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**Constructing the Concept of 'Culture' in a Mexican University
Language Department: The Struggles of a Small Group of
English Teachers and Students**

By

Ireri Armenta Delgado

**Thesis submitted to Canterbury Christ Church
University for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy
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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of how a group of foreign and local English language teachers and students at the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, Mexico construct 'culture'. Through an ethnographic approach, with the use of interviews and classroom observations as the means for gathering data, the stories of eight teachers and twenty four students were explored, in order to unravel their constructions of 'culture'. Given the abstract nature of the concept 'culture', critical incidents from my personal and professional experience were used to spark the participants into sharing their stories. It was through the telling of these stories that the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the participants regarding the Self and the Other were revealed. The construction of 'culture' was found to be a complex process in which teachers and students struggle in negotiating diverse sources of knowledge—from the personal (parents and upbringing), to professional and/or public discourses. The processes of relativization, recognition and transformation, as understood in the cosmopolitan tradition, were adopted to explore individuals' capabilities in constructing 'culture'. When constructing people and 'cultures', individuals are seen to traverse personal and professional trajectories, making the ability to relativize worldviews a challenge. Thus, the cosmopolitan imagination, which foresees Self and societal transformation, is seen to aid the individual in effecting the relativization of worldviews, so that recognition from the perspective of the Other and transformation are made possible. Constructing 'culture' was found to be a non-linear process, sometimes smooth and sometimes a struggle. Indeed, this thesis proposes that there are many intersecting factors in the construction of 'culture': the concepts which are invoked, the processes involved, and the abilities utilized when deliberating over 'culture'. The individual is seen to draw upon all of these resources according to the specific contextual factors of the intercultural event.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
ELT	English language Teaching
ENL	English as a Native Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
L1/C1	First Language/First Culture
L2/C2	Second Language/Second Culture
ICC	Intercultural Communication

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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.

Patio of the Language Department



Preface

The photograph shown above is the place where I studied, learned and first began to teach the English language: the Department of Languages of the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. This is the place where my interest in learning about language and culture began to take on an academic shape, first as an undergraduate student in the University's TESOL program, then as a distance student of Canterbury Christ Church University, and finally as a Ph.D. student in Applied Linguistics at the same institution, this time on site in Kent. This thesis represents the academic outcome of a lifelong interest in the intercultural experience, an experience which started for me with a year's stay in Midwest America, in Chicago studying English. It was after this stay that I met my American husband John, not in the US, but in Guanajuato, where he was playing in the local symphony orchestra. Soon after meeting, we got married and went to live in Vienna, Austria—Vienna was a place which proved to be a cosmopolitan environment and very conducive to language learning. While living there, I used English to communicate with a circle of international friends including Austrians, Germans, Poles and Czechs. Although I met many native English speakers in Vienna, I found that one of the primary uses of English was communication between people who had no other common language. This was my first large-scale experience with English as an international language—people who spoke German, Polish and Czech were mixing with native Spanish speakers like me, and all of this was happening with English as the medium. When I returned to Mexico, my cultural encounters continued; besides the yearly visits to my husband's family near Dallas, Texas, there were plenty of occasions to meet and talk to English speakers. I also had chances to travel: Vancouver and New York were among the places I visited while doing courses and teacher training seminars. Observing the interaction of people from diverse cultures in these places sparked further interest in language and culture—some of the critical incidents which appear in this thesis were real-life encounters which took place on these trips. I became increasingly interested in the issues surrounding intercultural communication, reading the literature as I continued my studies through the Master's phase. Finally the time arrived to begin Ph.D. studies as a condition to pursuing a full-time position in the Language Department of the school where I had begun my studies. As will be set out below, two key incidents involving my American colleagues' reactions to local culture led me to conceive the theme of this thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Focus of the Thesis

This thesis is an analysis of how a group of eight teachers and twenty-four students from the University of Guanajuato construct the concept of ‘culture’.¹ The thesis focuses 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 construct ‘culture’, this thesis 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—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 thesis 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 became 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.

When struggling to make sense of ‘culture’, individuals draw on several sets of resources: their personal and professional trajectories, on the one hand, and public

¹ Because culture is such a fluid, movable concept with so many different meanings, the word will be placed in inverted commas throughout this thesis. However, when used by other interlocutors or in other contexts, inverted commas will not be used.

discourses taken from the local and global spheres, on the other. This thesis explores how these resources are used; they are valuable for making sense of the world, but at the same time they can be potential sources of conflict when constructing ‘culture’. 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.² 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 where individuals were seen to struggle to relativize their worldviews, to question 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, as will be seen in the data chapters. Yet there was the possibility of modest transformation of the Self, perhaps due to the innate cosmopolitanism qualities embedded in each individual.

This investigation explores 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

² For relativization, see Shaules’ (2007) definition above. When the term relativization is used in this thesis, by no means is cultural relativism meant. Glover (1995) writes, ‘relativism can lead to a lack of confidence about giving justice priority over the preservation of cultural variety. If the ideas of justice and injustice are purely relative to a given society, we may lose confidence in our judgment [...]’ (p. 129). Indeed, Nussbaum (2011) pleads for a set of universalistic values which she terms ‘human capabilities’ (p. 101). This was partially in response to negative manifestations of relativism which sought to justify local practices that are not acceptable in the moral cosmopolitan tradition.

are confronted with difference, they are 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 do 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 their native environment.

1.2 Motivation to Carry Out the Investigation

The motivation to look more deeply into the issue of 'culture' was stimulated by several events in my professional life. 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. 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, November 2010)

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, November 2010)

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.

1.3 Developing the Focus of this Thesis

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, 1980, 1991, <http://geert-hofstede.com/mexico.html>, accessed 16/12/2012), or lacking in self-confidence (Holliday, 2011), while independence is a quality Americans are presumed to possess. Both 'cultures' are perceived as a static or homogeneous entity. Finally, the two teachers seem to be using their 'American native culture' as a point of reference, not only to judge what in their perception is the most appropriate form of behavior, but also to condition students to act according to 'US social norms', including 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 this 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 hold about 'culture' (whether these were driven by personal or professional experience) and to capture descriptions of exactly what the participants were doing with 'culture'. As stated above, the focus was on individuals' constructions rather than the small culture formation of the classroom as an entity. 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.

1.4 The Importance of this Investigation

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 thesis offers new insight into the challenges facing the ELT practitioner, presenting views that have yet to be specifically approached in the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato.

1.5 Overall Methodology

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 the study of any social group (*vide infra*, Section 4.2). 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. *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* 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’.

I believe that 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’.

1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One introduces the thesis by delineating the focus and motivation of the investigation, the setting and participants, as well as the methodology used. Chapter Two provides an overview of the framework of the investigation. It describes the impact of globalization on the status of English in Mexico. Chapter Three provides a discussion of the literature as it relates to the subsequent analysis of the data. The discussion of the literature is centered on five large areas: 1) the role of ‘culture’ in the teaching of English as an international language; 2) definitions and general consideration of ‘culture’; 3) the social construction of ‘culture’, cultural differences and cultural practices. Corollary to this discussion is the issue of culture shock; 4) the processes of critical reflexivity, relativizing, recognition and self-transformation as related to the intercultural and cosmopolitan traditions; 5) stereotypes and the theory of Othering. Chapter Four introduces the conceptual framework and provides an analysis of the research

methodology used in this thesis. Chapters Five to Seven present the various themes identified in the analysis of data: Chapter Five discusses the theme of the impact of ‘culture’ on social conventions, while Chapter Six discusses the issue of stereotypes and Othering when constructing people and ‘culture’. Chapter Seven looks at the construction of ‘culture’ from the perspective of social use of language, specifically the *Tú* and *Usted* forms of modern Spanish, while the concluding Chapter Eight discusses the implications of the findings of this investigation for the field of ELT, and a conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Setting the Scene: Globalization, English and ‘Culture’ in Mexico

The march of globalization has affected Mexico in many aspects, including the political, the economic and the social. The field of education has also been affected top to bottom, from the policy makers at the Ministry of Education down to the small world of the ELT classroom at the University of Guanajuato. Considering the international status of the language it appears important to understand the role of the ELT practitioner in transmitting cultural knowledge, the role of ‘culture’ in the ELT curriculum of the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato and the role of English in the world, Mexico included, given the international spread of the language. Although my prime concern is with the actors’ viewpoint, the significance of this investigation is that it discusses how discourses of ‘culture’ are embedded in the social circumstances that surround them. To contextualize the viewpoints of the social actors in this investigation, the status of English in Mexico is highlighted briefly in this chapter.

2.1 Globalization and the Growth of English in Mexico

The ongoing establishment of international companies in Mexico has brought a perceptible exchange of persons that speak other languages. The Trade & Investment Minister Lord Green stated at the G20 conference in Los Cabos, Mexico 2011 that Mexico is ‘one of the world’s most promising markets, Mexico is currently the 14th largest economy in the world and the second largest in Latin America’. Thus, Mexico is recognized as a fast-growing economy in a world context. Globalization could be said to be the mechanism that has brought the abstract global into the local, increasing the mobility of individuals visiting or working. In fact, this issue is related to the reality of the Language Department, since every semester it welcomes new foreign teachers and groups of international students.

Crystal (2003, 2004) describes the spread of English in terms of historical, geographical and sociocultural factors, as well as in terms of increasing economic development. The need for a *lingua franca* became particularly evident with the creation of

the international forum for political communication, the United Nations (UN) in 1945, which was followed by the advent of many other international organizations (Graddol, 1997; McKay, 2002 and Jenkins, 2007, among others). At a more restricted level, other multinational regional or political groupings also came into being, such as the European Union (EU) or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the USA and Canada.

Indeed, Mexico's economic development started flourishing in the 1990s with the NAFTA agreement. Mexico's strategy had been to seek membership in the industrialized global community in order to stimulate economic development. According to Hanson (2011, p. 2), the NAFTA Agreement was the culmination of a series of strategies designed to motivate industrial investment; it was then that Mexico began to drop barriers to outside trade and investment. As a result, economic development has been ongoing, with more and more international investment. International companies that seek entry into the USA find in Mexico the ideal place to produce their goods for exportation to the neighbouring northern country. This is indeed the greatest advantage that Mexico offers over other low-cost countries such as Pakistan or India, where a cheap labor force is to be found. It is the proximity to the territory of the US and the cheap cost of transportation that maintains interest in international investment in Mexico.

2.2 Globalization in the State of Guanajuato

The state of Guanajuato could be considered one of the so called 'high exposure' states whose export-oriented industries have been 'magnets for foreign investors' (Hanson, 2011, p. 1). As a result, it has experienced more of the effects of globalization than some other states. Guanajuato is sixth place in industrial investment in the country; its geographic location in the centre of the country is perhaps the main reason for that. It has an excellent transportation infrastructure, including toll roads and two railway systems connecting to the border, an international airport, and an interior customs clearing house. Industry has grown at an amazing speed over the last twenty years, which shows in the six industrial corridors, or industrial zones which have sprung up along the State's principal highways (Mexican

Government' Agency for Economic Investment, 2012). The motor industry corridor is probably the largest one. The General Motors Company was established in Guanajuato in 1994, and in 2011 Guanajuato welcomed three new automobile companies, Honda, Volkswagen and Mazda. As a result of the globalized market and the establishment of international companies, the demand for a work force with English language knowledge has also increased. It has been argued that in a post-industrial economy the linguistic skills of workers at all levels take on a new importance (Byram, 2008; Crystal, 2003; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992a). This seems to be the case in Guanajuato.

In November 2010, the former President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, announced the country's entry into the aeronautics business. Coincidentally, the state of Guanajuato has been designated for the establishment of two new industrial corridors that will be dedicated to this project. In a 2011 speech addressed to the leaders of industry, science and technology as well as those of education, the Governor of the State of Guanajuato, Juan Manuel Oliva, stated that 'the role of education is to serve science and technology'. This statement followed the announcement of an expanded budget destined for the construction of a new campus for the University of Guanajuato near the site of the aeronautics corridor (research notes, May 2011).

In fact, one of the demands expressed by the committee representing the aeronautics industry had been the need for a specialized labor force in the field. With the opening of a new campus and the creation of new educational programs, the government intends to meet these requirements. The collaborative work between the academic community and the industrial branch is intended to benefit both parties. Not only will teachers and students have access to research facilities, but academic work will generate new knowledge in the field. This issue represents probably one of the biggest achievements for the State of Guanajuato, as well as for the University of Guanajuato. Furthermore, now that Mexico is entering this new field, such a big impact has been made on the country that the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM) has announced the opening of a new campus in Guanajuato. This is the first campus in the history of the UNAM to be built outside of the metropolitan area of Mexico City and its

construction is a historically unprecedented event. Despite the enthusiasm of political and educational figures for these new developments, it remains to be seen whether mutual benefit will be as great as expectations suggest.

2.3 The Status of English in Mexico

According to Block and Cameron (2002), globalization changes the conditions under which language learning takes place. These economic and political changes affect the choices made by governments when allocating resources to foreign language education (Byram, 2008; Crystal, 2004; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992).

The formal instruction of English in Mexico has always formed part of the educational curriculum. Nevertheless, the economic changes of the globalized era have pushed the Mexican government to place greater emphasis on its instruction over the past decades. This can be appreciated in the administrations of the last two presidents of Mexico, Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón, and the administration of the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto. English has been given priority over other foreign languages. The government provides adequate financial support to foreign language teaching policy through the Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP). Schools and institutions of higher education have taken the teaching/learning of English into their programs, seeing to it that they have the funding and the resources necessary to help people have access to English language instruction. Furthermore, the government has increased the funding for the creation of new programs to prepare teachers in the field. Indeed, in the last decade there has been an increase in the number of TESOL programs (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in many universities, public and private, all over the country. (Planes de Estudios de Licenciaturas, 2011).

2.4 Social Makeup of Mexico and Guanajuato State

In the last section in this chapter I provide an overview of the social makeup of Mexico as a country, the State of Guanajuato, and the city of Guanajuato. My intention is to highlight the impact that the economic factors mentioned above have in its social configuration.

Differently from Europe, where the intense flow of people crossing national and cultural boundaries has given rise to the formation of societies that could be considered multicultural, Mexico may be seen as largely monocultural in character. Kramsch (1998) defines multicultural as ‘political term used to characterize a society composed of people from different cultures [...]’ (p. 129). This definition draws attention to the most commonly use of the concept of ‘culture’. This term more often than not, is used as a synonym of nation with well-delineated geographical boundaries.³ Thus, multiculturalism in this sense is understood in terms of cultural diversity as a result of the intermingling of people from different nations. A brief comparison of Mexico with the United Kingdom drawn from official statistics will serve to exemplify the contrast between multicultural and monocultural.

In the UK, with a population of 62.641,000, 300 different languages are spoken in London alone (Crystal, 2002). The Office for National Statistics in their 2011 census shows the population in the UK based on broad ethnic group categories: White –British, Irish; Mixed –White and Black Caribbean; Asian or Asian British –Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi; Black or Black British –Black Caribbean, Black African; Chinese or other ethnic groups. In 2010 there were 7.0 million foreign-born residents in the UK, corresponding to 11.3 *per cent* of the total population. In religion, the three most representative groups include: Christian 60 *per cent*, Muslim less than 10 *per cent*, Hindu less than 5 *per cent* and 28 *per cent* no religion (www.statistics.gov.uk Accessed 08/03/2013). Though these statistics speak for themselves, multiculturalism can certainly be observed, felt and heard through the many different languages spoken, the appearance and

³ As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, defining ‘culture’ is very complex process that invokes many different concepts and uses.

dress of some cultural groups, the fashions followed, and artistic and other cultural manifestations.

On the contrary, Mexico is a country with a population of 112.3 million people according to the National Census in 2010 (<http://mim.promexico.gob.mx>, accessed 16/10/2012). According to the INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics), the number of foreign people living in Mexico is only 492,617, from 28 different countries. The four Mexican states with the highest concentration of foreign population are: Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán and Mexico City. The three largest minority groups are: US nationals, 69.7 *per cent*, Guatemalans, 4.8 *per cent* and European Spanish, 4.2 *per cent*. Mexico is a country where 95 *per cent* of the population is Catholic (<http://www.inegi.org.mx>, accessed 10/10/2012).

These figures indicate much less cultural diversity in terms of the foreign/international population in Mexico compared to that of the UK. By extension, the city of Guanajuato cannot be considered a multicultural city. However, the establishment of the international companies mentioned above and the steady stream of international tourism lends the city of Guanajuato an international flair. There is no considerable population of indigenous persons seeking to preserve their languages and traditions as is the case of the States of Oaxaca, Chiapas or Yucatan. Indeed, the largest non-Spanish-speaking enclave is the community of retired persons from the United States in the city of San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, who in 2000 made up approximately five *per cent* of a population of 140,000 (De Gast, 2000).

The University of Guanajuato is a state-funded organization, whose students come from families with median economic resources. The student population may be viewed as relatively homogeneous in social and economic terms—several private universities such as the Universidad de la Salle, the Tecnológico de Monterrey and the Universidad Iberoamericana serve the educational needs of families with superior economic resources. Only a small number of students continue in postgraduate programs, while the greater

number of leavers find their way into the growing formal economy of the State, although overall job prospects have been affected by the ongoing economic recession in North America as a whole.

2.5 Summary of this Chapter

As seen in this chapter, the themes of globalization, education, politics and technology are interrelated to one another. In the present scenario, with the current economic developments and the emergence of multinational organizations operating at a global scale, the desire for commercial and technological contact have led the Mexican government to favor and prioritize English language instruction in the educational system. The global status of English as a functional tool for business and communication is well recognized in the country. Thus, with the advent of globalization, whether at an intra-national or an international level, the goal of English instruction is to provide individuals with the resources that would enable them to communicate and to cope with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. As a result of the blending together of people from different backgrounds due to the phenomenon of globalization, English emerges and acquires significance as a contact language.

Chapter 3: The Construction, Processes and Practices of ‘Culture’

In order to provide a background to the main theme of the thesis, that is, how individuals construct the concept of ‘culture’, I turn now to a discussion of how issues relating to this theme are presented in the literature. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I set out to investigate the *whats* and *hows* involved in the process of making sense of ‘culture’. This review of literature proposes to identify how various scholars have interpreted the nature of constructions of ‘culture’. I place special emphasis on the literature surrounding the affective aspect of ‘culture’, as affective issues appear to have an impact on the ability of individuals to relativize their own ‘culture’, and by extension, their ability to recognize different ways of viewing the world. The cosmopolitan orientations of *relativization*, *recognition* and *transformation* are put forward; however, special emphasis is placed on the issue of relativization. This analysis of literature provides a synthesis of the academic arguments outlining the implications that the ability—or lack of it—to relativize one’s own worldviews can have on the construction of ‘culture’ and persons. Success in the ability to relativize is highlighted in the various branches of the literature—this includes language education, and more specifically, the field of intercultural communication within language education. This discussion proposes the view that success in the experiencing of Otherness depends upon the ability to relativize. Multiculturalism as a concept offers the argument that the ability to relativize one’s views can lead to better acceptance of and adaptation to new cultural environments. Applied psychology, or cross-cultural psychology, furnishes research on the mental and emotional state (positive or negative) of those facing intercultural learning challenges. The fields of sociology and the body of cosmopolitan theory offer debates regarding the challenges facing individuals when intermingling with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Cosmopolitan theory argues that when individuals are able to relativize their worldviews, learning from the Other can be achieved. I found that all of these various branches of literature were relevant to my research, and will therefore be set forth in this Chapter.

The literature review is framed in five large sections: The first refers to English language teaching (ELT); special attention is given to the role of cultural instruction in English as an international language (EIL). My intention is to show the impact that ELT philosophy has on the ELT practitioner when attempting to approach ‘culture’ in the classroom. Here, the role of the foreign language and the impact of its ‘culture’ on individuals’ lives is delineated—the affective aspects of ‘culture’ are seen to have an influence on how teachers and students deal with this concept. The second section is a brief discussion of the issues surrounding the ambivalent concept of ‘culture’. This section is included in order to highlight the fluidity of the concept of ‘culture’—this fluidity and ambivalence may be seen particularly in the participants’ discourses viewed in the findings chapters. The third section discusses the social construction of ‘culture’, cultural differences, as well as the issue of cultural practices. These matters are discussed in order to understand how ‘culture’ is acquired and how primary social knowledge figures in the construction of new social knowledge. This discussion provides the basis for understanding the challenges facing teachers and students in negotiating their worldviews when being confronted with cultural differences. The fourth section provides an analysis of the issues surrounding the process of intercultural learning. Intercultural learning is viewed as a dialogic process that involves critical reflexivity on the worldviews of the Self and the Other—this reflexivity is a key component conducive to the relativization of first social knowledge. The process of ‘unlearning’ or suspending first social knowledge in order to acquire new knowledge and skills is a struggle that visibly took place for the participants during the course of this investigation. As relativization is one of the important themes in this thesis, it is relevant to discover how this theme is treated in the theoretical literature. This section also includes an analysis of the cosmopolitan tradition, which is likewise extremely significant to this thesis. Whereas relativization is emphasized in the intercultural tradition, the cosmopolitan tradition foresees recognition and acceptance of other ways of doing, leading in this way to the possibility of Self and societal transformation. The fifth and final section explores the issue of stereotypes and Othering. This section discusses the impact that public discourses have on the construction of the Other. The literature of stereotypes and Othering provided a theoretical frame for understanding how the participants’ discourses are influenced by

essentializing factors—the ability to relativize was once again seen as an important element in the avoidance of essentializing tendencies.

3.1 The Construal of ‘Culture’ in ELT

In order to provide a background to the main theme of this thesis, this section looks at some of the key concepts delineating the interconnection between ‘culture’ and the teaching of English as an international language for communication. Indeed, the debates in ELT which have led to the questioning of the teaching of English and its attendant ‘culture’ as a model to imitate are worth discussing, given the international status of the language. The theory behind the potential teaching of ‘culture’ is important, because it forms part of teachers’ schematic knowledge of their profession. How ‘culture’ is viewed in ELT can play a major role in shaping teachers’ construction of ‘culture’.

3.1.1 Language as a Social Phenomenon

Hinkel (2005) considers the foundational works of Hymes and Gumperz, which view language as a social rather than a linguistic phenomenon, to have been a major contribution to ELT at the time of their publication. Ethnographic studies of speech view language as an interactional social practice, including ‘the individual’s ability to use the language appropriately in various socio-cultural contexts’ (Hinkel, 2005, p. 131). The work of Gumperz focuses on the meaning of linguistic structures as used by speakers in various interactional contexts. Thus, the socio-cultural parameters of interaction may be said to determine the syntactic construction and other aspects of speech.

The work of Austin and Searle in the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to the speech act theory, which as Hinkel highlights, ‘today serves as a foundation for the study of pragmatics in interaction and speech act behaviors’ (ibid.). Kasper defines pragmatics as a discipline concerned with the way people use language in social interaction: ‘the choices they make, the constraints they encounter [...] and the effect their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication’ (1997, p. 1). Leech (1983, p. 11) recognizes

two elements of pragmatics, pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources which a given language provides for various speech acts, while sociopragmatics deals with appropriate linguistic behaviour, or social conventions that depend on a given context.

These theories certainly serve to highlight that language and ‘culture’ cannot be separated entirely, and as Strevens (1992) remarks, in order to understand the way individuals use language, language teaching/learning should include not only linguistic, but also social learning. Thus, Strevens (ibid.) argues for the need to enhance understanding and sensitivity towards differences in social use of language across ‘cultures’.

Nevertheless, Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 216) argues that, although such social theories of interaction can be illuminating, they come from Western theorists; thus, he argues, ‘it is limited and can be limiting’. Kumaravadivelu writes:

‘It is limited because they treated European patterns of social and corporate communication styles as the norms against which those of other cultures are studied, analyzed, described, and judged. Consequently, interculturalists seldom recognized that certain communication behavioral patterns of other [...] cultures may not be satisfactorily explained by Western theories’.

For Kumaravadivelu ‘intercultural communication is beset by Eurocentrism’ (ibid). This can be perceived particularly in the approach to the teaching of pragmatics, which was viewed from the native speakers’ cultural perspective. This type of approach has been questioned by several authors (Brutt–Griffler, 2002; Brutt–Griffler and Samimy, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Kramsch, 1998c; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Phillipson, 1992a, 1992b; Saraceni, 2009 and Widdowson, 1992, 2003; among many others. So then, how to greet people in English, what is considered polite, or what is the most appropriate form of behaviour in a conversation were all taught from the ‘native speaker’ perspective without much consideration being given to the different characteristics of English learners’ first language and ‘culture’ (Phillipson, 1992a; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999). Although the work of theorists in the area of pragmatics was a major contribution to ELT, in that

attention was brought to sociocultural aspects of language, further reassessment of English as an international language for communication was felt to be necessary; the teaching of the social norms of the Anglophone countries in international classrooms continued to be questioned.

3.1.2 The Role of 'Culture' in English as a Foreign Language

McKay (2002, 2003a, 2003b) views the implications of the teaching/learning of EIL from three perspectives 1. The character of its users, 2. The changes that have accompanied the spread of English and 3. The relationship between culture and the international language English. These can be analysed by looking at the status of English, according to what linguist Kachru (1992, p. 356) denominates as the three concentric circles. These circles represent the way in which the language has been acquired and how it is used— whether English is taught as a second language or foreign language should dictate the emphasis placed on the issue of culture within the teacher's approach. The spread of English around the world was represented by the linguist Kachru (ibid.) in what he denominates the three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.⁴ Recent discussions acknowledge the permeability of these circles since Kachru first presented them; nevertheless, they present a useful distinction that is still relevant. In Mexico, for example, English does not have legal recognition in government or courts of law, as is the case of countries in the Outer Circle.

It has been argued that the model of instruction in the Expanding Circle environment is that of English native language competence, with a native accent as a model to imitate and achieve (McKay, 2002; Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2007

⁴ The Inner Circle refers to the traditional bases of English where it is the primary language of the country or English as a Native Language (ENL, hereafter). This includes the USA, the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle refers to settings where the language plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting. Examples of this include the ex-colonial countries such as Singapore, India, Malawi and over fifty other countries (Crystal, 2004). English has an official status, as it is used as a medium of communication in such domains as government, courts of law, administration, the media and the educational systems of these countries. In these countries, the status of English is that of a Second Language (ESL). The Expanding-Circle is composed of those nations that recognize the importance of English; it is widely studied as a foreign language in these countries. This includes countries such as Japan, Greece, Italy or Mexico. In the Expanding Circle the status of English is English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

among others). Moreover, developing second language (hereafter L2) linguistic competence has also meant developing L2 cultural competence (hereafter C2). Nonetheless, many linguists in the ELT field such as Brutt–Griffler, 2002; Brutt–Griffler and Samimy, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Kramsch, 1998c; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Phillipson, 1992a, 1992b; Saraceni, 2009 and Widdowson, 1992, 2003; among many others, have urged a paradigm shift away from the long-held belief that Inner-Center cultural knowledge should be inherent in the spread of English in Periphery countries.⁵ In Phillipson’s view (1992a, pp. 47–48),

The legitimation of English linguistic imperialism makes use of two main mechanisms in relation to educational language planning, one in respect to language and culture (Anglocentricity), and the other in respect to pedagogy (professionalism). [...] Anglocentricity takes the forms and functions of English, and the promise of what English represents or can lead to, as the norm by which all language activity or use should be measured. It simultaneously devalues other languages, either explicitly or implicitly.

Phillipson describes linguistic imperialism as a primary component of social imperialism which ‘relates to the transmission of the norms and behavior of a model social structure, and these are embedded in language’ (ibid. pp. 53–54). Thus, with English comes the adoption of its social norms. Phillipson questions the idea of British social norms having any currency at a global level; he further questions the authority of ‘experts’ from the core English-speaking countries exerting influence in the local sphere. This author argues that this occurs wherever a socializing influence is exerted by what he defines as inter-actors (1992a, p. 53). This would include English language teachers working abroad and applied linguists who disseminate their ideas in books or journals, Center-designed textbooks and other media (Canagarajah, 1999; Gray, 2000, 2002; Prodromou, 1988, 2006). Phillipson (1992a) and Pennycook (1994) argue that this raises a number of concerns associated with linguistic and cultural imperialism. These authors maintain that the export of English often

⁵ The Center and Periphery or West and Non-West are concepts used to describe a division in the disparity of power that operates in the world (Phillipson, 1992; Said, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Pennycook, 2004). The dominant Center represents the powerful western countries and interests; whereas the dominated Peripheries represent underdeveloped countries (Phillipson, 1992, p. 53).

goes hand in hand with cultural elements, such as consumerist values, religious beliefs, scientific approaches, bodies of research knowledge and popular culture, and thus can lead to cultural domination of the local sphere by countries 'exporting' English, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Phillipson (1992a) has argued that the social construct that elevates NS's cultural contexts at the expense of local identities would seem to perpetuate the role of ELT as an instrument of cultural and linguistic imperialism.

The empirical data showed that foreign English teachers sometimes attempted to change students' behaviour to conform to 'English' social norms of address. This attitude could be said to have a hint of 'cultural imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992), indeed, there are many 'native' ELT teachers, who begin to teach 'their' language based on the mere fact that they know the language and its 'culture'. This suggests that 'native' English teachers, perhaps driven by their personal trajectories and affective impulses, attempt to impose 'their' social norms and 'culture' in the ELT classroom. Indeed, except for one of the four foreign teacher participants in this investigation who had obtained a MA TESOL degree in 2011, all have an educational background in other fields of studies (see Appendix III). Thus, the approach of some 'native' teachers to English language instruction might be said to be guided by schematic knowledge obtained from the process of primary socialization. As will be seen in Chapter 5, foreign language teachers were seen to struggle to disassociate the strong affective element underlying their concepts of 'correct English' from the overall goal of teaching English as a foreign language (see 3.1.3 below). However, what teachers do in the classroom cannot be dissociated from their personal trajectories; teachers inevitably bring these with them into the classroom.

