" and "native speaker", which emerged as the two poles of a dialectical pair (cf. Baxter & Montgomery 1996). However, a third macro stereotypical position, i.e. "intercultural speaker", also surfaced as a counterpoint to these, thereby supporting the idea that in our global and digitally mediated world, "the asymmetric distribution of power no longer rests on the simple dichotomy of native speaker and language learner" (Darvin & Norton 2015: 41). The positions of "language learner" and "native speaker" appeared as mutually exclusive subject categories which, by contrast, could not be

defined without the other. Learners positioned themselves as "language learners" vis-à-vis "native speakers", which they associated with the positions of "teacher" and "member of a foreign community".

Students discursively indexed these positions mainly by means of semiotic resources like personal pictures or videos in which they appeared with other classmates and their teachers (Figure 2), and stereotypical images of themselves or pupils with their teacher in the classroom (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Personal video extract of learner with classmates and teacher

Figure 3.Stereotypical image of learners with teacher.

Students also deployed photographs of themselves with L1 English speakers (Figure 4) and, less frequently, stereotypical pictures of native speakers as members of a foreign culture (Figure 5). The common use of images containing both teachers and learners as well as learners and native speakers as opposed to separate images for each of these categories underscores their understanding of the "language learner", and "native speaker", "native speaker-teacher", "native speaker-member of a foreign community" and "teacher" positions as interdependent (cf. Thorne & Black 2011).

Figure 4. Personal image of learner with native speakers.

Figure 5. Stereotypical image of native speakers as members of the foreign culture.

Learners' non-standard use of English indexed their identities as language learners (Menard-Warwick 2007) coupled with the absence of specific features they ascribed to the position of "native speaker", the most salient one being the ability to communicate in the target language. Students equated this ability with speaking, which they identified as the best way of learning the L2/FL, thus engaging in the discussion of issues traditionally debated in second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis 1994, Gass & Selinker 2008, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991). In so doing, they reflexively positioned themselves as "SLA learners" or learners of the foreign language teaching course they wrote their texts for (FLT learners), whilst interactively positioning their audience as individuals who share such knowledge, namely, their teacher and classmates, or any other SLA/FLT teacher and students. In this way, learners developed a sense of community (Darvin & Norton 2014, Davies & Harré 1990, Lam 2000, Thorne & Black 2011), which personal recounts have proved suitable for (Brisk 2015). The following example illustrates these findings:

Example (1)

I started learning my second language when I was three years-old in the German school of Valencia.

I have grown up hearing German during a big and important part of the day

five days a week; and since all of the teachers were native speakers

there was no other option for us children to try and speak German if we wanted to communicate.

In this example, the student equates communication in German with speaking, and ascribes this ability to her native speaker (NS) teachers. She also argues that extended exposure to German and reception of input in this language were the most suitable conditions to learn it in her school days (Krashen 1982, Swain 1993). However, she had conform to the position of "German speaker" as part of her identity ("there was no other option for us children to try and speak German if we wanted to communicate"), and had to struggle to increase her cultural and linguistic capital in this language. Her initial resistance to embrace this position, her final adoption of it, and her struggle to learn German illustrate her awareness of the unequal power relations that permeate language learning and education, her contribution to their reproduction (Davies & Harré 1990, Norton 1995), and her attempts at levelling the power imbalance deriving from these (Darvin & Norton 2014, 2015, Norton, 1995, 2010, Norton & Toohey, 2002, 2011, Menard-Warwick 2007). Although she temporarily rejected being positioned as a "German speaker", she claims this position for herself, unveiling a self-image of someone who has become bilingual as a result (Cummins et al. 2015).

