

Spanish “tú” or “usted

German “du” or “Sie”

## Different Cultures, Same Complexities: The Process of Constructing Culture

**ARMENTA-DELGADO, Ileri**

Bulgarian “ti” or “vie”

Romanian “dys” or “ai”

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Portuguese “seu” or “você”

Danish “din” or “du”

Turkish “sizin” or “seni”

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**Different Cultures, Same Complexities: The Process of Constructing Culture**

**Diferentes culturas, mismas complejidades: El proceso de construcción de la cultura**

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The Book will offer selected contributions of researchers that contribute to the scientific dissemination activity of the Universidad de Guanajuato for its research area in the function of the University facing the challenges of the Knowledge Society. In addition to having a total evaluation, in the hands of the directors of the Universidad de Guanajuato, quality and punctuality are collaborated in their chapters, each individual contribution was arbitrated to international standards (RESEARCH GATE, MENDELEY, GOOGLE SCHOLAR and REDIB ), the Book thus proposes to the academic community, the recent reports on the new developments in the most interesting and promising areas of research in the function of the University before the challenges of the Knowledge Society.

# Content

Objectives and Methodology	1
Contribution	1
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Why Culture?	2
1.2 Challenges of Researching Culture	3
1.3 The Importance of Researching Culture in ELT	4
1.4 The Structure of the Book	4
<b>Chapter 2. The Ambivalence of Culture</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 The Dimensions of Culture	5
2.2 The Social Construction of Culture	7
2.3 Struggles in Negotiating between the Old and New Social Knowledge	9
2.4 Summary of this Section	10
<b>Chapter 3 The Intercultural and Cosmopolitan Orientations</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1 Critical Cultural Awareness	12
3.2 Acting Interculturally	13
3.3 Globalization and Culture	14
3.4 Cultural Cosmopolitanism	15
3.5 Critical Cosmopolitanism	16
3.5.1 Cosmopolitan Transformation	16
3.6 Summary of this Section	17
<b>Chapter 4 The Research Approach and Research Procedures</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1 The Site of the Investigation	18
4.1.1 Characteristics of Social Setting	18
4.1.2 Characteristics of the Participants in the Investigation	19
4.2 The Qualitative Paradigm	19
4.3 Ethnography in Education	20
4.3.1 Ethnographic Research: From a Large to a ‘Small Culture’	20
4.3.2 Thick Description	21
4.3.3 Reflexivity	22
4.3.3.1 Ethical Issues and Data: A Reflexive Account	22
4.3.3.2 Reflexivity in “Telling the Story”	23
4.3.3.4 Reflexivity in Terms of the Research Process	24
4.3.3.5 “Making the Familiar Strange”	25
4.4 Interviews	25
4.4.1 Approaching the Interview	26
4.4.2 Critical Incidents	27

4.4.3 Origins of Critical Incidents	27
4.5 Issues of Readability	28
<b>Chapter 5 Social Use of Language</b>	<b>30</b>
5.1 “A Mexican Thing”: Requesting Permission to Enter the Classroom	30
5.1.1 Cultural Practices and the Cosmopolitan Outlook	32
5.2 “An Anglo-Saxon Thing”: Changing Students’ “Mexican” Behavior	33
5.3 The Foreign View: The Egalitarian “You” of English-Speaking Societies— “we are all equal”	37
5.4 The Local View: Supposed Non-Egalitarian Use of <i>Usted</i> of Mexican Society	39
5.5 Reflective Dialogue for Local and Global Social Construction	44
5.6 Summary of this Chapter	47
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications</b>	<b>48</b>
6.1 General Conclusions	48
6.2 Conclusions: Key Findings	49
6.3 Final Considerations on the Research Question	51
6.4 Implications	52
6.5 Pedagogical Suggestions	52
6.5.1 Training in Interculturalism	52
6.5.2 Critical Incidents to Cultivate Intercultural Competency	53
6.5.3 Critical Reflexivity: The Dialogic Perspective	53
6.5.4 Tell Your Story	53
6.6 Limitations	53
6.7 Further Research	54
6.8 Final Comments	54
References	55
Glossary	60
Appendix I Critical Incident: An American in Mexico	61
Appendix II <i>Elizabeth’s</i> Classroom Observation (CO12)	62

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the processes individuals go through in the construction of culture. Researching an abstract concept such as "culture" was achieved by adopting the ethnographic method, through field work, with the use of interviews and class observation as tools for data collection. Both tools allowed the author to explore what English teachers and their students think about culture, how they conceptualize it, as well as what they are seen to be doing with it in the classroom. In other words, observation allowed this researcher to capture the way the participants deal with culture. In the case of interviews, beyond the use of a common series of questions to answer, the use of critical incidents (short stories that narrate a cultural event) were used to explore the opinions, ideas and feelings of the participants. This innovative technique allowed for spontaneous reactions which motivated the participants to share their own stories. Through their narratives the processes involved in the construction of culture became evident: the processes of deliberation when trying to understand and make sense of culture(s) as well as the concepts and knowledge (personal and professional experience) that inform their own constructions. The processes in the construction of culture emerged in a natural way, thus evidencing the complexities of this process. This is conducive to reflecting upon and questioning the traditional and essentialist methods of "teaching" a language and "its culture".

## **Contribution**

The topic of culture in English language teaching tends to be addressed through the "teaching" of cultural recipes, that is to say what people belonging to the culture of the language being taught/learned say or do. This vision, far from sensitizing students towards cultural diversity, tends to create generalized representations of cultures and people. Culture is presented as an objective reality, when it actually possesses the characteristics of a verb, that is, something that people do, that is negotiated and constructed according to situational and circumstantial contexts. Through the stories narrated by the teacher and student participants in this investigation, the complexities of this process are highlighted, not obscured. In the same way, the study discusses the challenges that cultural negotiation can represent for individuals. The findings of this investigation provide empirical information identifying the cognitive processes leading to the success, or obstruction, of the intercultural exchange. The cosmopolitan orientations of "relativization" and "acceptance" from the positions of the intercultural and critical cultural cosmopolitanism traditions are highlighted in order to achieve reflexivity from a dialogic perspective (the Self and the Other). Reflexivity is not critical, if it is not dialogic. This research makes a contribution towards informing new ways to approach culture in the classroom, from a cosmopolitan vision which cultivates cultural mediation, and therefore, acceptance of cultural diversity.

## **Cosmopolitan Orientations, Critical Cultural Cosmopolitanism, Interculturalism**

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Why Culture?

The motivation to look more deeply into the issue of culture was stimulated by several events in my professional life as a university professor in Mexico. When engaging in conversation with foreign colleagues, I began to wonder what individuals really *do* with culture; how do they *use* culture; how do they *make sense* of culture? So then, on a more narrow level, this investigation was inspired by a recurrent phenomenon observable in the expressions of some of the foreign English language teachers at the Language Department where I work. The following fragments, recorded in my research notes, serve to illustrate this occurrence:

*Students are always asking for permission to enter the classroom—Teacher may I come in?—They also ask for permission to use the bathroom!—Teacher can I go out to the bathroom?—I always tell them—You don't have to ask me for permission to use the bathroom, in America, you don't do that, you just get up and go!—This is my way of teaching them self-confidence (Research notes)*

*I tell my students in America you call your teachers by their names not 'Teacher'. I disagree with these tu and usted forms I just don't think that some people deserve more respect than others (Research notes)*

These incidents took place at the Language Department when engaged in casual conversation with two American teachers on two different occasions. However, these were not the only times I had heard teachers discussing these issues. It appears that almost every semester, with the arrival of new foreign teachers, similar comments are heard. It seems to be inevitable that this particular aspect of the students' behavior captures the newcomers' attention the moment they become immersed in the host society. As I recall, at the time these incidents took place I felt uncomfortable and perhaps a little disturbed by these remarks. I resented these comments because they were made more like ideological pronouncements rather than mere curiosity-driven conjecture into the mindset of the students. I disliked the lack of sensitivity and consideration in the tone of these two statements.

The immediate impact that the statement “in America” had on me was a sense of alienation, being a non-member of “that culture”. The remarks of these teachers, emphasizing the persistent phrase “in America”, made me overly conscious of the “cultural knowledge” that only they, the “native speakers”, could possess, having been brought up in that culture. This thought brought back both personal and professional memories of conducting research for my MA dissertation (Armenta, 2008), an investigation exploring the native/non-native dichotomy. The findings of my investigation showed that the local “non-native English language” teachers were made to feel inferior by “native speaker” English language teachers, due to a supposed lack of “cultural knowledge”, among other reasons. Indeed, one of the strongest arguments favoring the “native English speaker” as the most qualified to teach the English language has been because of their “cultural knowledge”. Although these ideas have been contested by many theorists (Braine, 1999; Holliday, 2005; Kramsch, 1997; Llorca, 2005, McKay, 2002; Medgyes, 1993, 1992; Modiano, 2005; Phillipson, 1992a, 1992b; and Rampton, 1990 among many others), it is still a prevalent attitude, as my findings showed. So then, at the time the critical incidents in question took place, I could not help feeling uncomfortable, assuming that these American teachers knew “American culture”, and that I did not. At the time of this investigation I became aware that to speak of a “native speaker” was problematic; it was equally so to speak of culture.

However, as I reflected on these events more deeply, I began to question the remarks and attitudes of those two American teachers. Their remarks seemed to hold barbs for a number of reasons. First, the comparison contained in the phrase “*in America*” implies a negatively constructed inferior-superior continuum. Secondly, the American teachers' impressions of “their culture” appear to conform to the standard stereotype of “Mexican culture” as collectivist (Hofstede, 1991, 2001), or lacking in self-confidence (Holliday, 2011), while independence is a quality Americans are presumed to possess. Both cultures are perceived as static or homogeneous entities. Finally, the two teachers seem to be using their “American native culture” as a point of reference. In their perception, this point of reference prescribes the most appropriate forms of behavior, and also gives them license to condition students to act according to “US social norms”, including prescribing forms of address. The teaching of English might appear to be used as a medium of what some authors (Phillipson, 1992a, p. 47; Pennycook, 1994, p. 77) refer to as “cultural imposition”. In the present case, these teachers could be perceived to be imposing American socio-cultural norms on the local environment.

Although these were some of my initial thoughts, I was aware of the risk involved in arriving to conclusions too quickly. In fact, the comments of those two teachers afforded me an instructive insight into the complexities of the handling of culture, manifested in the way they reacted to and spoke about culture. Thus, the question I was seeking to answer was: *How do English language teachers and students construct the concept of culture?*

My intention was to capture the participants' reactions, to record specific ideas they might have about culture (whether these were driven by personal or professional experience) and to capture descriptions of exactly what the participants were doing during the process of deliberating culture. Thus, this investigation proposes to explore the constructions of culture of both local and foreign teachers and their students. Although the constructions of local students and teachers were explored, the most prominent discourse often came from foreigner teachers. This is not surprising, given the fact that they are living and working in a new environment. Thus, they were confronted with difference, experiencing it first-hand, and as a result they become more conscious of it. The experiential discussions from the vantage point of the foreigners found response in the voices of Mexican teachers and students. Differently from the foreign teachers, the locals did not seem to be particularly aware of their own practices; this seems reasonable considering that one's own worldview can consist partly or largely of subconscious knowledge, especially when surrounded by the familiar objects of the native environment.

The participants chosen for the investigation included twenty-four local students and eight English teachers. The teacher participants included four local teachers, while the foreign teachers selected were an American, a Canadian and two British nationals. The investigation focused on how culture is constructed by each individual independently of their roles as student or teacher. Beyond these roles, each individual has a story about how they make sense of life, themselves and others. In these stories myriad concepts are invoked: language, nationality, professional and cultural identities, differences, practices, social norms and traditions. In order to understand how individuals deal with culture, this investigation looks at the concepts invoked, or the *whats* of culture, and the processes involved in this construction, that is to say, the *hows* of culture. In this investigation, I set out to discover what individuals were doing with these concepts and how they talked about them, in other words, the processes involved in the negotiation of these concepts. This made it possible to capture the detail of what goes on when individuals construct culture.

The core finding of my investigation revealed the complexities and struggles of individuals in constructing culture. Indeed, how this small group of people construct culture demonstrated that it is a very complex process that would appear to be rather contradictory at times. However, constructing culture, as implicit in the progressive form of the verb "construct", is a transformative process. Individuals become engaged in a process of constant deliberation—in this deliberation over culture, representations of the Self and Others were questioned. This process revealed the human capacities present in the construction of culture and the developmental nature of intercultural learning. At a certain point, it became very evident in the detail of my data that relativization was the major issue at the core of the process of negotiating knowledge. Indeed, foreign teachers in particular appeared to struggle to accept different ways of doing/acting, as will be seen throughout. Based on the slogan "we are all equal", foreign teachers problematized Spanish language use of formal address and titles, which they viewed as non-egalitarian. This was one of the clearest manifestations of individuals struggling to relativize their worldviews, questioning at the same time the beliefs they hold about themselves and their culture. The participants' struggle to relativize their worldviews sometimes had a positive outcome; through the process of relativization, individuals were able to see beyond their cultural realities, recognizing the validity of the Other's ways of doing/acting. This recognition of the qualities of the Other led in many cases to a positive outcome, the modest transformation of the Self. The participants were seen advancing on the struggle-laden path towards negotiating the construction of the Other, first taking faltering steps forward, then two backwards, and then advancing once more—relativization, recognition and transformation was by no means a linear progression for the participants. Yet there was the possibility of modest transformation of the Self, perhaps due to the innate cosmopolitanism qualities embedded in each individual.

## 1.2 Challenges of Researching Culture

The ethnographic approach was the method that best accommodated the purpose of this investigation. The term "ethnography" is not meant to be taken in the sense of anthropology *per se* but as social research, in other words, the study of *any* social group (*vide infra*, Section 4.3). This type of research is grounded on the conceptions of the Chicago School, which viewed the study of "problems at home" (Wolcott, 2008, p. 23). The ethnographic approach provided a wide range of strategies, enabling me to ensure that the phenomenon was covered from different angles within an interconnected social environment.

This in turn allowed me to gain an ample picture of the social group (Fetterman, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Thomas, 2003; Wolcott, 2008). Through *fieldwork* I was able to obtain a rich variety of data, achieving an insightful and sensitive image of this social group. Ethnography allowed me to observe and participate in the activities of the participants in this investigation, to interact and mingle with them in the setting where they work and study. Indeed, *class observation* allowed me to see the way in which teachers and students act, how they understand and respond to two different linguistic and cultural systems, those of the Self and the Other. *Interviewing* teachers and students allowed me to see a further dimension of their views. The use of *critical incidents* (brief stories about cultural encounters) played a major role, in that they elicited spontaneous reactions, making it possible to obtain a more realistic view of the way teachers and students construct and try to make sense of the concept of culture. These incidents were seen not as topics, but as resources that allowed insight into how interviewees talk about culture, their capacities for deliberation, and their skill at invoking personal experiences when talking about culture. In other words, I was able to use knowledge of teachers' and students' stories, their statements and interpretations, to reveal the way people interpret and construct culture.

By interconnecting field notes and by interviewing both teachers and students, I was able to look into the deeper strata of their views of culture, its complexities, and the struggles and challenges it represents for individuals when trying making sense of it. The ethnographic approach provided a powerful tool for achieving a more holistic view of the complex phenomenon of culture.

### **1.3 The Importance of Researching Culture in ELT**

The literature of English Language Teaching (ELT hereafter), specifically that dealing with Intercultural Communication (ICC hereafter), offers guidelines for curriculum design, methodology and procedures for approaching cultural awareness. However, an area that seems to be neglected is the impact that the ELT practitioner's view of culture can have on their conscious or unconscious approach to the subject. This impact might include one's vision of oneself and the Others, as in the case of foreign teachers working in a new environment, or how understanding of culture affects response to the local environment, including response to students or colleagues. Closely related to the issue of the ELT practitioner's approach is the understanding of the role of culture in ELT, taking into consideration its status in the world of English as an International Language (EIL hereafter), or in the place where the instruction takes place English as a Second Language (ESL hereafter) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL hereafter). Thus, by investigating how culture is constructed by ELT practitioners, this investigation offers new insight into the challenges facing the ELT practitioner, presenting views that have yet to be specifically approached in ELT.

### **1.4 The Structure of the Book**

This book is divided into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the investigation by delineating the focus and motivation of the investigation, the setting and participants, as well as the methodology used. Chapter Two provides a discussion of the literature as it relates to the subsequent analysis of the findings. The discussion of literature is centered on three large areas: 1) definitions and general consideration of culture; 2) the social construction of culture, and cultural practices; 3) the processes of critical reflexivity, relativizing, recognition and self-transformation as related to the intercultural and cosmopolitan traditions. Chapter Four introduces the conceptual framework and provides an analysis of the research methodology used in this investigation. Chapter Five discusses the theme of the impact of culture on social conventions. It looks at the construction of culture from the perspective of social use of language, specifically the *tu* and *usted* forms of modern Spanish, while the concluding Chapter Six discusses the implications of the findings of the investigation for the field of ELT, and a conclusion of the investigation.

## Chapter 2. The Ambivalence of Culture

Indeed, the term “ambivalent” describes the nature of the ELT literature dealing with culture. The many interpretations made by various scholars show something of the complex and contentious nature of engaging with culture as a phenomenon. Given the complex nature of the task of dealing with culture, many different and varying interpretations were drawn upon to explain the phenomenon. More than an exposition of the relative merits of different authors’ interpretations of culture, this review of the extant literature seeks to provide an overview of many different viewpoints in order to better capture the complex nature of the subject.

### 2.1 The Dimensions of Culture

Some scholars debate whether the word culture should not be considered a verb rather than a noun. It is argued that viewing culture as a noun gives the impression that it is an object or a thing (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Pennycook, 1994; Scollon *et al.* 2012; Shaules, 2007), something rather tangible, when in reality Street (1993) argues that culture is a dynamic process of “the active construction of meaning” (p. 23) therefore it carries the qualities of a verb. This conceptualization has important implications, because as Scollon *et al.* (2012) argue, “to say that ‘culture is a verb’ is to say that culture is not something that you think or possess or live inside of. It is something that you *do*. And the way that you do it might be different at different times and in different circumstances” (p. 5). These authors highlight this view by describing some of the many interpretations that people attach to culture, including “(a) thing that you have, like courage or intelligence, (b) something that people live inside of like a country or region or a building, (c) a set of beliefs or values or mental patterns that people in a particular group share, (d) a set of rules that people follow which they can either conform to or break, (e) a set of largely unconscious habits that govern people’s behavior without them fully realizing it, (f) something that is rather grand, (g) something one finds in the halls of museums and between the covers of old books, (h) something that is to be found in the everyday lives of everyday people, (i) something that some cherish as the thing that holds us together, and (j) others who deride it as the thing that drives us apart” (*ibid.* p. 3).

Each one of the different views of culture seen above has the potential to lead to a different artefact; at the same time none of them alone can be considered a definitive or complete definition. These scholars emphasize the idea that individuals should be able “to use these various ideas about culture without being ‘taken in’ by them, without falling into the trap of thinking that any particular construction of ‘culture’ is actually something ‘real’” (*ibid.* p. 3). What people *do* with culture became evident in the way the participants in this investigation talked about it. The participants often treated culture as a synonym for: “traditions”, “customs”, “values” and “social norms”, (Extracts 2–5). They also used it to mean “habits” (Extract 10) or “society” (Extract 11). Culture was one thing or another at different times under different circumstances.

One of the most contested matters surrounding the concept of culture is determining the degree to which the members of a social group may be said to share the same characteristics. As Shaules (2007) writes, “it is difficult to describe cultural difference in a way that both recognizes the diversity and dynamism of particular behaviors and deep patterns of similarity that unify people in cultural communities at differing levels of abstraction” (p. 59). As the following definitions of “culture” show, authors have considered that groups of people may share characteristics, but this is not determinative of behavior in every case.

*Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behavior and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behavior (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 15).*

*Culture is the shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group, where ‘social group’ can refer to any collectivity of people, from those in a social institution such as a university, a golf club, a family, to those organised in large-scale groups such as a nation, or even a ‘civilisation’ such as ‘European’.*

*The beliefs in question are the ‘shared meanings’ (Taylor, 1971) which justify and underpin their behaviours and the ‘social representations’ (Farr and Moscovici, 1984) they hold in common. There are also shared ‘values’ that include the values attached to their beliefs and behaviours, and the attitudes they have towards their shared social representations (Byram, 2008, p. 60).*

*Culture can be viewed as the set of fundamental ideas, practices, and experiences shared by a group of people. Culture can also refer to a set of shared beliefs, norms, and attitudes that are used to guide the behaviors of a group of people, to explain the world around them, and to solve their problems (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004, pp. 11–12).*

*Culture can be defined as membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings (Kramsch, 1998a, p. 10).*

As seen in these definitions of culture, it is considered that groups of people may share characteristics, but this is not determinative of behavior in every case, a view which acknowledges the diversity within any group of people. Indeed, scholars from the fields of anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Fetterman, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2009; Spradley, 1980; Wolcott, 2008), sociology (Appiah, 2006; Delanty, 2009; Nussbaum, 1996); education (Kramsch, 1998a; Kubota, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; McKay, 2002; Hansen, 2011; Holliday, 2011; 2013), multiculturalism (Phillips, 2009; Kymlicka, 2009), psychology (Kim 2005; Nishida, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005; Weaver, 1993; Wierzbicka, 1998), share the belief that no culture is homogeneous. They recognize that the diversity within any social group can be as immeasurable as that between any two communities. Similarly, diversity within any individual person is likely to be as immeasurable as that between two individuals.

Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 47) elaborate on the issue of regularity and variability, noting that: 1) the regularities of culture are manifested in numerous different interrelated ways; 2) these regularities go hand in hand with variability; 3) culture is associated with infinite types of social groups that can vary in size and complexity; and 4) people are simultaneously members of many different cultural groups. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 35) observe that it is important to consider all forms of regularity that are characteristics of a given cultural group. Kecskes maintains that variability is just as important as regularity. In an interview with Spencer-Oatey (2009), Kecskes observes that a constructivist approach to variability has emerged, arguing that:

*[...] cross-cultural encounters create an entirely new context in which the rules that will govern the relations between cultures do not yet exist and hence must be constructed. Norms in this view arise directly out of the communicative process, occasioned by the need of individuals to coordinate their actions with others. [...] culture is situational in all its meanings and with all its affiliated concepts and depends on the context in which concrete interactions occur. Culture cannot be seen as something that is 'carved' in every member of a particular society or community. It can be made, changed, manipulated and dropped on the spot (pp. 35–36).*

Likewise, Kramsch (1998a), Kumaravadivelu (2008) and Phillips (2009) highlight the fact that each individual member of a social group has a different biography and life experiences; they may differ in age, gender, ethnicity, religion and have different political opinions. This demonstrates how a myriad of constructions of culture can derive from the innumerable personal backgrounds which all individuals display. The issues of regularity and variability seem to be the most controversial when constructing culture. Although interviewees' discussions showed a high degree of awareness of individual difference, it is the aspect of regularity within culture that is often invoked when trying to understand the Other.

Thus, while individuals may have many different conceptions of culture, some more colloquial and some more refined in nature, it must be conceded in any discussion that culture is an amorphous, all-encompassing concept that is open to a diversity of interpretations. Indeed, in dealing with this concept, the teacher and student participants in this investigation appear to be whirling in an ocean of ideas and myriad concepts, which they invoke in their everyday life experience. The fluidity of the concept of culture when juxtaposed with the process of making sense of it (constructing culture, in other words) suggests that individuals' constructions are not permanent standpoints, and that they do not have a fixed nature—indeed, I found this to be true in the course of the investigation, as viewpoints and opinions shifted quickly. As suggested by Scollon *et al.* (2012), culture can mean different things to different people at different times, depending on situation, persons, events, circumstances, the topic at hand, or even feelings and emotions. Culture could be said to be a “joker card” that individuals use and modify/construct moment by moment, depending on their everyday life experiences. This would seem to suggest that in reading other people's construction of culture, attention must be paid to the surrounding elements that shape its use.

The dichotomy between individual behavior and group characteristics is noted in all of the discussions offered by the authors mentioned above. Indeed, definitions of culture such as those of Spencer-Oatey, Byram, DeCapua and Wintergerst and Kramsch can only be partial ones because of the fluid nature of this concept. Perhaps Scollon *et al.* come closer to a comprehensive definition of culture with their conception of it as an action rather than an object, in other words, as a verb rather than a noun. Kecskes' model of cross-cultural encounters has special value for this investigation, as he derives constructions of culture from situational processes. As will be seen in Chapter 5, English-speaking teachers engaged in a dialogic meaning-making process in negotiating characteristic forms of address in Spanish.

As will be discussed in Section 3.4, the construction of culture is reflective and critical; individuals' active role in this process demonstrates their capabilities for observing, listening, negotiating, copying, problematizing, questioning the beliefs they have about themselves and others. Through these practices of the Self as highlighted by Hansen (2011), teachers and students were seen to be able to relativize the ideas they might hold about their own and the Other's culture, recognizing the value of different ways of doing/acting.

In order to understand the elements surrounding a reading of the construction of culture by the Self and the Other, it was necessary to establish a theoretical point of departure; this was found in the social construction of culture (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Throughout the period of investigation I was able to appreciate the influence that deeply embedded primary/secondary social knowledge had on the participants, and how difficult it was for them to negotiate or change the cultural inheritance. Likewise, the theme of the acquisition of and movement within second culture presented itself as an issue in the findings—individuals were seen to navigate new practices, new norms and new ways of doing. The theory of the social construction of knowledge is mirrored in the struggles of the foreign teacher participants to negotiate between the forces of old and new knowledge. At times transformation could be seen to be taking place, while at others the teacher participants hesitated in accepting new knowledge to be as valid as the old. In order to understand the dynamics of the negotiation between old and new social knowledge when constructing culture, the theoretical basis will be visited in the section below.