The discussion put forward by Phillipson, Pennycook and Canagarajah in the 1990s served to raise awareness of a possible underlying ideology within ELT, and indeed their debate has led to changes in the ELT curriculum, resulting in a broader vision of English as an instrument for international communication, or EIL. Indeed, the current expectations and demands of English language teaching/learning have shifted away from acceptance of notions elevating the 'native' speaker's cultural contexts at the expense of local identities, and have moved towards a more diverse view of ELT. When we consider that the

exchange of people and culture is increasing every day, and that the role of English is that of a lingua franca⁶, or common language (Phillipson, 1992a), learned for the purpose of international communication, the English language teaching curriculum should focus on preparing students to better cope in a global village where they will be engaged in communication with people from different cultural groups (Crystal, 2003, 2004).

3.1.3 English as an International Language

The unprecedented growth of English is what characterizes it and gives it the status of an international language (EIL). Nevertheless, McKay (2002, p. 1) writes that, ‘to be considered an international language, a language cannot be linked to any one country or culture; rather it must belong to those who use it’. Authors Braine (1999); Brutt-Griffler (2002), Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999), Jenkins (2000, 2003, 2006, 2007), Kirkpatrick (2006, 2007), Kramsch (1993, 1998a), Llurda (2005), Modiano (2005), Valdes (2001), Widdowson (2003) among many others, argue that language users do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers, nor adopt the values, beliefs and behavior of any English native speaking community. Kramsch (1998b), Byram (1989), Modiano (2005) and Valdes (2001) adhere to the notion that the teaching of language and culture requires a keen respect for the learner’s cultural orientation; the learner should not be seen as a prospective member requesting acceptance/admittance to English-speaking culture. Modiano argues that students should be encouraged ‘to position themselves as members of their own culture who understand their own and other cultural positioning, and not as prospective members requesting acceptance/admittance of a foreign group of L1 speakers’ (2005, p. 31). The focus then should be on the student’s cultural distinctiveness and in the negotiation of the target language and culture. Valdes (2001, x) warns that ‘adjusting a person to a culture has connotations of cultural chauvinism’ or as Byram expressed, ‘it would be misguided to teach as if learners can acquire foreign cultural concepts, values and behavior, as if they were a *tabula rasa*’ (1989, p. 10). Kramsch argues that:

⁶ There exist in the ELT literature different labels to refer to English, given its unprecedented spread. Some of them are: English as an international language (EIL), McKay (2002); English as a global language (EGL), Crystal (2004); or English as a *lingua franca* (ELF), Phillipson, (1992); Jenkins (2007).

‘our purpose in teaching culture through language is not to make our students into little French or little Germans, but in making them understand why the speakers of two different languages act and react the way they do, whether in fictional texts or in social encounters, and what the consequences of these insights may mean for the learner’ (1998b, p. 27).

Many scholars challenge native speaker norms in their descriptions of English as an international language. Hence, these norms are also challenged in English as a foreign language, and by extension the methodologies that are dominated by Anglo-American cultural perspectives. Alptekin writes:

‘[...] the conventional model of communicative competence, with its strict adherence to native speaker norms within the target language culture, would appear to be invalid in accounting for learning and using an international language in cross-cultural settings’ (2002, p. 63)

In this author’s view, within the conventional approach the non-native English speaker teachers are expected to apply the linguistic, pragmatic and cultural features of the native speaker, while their own (and their students’) language and culture are peripheralized (see also Alptekin and Alptekin, 1984).

McKay and Strevens leaned heavily on the work of Smith, who in 1976 first made reference to what was then a new concept, ‘international’ English, using the title of his article English as an International Auxiliary Language (EIAL). McKay citing Smith (2002, pp. 11–12; 2003a, p. 140) highlights three features in reference to the relationship of an international language and culture: (1.) its learners do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language; (2.) the ownership of an international language becomes ‘de-nationalized’; and (3.) the educational goal of learning is to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture to others. Strevens citing Smith (1992, p. 41) writes:

‘It is the widespread use of English which makes it an international language. This does not mean, however, that soon everyone everywhere will be speaking English, wearing jeans and dancing to a disco beat. The spread of English is not a homogenizing factor which causes cultural differences to disappear, but the use of English offers a medium to

express and explain these differences. There is no desire among members of the world community when using English to become more like native speakers in their life style. Native speakers must realize that there are many valid varieties of English and that non-native speakers need not sound or act like Americans, the British, or any other group of native speakers in order to be effective users. English is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade, and tourism. Native speakers need as much help as non-natives when using English to interact internationally. There is no room for linguistic chauvinism?

Thus, English in the Expanding Circle countries use EIL to communicate across borders. English should be taught without regard to specific issues concerning the culture of any country from the Inner Circle. The culture of English language teachers may be considered just another culture students could learn about. In this respect, Widdowson (2003) observes that languages are shaped by their use, and that the linguistic process of language variety is already under way. However, this author argues, it needs to be legitimized. Widdowson clearly views the increasing use of EIL in his argument of language distribution and language spread; the author states:

‘Distribution denies spread. So you can think of English as an adopted international language, and then you will conceive of it as a stabilized and standardized code leased out on a global scale, and controlled by the inventors, not entirely unlike the franchise for Pizza Hut and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Distribution of essentially the same produce for customers worldwide: English the lingua franca, the franchise language. There are no doubt people who think in these conveniently commercial terms, and if English as an international language were indeed like this, there would be cause for concern. But it is not. It spreads, and as it does it gets adapted as the virtual language gets actualized in diverse ways, becomes subject to local constraints and controls’ (ibid. pp. 50–51).

However, in countries where English is being used as a common language for people from diverse linguistic backgrounds to communicate with one another, the issue of intelligibility has arisen. According to Jenkins (2000, 2003), with the increase in number of first language (L1) groups who speak EIL, the range of differences among their ‘Englishes’ has also inevitably increased. The demands of mutual intelligibility indicate a need to decrease accent differences among speakers from different L1 backgrounds. This is not to imply that L2 learners should be encouraged to imitate a NS accent. Jenkins argues that in the case of

EIL ‘there is a strong justification for not conforming to the accent (or even lexicogrammar) of a native-speaker group: the fact that the EIL community is by definition international rather than associated with any one national speech community’ (2003, pp. 36–37). However, issues of intelligibility are not limited to L1/L2 transfer, but also spill over to C1/C2 transfer.

There is even a suggestion that some of the territories of the Expanding Circle may be bending English to suit their purposes. Local usages are emerging, and achieving standard status within a region. For example, the expression ‘Welcome in Egypt’ is now established among Egyptian speakers of English of all educational backgrounds and social classes. Indeed, Nelson (1992, p. 329) writes that ‘the culture in which English is used determines its applicability and its innovations at all linguistic levels’. Therefore, it is not unusual that the speaker’s linguistic and cultural background will influence their variety of English. As Kirkpatrick writes, ‘these are mirrored in the schemas they use’ (2007, p. 25). This author refers to the way language is used in real situations as cultural conventions or schemas. For example, in certain Asian cultures it is normal to greet people by asking the equivalent of ‘Where are you going?’ or ‘Have you eaten?’. In a Mexican context, a common way to greet people is to call them by their professional title, thus, a common expression to greet an English teacher might be ‘hello teacher’, or when speaking to other persons, ‘goodbye architect’, ‘good morning engineer’, and so forth. These utterances, however, could create confusion for a listener who might be unfamiliar with this culturally-specific form of language use, whether native or non-native speakers (see also Jenkins, 2003; Seidlhofer and Jenkins, 2003).

However, Crystal (2003, pp. 186–187) argues that people’s cooperation and attitude will lead interactants to switch and accommodate other speakers. He observes that even native speakers reduce, or omit all together, the use of idiomatic expressions; and in terms of spoken interaction, they reduce their speed. In effect, Seidlhofer’s (2006, pp. 42–44) study of non-native speakers interactions at the University of Vienna, the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) evidences that EFL interactants draw on their awareness of the intercultural and bi- or multi-lingual nature of the communication they are

engaged in, and they employ very effective strategies in order to successfully communicate across cultures. Seidlhofer citing Bamgbose reminds us that ‘the point is often missed that, it is people, not language codes, that understand one another’ (ibid. p. 44). In Crystal’s (2003) view, little would change in the future of national Englishes. People would still have their dialects for use within their own country, but when they need to communicate with people from other countries they would slip into a new form of English, World Spoken Standard English (WSSE) (see also Jenkins 2003, 2007). Scholars such as Crystal and Seidlhofer argue that individuals are social beings who are capable in any case of working out meanings—these authors’ discussions resonate with those of cosmopolitan theorists such as Delanty (2009) who speaks of capacities, Appiah (2005) and Hansen (2011), of abilities, and Holliday (2013), of skills and strategies.

3.1.4 Summary of this Section

In this section I have attempted to point out the complex and contentious nature of the arguments surrounding the teaching of English as an international language. 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. As has been suggested, cultural transfer might not only take place at the level of linguistic, phonological or syntactical features, but also in socio-linguistic conventions. One major problem with the approach to ‘culture’ in relation to the teaching of EIL was discussed: it cannot be assumed that the ‘culture’ of any one particular country from the ‘Inner Circle’ (Kachru, 1992) should be a model to imitate. On the contrary, the learner should be allowed to project their cultural identity in and through English (Modiano, 2005).

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.⁷ Influenced by ELT beliefs, certain teachers constructed these behaviors as ‘un-English’ and tried to banish them from the classroom.

Canagarajah, Kumaravadivelu, Pennycook and Phillipson 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. This political dynamic (an example of Holliday’s concept of the influence of global positioning, Section 3.3) is discussed in Chapter 6.

For the teacher participants in this investigation the philosophical aspect of the profession may have an impact on the way that they perceive and construct both the foreign and local ‘culture’. As discussed, the personal trajectory of each ELT actor determines to some extent the approach to cultural instruction. Teachers are not isolated entities, but bring with them their cultural resources, and act according to the ideas which they themselves have about the world.

The way in which ‘culture’ is presented in the ELT literature adds to the complexities in dealing with this concept. In the next section, the ambivalent nature of the construction of ‘culture’ within the ELT literature will be discussed.

⁷ For the distinction between formal *usted* and informal *tú* see Chapter 7.

3.2 The Ambivalence of ‘Culture’

Indeed, the term ‘ambivalent’ describes the nature of the ELT literature dealing with ‘culture’—some of the varied and complex interpretations of ‘culture’ present in the literature will be viewed in this section. 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 literature seeks to provide an overview of many different viewpoints in order to better capture the complex nature of the subject.

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, p. 23) argues that culture is a dynamic process of ‘the active construction of meaning’ therefore it carries the qualities of a verb. This conceptualization has important implications, because as Scollon *et al.* (2012, p. 5) 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’. These authors highlight this view by describing some of the many interpretations that people attach to culture (*ibid.* p. 3).

- A thing that you have, like courage or intelligence.
- Something that people live inside of like a country or region or a building.
- A set of beliefs or values or mental patterns that people in a particular group share.
- A set of rules that people follow which they can either conform to or break.
- A set of largely unconscious habits that govern people’s behavior without them fully realizing it.
- Something that is rather grand, something one finds in the halls of museums and between the covers of old books.

- Something that is to be found in the everyday lives of everyday people.
- Something that some cherish as the thing that holds us together, and others who deride it as the thing that drives us apart.

Scollon et al. (ibid. p. 2) suggest that it is ‘best to think of culture not as one thing or another, not as a thing at all, but rather as a heuristic.’ Heuristics, then, provide a dynamic process for the discovery of culture; in fact this word comes from the Greek word meaning ‘to find’ or ‘to discover’. 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’ and ‘social norms’, (Extracts 2–5). They also used it to mean ‘habits’ (Extract 17 and 29), ‘society’ (Extract 26) or ‘values’ (Extract 61).

3.2.1 What ‘Culture’ is Not: Regularity vs. Variability

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 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’ (2007, 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.

1. ‘[...] the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different from each individual, communicated from one generation to the next’ (Matsumoto 1996, p. 16).

2. '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).
3. 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).
4. '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).
5. 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).

There are some important characteristics these scholars draw attention to: 'culture' is expressed through consistencies of form which are shared by a society or group of people. 'Culture' affects individuals' behavior and interpretations of behavior. Although 'culture' is associated with social groups, individuals within a group do not necessarily share the same characteristics, a view which acknowledges the diversity within any group of people.

Indeed, several other 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, 2007),

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. 46) elaborate on this issue, noting that:

- regularities of culture are manifested in numerous different but interrelated ways;
- these regularities go hand in hand with variability;
- culture is associated with infinite types of social groups that can vary in size and complexity;
- people are simultaneously members of many different cultural groups.

Based on these arguments, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (*ibid.* p. 34) suggest that when studying culture ‘it is important to incorporate *all* forms of regularity that are characteristic of a given cultural group’. In their view, ‘the culture of a given group is best seen as a complex web of different types of regularities’ (*ibid.* p. 35). Spencer-Oatey and Franklin highlight three points for consideration in regard to regularities within a group: first, social groups may not necessarily show regularities in all of the various facets possible, second that there is a contextual basis to the manifestation of regularities, and lastly that personalized style of interaction and variation can occur freely, interrupting regularities.

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. Generalizations which are thought of as characteristic of a ‘culture’ can run the risk of becoming stereotypes. This will be discussed in Section 3.5 which is concerned with the literature on stereotyping, Othering and culturism.

Another aspect that cannot be ignored is the contradictions in human conduct. Hansen (2011, pp. 52–53), basing his views on those of the French essayist Montaigne (1533–1592), argues that ‘the variability within and between persons is conjoined with an inconstancy in human conduct that would be startling to us were it not so ubiquitous’.

Hansen cites Montaigne at length:

‘Every sort of contradiction can be found in me, depending upon some twist or attribute: timid, insolent; chaste, lecherous; talkative, taciturn; tough, sickly; clever, dull; brooding, affable; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant; generous, miserly and then prodigal—I can see something of all that in myself, depending on how I gyrate; and anyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself and in his very judgement this whirring about and this discordancy. There is nothing I can say about myself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture’ (2011, pp. 52–53)

According to Hansen, the individual inconstancy Montaigne finds in himself is characteristic of cultures as well of individuals. Furthermore, the author asserts, these dynamics cannot be said to follow a specific pattern, nor can they be said to have a starting

or ending point. Individuals take different stances depending on the topic at hand, situational context, their mood, and many other interior and exterior factors. The inconsistencies found in the way individuals respond to life encounters are part of the complexity of the human being.

3.2.2 Summary of this Section

The dichotomy between individual behavior and group characteristics is noted in all of the definitions given by the authors mentioned above. Indeed, definitions of ‘culture’ such as those of Matsumoto, 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 thesis, as he derives constructions of ‘culture’ from situational processes. As will be seen in Chapter 7, 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 (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.

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.

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' in Berger and Luckmann's (1991) sense. 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 described by Berger and Luckmann. 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.

3.3 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.

3.3.1 Primary and Secondary Socialization

The central premise of *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1991) is that the world is socially constructed by the social practices of individuals. Through interacting, individuals create representations of each other's actions. These concepts become 'habitualized' (ibid. p. 70) into common roles played by the social actors. When these roles are made available to other members of society, the reciprocal interactions become 'institutionalized' (ibid. p. 72). In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded into society, according to the authors. Social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed; thus, what one considers to be 'reality' in one society may not be construed as such in another.

According to the authors, socialization is a two-step introduction of the individual into the social structure. 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; it is learned through training and specific rituals. Contrary to primary socialization, it is not emotionally charged. Primary socialization is much less flexible than secondary socialization, or as Berger and Luckmann state, 'the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly ingrained in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary

socializations' (ibid. p. 129). These authors write that, '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). They note that a large part of the social stock of knowledge consists of 'recipes' for the mastery of 'routine problems' (ibid. p. 57). So long as this knowledge works satisfactorily, 'the individual is generally ready to suspend doubts about it' (ibid. p. 58); it becomes unconscious knowledge. One of the most important advantages of this process is that each member of society can predict the other's actions, 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; Doyé, 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. Berger and Luckmann's concept of social construction of knowledge was not destined for the intercultural sphere—it did not fit easily with descriptions of fluidity and hybridity in contemporary societies (Byram, 2008). Indeed, Berger and Luckmann's analysis was one of a static monocultural society, where mobility takes place from one social stratum to another. However, the authors listed above found Berger and Luckmann's theories adaptable to interaction and mobility across cultures.

Scollon et al. observe that the patterns of social behavior 'are given a firm cast during the period of primary socialization' (2012, 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'⁸ (p. 164). In his examination of the 'cultural schema theory', Nishida speaks of the 'schemas' conforming social knowledge. This scholar (2005, p. 402) defines cultural schemas as:

'[...] generalized collections of knowledge that we store in memory through experiences in our own culture. Cultural schemas contain general information about familiar situations and behavioral rules as well as information about ourselves and people around us. Cultural schemas also contain knowledge about facts we have been taught in school or strategies for problem solving, and emotional or affective experiences that are often found in our culture. These cultural schemas are linked together into related systems constructing a complex cognitive structure that underlies our behaviour'.

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 of one's own Primary Social Interaction (PSI) schemas into those of the host culture and the acquisition of new PSI schemas in the host-culture environment' (*ibid.* p. 408).⁹

Indeed, Kim (2005, pp. 382–383) adds to the discussion by arguing that 'entering a new culture is like starting an enculturation process all over again'. 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

⁸ Scollon *et al.* define discourse systems as 'any group that has particular ways of thinking, treating other people, communicating and learning can be said to be participating in a particular discourse system. Discourse systems can be associated with very large groups of people [...] or rather small groups of people like families or affinity groups' (2012, p. 9).

⁹ Nishida (*ibid.* pp. 405–406) 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.

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; for saying that one doesn’t want to do something; for saying bad things about people and for saying good things about people; for telling people that one thinks the same as they do, or that one doesn’t think the same, and so on’ (ibid. 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’ (1993, 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:

- 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;
- Primary socialization provides the social skills necessary to construct and negotiate new social knowledge;
- It works at a subconscious level; thus, it is difficult to explain or grasp in the case of cross-cultural encounters;
- It is emotionally charged, thus it can be difficult to negotiate in cross-cultural encounters;
- 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 offering/refusing food, complaining and 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 sees this as the utilization of previous social knowledge, or as he puts it, ‘culture on the go’ (2013, p. 3).

Holliday (2013) 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. He lists these sources of knowledge as being constituted from cultural resources, the above-mentioned global positioning and politics, and personal trajectories, all of which could be viewed as components of both primary and secondary socialization in Berger and Luckmann’s sense. The term ‘cultural resources’ makes reference to the resources derived from the social and political framework of the society where one grows up. Holliday

identifies these resources with national culture—it is what the individuals living in it might refer to as ‘our culture’. In the domain of cultural resources Holliday includes: nation, religion, language, education and form of government; he also includes economy and media in this domain. As Holliday observes, these national/cultural elements differ from country to country, and have an impact on the ways of being of people. However, this scholar observes that, although cultural resources are drawn upon, they do not mark all limits of doing and thinking.

For Holliday, global positioning and politics, or the juxtaposition of oneself and one’s society in relation to that of the Other, is a crucial matter. This positioning affects all aspects of intercultural relationships, because individuals are ‘inscribed by long-standing constructions’ which condition their views (ibid., p. 2). An example of this is how people in the West view non-Western countries and how people outside the West view the West. For Holliday,

‘almost everything intercultural is underpinned by this positioning and politics, which is very hard to see around because of the degree to which are all inscribed by long-standing constructions of who we are in relationship to others—Self and Other—in our histories, education, institutions, upbringing and media representations, and that these are rooted profoundly in a world which is not politically or economically equal’ (ibid).

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’. Holliday’s insistence on the importance of global positioning and politics could in some ways be contended; all individuals are not motivated to the same extent by their national background. However, these factors were seen in some aspects in the empirical data to have impact upon how Mexicans perceive and construct the American Other.

3.3.2 Cultural Differences

The discussion of the imprinting of social knowledge opens the door to the analysis of the issue of cultural differences, and by extension, the analysis of cultural practices. It should be mentioned at the outset that individuals' constructions of 'culture' are at issue in this investigation rather than cultural practices per se. The participants in this investigation were seen to construct 'culture' in terms of cultural differences. Cultural difference has generated a large body of literature analyzing the difficulty of understanding the Other and his/her practices. Cultural difference 'refers to ways in which products of meanings of a cultural community differ in systematic ways from those of another' (Shaules, 2007, p. 240). I could begin by citing Appiah (2006, p. 16) who quotes a Caucasian saying taken from Tolstoy's short novel *Hadji Murat*: 'A dog asked a donkey to eat with him and gave him meat, the donkey asked the dog and gave him hay: they both went hungry [...] Every people find its own ways good'.

Indeed, the imprint made by primary social knowledge makes understanding the Other's cultural practices difficult. Several scholars, Appiah (2005, 2006), Byram (2008), Hansen (2011), Holliday (2013), Kim (2001, 2005), Kramsch (1998a), Kumaravadivelu (2008), Kubota (1999), Nishida (2005), Scollon et al. (2012), Weaver (1993) and Wierzbicka (1998) among others, argue that the individual's worldview is greatly influenced by their cultural upbringing. People respond to specific stimuli in their environment and expect others to behave in culturally appropriate ways. The Other is expected to know what these appropriate ways are, and adjust their worldviews to those of the host culture. However, when confronting a new 'culture', individuals must learn a new set of facts, and a new set of meanings. Likewise, they must learn not only 'things', but also 'how things work' (Shaules, 2007, p. 240). The learning of this new set of meanings represents a challenge because individuals are many times not aware of the accustomed mental processes and background values which guide their actions. Consequently, it can be difficult for individuals to explain or grasp in cross-cultural interaction why they act as they do.

As discussed in section 3.3.1, social knowledge functions intuitively, below the level of conscious awareness. Kim 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 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’ (2005, 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). Banks and McGee share the idea that culture is learned and taught outside of awareness. These authors argue that ‘neither the cultural insiders nor the newcomers are aware that certain aspects of their culture exist’ (2004, p. 40). Nonetheless, Shaules 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 (2007, p. 10).

Additionally, Shaules (2007, p. 63) 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’)’. 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. Appiah writes:

‘Values guide our acts, our thoughts, and our feelings. These are our responses to values. Because you see the value of courtesy, you try to understand the conventions of each society that you live in so that you can avoid giving offense. You act as you do because you respond to the values that guide you. And values shape thought and feeling as well. Truth and reason, values you recognize, shape (but, alas, do not determine) your beliefs (2006, pp. 25–26).

To complicate things further, as discussed in section 3.2.1, 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. Moreover, Appiah observes that some values are loaded with moral weight while others are felt to be less weighty. The value implicit in the term ‘politeness’, for example, is usually taken to be less serious than more morally central terms such as ‘cruel’ (ibid., p. 58). Though Appiah questions some ascribed values of right and wrong, his rooted cosmopolitanism is by no means morally neutral; certain principles cut across religious and social boundaries.¹⁰

Appiah (ibid., pp. 66–67) identifies three kinds of disagreements about values: people fail to share a vocabulary of evaluation, or they give different interpretations of the same vocabulary, or they give different weights to the same value. He observes that each of these problems seems more likely to arise if the discussion involves people from different societies. In fact, in the case of outsiders arriving to a new social environment, Gudykunst argues that ‘strangers often evaluate host nationals’ behavior negatively’ (2005, p. 440). From his viewpoint this causes problems in their interaction with the locals and adjustment to the local culture. He adds,

‘respecting host nationals also is necessary to behave in a moral fashion. We need to interact with host nationals on the basis of a ‘presumption of equal worth’. When we respect host nationals we unconsciously assume that host nationals respect us. This leads to low levels of anxiety about interacting with host nationals (ibid.).

For Appiah (2006) and Shaules (2009), disagreements about values can arise at the level of ‘deep culture’, the most deeply imprinted layer. This will be examined in the next section.

¹⁰ Cosmopolitanism has a long tradition and takes many forms. It can be divided in three broad strands for the purpose of illustration into strong and weak forms. They are: moral cosmopolitanism, economic cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism and cultural cosmopolitanism. Political cosmopolitanism focuses on institutions, policies, and laws that transcend national jurisdictions and that are intended to protect human rights and ways of life. Scholars and activists in this line of thinking as well as peace organizations, international agencies ranging from the UN to the International Criminal Court focus on human rights. They work across political and geographic boundaries (Hansen, 2011, p. 10).

3.3.3 Cultural Practices: Deep and Surface Culture

In section 3.2 the ambivalence of ‘culture’ in relation to ELT was the topic of discussion. Approaches to ‘culture’ in ELT follow a variety of patterns of categorization: one classification distinguishes between culture with large ‘C’ and culture with small ‘c’ (Kramersch, 1998a), while other authors distinguish culture as ‘visible’ or ‘invisible’ (Banks and McGee, 2004), ‘covert’ or ‘overt’ (Byram and Fleming, 2002), or ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ (Shaules, 2007). Indeed, Kramersch’s classification of culture with large ‘C’ breaks down into a subset including ‘the four F’s foods, fairs, folklore, statistical facts (1998a, p. 218), while that with small ‘c’ includes values, beliefs and behavior. Whereas culture with large ‘C’ can be discussed in a more or less straightforward fashion, culture with small ‘c’, many linguists argue, is more problematic to pin down, because it is difficult to fully understand the hidden networks of meanings, values and beliefs that guide individuals’ actions or surface behavior.

Shaules 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’ (2007, 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. Shaules draws differences between deep and surface culture:

‘An English visitor to Thailand may experience a profound sense of cultural difference when seeing monks with begging bowls. The visitor hasn’t—strictly speaking—had a Thai experience but an English experience in Thailand. The deep elements of Thai culture are not those that are the most sacred or symbolically important, they are those that are most fundamental and subtle. What seems ‘spiritual’ to our visitor may seem simply an everyday routine to many Thais. Thai communities place an importance on ancestry or family relations that our English visitor will find hard to grasp. The levels of formality in the Thai language may seem impossibly complex and hinge on social distinctions that our visitor is unaccustomed to making. The meaning of simple concepts—family,

responsibility, independence, morality, shame, fun, adulthood, etc. may seem very different when viewed from a Thai perspective' (ibid. p. 12).

This example serves Shaules (ibid. pp. 12–13) to highlight several points:

- The more the visitor participates in the local community, the more his/her perceptions may change. This change occurs when the visitor comes to share more of the locals' worldviews.
- The visitor's understanding may change from that of an outsider observing and interpreting an explicit cultural experience, to that of an insider who shares knowledge of the meanings and interpretations of the local community.
- Any change is largely intuitive, not intellectual. It requires a willingness to suspend the outsider's judgment and try to see the world from a new point of view (adopt/adapt to the worldview of the Other).

According to this scholar, it is through the understanding of the internal logic of the community that the outsider may learn to function within a new cultural framework. For Shaules, 'it is this intuitively felt internal logic, the unspoken assumptions behind a community's behaviour, which constitutes deep culture. 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 behaviour 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, Shaules' theory is problematic in reference to

values, a problem which he fully acknowledges. Individuals are not necessarily aware of the ‘cultural programming’ which informs the values guiding their actions. Nonetheless, I find value in Shaules’ theory as it draws attention to matters deeper than those on the surface. Shaules’ theory avoids the type of simplistic interpretations of ‘culture’ which came up in the course of the investigation.

It may be argued that it can be challenging to accept the Other’s ways of doing and acting to be as valid as one’s own. In Shaules’ view, ethnocentrism rests on the lack of ability to relate to the Other. Indeed, several authors (Delanty, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Shaules, 2007; Byram, 2008, Kramsch, 1998a among others) highlight the importance of relativizing one’s worldviews; this relativizing is performed in order to broaden the individual’s ability to see things from the perspective of the Other (Delanty, 2009). In a similar way, relativizing may be enacted in order to avoid judgmental attitudes. Indeed, Locke cited by Hansen (2011) illuminates differences between relativization and relativism. The former can denote a ‘serious regard for cultural distinctiveness, while the latter simply undermines any meaningful form of judgment including of one’s own roots’ (p. 27). Shaules 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 (2007, p. 248).

The ability to relativize is motivated, as several scholars suggest, by the cognitive or intellectual capacity of the individual for critical reflexivity (Byram, 2008; Kim, 2005; Hansen, 2011; Delanty, 2009). Critical reflexivity can be enacted by providing the opportunities for self-understanding, self-problematization and reflexivity (Delanty, 2009). 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.

3.3.4 Cultural Adaptation and the Issue of Culture Shock

In section 3.3.1 it was discussed that when schemas are challenged in unfamiliar settings, this may become a cause of uncertainty, anxiety or stress for the individual. This impact on the individual, which is sometimes interpreted as ‘culture shock’, is the topic of discussion of this section.