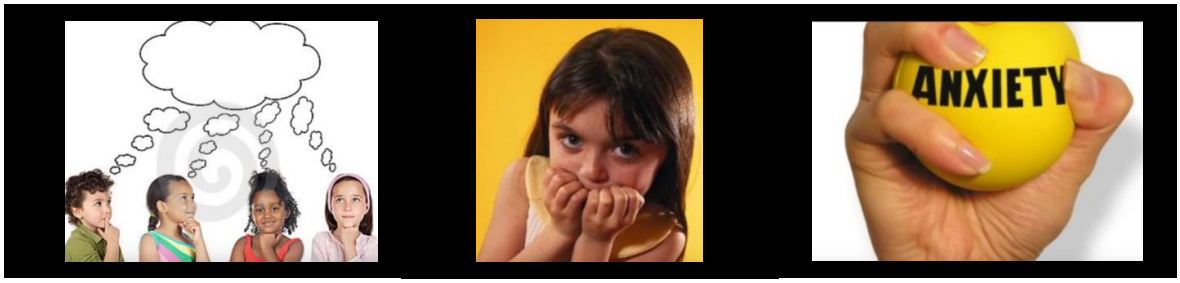
Learners' equation of communication in L2/FL with oral proficiency, and an advantageous, distinctive and special ability, which amounts to being "native" and evokes the most appropriate and natural way of learning a language, unveils a) a view of face-to-face ordinary conversation as the primary type of discourse in any language (cf. e.g. Lakoff 1989), b) an understanding of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), namely, "conversational fluency in a language" (Cummins 2008: 2), as the elementary abilities any language learner should master (Cummins 1983), and c) a standardised conceptualisation of L2/FL learning, whereby the "native speaker" is the "norm" to follow, linguistic accuracy is accentuated over meaning-making, and formal versus functional aspects of the language are foregrounded (cf. Cummins 2006, Cummins 2005a, 2005b). These considerations evince students' beliefs about, and prejudices against, different types of communication with regard to EFL learning. Teachers may rely on this information for the design and implementation of pedagogical practices that raise students' awareness of the capacity of other forms of communication (e.g. writing, digital communication) for developing their digital, multilingual, and multiliterate abilities in the target language.

Students associated oral proficiency in L2/FL with academic success and literacy development (Manyak 2004), and hence identities of competence they related to the positions of "English learner in an immersion context", "English learner with native-like oral proficiency", "family bilingual", "intercultural speaker", "English teacher in Primary Education", "active learner" and "motivated learner" besides "native speaker". Nevertheless, they not always considered the position of "native speaker" an identity of competence when combined with that of "teacher". Apart from oral proficiency, a dynamic and communicative type of language instruction was required for an NS teacher to qualify as competent.

In spite of mainly depicting face-to-face interaction in L2/FL positively, students occasionally related this form of communication to frustration and anxiety by discursively constructing and identifying with the position of "anxious learner". They attributed this position with test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986), and built it as a silencing identity that did not allow them to express themselves freely or have a "voice" in English. Learners' use of images of individuals conveying frustration and/or requesting help, conceptual images emphasising the word "anxious" or "anxiety" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and other images denoting negative meanings (e.g. a hand with the thumb down) indexed this position along with linguistic elements such as: negative emotion verbs ("disconnect", "dislike") (cf. Oskoz & Elola 2016); thought verbs related to cognitive processes of others about self ("think", "judge") (see Brisk 2015); negative noun-phrases on self-perception of own worth ("low self-esteem", "low self-confidence"); intensifiers ("higher") (cf. Darvin 2016, Jones & Hafner 2012, Page 2012); and negative qualifiers applied to self ("stupid").

The learner in Extract (2) draws on some of these semiotic and linguistic resources to refer to speaking in front of the class as an anxiety-provoking situation, which she compares with the anxiety-free context of small group interaction.

Example (2)



That is very important because with a little group of people I can speak without problem,

but when I have to speak to the whole class, I am feeling a bit anxious, because I think everybody is judging me, and I am aware that

I have to reduce that anxiety if I want to improve my skills.

Students linked the subject position of "anxious learner" to that of "unmotivated learner", and categorised both primarily within the position of "English learner in Secondary school", which also included the position of "passive learner". These school-based positions described types of learners unable to learn and use the target language efficiently mostly in ordinary conversation, hence silencing identities (cf. Norton 2010, Norton & Toohey 2011).