## 2.2 The Social Construction of Culture

*The person "who doubts that the French are different can go to France and find out for himself"*

This quote is taken from Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1991, p. 194), a work which theorizes about how social knowledge is constructed, sustained and replicated by the individuals who constitute a social system. According to the authors, socialization is a two-step introduction of the individual into the social structure, which they referred to as primary and secondary socialization. These authors assert that the individual is not born a member of a society, but becomes a member. They identify that primary socialization takes place during childhood—this socialization is highly charged emotionally and is not questioned. Secondary socialization includes the acquisition of role-specific knowledge e.g. the role of being a mother, a student or a teacher; it is learned through training and specific rituals and contrary to primary socialization, it is not emotionally charged. Primary socialization is much less flexible than secondary socialization, or as Berger and Luckmann state, "it takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood; much less to destroy the realities internalized later" (*ibid.* p. 162). The authors note that a large part of what they refer to as "social stock of knowledge" consists of "recipes" (*ibid.* p. 57), knowledge which is activated in everyday life to function in the social environment. This knowledge becomes unconscious knowledge. As argued by these scholars, one of the most important advantages of this process is that each member of society can predict the other's actions, in fact, individuals expect the others to follow the social rituals. As a result, interaction becomes predictable, uncertainty is reduced, and many actions are possible at a low level of attention. Berger and Luckmann's concept of social constructionism sheds light on how a subjective conception of the world can become objective reality, and how this objective reality, in turn, becomes the common sense knowledge shared by people living in the same society.

This theory is particularly useful in understanding the role of social knowledge acquired early in life in the process of learning, constructing, or dealing with other social systems. Indeed, several scholars (Byram, 2008; Doye, 1999; Gudykunst, 2005; Holliday, 2013; Kim 2001, 2005; Shaules, 2007; Scollon *et al.* 2012 and Nishida, 2005, among many others) have adopted key concepts from Berger and Luckmann (1991) in their analyses of the process of intercultural learning/adaptation.

Scollon *et al.* (2012) observe that the patterns of social behavior "are given a firm cast during the period of primary socialization" (p. 164). These authors observe that whatever changes individuals may undergo later in their lives, these changes are offset against this stronger early learning: "the discourse systems which we enter through primary socialization have a weighted advantage over any we enter into later on" (p. 164). In his examination of the "Cultural Schema Theory", Nishida (2005) speaks of the "schemas" conforming social knowledge. This scholar defines cultural schemas as:

*[...] generalized collections of knowledge that we store in memory through experiences in our own culture. [They] contain general information about familiar situations and behavioral rules as well as information about ourselves and people around us. [...] These cultural schemas are linked together into related systems constructing a complex cognitive structure that underlies our behaviour (ibid. p. 402).*

A particularly salient point of Nishida's theory is that schemas are stored in our long-term memory and our behaviors rely heavily on them. Schemas are not a unitary dimension, some are unique to an individual; they are thus idiosyncratic. Any person is exposed to an individualized environment and has personal experiences or knowledge. However, our cultural environment also provides universal experiences, ones to which every member of the culture is exposed (*ibid.* p. 402). Nishida argues that the process of cross-cultural adaptation will imply the transformation or configuration of the old cultural schemas or Primary Social Interaction (PSI) schemas, as well as the acquisition of new cultural schemas. This author (*ibid.*) identifies eight PSI schemas, they are: 1. fact-and-concept schemas; 2. person schemas, 3. self-schemas, 4. role schemas, 5. context schemas, 6. procedure schemas, 7. strategy schemas and 8. emotional schemas (pp. 405–406). Indeed, Kim (2005) adds to the discussion by arguing that “entering a new culture is like starting an enculturation process all over again” (pp. 382–383). The challenge facing those confronting a new culture lies in the fact that they are faced with situations that deviate from the familiar and internalized cultural scripts. Wierzbicka (1991) highlights the use of pre-existing cultural “scripts” and their impact in communication; this scholar writes that these scripts “have to do with culture-specific norms for saying what one thinks, saying what one wants, and saying what one feels, norms for telling people what one wants them to do and what they have to do” (p. 245).

A similar discussion can be found in Weaver (1993) who talks about “cues”. He divides them into physical cues and behavioural or social cues. The former includes “objects which we have become accustomed to in our home culture which are changed or missing in a new culture” and the latter which “provide order in our interpersonal relations” (p. 140). One important point made by this scholar is that cues make individuals feel comfortable, because they seem so automatic and natural. He observes that “the immediate result of a lack of familiar cues is a need to pay more attention to our environment and more actively evaluate the environment in relation to our behaviour” (*ibid.*). This may be as simple as needing to look for signs to find the way out of an unfamiliar airport or examine carefully a menu we do not understand. At deeper levels, the adjustment process can still be very difficult, however. In any case, individuals can no longer rely on “perceptual habits or existent competencies to manage activities” (*ibid.* p. 141). Weaver affirms that finding oneself in an environment where cues are challenged can cause uncertainty. According to this author, “the very act of changing physical environments causes stress” (*ibid.*).

As the scholars in the foregoing paragraphs discuss, it is through the process of socialization that individuals acquire their assumptions about the world; their values, beliefs and behaviors are conditioned by the socialization process. Indeed, several points can be made from the above discussion regarding the impact of primary and secondary social knowledge on intercultural learning. They could be listed in the following manner: (a) primary social knowledge is the worldview from which individuals attempt to make sense of the world and the Other, it is the cultural reference that the Other is seen against; (b) it provides the social skills necessary to construct and negotiate new social knowledge; (c) it works at a subconscious level; thus, it is difficult to explain or grasp in the case of cross-cultural encounters; (d) it is emotionally charged, thus it can be difficult to negotiate in cross-cultural encounters; (e) and it provides certainty, or uncertainty, when this knowledge is challenged in cross-cultural encounters.

Indeed, a highpoint of this complex of construction theories is the realization of the degree to which individuals rely on acquired schemas for everyday activities and social interaction. Whether identified as schemas, cues or scripts, the foreign teachers in this investigation experienced the lack of accustomed social reference points when performing such acts as greeting or addressing others. Learning the local schemas was sometimes a struggle for the foreign teachers. However, drawing on their social abilities to work things out, just as they would do at home, they were able to cope. Holliday (2013) sees this as the utilization of previous social knowledge, or as he puts it, “culture on the go” (p. 3). This scholar adds yet another component to the construal of culture, that is, global positioning and politics, which according to this scholar is an area that is often ignored in intercultural studies texts. Holliday (*ibid.* pp. 1–3) provides a “thick description” of the multiple sources which make up individuals’ stock of social knowledge being constituted from: cultural resources, the above-mentioned global positioning and politics, and personal trajectories. In the domain of cultural resources, he includes: nation, religion, language, education and form of government; he also includes economy and media in this domain. However, this scholar observes that, although cultural resources are drawn upon, they do not mark all limits of doing and thinking. Personal trajectories involve one’s journey in society; ancestors and origins make this journey along with the individual. For Holliday, this is the area where the individual is most likely to step out of the known and engage with new domains. Holliday (*ibid.*) places special emphasis on the “underlying universal cultural processes” which involve “skills and strategies through which everyone, regardless of background, participates in and negotiates their position within the cultural landscapes to which they belong”. In his view, this is what allows individuals to “read culture”.

### 2.3 Struggles in Negotiating between the Old and New Social Knowledge

As discussed in section 2.2, social knowledge functions intuitively, below the level of conscious awareness. Kim (2005) argues that it is when being confronted with a different social environment that individuals become more aware of previously taken-for-granted mental habits. Kim (2005) citing Boulding argues that the human nervous system is structured in such a way that “the patterns that govern behaviour and perception come into consciousness only when there is a deviation from the familiar” (p. 283). Thus, we usually remain unaware of these patterns until confronted with a need to interact with people who have different cultural assumptions. In the same way that fish do not notice water, we do not notice our own “hidden cultural programming” (Shaules, 2007, p. 12). Nonetheless, Shaules (2007) highlights that the process of intercultural learning/adaptation refers “to a need to rethink the out-of-awareness beliefs, values and assumptions that we normally use to make sense of the world and get along with others” (p. 10). Additionally, Shaules (2007) argues that “when cultural difference does not ‘make sense’, or it threatens to undermine our view of reality, it can create cognitive dissonance (‘my view is reasonable but those people are being unreasonable’)” (p. 63). In fact, misunderstandings in intercultural interaction are said to arise from the lack of ability to understand the values behind the actions of Others. Several scholars, Appiah (2005, 2006), Hansen (2011), Kramsch (1998a), Phillips (2009), Nussbaum (1996, 1997) among them, argue that values are universal principles and that they guide individuals’ actions.

To complicate things further, as discussed in section 2.1, how the individual person behaves will vary according to circumstances, contextual factors, personality of the individual, and other factors. Additionally, in his discussion of the moral weight of values, Appiah asserts that not only are values enacted in different ways, but that ascribed values of “right” or “wrong” could vary across cultural systems.

In his discussion of *Deep and Surface Culture*, Shaules (2007) observes that deep cultural learning does not refer to witnessing specific behaviors such as washing in cow urine (reportedly practiced by the Masai in East Africa), but rather to “the values and assumptions that underlie those actions” (p. 12). He argues that “cultural difference at this deep level constitutes the most fundamental challenge of intercultural learning. It is the foundation upon which ethnocentrism rests and it constitutes the raw material for our cultural biases” (*ibid.*). He argues that in many intercultural contexts, deep culture is not noticed or understood in any profound sense. For Shaules, “the process of acquiring the ability to step into these new frameworks of meaning is deep cultural learning” (*ibid.* p. 13). However, as Shaules and Appiah suggest, it can be difficult to identify the values that lie behind the actions. As will be seen in Chapter 5, Shaules’ theory of deep and surface culture was applicable when attempting to understand and interpret the reactions of foreign teachers to students’ behavior. Initially, teachers acknowledged being struck by the students’ surface behavior in such actions as constantly asking permission to enter and leave the classroom, despite being asked not to do so. After being immersed in the new environment for a time, the teachers came to understand the values that lie behind students’ behaviour—this is Shaules’ notion of deep culture, in which an outsider’s perceptions may change on exposure to different worldviews.

However, it is also argued that it can be difficult to accept others’ worldviews to be as valid as one’s own. Several authors (Delanty, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Shaules, 2007 among others) believe that relativizing, that is, suspending one’s own views, can lead to the ability to see things from the perspective of the Other. This in turn can lead to better understanding and appreciation of the Other’s worldviews. Shaules (2007) defines relativization as:

*To relativize an experience refers to looking at the contextual reasons that influence one’s experience of it. This often leads to a perceptual decentering as standards for judging a given phenomenon shifts away from oneself and moves to larger frames of reference. Relativization can involve the discovery that one’s reactions to a phenomenon are a product of one’s expectations or experiences and don’t come from any intrinsic quality of the phenomenon itself (p. 248).*

So then, this process allows us to question the beliefs we have about ourselves and others, activating the abilities of listening, observing, speaking, interacting and articulating ideas. This will be discussed further in section 3.4 below. In the discussion of her theory *Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic*, Kim (2001; 2005, p. 383) argues that each experience of adaptive change is inevitably accompanied by “stress in the individual psyche”. The conflict arises from the desire to acculturate and the corresponding resistance to de-culturation. Kim defines this antithesis as “the push of the new culture and the pull of the old one” (*ibid.*). According to this scholar, these conflicting forces produce a state of disequilibrium that manifests itself in “emotional ‘lows’ of uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety” (*ibid.*)<sup>7</sup>

However, Kim argues that a subtle process of growth follows the dynamic stress-adaptation disequilibrium: “Periods of stress pass as strangers work out new ways of handling problems owing to the creative forces of self-reflexivity’ and self-transformation” (*ibid.* p. 384). Thus, stress, adaptation and growth are the high points of the cyclic changes that individuals experience over time in the acculturation process. Nevertheless, Kim highlights that this process does not occur in a “smooth, steady, and linear progression, but in a dialectic, cyclic, and continual ‘draw-back-to-leap’ pattern” (*ibid.*) Kim citing Kirschner, explains that, “as growth of some units always occurs at the expense of others, the adaptation process follows a pattern that juxtaposes integration and disintegration, progression and regression, novelty and confirmation, and creativity and depression” (*ibid.*).

Shaules’ discussion of “The Dilemma Theory” (2007, pp. 146–147) sheds light on to the dynamic in the intercultural learning process. Like Kim, Shaules argues that not everyone progresses smoothly or in the same way towards “ethnorelativism”. The demands of intercultural experiences provoke different reactions according to the makeup of the individual person. Shaules describes the tension between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, “ethnocentrism is the normal (though not necessarily desirable) tendency to judge one’s experience from one’s own cultural viewpoint while ethnorelativism involves the creation and integration of new perceptual categories” (*ibid.* p. 243). This is not to deny, as argued by Shaules, that dilemmas associated with the demands of adaptation may follow interaction in a new cultural environment. This scholar characterizes these reactions as the conscious and unconscious choices made to resist, accept and adapt; these dilemmas have both an implicit and explicit element. Shaules (*ibid.* p. 146) defines the reactions of the individual confronted with adaptive demands as consisting of: 1] Resistance implies an attempt to maintain internal standards as valid while denigrating or ignoring external standards; 2] Acceptance implies recognizing that neither the internal nor the external standards are primary—they are both viable in their own right, and 3] Adapting to the demands of one’s environment can either be constructive if it is done from the standpoint of acceptance or destructive if attempted while still resisting cultural difference.

Whether the individual encounters cultural difference in communication styles, customs, values and worldviews, these can be resisted, accepted or adapted to at both the implicit or explicit level. However, Shaules observes that it is the implicit demands that are more difficult to negotiate, because as he states, “the internal dilemma involves a loss of clear internal criteria for making decisions and anchoring one’s identity [...] the conceptual universe that sojourners use to interact with their environment is less functional than usual and needs to be adjusted” (*ibid.* p. 145). As argued by Kim (2001, 2005), Gudykunst (2004, 2005), Nishida (2005), Scollon *et al.* (2012), Wierzbicka (1998) and Weaver (1993), negotiating first cultural knowledge can be challenging. To cite Berger and Luckmann once more: “It takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood; much less to destroy the realities internalized later” (1991, p. 162). Shaules’ model was particularly enlightening because it provides a thick description of the reactions of individuals to the intercultural learning experience. As shown in Shaules’ model of intercultural learning, individuals can experience different reactions at different times, to different intercultural experiences. Kim’s *Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic* and Shaules’ *Dilemma Theory* were seen to be at work in the behavior of the foreign teacher participants in particular. Any progression towards growth was seen to involve resistance and a pull and tug movement on the part of the foreign teachers, exactly as these scholars predict. Kim and Shaules recognize the difficulty of the process of intercultural learning—the power of affective ties to the first culture became evident in the reactions of all participants, showing how difficult the learning/adaptation process can be. These scholars’ relationship to the concept of ethnorelativism is ambivalent. Generally, ethnorelativism is seen to be a positive criterion. However, the desirability of a complete adaptation to a new environment is not considered, but rather only the dynamic involved. For these scholars, ethnocentrism is a force to be resisted, but the opposing concepts of openness, respect, and tolerance are left undefined and in the abstract.

## 2.4 Summary of this Section

In this section the literature concerning the social construction of knowledge was discussed. This theory allows an understanding of how social knowledge is acquired and how it becomes embedded in the individual, forming in this way their social reality. This section has further attempted to highlight the different sources of knowledge that can play a role in individuals’ construction of culture: social knowledge from primary and secondary socialization, life experience, personal and professional trajectories, public discourses and global positioning and politics. These sources of knowledge were identified as having an impact on the way the participants construct culture. In the construction of culture, individuals are challenged with the negotiation of these different sources of knowledge. Indeed, various cases of the participants’ struggles to negotiate and reconcile these sources of knowledge will be presented below.

For the teacher and student participants in this investigation, the necessity of learning or adapting to a culturally different setting with different cultural practices and worldviews clearly demands negotiation and relativization of social knowledge. Cultural adaptation was explored in regard to the relativization process necessitated by confrontation with difference. Another facet of confrontation with difference is the more positive process of intercultural learning, which requires the ability to relativize, negotiate and exploit primary and secondary social knowledge in order to construct new knowledge. This was seen to be taking place at an everyday level in the foreign teacher participants' struggle to negotiate new arrangements with the social conventions present in the new social environment.

## Chapter 3 The Intercultural and Cosmopolitan Orientations

According to several scholars (Byram, 2008, Byram and Fleming, 2002; Byram and Cain, 2002; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009; Kim, 2001, 2005; Kramsch, 1998a; Scollon, *et al.* 2012 and Shaules, 2007, among others) cross-cultural communication depends on the capability of individuals to understand different ways of viewing the world. The intercultural and cosmopolitan traditions foresee a process of reflexivity and an ongoing negotiation of worldviews as necessary components for the success of intercultural exchange. Indeed, several scholars (Shaules, 2007; Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 2008; Delanty, 2006, 2008, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Hansen *et al.* 2009) argue that intercultural learning is a dialogic process that involves not only learning about the Other, but also self-reflexivity and understanding of one's own culture.

### 3.1 Critical Cultural Awareness

Byram (2008, p. 29) speaks of the concept of “tertiary socialization”, which takes place when learning a foreign language. According to this author, acquiring competency in another language brings with it an element of socialization, which “can take learners beyond a focus on their own society, into experience of otherness, or other cultural beliefs, values and behaviours” (*ibid.*). Byram considers that in the cognitive, moral and behavioral changes of tertiary socialization there is a process of reassessment of assumptions and conventions, stimulated by juxtaposition and comparison of familiar experiences and concepts with those of other cultures and societies. According to this author:

*The purpose is not to replace the familiar with the new, nor to encourage identification with another culture, but to de-familiarise and de-centre, so that questions can be raised about one's own culturally-determined assumptions and about the society in which one lives (ibid. p. 31).*

This view clearly evidences the importance of relativizing one's own cultural reality, so that one can reassess the familiar. From Byram's viewpoint, intercultural communicative competence carries with it the potential for mediation between systems of values, beliefs and behaviors. The component elements of communicative competence are centered around what Byram terms ‘savoirs’ (*ibid.*, p. 69). These include attitudes (*savoir etre*), critical dispositions and orientations (*savoir s'engager*), knowledge of social groups (*savoirs*), and skills of interpreting, learning and doing (*savoir comprendre, apprendre, faire*). These are broken into sub-competencies, for example, attitude (*savoir etre*) is defined as “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own” (*ibid.*). Similar in concept to Byram's ideas of tertiary socialization, Kim (2005) explores the processes of cross-cultural adaptation in the context of the individual psyche, also using “competence” as a maxim. Kim's (2005) theory of Host Communication Competence (HCC) facilitates the cross-cultural adaptation process in significant way. It enables strangers to understand the way things are carried out in the host society and the way they themselves need to think, feel, and act in that environment. The key elements that generally constitute the concept of communication competence including the conceptualization of HCC are: cognitive, affective and operational (pp. 375–400).

For Byram, “critical cultural awareness”—*savoir s'engager*—is the central concept of intercultural communicative competence. He defines critical cultural awareness as “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries” (2008, pp. 162—163). It consists of: “Identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in [...] events in one's own and other cultures; making an evaluative analysis of the [...] events which refer to an explicit perspective and criteria and interacting and mediating in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes” (*ibid.*).

Because culture is something that individuals *do* out of awareness, Byram emphasizes the importance of making the implicit explicit. In this way practitioners can stimulate critical reflexivity. The theory based on “*saviors*” is useful because it provides a detailed account of the composite of competencies and sub-competencies (attitudes, knowledge, skills, orientations, etc.) which are involved in the process of constructing and making sense of culture.

Byram's concept of “critical cultural awareness” resonates with Delanty's (2009) conception of “critical cultural cosmopolitanism”. Byram places emphasis on interpreting events from both the perspective of the Self and the Other, on mutual critical evaluation, and also on the negotiation and/or acceptance of Others' worldviews. Like many other scholars (Appiah, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Holliday, 2013; Delanty, 2009 and Scollon *et al.* 2012), Byram sees the skills of individuals deriving from primary social knowledge as potential tools for mediation in the intercultural exchange.

### 3.2 Acting Interculturally

The idea, as portrayed by Berger and Luckmann (1991), that individuals acquire, construct and modify social knowledge through mutual negotiation and mutual observation led Kramersch (1993) to suggest that culture in the English classroom can be constructed by means of individuals interacting with one another. Kramersch rethinks the concept of language as a social practice wherein individuals construct the world around them. Further, Kramersch places strong emphasis on contextual factors when reflecting and constructing one's own and the Other's culture.

Like Byram, Kramersch (1993) believes that the learning of culture is more than transfer of information between cultures. She argues that learning about a culture requires that an individual considers his or her own culture in relation to another by establishing a "sphere of interculturality" (1993, p. 13). In her view, the process of learning about another culture is a dialogic one which involves a "reflection on one's own culture as well as the target culture" (1993, p. 205). When students do this, Kramersch argues, they are acting as an "intercultural speaker" who is "operating at the border between several languages or language varieties, manoeuvring his/her way through the troubled waters of cross-cultural misunderstandings" (1998c, p. 27).

For Kramersch, cultural awareness plays an essential role in overcoming the problems in communication arising from differences in beliefs, values, norms, and attitudes. Kramersch (1998b) suggests that the teaching of culture needs to emphasize the development of general sociolinguistic competence and social awareness across cultures. She highlights different ways in which awareness across cultures might be developed in the classroom, and she argues that the context of the native language and the new culture must be built on their own terms. To achieve this, Kramersch suggests that students need to reconstruct the "context of production and reception of a given text" from within the foreign culture itself (1998b, p. 25). She highlights the importance of understanding why people say what they say, how they say it, and to whom they say it: a specific situational context is required for understanding. In the classroom, however, the teacher's interpretations should not be imposed.

The approaches of both Byram and Kramersch emphasize critical reflexivity for the achievement of cultural awareness. In their view, critical reflexivity should be a dialogic process involving both C1 and C2. They place emphasis on critical evaluation when interpreting the values contained in events, and believe in individuals' skills to mediate between cultures. This view is also highlighted in the cosmopolitan tradition. However, neither Byram nor Kramersch seem to envision the transformation of the Self as a result of an encounter with the culture of the Other; this body of theory seems to stop short of seeing the individual change, or adopt, new ways of viewing the world. Nevertheless, it must be noted that these two scholars are the precursors of those who feel that transferral of foreign cultural norms in the classroom is no longer necessary or desirable. Byram opposes to the idea of teaching culture to students "as if they were a *tabula rasa*" (1989, p. 10); indeed Kramersch states that "our purpose in teaching culture through language is not to make our students into little French or little Germans" (1998b, p. 27). Thus, it could be said that the approach of these two scholars to intercultural learning is a cautious one, sustaining the idea that respect for the students' cultural identity should be maintained. This stance on the part of Byram and Kramersch had an application in understanding student construction of cultural identity. It was possible to observe this during the course of the interviews. As will be seen in Chapter 5, students were quick to defend what they saw as their cultural traditions and identity when challenged by learning a foreign language. Indeed, when citing a critical incident in which a French teacher told her class "You're going to learn to speak French but you will always be Mexican" (Extract 14), I was confronted with a number of lively responses by students defending the validity of "Mexicaness". Conversely, when not threatened in their identity students showed a positive attitude toward understanding and accepting aspects of the culture of the Other.

Canagarajah (1999), Kumaravadivelu (2008), Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (1992) note the hidden imperialistic agenda of some ELT approaches to English instruction which also included culture. While some University of Guanajuato students are undoubtedly interested in some aspects of English-speaking culture (one can name British rock music, for example), the problematic unequal power relationship between the United States and Mexico is omnipresent. This power relationship colors students' constructions of the English language, sometimes leading them into negative views and rejection of American culture, generating a sort of negative right to keep their home language/culture intact from English-speaking influence.

The construction of culture can be argued to be influenced by global, socio-economic and political discourses. The political-economic relationship between Mexico and the US, the role of English in the world and the role of English in students' lives can have an impact on the way students construct Americans or "their language". This notion resonates with the theory presented in Section 2.1, which discusses how global positioning and politics can have an impact on the way individuals position themselves and/or their society in relation to that of the Other (Holliday, 2013). Indeed, English language for long has been associated with imperialism highly related to the issue of globalization.

### 3.3 Globalization and Culture

As Cvetkovich and Kellner (2018) note, the term globalization "is often used as a code word that stands for a tremendous diversity of issues and problems that serves as a front for a variety of theoretical and political positions" (p. 2). For these authors, culture is a "particularizing, localizing force that distinguished societies and people from each other" (p. 8), that is to say that culture stands as a mechanism which resists the levelling forces of globalization. Iyall Smith (2018) agrees with this assessment, noting that globalization exerts "pressure on local communities" (p. 3); according to the author, local communities do not "wish to adopt wholesale the global culture being pumped in" (*ibid.*). Roland Robertson has long been concerned with globalization and globality as sociological phenomena (1992, 2018). While recognizing the amorphous nature of the term "globalization"—very much in the sense of Cvetkovich and Kellner's "code word"—Robertson (1992) asserts the reality of global culture, stating that "it would not be too much to say that the idea of global culture is just as meaningful as the idea of national-societal, or local, culture" (p. 114). Habermas (1999) views the phenomenon of globalization in terms of the conflicts it generates within countries, asserting that "the national State at the moment clings to its identity, given that it has been run over and weakened by the processes of globalization" (p. 101). For Habermas, the classic national state is "challenged from within by the explosive force of multiculturalism and from without by the problematic pressure of globalization" (p. 94). In dealing with globalization as a concept, the author of this present book has preferred to approach the discussion of culture in terms of contemporary cosmopolitanism (see below) rather than highlighting the opposite poles of "globalization" and "local culture". While a certain tension between local Mexican culture and the forces of globalization can be said to exist, in the context of ELT the debate concerns the cultural baggage associated with English as a Foreign Language rather than the extreme downward pressures on local culture emphasized by Cvetkovich and Kellner (2018), Iyall Smith (2018), Roland Robertson (1992, 2018) and Habermas (1999).