This section draws on literature from multicultural studies (and to some extent literature from the field of psychology) in the analysis of cultural learning/adaptation. In contemporary intercultural or multicultural studies, anthropologists and sociologists have applied various terminologies to the processes studied, including enculturation, acculturation, de-culturation, assimilation, adaptation and integration. Although this thesis does not propose to be a macro study of ‘culture’¹¹, I draw attention to the discussions regarding the processes of ‘enculturation’ and ‘acculturation’, primarily because these theories shed light on the challenges facing individuals in the negotiation of old and new social knowledge. In intercultural learning/adaptation, enculturation refers to the socialization process that children go through as they grow up, while acculturation refers to the process of internalizing the cultural patterns of a new cultural environment (Kim, 2005, p. 382; Scollon *et al.* 2012, p. 162).

In the discussion of her theory ‘Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic’, Kim (2005, p. 383; 2001) 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

¹¹ Studies at this macro level involve the categories of multiculturalism, namely plurality, hybridity or diasporas (Phillips, 2009). These studies have been carried out to better understand the processes of acculturation, de-culturation, assimilation/adaptation and integration of minority groups, and how these groups respond to a new or unfamiliar environment. This is an area which is linked to the teaching of ESL, in cases where English is taught for the purpose of helping individuals integrate into a host environment (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Crystal, 2003). The creation of inclusive societies is another concern of multiculturalism; questions of cultural and social identity generated interest. Studies of this type include the study of social identity—how race, gender, ethnicity, power relations and others affect one’s sense of self and view of the world (Shaules, 2007; Phillips, 2009; Kymlicka, 2007).

forces produce a state of disequilibrium that manifests itself in ‘emotional “lows” of uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety’ (ibid).

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). Figure 3.1 represents Shaules’ diagram demonstrating this dynamic (ibid. p. 147):

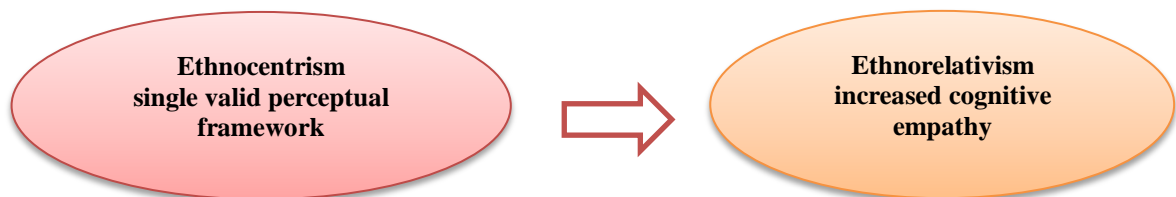


Figure 3.1 Cultural Learning as a Developmental Process

Bennett (1986), DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004), Kim (2005) and Kumaravadivelu (2008) share the belief that ethnocentrism is a built-in part of individuals' perceptual reality and can thus not be avoided completely. These scholars warn that ethnocentrism impedes the ability to see beyond one's cultural reality, making it difficult to acquire new cultural knowledge. The concept of openness is highlighted, because it leads individuals to seek intellectual and/or emotional connection with Others, according to these authors. Kim observes that openness is a personality construct. Kim defines openness as:

‘[...] an internal posture that is receptive to new information (Gendlin, 1962). Openness minimizes resistance and maximizes a willingness to attend to new and changed circumstances, and enables strangers to perceive and interpret various events and situations in the new environment as they occur with less rigid, ethnocentric judgments.’ (2005, p. 390).

According to Kim, citing Matsumoto, openness ‘is a broad term that incorporates other similar but more specific concepts such as ‘open-mindedness’ ‘intercultural sensitivity’ ‘empathy’ and ‘tolerance for ambiguity’ (ibid.). Indeed, this has led several authors (Byram, 2008; Hansen, et al. 2009; Hansen, 2011; Kramsch, 1998a; Kim, 2005) to adopt a view that emphasizes the role of educators in motivating students to adopt an attitude of world openness, tolerance and respect for others.

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:

Resistance implies an attempt to maintain internal standards as valid while denigrating or ignoring external standards.

Acceptance implies recognizing that neither the internal nor the external standards are primary—they are both viable in their own right.

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.

Shaules observes that in practice, most people have all three reactions, resisting some things while accepting and adapting to others. This is represented in Figure 3.2 (ibid. p. 148).

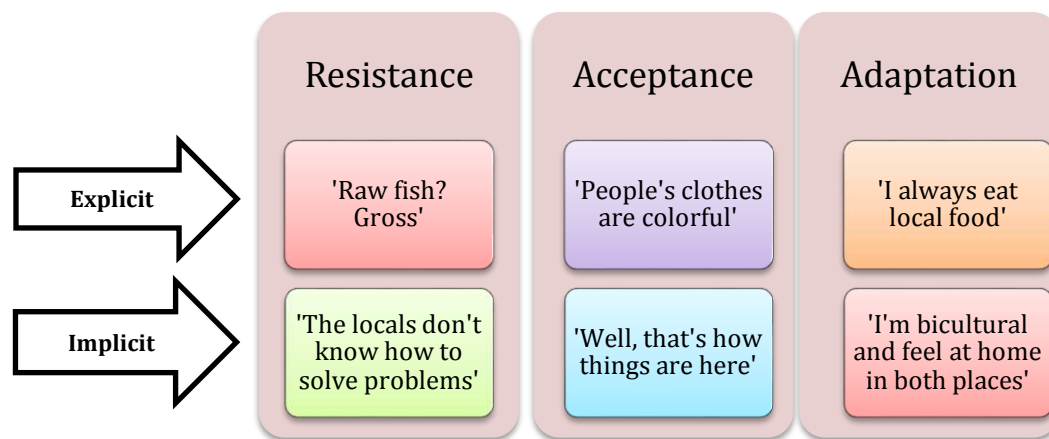


Figure 3.2 A Model of Cultural Learning

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) and negotiating first cultural knowledge can be challenging, because as clearly stressed by

Berger and Luckmann: ‘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).

I find Shaules’ model 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. Adding to the complexities, from a cosmopolitan perspective, Hansen believes that the tendency to retreat exists in tension with the cosmopolitan impulse to participate, to respond, to engage life as it comes in all its diversity and difficulty (2011). Cosmopolitanism is an orientation that does not banish the difficulties that engaging with life, change and diversity could represent for the individual. A cosmopolitan perspective acknowledges that:

‘It is impossible to try to be open at all times to everything new, or loyal at all times to everything known, the former stance dissolves life, the latter petrifies it [...] (p. 40). Home and belonging also remain for the teacher as for everyone else subject to change, to pressure, and to unsettlement whether physical or spiritual in nature. In cosmopolitan perspective the dual sides of tension and of home continually intersect. Anxiety and contentment, being adrift and being moored, fear and hospitality, vertigo and stability: a cosmopolitan orientation does not banish these conditions of risk and safety, of loss and gain. Instead, it highlights modes of generative response to them (2011, p. 59).

Hansen’s view supports Shaules’ dilemma theory—as Hansen notes, individuals are human beings, and part of the intercultural learning experience is the right to be confused, to fail, to falter and then start over again.

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 (Appiah, 1996, 2005; Hansen et al. 2009; Hansen, 2011; Delanty, 2009).

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.

The literature regarding culture shock provides in-depth analyses of the psychological processes of adaptation when dealing with unfamiliar practices and environments (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004; Shaules, 2007; Spencer and Franklin, 2009). 'Culture shock occurs when people interact with members of a different culture and experience the feeling of a loss of control. It occurs when a person's expectations do not coincide with—and indeed conflict with—a different cultural reality' (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004, pp. 68–69). Thus, culture shock is the reaction people experience when they are confronted with the unknown and the different.

Authors Bennett (1986), Ward et al. (2001), Berry (2006) observe that it is the unusually large number of changes in an individual's life when confronted with cultural differences that can be particularly stressful, and this is what in fact gives rise to culture shock. It is argued that cultural change, whether on a short or long term basis, caused by traveling abroad or moving overseas, would typically involve being confronted with changes in ways of living, food, social activities, working hours or conditions, work responsibilities, family circumstances and so on. Hence it is this large number of changes that prime culture shock. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 153), citing Oberg's early

work on culture shock, argue that people's emotional reactions to cultural change follow a U-curve:

1. Honeymoon with emphasis on the initial reactions of euphoria, enchantment, fascination and enthusiasm;
2. Culture shock, or the crisis, characterized by feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety and anger;
3. Recovery or adaptation, including crisis resolution and culture learning;
4. Adjustment or acculturation reflecting enjoyment of functional competence in the new environment.

Other symptoms identified with individuals undergoing culture shock include: hostility, unhappiness, feelings of isolation and loneliness, depression, self-pity and homesickness (DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004, p. 68–69; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009, pp. 152–153). However, it is argued that these symptoms not only vary from person to person, but may also vary in degree, from mild annoyance to strong feelings of anger. Additionally, the validity of the U-curve patterns has been questioned by Ward and colleagues, who report that one study of overseas students displays the complete opposite: the degree of depression experienced by students at month one and month twelve was significantly higher than at month six. These authors argue that these students were happiest and most satisfied in the middle of their experience and less so both at the beginning and at the end (cited in Spencer-Oatey et al. 2009, p. 153).

According to Matsumoto *et al.* (2007, p. 544) there are a number of personal qualities that are helpful for managing culture shock and stress. These scholars suggest four key ingredients for the effective management of cultural stress and the heightening of personal growth. They are: emotion regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking. However, Matsumoto *et al.* argue that 'emotion regulation is the gatekeeper skill as it is necessary for individuals to control, regulate, and otherwise manage their emotional reactions to stress and conflict that occur in intercultural situation' (*ibid.*) Thus, unless individuals have control of their emotions, they may experience difficulties in engaging in

critical thinking and welcoming new cognitive schemas, in other words, new packets of information representing general information about situations, events or actions (Nishida, 2005).

The subject of culture shock has been widely studied in scholarly and popular publications. The difficulty of giving prescriptions for overcoming culture shock is evident in the literature. Bennett (1986) and Ward et al. (2001) have studied the phenomenon of culture shock in detail and have attempted to provide mechanisms for overcoming it. However, any mechanisms provided will by nature be limited, as specific reactions to particular experiences differ widely across the range of individual personalities. Likewise, Matsumoto does this, but his advice assumes strong abilities of emotional control, and is perhaps culture-specific. Culture shock was reported by the participants to be a common phenomenon among American teachers—teachers and students alike narrated events indicating anxious reaction of Americans to cultural differences (for culture shock, see Section, 6.1). As DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) note, these reported reactions ranged from mild annoyance to extreme anxiety.

3.3.5 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 construe 'culture'. In the construal 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 and culture shock were explored in regard to the relativization process necessitated by confrontation with difference. The impact on the psychological welfare of individuals as a consequence of the complexities of dealing with cultural differences was the subject of the final section. In the case of the foreign teachers who are coping with a new environment, the theory surrounding culture shock is immediately applicable—this theory helps to understand how they are affected in their constructions of the students and local environment. The ability or inability to relativize worldviews has an impact on the individual psyche in a negative or positive way as will be seen in Chapter 6. In expecting to find the familiar in a strange place, some American teachers were reported by the participants to display judgmental attitudes towards local people and practices. These teachers were seen to experience culture shock; in contrast, those who were able to relativize their worldviews were more at ease.

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. This is exemplified in Chapter 5 of this thesis, where two British teachers are seen to draw on their first social knowledge when dealing with the complicated ritual of offering and refusing food in Mexico.

3.4 The Intercultural and Cosmopolitan Orientations

As previously discussed in Section 2.1, the intermingling of people in a globalized world presents the individual with opportunities to learn about other ways of doing and acting. EIL may be seen as a tool that enables contact and communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds; thus, in the intercultural exchange which takes place,

individuals will be confronted with different worldviews and cultural practices. As seen in Sections 2.1 and 4.1, the Language Department reflects this intercultural exchange at a local level, welcoming new foreign students and teachers each year. 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'.

3.4.1 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 être*), 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 être*) 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.¹²

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, p. 162—163). It consists of:

1. Identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in [...] events in one's own and other cultures.
2. Making an evaluative analysis of the [...] events which refer to an explicit perspective and criteria.
3. 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.

Although Byram emphasizes 'explicit criteria' as the means to evaluate 'cultures', he is not precise about what he means by this term. Nevertheless, I believe his theory based on 'savoirs' is useful because it provides a detailed account of the composite of competencies

¹² Kim (2005, pp. 375–400) 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.

and sub-competencies (attitudes, knowledge, skills, orientations, etc.) which are involved in the construction 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.

3.4.2 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 Kramsch (1993) to suggest that culture in the English classroom can be constructed by means of individuals interacting with one another. Kramsch rethinks the concept of language as a social practice wherein individuals construct the world around them. Further, Kramsch places strong emphasis on contextual factors when reflecting and constructing one’s own and the Other’s culture.

Like Byram, Kramsch (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, Kramsch 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, Kramersch determines.

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. As discussed in Section 3.1.3, 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’, 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.

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’.

3.4.3 Cultural Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has a long tradition, from its Greco-Roman roots to its modern applications in the work of Appiah (2005, 2006), Delanty (2008, 2009), Hansen (2011) and Nussbaum (1996, 1997). Delanty (2008, 2009) makes a distinction between classical and contemporary cosmopolitanism, while at the same time pointing out the classical basis for

modern developments. It is classical cosmopolitanism that sets out the basic principles that shape contemporary cosmopolitan philosophy. Delanty (2009) and Hansen (2011) frame contemporary cosmopolitanism in terms of four areas: moral, political, economic and cultural. Since the discussions which feature in this thesis resonate more closely with the concerns of moral and cultural cosmopolitanism, these will be the primary focus of discussion.

Cosmopolitan theory acknowledges that cultural transformation can stem from the dynamic relation between the local and the global. Indeed, Rumford 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’ (2008, p. 14).

For Hansen, cultural cosmopolitanism highlights new social configurations characteristic of the increased intermingling of people, customs, and practices in many parts of the world (2011, p. 11). From his viewpoint, people can be rooted meaningfully in more than one culture or community. Similarly, Delanty (2009, p. 70) speaks of cultural cosmopolitanism as a condition in which cultures undergo transformation in light of their encounter with the Other. For Hiebert (2002, p. 212), 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’. 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, p. 5), 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'.

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 97 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 99 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.

3.4.4 Critical Cosmopolitanism

In his discussion of 'critical cosmopolitanism', Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009) places strong emphasis on the socio-cognitive processes by which new forms of social reality are constructed. For him, critical cosmopolitanism seeks to avoid the pitfalls of universalism and relativism. He recognizes that traditional cosmopolitanism has been almost exclusively concerned with universalistic principles such as: 'the negotiation and crossing of borders, a concern with overlapping allegiances, a concern with global equality and the suffering of others' (2008, p. 218). According to Delanty, critical cosmopolitanism is a post-universalistic self-understanding that can be seen as self-problematization, and as learning from the Other. Indeed, Delanty puts particular emphasis on the intellectual capacity of individuals for self-understanding, self-problematizing and reflexivity. All of these are conducive to the enactment of cosmopolitan orientations. For Delanty (2009, pp. 252–253) cosmopolitan orientations may take four main forms, which vary from the more limited to the more pronounced, these being:

1. Relativization of one's own culture or identity in light of the encounter with the Other;
2. Recognition of the Other, in other words, recognition of diversity whereby no one culture is prioritized;
3. 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'.
4. Emergence into new norms and new worldviews.

According to Delanty, the last two forms involve stronger degrees of transformation, 'in these cases there is the possibility of inter-cultural dialogue, he writes, 'without the dimension of dialogue cosmopolitanism lacks significant normative force' (ibid., p. 253). Delanty's progression of cosmopolitan orientations is represented in Figure 3.3 below.

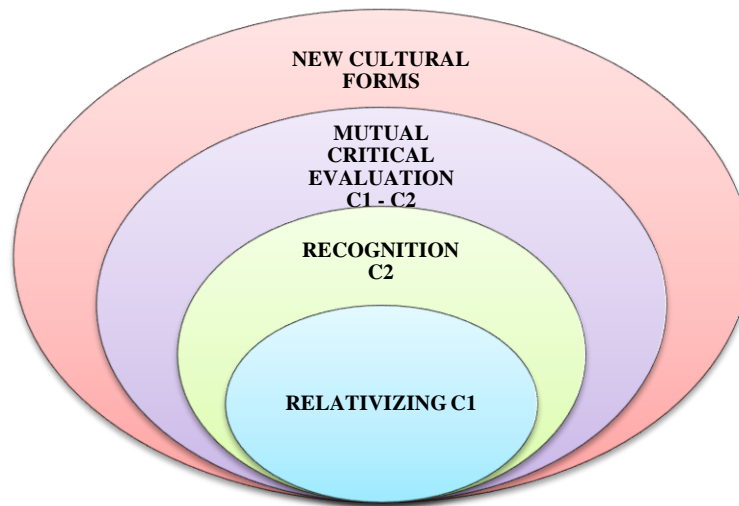


Figure 3.3 Cosmopolitan Orientation Dynamic

Although Delanty distinguishes between more limited and stronger forms of cosmopolitanism, he believes that recognition from the perspective of the Other is the key to cosmopolitanism; in his view, ‘it makes little sense speaking of cosmopolitanism if this is absent’ (2008, p. 220). In the representation of the Cosmopolitan Orientation Dynamic shown in Figure 3.3, ‘relativizing’ is placed at the core. Indeed, several scholars from the fields of intercultural communication and applied psychology, among them 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 consider and mediate their ‘culture’ in relation to the Other. From their viewpoint, relativization is the bridgehead that can lead to—or constrain—successful adaptation to and acceptance of different worldviews. However, cosmopolitan scholars such as Appiah (2005), Beck (2002), Beck and Colin (2006), Delanty (2009), Hansen (2011), Hansen et al. (2009), Holliday (2013) and Nussbaum (1997) take the discussion further, acknowledging individuals’ capacities to recognize the Other’s worldviews, which in turn can lead to personal growth and the broadening of individual horizons.

3.4.5 Cosmopolitan Transformation

Thus, the term ‘transformation’ in the cosmopolitan perspective denotes not radical change but ‘incremental reconfiguration’ (Hansen, 2011, p. 8; Delanty, 2009, p. 9); it emphasizes learning, not just toleration of differences. For Hansen (2011, p. 8), 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’. 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’ (2011, 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 finding chapters, the teacher and students 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.

Appiah (1996, 2005, 2006) observes that one of the arguments against cosmopolitans is that they are ‘rootless’. As the son of a British and a Nigerian national, Appiah’s most profound thoughts find inspiration in his father’s affirmation that there is ‘no point in roots if you couldn’t take them with you’ (1996, p. 21). Appiah writes that the cosmopolitan:

‘[...] can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different,

places that are home to other, different, people. In a world of cosmopolitan patriots, people would accept their citizen's responsibility to nurture the culture and politics of their homes. Many would, no doubt, spend their lives in the places that shaped them; and that is one of the reasons local cultural practices would be sustained and transmitted. But many would move, and that would mean that cultural practices would travel also (as they have travelled). The result would be a world in which each local form of human life was the result of long term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization: a world, in that respect, much like the world we live in now' (ibid. p. 22).

For Hansen (2011, p. 60) transformation of the Self can be achieved by adopting an artful way of living. This author highlights the cosmopolitan accent in philosophy as the 'art of living':

'What is cosmopolitan about them is precisely their ability to traverse the space between the far and the near, the general and the particular, the universal and the neighbourhood. They neither deprecate nor disguise their local sensibilities—sometimes, warts and all. [...] They are loyal to home, to all that gave them their start in life, to all that allows them to have a reflective standpoint in the first place. But their respect for tradition does not render them traditionalists. They are able to take seriously different perspectives, mores, and philosophies of life—so much so that Herodotus, for example, was chided by some of his contemporaries as a "barbarian lover" (i.e., admirer of non-Greek speakers) for his sympathetic treatment of various Persian customs. [...] In their writing, these figures dwell in the world educationally: in varying degrees they learn from and with the world they observed, interact with, and read about. They are neither parochial not universalistic in their ethos, despite the all-too-human fact that at times they are judgmental and dismissive (they are not saints). Each of them, in a distinctive and cosmopolitan fashion, holds in hand the local and the global' (ibid. pp. 69–70).

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.

As will be seen in Chapter 5, two British teachers in this investigation, Colin and Elizabeth, negotiated between ingrained first cultural identities in adapting to local ritual in offering and refusing food (see Extracts 23, 25). This process of adaptation was important not at the surface level, but at the level of deep culture—as Colin put it, to reject offers of food in this culture is tantamount to 'rejecting at kind of a cultural level too'. Indeed, throughout the stories narrated by the participants their descriptions of how they dealt with these '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 thesis, 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.

Scollon et al. (2012) offer the view that primary social knowledge can stimulate the growth of new social knowledge. Borrowing an organic metaphor for the 'historical body' of social knowledge from the Japanese philosopher Nishida, these authors argue that this more accurately represents the fluid and unstable relationship between the individual and society. They observe that, for Nishida, the historical body is about 'becoming rather than being', representing a movement 'from the formed to the forming' (ibid. p. 173). Thus, Scollon et al. have used an organic metaphor for the historical body: they see it as 'a compost heap of social practices' (ibid.). Scollon et al. advocate this metaphor in the following way:

'What is useful about this metaphor is that it allows seeing individuals not just as storehouses of past social practices, but also as the ground for the ontogenesis of new social practices. What resides in the historical body is not hard fossil remains nor abstract rules, but humus and detritus, not buried treasure, but compost that prepares the ground for new growth. A person's primary socialization deposits layers of habit formations and experiences that compost in the unconscious, nourishing similar and compatible habitus while filtering out incommensurate ones. If secondary

socialization encounters conflicting social practices there is resistance, while compatible practices tend to foster growth. The historical body is an unstable, dissipative structure in interaction with its environment rather than an objective, regular, or durable set of dispositions, and the environment in which it develops typically consists of multiple discourse systems with multiple cycles of discourse circulating through it, some commensurate and some incommensurate, some new and some already present in the embodied experience of the individual' (ibid).

This analogy serves the authors to demonstrate that socialization involves constant negotiation between multiple discourse systems, between 'what has already been learned and what is about to be learned' (ibid.). From this perspective, old knowledge is perceived as a valuable resource.

A similar view is held by Holliday (2013, p. 3), who highlights how the embodiment of individuals' social knowledge comes into play in 'small culture formation'. According to this scholar, small culture formation occurs whenever any form of social grouping construct rules for how to behave, in an attempt to make the group a cohesive entity. Holliday sees individuals' social knowledge as the resource, 'the culture on the go' which individuals make use of in order to construct 'culture'. This scholar places especial emphasis on the 'underlying universal cultural processes', which involve the skills and strategies through which an individual 'participates in and negotiates their position within the cultural landscapes to which they belong' (ibid.). In Holliday's view, this participation and negotiation is the universal basis for the construction of culture.

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). To underline this issue, Hansen points out the Afro-American experience, which this scholar argues ‘has resulted among other things in imaginative, reconstructed, and renewed forms of art, of music, of religious practice, of community life, and more, all of which added significantly to local cultural creativity’ (ibid.).

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.

3.4.6 Moral Cosmopolitanism

The dominant conception of cosmopolitanism is what is termed moral cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 2005; Delanty, 2009; Hansen, 2011; Nussbaum, 1996, 1997). It refers to what today is called morality, defined as ‘the ongoing task of regarding and treating other people fairly and responsively’ (Hansen, 2011, p. 33). The question of morality has generally been identified with the Cynics and the later Stoics, whose concern was how best to respond to, regard and treat people. Based on a reading of the Stoic philosopher Hierocles, Nussbaum (1996, p. 9; 1997) summons up the idea that the individual is surrounded by a series of concentric circles representing the various levels of human kinship. She writes:

‘The first one encircles the self, the next takes in the immediate family, then follows the extended family, then in order, neighbours or local groups, fellow city-dwellers, and fellow countrymen—and we can easily add to this list grouping based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender, or sexual identities. Outside of these circles is the largest one, humanity as a whole’. (1996, p. 9)

Nussbaum does not suggest that individuals should give up their special affections and identifications in order to become world citizens—these affections and identifications make up an individual’s identity, and are therefore important. However, this scholar argues that ‘we should also work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, base our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the

circle that defines our humanity special attention and respect' (ibid.). In Nussbaum's view, people must treat their moral obligations as global in nature and significance.

3.4.7 Applications of Cosmopolitanism: Three Studies

Appiah (2006), Delanty (2009), Hansen (2011) and Nussbaum's (1996) arguments concerning cosmopolitan orientation have been the basis of research in recent empirical investigations. In the following section, three studies pertinent to this thesis are presented; these studies informed certain aspects of my own research such as the relationship between cosmopolitan orientation and globalization, as studied by Pichler (2013), cosmopolitanism in education and the community, as studied by Osler and Starkey (2003) and Szerszynski and Urry's (2002) work on age in relation to cosmopolitan orientation.

3.4.7.1 Factors Affecting Cosmopolitanism

In his article 'Cosmopolitanism in a global perspective: An international comparison of open-minded orientations and identity in relation to globalization', Pichler (2013) found that varying economic, cultural and social contexts lead to varying realizations of cosmopolitanism. He observes that 'globalization is a driving force behind cosmopolitanization' and that, 'cosmopolitan orientations and global identities are expected to be more frequent in the most globalized and richest countries' (ibid. p. 25). Pichler cites previous studies indicating that greater commitment to a cosmopolitan orientation is shown among younger, educated, upper-class urban dwellers. Using these premises as a point of departure, the author considers that age, education, occupational status and income may increase the likelihood of persons seeing themselves as a global citizen or embracing cosmopolitan attitudes. However, Pichler does not see these qualities as the sine qua non of cosmopolitan orientation.

In a quantitative study, Pichler conducted surveys in forty-nine countries with different economic, cultural and political backgrounds. Five aspects of cosmopolitan orientation were surveyed: trust, tolerance, diversity, international politics and absence of

nationalism. These were summarized using two dimensions: The first component was called ‘ethical cosmopolitan orientation’, capturing the ideas of openness and recognition of otherness. The second component was called ‘political cosmopolitan orientation’ capturing attitudes towards global political decision-making and nationalism.

Pichler’s findings show that ethical cosmopolitanism is more widespread than political cosmopolitanism. Strong global identities tend to be more widespread in non-western societies—especially in Africa and South-East Asia—whereas ethical and political cosmopolitanism are considerably more widespread in the USA, many European countries and Australia than in Asia and most African countries. Additionally, Pichler discusses the effect of socioeconomic characteristics—gender, age, education, occupational status, household income, place of residence, political orientation and religious denomination—in isolating the compositional effects of his quantitative study. For global identities, education, place where living and religion play the largest roles. According to Pichler’s findings, people with less education are usually not as likely to see themselves as global citizens as those with a university degree. In a similar manner, people living in rural areas are less inclined to identify themselves as world citizens, while those from relatively smaller urban areas do not show as much inclination towards global citizenship as inhabitants of larger cities. Pichler further reports global identities as being influenced by religion: Muslims most often identify themselves as strong global citizens, while Catholics show a somewhat more global identity than Orthodox Christians. Significantly for Pichler, stronger global identities are more often found in less globalized, less developed, less free and less cosmopolitan societies (here Pichler is ambivalent in his own terminology; he seems to mean less multicultural societies). Pichler found that highly educated people score higher in both ethical and political cosmopolitanism, as do professionals and people in urban areas. Muslims show strong ethical cosmopolitanism, along with women, who express a more ethical and political cosmopolitan stance than men. In Pichler’s quantitative findings, household income was found to be directly influential on the level of ethical cosmopolitanism.

For this scholar one of the most surprising findings is that ‘rather large proportions of populations see themselves as world citizens though these identities are significantly

more frequent in less developed countries. This finding indicates that global identities do not contradict or replace national and/or local identities' (ibid. p. 36).

3.4.7.2 Identity and Ethics

In a study of the meaning and possibility of 'cosmopolitan citizenship', Osler and Starkey (2003) administered a questionnaire to six hundred young people (10–18 years old) at four schools in Leicester, England. They followed up the questionnaire with a series of focused, discussion-based workshop activities. The investigators sought to explore the multiple identities and loyalties of these young people and how they interpret and respond to changing local and global circumstances. Their findings demonstrated that the young people showed: affective ties with other countries and places, their belonging to a community (the authors found this term was ambiguous for the young people interviewed), their concern with the improvement of their city and strong affective ties to their city. These ties were reflected in the value assigned to parks, schools, community centers or libraries. Osler and Starkey concluded that the young people are engaged as citizens and learn the skills of cosmopolitan citizenship within their homes and community. They write 'the young people in our research demonstrated multiple and dynamic identities, embracing local, national and international perspectives' (ibid. p. 252).

3.4.7.3 Concentric Circles: The Close and the Distant Other

Through nine focus group interviews as the means of data gathering, Szerszynski and Urry found that people have a strong awareness of global economics, of extended relations connecting them to others and of the blurred borders between nations and cultures. Cosmopolitan attitude was found within all the focus groups, 'not just amongst those who travelled a great deal or had international links as part of their work' (2002, p. 472). In questions of moral considerations towards others, it was found that at times compassion seemed to decrease with distance, or also with the abstract character (anonymous as opposed to particular) of the potential beneficiary. The investigators write:

‘Compassion seemed to be directed first at family and friends, then at one’s particular community and only then extended further afield. But at other times respondents placed the emphasis not so much on the near but on the particular, the problem being abstraction not distance [...] Their wider moral obligations were conceived more in the affective terms of care and compassion than those of abstract duty’ (ibid. p. 475).