Students also associated these identities and positions with a "transmission pedagogy" (Cummins 2006: 57), namely, a pedagogy that, inter alia, denies the language learner a) access to real language use by emphasising a formal versus a functional approach (Lam 2000), b) the possibility of making sense of their learning process, and c) the opportunity to get to know other languages and cultures. Learners mainly referred to this type of pedagogy in their Secondary school episodes with this educational stage emerging as a coercive institutional context that reproduces linguistic and social inequalities (Bordieu & Passeron 1990). Students discursively built such silencing identities and positions by means of stereotypical pictures of English textbooks, grammar exercises, disinterested and stressed pupils, and prisoners in jail. The most frequent linguistic resources underlying all these school-based positions were grammatical terms and expressions (e.g. "fill in the gaps exercises", "drills", "textbook"), core vocabulary related to a summative type of evaluation (e.g. "exams", "tests"), negative emotion verbs and nouns ("dislike"), and negative qualifiers ("boring", "tedious") (see Cummins 2006, Cummins 2005a, 2005b, Lam 2000). In this

way, learners also indicated their detachment from, and rejection of, these identities and positions. Example (3) illustrates these findings:

Example (3)

In addition, all lessons including the English one were boring, repetitive and decontextualised. So I feel very lost when I tried to memorised lots of concepts and ideas that

made no sense for me. Furthermore, as I am a dependent-field and intuitive learner, this problem affected my grades as my level of motivation continued to decrease quickly. Suddenly,

I realised I didn't want to study with the only specific goal of passing a test. This situation contributed to increase my level of anxiety because I want to succeed, but at the same time, I was having a very strong feeling of

dislike about the way high school subjects were structured. It was in this period that my motivation reached a minimum as I decided to leave English lessons out of having failed the FCE exam.

The student here depicts his position of English learner in Secondary Education as a silencing identity that derives from discouraging instructional practices, and an educational context organised around exams and grades. Such a context forced him to conform to this identity at the time, leading to poor learning outcomes (cf. Davies & Harré 1990, Norton 1995, Norton & Toohey 2011). In order to offer his description, the learner employs some of the aforementioned semiotic and linguistic resources, e.g. a stereotypical image of a stressed student, Wile E. Coyote asking for help, and a prisoner in jail coupled with summative evaluation terms ("exam", "test"), negative emotion verbs and nouns ("felt lost", "dislike") and negative qualifiers ("boring", "repetitive").

Transition identities are based on the idea that learners invest in their language learning to increase their linguistic and material resources in L2/FL (Norton 1995, 2010, Norton & Toohey, 2002, 2011). Therefore, they are a bridge to real or imagined identities of competence. In this study, these identities were observed to include subject positions that mainly referred to types of English learners in the school setting (English learner in Primary school, English learner in extracurricular activities); English learners in instructional contexts outside school (English learner in private lessons, English learner at a language school); autonomous learners who attempt to learn from audiovisual materials in the FL (music, films and TV series) (consumer of audiovisual materials in English), that is, from sources of input different from the teacher. In sum, transition identities and positions were not restricted to the school context as opposed to silencing identities, and further underscored learners' identities as "choosing subjects" (Davies & Harré 1990).

The semiotic resources underlying these identities range from real pictures of students' school centres, language schools, teachers and classmates, to images or video and music excerpts of their favourite singers, bands, TV series and films. Learners' use of these real images signals their personal involvement in the narrative construction of such identities (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), frequently so as to render them positively. Similarly, the linguistic elements and structures students employed to enact them in and through discourse, e.g. positive state and action verbs ("understand", "improved", "encouraged"), modal verbs indicating ability ("could"), marked use of terms related to the process of learning and the learner's engagement in such a process ("learning", "interest", "engaged"), and upgraders ("a lot", "quite well", "really") (Darvin 2016, Jones & Hafner 2012, Page 2012), highlight their positive attitude and, in some cases, even their pride in these ways of being a learner:

Example (4)

On the other hand around that time I listened to English music very often, since my sister played it constantly at home. My favourite song made me enthusiastic about its meaning and about learning the language. This song

is “Wind of change” (song starts playing).

At the beginning I couldn’t understand the lyrics, but later I started to understand some words. Through music I realised that learning English was useful, so I developed an interest to learn it.

In this example, the student discursively builds and takes the position of “consumer of audiovisual materials in English”, in particular, “consumer of English music”, through certain semiotic and linguistic resources that enable her to depict herself as an autonomous learner she is proud of, since she was able to understand the lyrics of her favourite English song.