It is clear that cultural background, native language and ethnicity will have an influence on a speaker's use of English as a tool for communication. In the empirical data gathered, teachers' and students' constructions of culture were found to be highly influenced by their respective L1/C1-L2/C2 perspectives. In the case of the teachers, their professional trajectories also informed their interpretations of students' behavior. From the outset of the investigation the impact of the students' cultural background and native Spanish language on their English speech production was evident. This can be seen in the insistence on the phrase "hello teacher", analogous to their native Spanish "hola maestro". Likewise, the cultural background of the students influenced their social and linguistic behavior: this could be seen in the students' address of the teacher with the formal *usted* and the persistent asking of permission to enter/leave the classroom, despite teachers' requests not to do so. Influenced by ELT beliefs, certain teachers constructed these behaviors as 'un-English' and tried to banish them from the classroom.

In summary, these perspectives of Byram and Kramsch portray a different view of culture. Transfer of culture is no longer the object, but rather reflexivity about the foreign and one's own culture. Something of the importance of understanding and reflecting on one's own culture can be appreciated in the efforts of the participants in this investigation to construct culture during the interview process. Small transformations were observed as the foreign participants meditated on their own culture in relation to that of the Other; likewise, reflexivity could sometimes be absent—no new knowledge was negotiated. Thus, reflexivity seemed to be a pre-condition for the participants' small transformations. When not present, the participants seemed to continue to be influenced by unconsidered knowledge stemming from their primary social conditioning.

Thus, while reflexivity and relativization of one's own ways of doing are emphasized as promoting the experience of "otherness" as put forward by Byram, they may also be criticized for overlooking the potential of the cosmopolitan imagination. Cosmopolitan values seemed many times to be influencing the participants in this investigation—this could be seen in a discourse of openness among both teacher and student participants as they negotiated and constructed culture.

### 3.4 Cultural Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has a long tradition and takes many forms. Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009) makes a distinction between classical and contemporary cosmopolitanism, classical cosmopolitanism being the guiding and basic principle of the contemporary cosmopolitan philosophy. Some authors frame contemporary cosmopolitanism as moral, political, economic, ecological and cultural cosmopolitanism (Delanty, 2009, Hansen, 2011). As the discussion in the present work resonates more closely with the theory related to cultural cosmopolitanism, this will be the main focus of discussion. Cosmopolitan theory acknowledges that cultural transformation can stem from the dynamic relation between the local and the global. Indeed, Rumford (2008) writes that:

*Cosmopolitanism requires us to recognize that we are all positioned simultaneously as outsiders and insiders, as individuals and group members, as Self and Other, as local and global. Cosmopolitanism is about relativizing our place within the global frame, positioning ourselves in relation to multiple communities, crossing and re-crossing territorial and community borders (p. 14).*

For Hansen (2011), cultural cosmopolitanism highlights new social configurations characteristic of the increased intermingling of people, customs, and practices in many parts of the world (p. 11). From his viewpoint, people can be rooted meaningfully in more than one culture or community. Similarly, Delanty (2009) speaks of cultural cosmopolitanism as a condition in which “cultures undergo transformation in light of their encounter with the Other” (p. 70). For Hiebert (2002), a cosmopolitan outlook is “a way of living... associated with an appreciation of, and interaction with, people from other cultural backgrounds [...] where diversity is accepted and is rendered ordinary” (p. 212). The potential for transformation is clearly recognized in cosmopolitan theory. Although these scholars recognize that the process of transformation can be slow and challenging, they believe that the potential in cultural cosmopolitanism lies in positioning people to appreciate the pleasure of the new. Delanty (2009, p. 70) places the concept of “immanent transcendence” at the core of the cosmopolitan discussion. Cosmopolitanism understood in terms of immanent transcendence “refers to an internally induced social change whereby societies and social agents undergo transformation in their moral and political self-understanding as they respond to global challenges” (Delanty, 2009, p. 251). Hansen believes that as an internally induced change, a cosmopolitan orientation provides individuals with the resources to “strengthen, broaden, widen and deepen their ways of thinking and acting” (2011, p. 87). Hansen (2011) further affirms that this orientation will sustain the individual’s ability to interact with others.

According to the scholars named above, transformation can take place at three different levels: the Self, the community and societal levels. At the micro level, the cosmopolitan orientation, Hansen writes, “gives rise to the possibility of broadening people’s horizons, which does not necessitate physical movement *per se* but rather aesthetic, ethical, moral and intellectual movement [...]. The orientation propels persons to express, to create, a generous response to the world” (2011, p. 120). At a macro, societal level, the cosmopolitan imagination entails a view of society in an ongoing process of self-constitution. Stevenson (2003), basing his remarks on the ideas of Castoriadis, states of the imagination:

*All societies are dependent upon the creation of webs of meaning that are carried by society’s institutions and individuals. Society, then, is always a self-creation that depends upon norms, values and languages that help to give diverse societies a sense of unity. The ‘imaginary’ is a social and historical creation, and serves to remind us that society must always create symbolic forms beyond the purely functional (p. 5).*

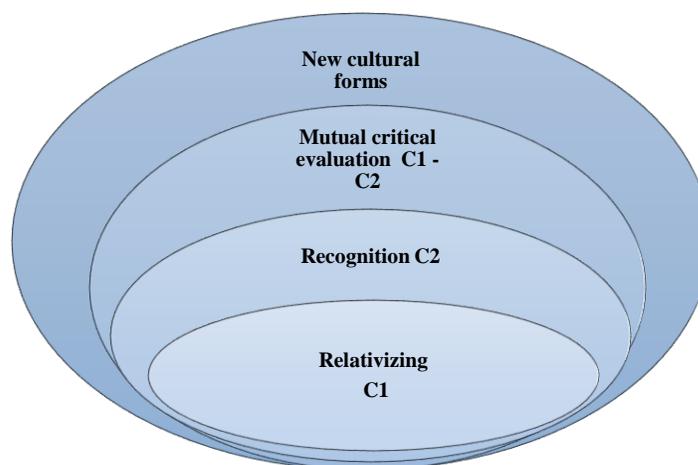
Stevenson (*ibid.*) argues that the emergence of an “imagined” society requires not only that we rethink notions of culture, but also develop a new understanding of contemporary social transformations. Thus, overall, the cosmopolitan imagination proceeds confident in the assumption that individuals and societies contain capacities for learning, and that they have developmental possibilities (Appiah, 2005, 2006; Delanty, 2008, 2009; Hansen *et al.* 2009; Hansen, 2011; Holliday, 2011, 2013). The participants many times emphasized that human capabilities can be applied in the process of learning and adaptation. The teacher *Colin*, for example, in Extract 39 speaks in a cosmopolitan tone about the responsibility of the individual to change things for the better if possible. He stated expressly: “I think that there are things of Mexican society that can change for the better”, mentioning women’s position in society. Another teacher, *Johnny Rodriguez*, explains in Extract 41 his view that “cultural acceptance is something that’s within every human being”. It became evident to me during the interviews that teacher and student participants possessed cosmopolitan imagination in Delanty and Stevenson’s sense—they were sensitive and could understand that other people have different ways of viewing the world.

### 3.5 Critical Cosmopolitanism

For Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009) “critical cosmopolitanism” is a condition that occurs through deliberation given the intellectual capacities of individuals for self-understanding, self-problematizing and reflexivity. These capacities are conducive to the enactment of what he identifies as cosmopolitan orientations which may take four forms (Delanty, 2009, pp. 252–253): (a) Relativization of one’s own culture or Identity in light of the encounter with the Other; (b) Recognition of the Other, in other words, recognition of diversity whereby no one culture is prioritized; (c) Mutual critical evaluation, in which the cultures involved go through transformations stimulated by mutual learning, and where no one culture is valued over the other. Delanty evaluates this as an “intensified form of cosmopolitan self-awareness”; (d) Emergence into new norms and new worldviews.

According to Delanty, the last two forms involve stronger degrees of transformation. Delanty’s progression of cosmopolitan orientations is represented in Figure 3.5 below.

**Figure 3.5** Cosmopolitan Orientation Dynamic



In the representation of the Cosmopolitan Orientation Dynamic shown in Figure 3.5, “relativizing” is placed at the core. Indeed, several scholars from the fields of intercultural communication and applied psychology (Byram, 2008; Kramsch, 1993; Shaules, 2007 and Kim, 2001, 2005), place special emphasis on the process of relativization. According to these scholars, through a process of self-reflexivity individuals can be motivated to suspend and mediate their culture in relation to the Other. Only then, recognition from the perspective of the Other will be achieved. Indeed, Delanty (2008) argues that “it makes little sense speaking of cosmopolitanism if [recognition] is absent” (p. 220). So then, cosmopolitanism is identified with transformation through the encounter with Others, it is critical and dialogic.

#### 3.5.1 Cosmopolitan Transformation

For Hansen (2011), the cosmopolitan view implies that, “to learn is to absorb, to metabolize the new into the known such that the latter itself takes on new qualities” (p. 8). The author emphasises repeatedly:

*[...] there are dynamic tensions, and real losses and gains, that accompany the movement of reflective openness and reflective loyalty. Not only is this cultural ledger hard to tabulate, but the ledger itself keeps transforming. What was at one time considered a loss—of a particular belief, practice, or ideal—morphs into a gain, an encounter with the larger world for which one is now grateful. The opposite appears to happen just as often. Perhaps what is most typical is the realization that most changes embody aspects of loss and gain. There is no halting this experience but there are, [...] better and worse ways of responding to it (p. 65).*

As Hansen points out, the dynamic tensions arising in the negotiation of the old and the new can be a significant challenge facing individuals. As will be seen throughout the findings chapter, the teacher and student participants in this investigation struggle in the negotiation between the old and the new—naturally old ways are resistant to change, but change is possible. The cosmopolitan tradition invites us to relativize our place in the global sphere through the adoption of a philosophy which views culture as an open horizon where people learn through critical reflexivity.

Hansen (2011, p. 36) and Appiah (2005, p. 257) believe that the cosmopolitan accent—deliberative, responsive modes of listening, speaking, interacting, writing and articulating—can assist individuals in realizing their personhood and in engaging others whose views and values may differ. So then, according to these scholars, a cosmopolitan individual puts trust in the human capacity to “perceive, discern, criticize, and appreciate—capacities triggered, in part, by their encounters with differences from local norms” (Hansen, 2011, p. 36). This scholar views these practices as “arts in development since their aim is not serving the self but rather improving it” (*ibid.*). This always unfinished process generates what cosmopolitan tradition describes as exercises or practices of the Self.

Indeed, throughout the stories narrated by the participants their descriptions of how they dealt with the “new” practices shows the processes of negotiation between the old and the new. As the foreign teacher participants narrated their experiences, they seemed to be reporting changes brought on by the exercises of the Self, described in cosmopolitan theory (Appiah, 2005; Hansen, 2011). In this investigation, it became evident that the construction of culture is achieved by these exercises of the self—listening, observing, interacting, and engaging in dialogue, capacities which all individuals possess. Holliday (2013) views these skills of individuals as “the culture on the go”.

Thus, these scholars believe that these deliberative modes are not merely means to an end, but can serve in the enactment of cosmopolitan orientations; it is possible to learn from each other’s stories and allow these stories to influence one’s life. Indeed, cosmopolitan scholars (Appiah, 2006; Bhabha, 1994; Delanty, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Hansen *et al.* 2009; Nussbaum, 1996) argue that historical research demonstrates that individuals have enacted cosmopolitan sensitivities in the past, just as they do in the present. Individuals can retain features from their traditions, roots and cultural continuities, but at the same time they may appropriate new configurations, “not just borrowing but deeply absorbing [...] cultural traditions of the places in which they found [find] themselves” (Hansen, 2011, p. 64). According to Hansen (2011) the idea of ethics as the cultivation of the Self invites individuals to be receptive, to learn from the ways, mores, and arts of Others. This participatory attitude can, in turn, move persons further towards a willingness to engage in questions of morality.

### 3.6 Summary of this Section

In summary, cosmopolitanism represents an important complement to other approaches to intercultural learning and dialogue. Cosmopolitan tradition sees the intermingling and exchange of people as an opportunity for personal growth and transformation; indeed, this tradition is concerned with the capacity of the individual—and whole societies—to transform themselves in the light of the perspective of the Other. Indeed, transformation may be seen as one of the strongest manifestations of cosmopolitanism; relativization and recognition may be considered less so in degree, yet they too are oriented towards cosmopolitanism. As Delanty (2009) remarks, success in enacting these cosmopolitan orientations can lead to transformation. In the course of researching constructions of culture, the participants in the investigation demonstrated some degree of openness to the possibilities of growth and transformation, although this process was most often a struggle for them. Throughout the findings chapter, individuals may be seen negotiating new ways of thinking about the Other and his/her ways of being. Teachers wrestled with traditions embedded in the local environment, showing a native openness, but then rejecting the Other’s practices.

It is particularly significant to observe how the scholars reviewed in this section emphasize individuals’ human capacities for deliberation. Making use of social skills as a resource for the construction of new social norms seems to be one of the primary concerns of Appiah (2005), Delanty (2009), Hansen (2011) and Holliday (2013). Indeed, this process of “working out” new norms based on pre-existing skills may be seen in the actions of foreign teachers living and working in Mexico, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the “working out” of a new norm for handling students’ requests to enter or leave the classroom will be visited.

## **Chapter 4 The Research Approach and Research Procedures**

In order to investigate how culture is constructed by English language teachers and students, I decided to adopt an ethnographic approach as the method of inquiry. Class observations and interviews with teachers and students were the research tools used for data collection. The use of critical incidents adapted from my personal experiences was significant to the investigation; the use of these critical incidents allowed me to explore interviewees' beliefs and assumptions about the ways of doing and being of the Self and the Other. This investigation strives to conform to a qualitative paradigm, theoretically based in constructivism. In the following chapter, the justification for selecting the ethnographic approach as the research method for this investigation is provided. In the first section of this chapter I provide a description of the characteristics of the site and of the participants in the investigation.

### **4.1 The Site of the Investigation**

The investigation took place in the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. The fact that I am a full-time teacher at the Language Department gave me automatic access to site; thus, negotiating access to site was not a problem. There were no "gatekeeping" issues in this case (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 27). Additionally, and because I have worked in the university for over ten years I know most of the teachers in the school personally. I have a good, friendly relationship with them. They provided me with their support and participation in my investigation. Having the support of our superiors was certainly an asset, and I made sure to inform the participants of this. However, this was not used to force their participation but to assure them of the seriousness and integrity of my research. Even though I had their consent, there were other ethical considerations and decisions I had to make over the course of the investigation. In terms of ethics, all the participants gave me their informed consent for the use of the data they generated and were assured of privacy. Although our friendship worked to my advantage because it gave me automatic access to the subjects; I was still challenged to build up a new relationship, that one of researcher and researched. This is discussed in section 4.3.3 where I provide a full description of how I dealt with this issue.

#### **4.1.1 Characteristics of Social Setting**

The Language Department can be considered a small multicultural setting that provides many opportunities for interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This ranges from the numerous foreign teachers who impart courses in their respective languages to the highly mobile and variegated student population, to the volunteers who collaborate with the Language Department in the Self-Access Center (CAADI, Centro de Auto-Aprendizaje de Idiomas in its Spanish anagram).

The Department offers two BA programs, a Teacher Training Program in TESOL and Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language. Additionally, six foreign languages are taught: English, German, French, Japanese and Italian. Spanish as a foreign language is also taught in the department.

The Language Department has several exchange programs with foreign universities; the US and Japan figure the most prominently among the countries participating in exchange programs. This makes for mobility of foreign students all year long, and indeed both local and foreign students are encouraged to engage with one another to practice their language skills and to learn about each other's culture. Additionally, the Language Department has a Self-Access Center, known by its Spanish anagram, CAADI, that students can attend in their free time to study and practice foreign language skills. The conversation workshops given at the CAADI are particularly popular with the students, as they involve the active participation of foreign volunteers visiting or living in Guanajuato. Guanajuato has an international feel in general; it is the Mexican state with the fourth largest number of foreign residents, many of them concentrated in the city of Guanajuato. As one of the most visited places in Mexico, there is a steady flow of national and international tourism throughout the entire year; one only needs to walk in the town center to get a sense of this.

For all of these reasons, the Language Department and the city of Guanajuato itself provide rich opportunities to research how individuals, teachers and students, deal with culture, the Self and the Others'.

### 4.1.2 Characteristics of the Participants in the Investigation

Considering that the staff at the time when this investigation took place was composed of twenty-two teachers, half of which are local and half of which are foreign, I thought that a representative sample for this investigation could be four local and four foreign teachers. The local teacher group included two men and two women, and the foreign group three men and one woman. This national makeup of the foreign group was one American, one Canadian and two British nationals. The teaching experience of participants varies from six to twenty-seven years of service, representing a broad range. In terms of education, three of the Mexican group hold a degree in TESOL and one an MA in Social Sciences. As for the foreign group, all of them come from fields other than ELT, and only one of them recently concluded an MA in TESOL. The sample of eight teachers was large enough to be representative, but still a manageable number to interview and observe. When selecting both the local and foreign teachers, several aspects of the participants' experience were taken into consideration. I considered that the experience of being confronted with cultural issues in a marriage, traveling experience and the experience of having lived abroad for the purposes of work or study might be important. Indeed, additionally to their educational degrees or experience in teaching English, their personal experiences in dealing with different cultures and cultural practices was considered an asset, as these sources of knowledge can have an impact on the approach to the teaching/learning of English in the classroom.

An interesting phenomenon in the Language Department is the constant mobility of foreign teachers. Some of them arrive to Mexico for a short stay, but end up making it their home, others stay long enough to learn the language and its "culture" whereas many others leave after one or two semesters. This factor added richness to the present investigation as the experiences from the viewpoint of the foreign teacher participants varied from one year to fifteen years. Thus, it was possible to appreciate the different stages and processes of cultural development and adaptation. Interestingly, only one of the foreign teacher participants continues working in the Department. This issue however does not have any impact on the investigation as the focus of the study relates to the processes involve in the construction of culture.

The student participants in this investigation included twenty-four students, sixteen women and eight men. Except for three students who are studying English out of intrinsic motivation, the rest are in English classes for instrumental reasons, as English language is a compulsory subject in their faculties. These include law, administration, design and engineering. Their ages vary between eighteen and twenty-two years old. English is a compulsory subject at the University of Guanajuato; students are required to cover a minimum of four semesters, or up to eight semesters, depending of the field of studies. Some students study other foreign languages, as is the case of many of the student participants in this investigation, some of whom are studying three different languages at the same time. Except for one student who mentioned having travelled to the UK, the student group did not have much experience traveling abroad. The English language level of the students who participated in the investigation varies from intermediate (level 400) to advance (level 800) according to the program of the Language Department. It is important to consider that English in the University of Guanajuato is taught as a foreign language or international language for the purpose of communication. The objective of language instruction is to provide students with the tools to compete in the labor market, as English has become one of the requirements for many job opportunities. Likewise, English language skills are necessary for academic growth in the case of students who continue with postgraduate studies abroad.

### 4.2 The Qualitative Paradigm

As stated in the Introduction to Chapter 1, the aim of this investigation is to explore the social variables that shape the worldviews of English language teachers and their students when constructing their own and the Other's culture. Thus, to conduct this research, I needed to conceptualize a research paradigm that would enable me to explore the complexities of making sense of and understanding culture. In this case, it seemed that subjectivity mattered. Therefore, the qualitative theoretical perspective was the most appropriate vantage point, because, contrary to traditional objectivist approaches, it allows meaning to emerge from the social actors and setting. A qualitative paradigm enabled me to acknowledge that people's attitudes are influenced by social aspects. How people act, how they behave, and why people say what they say cannot be explained simply in terms of "fixed social variables" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 22; Holliday, 2007, p. 5; Richards, 2003, p. 36). On the contrary, the qualitative paradigm allowed me to bring out the myriad of factors influencing the meaning that the participants in this investigation attribute to their world. As Holliday (2007) writes, "[...] it is these qualitative areas in social life—backgrounds, interests and broader social perceptions that qualitative research addresses [...] rather than finding ways to reduce the effect of uncontrolled social variables, it investigates them directly" (p. 5). Seeing from these viewpoints, qualitative paradigm gave me opportunities to elicit multiply constructed realities.

I was able to explore the meaning that English language teachers, local and foreign, and their students give to their worlds, the nature of their own beliefs and the knowledge that guides their actions within the specific social setting of the environment where they work and/or study. The principle of constructivism would enable me to acknowledge that reality is socially constructed. Richards citing Schwandt writes:

*The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action (pp. 38–39).*

In choosing this theoretical perspective would enable me to acknowledge that the social world in which we live today is in constant change and transformation; therefore, it would afford me the possibility of acknowledging that there is no single reality—that there is no one way of seeing the world, but immeasurably many ways. Additionally, I was aware that the reality observed in the investigation would be constructed by the various realities created by different individuals and groups at different times and in different circumstances, as the research developed (Richards, 2003, p. 38; Silverman, 2010b, p. 131). In terms of the subject matter this approach was appropriate, because as has been discussed, constructing culture is very fluid process, varying according to situation, the speakers, the topic and other factors. All these social variables would have an impact in the process of deliberating about culture. Constructivism was a key aspect in this investigation because it allowed me to explore how meaning is constructed; the concepts the participants invoke in making sense of culture became apparent in their telling of their stories.

### **4.3 Ethnography in Education**

Given the complexities of the nature of my research, in that it seeks to understand the interpretations of English language teachers and their students with regard to the concept of culture, superficiality, or lack of depth, was perceived as a distinct risk. Had I approached the investigation by simply asking interviewees “*how do you perceive culture or how do you—or your teachers, approach it in the classroom?*”, participants might have given me their professional opinions, possibly by describing a range of activities they perform in the classroom. I became aware that discovering how individuals construct culture was not going to be revealed in an interview within the confines of an office. I had to [re]consider how I was going to approach the investigation, and how I was going to address the interviewees. I became aware of the need for a creative approach that would allow me to dig deeply to discover what was going on in this social environment. Furthermore, because this investigation involved the construction of culture as viewed by social actors, I decided that the ethnography approach best accommodated the purposes of this investigation. There were many advantages that this approach brought to the investigation, which will be described below.

Traditional ethnography became a model for social research during the twentieth century, being applied later to ELT after undergoing many changes. The core characteristics that make ethnographic approach so suitable for the study of the construction of culture, in this case, will be considered briefly. It was necessary for me to consider my own position in the ethnographic tradition.

#### **4.3.1 Ethnographic Research: From a Large to a ‘Small Culture’**

Ethnography finds its origins in anthropology from the nineteenth century where an ethnography (*ethno* = *culture*; *graphy* = *writing* or *product*) involved a descriptive account of a community or culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2008). Wolcott (2008) writes that the purpose of ethnographic research is “to describe what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to the doing, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process” (p. 72). Ethnography was seen as complementary to ethnology which referred to the historical and comparative analysis of non-Western cultures. A characteristic of this type of inquiry was the study of new cultures in exotic places that were dramatically different from one’s own; ethnographers endeavored to “make the strange familiar” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9; Wolcott, 2008, p. 231). During the twentieth century anthropological ethnography became one of the models for social research in Western Europe and the United States. The interest in studying the “problems at home” came to be known as “social research” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 23). Research was carried out in small villages and towns to study the impact of urbanization and industrialization. Similarly, many sociologists at the University Chicago developed an approach to studying human social life, more specifically, the study of different patterns of life to be found in the city. This type of social research came to be known as “Chicago School” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 23; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 2).

In the process of “coming home”, Wolcott argues that the ethnographer no longer has to undergo the hardship of life “in the bush” (2008, pp. 31–32), and that studies can well be conducted in our own communities, schools and with our own colleagues. Indeed, Scollon *et al.* (2012, p. 22), Wolcott (2008, pp. 209–210), Richards (2003, p. 15), Thomas (2003 p. 36), Fetterman (2010, pp. 19–20) acknowledge that the ethnographic approach has been adopted in education, ELT included. Ethnography can be adopted as a method of inquiry, as a research instrument(s) and as a product. Indeed, there are several critical studies on education on the topic of language, culture and identity that have been produced by scholars using an ethnographic approach (see Rampton, 1995; Schecter and Bayley, 2010; Hernandez-Zamora, 2010). Another change in ethnography is that contrary to the traditional manner of ethnographic studies, one can select the population and focus of the study topic (Wolcott 1988, p. 188). Wolcott emphasizes that, “one can do ethnography anywhere, anytime, and of virtually anyone or any process, as long as human social behavior is involved” (2008, p. 73). The changes which took place in ethnographic research during the early 70s and 80s as seen in the discussions of Geertz (1973), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Spradley, (1980), Wolcott (1988) revolutionized its vision and application. So then, the ethnographic approach enabled me to conduct the investigation within the specific social context of the Language Department. In adopting the concept of “small culture” from Holliday (2007, pp. 40–41), I was positioned to investigate how this “small culture” composed of eight English language teachers and twenty-four students, constructs culture. Holliday uses the term “small culture” to mean taking a section of the social world, i.e. a “small culture”, as a means to investigate (*ibid*). Thus, this “small culture” became the group of people around which I drew boundaries for the purpose of the investigation. Carrying out a study focused on a group of reduced size enabled me to explore individuals’ views in depth.

The ethnographic approach fostered close contact and communication with each of the English language teachers, and with their students. Observing the language teachers working and interacting with their students in the natural workplace environment proved to be beneficial, as the teachers and students were relatively at ease in their regular work/study setting. The closeness and involvement with them allowed generating richness in the quality of data gathered. This reflected in the data generated by the discourse of the participants, which revealed their inner thoughts, ideas or feelings, allowing obtaining a better and deeper understanding of the complexities embedded in their constructions of culture. In the case of this investigation, this was better achieved by a study on a smaller scale; a large-scale quantitative study might have lacked the component of a deeper reading of the participants. Wolcott (2008) observes that “in a day when large sample sizes remain the vogue, the critical aspect of focusing on depth rather than breadth has become contentious” (p. 93). But from his viewpoint, devoting attention to one case with a manageably small sample size allows the opportunity to report in-depth. Indeed, this study does not purport to be representative of a larger population, but rather the in-depth quality of the data gathered permitted the understanding of the complexities within the smaller group when attempting to make sense of culture.