These scholars report the result of the Soul of Britain survey where age, religious belonging and voting intentions were found to be among the most significant factors shaping the distribution of a sense of global belonging. These scholars report that: whereas 19% of 18–24 year olds chose ‘the world’ as their primary focus of belonging, this figure dropped to 11% of 24–34 year olds, and dropped further to 9% amongst those over 65. In terms of religion, 14% of Roman Catholics and ‘other’ religions and 13% of those with ‘no religion’ chose ‘the world’ compared with 9% of ‘convinced atheists’ and only 6% of Protestants. Similarly, 12% of Labour voters identified with the ‘world’ compared to 6% of Conservative voters (ORB, 2000).

Szerszynski and Urry identify what they term ‘banal globalism’, emanating from the media, and interpreted in various ways. The authors find that, ‘amongst younger and more mobile groups, it appears as a cosmopolitan openness to the new and to the different’ (ibid. p. 476). For older people, globalism may conjure up images of fulfilment of duty, responsibility and the ‘British character’ associated with the days of the Empire and the World Wars. The authors note the varying nature of these interpretations.

Szerszynski and Urry concluded that cosmopolitan identities and practices are articulated differently at different periods of one’s life. Young people speak about traveling and working around the world, yet still expect to return to their place of origin to settle down. Adult responsibilities bring ideas of duty and caring, which may be extended to other peoples and places.

In my view, Pichler’s findings are often contradictory, perhaps as a result of the wide range of his quantitative study. However, some aspects of the study have value in estimating the global reach of cosmopolitan thought. For example, Pichler’s assertion that global identities are more frequent in less developed countries may well be the result of

quantitative methods. Nonetheless, the students interviewed in this investigation tend to confirm Pichler's thesis. Despite lack of travel experience, the student participants evinced a high degree of cosmopolitan imagination in their interview responses, as will be seen throughout the findings chapters. The data derived from the qualitative studies carried out by Osler and Starkey (2003) and Szerszynski and Urry (2002) also sheds light on the argument that young adults show more tendencies towards cosmopolitan orientations. One important element that resonates throughout all three studies is the undeniable presence of the universalistic principles advocated by the cosmopolitan tradition—for these authors, young adults respond towards the world around them in a cosmopolitan fashion.

3.4.8 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 chapters, individuals may be seen negotiating new ways of thinking about the Other and his/her ways of being. Students sometimes showed a cosmopolitan flair for theorizing and imagining the Other; 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 in Sections 5.1 and 5.3. In these sections, the ‘working out’ of a new norm for handling students’ requests to enter or leave the classroom, and the negotiations surrounding the Mexican ritual of being offered food will be visited.

It is not such an easy matter to understand the Other, indeed popular discourses tending towards monolithic representations of the Other continue to influence ELT. These representations in turn generate cultural stereotypes which are applied indistinctly to persons or groups. In the following section, the question of stereotypes in the construction of the Other is probed in reference to the literature.

3.5 Cultural Stereotypes

It was seen in the course of this investigation that stereotypes undoubtedly had an influence on the participants’ construction of the Other—this happened almost unwillingly to some of the participants as they trotted out cultural stereotypes of the Other, which they then were observed to retract or modify. The large body of theory surrounding stereotypes assumed importance in understanding how students and teachers construct the Other.

‘Culture’ in ELT has most often been approached by adapting theories from the fields of anthropology and sociology. The beginning of social research carried out in the field of Intercultural Communication (ICC) may be seen in the work of Hall (cited in Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009, p. 22–24; Shaules, 2007, p. 27–28; DeCapua and Wintergerst, 2004, p. 50–51). Hall was the first to use the term *intercultural communication* when studying culture as it relates to cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. His work rests explicitly on the premise that ICC is difficult because ‘we are unaware of our own hidden patterns of thinking and communicating’ (Shaules citing Hall, 2007, p. 28). Following Hall’s lead, further work in this field was carried out in

studies made by Hofstede (1980), Triandis (1994) and Trompenaars and Turner (1993), among others.

The theories of Hall's successors have not only circulated widely in the field of ELT, but found their way into public discourses. For example, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, pp. 210–211) report a study conducted by Berardo and Simons in which 261 intercultural trainers working in the professional development context were asked to record the particular sources of the knowledge they pass on in their interventions. With 89 of 170 mentions, the researchers found that Hofstede and Turner and Trompenaars are the first and second preferences among 'cultural models'. However, how these theories of culture are employed is an issue that has occupied several scholars (Angouri, 2009, 2010; Holliday 2011, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Phillips, 2009 among many others). Generally, these authors argue that the use of categories tends to represent an overly objectified view of 'culture', with its clear-cut rules, established cultural values, and codified beliefs and behaviors. Furthermore, it is also argued by many of these authors that the establishment of hard and fast 'cultural' categories entails a risk of stereotyping and Othering.

3.5.1 The Issue of Stereotypes and Othering

The risk inherent in categorizations which represent 'cultures' as monolithic entities is that these categorizations may lead to over-generalization about groups and the stereotyping and Othering of people. Several scholars, among them Kumaravadivelu (2008), McKay (2003b), Kubota (1999), Kim and Jen (2002) and Cortazzi and Jin (1996), argue that stereotyping is prevalent in ELT. It is also argued that textbooks, media and/or the internet play a big role in creating essentialist representations of 'cultures' (Byram, 2008; Phillipson, 2001; Gray 2000, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Holliday et al. 2010 among others). However, contrasting opinions regarding the usefulness of stereotypes exist in the literature. Some authors view stereotypes as mere concepts, or even as a useful tool, while others regard them as harmful and likely to lead to prejudice.

3.5.2 The Ambivalence of Stereotypes

The psychologist David Schneider remarks that the word stereotype comes from the conjunction of two Greek words: stereos, meaning ‘solid’ and typos meaning ‘the mark of a blow’ or ‘a model’; stereotypes thus refer to solid models (2004, p. 8). He observes that the term can have two connotations: rigidity, and duplication or sameness. However, one important distinction he brings to our attention is the difference between stereotyping as a ‘process’ and stereotypes as ‘content’. Schneider (ibid. p. 12) explains that the research on stereotypes carried out in the twentieth century shifted from an initial phase of the study of the content of stereotypes—this content was the ascription of traits to a group—to the study of the cognitive processes involved in stereotyping. Thus, stereotyping (process) replaced stereotypes (content). Relevant to this discussion is Schneider’s distinction between social cognition and social psychology. In social cognition, stereotypes are seen as simple generalizations, whereas social psychology ‘emphasized the role of abstract knowledge structures in processing information about others’ (ibid.). The interest of social psychology was in studying discrimination, for example gender discrimination, thus ‘the psychology of prejudice was key’ (ibid. p. 13).

Based on this discussion, Schneider (2004, p. 562) offers the view that stereotypes can take the form of simple generalizations about groups of people, and that people use this type of generalization on a regular basis. In Schneider’s view, it is not clear how stereotypes differ from the usual type of generalizations, or whether they can, or should be avoided. He writes ‘to give up our capacity to form stereotypes we would probably have to give up our capacity to generalize and that is a trade none of us should be willing to make. The ability to generalize is a central, primitive, hard-wired cognitive capacity’ (ibid. p. 8). Thus, for Schneider this kind of generalizing is an integral part of our everyday lives. He observes that stereotypes cannot easily be separated from more normal ways of thinking about people or objects:

‘As a cognitive process, stereotyping seems pretty much like business as usual. Stereotypes are simply generalizations about groups of people, and as such they are similar to generalizations about dogs, computers, [...]

city buses, or Beethoven piano sonatas. We have them because they are useful' (2004, p. 562).

A similar view is shared by Nachbar and Lause (1992, p. 238), who add that sometimes it is valuable to create classifications of individuals. These authors write:

'[...] the term 'freshman' on college campuses brings to mind a popular image of a rather naïve newcomer who is not familiar with both the social and intellectual life of a campus. Of course, many freshmen don't fit this narrow picture. Nevertheless, the stereotype of the freshman serves the purpose of encouraging professors to construct introductory courses for those with no experience in the subject matter and it also encourages campus social organization link fraternities and sororities to sponsor group activities planned especially for campus newcomers'.

Adler (2001, p. 77) advocates a similar view of stereotypes, conceding that as much as any other form of categorization they can be helpful or harmful, depending on how they are used. She believes that 'effective' stereotyping allows people to understand and act appropriately in new situations. Adler (ibid.) states that stereotypes can be helpful if they are:

- Consciously held, people should be aware they are describing a group norm rather than the characteristics of a specific individual.
- Descriptive rather than evaluative, the stereotype should describe what people from this group will probably be like and not evaluate the people as good or bad.
- Accurate, the stereotype should accurately describe the norm for the group to which the person belongs.
- The first best guess about a group prior to acquiring information about the specific person or persons involved.
- Modified based on continuing observation and experience with the actual people and situations.

Regarding the use of stereotypes, Basu and Weibull (2003) and Scollon et al. (2012, p. 273) suggest that 'it must be remembered that no individual member of a group embodies all of his/her group's characteristics'. The same could be said to apply the other way around.

Additionally, the comparison of groups ‘should always consider both likenesses and differences and they should be based upon more than a simple dimension of contrast’ (ibid. p. 273). Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 141) also suggest that one way of judging the accuracy of stereotypes is to compare a group’s stereotypes of themselves with the stereotypes held by non-group members. They write, ‘if there is convergence then the stereotype could be regarded as accurate’ (ibid). However, they warn that even if a stereotype is found to be accurate, two things need to be kept in mind: first, that stereotypes are subject to change; they are not fixed or static in character, and secondly, that people may differ in their evaluations (positive/negative) of a given stereotype. Indeed, Schneider makes the point that the evaluative nature of the content of stereotypes can hardly be a defining feature, writing that:

‘[...] the fact that many traits can be seen as positive in some situations and negative in others, as good by one group and bad by another, as worthy when embedded among other positive traits and as a bit sinister when part of a more negative constellation. The more important point is there is no a priori reason to assume that positive and negative generalizations are fundamentally different except in their consequences. The evaluative nature of beliefs about others, therefore, ought not to be a defining feature of stereotypes’ (2004, p. 19).

The differentiated approaches of Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) and Adler (2001) to stereotypes were found to be useful in understanding the complex nature of their use. It is important to highlight that stereotypes in Adler and Spencer-Oatey and Franklin are approached from the viewpoint of social cognition (Schneider, 2004), taking the form of mere generalizations—in the case of this investigation, the stereotype of the polite Englishman and the unpunctual Mexican. Both Spencer-Oatey and Franklin’s and Adler’s approaches to stereotypes incorporate the dialogic element advocated by the intercultural and cosmopolitan traditions—critical reflexivity is encouraged by juxtaposing the accuracy of the stereotype of the Self and the Other. As will be seen in Chapter 6, the participants in this investigation appeared to be very aware of the limitations and constraints in the use of stereotypes, demonstrating an intellectual capacity to question their use. Nevertheless, some of the participants failed in applying critical reflexivity when confronted with stereotyped

images of the Other—the dialogic process advocated by the above-mentioned scholars would seem to be a useful measure in dealing with stereotypes.

Like many other scholars, including Scollon et al. (2012), Kumaravadivelu (2008), Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) and Holliday et al. (2010), among others, Schneider does not deny that ‘there are indeed stereotypes that are negative, untrue and unfair’ (2004, p. 19). In his view, one of the reasons for which stereotypes have been regarded as negative in the literature is because they are the result of faulty reasoning processes: ‘they are usually based on insufficient information [...] people are letting their cultures think for them; instead of forming their own generalizations from experience’ (ibid. p. 20). Another reason for a negative evaluation in the literature is that ‘since stereotypes are often used aggressively by prejudiced people, stereotypes must be driven by prejudice’ (ibid.).

It would seem that the predominant discussion on the issue of stereotypes has been carried on from the viewpoint of social psychology in Schneider’s (2004) sense, that is, the prejudicial nature of their use. Although this cannot be ignored, neither may it be presumed that stereotypes are invariably prejudicial. The teacher and student participants in this investigation used stereotypes for all kinds of reasons, as generalizations or with a hint of humour. In the worst case scenario, stereotypes seemed to be invoked as a reaction to negative comments, as will be seen in Chapter 6.

3.5.3 Prejudice and Othering of People

The fact that stereotypes are often infected by prejudice, which in turn leads to Othering, is what has led Holliday et al. to reject the idea that stereotypes are useful (2010, pp. 25–27). The authors contend that people do not behave sufficiently rationally in intercultural dealings to be able to ‘work’ such stereotypes objectively. In their view, individuals could too easily form stereotypes which can pre-define what people are like, ‘we can imagine or reify ‘cultures’ as objects, places, physical entities within which and by which people live’ (ibid. p. 26). The authors write that reification means ‘to imagine something to be real when it is not. Hence, essentialism is born’ (ibid. p. 26). Holliday et al. believe that that there is

just a small step from essentialism to culturism. The authors suggest that culturism is similar in construction to racism or sexism, in that ‘the imaged characteristics of the ‘culture’ are used to define the person’ (ibid. p. 27). For Holliday et al., the imaged characteristics of the ‘foreign Other’ can vary in terms of ethnicity, religion, political alignment, class, caste or gender, yet they remain negative projections. A certain tension exists between Holliday’s largely negative estimate of stereotyping and Schneider’s allowance of generalization as a useful category. However, both authors rightfully encourage caution when stereotypes are invoked.

Cultural stereotyping as discussed by Kumaravadivelu (2008) can be traced in the discussions of postcolonial thinkers such as Memmi, Fanon, Said and Bhabha, who viewed cultural stereotyping as a binary opposition between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. This perspective produces an essentialized and static view of the Other, according to the author. Kumaravadivelu argues that ‘the works of these post-colonial thinkers clearly reveal that cultural images of other people that most of us have constructed in our minds may be no more than poor representations of reality’ (ibid. p. 18). He describes the phenomenon of Otherization in the following terms:

“‘Otherization’ is a crudely reductive process that ascribes an imagined superior identity to the self and an imagined inferior identity to the Other: there is a general tendency among individuals and communities to portray themselves as having an identity that is desirable and developed while presenting the identity of people who are racially, ethnically, or linguistically different as undesirable and deficient. Most often a significant power differential is involved in the process of otherization, particularly cultural “Otherization”” (ibid. p. 16).

The issue of ideology and representations of culture is discussed extensively by Holliday (2011). Holliday defines ideology (2011, p. 8) as a ‘system of ideas that promote the interests of a particular group of people’. Holliday argues that ideology can be present in everyday assumptions; conditions which are assumed to be natural, such as relationships of power, may in fact be conditioned by ideology. Holliday (2011) writes that ‘Othering is also essentialist in that the demonized image is applied to all members of the group of society which is being othered’ (ibid. p. 69). From his viewpoint, Othering operates at all

levels of society and can be seen as a basic means whereby social groups sustain a positive sense of identity, as indicated in the following sequence (*ibid.* p. 70):

1. Identify 'our' group by contrasting it with 'their' group.
2. Strengthen the contrasted images of Self and Other by emphasizing and reifying respective proficient and deficient values, artefact and behaviours.
3. Do this by manipulating selected cultural resources such as Protestantism or Confucianism.
4. Position Self and Other by constructing moral reasons to attack, colonize or help.
5. The Other culture becomes a definable commodity.
6. The imaged Other works with or resists imposed definitions.

Holliday argues that 'the sequence represents a neutral politics in the sense that we may have no idea that we are on the road to Othering as we set up who we are in contrast to others' (*ibid.*), a process that can occur at a small scale but that could presumably progress to a large one. Indeed, according to Holliday, it is by small degrees that this projection and positioning of the Self progresses to Othering on a global level. This author argues that:

'There is an imagination of neutrality while in effect the constructions that are generated are not neutral. Construction is by its nature a non-neutral and therefore ideological projection on the world. The Self can thus be 'we the strong' or 'we the pure'. Within the conceptualization of individualism and collectivism, the Self is 'we the efficient'. In order to maintain these images it is necessary to construct the Other as 'they the weak', 'they the impure' or 'they the deficient'" (*ibid.*).

Some would contend that Othering in Holliday's sense is still all too prevalent in the circles that produce ELT teachers and theory. In the context of the ELT classroom, Cortazzi and Jin (1996); Kim and Yeh (2002), Kubota (1999), Kumaravadivelu (2008), McKay, (2003b), Wallace (2003) and Wolf and Spencer (2008) argue that cultural stereotyping can indeed be encountered in academia. Kumaravadivelu argues against the use of stereotypes to predict students' behavior, or to explain failure attributed to 'culture'. Kumaravadivelu citing Guest points out:

‘When we interact with people from our own culture, we tend not to ‘culturize’ them. That is, we do not search for cultural explanations in order to interpret their behaviour. Rather, we ascribe personalities to them. Why then, Guest wonders, do we interpret the behaviour of a foreigner as though it ‘is entirely a product of his or her culture?’ (ibid. p. 63).

In this sense, Kubota (1999), Kim and Yeh (2002), McKay (2003b) and Wallace (2003) problematize tendencies that ignore individuality and that create unfounded expectations.

In a study conducted by Kubota (1999), the author points out that a large research project on Japanese primary schools shows that Japanese pre-school and elementary curriculum does indeed ‘promote creativity, original thinking and self-expression’ (p. 23). These findings challenge the stereotypical images of Japanese education, in which only regimented mechanical learning and a lack of individualism are present, and skills of creativity and problem-solving are lacking. Kubota argues that the cultural labels attached to Japanese culture are fabrications of applied linguistic research; she maintains that ‘images of the Other are constructed not only through a colonial Orientalist discourse that manifests unequal relations of power but also by the Other itself, creating *self-Orientalism*’ (p. 19). It is notable that the cultural labels Kubota criticizes may be at least partially the result of self-Othering.

Kim and Yeh (2002) explored the imaged characteristics of Asian American high school students; educational stereotypes of Asian Americans school-goers included such positive attributes as ‘great at math and science’ along with negative ones such as ‘over-achievers’, ‘nerdy’, ‘submissive’ and ‘poor communicators’. The authors cite a study conducted by the Educational Testing Service in 1997 that found that twelfth-grade students from six major Asian groups (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, and Southeast Asian) had significant variations in their educational background and levels of achievement. The study also demonstrated how such stereotypes ‘are reinforced in the school context and contribute to a biased and limited perspective of Asian Americans that does not reflect their within group heterogeneity’ (*ibid.* p. 2).

For example, McKay (2003b) cites a study by Fowerdew comparing the Chinese and Western approaches to academic lectures. In the study, a list is provided of Confucian and Western values as they relate to academic lectures. The first example in the list reads: Confucian: Respect for authority of lecturer. Western: Lecturer valued as guide and facilitator. McKay raises two objections regarding this study: ‘national identities are not monolithic entities, they differ by age, social class and region’, and ‘what is particularly disturbing in this comparison is that the terms ‘Confucianism’ and ‘Westernism’ are accepted as legitimate labels rather than as labels that need to be examined and problematized’ (pp. 13–14).

For Wallace, the Western preoccupation with the issue of ‘critical thinking’ is a form of cultural imposition. This scholar voices her criticism of the stereotype that views groups from collectivist cultures, such as South East Asian students, as ‘less critical’ than students from individualist cultures (2003, p. 55). Indeed, she states that many successful students in her critical reading class are from countries such as Indonesia, Japan and China. Wallace writes:

‘Leaving aside the odd assumption that individualism is to be equated with criticality, it is doubtful whether, once a number of factors are taken account of, including institutional expectations and, most obviously, the level of language proficiency, students from such countries are any less disposed to be critical than British or North American students. In my experience, while some students may be initially reluctant to offer opinions, given time and opportunity for further reflection, they may produce powerful pieces of written work’ (*ibid.* p. 57).

3.5.4 Summary of this section

In summary, I have attempted in this section to provide an overview of the literature concerning the nature of cultural stereotypes. The ambivalence of the nature of these stereotypes is commented on by the many authors cited in this section; on the one hand it is argued that they are commonly used by individual persons or within public discourses and community or social arenas as a matter of course. Categorization is acknowledged as a human practice which is performed every day. However, as the authors cited in this section

would contend, the major risk of stereotypes is that they may contain prejudice and lead to the Othering of persons. Ideological forces were sometimes seen to be at work: Mexican students were essentialized as latecomers, while Americans were associated with the warlike political behavior of their country. Although the participants expressly rejected stereotypes to construct persons, paradoxically they continued to use them in reference to the Other. For example, in Extract 61 below, the local teacher Miguel discusses the relationship of his American colleagues to the many holidays in the university calendar—he at first dismisses stereotyped categorizations, saying that there are also corrupt Americans and unpunctual Britons, but then classifying American teachers as so hard-working that they will never take a day off. This may be seen as an idealization of the Other, but nonetheless Miguel falls into the trap of the stereotype. The paradoxes of constructing ‘culture’ became evident in the data. In this process of construction, individuals were seen to be struggling in the negotiation and reassessment of their images of the Other. The normal process of categorization was sometimes infected by ideological representations, as will be seen in Chapter 6, where the battle between two worldviews on the matter of punctuality is examined.

3.6 Conclusions to this Chapter

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to highlight the complexities that theorists encounter in the construction of ‘culture’. A common thread that runs through the literature concerning the concept of ‘culture’ is the importance of the relativization process. Whether this is in English language teaching and English as an international language, or in the intercultural tradition, reflexivity about the Self and the Other is needed for successful communication. As the literature suggests, ‘culture’ means many things to different people, it is by nature very fluid, as the authors viewed in the second section demonstrate. It is clear that ‘culture’ is socially constructed—this construction depends on the highly charged primary social knowledge acquired in earlier parts of life; this was the theme of the third section. Individuals face important challenges to their worldviews when confronted with cultural differences, because, as discussed, ‘culture’ is emotionally charged. It would appear that the theorists who highlight the intellectual capacity of intercultural learning at

times seem to underrate the impact that the individuals' psyche can have on their constructions of 'culture'. I would argue that both aspects, intellectual and affective, work in tandem and both need to be given equal consideration. Beck (2002) and Delanty (2009) emphasize the importance of intellectual capacities, when confronting the world to gain new knowledge. However, these authors seem to underestimate the powerful tug of primary social conditioning which influences the affective element in intercultural learning. This may be a result of the position of Beck and Delanty within the field of sociology; this field requires them to speak of cosmopolitan transformation at a macro-societal level rather than at the individual level where the affective comes to the fore. Indeed, the affective is an area particularly emphasized by those scholars recognized as moral (Nussbaum) or rooted (Appiah) cosmopolitans.

The intercultural and cosmopolitan traditions were the subject of the fourth section. Intercultural learning motivates self-reflexivity and relativization of social knowledge, enabling a vista from the perspective of the Other. The cosmopolitan tradition sees beyond relativizing, foreseeing acceptance of the Other's ways of doing and being. As seen in this section, the cosmopolitan perspective is an important complement and continuation of relativization, opening up possibilities of transforming the Self and society. Finally, this chapter explored literature concerning stereotypes and Othering—stereotypes and Othering have found their way into certain public discourses present in ELT, with potential negative consequences for the construction of the Other.

This body of theory informed the analysis of the findings, providing the necessary tools for understanding the diversity of the participants' worldviews. The wide range of individuals who participated in the investigation, with their many different life experiences made a broad theoretical base necessary. Social construction of knowledge, the intercultural tradition, the cosmopolitan perspective and the theory around stereotypes/Othering were necessary ingredients for understanding the myriad discourses of the participants, each discourse influenced by the individual's personal trajectory and life experiences. As remarked above, the importance of relativization was the common

thread that ran through the investigation and the choice of theoretical literature that informs it.

The intercultural learning/adaptation process, as the literature suggests, involves many factors. All authors viewed in this chapter concede that any construction of ‘culture’ is complex and fluid, not a linear process. As the findings in this thesis reveal, the complexities of the construal of ‘culture’ challenges individuals’ capacities to learn and adapt—these struggles to learn and adapt are at the core of the present discussion.

3.6.1 Synthesis of Theoretical Positions

Considering the broad nature of the theoretical base needed to understand the participants’ thinking on ‘culture’, it was necessary to refine and narrow the scope of the literature so that all essential elements could be included. Yet, something could be drawn from each theory to make this broad base into a synthesis of elements that could in turn be applied to the empirical investigation. Thus, I identified the following strands of theory as being of particular importance to the investigation:

Berger and Luckmann’s thesis that ‘culture’ is a social construction was fundamental in identifying and interpreting the words and actions of the participants. The influence of highly charged primary social knowledge is difficult to escape, in other words, to relativize, even for the most sophisticated interlocutors. According to Scollon et al. (2012) the emotionally charged nature of primary social knowledge can impede the acquisition of new learning, the recognition of other ways of doing/acting, or the adaptability to a new environment. Features of emotionally charged primary social knowledge were seen to be at work in the empirical data. Tension was reflected in the students’ resistance to internalizing social norms offered by their English speaking teachers. Likewise, foreign teachers rejected aspects of local ‘culture’ that did not fit in with the primary social knowledge they had acquired as children in their home countries. So then, relativization of one’s own social knowledge plays an important role in the construction of ‘culture’. Nonetheless, Holliday (2013) argues that the social skills acquired alongside

primary social knowledge allow the individual to interpret and negotiate unfamiliar environments.

Shaules' model of resistance, adaptation and acceptance may be seen as another facet of the dichotomy between Scollon et al. and Holliday's views on the instrumentality of primary social knowledge. As previously stated, it is my contention that the process of relativization, or the setting aside of emotionally charged primary social knowledge in order to better understand the Other, is at the core of intercultural learning and exchange. Shaules' theory of incremental adaptation to new cultural environments was relevant to this investigation in that it highlights the dynamic nature of intercultural learning. I saw Kim's (2001, 2005) model of 'Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic' as an important complement to Shaules' theory—both of these informed my overview of the empirical data. These theories coincide in viewing intercultural learning-adaptation as a dynamic and developmental process. As Kim notes, learning is often accompanied by stress; the culture shock that was visible in some of the foreign participants was a result of the type of stress generated by being confronted with difference. The literature centered on culture shock as a phenomenon was instrumental in understanding the influence that the affective component of the personality has on the individual when confronted with difference. Bennett (1986), Ward et al. (2001) and Berry's (2006) detailed account of the different reactions to cultural change, as well as the feelings that accompany them, were particularly relevant to understanding the foreign teachers' reactions during the course of this investigation. Although acculturation as the final stage of the process of intercultural learning/adaptation may be seen in the accounts of some of the participants, acculturation per se was beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Oberg's work on culture shock, as discussed by the above authors, proved to be a valid orientation point which informed the interpretation of data.

Two crucial points of reference for this thesis are Byram's (2008) 'critical cultural awareness' and Delanty's (2009) 'critical cultural cosmopolitanism'. Criticality, I would argue, may be seen in the application of the individuals' skills to the construction and negotiation of 'culture'. These skills might include self-understanding, self-

problematization, reflexivity (Delanty, 2009), speaking, listening, articulating (Appiah, 2005, 2006; Hansen, 2011), mediation, interaction (Byram, 2008) and negotiation (Holliday, 2011, 2013). Indeed, many scholars apply many different names to these critical skills. Whether these are called capacities (Delanty, 2009), human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011), skills and strategies (Holliday, 2013), competencies—savoirs (Byram, 2008), abilities (Appiah 2005) or arts (Hansen, 2011), I see these to be critical faculties which the individual applies in the task of making sense of the Self and the Other.

Finally, the search for meaning in the empirical data was informed by what Delanty (2009) calls critical cosmopolitanism. This may be taken to mean a dialogic process in which the individual or entire societies engage in critical reflexivity, analyzing not only the Other, but also the Self. Relativization, or the suspension of first cultural knowledge, in order to better understand the Self and the Other, was the key to unlocking the dynamic developmental processes which make recognition, acceptance and transformation possible.

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. This is followed by a description of the data collection process, concluding with a description of the process of the categorization and interpretation of data. 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). Moreover, I had the support from the Head of Division as well as the Head of the Department, not only to do my doctoral studies but also to carry out my research project in the school. 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 (CAADI¹³, in its Spanish anagram).

The Department offers two BA programs, a Teacher Training Program in TESOL and Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language. The In-service Certificate of English Language Teaching (ICELT) is also offered. Additionally, six foreign languages are taught: English, German, French, Japanese, Italian and Mandarin Chinese. Spanish as a foreign language is also taught in the department, along with classical Latin and Greek. 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 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

¹³ CAADI Centro de Auto-Aprendizaje De Idiomas.

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 for individuals to be engaged in interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds.

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 one woman and three men. This national makeup of the foreign group was one American, one Canadian and two British nationals. 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 away from the home country for the purposes of work or study might be important. Additionally, both feminine and masculine viewpoints were represented in the sample group of teachers (see Appendix III for Interviewees' Background).

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 UG; 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.

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 appeared to be the most appropriate vantage point, because, contrary to traditional objectivist approaches, it allows meaning to emerge from the social actors and setting. With objectivism and subjectivism as opposite positions of viewing the world, the posture that the social world is an entity with well-established laws which serve to explain social behavior, is as Richards expressed it, a 'fairly naïve objectivist assumption' (2003, p. 36). A qualitative paradigm would enable 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, p. 5) 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'. 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 of 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.

In the next section, I go on to discuss and analyze the core characteristics of the ethnographic approach. Such an analysis shows how these core characteristics interconnect in the overall strategy.

4.3 Ethnography as Social Research

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 in order 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, p. 72) 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'. 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 in order 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, p. 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 approach¹⁴. 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

¹⁴ Rampton, (1995) *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents*. London: Longman.
Schechter, S. and Bayley, R. (2010) *Language as Cultural Practice: Mexicanos en el Norte*. New Jersey: Routledge.
Hernandez-Zamora, G. (2010) *Decolonizing Literacy: Mexican Lives in the Era of Global Capitalism*. Great Britain: Multilingual Matters.