The competence, silencing and transition identities and positions discussed above along with the semiotic and linguistic resources that instantiate them illustrate both the learners’ reflexive and interactive positioning in their DITs. Learners rejected and claimed some of these positions and identities for themselves in order to empower themselves as EFL learners. Concerning silencing categories, students subverted the powerlessness ascribed to these (Darvin & Norton 2014) by a) discursively showing and narrating the struggle they experienced to increase their linguistic and cultural capital in the target language (see Example 1 above) (Menard-Warwick 2007), and b) exhibiting mastery of specific theoretical concepts and issues mostly through the use of specialised jargon (this applied especially to the position of “SLA/FL learner”). In both cases, students saw themselves as “capable of higher order thinking and intellectual accomplishment” (Cummins et al. 2015: 577), and were commonly proud of their learning efforts and knowledge (Fong et al. 2016, Chen 2013).

However, it was mainly through identities of competence and their positions that students bid for power in their texts. More specifically, as the macro stereotypical position of “native speaker”, albeit desirable, was conceived as unreachable, learners

invoked the position of "intercultural speaker", which they commonly specified in the positions of "Erasmus student", "exchange student" and "international student", and defined as a mediator between languages and cultures, and a citizen of the world. This subject position is in line with criticism raised against the figure of the NS as the model for appropriate language use in and outside the field of language education (e.g. Prodromou 1992, House 2008). By endorsing the position of "intercultural speaker", learners thus partly rejected this model, accepting instead a diverse English-speaking world (Crystal 2003) populated by millions of English language users with different linguistic and socio-cultural norms, all of them equally valid as a baseline for comparison with their learner language (Ellis 1994, García-Pastor 2010).

Lastly, students also empowered themselves in their DITs by foregrounding their position as authors/writers, which emphasises the self as the author aspect of their discoursal selves (Ivanič 1998). In so doing, they were interactively positioning the viewer as a reader/receiver, thus casting the latter as a powerless agent (Darvin & Norton 2014). Learners claimed greater authorial agency mostly through the use of their own voices to narrate their stories and other resources such as visually ascribing a print-based format to their personal recounts (e.g. "Chapter 1: Age", "High school", etc.) and metalinguistic comments that further stressed their position as "experts", and that of viewers as "novices" (e.g. "I know who I am, what I like, and what I'm good at"). In this way, learners not only stressed their authorial identity, but also revealed an understanding of print-based literacy as authoritative in comparison with other forms of literacy. These ideologies should be deconstructed and discussed in L2/FL teacher education courses and EFL classrooms to raise students' awareness of their presence, and promote views of literacy in the target language more attuned with our digitally mediated world, in which written and spoken modes of communication merge (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006) and literacy practices go beyond the written word (Darvin 2016).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored university students' identity construction as EFL learners in DITs produced in the context of a specific subject within the English Teacher in Primary Education degree. This paper contends that an understanding of how learners

build their identities in and through digitally mediated literacy practices and genres like identity texts can provide insightful information for educators to design materials and implement pedagogical practices that embrace students' multiple reflexive positionings, promote identity positions which offer the greatest opportunity for social participation and interaction in L2/FL, and combat positions that silence their voices.

Upon analysis, learners mainly crafted their identities as autobiographical selves, which contributed to shape their texts partly as memoirs, and mostly as personal recounts or narratives. However, they also discursively built their identities through certain subject positions that evinced the multiple, fragmented, non-unitary, fluid and contradictory nature of their identities. Students not only positioned themselves in and through their texts (reflexive positioning), but also positioned their viewers (interactive positioning) primarily to generate a sense of community. Learners depicted the macro stereotypical positions of "learner" and "native-speaker" as opposites in a dialectical dyad, and that of "intercultural speaker" as a counterpoint to these two. They ascribed the position of the "native speaker" and "intercultural speaker" the ability to use the target language efficiently in oral communication and a natural way of learning, whilst defining the position of "learner" mainly by the absence of these features. Therefore, they associated the former with identities of competence, and some subject positions defining the latter with silencing identities and transition identities leading to imagined or real identities they desire.

In order to build these identities and positions in their DITs, students resorted to a series of semiotic and linguistic resources, which contributed to the construction of their identities as a site of struggle, helped them undermine powerless ways of being a learner, and empowered them as EFL learners. The position of "intercultural speaker" was relevant in this regard, since students appropriated this position as a way to subvert the lack of power typically ascribed to being a learner and to overcome the unreality of always qualifying as a native speaker. These findings further attest to the potential of identity texts for identity affirmation. In sum, this study has attempted to highlight the multiplicity and complexity of learners' subject positions and identities as language learners, and acknowledge the ways in which language, identity, agency and power are inextricably intertwined in digitally mediated literacy practices.

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