Additionally, ethnography allows placement of the study in a social setting where the abstract global and local come into contact. Holliday (2007) emphasizes sociological imagination as a means of situating the researcher, subjects and the study within a wider community or world scenario. “Developing a sociological imagination in ELT very simply means making connections between professional practice and what is happening in the rest of the world” (p. 20). Thus, from a sociological perspective, ethnography allows the positioning of the investigation in relation to a broader series of interrelated social issues, such as globalization, mobility, the issue of English as an international language and culture and the classroom. All these factors can have an effect, in a direct or indirect way, on the social environment that shape individuals’ worldviews. Thus, ethnography permitted movement towards a sociological imagination that served to reveal the participants’ deeper feelings and concerns about culture in relationship to a broader social context. Mills (2000) writes “neither the life of the individual nor the history of society can be understood without understanding both... it’s necessary to understand the interplay of man and society, biography and history, of self and the world” (pp. 3–4). Holliday (2007) citing Mills, emphasizes the critical aspect of sociological imagination. He writes, “by their reflection and by their sensibility, [researchers] realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences and of their place within this meaning” (p. 20; 1996, p. 235). The concept of “thick description” was indeed an important component in achieving sociological imagination; it became necessary to consider the nature of “thick description” in order to reach a more complete vision.

#### 4.3.2 Thick Description

In borrowing Gilbert Ryle’s notion of “thick description”, Geertz (1973) argues that when describing cultures, “the aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts” (p. 26). He writes of the utility of “thick description” in the interpretation of behavior:

*[...] thick description is to provide descriptions beyond the obvious and superficial... our double task is to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts, the "said" of social discourse, and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures, what belongs to them because they are what they are, will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior (1973, p. 27).*

Thus, I employed the method of “thick description” by exploring the multiple levels of meaning layered in the phenomena under investigation. This was done by “embracing different perspectives” (Richards, 2003, p. 15), including the perspectives of English teachers, local and foreign, and those of their students. Hearing their stories allowed exploration of the broad picture, by analyzing how they view their place in this social world. Their vantage points ranged broadly, from their professional roles as English teachers or students to their individual family roles as son/daughter or husband/wife. The broad picture took their experiences, backgrounds and perspectives on English as a foreign language into consideration. Their accounts were not seen as independent from the world they live in, but as influenced and shaped by it.

### **4.3.3 Reflexivity**

A necessary corollary to the ethnographic tradition is the employment of the discipline of reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, pp. 15–16; Fetterman, 2010, p. 28). Whereas positivist tradition tries to understand social phenomena as independent from the person of the researcher, under the assumption that the researcher can be a source of potential distortions—potential distortions whose effects must be guarded against in order to preserve objectivity, supposedly revealing a “true object” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 16) uncontaminated by the researcher—ethnography acknowledges that the researcher is part of the world he is investigating.

Reflexivity afforded me some measure of self-understanding and self-awareness as a participant of the investigation. Through the reflexivity process I became aware of how I affected the site and the participants, and of the subjectivity I brought to the investigation. Sultana (2007) emphasizes the scope of reflexivity in research: it involves reflection on self, process, and representation, critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, as well as accountability of the researcher in data collection and interpretation. Reflexivity would enable me to remain aware of my own interests, values and identity. At the same time the reflexivity process made me conscious of the need to distance myself to avoid letting my own perceptions get in the way of what was seen or heard. I anticipated the impact that my presence could have on the dynamic of the investigation in the ways described below.

#### **4.3.3.1 Ethical Issues and Data: A Reflexive Account**

As has been described in section 4.1, gaining access to the site of investigation and the participants was not an issue, as I had the support of my superiors and colleagues to conduct my research in the Language Department. Although I knew the teacher participants and had a close, friendly relationship with them, I was aware that I was positioning myself and my colleagues in new roles, the researcher and the researched. Thus, I became aware that I had to consider how I was going to build “field relations” in the ethnographic sense (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 72). It was necessary to gain the participants’ trust so that they would open up and tell me things which we did not necessarily talk about as friends. Doing research in a familiar setting with persons I knew led to further considerations regarding “how much of this discourse might be disclosed, and in what form” (Ellis, 2007, p. 3). How to create a balance between friendship and research was one of the most difficult issues I had to deal with in investigating at familiar site; I became intensely aware of the responsibility I had towards my friends and colleagues. Thus, I took advantage of this friendship, but this required the application of reflexivity. It was necessary to be conscious of ethical choices—these choices ranged from how to protect the participants’ identities, to what to report, what could be shared with other participants as the investigation progressed, to how to do all of these things ethically (Ellis, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2010).

For this reason, I took steps to assure the integrity of my research; I explained what I was doing, why I was researching this subject and precisely what I intended to do including interviewing teachers and their students. I explicitly asked for the authorization of the participants to gather information from their interviews. Further, I assured them that all of the information derived from interviews would only be accessed by me alone. Likewise, the participants were advised that pseudonyms would be used in the text of the investigation so that their identities would be protected. This in turn led me to other ethical considerations concerning how best to contribute new knowledge while studying the participants’ constructions of culture.

On the one hand, I felt that I owed my readers “the truth”; I would have to provide as accurate an account as possible of what was said and heard, while remaining within the parameters of academic research. I took care to build the discussions in the investigation in an impartial and fair way, taking great care in how best to represent them in my work while still telling “the truth”. As will be seen in the finding chapter, I made the participants part of my research—they became co-constructors with me, attempting to unravel the complicated weave of culture. Through the means of reflecting on their cultural experiences, they began the journey to criticality, questioning themselves and others. I put things up for scrutiny, and they submitted their thoughts to me in a dialogic process. This could be achieved because of the friendly relationship I had with them—friendship formed the bridge to our new researcher-researched relationship. At certain moments in the process I was able to appreciate the subtle shift in my relationship to the participants; we were able to cross the line from friendship to a confident researcher and participant status where it was possible to explore culture together.

#### 4.3.3.2 Reflexivity in “Telling the Story”

A major advance in ethnographic research set forth by the Chicago School was the reassessment of the role of the ethnographer. This change was in turn bolstered by the postmodern tradition which criticized the autobiography of the researcher. The arguments put forth by Clifford and Marcus (1986) in a discussion of “crisis of representation” and “partial truths” led to some significant changes that helped to reshape ethnographic writing. Wolcott (2008) observes that historically, traditional ethnography found “the anthropologist telling someone else’s story” (pp. 144–145). The native’s point of view was presented as understood by the ethnographer (etic view). However, conventional ethnographic accounts became contended on the basis of two arguments: the first was that the accounts imposed a particular kind of authorial perspective; the second pointed out a lack of clear acknowledgement of the role and impact of the ethnographer on the research site and the subjects of investigation (Wolcott, 2008; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In terms of the former, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) one consequence of the “crisis of representation” was the advocacy of more open texts. Therefore, instead of having “a single authorial viewpoint, ethnographic texts would have variegated textures combining different kinds of writing style and shifting viewpoints” (p. 203). In terms of shifting voices, three styles are clearly described by Wolcott (2008, p. 145): the ethnographer tells someone else’s story (etic tradition), the ethnographer incorporates *their* story (emic) into the one the ethnographer tells (etic) and the ethnographer helps people tell *their* story (emic). Therefore, armed with the possibility of a more open type of text, reflexivity afforded me awareness regarding how I was going to present the account, as well as the claims I could make in the analysis of how this “small culture” composed of teachers and students construct culture.

It has been discussed that the constructivism paradigm acknowledges that the reality observed is constructed in a dialogic process by the participants in the investigation: the participants’ words, ideas and feelings, and the researcher’s own understanding of their contributions are part of the dialogic process. In terms of narration, this investigation reflects the insiders’ views in the form of implicit evidence from verbatim quotations, and the outsider’s vantage point in the presentation of these accounts. Regarding the subjectivity that the researcher brings to the study, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) believe that it is reasonable to assume that in the course of a systematic inquiry, the researcher has the possibility to “describe phenomena as they are, and not merely how we perceive them or how we would like them to be” (p. 16). By applying reflexivity principles, I intended to construct social phenomena as they “were”, in the sense that Hammersley and Atkinson indicate above.

As seen in the review of literature, Chapter 2, culture is a very fluid concept that means different things to different people. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges in exploring Others’ constructions of culture was the avoidance of limits and definitions, for example setting boundaries such as “what culture is, what culture is not”. Clearly, it would be mistaken to project myself so far into the investigation that I wrote things as I would like them to be. Thus, in terms of subject matter, how I positioned myself with respect to my own view of culture would enable me to acknowledge my own subjectivity. I was challenged to understand myself, and to explore my own construction of culture. While listening to the discourse of some of the interviewees, who did not seem to be aware of the use of their own cultural references in evaluating the Other, I became aware that my own cultural biases might prevent me from seeing the perspective of the Other. Thus, I was aware that my interpretations are shaped by my understanding of culture, my background and personal experience. This awareness aided me in maintaining an open mind in accepting Others’ interpretation and understanding of culture. This necessitated stepping away from a “right or wrong” discourse when construing culture; a moralistic judgment of individuals’ interpretations of culture lay too close at hand.

The idea presented itself that the subjectivity of culture and its complexities should be allowed to emerge and speak with its own voice. Only in this way would I be able to enquire as to how individuals construct culture—I could enquire about their own interpretations, their ideas, opinions, and experiences. In my case, bringing this necessary element of reflexivity into data analysis was achieved through a systematic rereading of my findings chapter. This allowed me to identify any potential Othering of the interviewees, a trap to be avoided. This helped to give equal weight to the perspective of all the participants involved in the study, a process of decentering.

Reflexivity afforded me an awareness of the responsibility invested in me as “the storyteller” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 148). My interviewees had entrusted me with their thoughts and feelings, and consciousness of this fact remained with me throughout the writing process. Double reflexivity, as Blackman and Commane say, can be applied in order to: “enable the researcher to demonstrate commitment in fieldwork and write-up” (2012, p. 231) (see also Blackman, 2007).

#### 4.3.3.3 Subjectivity in Constructing Culture

In writing about others, however, one should be wary about claiming to “know the truth” or even to “claim to approach it”. Marcus (1986) writes, “the ‘rigorous partiality’ is seen as liberation in recognizing that no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects” (p. 25). Given the subjectivity of the individual’s construction of culture, I was aware that this reality can only be imperfectly understood. I was aware that individuals’ accounts are subjective reports, particular to a time and place, and based on a set of personal experiences which are in their nature changeable (Silverman, 2010b; Wolcott, 2008; Madison, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Madison (2012) speaks of the attributes and elements that influence the participants:

*An experience or event that we wish to grasp as researchers will always be grasped through the degree of subjectivity encased in the expression of the telling (the participant’s subjectivity), as well as the degree of our own subjectivity that is encased in our listening (the researcher’s subjectivity). Subjectivity becomes all at once a vessel, lens, and filter of every telling (p. 42).*

Hence, to assert that such interpretations should be taken as an objective reality or as “established truths” would be too much of a hyperbole. On the contrary, the construal of culture evidenced the constant deliberation of individuals in interpreting and constructing meaning. I recognize the outcome of my research as constructed by the researcher *and* interviewees, in our interactions through interviews as we talked about and discussed culture. Thus, even though this is a story from an insider’s point of view, it is my constructed version of the insiders’ stories, observing the principle of reflexivity in the recounting.

#### 4.3.3.4 Reflexivity in Terms of the Research Process

In fact, Spencer–Oatey (2008) warns that in intercultural research, “there is a high risk that data collection and analysis is conducted from the cultural viewpoint of the researcher and hence may be culturally biased” (p. 28). The term “decentering” refers to “the process of moving away from the researcher’s perspectives so that more equal weight is given to various cultural perspectives” (*ibid.*). In line with this thought and given the sensitivity of the topic, I had to make certain to position myself in a neutral manner, particularly when discussing culture with foreign nationals, in order to avoid any misleading ideas of the “my culture, your culture” type. Being aware of this afforded me the creation of a non-threatening environment where the discussion could be approached in a friendly but critical manner. I was aware of and alert to my own conduct in approaching the topic and discussion. Fetterman (2010) observes that “ethnographers cannot be completely neutral. We are all products of our culture. We have personal beliefs, biases, and individual tastes. Socialization runs deep” (p. 24).

The ethnographer can guard against the more obvious biases, however, by making them explicit and by trying to view other people’s practices impartially. This author writes “ethnocentric behavior—the imposition of one culture’s values and standards on another culture, with the assumption that one is superior to the other—is a fatal error in ethnography” (*ibid.*). Because this investigation involved the construction of culture from the perspective of the Self and the Other, one factor I had to be aware of was possible bias stemming from my own background. Not only am I Mexican, but I am also married to an American—all my colleagues were aware of this. On the one hand, the participants’ awareness of my being Mexican and a local teacher could have affected their freedom in expressing points of view concerning the local environment including their experiences, good or bad, while living and working in my country.

On the other hand, seen from the perspective of other local teachers and students, there was a distinct risk of my presence generating an “Us–Them” tenor to the interviews. Further, I felt that my status of being married to an American might have a similar effect on the participants. However, the good relationships I enjoy with all my colleagues overrode any possibility of reticence to speak or compulsion to agree that they may have felt as a result of cultural background.

#### 4.3.3.5 “Making the Familiar Strange”

Whereas the task of the early ethnographers was “making the strange familiar”, in my role as an ethnographer at home in the UG, Mexico, one of the challenges I faced was “making the familiar strange” (Wolcott, 2010, p. 231; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9). Fetterman (2010) warns that “a setting may be so familiar that the ethnographer may not notice things, or take things for granted” (p. 39). However, being aware of this risk encourages the ethnographer to seek after and use different strategies at different stages of an investigation. For example, one strategy suggested by Wolcott (2008) is to set the mind to a “discovery” perspective, or as Blommaert and Jie suggest, the ethnographer should never stop asking “silly questions” (2010, p. 27). Additionally, from Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007) viewpoint, not only can reactivity to the presence of the researcher be minimized and/or monitored, but also “exploited” (p. 16).

It was somewhat challenging to approach the site and participants in the investigation from a perspective of “discovery”, because I have worked in the Language Department for over ten years. Nevertheless, the fact that I had been in England for some time created at least some critical distance; stepping into the site after being away for that period gave me a sense of entering the site with fresh eyes. So, it could be said that I was a well-known “stranger” at the site. I found that knowing the participants and their environment had more advantages than disadvantages—it was certainly somewhat challenging to distance myself and to attempt to “make the familiar strange”, but I reminded myself that the point was to reflect and be aware of both the positive and negative aspects of knowing the environment. Bias deriving from over-familiarity was to be avoided, while still taking advantage of knowing the terrain. I was also able to exploit my knowledge of the school setting, infrastructure and schedule—knowing the environment was an advantage, because I knew where the teachers congregate, their break times and when they would be the most approachable (Wolcott, 2008). It is commonly known that the ethnographic researcher as an outsider spends a good deal of time in gaining entry into the lives of the individuals being studied (Holliday, 2007). In the present case, knowing the participants made it possible for me to carry out the investigation in a relatively short period of time, as I was able to turn my status as a colleague or friend to good advantage during the interview process. Approaching interviews from a narrative perspective requires a high level of openness and trust between the participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2006), and it was precisely the intimate, long-term acquaintance I had with these teachers that enriched their accounts.

To sum up, the exercise of reflexivity afforded me a conscious awareness of my place in the social world I was investigating, it afforded me greater sensitivity of how I affected the place and participants I was investigating. Moreover, I gave them voice, data derived from what they expressed, with me as the instrument to represent their story. Being aware of the impact that my presence had on the research site and participants brought a measure of reflexivity. I believe I was able to provide a transparent account of what I had been told by the participants, their reflections, their ideas and feelings. In this way, the message of partiality resonates throughout this piece of work. Having described the research paradigm and research method selected for the investigation I next provide the rationale for the research strategy adopted to approach the investigation.

#### 4.4 Interviews

The interview was the main tool for data gathering. Given the exploratory nature of this study and the fluid nature of its subject, interviews were a tool which allowed me to attain the necessary close contact and communication with the participants in the investigation. As Marshall and Rossman put it, they “capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants’ own words” (2006, p. 55). Byrne (2004) suggests that,

*Qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values—things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees’ views, interpretation of event, understandings, experiences and opinions...Perhaps the most compelling advantage of qualitative interviewing is that, when done well, it is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches (p. 182).*

Thus, through the interviews I achieved close contact with the participants in the investigation, enabling me to obtain their experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings on the subject matter, while at the same time allowing the participants' perspective on the phenomena under investigation to unfold naturally. Interviews revealed the struggles of individuals in making sense of culture. Such a broad, abstract concept with so many meanings was difficult to put into words; their struggles became evident in their pauses and their facial expressions of concern, doubts, surprise or annoyance. Even when their thoughts were put into statements, these were often reassessed, rephrased, or re-considered.

Another advantage that interviews offered was the wide range of possibility for interaction with the participants in the investigation—interviews allowed a flexible basis for approaching the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The choice and use of interviews varied in terms of moments during the investigation. For example, at some moments a higher level of formality proved useful, at others a lesser degree of involvement; I also sought a balance between active and passive roles in the interview process (Fetterman, 2010). This author also makes a distinction between “informal or spontaneous/casual conversations, and formal interviews in which time is set up to conduct the interview” (p. 41). Informal interviews were used when making first contact with teachers as a form of “ice breaker”. At this stage, I took the opportunity to explain the topic of my research project and set up time for a formal interview.

The different types of interviews proved to be another advantage, as I was able to use two types of formal interviews: individual—or face-to-face interviews, and focus group interviews. Whereas interviews with teachers were individual, I decided on group interviews with students. Krueger and Casey (2000) define the focus group interview process as, “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment [...] group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others” (p. 5).

The use of focus group interviews appeared to be the most effective way to interview students, considering that this type of interview is less formal, and that students might feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions in the company of their peers (Hennink, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Interviews were to be conducted in the participants' native language. The intention was to elicit more complex and accurate responses from the participants speaking in their mother tongue (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009). However, this would change in the case of the student focus group interviews, due to circumstances described below.

#### 4.4.1 Approaching the Interview

To approach the participants on the subject of the nature of culture was something that required a major thought and special consideration. The purpose of the interview was clear: to establish close contact with interviewees to obtain first-hand accounts on the subject matter. However, I still had to come up with a method that would serve the purpose of stimulating interviewees' reactions to talk about culture, to reveal how they construe culture. One of my first thoughts was the use of photos and video.

Silverman (2010a) observes that photos and video can be good tools for eliciting interviewees' inner thoughts, ideas and feelings. This author (*ibid.*) describes how the use of photos was adopted in an investigation conducted by Jenkins *et al.* studying military life (p. 245). In the study, sixteen military personnel were asked to choose ten photos that best represented their experience in military life. Each person was then interviewed and their accounts of the photos were used to analyze how military identity is represented. In an investigation using video, Anderson (2008) set out to study ELT practitioners' pedagogy—theory and practice. In this approach, he presented ELT practitioners with video extracts of a lesson for their comments. The video discussion was used to encourage “the teachers to talk about their teaching in such a way that they would reveal their rationale”, which Anderson argued was not easy to unravel with the sole use of interviews and class observations, because “this was a given in their lives, so naturalized, that it was not talked about” (pp. 137–138). Through the analysis of teachers' discussion of the video Anderson, was able to reveal ELT practitioners' rationale of their pedagogy and practice.

In this investigation, I realized that I was dealing with a topic that possessed a degree of abstractness similar to the topics of these studies. Thus, I was aware that thinking and re-thinking one's own construction of culture and developing an understanding of oneself and others is not necessarily an easy thing to put into words. For these reasons, the use of critical incidents was finally chosen as the resource for approaching the participants. Indeed, critical incidents share some similarities with the use of photos and videos; as an external device they can provoke reactions in individuals, making it possible to unravel their interpretations of culture.

#### 4.4.2 Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are widely used in the field of intercultural communication (See Arthur, 2001; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009; DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004; Holliday *et al.* 2010; Holliday, 2011; Corbett, 2003; Shaules, 2007 and Wight, 1995 among others). Likewise, many ethnographers acknowledge the role of critical incidents, which they also term narratives, stories, accounts, life histories and life stories (Chase, 2005; Fetterman, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2010, 2013; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 2010). The authors differ on methods of analysis of the narratives. However, they agree upon the efficacy and adaptability of narrative to ethnographic techniques.

Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 221) state that the term “critical incident” in intercultural contexts is used with two slightly different meanings. Critical incident can denote an intercultural interaction or repeated experience which one or all parties to the communication experienced as ineffective, and/or inappropriate, and/or unsatisfying. This is the meaning that the term has when an interactant recounts such an occasion, or when it is used in the research context (see Arthur, 2001; Corbett, 2003). Critical incident for the purpose of intercultural development can denote a description of such an interaction made to fulfill a pedagogical purpose. The short prose text sometimes merely describes what happened, though often the unspoken feelings and thoughts of one or all parties to the incident are included.

The critical incidents seemed to be an excellent vehicle for provoking an examination of the assumptions and ideas the participants might hold about themselves and others regarding culture-related issues. The presentation of critical incidents allowed approaching this difficult subject obliquely with my participants rather than confronting them with direct questions. I further found this approach to be a good way to encourage openness in the dialogic process. With these matters in mind, I decided to adopt the “telling your story” strategy from feminist theory. In one adaptation of this strategy, as Silverman (2010b, p. 123) observes, researchers are encouraged “to tell their stories to respondents” to motivate them to tell *their* stories (see also Williams *et al.*, 2003).—Indeed, I saw a close relationship between feminist storytelling as a method and the use of critical incidents to develop empathy and dialogue with the participants. Although the critical incident approach lacked some of the rich complexity characteristic of feminist storytelling, it proved to be a valuable tool for generating the stories from which the participants’ thoughts on culture could be gathered. In an atmosphere of openness, the critical incident approach led the participants to share their stories with confidence—at the same time, they were reassured that their experiences mirrored those of many others (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010, p. 16). One side effect of the storytelling approach was the removal of some of the affective filters which can make it difficult to talk about intercultural encounters. The participants slipped quite naturally into the roles created by the critical incidents, commenting and giving opinions about the cultural issues raised in the stories.

#### 4.4.3 Origins of Critical Incidents

I identified some critical incidents experienced in my professional life as a means of sharing my story. Though I had originally considered adapting some vignettes from intercultural communication handbooks, but as discussed above, sharing my genuine experiences would motivate the participants to respond with the sharing of their experiences.

The critical incidents that I chose was related to an issue of culture and raised a number of issues that could become talking points (For the full text of the critical incident see Appendix I). This incident epitomizes my experience; it is real, and such details as the nationalities of the parties involved in them were retained. The persons involved in this incident were real-life individuals I had interacted with and who happened to share my profession. So, given our common experience, I decided that it would be fair to maintain a real, close description of the events in the critical incidents exactly as they had been narrated to me. So then, the incidents are stories drawn from my professional experience at different times in my working environment while interacting with other English teachers.

In adaptation of the approach suggested by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 221) and Wight (1995, p. 135), I introduced the critical incident without offering possible interpretations. The participants were left free to generate their own reactions and to suggest possible ways of handling the situations contained in the critical incidents. In this manner, I could obtain spontaneous reactions, ideas and opinions.

So then, this was my way to tell my own stories to the respondents; these critical incidents were the “stimulus” (Silverman, 2010a, p. 245), which in one way or another, were relevant to the participants. Moreover, the use of critical incidents fulfilled its function as a spark that spurred teachers and students to recall their personal experiences, whether good or bad. The sharing of such experiences even generated further critical incidents, as the participants shared and reflected on their stories. According to Lawler, “stories circulate culturally, providing means of making sense of that world and also providing the materials with which people construct personal narratives as a means of constructing personal identities” (2002, p. 242). The participants’ experiences were not limited to the Self, but also included telling and reflecting on stories relating to the Other.

Juxtaposing stories proved to be a valuable technique, providing valuable hints about the lived experiences of teachers and students, while giving firsthand examples of how the participants make sense of culture, and how they relate this knowledge. The processes of the participants also show, as Blommaert and Jie put it, “how particular bits of experience and knowledge are invoked to support, modify or attack an argument” (2010, p. 52; Williams *et al.* 2003).

The fact that storytelling takes on retrospective aspects is also very pertinent in this investigation. In the case of the foreign English teachers entering a new social environment, this approach provided insights into how they become socialized in a new environment with different social norms, how they created meaning and which social changes they have experienced over time while learning and adapting to a new environment. This became evident in their narratives with phrases such as “I started like this”, “at the beginning...”, “it was a form of culture shock but then I realized...” and so forth.

As I look back at what I achieved, I also realize that what contributed to succeeding in adopting this approach was the close relationship I have with my colleagues. One requisite for effective participation in storytelling is that the two sides, interviewer and interviewees, “are involved in a mutual and sincere collaboration” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 118). Indeed, as discussed in Section 4.3.3., one of the advantages of conducting research in my own institution was that I knew all of the teachers and had a friendly relationship with them, “friendship is a powerful stimulus to encourage the telling and re-telling of stories, and the participants did not hesitate to share their viewpoints and perspectives, their experiences and emotions” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p.118).

In summary, critical incidents allowed narrative accounts to develop. The discovery of new incidents and experiences brought up the question of the social context of the investigation, the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato. The participants’ narratives allowed me to appreciate the dynamics of how their constructions were impacted by this social context. Similarly, the capabilities of the participants when deliberating over culture became apparent. Interviews and observations were crucial for what was seen, heard and experienced at the research site to be integrated into a larger context. The canvas of the investigation was becoming larger and more detailed through the combination of interviews to teachers, foreign and local, and their students.