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, p. 93) 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. 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, p. 20) 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. 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, ‘culture’ and the classroom, and complex socio-political issues such as the relationship between Mexico and the United States. All of 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 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 (2000, pp. 3–4). Holliday, 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’ (2007, 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, p. 26) argues that when describing ‘cultures’, ‘the aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts’. 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. Furthermore, in adopting an ethnographic approach, the use of various strategies provided opportunities to observe the phenomena from different angles, which added another layer to the exploration. Thus, by juxtaposing data from interviews, observations, field notes written in a notebook, and documents related to the department, a rich description of the phenomena was obtained. The interconnectedness of all of this data allowed for patterns to emerge, revealing in this way the complexities in the construal of 'culture'. Thus, ethnographic approach provided the basic method for constructing a 'thick description'. A detailed description of how this was achieved is provided in Section 4.6.5.

4.3.3 Reflexivity

A necessary corollary to the ethnographic tradition is the employment of the discipline of reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 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 s/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 in order 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 in terms of interviews and classroom observations. In every case, I explicitly asked for the authorization of the participants to gather information from their interviews and from observations of their classes. Further, I assured them that all of the information derived from interviews or classroom observations would only be accessed by me alone. Likewise, the participants were advised that pseudonyms would be used in the text of the thesis so that their identities would be protected.

Other elements worked to my advantage in conducting research in close proximity to my University and colleagues. Teachers in the Language Department are aware that research is continuously being conducted at the school. The University of Guanajuato is a research-oriented institution—this orientation is mentioned in the current mission statement, and private, State and Federal support is given to the University to stimulate research. Indeed, five of my colleagues carried out their Ph.D. research projects at the school. All of these colleagues had carried out research projects at the school previous to their Ph.D. studies, and all have continued with projects subsequently. Several of my colleagues' Ph.D. theses have been published and may be found in the central University Library. So, teachers at the Language Department are aware of the research done in the school, and more importantly, they know how this work is carried out and presented. These factors have contributed to the development of confidence in the research done at the school—as a result, I found the 'playing field', inasmuch as participant confidence, already prepared for the work I was going to be doing.

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. But at the same time, I had to be careful and consider the possible

effects of the written results of the investigation on the participants—what I wrote or chose to leave out might affect my relationship with them, and their relationship to the school administration or to other colleagues. Further, I took care to build the discussions in the thesis in an impartial and fair way, as I was aware that the participants might access the content at some future date. Thus, I took great care in how best to represent them in my work while still telling ‘the truth’.

As will be seen in the findings chapters, 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 autography 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, pp. 144–5) observes that historically, traditional ethnography found the anthropologist telling someone else’s story. 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 (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 204). In terms of the former, according to Hammersley and Atkinson, 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' (2007, 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 thesis 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 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' (2007, 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 3, '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 chapters. This allowed me to identify any potential Othering of the interviewees, a trap to be avoided. Feedback from my supervisors helped me to revisit the data and analyze it in a more reflexive and critical way. 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, p. 25) 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’. 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, p. 130; Wolcott, 2008, p. 194; Madison, 2012, p. 32; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007 p. 194).

Madison (2012, p. 42) 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’

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, p. 28) 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. 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’. 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 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’ (2010, 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 of 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 of 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 warns that a setting may be so familiar that the ethnographer may not notice things, or take things for granted (2010, 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 viewpoint, not only can reactivity to the presence of the researcher be minimized and/or monitored, but also 'exploited' (2007, 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 seven months 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, p. 35).

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 methodologies adopted to approach the investigation.

4.4 Methodologies in Approaching the Investigation

Ethnography provided me with the basic tools for approaching the investigation from different angles: in the course of fieldwork, class observations allowed me to see what people were actually doing in the classroom, and interviews allowed me to explore what the participants were saying. The dynamic of the classroom observations was passive; in the interview process, there was an active participation. This flexibility in approaching data collection was one of the most attractive aspects of the ethnographic method; it provided choices of passive/active, formal/informal and involvement/distance. So, I found the ethnographic approach to be the most appropriate method for this investigation, because it

seemed well-adapted to the complexities of unraveling the participants' constructions of 'culture'.

4.4.1 Fieldwork

Several scholars (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2008; Fetterman, 2010; Richards, 2003; Thomas, 2003) agree that fieldwork is the hallmark of ethnographic research. Fieldwork offered me a wide range of possibilities and rich opportunities to engage in the gathering of data. Standard fieldwork procedures for gathering data included two major activities: observation and interviews. I made use of both of these by conducting classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students. In their broader sense these activities include everything from informal to more formal ways of structuring the activities. Thus, I had the flexibility to switch between varying different degrees of participation, from casual conversations to more formal interviews with teachers and students, to adopting a more passive role when conducting class observation (Spradley, 1980, p. 58).

As discussed in section 4.2, I was aware that discovering how 'culture' is treated by the participants might be beyond the boundaries of an interview, given the complexities of the topic. Thus, I needed to complement what was said, the verbal evidence of the interviews, with what the participants actually do with 'culture' in action in the classroom. For this reason, being there, observing participants in action in their classroom, as well as conversing with them by means of formal or informal interviews, were seen as two strategies that complemented each other. Indeed, both these practices provided a more in-depth understanding, because the phenomena were being looked at from different vantage points at different times, as the research developed. Denzin and Lincoln believe that each one of these practices makes a situation visible in a different way. These authors assert that these practices 'add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry' (2005, p. 5).

Data gathered in the course fieldwork was recorded in a notebook. This notebook contained all kinds of raw data, from information regarding the scheduling of classroom

observations and interviews, reminders to send e-mails or contact administrators, ideas to keep in mind, events or accounts experienced during classroom observations and interviews, or ‘tags’ with key words and/or phrases as reminders of topics to approach with interviewees, to diary-type commentaries. Keeping record of these notes was very conducive to regular review and reflexivity; it gave me a sense of direction, because recurrent topics that began to emerge were kept in mind for following up. Needless to say, this added a greater degree of focus to the investigation process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 151). These notes, juxtaposed with data gathered from classroom observations, interviews and other documents collected during the investigation were intended to achieve a ‘thick description’ (see Section 4.3.2) of the phenomena in question. The rationale for my choice of the particular tools used for the purpose of data collection is described in the following section.

4.4.2 Class Observation

Although the interview was the main tool of data collection, conducting classroom observations added a complementary dimension to what was seen and heard during the course of the interviews. Instead of simply asking teachers/students what they do in the classroom, or how they treat ‘culture’, I found that by observing their classes I could obtain a sharper and more layered perspective of what was happening in the classrooms than by using interviews alone.

Ethnography distinguishes between observer-as-participant and participant-as-observer. To differentiate them, Raymond Gold proposed in 1958 a continuum that highlighted the degree of participation of the researcher—this distinction is still valid for Blommaert and Jie (2010, pp. 29–30), Fetterman (2010, pp. 37–38), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 82, 85), Richards (2003, p. 108), Spradley (1980, p. 58) and Wolcott (2008, p. 48). This last author writes ‘such nuanced distinctions set between poles of the totally detached observer at one extreme and the totally involved participant at the other’ (2008, p. 48). As it is my intention to capture what was going on in the classroom I decided that participant-as-observer best accommodated the purpose of this investigation. Spradley

(1980, p. 58) provides a definition of passive participation, where the ethnographer is ‘present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent’. This approach appeared to be a desirable method, in this case because I could allocate my complete attention to registering how English classes take place: interaction between teachers and students, how they go about teaching/learning English and/or how teachers and students handle their discussions of topics from the textbook. In the process of conducting classroom observations, my role was to remain passive, observing what went on in the classroom and taking notes. This approach would allow for the activities and interaction between teacher and students to develop in a habitual way. Thus, I followed a traditional approach to classroom observation by taking a seat in the back where I would not disturb the dynamics of the class.

For purposes of the classroom observation I used a template, where I took note of the basic information of the group including: Teacher, date, class, number of students, class schedule, level, date, time and teachers’ initials, while the bottom part of the page was used to register my observations (see Appendix IV). These notes were taken in front of the class. They were rather brief commentaries or simply key words that would be sufficient for a ‘complete reconstruction’ afterwards. This was usually done the same day when the classroom observation took place, at home, directly into my laptop. In this way I could note down the passages ‘as accurately as possible’ before I could forget important details (Fetterman, 2010, p. 117).

Ethnographic research has devised a ‘funnel’ structure (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 175)—a structure intended to provide more focus to a study. The noticing of emergent or recurrent ideas, even those which occurred at early stages, is facilitated as a result of ‘regular reviews’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 150–151). Spradley (1979, p. 76) suggests that in order to make deeper and more general sense of what is happening, observers should keep four separate sets of notes: 1) Short notes made at the time; 2) expanded notes made as soon as possible after each field session; 3) a fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork and 4) a provisional running record of analysis and interpretation. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 69)

offer systematic ways of expanding what gets recorded in field notes. They suggest writing contact summary sheets or extended memos after each observation, posing the question of the main themes or issues in each contact, or the central bearing of the contact on the research questions. In an adaptation of these strategies, after every class observation or interview I noted what I called ‘tags’, with key concepts or ideas for following up. Thus, topics that were discussed in a particular focus group interview were registered, so that they could be explored in subsequent focus group interviews.

As I mentioned above, I approached the class observations as a means to identify what was going on in the classroom from a general perspective, in other words, I did not have a check list with specific questions to be answered. However, keeping in mind the maxim that ‘the more specific the guide question, the more efficient the observation’ (Thomas, 2003, p. 61), I directed my attention to culture-related issues. Given the fact that some of my duties at the Language Department include conducting classroom observations, I felt the need to reframe my approach to observations so that they would not resemble professional procedures. For instance, in typical procedure, an observation is generally made for the purpose of teacher development. These observations are very structured, with specific points to be observed, including such questions as: ‘Giving instructions’: Are instructions clear? ‘Grouping’: Does the teacher use different types of grouping techniques? I had to bracket off this knowledge and try viewing these observations from a different perspective. These were some of the culture-related questions I came up with during a brainstorming exercise calculated to change my mindset and prepare me for the class observations. They were adapted from the discussions concerning the role of language and culture in the ELT field (Chapter 3, Section 3.1).

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'?

Performing this exercise was a strategy to help me gain distance from the type of classroom observation I was used to conducting. In fact, I had been so concerned that I might not be able to distance myself from my ELT background that I decided to include these questions as part of the template, as a reminder of the focus of the observations.

4.4.3 Interviews

Whereas classroom observations allowed me to take a passive stance to observe how 'culture' was treated—'in action', in the classroom, 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, p. 182) 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'

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, p. 108). 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, p. 41). 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 (*ibid.*). 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. Silverman (2010a, p. 434) defines focus group interviews as ‘group discussions usually based upon stimuli (topics) provided by the researcher’. Krueger and Casey (2000, p. 5) 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’. 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, p. 8; Hammersley and Atkinson, p. 110). 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, p. 286). However, this would change in the case of the student focus group interviews, due to circumstances described below.

4.4.3.1 Approaching the Interview

The culture-related questions outlined above (Section 4.4.2), most which have been addressed in some form or another in the literature regarding the role of ‘culture’ in ELT, allow me to highlight once more how challenging it would have been to come up with the ‘right’ questions to ask, had I decided to approach the interviews with a set of open-ended or semi-structured questions to elicit a reading of ‘culture’. 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, p. 245) 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. 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’ (*ibid.* 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'.

4.4.3.2 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. From this perspective, Wight (1995, pp. 135–136) views critical

incidents as an experiential ‘discovery’ learning perspective, because individuals generate their own reactions and ways of handling the situation. The role of the developer, according to this author, is to elicit the likely effectiveness and appropriateness of the suggestions, ask the participants how they would feel in the situation, and/or get them to take the perspective of the various parties. For DeCapua and Wintergerst, the use of critical incidents is a valuable resource, because individuals are motivated to reflect on the possible explanations for an incident, thus increasing their awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences. From the viewpoint of DeCapua and Wintergerst, ‘their use encourages re-examining one’s own assumptions and preconceptions about oneself and others’ (2004, p. 4).

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’ in order to motivate them to tell *their* stories (see also Williams *et al.*, 2003).

Storytelling may be placed firmly within feminist theory, where narrative techniques are used to build trust, to create empathy and above all, according to Koch (1998), ‘allow marginalized groups to have a voice’ (p. 1183). Chase (2005, p. 655) notes that when using techniques of storytelling, feminists were interested in women as social actors and the meanings that they assigned to events and conditions in their own lives, rather than acquiring social information through narratives. Likewise, I was interested in the subjective storytelling of the participants in order to gain insight into meanings that they assigned to their experience, particularly when speaking of ‘culture’. Although the participants’ stories might not be considered ‘storyworthy’ (*ibid.* p. 661) in the feminist sense, listening to them proved to be a valuable reflective exercise. 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.

4.4.3.3 Origins of Critical Incidents

I identified six 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.

Each of the critical incidents that I chose was related to various issues of culture and raised a number of issues that could become talking points (For the full text of the critical incidents see Appendix V). These incidents epitomize my experiences; they are real, and such details as the nationalities of the parties involved in them were retained. The critical incidents I chose involve individuals from different cultural backgrounds—the nationalities of the persons involved ranged from Mexican to Canadian, American, Saudi Arabian, Japanese and Korean. The persons who narrated these incidents 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 different settings, for example while attending seminars in New York (Critical Incident C: A Korean English language teacher in New York) and Vancouver (Critical Incident B: A Canadian national in

Saudi Arabia), or from my working environment while interacting with my BA students (Critical Incident A: A Mexican student in Japan), or also occasions when I was working with other English teachers, both local and foreign (Critical Incident D: An American teacher in Mexico; Critical Incident E: A Mexican Spanish teacher in a multicultural class in Guanajuato, Mexico and Critical Incident F: Complaining in Mexico).

In adaptation of the approach suggested by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, p. 221) and Wight (1995, p. 135), I introduced the critical incidents 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. Emotional reactions to what seemed to the participants to be right or wrong in a story were not excluded, indeed these were some of the more telling moments in the interviews. 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, p. 36).

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 4.3.3.1, 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 and classroom observations.

The next section is a description of the chronology of the data collection, an account of how the interviews were transcribed, and how the resulting data was categorized.

4.5 Mapping the Research Process

After having been in Canterbury for seven months, I decided that the first thing to do upon arrival at the site was to begin to find out what was going on in the Language Department. My initial task was to contact potential teacher participants for the investigation by way of spontaneous informal interviews. I took this opportunity to negotiate access to their classrooms. I had decided that classroom observations should be the first instance of the investigation, for two reasons: I could begin to engage in the practices of the participants, start building rapport with them and observe how ‘culture’ was treated in their classrooms. Additionally, classroom observations allowed for the identification of potential students who could participate in focus group interviews. Focus group interviews with students were conducted before the interviews with teachers—indeed, interviews with teachers were conducted after all interviews with students and all classroom observations were done. This was a scheduling necessity, as the students were nearing the end of the semester. In the process of classroom observations I witnessed several critical incidents; it was these incidents and what I observed by being in the classroom that gave me insight and additional hints about how I was going to approach the participants in the interviews. A chart of the research process follows, Figure 4.1.

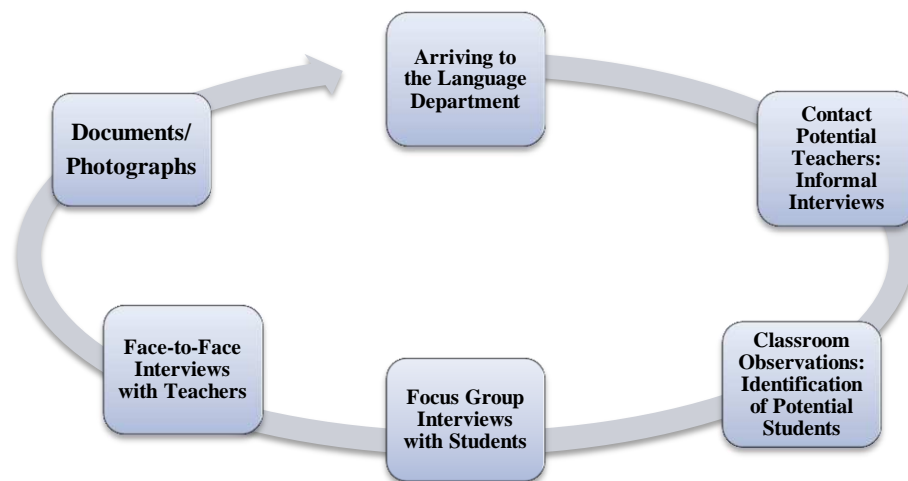


Figure 4.1 The Research Process

4.5.1 Arriving to the Site

This research was conducted in the period from May 2011 to July 2011. In April 2011 I left Canterbury to embark on the data collection process. According to the official calendar of the University of Guanajuato, classes for the spring semester begin the second week of January and end by the second week of June. So, I had originally thought that I would have all of May and part of June, about five weeks, to conduct the class observations.

Previous to my trip I had contacted the head of the school in order to obtain official consent to conduct research at the school. In this first communication, I took the opportunity to provide the details of the research project I intended to conduct, including the subject of my investigation, the activities I proposed to do, but most importantly I indicated the period of time that I had planned to carry out the study. The director arranged to free the office I had formerly occupied, so that I could have access to my office and equipment during the time I was going to be there. All gatekeeping and access issues seemed to have resolved. To my surprise, when I arrived to Guanajuato I found out that the University was trying to rearrange its calendar in order to fit the standard international school schedule. This was being done so that the University could offer programs to a greater number of international students. The director had never mentioned anything about the changes in the calendar. In fact, these changes did not reflect in the calendar posted on the University's web site, which I had checked previously. The semester was going to be ending on 28 May 2011, much earlier than anticipated.

Although it appeared that I had four weeks of classes left, I was aware that as the semester was coming towards its end, there were several other matters to consider. The final exam for listening and reading was scheduled for the 28 May, 2011 (See Appendix II). Additionally to this, I had to consider that many teachers assign time before the final exams for students' presentations, and for doing a general review of what had been covered during the semester, or they simply assign time for their 'end of the semester' celebration gatherings (Davoli, e-mail communication, see Appendix VI). This implied a window of only about three weeks to conduct all my class observations, sixteen in total, and to contact

students for the focus group interviews. Time for conducting interviews with teachers or for collecting documents was less of a problem, because teachers are required to be present for two extra weeks of administrative work after the final exams. So, I had at least some extra time for interviews with teachers and to collect other documents, but I had to move fast and take immediate action on the observations and the contacting of students, who would soon be leaving for the summer break.

4.5.2 First contact with Teachers: Informal (casual) Interviews

My first piece of fieldwork was an informal structured interview (Fetterman, 2010, p. 41), which took place at the initial phase of the investigation. This first contact was extremely important for several reasons. It served as both a direct and formal invitation for teachers to participate in my investigation, either by providing me with time for a face-to-face interview, and/or by allowing me into their classroom to conduct class observations. I took the opportunity to explain the topic and purpose of my investigation, hoping for positive responses to my requests. The type of questions asked at this early stage concerned general information such as the teacher's background, experience and qualifications. Sharing too much knowledge with teachers was a matter that had to be handled with care. It could have stopped me from asking the necessary 'silly questions' (Blommaert and Jie, 2010, p. 27) for example, asking 'have you taught at all levels?', 'what textbook are you using?' or 'how long have you been working here?'. At times though, teachers gave me 'the look' because, as a Department insider, they 'knew' that I 'knew'. But in the end they cooperated with me; they saw me as a researcher and understood the role. It was for me to ask the questions and for them to answer.

This first contact with my colleagues allowed me to 'introduce' myself in my new role as a researcher. At the time I returned to Guanajuato for the data collection process, I had already been in Canterbury for seven months. Although my colleagues knew that I was absent because of my doctoral studies, and that I was in Guanajuato to conduct research, I felt the need to present myself in my new role as a researcher. Conducting an informal type of interview proved to be a non-threatening icebreaker and helped to get my colleagues,

now informants and participants in the investigation, used to the presence of the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

When arranging classroom observations with the teachers, explaining the aim of my study in an informal way was particularly useful in keeping the teachers at ease and comfortable with giving me access. It was important to negotiate this with teachers, because as mentioned above, class observations are conducted every semester by the English Coordination as a means of evaluating performance. Needless to say, class observation could make teachers feel uncomfortable, as they might feel I could be evaluating them in the same way the Department administrators do. Therefore, I assured them that the information gathered while conducting the observations was to be used only for the purpose of my investigation. Explaining this to the teachers eased any possible concerns they might have had about my presence in the classroom. At the same time, I assured the participants that all information was to be accessed only by the researcher. They all agreed with no reservations whatsoever, and to my surprise, some of these teachers planned a time for me to conduct the class observation. They provided me with their schedules and general information about their groups. Similarly, some offered to schedule a time and date for the interview. However, I suggested carrying out the class observations first as ‘they will give us something to talk about’, as I put it. The teachers gladly agreed. In some form explaining the topic of my investigation also served the purpose of activating memories, feelings and experiences they had concerning the topic at hand (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I also explained what I intended to do—interviews and classroom observations.

All of the information gathered from these first contacts, or casual interviews, was recorded in my notes, as at this stage, data related to the interviewees’ personal information was beginning to be generated. Similarly, in the process of scheduling class observations, keeping record in my field notes of dates and time was very handy for the purpose of data organization, as I was able to relate dates and times to emerging data.

4.5.3 Negotiating Class Observations and Interviews with Teachers

I contacted as many teachers as I could the first day on site. On the first day I was able to schedule three class observations and the corresponding interviews with three different teachers. Once I had achieved access to the teachers' classrooms, the next move was to contact students. It was while conducting class observations that I planned to take the opportunity to approach students about participating in the focus group interviews. Soon after I began the first round of class observations, I started contacting other teachers, scheduling class observations and interviews with them. The process went on in a cyclic way, and before I knew it, I was totally immersed in the research site, talking to people, meeting teachers and students, going from one building to another, printing my material for class observations, taking notes, and carrying out all of the activities that the research demanded of me. I was able to accomplish eight teacher interviews, observe the teachers in class twice and interview one group of students for each one of the teachers I observed, all within this cyclic burst of activity. The negotiation of the observations and interviews was a simple process, generating a great deal of work, but also data.

4.5.4 Procedure for Class Observations and Interviews

As noted above, the procedure for data collection was systematic; every class observation was followed by an interview. I felt that it was important to conduct the observation before the interview, so that the observation could generate points for discussion. However, focus group interviews came before I could meet with the teachers. Interviews with teachers were conducted after I had conducted all class observations and all focus group interviews with students. As mentioned above, this was due to the relatively short amount of time I had available to carry out these activities before the classes were over.

I did a round of classroom observations of all of the eight teachers I intended to interview. I observed each teacher two times and obtained a focus group interview for each teacher. When I went to observe the classes, each one of the teachers took a few minutes to explain to their class who I was, as well as the purpose of my presence in the classroom.

The teachers assured their students I was there only to observe the class, not for evaluation purposes. Many students smiled at me, which made me feel welcome in their classroom. Class observations allowed teachers and students to become accustomed to my presence. Not only did the teachers and students see me in the classroom, but my presence was becoming very apparent as I spoke to students in the aisles and carried out my rounds of observations. If I had my guess, students may have been talking about a ‘researcher from Canterbury conducting research in the school’. Class observations allowed me to spot students who seemed to be open and outgoing, those who seemed willing to express their opinions. In some cases, I consulted the individual teachers about those students I had selected, in order to confirm whether my impressions were correct. They agreed with me in all cases, and some even suggested other possible students to consider, in case I needed ‘more students’, as they phrased it. I approached these students outside the classroom to set up interviews.

The first group of students I approached seemed a little bit reluctant. They explained they were very busy and were feeling a little bit stressed out preparing for their final projects and exams, as the semester was coming to an end. As these three students were expressing their reservations and concerns about the amount of work and time an interview might involve, one of them said—‘on the other hand, this could be a good practice for our oral exam!’. Indeed, students were facing their final exams at the Language Department, and in their main subject matter. The moment this comment was made, the other two students immediately agreed to do the interview.

This incident was very significant in the process of data collection for two reasons: first, it made me aware of a possible problems in obtaining other students’ participation, because they were facing the final exams period according to the UG calendar, and second, the quality of my data, because students were now talking about doing the interview in English. I had originally thought I would conduct the interviews in Spanish to avoid any difficulties in the expression of ideas and opinions due to language constraints. This is not to suggest that I did not trust students’ abilities, but as discussed previously, I had thought of conducting the interviews in the interviewee’s native language so they would feel more

comfortable expressing themselves in their own language. Also, because I was aware of the inherent difficulties of talking about culture-related issues, in which case language could be an issue for any of the participants, native or foreign.

However, on the positive side, these three students had provided me with a convincing argument that could be used with the others to persuade them to collaborate in my investigation. Fortunately, I did not have to use this argument many times, though I had it at the ready to ensure students' participation. As for the language, being a Spanish speaker myself, I was confident that I could interpret what the students said, though this is not to suggest that I could pretend to 'know' what they meant, but rather that I could read their discourse from English back into Spanish, should it be necessary. One clear example was the use of the word 'more' (*más*) which was translated literally from their native Spanish in many cases. This word, like in English, is an adjective for quantity. However, the expression in Spanish, 'more' can also be interpreted as 'superior'. So, when a student said 'They think that they are *more*' this meant 'They think that they are superior'.

In the extreme case that I could not understand, or when the students were struggling to get meaning across, we had the advantage of switching to our native language, Spanish, as we did a few times. But overall, as in any conversation when construing meaning and getting the message across, I encouraged the use of common conversational strategies such as repeating, rephrasing, or asking for clarification in order to keep the conversation flowing. This would prevent the students from feeling embarrassed or frustrated if they were having a hard time expressing themselves. I was aware that my role in these focus group interviews would be to keep the conversation flowing, to make students feel comfortable, to ensure that they expressed what they wanted, and sometimes to interpret what they meant. This would help to ensure both fairness to the students and quality of data.

Having set up the mechanics of the focus group interviews and introduced the students to it, I could perceive that I had achieved my goal; they felt comfortable in the interviews and were helping each other with vocabulary to express their ideas. Sometimes a

student would even finish the phrases of another; this would then be followed by a confirmation of accuracy in the completion of these phrases. The original precaution of having the interviews in Spanish was turning out to be unnecessary.

By the second round of class observations I had witnessed some significant incidents which took place during this process. I invoked these incidents at the interview with the particular teacher of the class where the event took place. Thus, when I observed a teacher say to his students ‘read loud like a gringo!’, this was approached at the interview. Also, I used some of these incidents at other times with other interviewees. However, these fresh critical incidents were not necessarily used in a serial fashion. The critical incidents derived from conducting class observations or interviews were only brought up in interviews where a similar situation had come up. So then, critical incidents were recycled as an ongoing process and they were used with different participants at different times.

4.5.5 Interview Procedures

All of the interviews with students, and some of those with teachers were conducted in my office. Other interviews with teachers took place at a café. The office provided a nice, private environment where the students could feel free to express themselves. This was important, because doing them in an interior space ensured that I could rely on the quality of the recording. The interviews conducted at the coffee shop were more difficult to transcribe because of the noise and the background music, but the coffee shop ambience proved to have its compensations. Going to the café had in fact been a good option because the weather had been very hot. I had been somewhat concerned that interviewees might rush through an interview being conducted in a small office, wanting to get back into the open or a larger space. But showing them my concern for their ease during the interviews allowed me to build warm social relations.

Along with the aspects of physical space for the interviews, interview structure was a procedural concern. All interviews were recorded with the previous authorization of the interviewees. I carried out the interview sequence in the following way: at the beginning of

the interview I first explained the purpose of the interview, the topic and the mechanics I intended to follow. At this point, I asked for the interviewee's explicit consent to record the interview. One of the reasons for which I wanted to record the interview, I explained, was because I wanted to maintain full attention on what was being said, instead of taking notes. The moment I obtained agreement (this was the case for all interviewees), I proceeded to set up my digital recording machine and started recording (for ethical considerations concerning interviewees consent see Section 4.3.3.1). As a strategy for obtaining their permission on the recording, I thanked the participant(s) for agreeing to let me record the interview, making a pause after the statement. I assured the interviewees that the recording was going to be used for the purpose of my Ph.D. investigation only. I further assured the participants that the information was going to be accessed only by me, and that pseudonyms would be used to guarantee privacy.

After every interview I wrote up my notes on the encounter, noting interviewees' reactions alongside my reactions and observation about the interview. Writing up my notes after the interviews allowed for reflection about the trajectory of the research, tagging themes that began to emerge and/or refine ideas to be considered for subsequent interviews.

4.5.6 Procedure in Presenting Critical Incidents

I presented five critical incidents to the students, critical incidents A-E below (See Appendix V for the texts of the critical incidents). This was done in a systematic way, following the same order of presentation with each group of students. I explained that these were incidents I had experienced in my professional life and they involved intercultural events. For the sake of practicality I read the incidents out loud for the two or three students present at the time. After reading it, I posted the questions: '*What are your thoughts about this incident? What are your impressions or ideas?*'

Critical Incident A: A Mexican student in Japan.

Critical Incident B: A Canadian national in Saudi Arabia.

Critical Incident C: A Korean English language teacher in New York.

Critical Incident D: An American teacher in Mexico.

Critical Incident E: A Mexican Spanish teacher in a multicultural class in Guanajuato, Mexico.

Critical Incident F: Complaining in Mexico (used for teachers only)

The main reason behind organizing the presentation and discussion of these critical incidents in this specific order was to avoid predisposing students' reactions, especially considering that *CID: An American in Mexico* involved a teacher's interpretation of students' behavior. Placing this critical incident next to last assured that it would not become the exclusive object of discussion.

The same procedure of presenting the critical incidents was used with the teachers, although I did not use all of the incidents with each one of them. Only critical incidents A, D, E and F were used with every single teacher participant in the investigation. CIB and CIC had initially provoked a great deal of discussion with teacher participants. Although no critical incident was intrinsically better than another, I felt that CID might be more important because of the professional teaching element and context, having its setting in the Language Department with an American teacher and Mexican students as protagonists.

By the time I met with the teachers to interview them, several focus group interviews had taken place. As these interviews had generated new incidents, these were incorporated, making a cyclic process. However, the sequence of critical incidents A, D, E and F provided a durable framework for the teacher participant interviews.

4.5.7 Interviews with the Use of Critical Incidents

The incidents captured the immediate attention and interest of the participants in the investigation, who had been chosen because they had experience living or working abroad. The critical incidents encouraged the free expression of similar incidents experienced by interviewees. In the case of episodes which involved misunderstandings, the participants reflected on what happened, what they could have done better, and at the same time they

articulated other possible ways of acting. By taking the perspectives of the various parties, the interviewees were motivated to express the possible viewpoints, the reasons for which they may have said or done what they did. In other words they ‘put themselves in the shoes’ of those involved in the incidents. In the particular case of the focus group interviews with the students, the students discussed and debated about the effectiveness and appropriateness of each other’s’ comments and suggestions. In some cases interviewees related to the incidents; they identified and empathized with one or the other party in the incidents, or they filled in gaps in the stories with their own experiences.

Both student and teacher interviewees had full licence to speak about, debate, relate to, interpret and even provide analyses of the critical incidents. Indeed, *my* stories encouraged teachers to recount *their* own stories, *their* own experiences, what they had observed or experienced. Interviewees made the critical incidents ‘theirs’, using their personal experience to problematize and analyze, or enter into a critical discussion of the critical incidents. This was done from various angles such as Mexican, American, student, father/mother, son/daughter, and so on. Sometimes they felt a connection with one of the parties in the critical incidents, or shared a concern about one of the topics contained in them. The interviewees’ reflections showed their capacity to arrive at a more critical reading of differences in cultural practices, and ways to approach these differences. Critical incidents were a very useful resource to motivate reflection, to encourage and challenge interviewees, to explore their beliefs and their assumptions about the Self and Other’s ways of being/acting.

Even though the interviews were conducted in the teachers’ native language, I could appreciate the difficulties they experienced in expressing their opinions. They were highly concentrated on trying to formulate their ideas and concepts, and to put their abstract feelings into words. I saw them deeply engaged in thought during the course of the interviews—one could read this in their faces. The discussion of the critical incidents revealed the complexities of talking about ‘culture’. One way in which this became evident was the degree to which the interviewees hedged and rephrased their ideas. This could be said to be a barometer of their efforts to make sense of ‘culture’. At the same time, they

were being careful about accurately formulating their ideas, trying to buy time to organize them, and being particularly careful not to appear too judgmental.

4.5.8 Focus Group Interviews with Students

As noted above, focus groups were used for student interviews in order to keep the students at ease, to allow them to feel more comfortable in expressing their ideas in the company of their peers, as well as to create debate among them (Hennink 2007, pp. 7–8). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, pp. 111–112) observe that group interviews allow a greater number of people to be interviewed at the same time and that it is less threatening for interviews which encourage them to be more forthcoming.

The focus group discussions were relatively structured, as they included five critical incidents to be discussed. However, the group discussion allowed sufficient opportunities for the participants to discuss in detail their opinions or ideas that were relevant to them. The dialogue format served to generate discussion between the participants; they created the dialogue, contributing freely to the discussion by generating issues as well as detailed and varied responses. They reacted to the comments made by the others, leading to reflection, explicit discussion, and debate on the issues that arose. Patton (1990, p. 335) highlights the value of focus group discussion, as this type of discussion can be a ‘highly efficient qualitative data-collection technique [...] in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views’. Thus, my role was that of a moderator, facilitating the discussion and encouraging a range of responses that provided greater understanding of the attitudes, behavior, ideas and opinions of the interviewees.

How to balance building rapport with interviewees without showing too much agreement was a point I had to consider (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Instead of saying ‘yes’ or ‘I agree’, I thought of neutral phrases such as ‘I see your point’ or ‘I understand’. This was probably one of the greatest challenges in doing the interviews, because interviewees expected some form of re-assurance and/or agreement. In focus

groups I had the option to re-direct attention to what the other participants thought about the comments that had been made. But in the face-to-face interviews with teachers re-directing was not a valid recourse, so I had to keep alert to avoid this.

What was significant from these interviews was the fact that they wanted their voice to be heard and in the process they did not hesitate to express their feelings as well. Although these feelings might have got lost in the transcription, emotional reactions were recorded in my notes after each interview. This data was used when it was particularly important to mention in the writing of the findings. Moreover, in the focus group interviews I had to be alert to everyone's reactions. Most of the times, when a comment was made by a student there was an additional comment to support or rearticulate the comment made. But other times, the students simply nodded, this was interpreted as agreement. Thus, in the presentation of findings, this was represented as a group agreement to the point in question.

4.6 Categorization and Interpretation

In keeping with the qualitative paradigm and a heuristic approach, 'thematic analysis' was chosen as a means to organizing the data. In contrast to 'deductive analysis', where categories are stipulated beforehand, I followed a process of 'inductive analysis', generally allowing for themes to emerge so that they could be identified. Patton (1990, p. 390) describes 'inductive analysis' as process of 'discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data'. Arriving at the main themes of discussion for the findings chapters was a process that involved several stages. The procedure of data analysis began with the initial mechanical stages of transcribing the data, proceeding onwards to the coding and categorization of the resultant data, then to the design of tables that organized all data gathered from fieldwork, and finally to the process of juxtaposing of data in order to achieve 'thick description'.

4.6.1 Catalogue of Data

The data collected for this thesis is divided into three categories: I: Interviews, II: Observations and III: Research notes. These categories correspond also to the three main forms of data collection. A detailed account of the procedure of data transcription, organization and labelling is provided in this section. However, the following table provides a general overview of the origins of the data and the codes used as references in the main text of the findings chapters.

Data Category	Type	Number of Interviews/ Observations	Participants	Code	Location in Appendix
Interviews	Face to Face	9	4 local teachers 4 foreign teachers 1 Administrator	Pseudonym of teachers in Italics	Appendix IX
	Focus Group	9	24 students	FG1, FG2, and so forth	Appendix IX
Observations	Classroom Observation	14	Two classroom observations conducted to each one of the teacher participants	CO1, CO2, and so forth	Appendix X
Research Notes	All kinds of raw data, diary type commentaries, event/accounts from interviews or observations in the form of tags—key words/phrases, as topics for following up.			Research notes, date of entry	

4.6.2 Process of Transcription and Coding Data

The transcription process began upon my return from Guanajuato, Mexico to Canterbury in August 2012—this was a process that took over three months of intense work.¹⁵ All interviews were transcribed, resulting in approximately eighty thousand words of raw data (see Appendices XI and XII for examples of transcriptions). The interviews were

¹⁵ Transcribing focus group interviews with students was the most difficult part of this process. The student's eagerness to express their point of view during the interviews became significant to the process, because it was both an advantage and an impediment. The students interrupted each other quite often, seeking to seize the opportunity to speak, and as a result their discussions were full of overlapping moments where one speaker would seek to express ideas, and/or comments while another was still speaking. At times it was difficult to identify who was speaking, or else, they spoke so fast that even when I lowered the speed in my recording device I still had to re-play the recording several times. But also, when running the recording at such a slow speed it became so sluggish that it was difficult to understand. Thus, the transcription of the student group interviews was the most challenging and time-consuming of this research project.

transcribed using the most basic standard symbols to represent the participant's speech. This was done as simply as possible, while still retaining markers of meaning and affective state.

The symbols used for the transcriptions were adapted from Richards (2003, p. 173–174). They are as follows:

- Exclamatory utterance (!)
- CAPS are used for loud sounds relative to the surrounding conversation levels
- Pause of more than one second (...)
- Interruption or change of turn of speaking (//)
- Three dots in square brackets ([...])¹⁶ are used when a fragment from the transcription has been omitted in the quotation for the sake of brevity or clarity.
- A long hyphen (—) was used when the informants report or imitate the speech of others.
- Single quotation marks are used when the informants refer to third parties, these persons are given a pseudonym appearing in (‘’).
- Italics are used when emphasis is made by informants or by the researcher. Whether the emphasis has been added by the researcher or was originally made by the interviewees, it is indicated in square parentheses [her emphasis].

Of all the conventional symbols adopted to produce an adequate transcription, pauses and interruptions were among the most important, because they reveal the struggles of individuals in making sense of ‘culture’. Pauses indicate the actual time the participants required to put abstract ideas, thoughts and even emotions into words. Conversely, the frequent interruptions reflected individuals’ eagerness to express their ideas.

Once all interviewees had been transcribed, I proceeded with the organizing and coding process, which was crucial for putting the data into an intelligible order.

¹⁶ Richards (2003, p. 173) suggests using ([]) to signal overlap. However, these symbols were used instead to indicate omitted text.

4.6.3 Organizing and Coding of Data

As mentioned above, all of the information regarding the process of the investigation, from scheduling of interviews to classroom observations, was registered in a notebook. The first step, once all the data had been collected, was to organize it in a way that would facilitate retrieval, as Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 157–158) recommend.

The use of charts, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Madison (2012), seemed to be a good strategy. In a series of charts, I logged in the data, categorized by type of activity, whether interview or class observation. In the case of interviews, this information included: date, time, place of the interview and names of the interviewee(s); in the case of classroom observations, the information was recorded in the template which I used to conduct the observations (see Appendix IV). The template included spaces for date, time, level of class, number of students and name of the teacher. The first step in proceeding with the coding system and organization of data was to key it all into a table.

At this stage both pseudonyms for the participants and codes for the activities were assigned (see Appendixes IX and X). However, the pseudonyms originally assigned to participants had the defect of not distinguishing between teachers or students. I had initially considered mentioning teachers' nationalities, for example, AmT, BrT, CanT or MexT. However, as attaching characteristics to individuals based on their nationality would be contrary to the principal arguments of this thesis, I decided against this as a means of identifying the participants. In order to distinguish teachers from students, teachers' names appear in italics. The teachers emerged as distinct personalities in the course of the interviews, expressing points of view which reflect their characters and personalities—their own expression identified them much more clearly than a nationality label.

Once the codes were established, they were used as a filing system for data organization. Additionally, these codes are the ones used in the final document; all data presented in this thesis appear with the coded system, corresponding to pseudonyms assigned to participants, codes assigned for focus group interviews (FG), classroom observations (COs), or other data from field notes.

4.6.4 Organizing Data from Interviews

The data contained in many pages of interviews needed to be structured in some way before it could be analyzed in a systematic manner. One way of achieving this structure was by creating a Word chart, where I compiled all data derived from interviews (Figure 4.2 below). This table contained five columns for each one of the critical incidents used for discussion, and included interviewees' construal of these critical incidents. This chart not only provided a holistic picture of the interviewees' accounts, but more importantly, it comprised all the data generated by the critical incidents into a single table. This proved to be an efficient tool for accessing and managing the data, providing the necessary flexibility for the 'manipulating' of and the 'searching for' textual materials (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 154). It facilitated the creation of new files by providing the framework for 'cutting' and 'pasting' as needed. In fact, this became necessary, because as seen in Figure 4.2, the table did not allow much space to add another column for comments. Reducing the font size would have made reading difficult. Nonetheless, the chart fulfilled its purpose, because having all data integrated into this chart allowed me to grasp the general picture and refer to the data as needed.

FOCUS GROUP	CIA	CIB	CIC	CID	CIE
FG3 DC/400/3/AEJ Aminda, Eida and Joel	Aminda: Maybe he thinks that Japanese people are rude because we the Mexican always looking at the eyes a smile and waiting for the faces for the reaction in the talking. But Japanese people I think because I have some friends Japanese because I am learning Japanese too. They are so respect people, and I don't think so, they are rude, respect, respect, respect. I think that the comment about not to offend people, maybe to think to the eyes is inquiring too much. Joel: a lot of people, I see the most of the foreign, they are not cold, but it's weird for them when touch or greeting with a kiss or something it's very weird for them. They think the Japanese like their culture more respect and more philology they like more respect, like I see my soul in your eyes. Aminda: The Japanese who come here are -Oh my God- and we are like welcome to Mexico! In fact, one of my teachers is too cold like very serious. And another teacher is very enthusiastic. But in general respect.	J: In Russia is three kisses. I think it's normal the reaction of the professor. I think I was react the same way but it is normal learning and try to understand why and adapt to the culture. A: ...to be open minded. Because I am in another country, other people, and at this point not to learn of the culture of the people, I live in a little box and I don't want to change to other people, I think it's a bad reaction.	J: that was intolerant, I think. I have some troubles for accept US people because they are very close, because the y are the most big country and the most big economy. And not everyone, I know some very cool Americans, but mostly are very close minds and everything has to be right... (their way, they are the standard) A: Like if you are not blue, and red and white you are so strange, (colors of the flag). J: you are my employee and really I met some very cool guys from the US and other are very close one is very close, you are Mexican your culture is weird and they are very close mind. I have a lot of problems for accept them. E: I think that when we stay in a different group or a group with people from different cultures, we have to be prepared for listen different (other cultures) but in the same country if we are different places in the same country, (we have internal problems) we have problems for understanding another people. J: here in the same country. T: Not necessarily across countries, but within the country, Indigenous groups and there is a lot of prejudice and racism.	J: No it's part of this culture for him it could be... it's common here to asking for permission to use the bathroom I don't think that... the real interpretation is that it's common behavior here. It does not mean that you have less self-confidence or something. A: It is the wrong interpretation because here it is like show your manners. Because for the Mexican teacher if you don't do that. -Who do you think you are? Get out! (Excuse me I'm the teacher) J: Yeah, I think it's common here, why did you do that?-. I think it's good to make an agreement with that professor, because it's open mind about other cultures for the professor that means that I can't go to the bathroom if I don't ask for permission for the professor so they need to make agreements and talking like that. A: Thee teacher is here... if he does not understand that or not respect OK maybe he doesn't... (J: Let it be) Respect. Do you think I don't understand that? E: I think that when I go one people go to another country if she or he start notice different only can ask Why? T: You cannot go someplace and change the culture. Imagine Hands, in Canada we do not hold hands.	A: It's too pretentious to say I know all the culture. Because the people is not a culture, it is but -you Japanese go to the Mexican- and talk about beans and talk about rice. OK? -ok J: I think, it is, not pretentious, but I do, my believe, I do, I think she should be more open minded, and believe that other people from other cultures mix ... Yes, they can negotiate communication. E: I don't think that teacher has ethics... J: It could be possible but in every world there are exceptions... because it's not the culture, it's people. (T: the individual) the person. I don't know I'd do it in a different way but -she is the teacher.- T: But next week I am going to receive two students from the Czech republic. I have no idea how they are, I don't know what I am going to do with them, how to treat them? What would you say to that? A: Like normal, J: like people, they are not robots, or people from the Czech Republic I mean, they are people. T: So she is using her stereotypes concepts that she has about the culture, and she puts the culture to the person. 48.03 you're Mexican, you have to be happy. I: if you're not you are weird. You have to

Figure 4.2 Chart Critical Incidents from Students' Focus Group Interviews

4.6.5 Initial Labeling of Data from Interviews and Class Observations

I created a table for each one of the critical incidents in a different Word document, so I could analyze each one of them separately. Focusing analysis on each critical incident separately made the task less overwhelming; thus, instead of being faced with eighty thousand words all at once, I was dealing with manageable chunks of data. Also, separate tables for each critical incident were more manageable in terms of easy reading and sufficient space for writing comments. Additionally, dealing with smaller fragments allowed for reading and rereading of the data, permitting me to achieve a full ‘immersion in the data’ strategy (Richards, 2003, p. 277). This was an instructive way of becoming more and more familiar with data. Furthermore, this process was essential in identifying recurrent patterns and identifying what might become possible themes for discussion. The aim at this point was not to produce a set of categories, but to ‘generate a set of labels from which categories can be derived’ (Richards, 2003, p. 273). At this first stage, I labeled key words, phrases, or parts of the interviews which illustrated these potential categories—the key words, phrases or sections were then underlined, highlighted or written in a different font color so that they would stand out upon rereading (Figure 4.3).

Critical Incident B: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia

CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia
 'Hans, an English teacher from Vancouver, Canada spent two years working in Saudi Arabia. In that country, he described, it is a custom for men to hold hands when walking next to each other. He expressed—at first, it made me feel very uncomfortable, but I learned to put a good face on it because I didn't want to offend anybody—'

FG3	<p>Joel: In Russia is three kisses! I think <u>it's normal the reaction of the professor</u>. I think I was react the same way but it is normal learning and try to <u>understand why and adapt to the culture</u>./Aminda: ...to be open-minded. Because I'm in another country, other people, and at this point, not to learn of the culture of the people...like—I live in a little box and I don't want to change to other people—I think it's a bad reaction.</p>	<p>Attitude: understanding, adaptation, to be open-minded.</p> <p>Aminda: 'like-I live in a little box and I don't want to change to other people'</p>
FG4	<p>Luz: He acted in a good way, because he went there and he didn't criticize the culture and <u>he did what they did there</u>. I think he was a good visitor. It's normal, because here in Mexico it's <u>difficult to accept</u> people the same sex./Ana: I think it was a <u>normal reaction</u> he was like the other guys./Caro: I think he was very surprised because sexuality isn't good here, especially with men. In our country is very <u>difficult to accept</u> the situation without thinking that they are gay. So, it was nice of him, <u>to accept the situation</u>.../Luz: it must have been difficult for him.../Caro: Maybe he also felt very sure of his virility because another man could have reacted differently. 31:45/Luz: You can't go to a culture and change rules.</p>	<p>Attitude: understanding, 'he did what they did there' (adaptation), 'don't criticize' (to be open-minded), change.</p> <p>Luz: 'you can't go to a culture and change the rules'</p>

Figure 4.3 Table Comprising *CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia*

At a second stage, these highlighted elements were integrated into a new Word document. This allowed the identification of salient themes (Figure 4.4).

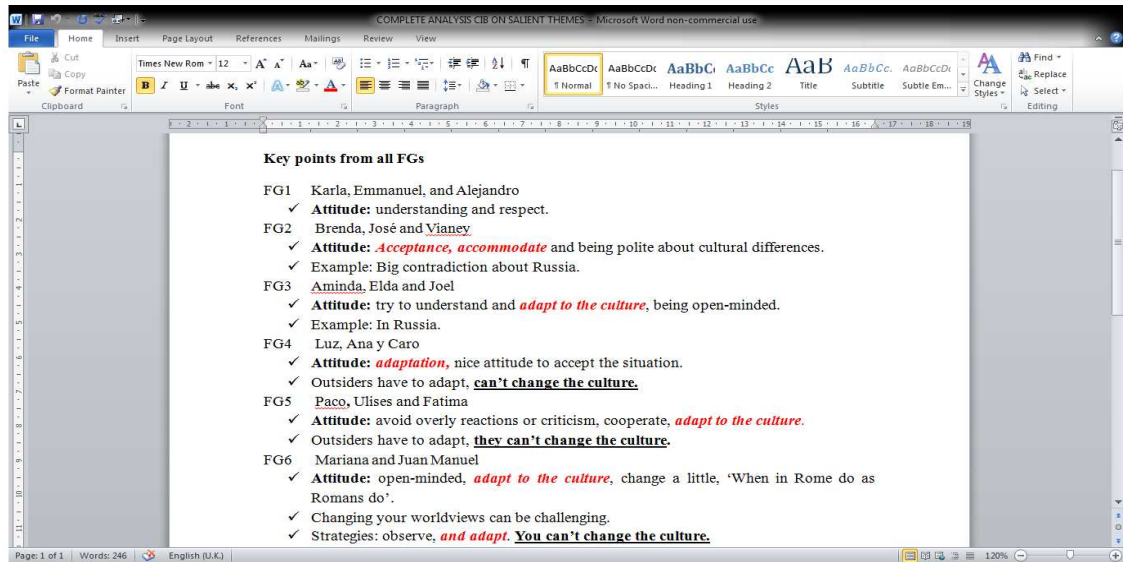


Figure 4.4 Salient Themes from *CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia*

At a third stage, as a process of reduction, I made a complete analysis of the *most* salient themes. An example can be seen in the screenshot below (Figure 4.5). This same process was repeated when analyzing each of the critical incidents discussed by students and teachers.

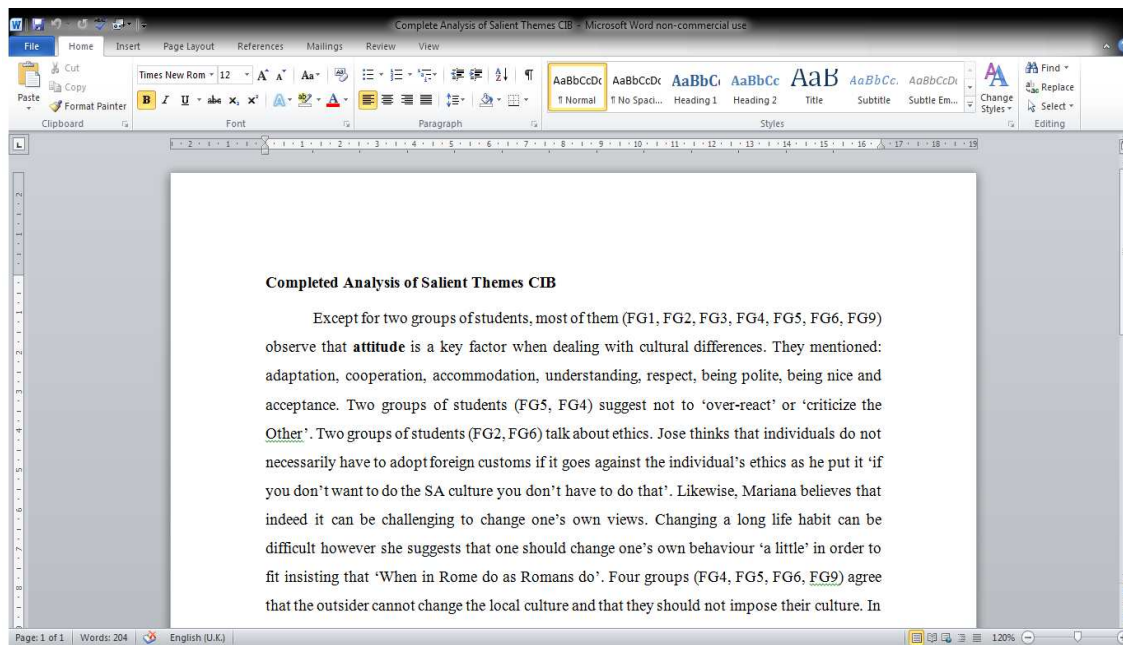


Figure 4.5 Complete Thematic Analysis of *CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia*

A similar procedure was used when organizing and coding the data obtained from classroom observations. Templates were used when conducting the classroom observations, an example of which can be seen in Appendix IV. However, in contrast to the interviews, not all of the data gathered in these templates was transferred to a Word document. Instead, all sixteen sets of notes generated by the observations were filed using plastic separators; these were organized in a binding folder where they were easy to access. Because of the sheer volume of discourse generated by a single class, only relevant key words/events and comments noted during the classroom observation were transferred into a table. Some of the events which had taken place in the classroom were ‘reconstructed’ (Fetterman, 2010, p. 117) afterwards, using these key points as reference, as can be seen in the following table (Figure 4.6).

CO	Teacher/Level	Date	Time	Students	Key phrases for ethnographic reconstructions	Categories
CO1	LU/400	5 May	10:00	4	Two late students: 'Teacher, may I coming?' Teacher nods with a smile. Students seemed very embarrassed, apologetic gesture in face.	L1/L2-L2/C2 Transfer How does she deal w/tardiness?
CO2	RO/800	5 May	10:00	8	Presentations. Both students talked about Mexican history	Use of L2 to describe C1
CO3	CO300	7 May	10:00-12:00 (2-Sat. classes)	28	'Nigger music' Greeting a late student: 'Good night and a wink'	Large class, crowded, difficult to circulate.
CO4	MI/600	9 May	10:45	26	Teacher's bump -Shit,, unnoticed by students. 2 late students! Students address teacher by first name	Taboo words C1/C2. Differences in forms for addressing T.
CO5	RO/700	9 May	10:00	6	Presentations Mexican traditions & an archeological site in Guanajuato	Use of L2 to describe C1
CO6	JR/400	10 May	9:00	6	'Speak loud, like a Gringo!' '5 de Mayo' & Saint Patrick's Day'	Stereotypes
CO7	MI/500	10 May	11:45	14	Teacher's bump 'Oh f...!' Raw attendance: 'Present'. A couple late students, they integrate	Taboo words C1/C2. L1/L2 Transfer.

Figure 4.6 Classroom Observations

In Appendix IV, notes from a classroom observation of *Elizabeth* can be found. A full reconstruction of these notes was the basis for Extract 46, which also generated a tag related to the issue of ‘asking permission’. The tag was intended to serve as a reminder to explore the issue with the teacher in an interview. Two further examples of reconstructions of events generated by key words/phrases can be found in Extracts 47 (‘Good night and a wink’) and 57 (‘Speak loud, like a Gringo’) from *Colin* and *Johnny Rodriguez’s* classes, respectively (see Figure 4.6).

So then, at this stage, salient themes and recurring ideas from interviews and classroom observations were established. These recurrent themes and ideas began to suggest a line of organization and possible themes for discussion. However, although the data from interviews and classroom observations provided the main source for classification, this needed to be informed by other sources (Richards, 2003, p. 274). These included notes from fieldwork and ‘tags’ generated by comments made during or after interviews, or during class observations, all of which were recorded in a notebook. A dramatic example of a ‘tag’ generated during a classroom observation, then recorded in a field notebook, was one student’s use of the phrase ‘nigger music’ to describe a musical genre that his teacher did not know (Research notes, 7 May 2011). The student seemed to be unaware of the implications of his words, but this ‘tag’ nonetheless gave rise to much discussion in the interview phase. The critical incident that arose from this ‘tag’ was recycled and used in the interviews with teachers to explore their perceptions. Many other such incidents were recorded in my notebook, allowing me to keep track of the various strands of the investigation, while also providing focus. Because this data was revised in an ongoing process, the task of identifying interrelated themes became less complex, and the interconnectedness of the data became apparent at an early stage in the investigation.

4.6.6 ‘Thick Description’: Interconnectedness of Data in Defining Main Themes

The next step was to establish consolidated main themes for the ethnographic account. This implied drawing on data from the classroom observations, the interviews, the ‘tags’

generated by the classroom observations and interviews, and the field notes recorded in my notebook. The themes would have to be constructed from the various forms of data; I would have to look for interconnectedness. The theme of punctuality seemed to be the ‘elephant in the room’—this theme emerged quite easily and gave rise to others. An example of how I constructed a theme, in this case ‘punctuality’, can be seen in the following description:

Interviews and tags from interviews: In the discussion of *CID: An American in Mexico*, the first teacher I interviewed directed attention to the issue of ‘class interruption’ and ‘tardiness’. At the end of the interview I marked these topics as ‘tags’ to follow up in subsequent interviews.

Classroom observation and tags from classroom observations: Since ‘punctuality’ appeared to be a salient theme from interviews, following this lead, I revised data from classroom observations. Indeed, I had recorded two incidents with a ‘tag’ on the margin that read: ‘Ask teachers how they perceive students’ habit of asking for permission to enter the classroom’. Although my attention was mainly focused on the issue of students asking for permission to enter the classroom, the teachers’ attitudes when dealing with ‘punctuality’ also became evident.

Notes from fieldwork: An incident recorded in my notebook added to the discussion regarding foreign teachers’ emotional state of mind when dealing with ‘cultural things’, in this case the issue of ‘punctuality’. In my notebook I had recorded an experience described by two students who had a ‘strange experience with an American teacher’. Other notebook entries detailing two events while sitting at the patio in the school provided a picture of student life in coping with their work, along with some contextual factors regarding the reality of the University of Guanajuato, they added to the discussion about essentialist representations of students in regard to the issue of punctuality.

At one level, it was a relatively straightforward process to connect the various forms of data into a coherent whole, which could then form a theme. Figure 4.7 represents this interconnection process.