#### **4.5 Issues of Readability**

The presentation of the verbatim quotations used in the final document required additional consideration for clarity and easy reading. One important issue was the handling of interviewee’s references to their own or to other “cultures”. To impose some order, the terms “local environment”, “host environment”, “local society” or “local culture” are used to refer to Guanajuato, Mexico. The words “locals” and “insiders” are used to refer to individuals of Mexican nationality. “Foreigner” and “outsider” refer to individuals from other countries besides Mexico, for example the US, the UK or Canada. The terms and phrases “they” and “their”, “one’s own culture”, “one’s own worldview”, or “Self” and “Other” may refer either to locals or foreigners depending on context. Care has been taken to avoid ambiguities in the text; context should provide sufficient cues to understand who is speaking or being spoken of at any moment.

In the case of interviews with local teachers conducted in Spanish, only the fragments used in the making of this investigation were translated into English. All translations were done by the researcher. As described above, focus group interviews with students were conducted in English. Verbatim quotations from students’ interviews were corrected only when insuperable problems of interpretation arose, otherwise these quotes were kept integral. In the case of interviews with native English speakers, the overuse of hedges was an issue. Some of the most commonly used were “sort of”, “kind of”, “you know” (Silverman, 2010; Richards, 2003). For purposes of clarity, some of these hedges have been suppressed, particularly in teachers’ accounts.

As discussed in above, when conducting the focus group interviews with students, group agreement or disagreement was sometimes expressed out loud and other times it was signaled with a simple nod or a shake of the head. In the analysis and interpretation of data, these were considered as group agreement or group disagreement. In the presentation of the text when reference is made to “students” or “these students”, the group (FG1) or groups (FG1, FG4, FG5) of students in question will be indicated. When a student from a focus group is referred to individually, the focus group is indicated, for example, Luz Ma (FG9).

As mentioned in above, when assigning pseudonyms to the participants it was difficult to distinguish names of teachers from those of the students. In order to overcome this difficulty, teachers’ names appear in italics: *Luisa, Jose, Miguel, Rosa, Colin, Elizabeth, Albert* and *Johnny Rodriguez* while students’ names appear in Roman type: Luz Ma, Aminda, Joel or Vianey.

Lastly, all the data extracts in the findings chapter are numbered for “easy accessibility” within the document (Silverman, 2010a, p. 347).

## Chapter 5 Social Use of Language

The current chapter introduces findings related to a cultural reference point: this reference point could be described in the slogan “we are all equal”, seemingly a worldview used by some of the foreign teachers when assessing features of local social use of language. The lack of ability to relativize C1, so that the new could be recognized in its own milieu, became apparent. On the one hand, it was found that the use of honorific titles transferred from C1 interfered with foreign teachers’ egalitarian conceptions in their trajectories both inside and outside the classroom. On the other, it was found that students were reported to reject attempts by teachers to change traditional concepts of “respect” exemplified in the use of honorific titles such as “teacher” (from C1 “maestro”), or the formal address *usted* when using Spanish. These linguistic matters were not an issue *per se*, but rather served as a lightning rod that attracted opinions revealing the participants’ construction of culture.

Foreign teachers appeared to object to normal features of the Spanish language in everyday social contexts: this included objections to the use of honorific titles such as “maestro” and “licenciado”, and extended to an irrational rejection of the formal address *usted* and the informal *tu* on the basis of supposed egalitarian principles. This rejection could be seen as inability to relativize C1 in the new foreign language social context, as I will argue in this chapter.

The discussion in this chapter draws on data from discussing *Critical Incident: An American in Mexico* (Appendix I), and classroom observations.

### 5.1 “A Mexican Thing”: Requesting Permission to Enter the Classroom

This section introduces findings that would seem to indicate that primary social knowledge coming from family and society determines individuals’ behavior: in this case, it is asking permission to enter or leave the classroom, a “Mexican thing” according to one teacher, that is a topic of debate among the interviewees. This behavior is deeply embedded, to the point that some participants view it as part of their identity. Indeed, when issues of identity were touched upon, the role of the ELT practitioner became contentious. “How much identity do you have to lose?” asked one participant.

In their discussion of *Critical Incident: An American in Mexico*, interviewees identified the act of requesting permission to enter the classroom as a common cultural practice in the local environment. The notion that this cultural practice might be considered as lack of self-confidence was emphatically rejected by all of the participants in this investigation. At the same time, interviewees acknowledge that this behavior is deeply ingrained. *Luisa* expressed this point:

*This is what the students do and I know it’s a cultural thing, a Mexican thing, completely [laughs]. The first day of classes I tell students that they will always have the right to enter, whenever they arrive. [...] they don’t have to ask for permission, I tell them to feel free to enter, that they don’t have to knock on the door, the door is always open. I tell them that they should enter, take a seat, get their book, observe what the others are doing and get on task, that’s more than enough for me. I tell them to proceed in the same manner if they have to go out... Well... [long pause and a deep breath] ... it’s like if I have NEVER said anything to them because the last day of classes they were still—Teacher, may I come in?—I mean, I think this is something that you cannot change them on! [laughs] (Extract 1)*

Here, *Luisa* observes that students appear to tacitly act and rely on their social knowledge to guide their behavior, an observation that leads her to define it as “a cultural thing, a Mexican thing”. She links this behavior to students’ sense of identity and family values; thus, this social knowledge appears to be emotionally charged. Similar views were voiced by local teachers *Miguel*, *Jose* and *Rosa*. Like *Luisa*, all of the student participants (FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG6, FG7, FG8, FG9) in this investigation spoke of the relationship between behavior, “family values” and social norms; in their view these are closely tied together and constitute their cultural practices. The following four fragments could be said to comprise what all of the student participants in this investigation expressed, at times quite explicitly:

*Ulises: It’s the way of doing things here...//Paco: because she doesn’t know what our traditions are in Mexico, the social norms. FG5 (Extract 2)*

*Mariana: It’s about being educated otherwise you are being disrespectful. It’s a way to show respect to a teacher. At home, your parents teach you to show respect for the authority, for older people, adults. This is a way to show respect [her emphasis]. FG6 (Extract 3).*

*Luz Ma: It’s for respect, for me it’s important because I’m not going to enter the classroom like if I’m the boss or something. It’s for respect. FG9 (Extract 4)*

**Juan Manuel:** *It's the same from the teacher's perspective; a teacher here can think that the student who doesn't ask for permission is considered rude. It has to do with family values. FG6 (Extract 5)*

For students, this cultural practice is viewed as a “tradition”, the “social norm” or “custom”. They explained their behavior as an expression of the values of respect and consideration for the teacher. Interrelated terms used to describe this included: having good manners, being educated, being polite or being obedient. Furthermore, all of the students recognize that these established social norms specify the behavior that is expected of them. Students are observant of their social role and have a clear conception of the teacher’s role within the social environment of the classroom. Correspondingly, they acknowledge the teachers’ sharing of this social norm.

A clear manifestation of this sense of respect and consideration for the teacher is the following fragment which is reconstructed from some of the key notes made when observing *Colin*’s class (CO11), a Saturday class from 10AM to 2 PM, a rather large class of 28 students.

*The teacher sets up a ‘Walk and Talk’ activity. Students talk about their last vacation. The classroom is ringing with noise, with the students circulating and talking out loud, moving furniture to make their way around, teacher mingling with the students moving from one group to another, motivating them while the music is playing. A student arrives during the activity. This is 25 minutes past the hour. She stands at the door looking for the teacher. She keeps her hand on the door in a motion as if to knock, but she doesn’t knock, (she knows it would be useless). She stays still in this position for a few more seconds looking for the teacher. She finally gives up but still with hesitation, she enters the classroom [...] (Extract 6)*

*Colin*’s enthusiasm and professionalism was evident, he was in complete control of his class. The students were fully engaged, cooperating and participating with him; the classroom atmosphere was friendly and it felt brimming with energy. What caught my attention at the time was that this student did not dare to just walk in, even though the classroom was crowded and noisy. She stood up by the door waiting and waiting, trying to catch her teacher’s eye in order to ask permission to enter the classroom. Her behavior evidences how important it was for this particular student to show her respect for her teacher and to observe the rule that is expected of her role of being a student and that one of being a teacher.

So then, the practice of asking permission to enter or leave the classroom is perceived as conforming to individuals’ sense of cultural identity; they cultivate this cultural practice, citing “norms”, “customs” or “tradition”. The students seem to recognize cultural value in sustaining, transmitting and maintaining their practices. Moreover, this data seems to reveal the affective aspect that accompanies individuals’ conception of culture. However, although there is a general consensus among students that acknowledges certain identifiable regularities regarding social norms and behaviour, several students (FG3, FG4, FG7, FG8, FG9) observe that these norms can vary, as shown in these statements:

**Lilia:** *But also, now in the university we don’t necessarily ask for permission because the teachers ask us not to interrupt... they give us the rules, it varies. FG8 (Extract 7)*

**Ana:** *In the school you notice that is different between one or another teacher, in some cases is personal. FG4 (Extract 8)*

**Lulu:** *... I don’t know, umm ... it’s different in many different contexts because in some particular schools you don’t have to ask for permission to go out, and in other schools you should, you have to have the permission, like in secondary school or in some private schools. So it’s difficult, not all are the same... FG7 (Extract 9)*

Students’ discussion seems to suggest that the social norms within the environment of the classroom are constructed by teachers and students, and these can vary according to context or characteristics of individuals. So then, small culture construction is perceived as a social practice that takes place in the process of negotiation. As I was able to appreciate when conducting class observations, not all students asked for permission to enter, some did, while others did not (See Appendix II). And none of the teachers seemed to have a negative reaction towards those students who asked, or not, for permission to enter the classroom. This is an idea that supports individuals’ (teachers and students) capability to negotiate, construct and/or adapt to new social norms. Classroom norms, however, did not seem to be the same—I observed lots of irregularities, but they did not seem so different from one another either; one might say, for example, that classroom behavior holds its similarities, as it were, to “church behavior”, or “bank behavior”.

Although individuals acknowledge that asking permission to enter the classroom is a common practice, several of the interviewees recognized that it is not necessarily a fixed rule. These findings demonstrate that social behavior can be changed—individuals can construct new realities according to the circumstances.

### 5.1.1 Cultural Practices and the Cosmopolitan Outlook

In this section, findings are introduced which suggest that the student participants feel that they are being placed into a superior/inferior continuum when Mexican and American cultures are compared. As one student put it, a comparison of cultures should be used to try to show interest and understanding, “not just [to] attack others’ habits”. Indeed, it was found that several student participants felt the weight of Othering when they heard the account of *Critical Incident: An American in Mexico*. The interviewees seemed to be suggesting that the necessary ingredient of relativizing one’s worldviews and the ability to see things from the perspective of the Other were lacking, in this case.

Students’ first reaction when reading *Critical Incident: An American in Mexico* was one of surprise, because they had not thought that the local custom of requesting permission to enter/leave the classroom could be considered “strange” or that it could have attracted the attention of foreigners; thus, it was a revelation for them. The discussion of this critical incident raised the issue of the risk of placing cultures in an inferior/superior continuum, or a right and wrong discourse which could lead to Othering. In doing so, students’ discussion shows a more cosmopolitan reading of other ways of doing. I provide the two extracts because they comprise what several other students (FG2, FG3, FG4, FG6, FG8) expressed. This group of students suggests a more open approach to the reading of cultural practices:

**Karla:** *This foreign teacher was like just thinking of himself, his point of view, like ‘This is wrong, these people have all sorts of problems I’ll tell them what to do, what is right’ I think, he could have said, ‘This is interesting, why do students ask for permission?’ It would’ve been better too, and discover that maybe there is a reason, is it for respect or being polite? And in the implication when he says, “in America” then we could say ‘Well, we are in Mexico!’ [Her emphasis].***Emmanuel:** *We have to understand the other culture, we have to put ourselves in their shoes... be more curious about the culture, show interest, try to understand and not just attack others’ habits. [...] We must learn about other cultures but not to create an idea about them, for example, there are some places where it’s incorrect or inappropriate to kiss someone in the cheek like here, or holding hands, that is one example you know something about that culture, but using for a good reason //***Alejandro:** *not to criticize//***Karla:** *or for prejudice. FG1 (Extract 10).*

For Karla the statement “in America” casts different ways of doing in a superior/inferior continuum. In her interpretation of the foreign teacher in the *Critical Incident: An American in Mexico*, she problematizes the narrow reading of cultures which results from inability to suspend worldviews—foreign standards have been used to evaluate the Other. Her response “Well, we are *in Mexico!*” suggests that from her viewpoint, outsiders should be able to recognize that being in a different country, individuals are likely to be encountered with different social norms. This group of students talk about the capabilities and strategies, which from their viewpoint, individuals should put into practice when being confronted with different ways of acting e.g. being curious. Emmanuel suggests “putting oneself in the shoes of the other” to try to see things from the perspective of the Other. From their perspective, different ways of doing or acting should be seen as something to learn from, not to attack or criticize. As Karla expressed, criticism should not be practiced “for prejudice” [out of prejudice]. Laura and Lulu also talk about the issue of superiority:

**Laura:** *It’s the WRONG interpretation, it’s not a question of confidence [...]. It’s respect, the rules of society. He could explain that it’s confusing for him... But also this tendency to present one culture as superior, in America we’re independent we have self-confidence, and you Mexican people you don’t have self-confidence [her emphasis] [...]***Lulu:** *Yes, and the question is who is right, they or we?//***Researcher:** *Right, that’s the question, whose perception is right? FG7 (Extract 11).*

Although Laura seems to be sensitive to the outsider’s feelings of confusion, these students nonetheless problematize putting of cultures into a superior/inferior continuum, where they would be reduced to a state of Otherness. In contrasting the different interpretations of the act of requesting for permission, Lulu asks: “The question is who is right, they or we?” The response by several groups of students to the “*in America*” comment could be considered a normal reaction to an undesirable comparison.

Overall, students' general discussion is focused on the idea that differences should be perceived simply as diversity, not better or worse. They also seem to adhere to the idea that in constructing culture, individuals should make an effort to try to see things from the perspective of the Other. Instead of attaching notions, it could instead be asked: "Why do they act the way they act?"—an attempt could be made to try to understand the principles or values behind actions, in other words, the deep cultural meaning. From a general analysis based on their discussion of all students' interviews, students' ideas, suggestions and strategies when constructing culture can be summarized as: "put yourself in their shoes", "show interest", "try to understand, "don't attack other people's habits", "you don't have to accept but try to adapt", "be polite and open-minded". A more extreme suggestion would be to "shut up, and don't say anything". A very significant remark is that, whatever one might discover about the other cultures it should be used for a good reason, "not to criticize" and much less "to use it against people". Students' discussions show their abilities and the competency of *savoir etre*, as put forward by Byram (2008), to view things through a cosmopolitan prism when mediating and/or constructing culture. An attitude which they seem to acknowledge is essential when interpreting Others' peoples' cultural practices.

## 5.2 "An Anglo-Saxon Thing": Changing Students' "Mexican" Behavior

Within the context of teaching/learning a foreign language, the issue of changing one's way of doing/acting to fit foreign norms was questioned. The issue of identity, grounded in emotionally charged C1 knowledge, emerged once more. The idea that language learning should imply making a change in one's identity was contested by several students (FG1, FG2, FG5, FG6, FG8). Luz Ma gave clear expression to this contestation, stating that:

*Luz Ma: You can't go a country and change the culture, and those differences don't mean that they are superior or inferior. And you [the outsider] have to live in that way because you [the outsider] are in that country. If you are in your country [referring to students] you don't have to act like an American or something like that because you are in your country, again, it's important that you know the rules of the other country but you don't have to act like them because you're Mexican. It's impossible to change like that just because you are learning the language... [her emphasis] FG9 (Extract 12)*

Although Luz Ma acknowledges the value of learning about the "rules of the foreign country", she rejects the suggestion that learning a foreign language might imply changing one's identity; as she put it "you don't have to act like an American". Indeed, all of the student participants in this investigation (FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG6, FG7, FG8, FG9) shared the belief that foreign teachers should respect the local customs and their students' identities; on the contrary, it is for them to adapt to the local environment. Like the students, Luisa seems to problematize the lack of sensitivity or respect towards students' behavior:

*[...] students bring these concepts to the classroom and you have to respect it. And you as a teacher, you have to be open and respect that, otherwise it would be like trying to switch people's brain... if students were taught these things at home, to be respectful to teachers, ask for permission, to address them with the 'usted' form, and then they arrive to the classroom to find a teacher who wants them to act differently, they might feel that they are betraying their family, that they're being disobedient... but this must definitely have nothing to do with lack of self-confidence...at all! [her emphasis]. (Extract 13)*

According to Luisa, teachers should respect students' cultural practices. She believes that the teacher should not try to change students' behavior when it goes against their concept of respect. Furthermore, in her view, trying to change the students' behavior could lead to the students experiencing discomfort and feelings of guilt, as they would be going against what they had been taught.

Luz Ma's discussion (Extract 11) of the critical incident in question caused her to generate her own story. This is one example of how the critical incident approach motivated interviewees to share their own stories—my leaving/entering the classroom story led her to share a story of her own from her French class. She described the unfolding of events in the class in this way:

*...when I was studying French for the first time the first day of classes the teacher told us, [Luz Ma switched to Spanish] —Ustedes van a aprender a hablar frances, pero van a seguir siendo Mexicanos— [You are going to learn to speak French but you will always be Mexican]. Yes, obviously! But, the problem was that she said it like 'despreciando' [despising] and we were like—WHAT?! We know we are Mexican!!— ...and she wasn't even French, she was from Tunisia. Maybe everybody feels at moments that their culture is "the best" [gesturing quotation marks], but you don't have to show other people that you feel it because it's dangerous. [Her emphasis] FG9 (Extract 14).*

Luz Ma seems to have developed a strong opinion on the issue of foreign language learning and its relationship to identity, perhaps due to her personal experience with the French teacher. It appears that the implication made by her French teacher that students' interest in learning French could be interpreted as a desire to "become French" seems to have had an impact on her. The discussion offered by the participants clearly negates the notion that foreign language instruction should imply transferal of foreign cultural norms. This concept of disassociation resonates with Kramsch and Byram, who additionally argue that respect for students' cultural identity should be maintained in intercultural learning.

*Colin*, as an ELT practitioner familiar with the phenomenon of students asking permission to enter/leave the classroom, had his own response to the critical incident:

*No, it's for respect... I started out like this too [trying to change students' behavior], and this is not really understanding the profoundness of cultural differences. And then, I thought, let's see if I could change this [...]. And what we just said, one person can't change the culture. It's ingrained in us, in our DNA and it's not that easy. One of the things that would be great about teaching is if students could come to this English bubble where they really acted and everything was so different and they became more English or American, not that, but they could kind of, but it's very difficult, you don't leave your identity at the door and then walk into this English kind of classroom [...] And I always tell them you don't have to knock when you come to the classroom and you do not have to ask to go to the bathroom and they kind of start to get it after a while, but it is very difficult... This is one of the very difficult questions. How much identity do you have to lose? It's one of these kinds of lines because I'm not sure about that either. You cannot stop being yourself but you have to moderate it in some way... (Extract 15).*

Here, it would appear that *Colin's* professional trajectory as an ELT practitioner leads him to assume that he should teach students to adopt a foreign custom, and that the English classroom should represent another "culture". He talks about an idealized English student who could become "more English or American", though acknowledging this as an unrealistic goal at the same time. However, trying to accustom students to act differently seems to fail because according to *Colin*, students' cultural orientation is what dictates their actions as he put it, "[culture] is ingrained in us, in our DNA". His statement "you cannot stop being yourself but you have to moderate it in some way" seems to suggest that in the intercultural exchange individuals will have to mediate their culture, as he himself appears to be doing. *Colin's* experience is a clear example of how individuals' trajectories intersect one another in their constructions of culture; *Colin* is at once the teacher and the individual, a foreigner in a new environment. *Colin* seems to struggle in relativizing his C1 knowledge, and recognizes trying to change his students' behavior to conform to *his* social norm, to what he refers to as "an English bubble" or an Anglo Saxon culture, English or American. This is done, at least potentially, within the platform of the English classroom. However, he is also seen to be able to negotiate his perceptions and to recognize value in the local cultural practices. Indeed, it is significant how *Colin* acknowledges the changes over time in his perceptions regarding this cultural practice. *Colin* problematizes his own attitude by stating "this is not really understanding the profoundness of cultural differences". It could be said that *Colin's* active engagement with the environment and ability to self-problematize led him to reexamine of his own assumptions. In the end, this teacher was able to understand the principle behind his students' behavior, or as he put it, "it's for respect". So then, *Colin* was able to understand the deep cultural meaning, the value behind the act. Similar changes in perceptions and attitude towards this local practice were also expressed by *Johnny Rodriguez*, *Elizabeth* and *Albert*.

As I shared Luz Ma's story (Extract 13) with *Jose* and *Johnny Rodriguez*, they seemed to problematize the lack of sensitivity and respect towards students' cultural identity. This is what they expressed:

*—Is that wrong?—It's what I would've said to her! And also—Thank God for that!—Sometimes we act so... [long breath] being a teacher is also very complex, once you enter the classroom your personality will lead. You can study all you want but at the end of the day, your personality will dictate, it will be the subconscious that will be dominating. We (teachers) all might share the same knowledge of teaching the subject but our classes will be totally different for several reasons, from personality, love or affection, all which form part of the individual, the energy or lack of it, the desire, the will, being humble, your compassion and many other factors. Jose (Extract 16).*

As *Jose* made the comment “sometimes we act *so...*” I could perceive a sign of disappointment and preoccupation concerning the attitude and/or lack of sensitivity of the foreign teacher in question. From *Jose*'s perspective, being a teacher is complex; it is not limited to knowledge of the subject alone. The individual's qualities will be a factor, according to *Jose*. He names among these, “love”, “affection”, “energy”, “desire”, “will”, “being humble” and “compassion”. For *Jose*, the qualities of a teacher will emerge, dictated by the personality and the subconscious. It could be said that for *Jose* the affective element, or moral concern for the Other, is a key ingredient in the construction of the Other. The same incident caused *Johnny Rodriguez* to reflect on his own experience as an English language teacher and the connection between cultural identity and foreign language teaching/learning:

*Well, if it was in a denigrating sense, like—You will never be like Us—an elitism which is stereotypically French...that was horrendous! But I have had classes where I taught English, like, first I do technical English because there's a lot of resistance to English [...] there's some kind of antagonism towards English; I tell them, —I'm not here to impose my culture I'm not saying that it's good, I'm not saying that it's absolutely useful, if you can't at least recognize that there's use for it in your lives...— We need to talk and find some other way around it, in a way I'm saying, —you are Mexican it's OK you will always be Mexican and I'm not here to change that—so... (Extract 17).*

Here, *Johnny Rodriguez* discusses the students' rejection of English as an act in defense of their Mexican identity—an act he seems to understand. He appears to adopt a practical stance in raising students' awareness; he is not there to “impose” English, or tell students that English is “absolutely useful”. *Johnny Rodriguez* seems to have encountered a positive pendant to the French teacher's statement—the students can learn English, but they will “always be Mexican”. There would be no attempt to alter students' identity: “I'm not here to change that”, he remarks. *Johnny Rodriguez*'s view seems to be one that dissociates foreign language learning and the transferal of foreign cultural norms. Furthermore, *Johnny Rodriguez* is sensitive towards the attitudes of his students; he is aware that there is a political tinge in his students' rejection of the English language.

These findings seem to suggest that students have their own ideas regarding the role of the foreign language in their lives, the purpose for learning it, and the role teachers should play in imparting knowledge. When it comes to issues of foreign language learning, students seem to be protective of their cultural identity. Conversely, foreigners have their own ideas about English, “their language” and its social norms, because these embody their own cultural identity. Data evidences that culture, as argued by Shaules (2007), “runs deep”. Indeed, it appears that they find it difficult to disassociate their cultural background from the profession—this seems to influence the way they view English, their culture, ELT and their role in ELT. This became evident as some foreign teachers recognized having tried to change students' behavior to suit English speaker norms. Indeed, by reflecting on the implications of trying to change students' behavior, *Colin* himself begins to question the idea that the individual should change the identity at all, and instead speaks of “moderating” identity, in other words, negotiating or mediating between the Self and the Other culture. It would appear that at this moment in the conversation his discussion shifts—first he is speaking as an English teacher, then later as an individual, one might even say an individual with a strong sense of English-speaking identity; this caused him to state “you cannot stop being yourself”. *Colin*'s question (Extract 14), “How much identity do you have to lose?” gave me the lead-in to ask him:

**Researcher:** *Now that you are in Mexico, do you feel that your behaviour has changed?//Colin:* *Yeah, I behave differently, definitely, and I've changed. The person of who I am, you have to change because you have to adapt. I was thinking about this a while ago. And I rather think this is your person [grabbing a bottle of water on my desk], the bottle for example, and it is kind of full, and this is your identity, and you have to remove part of your identity to let some in, and it is kind of, it keeps expanding because you take more in, and, but I think you do have to change, but getting students to understand that, it's quite difficult too. (Extract 18).*

Drawing on his personal experience as a foreigner living in a new environment, *Colin* acknowledges having changed his behavior in trying to adapt to the new environment. He further acknowledges the developmental processes he has gone through in adapting to the local environment. *Colin* could be said to have been able to relativize his worldviews, and as a result, he has adopted compound identities by embracing new local perspectives. *Colin*'s story suggests that individuals are indeed able to mediate between the old and new, a process which leads, in many cases, to the cosmopolitan transformation of the Self. *Colin*'s personal experience seems to be the guiding principle which led him to state that “I think you do have to change, but getting students to understand that, it's quite difficult too”.

However, it could be argued that, differently from *Colin*, who is living and working in a new cultural environment, the status of his students is that of learners of a foreign language in *their* own social environment. Indeed, *Colin* appears to struggle in dealing with culture; he seems to be caught between two ideological positions, the personal and the professional. The relationship between foreign language learning and “cultural identity” is also highlighted by *Luisa*. This is what she responded as I placed the same question brought up by *Colin* “How much identity to do you have to lose when learning English?”