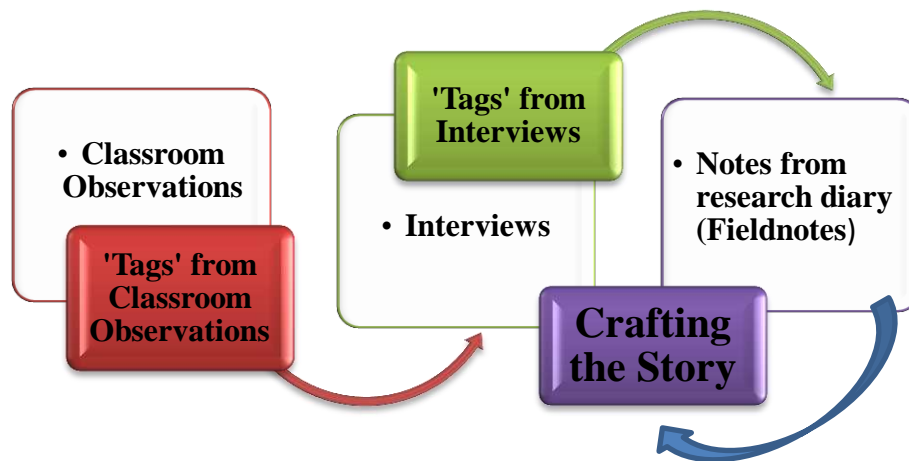


Figure 4.7 Interconnecting of Data

At another level, I was challenged to identify how one piece of data from a specific critical incident informed the other. Juxtaposing discussions across critical incidents helped to add new perspectives to the construction of the themes. For example, the discussion of *CID: An American in Mexico* showed the existence of some rather stereotypical discourses concerning the punctuality of Mexicans. However, participants' discussion of *CIE: A Mexican Spanish Teacher in a Multicultural Class in Guanajuato* revealed yet other views regarding teachers' and students' views of stereotypes. The discussion of the two critical incidents painted two contrasting views regarding stereotypes, adding dimension and desirable complexity to the resulting theme, 'punctuality'.

Thus, the juxtaposition of data yielded a framework for the elaboration of various themes. It was possible to divide the themes into subthemes, or theme complexes. 'Punctuality' rendered the following structure which is incorporated into this thesis:

Theme: The Issue of Punctuality and Official Holidays

Subtheme: Punctuality (and Holidays) a Mexican Cultural Traits

Subtheme: Punctuality beyond the Pale of Culture

Subtheme: The Reality of the University of Guanajuato

Subtheme: Cultural Labeling

Subtheme: The Political Tinge of 'Culture'

4.7 Thematic Structure of the Findings Chapters

Having provided a discussion of the methodology used to produce this study, including its research paradigm, the research methods, the data collection and the analysis of the data I now turn to a description of its thematic structure. The three major themes that emerged from the data analysis, which also make up the titles of the three findings chapters were as follows:

Chapter 5: The Impact of ‘Culture’ on Social Conventions. This chapter looks at individuals’ interpretation of social knowledge and its impact on social behaviour.

Chapter 6: The Issue of Punctuality. This chapter looks at the impact of stereotypes in the construction of the Other. It discusses the issue of ‘punctuality’ which appears to be treated as a cultural trait of Mexican society.

Chapter 7: Social Use of Language. This chapter looks at foreign teachers’ construction of the locals’ social norms of use of language. It discusses the challenges experienced by foreigners in negotiating ‘their’ social conventions in addressing people when in the host community these appear to go against ‘their’ value system.

4.7.1 Issues of Readability

The presentation of the verbatim quotations used in the final document required additional consideration for the purpose of 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 thesis 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 4.5.8, 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 4.6.2, 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, José, Miguel, Rosa, Colin, Elizabeth, Albert* and *Johnny Rodriguez* while students' names appear in Roman type: Luz Ma, Aminda, Joel or Vianey.

As discussed in 4.4.3.2, critical incidents were used as a means to motivate respondents to tell their stories. The data presented in the three findings chapters derives from the discussion of six critical incidents. The reader is recommended to review the full text of each of the critical incidents before approaching the findings chapters. See Appendix V for the texts of the critical incidents.

Lastly, all the data extracts in the findings chapters are numbered for ‘easy accessibility’ within the document (Silverman, 2010a, p. 347).

Chapter 5: The Impact of ‘Culture’ on Social Conventions

In this chapter, findings are presented that show the ways in which the small group’s constructions of ‘culture’ are influenced by individuals’ cultural resources (family values, upbringing, language and education). Cultural practices, such as requesting permission to enter or leave the classroom, offering/refusing food and complaining were found to have an emotionally charged quality for one side or the other, whether local or foreign. It was found that relativizing C1 knowledge was a challenge for individuals, due to the emotionally charged nature of this primary social imprinting. The capability to recognize different cultural practices from the perspective of the Other—to understand why individuals act the way they act— appeared to be dependent on the capability to relativize worldviews; it was observed that the inability to see beyond cultural references seems to lead to a mild form of Othering. Although resistance to the cultural practices of the Other manifested itself to various degrees, there was also willingness to transform the Self in order to harmonize with the new environment. The process of learning/adaptation did not follow a linear path, but the deliberations and negotiations to arrive at new understandings seem to be a zigzagging enactment of cosmopolitan orientations—orientations which I would argue are an underlying human characteristic. Further, it was found that professional discourses (ELT) can shape teachers’ and students’ constructions of ‘culture’. Both teachers and students became caught up in a struggle to deal with C1/C2 dichotomies within the context of English language teaching and learning—indeed, the role of ‘culture’ in foreign language instruction seemed to be problematized when it came to issues of identity.

This chapter draws on data generated by the discussion of four critical incidents: *CIA: A Mexican Student in Japan*, *CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia*, *CID: An American in Mexico* and *CIF: ‘Complaining in Mexico’* (see Appendix V).

5.1 ‘A Mexican Thing’

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 *CID: 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 the 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 is 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*, *José* 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.

It could be said that this practice 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 6)

Ana: In the school you notice that is different between one or another teacher, in some cases is personal. FG4 (Extract 7)

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 8)

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. As I was able to appreciate when conducting class observations, not all students asked for permission to enter, some did, while others did not. 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.

Nevertheless, 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 9)

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; 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 10)

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 concepts 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 9) 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 francés, 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 11)

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.

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 12)

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 ‘culture’ is inherent in the individual. According to *Colin*, students’ cultural orientation is what dictates their actions. It could be said, that from his viewpoint, ‘habitualized knowledge’ is so embedded in the students that it is difficult for them to step out of their socially induced behavior; as he put it, ‘it’s ingrained in us, in our DNA’. *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. 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. This led to a change in his perception, in that he was able to understand the principle behind his students’ behavior, as he put it ‘it’s for respect’, in other words, he was able to understand the deep aspect of ‘culture’. 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 with *José* 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. *José* (Extract 13)

As *José* 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 *José’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 *José*. He names among these, ‘love’, ‘affection’, ‘energy’, ‘desire’, ‘will’, ‘being humble’ and ‘compassion’. For *José*, the qualities of a teacher will emerge, dictated by the personality and the subconscious. It could be said that for *José* 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 14)

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’ critical 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* sensitivity towards the attitudes of his students may be a result of his bicultural status; he is aware that there is a political tinge in

his students' rejection of the English language. The political tinge, which affects students' views on learning English is seen, in Chapter 6, Section 6.5.

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. 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. 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 12), '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 15)

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. It could be said that he is drawing on social skills and abilities to construct ‘culture’—he is able to transfer experience into a new cultural environment. However, regarding his students’ role in language learning he sticks to the idea 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 him, his students are learning *a* foreign language in *their* own social environment. *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 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 16)

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,

‘your English can be “Mexicanized”’, 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’.

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 Sections 3.2.1 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. However, 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. Indeed, the difficulty of negotiating norms which have an emotional component is highlighted by Berger and Luckmann (1991), who stress the difficulty of relativizing social knowledge acquired within the inner circle of the family.

The foregoing section would seem to suggest that individuals’ personal and 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 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 the status of EIL that questions the notion that foreign language should imply 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 3.1.3.).

5.2 Cultural Practices and the Issue of Othering

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 *CID: 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 *CID: 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 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 17)

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 CID, 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. These include: being curious, showing interest, asking, being polite and trying to understand. 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 18)

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, ‘deep culture’. From a general analysis based on their discussion of all critical incidents, 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’. It could be said that students’ discussions show their abilities to view things through a cosmopolitan prism when constructing ‘culture’. An attitude which they seem to acknowledge is essential when interpreting Others’ peoples’ cultural practices. This became evident as they discussed the different ways of enacting the value of respect between people from Japan and Mexico.

For instance, when discussing the *CIA: A Mexican student in Japan*, most of the students (FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG6, FG7, FG8) problematized the response: ‘What’s wrong with that?!’ as portrayed in the critical incident, to the description of a Japanese cultural practice. Indeed, students’ discussion of this critical incident shows a more critical cosmopolitan attitude in responding to cultural practices. The following extracts exemplify this view:

José: Maybe in Japan they consider to look in the eyes only the boss, the teacher or people who have a bigger place in society, [...] if the person has a bigger status the bowing is deeper. But, here in Mexico, the US and England is normal to make eye contact//**Vianey:** ...because in our culture if you don’t look at people in the eyes is a rude thing, or it could be interpreted like someone wants to hurt, as if they’re ignoring you. Perhaps we think that

something is wrong with people who don't see you in the eyes because we show feelings through our eyes. Also, in Japan they don't say your name, they say your last name... it's a form to respect to the individual. I think that's why they don't see you in the eyes...But this person, I think 'Luis' doesn't accept what other people believe, we only want to believe what our family or our country wants us to believe//**José:** in Mexico we believe that if you see a person to the eyes you are telling the truth//**Researcher:** on the contrary if you look down...?//**José:** You're lying! That's right, if you see the eyes you're telling the truth. FG2 (Extract 19)

Here, these students reflect on the contrasting ways that Japanese and Mexicans enact signals of respect. Whereas not making eye contact might be considered rude for Mexicans, in Japan it is a symbol of respect, they conclude. These students show interest and curiosity when attempting to interpret and understand the difference between Japanese and Mexican enactments of respect. They acknowledge that 'being respectful' may reflect itself in different types of behavior in the different countries. These students are seen to be making an effort to see things from the perspective of the Other, positioning themselves critically from both standpoints. Furthermore, it could be said that the ability to relativize their worldviews seems to broaden their ability to recognize that 'being respectful' may reflect itself in different types of behavior in different countries. Similarly, Aminda and Joel expressed:

Aminda: Maybe 'Luis' thinks that Japanese people are rude because Mexican people always look at the eyes, a smile, and waiting for the faces for the reaction in their talking, and I don't think they are rude, it's all about respect, respect, respect. [...] maybe to look into the eyes is inquiring too much//**Joel:** a lot of people, I see that most of the foreigners...they aren't cold, but it's weird for them when we [Mexican people] touch or greet with a kiss and so on, and it's very weird for them. They think the Japanese like their culture more respect and more philosophy they like more respect, like—I see my soul in your eyes— FG3 (Extract 20)

Aminda draws attention to the impact that the individual's cultural knowledge (referring to Mexican student, 'Luis' in the critical incident) can have on the interpretation of the Other's behaviour. From Aminda's viewpoint, this could lead to misrepresentations of the Other—this led her to express, 'and I don't think they are rude'. Conversely, Joel reflects on how Mexicans' behaviour could be interpreted by the Other, or as he put it: 'it's weird for [foreigners] when we [Mexican people] touch or greet with a kiss and so on'. What is

significant in their discussion is that it included self-reflection on their own behavior, and on how the Self might be perceived in the eyes of the foreigner.

Like Joel (FG3, Extract 20), several students (FG2, FG3, FG5, FG8) discuss how differences could be perceived as ‘wrong’, ‘weird’, ‘being rude’ and could be a cause of ‘annoyance’ or ‘surprise’. So then, students seem to be sensitive to the impact that being confronted with differences can have on the individual. Like Aminda and Joel (FG3, Extract 20), several students recognize the impact of one’s own cultural viewpoint when interpreting the Other. However, Luz (FG4) seems to problematize this narrow view, stating that ‘not everyone is like us’. From her perspective, relying on one’s own social knowledge to make sense of the Other could be a barrier to the understanding of the Other. As she expressed it, ‘we can see it like a way to be rude, from *our* perspective, that’s dangerous’ [my emphasis]. Similar view was expressed by Juan Manuel (FG6) and Vianey (FG2, Extract 19) who seem to suggest that first cultural knowledge can be a source of conflict for the individual. From their viewpoint, this source of knowledge is so deeply embedded in the individual that it can prevent seeing beyond their own cultural reality; thus, it can constrain successful acceptance, or ‘resist’ difference. Indeed, it is noteworthy how Vianey problematizes the lack of ability to recognize Others’ worldviews, or as she puts it, ‘Luis’ doesn’t accept what other people believe’.

Thus far, it can be said that students’ ability to relativize their worldviews shows in their capacity for self-problematization and self-understanding. They exhibit a good deal of reflexivity in their analysis of the differences in worldviews between the Self and the Other. This was conducive to the discussion of the differences between Mexican and Japanese ‘cultures’; this was done in a non-judgmental way, the students viewing the behavior of the Other as merely different, not better or worse. Moreover, students’ discussions show that the construction of ‘culture’ is reflective and critical. Students’ active role in this process demonstrates their capabilities for observing, listening, negotiating, problematizing, questioning the beliefs they have about themselves and others.

Overall, data shows that students acknowledge that different perspectives of viewing the world can exist (FG2, FG8, FG5, FG6, FG8) and that these perspectives have an impact on social behaviour. Indeed, when trying to explain this behaviour characteristic of Japanese people, Laura (FG7), Aminda (FG3), Jose (FG2, Extract 19) talked about ‘status’. Jesús (FG8) on the other hand spoke of ‘rank’: “They respect the rank and that’s why they look down and they don’t look at you in the eyes because it’s like—I want to fight with you—”. Whether these perceptions might be correct to some degree, what is significant in this account is their willingness to try to see beyond the mere act of avoiding eye contact, and try to understand the possible principle behind it. These students are seen to show interest and curiosity when attempting to interpret and understand the difference between Japanese and Mexican enactments of respect. If anything students’ attitude could be perceived as ‘cosmopolitan curiosity’. They seemed to be overly enthusiastic or overly creative about such cultural differences, as in the particular case of Joel (FG3, Extract 20), who expressed, “They like more respect like,—I see my soul in your eyes—”. However, students’ ideas are not necessarily uninformed or mere guesswork; many of the students I interviewed have wide experience learning foreign languages. Japanese language is one of the most popular at the school (see Characteristics of Participants, Section 4.1.3), and over the year the Language Department welcomes several groups of students from Japanese universities who come to learn Spanish. Thus, the exchange and interaction between Japanese and Mexican students stimulates learning about each other. Students’ experience from learning other languages is a resource used in their constructing ‘culture’.

So then, most of the student participants in this investigation (FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG6, FG7, FG8) were seen to acknowledge different worldviews in the way individuals enact the value of respect—respect as a value is not observed as being particular to Mexican or Japanese society. The way students spoke about and contrasted these differences seems to indicate their cosmopolitan attitude in that they tried to explain, understand, and see things from the perspective of the Other. It can be said that students’ ability to relativize their worldviews shows in their capacity for self-problematization and self-understanding. They exhibit a good deal of reflexivity in their analysis of the differences in worldviews between the Self and the Other. This was conducive to the

discussion of the differences between Mexican and Japanese ‘cultures’; this was done in a non-judgmental way, the students viewing the behavior of the Other as merely different, not better or worse. Moreover, students’ discussions show that the construction of ‘culture’ is reflective and critical. Students’ active role in this process demonstrates their capabilities for observing, listening, negotiating, problematizing, questioning the beliefs they have about themselves and others. Students seem to be wary of the risk of attaching notions to different cultural practices; from their point of view, this could lead to prejudice. This recalls theories of Othering in which a negatively imaged Other is projected as a contrast to the proficient Self (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3).

At the same time, however, students are sensitive to the difficulties that adapting to different worldviews represents for the individual. This brought up the issue of adaptation and acceptance to which I turn on in the next section.

5.3 Cultural Adaptation or Cultural Acceptance

Indeed, it was found that adaptation to or acceptance of different cultural practices posed a dilemma, even in diminutive matters such as being repeatedly offered food, in the case of two foreign teacher participants. Once again, the baggage of emotionally charged social knowledge impeded seeing from the perspective of the Other. At times, the student interviewees displayed a willingness to throw out their cultural baggage, insisting on adaptation. However, it must be remembered that students’ opinions do not spring from first-hand experience, as is the case of foreign teachers who have been confronted with difference while living and working in a new environment. It did seem difficult to see the Other’s worldview as being as valid as one’s own; the ‘accommodation’ process mentioned by the students has its limitations, while the foreign teacher interviewees could only accept the Other’s ways up to a point.

In their discussion about *CIB: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia* all of the twenty-four student participants in this investigation hold the view that outsiders should adapt their behaviour to existing social norms when visiting a foreign country. Two extracts taken from two focus group interviews summarize the general perceptions of the students:

José: 'Hans' accommodated¹⁷ because he was living in South Arabia, when people from there come to Canada, maybe, they won't hold hands//**Vianey:** He was able to accept that it was common in Saudi Arabia maybe he was uncomfortable but he did it//**Brenda:** I think he was very polite to try to do their tradition, because perhaps a Mexican would be like —Don't touch me!— [Gesturing with hands]//**Vianey:** 'Hans' was accommodating to the situation, he was, we must accommodate to the local culture//**José:** I think you have to do some things when you are in another country; for example, you can respect, not necessarily accept, so respecting doesn't mean to say that you accept sometimes you can say [...] —OK, I don't like these kinds of things, but we are going to accommodate—//**Brenda:** I think we need to be able to learn and to listen and to want to explain. FG2 (Extract 21)

Ulises: I think in Mexico is similar than the Canadian, if I see two men holding hands is bad//**Fátima:** I think that everything like about your traditions, like he said, in Mexico is not normal because it is not the culture, people do not see it good//**Ulises:** they are gay//**Fátima:** even if they...//**Paco:** his reaction is normal because it's very different with the way they behave in Saudi Arabia in comparison with Canada//**Fátima:** I think that the thing you can do is to adapt to the culture because you can't have the same behavior that you have in your country and they are not//**Ulises:** you can be in contact with another culture but you need to respect the country. If it's normal for them, it should be for you too because you are there. You accept it you can't change it//**Fátima:** I think that one thing is important that you learn from them and they learn from you. FG5 (Extract 22)

The issue of adaptation/acceptance is raised fairly quickly when a cultural practice, in this case hand-holding between men, might be regarded as unconventional within one's social background. Some students (FG2, FG4, FG5, FG8) make their point by highlighting the differing interpretations of two men holding hands: in Saudi Arabia this may be quite normal behavior, whereas in Mexico it could be interpreted as 'being gay'. Thus, students acknowledge the challenge that being confronted with different behavioural practices represents for individuals, particularly for the Mexican males, in this case. For example, José (Extract 21) draws a distinction between adapting to and accepting local 'traditions': 'I think you have to do some things when you are in another country; for example, you can respect, not necessarily accept, so respecting doesn't mean to say that you accept'. It could be said that for José adapting to the situation does not mean compromising one's own

¹⁷ Here, students use the term 'accommodate' in the sense of 'adapt'. Spanish *acomodar* is a cognate.

‘principles’. In his view, respecting could be said to mean not judging the Other using one’s own worldviews.

Students’ reactions show a positive appraisal of the level of sensitivity and capability of the outsider [‘Hans’] in responding to the challenge and negotiating his behaviour in relation to an un-familiar cultural practice. As Brenda expressed it, ‘he was very polite to try to do their tradition’ (Extract 21) or as Luz (FG4) remarks, ‘I think he was a good visitor’. It could be said that students believe in the inherent human capacity of individuals to relativize, negotiate and adapt their worldview to other social environments. As discussed above, students talked about many kinds of strategies for the purpose of adaptation (Section 5.2). In their view, these strategies could lead to successful interaction and communication among people from different cultural backgrounds. But more importantly, as emphasized by students, these strategies could enhance individuals’ degrees of respect, tolerance, flexibility and empathy towards other worldviews.

The standpoint of the students that adapting might not necessarily mean accepting seems to coincide with some of the experiences described by two foreign teacher participants in this investigation. A case in point were narrations of teacher’s first-hand experiences when being confronted with what appear to be varying social conventions in the act of offering and refusing food in Mexico.

When I asked *Elizabeth* about her experience coming to Mexico, she replied:

Elizabeth: Mexico wasn’t what I expected, well, Guanajuato, not Mexico. It was more reserved when I arrived fourteen years ago; it was reserved, more reserved, very conservative. It was a shock; it was a culture shock when I came here // **Researcher:** Can you think of an example that created culture shock? // **Elizabeth:** Sure, people offering me food, people offering me strawberries and offering me different kinds of foods and here in this culture it’s rude not to accept whereas in England it’s rude to accept, it’s better to say—No, thank you. I’ve just eaten—or something like that, and that was a *big* problem [her emphasis]. It was a big problem for me because nobody told me. Nobody told me the culture norms here when I arrived, nobody told me that // **Researcher:** not too long ago another teacher was talking about ‘the ritual of offering food in Mexico’... there’s a first invitation, then a second one... and he said,—after the third time I have to accept it— // **Elizabeth:** I don’t accept it! I still don’t accept it! [overly enthusiastic

tone], depending of the situation [more calmly] because I'm a vegetarian so that created a lot of problems for me. A lot of problems because I had to say 'no' in a lot of cases and saying 'no' in a polite way is difficult here. (Extract 23)

Drawing on her personal experience, *Elizabeth* believes that having known more about the 'local culture' could have prevented her from experiencing 'culture shock'. According to her, not knowing the 'culture norm' when performing an act of refusal, resulted in conflict.¹⁸ This is something which she recalls vividly and which still disturbs her. Although *Elizabeth* says that she regrets the conflict generated by not knowing the local custom, her next comment seems to contradict this. Despite having lived in Mexican society for fourteen years and having acquired an awareness of the implications of refusing the offer of food, she still seems to resist. After I shared the story of another foreigner who expressed, that 'after the third time I accept it', *Elizabeth* repeatedly asserted in an overexcited tone, 'I don't accept it! I still don't accept it!' After a moment she became aware of the elevated tone of her voice and her hypercritical attitude, so in a more calm way, she tried to clarify that being a vegetarian was the main problem for her. So then, it would appear that from her perspective, local people should be more tolerant in accepting differences. When I asked *Elizabeth* if she shares her experiences with her students she responded:

Yes, it's very important. I think it's very important because I try to teach the students that it's better to be open about other cultures but also it's important to understand them. Maybe it's not wrong what people do but it's just different; and to understand and to try to respect difference in opinions and difference in ways of doing things. (Extract 24)

From her point of view as an ELT practitioner, *Elizabeth* believes in the importance of sensitizing students to cultural differences, 'to be open' and 'respect difference'. However, this apparent cosmopolitan view does not seem to extend to the Self.

Elizabeth does not seem to make an effort to see and recognize things from the perspective of the Other, in the case of being offered food, yet pleads for openness in the classroom setting. There does not seem to be a great deal of contemplation about the

¹⁸ In Mexico it is customary to offer food or drink a second and third time as a matter of course. Both interactants are expected to perform the roles of giver/receiver.

intended impression that locals are trying to make when offering food. Rather, this seems to be out of the realm of consideration. The local practice is not recognized as equally valid. In fact, *Elizabeth* explained that being a vegetarian was the main reason for which accepting food became problematic; nonetheless, she talked about people offering her strawberries. Nevertheless, she uses the nebulous ‘culture’ factor instead to solve the problem; as she put it, ‘in this culture is rude not to accept whereas in England it’s rude to accept’. In an environment where ‘her routinized’ ways of rejecting do not function in the same way, *Elizabeth* feels frustration and culture shock; as she expressed it, ‘saying “no” in a polite way is difficult here’. Nonetheless, it could be said that in reality, she has been actively engaged in the local environment. In the end, *Elizabeth* was able to observe this particular difference in the act of offering/refusing food; she has learned that in the local environment she must elaborate more. Although she might not acknowledge it, she has been able to work things out at a pragmatic level.

Whereas *Elizabeth* talked about resenting not having someone to guide her on common social practices in Mexico; *Colin*, on the contrary, talks about the role that his wife has played in this matter:

Refusing here for me is impossible [laughs] because people don’t accept that you kind of, and also my wife says, too, you kind of have to be careful as well because you do not want to appear that I don’t kind of, I’m rejecting, more than just rejecting, I don’t really know how to understand, but rejecting at a kind of cultural level, too, that does make sense? So, to say –no– to something, even if I really don’t want, sometimes I say –no– to be polite, but then I accept in the second or third time. Yes, it goes on! I know the game! But sometimes I really don’t want something or seconds, if they’re serving me food, and I’m like—Oh no, I’m going to explode!—And it’s difficult, very difficult, but also because people kind of push more with me than they would with a Mexican person. They really want to show that they are very generous and they want to be into appreciating//**Researcher:** It’s difficult, isn’t it? But you have your wife...//**Colin:** Yes, exactly, right I have my cultural translator too who can help me. So, lots of kind of foreign people coming to Mexico by themselves without that, without that support... really difficult. (Extract 25)

Like *Elizabeth*, *Colin* discovered that the act of offering/refusing food in Mexico is different from England. However, differently from *Elizabeth*, *Colin* seems to be more sensitive to the impression that locals intend to convey by insisting on offering food repeatedly. He seems to make an effort to understand the intended meaning behind the act of offering food, it is ‘to show that they are generous’ *Colin* remarks. Moreover, he seems to be aware of the ‘deep cultural’ aspect of refusing food; in that he is wary that he might be ‘rejecting, more than just rejecting, I don’t really know how to understand, but rejecting at a kind of cultural level’. *Colin* observes that at the surface a simple ‘no’ might not be sufficient. This comment resonates with *Elizabeth*’s comment who observes that ‘saying “no” in a polite way is difficult here’. However, this is not to say that *Colin* does not find it challenging to understand and accept. He does seem to make an effort to adapt himself to the local context, however.

As I shared these stories with *Luisa*, she also observes that in Mexico a second and third invitation is commonly made when offering food. She also recognized that refusing should be done with ‘*a lot of tact*, otherwise people can take offense’ [her emphasis]. She added that one should be ready to ‘offer a good excuse, maybe something like—I just ate—’. Paradoxically, this is the same excuse which *Elizabeth* suggests as a way to refuse food in Britain. Although offering food might not be done three times in England, it could be said that the social strategies to negotiate cultural practices that work in one system might not necessarily be different in the other system.

Luisa also shared her own experience at the Language Department:

I’ve experienced this in the school, say, if I arrive to the teachers’ lodge with a bag of chips and I offer some to those in the room, the Mexican ones accept and the foreigners more likely say—No, thank you—of course I don’t mind, it’s OK between us [teachers at school] because we know each other (Extract 26)

Luisa recognizes differences in behavior between foreign and local persons in the act of accepting/refusing food. She notes that other factors might make a difference, such as social distance between individuals and formality or informality of the setting. This seems to suggest these factors could help in determining how much a person needs to elaborate or

provide an excuse for not accepting food. *Luisa* seems to suggest that in the act of refusing food, individuals should be attentive to contextual factors and make use of their social skills in negotiating 'culture'.

Although there might be some regularities in social conventions surrounding the act of offering/refusing food both in Mexico and England, it could be said that these are not fixed rules. Is one to believe that in Mexico food is offered three times and 'you must accept it' or that in England is 'rude to accept'? Data shows that this act can be negotiated, with a lesser or greater amount of thought, depending on the circumstances, and indeed, individuals have the abilities to do so. It would appear that a more critical reading of 'cultures', a more thorough questioning of the beliefs held about the Self and Other 'culture', seems to be necessary.

Elizabeth and *Colin's* experiences portray two different ways of responding to a local social custom. On the one hand, *Colin* seems to be capable of recognizing from the perspective of the locals and makes an effort to adapt to the local social custom. On the other hand, *Elizabeth* does not seem to be willing to recognize the local custom as valid and instead is seen to resist it. These findings resonate with Shaules' dilemma theory (see Section 3.3.4), which proposes that all individuals have different reactions (resistance, acceptance, adaptation) to the demands of new intercultural experiences. However, as pointed out by this scholar, these reactions can change as a result of the developmental nature of intercultural learning. This can be observed in particular in the story shared by *Colin*. However, this is not the case with *Elizabeth*, who prefers to stick to 'her' way of doing things. Thus, it would appear that individuals' attitudes and personal choices seem to play a large role in negotiating 'culture'. The stories of these foreign teachers resonate with the discussions of Kim (2001, 2005), Shaules (2007), Scollon *et al.* (2012) Nishida (2005) and Weaver (1993) regarding the challenges of adapting to different cultural practices. Shaules (2007), in his dilemma theory, highlights the importance of relativization in negotiating the process of resistance, adaptation and acceptance (see sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4). It might be said that the degree to which individuals are able to relativize their

worldviews determines their openness to difference, and their ability to avoid judgmental assumptions and culture shock.

Thus far, the participants' discussion indicates that individuals recognize cultural differences in the behavior of both the Self and the Other: in the acts of requesting permission to enter the classroom, offering/refusing food, or two men holding hands in Saudi Arabia. Individuals acknowledge the diverse ways of enacting the value of respect: asking permission to enter the classroom in Mexican society, or avoiding eye contact in Japanese society.

As has been seen in the experiences shared by *Colin*, *Elizabeth* and *Luisa*, being confronted with different cultural practices seems to demand making use of the social strategies which one naturally possesses from one's first 'culture'. Secondary social knowledge may also come into play, as will be seen in the final section of this chapter, an examination of the act of complaining, or as one interviewee would have it, 'an American thing'.

5.4 'An American' Thing'

In the teacher participants' discussion of *CIF: Complaining in Mexico*, socio-economic factors were seen to influence behavior. Here 'the culture of complaining' was examined in a comparison of worldviews; the teachers showed critical capacities in their analysis of how complaints are brought forward in different societies.