*It depends on the purpose for which you're learning English, if you're learning it for instrumental purposes, say you come to the University to learn to speak English and say if your goal or idea is to live in Guanajuato then maybe your English can be 'Mexicanized'. And you won't have any problems because people with whom you will be talking to is going to talk 'like you', and they're going to understand you because really, who you are, your identity will be reflected in how you express in English. But if your idea is perhaps learning English because you'll be working abroad then you're going to be forced to put aside your identity to adopt a different way because if you don't, you're not going to fit... but this is temporary, I don't mean to say that you will obliterate who you are, no way, not at all, nothing of the kind, but in certain situations you may have to say —OK, right now I'm going to remove my Mexican identity and I'm going to put the American identity because I need to do this, or get through that— And then, you get over the task and you become Mexican again! (Extract 19).*

In this extract, *Luisa* acknowledges the capacity of individuals to negotiate their identities in their language use and conduct, and to draw on their knowledge at different times according to the circumstances. *Luisa* makes an important distinction in the intra-national or international use of the foreign language; in the first case there is no loss of identity, this “will be reflected in how you express in English”, she states. In the case of using the language internationally, *Luisa* seems to believe that individuals have to relativize their worldviews, or as she put it, “you’re going to be forced to put aside your identity”, at least to some degree, she asserts. From *Luisa*’s viewpoint, individuals can switch roles and adapt to the situation at hand. She views doing this as a “strategy” for the use of the foreign language that helps individuals to better “fit” into an international environment. For *Luisa*, individuals have the capacity to traverse cultures, just like *Colin* seems to be doing as his story above shows.

Although teachers and students recognize the act of requesting permission to enter/leave the classroom as a general characteristic, there is variability. These perceptions resonate with the theory analyzed in Section 2.1 regarding those features of regularity and variability which can be identified in any social system. As the findings show, this norm is negotiable, and it is constantly constructed by the interactants. This notion confirms that individuals have the capacity for negotiation and adaptation, not to say that this might come without challenges. It appears that the emotional aspect of cultural identity reflects in cultural practices—this emotional aspect can have an impact on how far individuals are willing to go in the negotiation of C1. On the one hand, the foreign teachers attempted to mold students’ behavior to conform to their idea of social norms, on the other, students found the negotiation of their own culture difficult to accept; however, this is particularly observed when it comes to foreign language teaching/learning within the environment of their own culture.

The foregoing section would seem to suggest that individuals’ personal and/or professional trajectories influence their construction of culture (Holliday, 2013). They seem to be drawing on these experiences at different times to suit different sets of circumstances. As findings in this section showed, the content of each individual’s trajectory partly determines their worldview—in the case of the Mexican student participants, their primary social knowledge conditions classroom behaviour. In the case of foreign teachers, their professional ELT trajectory comes into play in their decisions whether to teach Anglo Saxon social norms along with language. These findings show some contrasting views regarding the purpose and implications of foreign language learning/teaching and the idea of “adopting” foreign norms and behavior. This discussion reveals the impact that certain ELT discourses have on the teachers and students’ construction of culture. Indeed, interviewees identify a link between social behaviour and cultural identity which in terms of foreign language teaching/learning does not seem to be regarded as “negotiable”. These findings resonate with the discussion regarding interculturalism and English language instruction, in that it questions the notion that foreign language learning implies the teaching/adoption of foreign norms. Several scholars such as Byram (2008), Kramsch (1998a) and Valdes (2001) among others, argue respect for students’ cultural identity (see Section 3.1.).

### 5.3 The Foreign View: The Egalitarian “You” of English-Speaking Societies— “we are all equal”

There is no doubt that linguistic systems influence the construction of the Other—this was clearly seen in the case of Anglophone teacher participants who were seen to be in conflict with what they felt to be anti-egalitarian language use/usage. Two sources of professional and personal conflict for the foreign teachers were the use of honorific titles and formal/informal address, *usted* and *tu* (modern Spanish distinguishes between formal *usted* and informal *tu*). Foreign teachers did not seem to be able to see through the smokescreen of language use/usage; they construct their language as egalitarian and Spanish as full of hierarchical rankings.

*Colin, Elizabeth and Johnny Rodriguez* talked about the difficulties they experienced in understanding the use of formal address when they first arrived to Mexico:

*I started out like this too, and this is not really understanding the profoundness of cultural differences; and then, I thought, let's see if I could change this, and it annoyed me so much at the beginning when they called me —Teacher, teacher!— and I was like—What?! I've got a name, I've got a name [angry tone]!—But then you realize, it's respect. And that's how the culture is, because it was very peculiar to me hear people addressing each other 'Arquitecto', 'Ingeniero', and my mother-in-law is a teacher, and everybody call her that, 'Maestra'. And for me it was bizarre, it was peculiar, but you've got to have more understanding from the Mexican point of view [...] the tu and usted...umm, I disagree with it, too. I think, because we should treat everyone with respect and that, but that's how it is. That's how it is. It's not going to change, yeah, I don't know. Colin (Extract 20).*

*Colin* confirms having initially experienced some feelings of annoyance at being called “teacher, teacher”, and displays a certain discomfort with professional titles such as “maestro”. He resists or “disagrees”, as he put it, with the use of the formal *usted* and the informal *tu*. From his vantage point, the dissimilarities in use between the two forms *tu* and *usted* symbolize differences in the degree of respect accorded to individuals. This is a worldview which leads him to qualify the use of *usted* as inequalitarian, and the use of titles as “annoying”, “bizarre” and “peculiar”. What seems to be significant in this account is the change in his perception, as he eventually came to terms with the use of titles. As he put it, one has to understand things “from the Mexican point of view”. It can be said that he achieved a more cosmopolitan reading of the use of titles; he came to recognize this as a way that locals manifest respect. Indeed, his statement “I started like this” resonates with theory that suggests that intercultural learning is a developmental process; at first he resisted this practice, but eventually he came to terms with the use of titles, and was able to appreciate the value behind the act. The change in perception, however, does not seem to extend to the use of the *usted* form. *Colin's* presumable “value system”, in which everyone is treated with equal amounts of “respect”, causes him to resist the linguistic reality of two different forms of address. Thus, in a rather resigned way he said, “That's how it is. It's not going to change”. *Colin's* comment resonated with another British national, who in a somewhat troubled manner made very explicit how much he disagrees with the use of titles and the *tu* and *usted* forms. She established her position in the following way:

*These tu and usted forms I use in certain situations but I don't like people to use it with me. I don't like people to use the usted form with me, no. And I don't like this thing about 'licenciado' and 'licenciada' because it's part to look French, but it's a lot of crap! I don't like it! You're a 'licenciado' or 'licenciada'! So what?! It's a title! And a lot of people have titles! And it doesn't mean anything! I don't like that! Elizabeth (Extract 21).*

As I inquired whether he was aware of the reason behind their use, she responded in a calmer manner:

*I understand it, and I respect it, I respect it because is part of the culture norm and I think that if we live here we do have to respect cultural norms, we came to live here so we have to respect that, but for me personally, I don't like it. It puts me in a pedestal and I don't like that. I don't like to be put on a pedestal I think we are all the same, no matter what our titles. But sure, I use titles, I know how to use them, I use them with people in the proper situations. (Extract 22).*

*Elizabeth* also “disagrees” with the local forms of behavior implicit in Spanish language use. Similarly to *Colin*, she perceives that the use of these forms favors distinction among individuals. She also seems to adhere to the notion of equality, as she rejects being “put on a pedestal”. It seems very significant that in the above fragments she indicated her disapproval eight times by repeating “I don't like it”.

However, even though *Elizabeth* resists this local practice because it goes against “her principles”, she concedes that as an outsider it is her place to “respect” the local social norms. It would seem from the reactions of these two teachers that their cultural certainties of equality have been threatened, generating what Shaules (2007) terms “cognitive dissonance”. This could be said to be occurring to these two foreign teachers as a result of being confronted with deviations from the familiar, in this case with linguistic forms and usages not their own. However, there is an underlying assumption of a right to evaluate the local—the Other, using the Self as a point of reference. “Their” value system seems to be portrayed as better than the local one. It could be said that *Colin* and *Elizabeth* fail to arrive at a self-problematization and self-understanding of the beliefs they have about the Self, or their own culture; in other words to “de-familiarise and de-centre, so that questions can be raised about [their] own culturally-determined assumptions [...]” (Byram, 2008, p. 31). Thus, the critical reflexivity necessary to evaluate both the Self and the Other might be said to be lacking—the use of titles and formal address is not seen from the perspective of the locals, but rather is filtered through a so-called (Anglophone) value system. Moreover, *Colin* and *Elizabeth*’s experiences resonate with the cultural dilemma theory as portrayed by Shaules (2007). Although at an explicit level they appear to have come to terms and accept the use of titles under the argument that “that’s how it is”, at an implicit level, they seem to resist it. They appear to retain their internal standards as valid, while regarding the Others’ as invalid. Indeed, Appiah (2006) and Gudykunst (2005) note that conflicts may arise due to the greater moral weight ascribed to one’s own values in comparison with those of the Other.

*Johnny Rodriguez* acknowledges that being confronted with differences in language use can be a cause of confusion:

*It’s funny because as a new teacher I’ve felt... these were things I would’ve stated, but as a new teacher I was in the midst of being in a new culture myself, while I understand this, I wouldn’t believe that they’re better teachers, [...] and to state something like this, it’s not very sensitive, it’s very much imposing one’s own culture, American standard. Again it’s not particularly shocking to me because I’m dual cultural, the notions of reverence, the notion that the Mexican students may have their idea of what a good teacher is, what their idea of what respect is. I know those are very distinct, it’s often has come up with my colleagues here, that that has a lot to do with the successful classroom. It’s how the students view, how they bring their notion of authority in that role, and in any classroom that they bring it into. (Extract 23).*

*Johnny Rodriguez* seems to be more sensitive to students’ idea of respect; he believes that his bicultural status facilitates an interpretation of the use of titles and formal/informal address. *Johnny Rodriguez* shows capacity for self-recognition in the problematization of his own worldview in relation to that of the Other; he acknowledges that “reverence” may be enacted through the use of *usted*, and/or titles. From his viewpoint, teaching students to behave differently from their common ways denotes a lack of sensitivity and respect towards local customs, an attitude which he perceives as an act of cultural “imposition”. He questions the use of cultural schemas to judge the Other. Further, he questions the expectation that Others should function in a like way through the imposition of “their own culture”.

Although *Colin* and *Elizabeth* projected some degree of sensitivity towards difference, they still seem to question the local conceptions of respect and reverence. They persist in the idea of the dropping of titles, adhering instead to the view that “we are all equal”, therefore there should be no honorific titles. They seem to fail to acknowledge that values can be enacted in different ways in different linguistic/cultural systems (Appiah, 2006). Moreover, these findings resonate with the theory regarding the challenges faced by ELT professionals working abroad when being confronted with cultural practices that differ from their own. Students’ cultural schemas in the use of titles, or formalities in addressing their teachers, seem to have created confusion for some foreign teachers. It would appear that instead of accepting localized forms, some foreign teachers try to change students’ behavior to fit an idealized Anglophone cultural schema. This view could be said to have a hint of cultural imposition (Phillipson, 1992a; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999). It could be said that *Colin* and *Elizabeth* lack the ability to relativize their own worldviews, at least to some extent. However, it seems that over time, as they became immersed in the local environment, they were able to accept—at a surface level (Shaules, 2007)—these localized forms. This seems to coincide with the theory that views intercultural learning as a developmental process, as discussed in Section 3.4. However, these findings suggest that the process is not easy and brings with it a certain level of stress. This resonates with Kim’s theory “Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic” (2005) that describes the stages of the cyclic changes individuals experience when confronted with a new environment. Success in handling problems, according to this scholar, is due to the creative forces of self-reflexivity and self-transformation.

#### 5.4 The Local View: Supposed Non-Egalitarian Use of *Usted* of Mexican Society

This section presents findings that give voice to the local teachers, who in their deliberations over the use of formal and informal address in their language, show that the use of these forms is extremely complex and subject to a great variety of social factors: these might include age, gender, status, academic rank, social distance, regional speech traditions and social conventions. The findings presented in this section would seem to indicate that local teachers question the foreign teachers' constructions of the local social system in language use. The local teachers problematize the inexpert linguistic adaptation of the foreign teachers. Local teachers note that the necessary social distance, felt to be proper to the local environment, may break down with the use of first names. However, they show ability to see from the perspective of the Anglophone Other, demonstrating an understanding of foreign teachers' struggles to adapt and negotiate the forms of the new environment.

*Miguel* recognizes that some factors such as academic degree, age or status trigger the *per se* use of *usted*:

*To personify respect depends on the individual; there is of course the matter of degrees and all that. It can be because of the academic degree, the age, or the title... if it's not for one thing is the other. But it depends of the person, for example, I use the tu form with the head of my department and the head of division, they do have a higher status and degrees but they are very friendly, very polite. But say for example, with the Academic Secretary, zero! (Extract 24).*

So then, in *Miguel's* experience, one can possess characteristics which would lead to an automatic use of *usted* form. At the same time, he observes that there are also some individuals who demand formality and prefer to sustain their social roles and distance; thus, some people choose to emphasize these conventions more than others. A story shared by *Luisa* supports *Miguel's* observation, she described:

*A few months ago, a very important person from the University of Guanajuato came here [Starbucks] to get some coffee. When he placed his order, the young man in the counter asked him his name, he responded—I'm Doctor "Juan Perez",—After a while the guy dispatching the drinks started yelling—"Juan"! "Juan"! Café Latte for "Juan"! "Juan"!—he was FURIOUS because the paper cup read his name. And he went on telling the guy that he had studied in x and y university, that he had a degree...he grabbed his coffee and left the shop, but he was utterly hysterical! In this place [Starbucks] they don't respect the academic degrees, I think it has to do because it's an American chain, but yeah, for us these things are important. (Extract 25).*

So then, some individuals will prefer to maintain their status and social distance. This is something which may not necessarily be considered a cultural issue, but a personal one, as shown in the experiences of both the British and Canadian nationals (Extracts 28 and 33 respectively). To complicate things further, some people allow the *tu* form and still command respect. *Jose* elaborates on this view:

*Respect is not necessarily linked to tu and usted forms, to use usted and feel or show "respect" [gesturing quotation marks] is not the same as to use tu and really impose respect, these are little, subtle details. I know my students use the usted form with me because of my age... I guess it must be strange for foreigners. (Extract 26).*

*Jose's* empathy for foreign teachers is significant: "it must be strange for foreigners", he states as he tries to understand things from their perspective. Although there are some fixed cues, enactment of respect does not necessarily seem to be dependent on the use of one form or another; the issue appears to be more complex. *Rosa* talks about these complexities:

*You know, if you put a person from the north, say from Chihuahua and a person from the south, say from Chiapas, the one from Chihuahua is always going to use the usted form. In fact, my grandparents always used the usted form to address each other and they were married for ages! It was like—Would you allow me, please?—Thank you very much—. People from the south might be considered totally rude but also you cannot say that everybody in the south or everybody from the north use tu or usted respectively. (Extract 27).*

*Rosa* speaks of regional tradition as another principle which guides the use of *usted* form. Relying on common shared knowledge with the researcher, *Rosa* notes the customary use of *tu* by speakers from the South, contrary to the North, where *usted* is the form most commonly used. *Rosa* indicates that use of the *usted* form does not always equate to social distance, as in the case of her grandparents.

Adding to the complexities, *Luisa* and *Rosa* recognize that things are changing, society and language change. For instance, *Luisa* and *Rosa* described using the informal form with their parents. *Rosa*'s boy, who attends kindergarten, calls her teachers by their first names. However, *Luisa* talks about her experience working at a primary school, where she said, "nobody there uses the *tu* form with the teachers because the little ones know from their parents what the appropriate form of behavior is". The clearest representation of the diversity in uses of these two forms was expressed in the words of *Luisa*:

*I do believe that we are all equal but there are people who throughout their life, somehow, they have gained certain status, and for me to use the usted form with them is perfectly fine. I also use this form with people who I don't know... say, if I go to that newsstand right now [pointing out at the newsstand, visible from the Starbucks where we were sitting] to buy something there, I'm going to use the usted form with that gentleman, the owner of the little stand because I do use the usted form with people I don't know. (Extract 28)*

*Luisa* notes that there are some people whose hard work has earned them status; she remarks that it is "perfectly fine" to use the *usted* form with these people. However, for *Luisa*, the use of *usted* is not confined to any particular class of person. Despite apparent inequality of status, *Luisa* uses formal address to the newspaper vendor. The form *usted* would appear to have a more egalitarian use as well.

These examples, as discussed by interviewees, demonstrate that social norms are in continual change and transformation; the construction of social norms involves a process of constant negotiation. These teachers are seen to be making use of all of their skills and strategies in working out rules according to a changing array of different persons and circumstances. It would appear that *Colin*'s and *Elizabeth*'s conception of address with formal *usted* as meaning more respect for some people than others might not be completely accurate. Indeed, these experiences, as discussed by local teachers, demonstrate the difficulty of pinning down exact formulas—in this case, in the use of *tu* and *usted* forms. Hence, it is easy to understand the challenge facing foreigners when trying to grasp the use of these forms. However, the negotiation of social norms does not appear to be exclusive to Mexican social system; it would seem that all linguistic systems encode hierarchical schemas of some kind, as *Colin* expressed.

A query directed to *Colin* added to the complexities of negotiating social norms. "How do you show respect in English?" he responded:

*It's complicated, I'm sure it's very similar in lots of ways to how it happens in Mexico, it is rank and power. It's kind of...something that I noticed, when I went to Mexico, I knew how to use the usted, but for me the line behind it was hazy, but now, instinctively I know immediately which one to use, there's never any doubt, and I think that takes time, a little bit, and really understanding the culture. So, where in English using politeness and respect there are rules and much, kind of, more nuanced and vague and I'm thinking about it right now, it must be much more difficult to learn, to understand it, to really understand it. (Extract 29).*

To some degree *Colin*'s comment "I knew how to use the *usted* form" confirms what *Miguel* said. One could apply the *usted* form instinctively, based on explicit factors such as academic degree, age, or status. In reflecting about this, he recognizes that beyond the use of *tu* or *usted*, there are indeed some "hazy" implicit factors involved, which take longer to understand. This comment seems to concede that a similar complexity exists within the two systems when acknowledging respect among individuals. *Colin* also recognizes that are considerations of "rank and power" influencing the way in which one shows respect in English. In his opinion, the rules for markers of politeness and respect in English are "more nuanced and vague" making it more difficult, as he put it, "to really understand it".

This would suggest that the use of formality is not inherent only to Spanish language and Mexican social norms, but that they do exist in the UK in the use of English. Thus, differences in class, status and prestige do exist in England, and individuals observe these social markers. This is not to say that *Colin* agrees with them, as he insists that these boundaries between individuals should be broken down. As he expressed it:

*But also part of it, it's to let's not be too stuffy, let's break these kinds of boundaries between us because it kind of stops that real kind of connection sometimes that you should have between people. (Extract 30).*

Whether or not *Colin* disagrees with distinctions of social class in the UK or in Mexico, he fails at self-reflection over his own social rules, choosing to maintain the illusion that the English “you” is a symbol of egalitarianism. However, it does appear that being engaged in this interview made him reflect on the complexities of social norms implicit in his own language. This would suggest that the use of formality is not inherent only to Spanish language and Mexican social norms, but that a similar process of formality is at work in the English of the UK.

When discussing the critical incident, two other participants contested the idea that social distance is not observed in English-speaking society; the absence of a formal address is not an indicator of egalitarianism. For example, based on her personal experience, *Rosa* spoke about going to high school in the US:

*In fact, [...] I remember that when I was studying in the US I don't recall calling the teachers by their names... we certainly didn't call them 'Teacher', we called them by their names, but we always [her emphasis] used the title with it, Mister, Miss or Mrs. ... or we used the title and surname. Rosa (Extract 31)*

One student ventured that it might not be so simple to do away with titles and call teachers by name:

*Caro: [...] if you look at the pictures, American movies, I haven't seen anyone who calls the teacher—Hey Peter—So, for me, to say—in America—[...] it's his opinion, we don't have to accept it as a rule. FG4 (Extract 32)*

These participants seem to identify the use of titles as a social marker in the USA, and question that as a general norm that students use first names to refer to their teacher. Furthermore, *Rosa* and *Caro* are seen to apply critical reflexivity. They are drawing on their personal trajectories, what they have experienced or observed, in order to construct culture. Further exploration of this matter led me to query other US nationals on this issue. I simply posted the question whether students address their teachers by their first name. To exemplify this issue, an academic visitor from a university in the state of New York narrated an experience with a student.

*I once received an e-mail from a student who wrote: “Hi ‘Karen’, Here’s my paper. See you Monday”. On Monday I asked him to stay after class. As class concluded he approached me by saying—I hope you received my paper, I sent it through e-mail last Friday—I said it was not about the paper, but it was about the e-mail. I explained—‘Mr. Smith’, my family and friends call me by my name, you however, are not my family nor my friend, so you don’t call me ‘Karen’. If you have problems with my degree, then, don’t call me Doctor call me Professor... but you don’t get to call me by my name—(Researcher notes) [Extract 33].*

When I asked a student and professor from an Oklahoma university the same question, the student’s immediate response was: “What? No! I call them Mr. or Mrs. plus their last name”. As for the professor, he responded: “No. They call me ‘Professor Smith’”. These examples serve to highlight the risks when the dialogic element of Self and Other is absent when reflecting on cultural practices. Critical cultural awareness implies “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram, 2008, pp. 162—163). When not present, the participants seem to continue to be influenced by unconsidered knowledge, hence no new knowledge is negotiated.

*Albert* drew on his personal/professional experience working in other foreign countries, observing that a similar type of behavior in the treatment of the teacher can be observed in Canada and in China:

*I’ve actually never said anything like that, I never [his emphasis] ask students to do anything different, for that I try to adapt to the way things are here, actually in Canada I went to British run private schools where you would show a lot of respect for the teacher and you would kind of ask for permission, for me, it’s not that kind of different. In China they would actually call people ‘Teacher’, not in the same way, but there is kind of a greeting in Chinese that is ‘Lao Shi Hao’ which is like ‘Hello Teacher’. So, teachers have that special greeting. I kind of like that. I’ve never really complained about that. I think it is kind of funny, well not funny, I guess on one hand it’s not that shocking, or different, maybe because of my background I kind of like it. I don’t know... (Extract 34).*

From his personal experience as a student in a private British-run university in Canada, *Albert* acknowledges the social distance inherent in teacher-student relationship, as he put it he had to “show a lot of respect for the teacher”. Furthermore, from his teaching experience in China he describes the use of titles and even a special greeting for the teacher. It appears that both his personal experience as a student in Canada and as an English teacher in China were valuable experiences that allowed him a wider vision of differences or similarities in ways of doing/acting. In fact, it appears that for *Albert*, experience and mobility broadened his perceptions of the world; it could be said that his experience allowed him to be at ease with the local social practices at the University of Guanajuato.

These findings seem to suggest that the lack of formal and informal linguistic forms in English, with the attendant exclusive use of “you”, does not mean the absence of a social hierarchy, as *Elizabeth* and *Colin* seem to construct the British social system. They seem to lack the ability to question the beliefs they hold about their C1, and what is more, they are seen to construct the Other based on an idealized assumption of “equality”. It can be said that English speakers subconsciously recognize the authority vested in parents, the teacher, school officials and other figures. For Spanish speakers, one way of maintaining the degree of hierarchy is certainly the use of *usted*, although it is not a fixed rule. As discussed by *Luis*, *Rosa*, *Jose* and *Miguel*, the *tu* form can be used among individuals with differing status, age or academic degree, and does not necessarily signify less respect. Thus, the conception that English speakers might have higher, more egalitarian values, based on the illusive principle of “we are all equal” seems to deny the underlying reality of the existence of hierarchies at various levels. However, it could be said that it is perhaps the complexity inherent in the use of these forms that leads foreign teachers to reject their use, and to prefer the seemingly egalitarian “you”.

The lack of ability on the part of foreign teachers to relativize C1, and the application of their cultural schemas to the local environment can create problems, or, as *Miguel* put it, they could be seen to be “sending” a different message from the one they mean to convey. In *Miguel*'s opinion, in imposing their worldview by inviting students to use the *tu* form, or an invitation by the teacher to use a first name, could be misinterpreted by students. He said:

*When new foreign teachers arrive, the first thing I tell them is, to be cautious with being too informal with students by allowing them to use tu with them, there is the status of being the teacher and the status of being the student. This is one thing I warn foreign teachers about, [...] if teachers are too easygoing, students could interpret it as if they are 'friends'. It would be like sending the message that everything is cool, that they can arrive late or whenever they want. One has to be strict with students from the very beginning. I tell foreign teachers that they have to train students their way, and not the other way around, they are the teachers. Because otherwise they [foreign teachers] come here and start complaining that this is a university and students don't come to class, that this is a university and they accumulate up to ten absences! They complain that this is a university, and students are late, they don't do their homework! (Extract 35).*

Indeed, *Miguel* confirms that because the *usted* and *tu* forms are unfamiliar to foreign teachers, they are not aware of the implications of inviting students to use *tu*. From what he expresses, the discomfort of the foreign teachers with what they regard as a lax academic environment is evident. *Miguel* seems to suggest that foreign teachers' informal treatment of students could be part of the problem. Although classes are usually conducted in English, the use of the students' native language is allowed in the classroom. It is in this case when the degree of formality or informality in terms of relation between teachers and students become apparent, e.g. when the teacher is addressed by his/her name, implying also the use of the familiar form *tu*. The same informality could be transferred outside of the classroom. The statement by my interviewee warning teachers to observe differences in status suggests that in being too relaxed with students, teachers are inviting the students to an overly close and friendly relationship in terms of the classroom. In this case, the foreign teachers could be seen as responsible, at least in part, for fashioning the discipline problems which they face in the classroom. Echoing *Miguel*, for *Luisa* the use of the *usted* form can help in establishing discipline in the classroom. She said:

*The usted form allows more discipline in the classroom because you are presumably the authority, and sometimes this form, your usted figure helps you in creating discipline, imposing respect and maintaining social distance. In fact, I'm trying to think, of all those who work in the school, maybe half of us are Mexican and half are foreign teachers and I'm sure that students use the usted form with the Mexican teachers but not with the foreign ones. Students know that they could use the tu form with them [foreign teachers] and the usted form with us [Mexican teachers]. But, by telling students—You can say tu to me—the foreign teacher is running the risk that students might take him as a “buddy” and they might even use certain type of language that they'd only use with their “buddies” (Extract 36).*

*Luisa* also believes that one use of the “*usted* figure” portrays the teacher as the authority in the classroom, sustaining discipline, respect as well as maintaining necessary social distance with students. Indeed, when conducting class observations I was able to appreciate that students use the honorific title “teacher” when asking permission to enter the classroom. The following is a reconstruction of the event based on some of the key points written down when conducting the class observation in question (see Appendix II):

*The class starts at 8:10 AM, after greeting students and doing some small talk, teacher organizes her students for an activity in small groups. She is circulating from one group to another talking to students, sharing her own ideas with students, everybody seems to be enjoying themselves. She has her back to the door.*

*It is 20 minutes past the hour. A student arrives, he stands at the door; he tries to get teacher’s attention by knocking softly, the teacher who is now in the back of the room with another group of students sees him, once he had made eye contact with his teacher he asked—Teacher, may I come in?—Teacher nods.*

*It is 21 minutes past the hour, the teachers is still in the back of the room sitting with the same group of students, she sees the student arriving at the door; however, the student knocks at the same time that he asks, —Teacher, may I come in?—, —Yes—says the teacher.*

*It is 23 minutes past the hour now. Another student arrives, he comes in a rush and stops abruptly at the door almost losing his balance—May I come in teacher?—he asks, teacher nods.*

*24 minutes after the hour, the teacher is now standing in front of the class, she is trying to explain the next activity but she is interrupted,—Teacher, may I come in? — She turns to the student standing at the door, and the rest of the class too for this matter, she calmly responds—Yes, come in—she then continues with her instructions and having done that, students arrange their chairs for the new activity, which this time it involves pair work.*

*It is now 25 minutes after the hour. With—Buenos Dias—a student greets the whole class and the teacher, with a very loud voice in a very polite way. He walks into the classroom and has a seat in a chair on the opposite side of the classroom. He conducts himself very respectfully and silently. (Extract 37)*

I appreciated *Elizabeth* capacity to accommodate students while maintaining order and respect within her class. At no time did she seem to get upset with the interruptions. She greeted each one of the students who arrived late with a smile, nodding when they asked for permission to come in. She seemed to appreciate students’ consideration for her person and her class clearly shown in the use of “Teacher”. Her response supports her comment (Extract 22) in that she tries to adapt and respect the local practices. The overall environment in the classroom felt very friendly, I could observe the friendly relationship between teacher and students, and among the students themselves. This fragment evidences that social rules of conduct in this particular classroom are at work. They reflect the mutual understanding between the teacher and students.

Moreover, I observed that all teachers, local and foreign, allow their students to use the *tu* form with them and/or call them by their names. Some students used their name more than others, whereas others preferred the use of “teacher”. However, as suggested by *Miguel* and *Luisa*, it would appear that in contrast to the locals, foreigner teachers are faced with the challenge of grasping the subtle differences that would allow them to use the *tu* form with their students and still maintain social distance.

It was very significant to observe *Colin*’s reassessment of the existence of “rank and power” in personal address in British society. Thus, the egalitarian construction of their culture by *Elizabeth* and *Colin* may be an illusion, produced by an imperfectly understood linguistic difference. As the local teachers observed, levels of respect are not necessarily tied to the linguistic forms *usted* and *tu*. What is significant is that *Colin*’s interview was conducive to the type of self-reflexivity, self-understanding and self-problematizing required for intercultural learning. This relates to theories of intercultural learning as they are discussed by Byram (2008), Delanty (2009), Kim, (2005), Kramsch (1993) and Shaules (2007), who state that intercultural learning should be understood as a dialogic process which includes not only reflection on the Other, but also the Self.

Although calling teachers by their first names is practiced in the local environment and the informal *tu* is allowed by local teachers without compromising their authority or respect, these findings suggest that attempting to determine fixed recipes for the use of *tu* and *usted* denies the real complexity of the social/linguistic situation. This corresponds to the theories discussed in Section 2.1—theories which recognize the variability of language use/usage given the characteristics of speakers and how social norms are constructed by the speakers according to contextual factors. In the case of foreign teachers, the construction of culture might begin with the reassessment of the individuals' first social knowledge within the context of the new environment (Holliday, 2013). A step towards this might be a rethinking of hierarchical elements present in their own language, and how these hierarchical elements are negotiated—this might lead to a greater awareness of the possibilities of the transfer of an existing skill set from C1 into the new language and the new environment—culture on the go as put forward by Holliday (2013).

### 5.5 Reflective Dialogue for Local and Global Social Construction

The final section of this chapter presents findings related to the beliefs of participants about the possibilities of learning from the Other. These possibilities are viewed alternately with an optimistic tinge, which would seem to admit the potential of the bridging of cultures through self-transformation, then with pessimism about the difficulties of negotiating difference. The interviewees advised caution in approaching cultural differences—on the one hand, “culture” was too sensitive to be approached in the classroom; on the other, “culture” could “take care of itself” as one teacher put it. It was found that the interviewees struggled with the idea of intervention or non-intervention in the sphere of the Other. This dilemma seems to be at the core of the interviewees' reticence on the subject of “culture”.

*Jose seems to have an open view that assents to social change and transformation, Some people might perceive these [cultural] differences as better or worse, it depends on the perspective from which one looks at things... but the problem is also that for so long, people have been educated to see things from a very narrow good or bad perspective. I personally tend to see things simply as different... in any case, you have to respect. I mean, think of a marriage, I can't get in your marriage because marriage is a society composed of two, and only the two of you know what you do, if things work for you, fine, if not, it stays between the two of you. It's for you to fix them and how you go about fixing them. But, would I intervene in your society to change things? Of course not! It's the same thing for any given culture, if this is the way we decided to be, what can you do about it? You can't change things from one day to another. Do I believe that there are things which could be changed in our culture to make it better? Yes, of course! (Extract 38).*

In *Jose's* view, the ever-present rhetoric which explains the social world in terms of good and bad appears to dominate and influence individuals' interpretations. He objects to this black and white view, suggesting instead the recognition of things “simply as different”. Although he did not provide a concise example, *Jose* does not deny that some social components could be changed for the better. His view, however, seems to recognize the capacity of individuals to change and transform culture. Using an analogy comparing a small society (marriage) with a larger society (“any given culture”), he warns against intervention by outsiders, seemingly cautioning against external imposition. *Colin* talks about what foreigners can contribute to the local society:

*I think there are things about Mexican society that could change for the better. And so, I do not think that foreigners and people from other places should come and not challenge kind of things we do not agree with in Mexican society because maybe there are things, we look at other cultures and see what is happening in Syria and with the Taliban and it might feel wrong to us and we should say that, and I think that women's position in society should be considered more and things like that but do it sensitively otherwise you alienate yourself from the culture you want to become part of (Extract 39).*

Contrary to *Jose*, *Colin* believes foreigners can contribute to the social transformation of Mexican society. *Colin* seems to display concern for the rights of the individual; he identifies women as a group whose “position in society should be considered more”. *Colin's* voice echoes the voices of international concern which have given rise to the creation of organizations dedicated to the protection of the rights of women, children and indigenous persons. Significantly, *Colin* positions himself within a global framework, as a citizen of the world, whose concern for the suffering of others is a moral responsibility. However, *Colin's* comment, ‘but do it sensitively otherwise you alienate yourself’ indicates that he believes individuals should be attentive to their approach when delivering an opinion. His view resonates with that one of the students (above) and shows concern for “face”.

It would appear that maintaining a dialogue for the purpose of a mutual contribution towards social transformation demands certain considerations from the interactants. Their roles as speakers (givers) or listeners (receivers) determine in large measure how they approach the subject matter. A similar view was expressed by *Albert* when I asked him if he discusses culture-related issues with his students:

**Researcher:** *Having so much experience living abroad and being confronted with cultural difference, do you share your experiences, feelings or opinions with students?* // **Albert:** *Right... I'm a lot more sensitive in the class, even more than I'm being right now. Like I said, I try to know the local culture and what are sensitive issues so if I approach them at all, which I'd say I don't a lot, I do it very sensitively. And I mean, I think for that, one of my, one thing about teaching is that the textbook that students always read more carefully is the teacher. So, in that way, I think that it's not even exactly necessarily to say—you know, this is what I think— [...] you kind of react in certain way and to a certain things and very subtle things I think students will understand and pick up on that, and I think that probably in that way I will express it a little bit more. Maybe as I'm kind of getting a little more comfortable (Extract 40).*

Although *Albert* accepts hardly ever approaching cultural-related topics, he places a great deal of emphasis on maintaining levels of “sensitivity and respect” when approaching the subject. One aspect of *Albert's* discourse is his insistence on becoming familiar with the local environment, and knowing which issues are sensitive. It is important to mention that at the time this interview took place, *Albert* had been teaching in Guanajuato for only one year. His strategy when arriving to a new host community—*Albert* has experienced several—seems to be one of prudence, avoiding rushing into conclusions about cultural practices. Indeed, it could be said that *Albert's* current state, being immersed in a new environment and working things out, is mirrored in his approach to culture-related issues in the classroom. *Albert* believes in the capacity of individuals to apply critical sensibility and work their way through things. When asked about raising culture-related issues in the classroom, *Johnny Rodriguez* responded:

*[...] I don't know, there are a lot of times when I feel that I'm more than an English teacher and teaching more than just English, the subject, but a lot of times I have to remember that I'm simply teaching English, greater cultural acceptance is something that's within every human being and it will actualize or it won't, and there's just some things that I can attempt to as an English teacher and there's not so much time to do that, yeah, I think it's human nature [...] I think in the end it is only a school subject and an intuitive open flexible teacher, which I think should be elements of a teacher, I think culture takes care of itself, obviously a teacher, a feeling human being should be able to attune the students to be sensitive to differences. I do not necessarily know if refocusing or re-shifting language teaching towards cultural sensitivity is necessarily the way to be better language teachers (Extract 41).*

Echoing *Albert*, *Johnny Rodriguez* seems to assume individuals' capacity for building new relations between the Self and the Other, at least to a degree. He states unequivocally that “greater cultural acceptance is something that's within every human being”. Although he acknowledges that the task of imparting culture is not an easy one, he adheres to the idea that “culture takes care of itself” when a teacher is sufficiently sensitive to differences. *Colin* said.

*I think that they're such high goals for something that you do in a couple of hours in a week in a classroom, how are you going to manage that on top of everything else, the pace, the program that you're trying to teach. And, I think that to be able to teach like that, the teacher has to have a real kind of understanding of all of this aspect of learning language and understanding languages and also the kind of role of English internationally, I think it's so complex, and then try to transmit that understanding first to the students and try really to make them appreciate kind of the culture differences between kind of speakers, and what they kind of do, I think it's really hard. It would be a really difficult thing because it does, it does work if you kind of learn the language. My father in law taught himself English he's a very clever guy his grammar is excellent his vocabulary is excellent but it's, I can hardly understand a word he says because his pronunciation, that's one thing, and there are so many obstacles and kind of between us, even understanding each other on a linguistic level, and then when we look at this kind of cultural level too, that adds extra problems. But then, we, most of the time, we seem to understand each other quite well. You do see lots of examples when people get it wrong (Extract 42).*

*Colin* approaches the question of raising cultural issues in two ways, highlighting the complex nature of overcoming cultural differences in both the classroom and in his personal relationship to his father-in-law. *Colin* seems to admit that understanding of the Other is possible, but also that this possibility is fraught with difficulties, which can vary from language proficiency to cultural differences.

However, even though cultural sensitivity might not be a subject of instruction, and might not be approached directly, *Colin* believes in the individuals' ability to work things out. In another part of the same interview he expressed this belief in the following way: "I don't think it needs to be that complicated. We all have things in common, we can all make connection".

*Jose* opposes the idea of providing recipes for dealing with cultural differences, placing emphasis on the moral capacity of individuals to relate to Others,

*The only thing you can do as a foreigner is to open your eyes and your senses and adjust and adapt, because indeed that's what we always do naturally, instinctively, we observe and copy. All you can do is to advise students to be sensitive and respectful [...]. Life is like that, it's a change, it's always in constant change, then it's impossible to give a list of Do's and Don'ts. It's all about being sensitive, and remaining alert... As a human being you need to be compassionate, and you need to put yourself in the shoes of others before acting, and once you show compassion you are not going to have any problems, and even if you did, you will solve them better than if you're not compassionate, because if you arrive with all the arrogance that you're gonna change the world and people have to adapt to you, as if your culture is the maximum, of course that blocks the communication (Extract 43).*

*Jose's* view of life as a process that is in constant change makes him believe that it would be impossible to pin down formulas "a list of Do's and Don'ts" about how to respond to difference. On this basis, he stresses the critical capacity and moral values of individuals to interpret and negotiate culture as he put it: "observe", "copy", "be alert", "be compassionate", "sensitive", "respectful", "...open your eyes and your senses and adjust and adapt". *Jose* seems to be arguing from a moral point of view; success in communication and interaction can be a result of the desire and willingness to relate to the others and enhance human relations.

It is very significant how much trust *Jose*, *Albert*, *Colin* and *Johnny Rodriguez* put in individuals' human capacities to enact cosmopolitan attitude towards Others in negotiating cultural differences. The attitude and strategies suggested by these teachers resemble those of the students discussed in Section 5.1.1. I conclude this discussion with an experience related by *Vianey*, a student, who met a person of Indian nationality when traveling to the UK:

*Vianey: I would like to give you my own example. About three years ago I went to England and I met an Indian guy and he asked me if we could go out. I said, OK. And the first thing I asked —Are you Muslim?— Because I was very afraid, perhaps I said yes to going out with him and he might think I'm his property or something strange [looking embarrassed because of her thinking at that time]. He said he's no Muslim he's Hindi, I said— what's that?—He said—I have many Gods—, I said—OK—. But that wasn't the amazing thing in the conversation then he said—I'm just coming back from India because my sister just got married—, I thought that's nice, and he said—My parents chose her husband and they never met before and they never talked—He told me they don't have boyfriend or girlfriend, that they meet them the day of the wedding or perhaps they see each other once or twice before they get married. And I was like—what?! What happens with you people?! Oh my God!— //Jose: and that is another difference, in Mexico we believe only in one God and he said they have several...//Vianey: But the interesting thing was my behavior, you know, I continued talking to him for a month, after that month, I understood their way they do things, and his sister was very happy and I saw her pictures and her husband and they looked very happy and they make a good match, I understood... it's not the way I'd like to do it but it is a good way. Now I can understand they are happy and it's a good thing for them. But I needed time to assimilate it [...] I think we need to be able to learn and to listen and to want to explain. FG2 (Extract 44).*

This intercultural story illustrates *Vianey's* abilities of self-examination and self-criticism, particularly in the way she speaks about her attitude, the event, her responses and her prejudices. Although *Vianey* acknowledges a cultural conflict concerning the practice of arranged marriages in India, she continued communicating with her new friend. It was this continuous interaction that helped her gain understanding and even appreciation for this Indian tradition. As she observes, "I continued talking to him for a month, after that month, I understood their way they do things". Hence, *Vianey* went through a process of discovery and learning, and in maintaining an open-mind she was able to see things from the perspective of the Other. In highlighting the attitude "I think we need to be able to learn and to listen", she is exemplifying those very same qualities that enabled her to increase her capacity for understanding and positive recognition of the Other.

## 5.6 Summary of this Chapter

This chapter has attempted to show that the individuals' personal and professional trajectories have an impact on the construction of culture. Individuals' social knowledge from their upbringing appears to be a framework of reference that provides guidance about how to behave and what to expect of others (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Kim, 2001, 2005; Scollon *et al.* 2012; Nishida, 2005; Weaver, 1993; Wierzbicka, 1998). It should be emphasized once more that this social knowledge has force and is emotionally charged. This became evident in students' and teachers' protection of what they view as "their" ways or "traditions". In the case of students, the emotional force became evident in their reactions towards learning of English language and/or adoption of its social norms. However, findings demonstrate that first social knowledge can be negotiated, given the abilities of individuals to adapt and construct new realities. Indeed, the stories portrayed in this section reveal that intercultural learning is an ongoing developmental process; this became particularly evident in the stories told by the two British nationals. The telling of their stories showed their active engagement in the local environment. Their discovery of differences in cultural practices and their working out of ways to fit the new social system demonstrate their active participation in this developmental process. Indeed, the two models portrayed by Kim (2005) and Shaules (2007) support the idea held by many scholars that cultural learning/adaptation is a developmental process. Humans are not static; they have the capacity to adapt, to engage with the environment and to transform themselves as a consequence of this ongoing interaction with the environment (Hansen, 2011; Delanty, 2006; Shaules, 2007).

The participants' struggles to construct culture within the context of certain features of language use became evident. Individuals are seen to be able to relativize their worldviews, recognize other worldviews and transform or construct new realities, although sometimes with more success than others. Foreign teachers' social construction of reality becomes apparent in their worldview of 'we are all equal', a notion that is perceived as 'their' core value. Guided by the use of their social reference, the *usted* form is viewed as a heightening of undesirable social distance. Some foreign teachers seem to adhere to the notion that the lack of pronouns for formal and familiar address in the English language represents a corresponding equality in power, status and distance among individuals. Findings show that these hierarchical features are also observed in English, thus they do not seem to be unique to Mexican society, as foreign teachers imagine them to be. A more critical, self-reflection on the accuracy of the "we are all equal" philosophy seems to be lacking on the part of some of the foreign teachers. In terms of the adapting to the new local practice however, foreign teachers developed their understanding from observing an explicit cultural practice, graduating to an understanding of the implicit meaning of the local's use of this expression (Shaules, 2007).

Whether social transformation has taken place as a result of the encounter of the local with the abstract global, either as a result of globalization and/or the presence of foreigners, the discussion of the participants shows their vision of the rich possibilities for social and self-transformation. They believe in a cosmopolitan world of exchange of people, ideas, customs and ways of living; indeed, they show attitudes in keeping with the traditions of moral cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 1996, 2005, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Nussbaum, 1996, 1997). Further, they appear to recognize social construction not only at a national level; there is also the suggestion of global social construction. These findings resonate with critical cultural cosmopolitan theory that acknowledges the potential for self and societal transformation (Appiah, 1996, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Delanty, 2006, 2008, 2009; Holliday 2011, 2013; Nussbaum, 1996, 1997; Stevenson, 2003).

In my final chapter I now turn to a discussion of the key findings of this investigation, implications, limitations and possible areas for further research.

## Chapter 6 Conclusions and Implications

In order to answer the research question established at the outset, “*How do English language teachers and students construct the concept of culture?*”, I embraced the cosmopolitan orientations delineated by Delanty (2009). These are: relativization, recognition, mutual evaluation and transformation.

Thus, the adoption of these orientations when analyzing individuals’ construction of culture allowed me to dig deeper, to unravel all of the elements which can stem from the ability—or lack of it—to negotiate one’s own cultural knowledge. Attempting to unravel these elements meant asking myself several questions: How do teachers and students negotiate culture? What are they seen to be doing? Are they able to suspend or relativize the beliefs they have about the Self and the Other? Are they able to accept different ways of doing/acting? Although the adoption of cosmopolitan orientations allowed me to unravel some of the processes of constructing culture, that is to say the *hows*, this was only one part of the equation. The other part involved the *whats*, the concepts that individuals invoke when they speak of culture. Thus, in order to understand how individuals negotiate culture, I needed to look at culture itself. This implied asking the question, what is culture? What does it represent for individuals? By looking at these two components, the *whats* and the *hows*, the equation was complete; I believe that I was able to unravel the varied and complex processes going on in the construction of culture.

### 6.1 General Conclusions

As detailed in Chapter 1, this investigation was conceptualized out of my professional interest in understanding how individuals deal with the concept of culture. The participants’ constructions of culture in this investigation revealed very clearly the processes of relativization, recognition and transformation as described in Section 3.5. These processes, described by scholars from the fields of intercultural communication, cosmopolitanism (sociology), multiculturalism and psychology (Appiah, 2005, 2006; Bennett, 1986; Byram, 2008; Delanty, 2006, 2008, 2009; Gudykunst, 2005; Hansen *et al.* 2009; Hansen, 2011; Kramsch, 1998; Kim, 2001, 2005; Scollon *et al.* 2012 and Shaules, 2007 among many others) could be seen at work in the utterances and deliberations of the participants during their struggles to make sense of culture.

I have argued throughout this investigation that the construal of culture is influenced by multiple sources of knowledge; indeed, negotiating these sources of knowledge can be challenging for the individual (Section 2.2). Nonetheless, individuals *are* seen to be entering into the process of negotiation, sometimes with more success than others (Section 2.3), and *do* possess the capability to negotiate these multiple sources of knowledge (Section 3.2). It would seem that being ‘cosmopolitan’ is a feature that is not subject to measurement; indeed, it is difficult to classify individuals as “cosmopolitan” or not. In a very true sense, everyone can be said to be cosmopolitan, because we all have the capabilities to engage, communicate, negotiate and construct culture—it is human nature (Section 3.4).

The findings presented in this investigation demonstrate that these capabilities play a major role in the intercultural learning/adaptation process. Although there is a strong relationship between the processes of relativization, recognition and transformation (data in fact shows signs of all three), I would argue that success in the intercultural learning/adaptation process shows more in the details of relativization, which is embedded at the core of Delanty’s (2009) progression of cosmopolitan orientations (see Section 3.5, Figure 3.5). Thus, I would relate the findings in this investigation primarily to current theoretical discussions emphasizing the importance of relativization. The principles of the importance of relativization could be described in the following ways:

- Relativization of one’s own culture so questions can be raised about Others.
- Relativization of one’s cultural references in the evaluation of the Other, so as to avoid judgments.
- Relativization of one’s worldviews so that recognition and acceptance of the Other can be achieved. This in turn can lead to transformation of the Self.
- Relativization of one’s worldviews so that the new culture can be understood in its own milieu. As a consequence of this type of relativization, individuals are more at ease in a new environment, thus avoiding culture shock.

Corollary to the enactment of these cosmopolitan orientations—relativization, recognition and transformation—is the cognitive capacity for critical reflexivity (Sections 3.2 and 3.5); this ability is clearly envisioned by all of the scholars mentioned above. Reflection on C1 in order to become more fully aware of one’s own culture seems to be necessary for the avoidance of misconceptions.

The nature of culture acquisition, the theory which was visited in Section 2.2, demonstrates that primary social knowledge works at a subconscious level, or as Shaules (2007, p. 10) put it, “it functions out-of-awareness”. Given this subconscious dimension, active reflection on one’s own cultural “inheritance” seems to be necessary. Indeed, one of the major shifts in the approach to cultural awareness in ELT, as discussed in Section 3.2, has been the move towards promoting reflexivity as an ongoing process of negotiation for the experiencing of Otherness. This would be not only reflection on the Other’s culture, but also reflection on one’s own practices, beliefs, values and behaviors (Byram, 2008, Kramersch, 1993, 1998a; Scollon *et al.* 2012). As has been highlighted throughout the findings chapter, it became evident that when dealing with cultural differences the participants in this investigation became actively engaged, making use of all of their human capacities when constructing, making sense of, and negotiating culture. Moreover, the construal of culture seems to be a challenge, in a positive sense, to individuals’ abilities to negotiate and relativize the different sources of knowledge they draw on to make sense of the world they live in.

Throughout the findings chapter it has been my intention to discover how people construct culture. This process appears to be rather complex, because individuals are caught between different sources of knowledge which they draw on in their constructions. As discussed in Section 2.2, these sources might include family values and upbringing, life experience and professional and public discourses (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Byram, 2008; Holliday, 2013; Kim 2001, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Kubota, 1999; Shaules, 2007; Scollon *et al.* 2012, McKay, 2002; Nishida, 2005; Weaver, 1993 and Wierzbicka, 1998 among many others). These sources of knowledge seem to intersect, sometimes functioning in tandem and other times creating conflict.

I would argue that there are strong suggestions in the data which show that those who are able to relativize their worldviews, or primary culture, are better able to cope with the differences they inevitably face as teachers and students. I observed that participants relativized with varying degrees of success; at times a person who was able to adapt on one point was blind on another. The success, or lack of it, in the process of relativization was a result of various factors: the circumstances of the moment, the personality of the participant, the life experience of the individual and the topic at hand. Recognition from the perspective of the Other was also perceived in the participants. As discussed in 2.3, understanding the values behind the actions can be difficult to achieve. However, in the case of foreign teachers, this was seen to occur as a result of their active engagement with the new environment and the human capabilities to deliberate.

The ability—or lack of it—in relativizing one’s worldviews was seen to have an impact on the participants. Indeed, in the case of foreign teachers, difficulties were experienced when using their own cultural references as a benchmark for the evaluation of the Other. On the contrary, those participants who were the most capable and at ease in the working/learning environment showed a talent for adaptation, a product of their ability to relativize. The stories that I was told by this small group of foreign teachers underlined this point repeatedly—they were at their best when adapting and negotiating. Negative examples also emerged; narratives of teachers experiencing culture shock, reports of Othering and rejection of ways of doing/being embedded in the local environment.

## 6.2 Conclusions: Key Findings

The authors cited in the literature review agree that individuals’ primary social knowledge is the point of reference that allows them to make sense of the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Kim, 2005; Nishida, 2005; Scollon *et al.* 2012; Shaules, 2007; Weaver, 1993; Wierzbicka 1991). I would argue that the data presented in this investigation shows the necessity for relativizing and reflecting on this primary social knowledge so that a new milieu can be understood in its own right. This was seen in the case of *Elizabeth* and *Colin*, who even after years of experience living and working in Mexico could not completely come to terms with the “elitist” feature of the Spanish language, informal and formal address. In this case the C1 pattern of thinking summed up in the phrase “we are all equal”, impeded comprehension of a rather simple “cultural” artefact: in Mexico there are traditionally accepted ways to address persons that should be learned in order to navigate the local environment. *Colin* and *Elizabeth*’s construction of Anglophone culture as more egalitarian in its use of “you” rather than the dual formal/informal distinction made in Spanish suggests an incomplete understanding of their own social and linguistic system. The teachers’ culture can be seen to be working at a subconscious level; they are not necessarily aware of the illusory quality of their “egalitarian” construction. As discussed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, it is normal for individuals not to be aware of their cultural programming; thus, it is difficult to explain—or grasp difference in the case of cross-cultural encounters. Indeed, many theorists suggest that intercultural learning necessitates reflection on the cultures of the Self and the Other. In *Colin*’s case, the interview itself served as means for self-reflection; he acknowledged that distinctions of rank and power exist in English, despite the ubiquitous “you”.

Although at the implicit level, *Colin* and *Elizabeth* may resist the idea of formal address as a distinction between persons, they seemed to adapt at the explicit level of “that’s how it is. It’s not going to change” (*Colin*). In the end, they accept their students’ use of *usted* and *Teacher* with them; likewise, they admit using titles when this is necessary. The dilemma between acceptance and rejection of difference seems to be typical of the participants’ construction of culture (Kim, 2005; Shaules, 2007). Perhaps in the case of *Colin* and *Elizabeth*, the imprinting of primary social knowledge in the form of language is so strong that they will never be able to overcome it and fully participate in the Spanish language environment. As highlighted by Shaules (2007) internal dilemmas are the most difficult to negotiate because they imply the loss of internalized childhood realities. However, to go beyond the strong imprint left by C1 would be to understand from the perspective of the Other, in the sense of Delanty (2009). Nonetheless, they have adapted enough to allow them to “get along”—yet the question remains: can the intercultural line in the sand be crossed without leaving C1 baggage behind?

The fluid nature of the relativizing process became evident; if the participants sometimes had issues of faulty relativization, they also showed “capacities” (Appiah, 2006), “competencies” Byram (2008), “underlying universal skills and strategies” (Holliday, 2013), or simply knowledge of the “arts of living” (Hansen, 2011). Thus, the participants could be observed to be deliberating, listening, articulating, observing and negotiating while telling me their stories. This positive aspect was seen specifically in the various degrees of adaptation shown by the foreign teachers *Elizabeth*, *Colin*, *Albert* and *Johnny Rodriguez*, who were able to accommodate themselves to the local environment. It was found these teachers could adapt to new social conventions, or as mentioned above, to the formalities in language use. Likewise, the Mexican teachers were seen to actively use their capacities of reflection in the matter of formal language—they were able to understand the student’s imprinted behavior, while at the same time grasping why foreign teachers try to change the students’ behavior.

Corollary to the fluid nature of the participants’ constructions of culture, I discovered in the course of the investigation that constructions of culture were rarely arrived at in a linear process. A great deal of negotiation and deliberation on the part of foreign teachers was needed to understand and adapt to social conventions in the new environment. University students asking permission to enter and leave the classroom was a case in point. All the foreign teachers began by noticing and then attempting to change the behavior of students asking permission to enter and leave. After a phase of mild annoyance and even sarcasm, the foreign teachers eventually came to terms with the “deep cultural” aspect of students’ behavior: students were asking for permission because of “respect”, “tradition”, or “it’s what your parents taught you”. In the same way, the foreign teachers eventually realized that the students could not easily accept the egalitarian treatment of the figure of the teacher. For the students, the teacher must be a figure of benevolent respect, the “maestro”, or *Teacher* as students would continue to call them, despite repeated pleas not to. Teachers recounted many versions of the same narrative: the ups and downs of adjustment, the slow journey to understanding, the accommodation of different social practices, the mixture of amusement and annoyance with the new environment. Thus, it could be said that the foreign teachers underwent modest transformations which were nonetheless a successful attempt to see from the perspective of the Other.

Two teachers, *Jose* and *Colin*, expressed reservations about change that might come as a result of cultural imposition. *Jose* asked the question “would I intervene in your society to change things”, answering with a no. Likewise, *Colin* insisted that the outsider should approach changes to a society with sensitivity; no imposition is possible without alienating the Other. In fact, cultural imposition emanating from American teachers became a major theme in the stories the participants told me. In these narratives, American teachers were reported to be using their cultural schemas to evaluate the Others, that is to say their students and colleagues. Altogether, the reactions to the critical incident which featured the American teacher were negative—the statement “in America, you don’t do that” was viewed as chauvinism, not a case of superior confidence, the participants seemed to be telling me.

As has been remarked, adaptation was not a linear process for the participants; the pull and tug of ethnocentrism was seen at times in the participants’ unwillingness to change their worldviews. As DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004), Kim (2001, 2005) Kumaravadivelu (2008) and Shaules (2007) note, ethnocentrism impedes the ability to see beyond one’s cultural reality. However, the four foreign teachers who participated in this investigation seemed to have found the path to ethnorelativism. This did not seem to be the case of the American teachers who featured in the participants’ stories. These teachers were reported to demonstrate ethnocentric attitudes: in their idealized America, teachers are addressed as equals, by their first names. In general, America might serve as a model in the minds of the teachers in question.

This contrasts with the ethnorelativist reality of the teachers of the Language Department, where teachers are addressed with formal *usted*. Indeed, attitude towards these cultural realities proved to be the crucial dividing line between the teachers who could accept them and those who could not. When individuals insisted on maintaining their worldviews as *the* valid way, they were not able to cross the intercultural line in the sand, or the intercultural experience became an unpleasant one. The teacher participants in fact reported that some colleagues prefer to leave the country rather than making what seemed to them to be the difficult adjustment to the local environment.

Further to the key findings summarized above, elements of a cosmopolitan outlook became evident in the participants. I found that the participants shared abilities in common when constructing culture, regardless of their age, nationality, background, or amount of traveling experience—everyone seemed to have equal potential for cosmopolitan citizenship (Holliday, 2013). Nevertheless, constructing culture did not cease to be a struggle for the participants as they negotiated meaning. However, as Hansen (2011) remarks, “shared human capacities such as thinking and telling stories [...] form a ground for cosmopolitan-minded relations” (p. 87). Throughout this investigation it has been my intention to highlight these common capacities and abilities in the light of cosmopolitan orientations. It seems that a cosmopolitan orientation levels the path towards small culture formation (Holliday, 2013) (Hansen’s cosmopolitan-minded relations), providing the tools for negotiation of meaning. Hansen qualifies the scope of the cosmopolitan orientation, stating that “cosmopolitanism is not an identity in the familiar sociological sense of term, nor is it a badge or the name for an exclusive club. It is an orientation that assists people in sustaining their cultural integrity and continuity—but not fixity or purity—through change” (*ibid.*). The key word for this investigation seems to be “assists”—the individual is assisted in constructions of the Self and the Other by a cosmopolitan orientation.

### 6.3 Final Considerations on the Research Question

I have attempted to pull together the various threads from the empirical data according to the large themes which emerged during the course of the investigation. The complex and contradictory nature of every individual’s conception of what is meant by the term culture is reflected in the data gathered together in this investigation. These constructions were as varied as the individuals who feature in this investigation; Mexican teachers, Mexican students, British teachers, a Canadian teacher and an American teacher. Each one of these persons had a particular trajectory and set of experiences which informed their constructs. Many subsets emerged—an individual might be a teacher, student, mother, daughter, wife, husband, father, son, old, young, middle-aged, divorced or single.

At the outset of the investigation, armed with my research question, I set out to interrogate what people do with culture, how they use it, and how they make sense of it. The function of the research question was to discover the *whats* and *hows* of the participants’ constructions of culture. The story of *Colin* (Extract 15) exemplified the dynamic process of discovering what goes on when individuals construct culture. Informed by his personal trajectories, within the confines of the classroom and in his role as an English teacher, *Colin* was seen to struggle in negotiating culture. Initially, *Colin* drew on his first social knowledge, attempting to change students’ behavior by bringing it into line with what he found familiar. He then realized “one person can’t change the culture. It’s ingrained in us, in our DNA and it’s not that easy”. Finally *Colin* came to the realization that culture must be negotiated—some social knowledge can be retained and other must be discarded, or as he put it, “you cannot stop being yourself but you have to moderate it in some way”.

Thus, I was able to see the dynamic process at work, interrogating what people were doing with culture, and analyzing how people think about culture through listening to their stories. What emerged was a complex picture of the thoughts and actions of the participants which I have tried to capture in this investigation. Looking back at the two incidents that motivated me to explore the topic of this investigation, I sense more strongly than ever the importance of being critical in my own interpretations of what other individuals say and do with culture. Teachers are not isolated entities—they are a composite of many different identities, public, private and professional. When reading their constructions of culture it became necessary to mentally form a thick description of the perspectives and knowledge which inform their individual constructions of culture, and through a process of critical reflexivity delve more deeply into their interpretations. In delving more deeply, I was able to see myself more clearly, to see how I read both my own culture and that of the Other—this made me yet more aware of the need to relativize my own worldviews.

## 6.4 Implications

The struggles of the English teachers and students to make sense of the Self and the Other have many wider implications, which will be seen in this final section.

An area which appears to stem out of the findings and the discourse of the participants is the status in Mexico of English as an international language for communication. Because of issues raised by the intermingling of persons due to globalization, there are immediate concerns with EIL waiting to be addressed in Mexico as country, at the macro-level, and the Language Department at the local, micro-level. Students are learning English primarily because it is a requirement for their degrees. Others are learning to increase job opportunities—this is related mainly to international companies relocating production and services in Mexico. Therefore, the primary goal of EIL is purely instrumental, as a contact language between persons of different nationalities doing business in Mexico. What would then be the role of specifically Anglophone culture in the Mexican classroom? None, is the clear implication—English is being taught to enable communication with persons from many other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. At the micro-level in Guanajuato this currently includes American, Japanese, French, Italian and German car manufacturers, British aeronautics firms and Brazilian textile suppliers, among many others. At a very real level, the necessity to teach inner circle English-speaking culture of any type was superseded long ago, being replaced by the new realities of the globalized world.

This contact between persons from diverse places, doing business, living and working in a new environment, interacting with locals, would suggest the necessity for sensitizing teachers and students to different cultural practices, but not through “cultural instruction” *per se*. As I have suggested in reference to the findings, the teacher participants display a certain reticence in approaching culture in the classroom, preferring to omit culture-related topics because of the difficulty of handling them. Indeed, although teachers cite student sensibilities as a reason for the avoidance of cultural topics in the classroom, I would argue that there is space to introduce them. The foreign language classroom would seem to be the ideal platform to talk about, reflect on and debate cultural differences—far from offending sensibilities irreparably, it appears to me that individuals are able to use their capacities to construct culture very successfully, even with all the anxieties, conflicts, struggles and difficulties involved in understanding the Other.

## 6.5 Pedagogical Suggestions

Several implications for teacher training programs are suggested by the data gathered in the course of the investigation.

### 6.5.1 Training in Interculturalism

A primary consideration is the lack of preparation of teachers to deal with issues of culture in the classroom. Indeed, several teacher interviewees confessed to avoiding cultural issues in the classroom, citing reasons such as: “I think culture takes care of itself” *Johnny Rodriguez* (Extract 41), “how are you going to manage that [culture] on top of everything else” *Colin* (Extract 42) or “it’s impossible to give a list of do’s and don’ts” *Jose* (Extract 43). Various factors come into play in teachers’ avoidance of the subject of culture in the classroom: fear of misunderstandings, fear of being viewed as insensitive, problems delivering the intended message, and fear of disapproving responses by others. Indeed, the very subject of culture seems to have some of the emotional charge present in first social knowledge; touching on the subject of culture is felt to be, at least potentially, an attack on the students’ sense of identity.

Apart from the difficulties approaching culture that the teacher participants are evidently experiencing, there is also a lack of training. Interviewee’s backgrounds confirms that several foreign teacher participants who are cited in this investigation come from fields other than ELT, while another has acquired TESOL training recently. Among the Mexican teacher participants, three of four hold MA TESOL qualifications, while another has an MA in Social Sciences. I was able to observe while conducting the classroom observations that even those teachers with academic qualifications are reticent when approaching culture. This suggests that there is a need to train teachers on interculturalism in order to develop the necessary tools and strategies for approaching the subject.

### 6.5.2 Critical Incidents to Cultivate Intercultural Competency

The question of how to prepare teachers to confront culture in the classroom poses itself. One such model might be found in Holliday's (2011, 2013) "ethnographic narratives", which are intended to promote understanding and discussion of underlying cultural processes common to all human beings. Holliday's approach has various advantages: national stereotypes are avoided, readers are invited to interrogate the ideas presented in the stories and each story is intended to make one "think again about established truths" (2011, xi). Indeed, my experience with using critical incidents or "short stories", to motivate reflection and stimulate discussion had a similar principle. As discussed in section 4.4.2, critical incidents are widely used in the field of intercultural communication for the purpose of development in this area. ELT practitioners can create their own stories, based on their experiences or those of others, to motivate discussion and raise cultural awareness. As in the case of this investigation, the participants are drawn out of themselves, questioning the ideas they hold about the Self and the Other; in other words, critical reflexivity will be enacted.

### 6.5.3 Critical Reflexivity: The Dialogic Perspective

Throughout the investigation process, telling of individual stories functioned as an important tool for the exploration of constructions of culture. However, one key point that was discussed was that reflexivity is not critical if it is not dialogic. Throughout this investigation, I have highlighted the need for a process of active critical reflexivity on the part of teachers. Kramsch (1993, 1998a), Byram (2008) and Delanty (2008, 2009) all speak of the need to reflect on one's own culture so that the right questions can be raised about the culture of the Other. As has been seen several times in the presentation of data, upon reflection about their own culture, participants were able to remove blind spots and gain a better appreciation of the Other's ways of thinking and doing. *Colin's* realization that social hierarchies exist independently of the titles and formal/informal address used to mark them in Spanish was one example of this type of modest transformation through reflection on one's own culture. It was significant that *Colin's* realization came during an interview: on several occasions self-reflection was seen to be taking place at an intense level during the interviews, as the participants struggled to give form to their thoughts. This storytelling process may be repeated in the classroom in order to "draw out" an unselfconscious dialogue with students, encouraging and exploring reflexivity from a dialogic viewpoint. Given the cosmopolitan flair that the students displayed in their discussion of the stories generated by critical incidents, it seems likely that a similar combination of storytelling and dialogue in tandem with teachers might be a successful recipe for introducing culture into the classroom.

### 6.5.4 Tell Your Story

It might be suggested that an immediate measure for bringing culture into the classroom might be for teachers to share their personal stories of living, working or studying abroad with their students. Dealing with the new and different can indeed represent a challenge for individuals. Teachers sharing their real-life stories can be very motivating for their students as a mean to bring the outside world to the classroom. Through stories dealing with culture, (whether the experience is pleasant or unpleasant), teachers can demonstrate the challenges and struggles confronting them. In this way, they motivate and develop students' curiosity, empathy, and cultivate values of respect, openness and tolerance towards cultural diversity.

### 6.6 Limitations

As was seen in the findings chapter, students often displayed open, cosmopolitan attitudes in their reactions to the critical incidents that were narrated during the interviews. As this investigation was an exploration of constructions of culture, the students' reactions to critical incidents were taken at face value, as genuine manifestations of their thoughts about the Other. The question of students' response to real-life confrontation with cultural differences remains—they are still untested in the world of global travel. However, it can be said that they show tendencies towards a cosmopolitan outlook at a very basic level; they do show a concern for the Other in keeping with the traditions of moral cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 1996, 2005, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Nussbaum, 1996, 1997).

## 6.7 Further Research

This investigation could be repeated in a similar context where foreign teachers are entering a new environment; similar methods might be used to discover these teacher's characteristics and constructions in the new setting. In Section 4.3 I have stated the case for the ethnographic approach to social research, which, as Wolcott (2008) remarks, can be done "anywhere, anytime, and of virtually anyone or any process, as long as human social behavior is involved" (p. 73). Indeed, the ethnographic approach provided the large backdrop against which a close examination of the world of the social actors was possible; their interactions could be observed in the natural environment of the workplace.

The ethnographic approach could be used in further studies; this might be done at the University of Guanajuato in order to better understand the student population, the impact that the educational mission is having on students and the community, or the impact that University of Guanajuato-educated students are having on local industry and business in the context of globalization. The State of Guanajuato has the fourth highest emigration rate nationally, and has traditionally been a state with high levels of emigration. At an anecdotal level, one student expressed the common phenomenon, "almost everybody has a friend or a relative living or working in the USA". Naturally, this affects many families in the State of Guanajuato, most especially through the absence of fathers who are working in the US. A qualitative investigation using an ethnographic approach could be carried out, with the goal of understanding the possible impact of emigration on students' lives, or also on students' constructions of the US. This could be done as an interdisciplinary study in tandem with sociologists.

A further aspect that could be studied within the institutional context is the multicultural character of the Language Department. Other languages, such as French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese are being taught at the department along with English and Spanish as a foreign language. This small multicultural setting, with its constantly changing social dynamic, might prove itself to be a fertile source for studies. Indeed, the problematic predominance of English at the University of Guanajuato might become a subject of study in its own right. As Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999) suggest, English has acquired predominance as a supposed bringer of economic and social progress. This problematic ascendancy of English has many implications for the Language Department and its teachers, students and administrators, which could provide an ample field for studies.

## 6.8 Final Comments

An important difficulty in understanding the process of intercultural learning is the fact that every intercultural situation is different, and that individuals differ widely in their responses to apparently similar situations. Among the voices that can be heard in this investigation are those of students and teachers, foreign and local, men and women, young and old, single, married or divorced, some with extensive travel experience, others with little or none, each one of them moving forward in their own unique way, engaging with the realities of their world, dealing in their own way with thoughts, feelings and experiences, maneuvering through and trying to make sense of the world they live in. This small culture is seen creating new networks of meaning, negotiating ways of doing, dropping their culture when necessary, adopting new ways, and constructing new forms unique to the particular situation, contextual factor or specific moment in which they are constructed. Cultural learning and negotiation are seen being built through the relations, debates, conflicts, anxieties and constant deliberations of the social actors. This building process is not an easy task. However, it seems to me that these teachers and their students are working together in harmony.

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## Glossary

**Acceptance:** This is defined as perceiving as valid alternative interpretations of the cultural phenomena that one experiences. Acceptance does not necessarily imply changing oneself in order to better align one's internal patterns with those of a new environment, but rather indicates recognition of the validity of other worldviews. Acceptance implies a construal of cultural difference as valid and encourages cognitive empathy (Shaules, 2007, p. 237).

**Adaptation:** This may be defined as allowing for change in oneself in response to demands from a different cultural environment. However, adaptation does not imply that one necessarily views the demands of the different environment as valid. One can adapt (change oneself) and resist (see as invalid the source of the demand) at the same time. Adaptation at deep levels of the self often involves changes in one's sense of identity. Adapting one's behaviour is much easier than adapting deeper elements of the self (Shaules, 2007, p. 238).

**Cultural Difference:** This may be defined as the gap between a sojourner's existing internal cultural competencies and those required in his or her new host environment (Shaules, 2007, p. 22). It refers to ways in which products of meanings of a cultural community differ in systematic ways from those of another. For intercultural learners, cultural difference implies that a sojourner's knowledge of his or her environment is inadequate in systematic ways. Sojourners must deal with not only new facts, but also new systems of meaning. They must learn not only 'things' but also 'how things work' (*ibid.* p. 240).

**Cultural Environment:** This can be defined as a geographical or psychological entity from which an individual derives a sense of cultural identity at a particular point in time. This could be anything from a community, friendship group or occupation, to a notion of nation or civilisation (Holliday, 2013, p. 6)

**Cultural Practices:** This can be defined as ways of doing something which relate to particular cultural environments and may therefore be unfamiliar to newcomers. Cultural practices concern everyday activities where there are choices about eating, washing, clothing, communicating, timing, surroundings, being together and so on (Holliday, 2013, p. 6).

**Culture:** 1. Membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting. 2. The discourse community itself. 3. The system of standards itself (Kramsch, 1998, p. 127).

**Ethnocentrism** is the normal (though not necessarily desirable) tendency to judge one's experience from one's own cultural viewpoint. Ethnocentrism involves pre-existing categories to judge phenomena, while **ethnorelativism** involves the creation and integration of new perceptual categories. Ethnocentrism is a built-in part of human perceptual reality, meaning that it is difficult or impossible to even avoid completely (Shaules, 2007, p. 243).

**Intercultural:** 1. Refers to the meeting between people from different cultures and languages across the political boundaries of nation-states. 2. Refers to communication between people from different ethnic, social, gendered cultures within the boundaries of the same nation. (Kramsch, 1998, p. 128).

**Relativization:** To relativize an experience refers to looking at the contextual reasons that influence one's experience of it. This often leads to a perceptual decentering, as standards for judging a given phenomenon shifts away from oneself and moves to larger frames of reference. Relativization can involve the discovery that one's reactions to a phenomenon are a product of one's expectations or experiences and don't come from any intrinsic quality of the phenomenon itself (Shaules, 2007, p. 248).

**Socialization:** the process by which a person internalizes the conventions of behaviour imposed by a society or social group (Kramsch, 1998, p. 131).

**Transformation:** Changes in self-understanding or self-perception as a result of engagement with the Other. These changes may occur at an individual, group, or societal level and may be great, small, or incremental (Delanty, 2009).

**Worldviews:** 1. The way in which individuals think about and see the world; one's overall perspective of the world. 2. A set of beliefs held by an individual or a group.

**Appendix I Critical Incident: An American in Mexico**

Kevin's first experience working outside the United States was at the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. A few months into his teaching some cultural elements became apparent. He expressed,—Students are always asking for permission to enter the classroom “Teacher may I come in?” They also ask for permission to use the bathroom! “Teacher can I go out to use the bathroom?”— He said,—I always tell them—You don't have to ask me for permission to use the bathroom, in America, you don't do that, you just get up and go!—and he added,—this is my way of teaching them self-confidence—Kevin continued,—also, I tell my students in America we call teachers by their names, not “*Teacher*”—he explained,—I disagree with these *tu* and *usted* forms, I just don't think that some people deserve more respect than others!—.

Appendix II Elizabeth's Classroom Observation (CO12)

1. How do students respond to the teacher's discussion of 'culturally' related issues? Do teachers use the strategy of comparison and contrast?
2. How do teachers respond to students' curiosity and interest about the foreign 'culture'? How do they present and handle the issue of 'cultural differences' between the local and 'foreign culture'?
3. In which ways do teacher and students negotiate their 'cultural identity' in the classroom? How do they deal with the issue of 'culture'? In which ways do teachers motivate students to project their 'cultural identity' through English?
4. How do teachers respond to students' C1 transfer into C2 in the way they use English?
5. What are the perceived feelings and emotions of teachers and students about each other's 'culture'?

T gestures cheap 'tacaño' JR 'drink' gesture - IRISH  
 Comments: L1/L2 T L1/L2 T

St. I have to put some special 'pomada'  
 T Cream? special cream?  
 Individual - Collaborative work  
 St. knocks twice, walks in 18" late  
 T (pad on the back) Your brother?  
 St. He's parking the car  
 T Oh He's parking the car  
 St Yes  
 T: Don't spend all your 'quincena' in case you have to buy the cake next week.

Interview Behavior Asking for permission

St2 'May I coming?' 20"  
 St3 Knocks twice 21"  
 St4 Arrives 23 min. after hour  
 St5 May I coming [T giving instructions, turns to st direction, nods 24"  
 St6 'Buenos dias' 25" late

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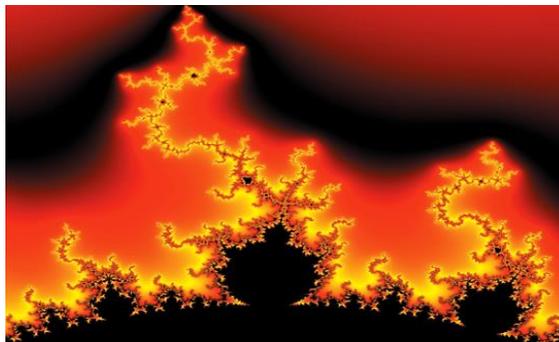
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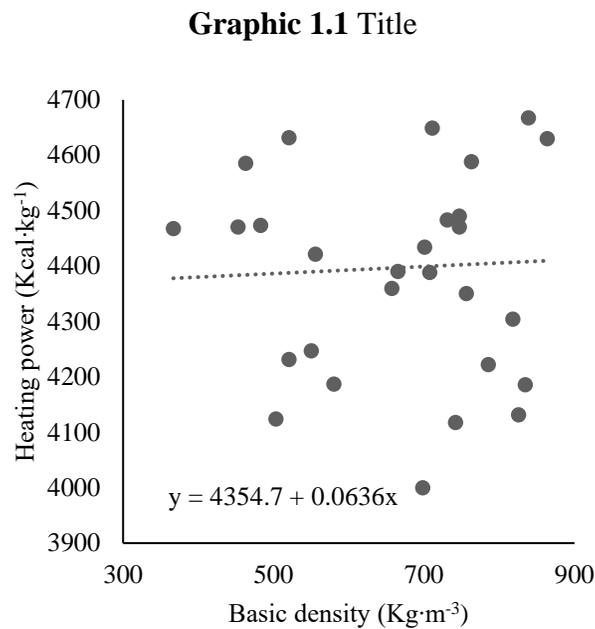
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