As *Elizabeth* narrated her experience of dealing with differences between Mexico and the UK in the act of offering/refusing food, I recalled another incident involving a foreign colleague. This colleague described having experienced a form of culture shock related to the issue of complaining. So, I made a spontaneous decision to write a vignette about '*Complaining in Mexico*' and use it in subsequent interviews. Fortunately, because this interview had been only the second one, I was able to present the vignette to the rest of the teachers. When writing the short prose for this critical incident I had overlooked

specifying the nationality of the individual. Although omitting the nationality was something that happened by accident, to my surprise, the moment I presented the vignette to the other teachers, their immediate response was to identify the nationality of the individual, –*It's an American!*– they said.

For example, *Albert* said:

I think that the person is American because in Canada we do not have quite the culture of complaining, demanding things quite as much, maybe we try to be more polite, I guess...umm... But, I wouldn't say that it's a great source of frustration that I always want to complain more about it... I could complain about the internet service in Mexico though [laughs]. (Extract 29)

Albert's interpretation of 'culture' seems to take the form of a habit, that is, 'the culture of complaining, demanding things [...]'. It could be said that to state that 'we [in Canada] try to be more polite' seems to indicate that he finds American's complaints mildly rude. *Albert* also views Americans as being demanding, a theme that *Colin* took up during his interview.

Colin's response to this critical incident was:

It's an American, demanding their rights in customer services, yeah, [laughs] I do agree, sometimes, I kind of see things and I don't see the logic, and occasionally I think–why is it so difficult? It could be a lot more straightforward and it doesn't seem to be, but it is a mind-set, it's different. And there's a different way of kind of, looking at things. So, this person, this American person, is thinking from that kind of cultural background from the consumerism, this is a consumer society, and you have got to please the consumer all the time. And I think from what I have seen in Mexico is kind of different, people have rights, but kind of manifested, umm, it's different... (Extract 30)

Colin relates the act of complaining to social factors present in the environment, in this case characterizing the US as a consumerist type of society. From his perspective, complaining and consumerism are interconnected; thus, pleasing consumers who are demanding their rights is a priority. According to *Colin*, socio-economic structures influence the individual's worldview, conditioning behavior such as complaining. *Colin* sees Mexico as different: 'people have rights', he says, but this is manifested differently.

Miguel believes that the process of making a complaint in Mexico is rather complicated and slow; he also spoke of the impact that the social-economic factor has in the functioning of American society,

[.] in the US..., if the client is not granted and gratified with his/her right to return the product, then comes the suing, and the fines for the companies...puff! I mean, they are *huge* fines, and of course they'll want to avoid this. Here in Mexico we have the PROFECO, but the bureaucratic procedure is long and slow that people prefer not to place a complaint. [His emphasis] (Extract 31)

Rosa also observes that complaining in the USA is driven by the philosophy that 'the client is always right'. However, she observes another feature,

I think it has to do more with the personality than nationality of the individual, but I wouldn't say that we do not complain. Perhaps it has to do more with the system itself and we prefer not to complain because the feeling is that the system doesn't work, you know, people can complain every day but the reply is not going to change, it's going to be slow and tedious, whereas in the States "the client is always right" [gesturing with hands]. (Extract 32)

Just as her colleagues above, *Rosa* feels that the bureaucratic process in Mexico tends to put people off from proceeding with formal complaints. However, *Rosa* rejects the notion that the act of complaining should be perceived as being dictated by the individual's cultural background, instead, she views it more as a characteristic of the individual.

José seems to share similar viewpoints to those of *Rosa* and *Colin*,

The person has the right to demand a good service and if you don't get it, he sure has the right to complain. But, to say that Mexican people do not complain? We act differently in this respect maybe more calmly or quietly whereas complaining in English [the language] could be more striking... the intonation of the language alone is loud, it's direct and short, so adding all of these elements to the equation of complaining... Perhaps because we don't "yell" [gesturing with hand] was what made the person believe that 'Mexican people don't complain'. But I wouldn't say we don't complain, we do it differently, I, for instance, complain if there's something I need to complain about. (Extract 33)

Like *Rosa* and *Colin*, *José* feels that people in Mexico do complain, but it is done in a different way, as he put it, ‘more calmly’. This leads him to reflect on the differences in intonation between Spanish and English language. He finds that intonation is a possible reason for the perception in the critical incident that Mexicans do not complain. He appears to arrive at this deduction by positioning himself in the perspective of the Other, although he is quite emphatic in his assertion that Mexican people can complain, only that they do it differently.

Elizabeth and *Luisa* also identify differences between British and Mexican society in the act of complaining. They seem to keep to the idea that people in Mexico do not complain. However, their discussion suggests that individuals are also capable of transformation. This is what *Elizabeth* expressed about this incident,

I think I’ve changed over the years because at the beginning of course I complained because it was part of my culture, part of my habits, the right to things, then I went through a time of *not* complaining because—that’s the way it is, let’s just say. But now, I’ve started complaining again because the way I see it the Mexican culture is changing, and there are associations and organizations, even if they are still very traditional, they are trying to change and in some way encourage people to demand their rights, like PROFECO¹⁹, and things like that, you know, to get good customer service you know. It might be a custom not to complain but they are being encouraged to do it. So, I’ve started doing it again and I don’t care about what people think about me, or how they think I react...I don’t care... But I’m not the only one... these are Mexican friends who have told me that they’re doing the same thing. People who have never left Mexico... [brief pause] so, I think it’s changing. (Extract 27)

Elizabeth portrays herself as having been an assertive complainer, which she attributes to ‘habits’ and ‘culture’. At the same time she ascribes a tradition of not complaining to ‘Mexican culture’, though she notes this might be changing. *Elizabeth* acknowledges altering her habits of complaining in an effort to adapt to the local environment, explaining that she accepted it because ‘that’s the way it is’. Her narration of the changes she went through from the time she arrived, oscillating from complaining to not complaining, then to complaining again (induced by social change in the local environment), suggests perhaps

¹⁹ PROFECO, Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor (Consumers Federal Protection Bureau).

some degree of adaptability in her behavior and attitude. During her stay in Guanajuato *Elizabeth* asserts that she has witnessed changes in the practice of complaining. She seems to value this transformation, which has taken place at the individual and societal level, she observes. Her last comment, that even ‘people who have never left Mexico’ are ‘doing the same thing’ [complaining], suggests approval of this change. Thus, her attitude seems not to have changed; in the end she adheres to the notion that local custom is ‘not to complain’.

Luisa also seems to identify differences between the UK and Mexico in the act of complaining, she expressed,

I learned to complain in England. I didn't usually complain but then I noticed that people there returned stuff if they weren't satisfied with the product, if it was damaged, or just because they changed their mind about the product and they could get their refund, and I thought, wow, I wish it were like that in Mexico! So, I changed my attitude about that and became more demanding and complained. It drove my parents crazy, they'd say—Please, why do you have to complain?— And I insisted when I had to, so, I'd talk to the manager or do what I had to do. The government is trying to change that, we have the PROFECO now, this is definitely something that we could really change for the best, I mean, we *must* change it. This is something that we could adopt from other cultures and modify ours because it's something positive. (Extract 28)

Luisa seems to share *Elizabeth's* viewpoint, in that she believes that people in the UK are more prone to complain, and that complaining is not a common practice in Mexico. Furthermore, her parents' reactions to *Luisa's* ‘new attitude’ of complaining appear to confirm *Elizabeth's* opinion that the conservative characteristics of people in Mexico prevent them from acting with more assertiveness. However, *Luisa's* comment that she became aware of deficiencies in the Mexican system of complaining after having lived in England suggests more a difference between the two countries in the results of complaining, rather than an inherent Mexican trait. *Luisa* learned and imported a different way of conduct, which in this case was something positive for her. As she put it, ‘this is something that we could adopt from other cultures and modify ours because it's something positive’. This experience could be said to be an example of self-transformation as a result of the encounter with the Other.

In the above discussion, social behavior is seen to be structured around the socio-economic factors characteristic of a given social system. Aside from the concrete question of whether or not changes might be needed in order to better protect customer rights, the true significance of the teachers' narratives shows in their reflections and deliberations on the subject—the process, rather than the actual product of these reflections seemed to be the point; this was the construction of 'culture' in action.

5.5 Summary of this chapter

In this chapter I have 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).

In the process of constructing meaning students show a certain capacity to relativize their 'culture' in order to try to see from the perspective of the Other. Students acknowledge that different social systems have different ways of doing and acting; they acknowledge different ways of enacting the value of respect (Appiah, 2005, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Kramersch, 1998a; Phillips, 2009; Nussbaum, 1996, 1997). They also reflect on the risk of using one's own cultural reference as the norm against which the Others' behaviour is judged. Students' lack of traveling experience seems to suggest that enacting cosmopolitan attitude is not dependent on this factor. This resonates with Pichler's study (2012) (see Section 3.4.7.1) in which cosmopolitan attitudes were found to be generally independent of traveling experience.

In the last section in this chapter, teachers talk about the act of complaining. Although they initially associated nationality with the act of complaining, they demonstrate critical capacity in differentiating other factors: socio-economic characteristics, infrastructure of organizations that receive complaints, differences in intonation between languages and the personality of the individual. This evidenced participants' capacity to reflect about themselves and about the Others in the way they analyze and try to see from the perspective of the other (Delanty, 2009; Shaules, 2007). The analysis and discussion led them to consider the issue of social transformation and learning from other social systems.

Chapter 6: The Issue of Punctuality (and Official Holidays)

In Chapter 5, constructions of ‘culture’ were considered in terms of personal trajectories—family values and profession, as well as individuals’ life experiences. The socio-economic and political structures of the two social systems, Mexico and the USA, were found to have an impact on social behavior as well. Some of the processes involved in constructing ‘culture’ were also discussed: how individuals are able to relativize their own views, recognize from the perspective of the Other and understand the values inherent in the Other’s actions. Values were recognized as being enacted in different ways across diverse social systems. The ability to appreciate difference without attaching notions to the Others’ worldviews or forms of behavior was also discussed.

In this chapter, findings are presented which would seem to indicate that stereotypes and representations of the Other have great influence on the participants’ constructions of ‘culture’. The specific subject of this chapter is the issue of punctuality; the discourse of stereotypes seemed to group itself around this theme, which functioned as a lightning rod, or catalyst. Punctuality was a theme that seemed to have almost ritual value—this theme emerged quite naturally from the findings, resonating throughout the discussions of the teacher participants. It was found that differences in the view of punctuality led to Othering of the Mexican students on the one hand, and that the Mexican view of US politics generated a negative American Other. Punctuality and holidays seem to have no intrinsic value as real issues, but in this chapter they may be seen in their function as a dividing line between ‘cultures’. Each side is conditioned by its corresponding worldview: the teacher participants report an ‘American attitude’ that seems to be conditioned by the Protestant work ethic. This seems to be in conflict with what is viewed as an easy-going working environment in the Language Department with its many holidays and relaxed standards of punctuality.

This chapter draws on data from the discussion of *CID: An American in Mexico* and *CIE: A Mexican Spanish Teacher in a Multicultural Class in Guanajuato* (see Appendix V), research notes and data from classroom observations.

6.1 Punctuality (and Holidays) Mexican Cultural Traits

This section is an exposition of findings concerning foreign teachers' constructions of the local environment—these constructions would seem to be conditioned by their worldviews, which they have had to relativize to some extent to gain more ease in the local environment. Inability to relativize was a catalyst for culture shock, as some of the teachers report. These English teachers' discussions draw on their experiences working hand in hand with their American colleagues, who are seen to be judgmental, falling into the trap of Othering Mexican students and colleagues in their working environment.

I have argued that one of the reasons for adopting the use of critical incidents was to motivate the interviewees to tell *their* stories, as I shared *my* stories with them. The clearest illustration of the value of this approach was the debate generated by *CID: An American in Mexico*, which traces the issue of requesting permission to enter the classroom. When reading the critical incident *José, Miguel, Albert and Johnny Rodriguez* were prompted to tell their stories about their American colleagues' reaction to tardiness.

José, who has over twenty-five years of teaching experience in the Language Department, described his assessment of the phenomenon:

One of the things that I've noticed is how problematic the concept of 'time' is for the Americans, the concept of punctuality of Mexican people. They complain about students being late, even for exams! They find it difficult to comprehend. *José* (Extract 34)

José observes that American teachers have issues coming to terms with the relatively lesser value students place on punctuality, noting that the Americans emphasize their concern by drawing attention to particular occurrences, as in 'even for the exams!' When *José* states that Americans have problems with 'the concept of punctuality of Mexican people', this would seem to indicate that the relative unimportance of punctuality is viewed as a national trait from both sides. In fact, *José* does not directly contest the implication that tardiness is a national characteristic; he chooses instead to highlight that time is 'problematic' for

Americans, and reports their complaints about latecomer students. *José* leaves the issue unresolved, saying that Americans find the situation ‘difficult to comprehend’.

Albert described a similar experience:

I’ve noticed there are some teachers from the US, well, in Mexico, you have a lot of holidays and stuff, and I may have made a couple of jokes about it myself...but I’ve seen some people that are very critical, like—Why do you [Albert] cancel your classes for students?!—You know, they [the authorities] shut the place at four o’clock it wasn’t like if I’ve had an option. So, yeah, I just try to go with the flow, I guess, in terms of that. (Extract 35)

Albert recognizes that the number of celebrations and the canceling of classes are notable features of the local environment. He notes that some of his American colleagues ‘are very critical’ of these practices. *Albert* reports that he has experienced such criticism first-hand, for canceling classes, even when the decision to close was beyond his control, ‘it wasn’t as if I’ve had an option’, he says. Though he recognizes the critical attitude on the part of his American colleagues, *Albert* is careful to qualify that these are ‘some teachers from the US’. *Albert* seems to be able to adjust to local circumstances; he admits to joking about short-term cancelations, which do not appear to be a source of worry for him.

Miguel, who as coordinator of the English language program is in constant communication with the English teaching staff, narrates a similar experience:

It’s shocking for foreigners that classes get canceled unexpectedly because of Mother’s Day or whatever. But here they [the authorities] cancel classes, like say, at two o’clock, just like that! Cancelations are announced from one day to the other, from one hour to the other. This is something that can be quite shocking for the Americans. (Extract 36)

From a general perspective, *Miguel* describes that cancelation of classes does not pass unnoticed by ‘foreigners’. At first *Miguel* uses the term ‘foreigners’, but later becomes more explicit; the sudden cancelations ‘can be quite shocking for the Americans’, he states. It would seem from *Miguel’s* statements that the improvised nature of the canceling of

classes ‘just like that!’ is a social pattern that is difficult for the American teachers to understand. In any case, *Miguel* does note the ‘shock’ of the Americans at this local practice.

For *José, Miguel* and *Albert* the relatively lesser local value accorded to punctuality is reported as being ‘problematic’ for their American colleagues. Likewise, the improvised cancelation of classes is ‘shocking’ for the Americans, according to these teachers. American disapproval of local conditions seems to encompass students, other teachers and the university authorities. The reports of *José, Miguel* and *Albert* seem to imply that the American teachers not only are using their cultural background as the reference point to evaluate the Other, but that they are attempting to portray themselves as more responsible by criticizing the local ambit. This became evident in the way American teachers are reported to be comparing their ‘culture’ to the local one—it might be said that they are failing to recognize the local ‘culture’ in its own milieu.

Johnny Rodriguez described another experience:

There’re good friends who are in staff, and very good friends of mine, who are within the school, who are of American culture, and so, certain habits that students bring to the... uh, really ends up on an point of frustration for these teachers, little issues I guess that typically, bad habits of being late, I don’t know, I think that when one brings in that standard, inevitably, you are setting up students and others to fail because there are of a different culture, they do have different parameters for what it is. (Extract 37)

Johnny Rodriguez observes that the habit of lateness is a source of frustration for some of his American colleagues. He acknowledges the existence of two different systems with two different ‘parameters’. Through his reflections on his colleagues’ reactions, *Johnny Rodriguez* problematizes American teachers using their own worldview as a reference for evaluating the performance of the locals; ‘you are setting up students and others to fail’, as he puts it. He problematizes that his colleagues are looking for the familiar in a strange place. *Johnny Rodriguez* reports that American teachers are attempting to bring in ‘that standard’ of punctuality to the local environment; he seems to question the wisdom of doing

this. It might be suggested that C1 is the reference point being used to evaluate the Other—this would seem to be the case, based on *Johnny's* reports of American attitudes. In *Johnny Rodríguez's* discourse there is an underlying suggestion that punctuality and the lack of punctuality are cultural traits which presumably set American and Mexican 'cultures' apart.

Miguel describes how another American teacher, 'Chris', uses personal experience from his home country to guide his views on punctuality:

'Chris' says that in the US, if he was late for class they wouldn't let him take the exam, and he complains that here it's like—Sorry, I'm late—and like—Oh, no problem, come on in, have a seat, here's your exam—Yeah, the high degree of flexibility is a shock for the Americans. Many students have problems with 'Chris', as far as punctuality is concerned, his posture is—This is how it is, if you're one second late, that's it! I don't care, don't come to me crying!—He's very strict, very square, *very, very* square... and it's a shock for the students... umm, I'm extremely strict with this rule too, but the students are used to certain ways. (Extract 38)

Miguel observes that this teacher compares the local environment with that of the US, where different worldviews regarding value of punctuality are in place. According to *Miguel*, the strict attitude shown by 'Chris' on the point of punctuality is a source of shock for students. 'The students are used to certain ways' that are less rigid, less 'square' than the ones that *Miguel* reports that 'Chris' applies. Conversely, *Miguel* says that the degree of flexibility in punctuality in the local environment is a 'shock for the Americans'. It can be said that the attempt by some foreign teachers to apply their familiar cultural formulae to the new environment has led to the experiencing of feelings of annoyance and frustration. *Miguel* is ambiguous on the issue of latecomers; on the one hand he says that he is 'extremely strict with this rule', and on the other that the students are 'used to certain ways'. Once again, views on the issue of punctuality are seen as a national traits by both actors; *Miguel* concedes that students are used to flexibility, while he reports that 'Chris' is very strict with his students, because of his US background.

Miguel's story about 'Chris' resonated with *Johnny Rodríguez*, who narrated a similar experience regarding the attitude of another American teacher:

I've seen them lose enthusiasm for groups for the entire semester, and really not enjoying going to the classroom... One particular teacher here has such high standards, and he's always disappointed in the classroom, and ends every semester just really hating the English teaching because students do not reach the standards of this teacher... it is sad. This teacher's student evaluations are always stellar, but this teacher has been called the 'Nazi teacher' by students, students are *afraid of* this teacher, *in-ti-mi-da-ted!* [His emphasis]. (Extract 39)

Johnny Rodriguez observes that the students' habit of being late for class can become a source of frustration, disappointment and emotional upset for some teachers. As he states, these teachers 'lose enthusiasm' or end up 'hating the English teaching'. *Johnny Rodriguez* notes that despite the 'stellar' evaluations that this teacher receives from the students, which would normally be an indicator of success in the classroom, he is so feared that he has earned the nickname 'the Nazi teacher'.

The next fragment is taken from my research notes, where I documented the experience of two students who shared what they qualified as a 'strange' experience with an American teacher.

Today I saw Pedro and Victor outside the main entrance to the language school. [...] I asked them how they found the English class this semester, they said the higher the level the more difficult [...] Victor said it helped that their teacher was Mexican, she was very patient and helped them a lot. I inquired a bit more. He replied—Well, it's not like with 'Alan', it was really ugly with him. He'd get very angry if we didn't study or if we didn't know something that we had already seen in class... one time he asked me something, you know, and I didn't remember. And he totally lost it, and he was like yelling and stuff, like—How is it possible?! How is it possible?! We have already covered this topic! It's not fair, it's not fair!—Pedro then interrupted by adding—Oh yeah! and he threw himself onto the floor, and he was pounding his fists in anger on the floor, really hard—, —It was really strange!—they both said. [...]—And quite honestly, it was very annoying too— Victor said—We thought, what's wrong with this guy?! He's weird! What a clown! Research notes, May 2011 (Extract 40)

This incident experienced by Pedro and Victor seems to have been very unexpected and confusing for them. The teacher's response to the classroom situation, as he 'threw himself onto the floor', and was 'pounding his fists in anger on the floor, really hard', was

perceived as 'strange' and 'annoying' by the two students. Pedro and Victor felt strongly enough about this teacher's performance to confide to me that they found it 'weird', and that the teacher was a 'clown'. The students referred to differences in attitude and behaviour between American and Mexican teachers, expressing feeling more at ease with the Mexican teacher that they were currently studying under. In this case, the American teacher received a negative categorization compared to the Mexican teacher, who was felt to be more patient and helpful.

How to go about confronting difference seems to be dependent on the individuals' personal characteristics and abilities to manage in the new environment. *Johnny Rodriguez* observes that:

It can be incredibly difficult, but that's so much about the person and so much less about the culture itself that they are traveling to. Even the most stalwart teachers, the most stalwart tourist teachers that have been, that had difficulty in the end, even the worst of them were able to reflect and understand that they weren't ready, they weren't opening up, they were really just seeking their familiar routine in the different country in an exotic location... I've seen many teachers struggle, we've had good teachers here who since left because they never adapted to the culture, there had even been a couple who I'm sure left Mexico and never came back to this country, to be tolerant and flexible is not an easy thing to do. And it's obviously incredibly important because we cannot be in another country, we cannot be imparting another language without taking it into account. (Extract 41)

Johnny Rodriguez places emphasis on the skills and capabilities of the individual in coping with differences as the main feature for the continued success of a teacher. He observes that some teachers are seeking their familiar routines in an exotic environment, but that even those teachers with the least amount of imagination must eventually reflect on the new environment. *Johnny Rodriguez* seems to suggest that the actual *experiencing* of differences, being confronted with them in real life is part of a necessary growth process. He sees a clear link between the ability to adapt to the new environment with its attendant 'culture', and the teacher's capabilities in general—being tolerant and flexible is a struggle, but it is an essential ingredient for being a good teacher. It might be stated that for *Johnny Rodriguez*, being successful in a new environment requires the ability to suspend one's

worldviews (relativize)—the new environment must be recognized as valid in its own right for successful adaptation to take place.

Miguel talks about those teachers who prefer to ‘escape’:

There are people who escape, I’ve had teachers run away saying—I can’t deal with this culture!—There was a teacher ‘Tim’ who in the middle of the semester was saying —I can’t stand this place! I can’t!—So, there’re people who like and adapt to it, and even come back. We’ve had teachers from England, right now ‘Kate’ is here, she returned to take a vacation. There will be some who totally fall in love with this country or some who may not. Some things are a source of frustration but they’ll have to adapt, to be tolerant and have to accept that things are so, and if they want to change things, they will be going against *years* of culture, so they might not be able to change them at all. (Extract 42)

Miguel also observes that cultural differences can be a source of frustration for some foreign teachers, and that some deal with it better than others. Similarly to *Johnny Rodriguez*, *Miguel* believes that dealing with difference requires an effort on the part of the individual. This effort demands skills of adaptation and toleration, but above all *Miguel* emphasizes that acceptance of the local environment is necessary. From his perspective, foreigners should adapt to the local environment: despite their frustration, the local environment presents certain features and foreign teachers must ‘accept that things are so’. *Miguel* seems to believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, to change a ‘culture’. Both *Johnny Rodriguez* and *Miguel* observe that there are those who prefer the more extreme solution of leaving the Department rather than trying to adapt.

The incidents described by *José* (Extract 34), *Miguel* (Extracts 38, 42), *Johnny Rodriguez* (Extracts 39, 41) and the students Victor and Pedro (Extract 40) portray American teachers who are observed to be experiencing ‘culture shock’. These interviewees describe having observed various levels of frustration and anger on the part of American teachers. This would seem to resonate with the symptoms of ‘culture shock’ as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.4. The American teachers are seen to be experiencing a state of mind that affects their ability to learn or adapt to different ways of doing/acting.

Perhaps this difficulty in adapting is a result of their seeming lack of ability to relativize their worldviews.

A common thread in the reflections of *José, Miguel, Albert* and *Johnny Rodriguez* about their American colleagues is the portrayal of a disapproving American attitude. The interviewees narrate American teachers' disapproval of tolerance for latecomer students and of canceling classes for holidays, for example. The worldview acquired in the US is applied to the local environment; students, co-workers and authorities are all evaluated as inferior Others, lacking in rigor and strictness. Tardiness is presumed to be a Mexican national/cultural trait and strict high standards a national/cultural American value. Clearly, the interviewees perceive Othering in the disapproving American attitude which they report—the local 'culture' is somehow being placed in a superior/inferior ranking. This resonates with issues of Othering as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3, particularly in terms of the portrayal of superior and inferior cultural values.

6.2 Punctuality beyond the Pale of Culture

Above, interviewees narrated experiencing American teachers passing through some form of 'culture shock'. Lack of ability to relativize worldviews, or the insistence on an 'American' worldview was seen as a factor that led to Othering in the work environment. Ability to relativize worldviews appears to be crucial—indeed, this section introduces research findings that seem to suggest that when individuals were able to relativize their worldviews, they were more at ease and more actively engaged with the social environment. Here, foreign teachers appeared to be actively making use of their social skills to negotiate and construct 'culture'. Again punctuality seems to be seen as a dividing line between Anglophone and local 'cultures'. However, it would seem that foreign teachers have been able to overcome their emotionally charged primary social knowledge and found ways to construct their Mexican students in a positive way. This does not appear to be merely a matter of tolerance, but that they have gone beyond the dividing line of punctuality, breaking beyond the pale of 'culture'.

The differences in the value ascribed to punctuality in the local environment are also recognized by the foreign teacher participants in this investigation. In this section, *Johnny Rodriguez*, *Albert* and *Elizabeth* reflect about their own views regarding this issue.

Johnny Rodriguez stated:

I understand the difference [in worldviews towards concept of 'time'] and I think within the classroom it has made me a better teacher, in that I'm more flexible, more patient more understanding with my students. [...] If in fact the student has a discipline problem I can delve a little deeper and see to that, but I do not dismiss the group entirely because they are not always on time. (Extract 43)

Here, *Johnny Rodriguez* describes his efforts to work out more effective ways of dealing with the issue of punctuality, or of finding strategies to discipline students. He seems to have the ability to observe the problem at an individual level, and not at a general level involving the whole group. Furthermore, he seems to perceive punctuality as a discipline problem that can be approached, controlled and resolved; he prefers this approach rather than dismissing an entire group based on the behaviour of individual students.

Albert also reflected on his own approach to this issue:

I try to adapt to the way things are here. In Mexico they're not that strict about punctuality, for that I try to adapt my class, you saw [referring to the CO9 I conducted], in the first 10 min they do a warm-up discussion activity. When we're observing other teachers one of the questions we would ask: 'How do teachers accommodate students who are late?' You know, implying that it is good we accommodate students who arrive late, obviously to a certain point. So, I try to accommodate to that. I had a British teacher when I was in Canada, I arrived when the bell rang and he said,—You are late, go find another teacher—The bell rang when I opened the door! That was an extreme case of course, obviously, but punctuality was very important... (Extract 44)

Albert tries to adapt to the local environment. He acknowledges that the local interpretation of punctuality might be less strict than it was at his former university, yet *Albert* does not appear to be judgmental about this difference. *Albert* says that he accommodates students by starting the class with pair work, so that the late arrivals are less of a distraction. This is

something I noted when observing his class (CO9), though *Albert* qualifies his attitude by saying that this tolerance is good ‘obviously to a certain point’. This seems to suggest that he could take action if there is a discipline problem; nevertheless, with his pragmatic attitude he seems to be avoiding the extremes of tolerance and strictness.

In fact, I was able to identify reactions to lateness similar to those of *Albert*, when conducting class observations of two British English teachers; both these classes took place on a Saturday from 10 AM to 2 PM. The first fragment is taken from an interview with *Elizabeth* made a few days after I had the opportunity to observe her class (CO12). My attention was drawn to the way *Elizabeth* handled the late arrivals to her class that day (6 out of 19 arrived late), or rather her attitude towards the issue of punctuality. As I decided to inquire a bit more, she responded:

Researcher: I noticed several of your students arrived late, how do you handle that?//**Elizabeth:** I don't say anything. Actually, I joke with them sometimes if they arrive late, I ask the rest of the classroom if they're allowed to come in, and of course they always say—Yes!—[laughs]. Also, I don't agree with...for example, the fact that we have to have a class, I don't agree with people to having to have to come to class every single day. I don't think it's necessary to learn, I don't think is necessary to learn doing that, I think that every individual is different. (Extract 45)

It is very significant to observe how *Elizabeth* disassociates the concept of class attendance and/or punctuality from the ability to learn. It could be said that for her, being on time does not represent more than ‘being on time’; ‘every individual is different’ and learns accordingly, *Elizabeth* seems to be saying. I appreciated *Elizabeth*'s capacity to accommodate students while maintaining order and respect within her class. 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 IV):

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.

A student arrives 18 minutes late to class, the teacher does not seem to take notice of the new arrival. He discreetly enters the classroom and finds a seat in the corner. He is sweating and looks very agitated. He must have run to get to the class. The teacher moves from talking to one group to another when she notices the student and approaches him. His sweating does not go unnoticed by the teacher who gives him a pat on the back, at the same time, she asks 'Your brother?' 'He is parking the car' replies the student 'ah! He's parking the car, OK'. She smiles and takes a sit with him and his group to get the conversation going.

It is 20 minutes past the hour. Another 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—May I come in?—Teacher nods.

It is 21 minutes past the hour when the brother who had been parking the car finally arrives. 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 the 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?—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 46)

At no time did *Elizabeth* 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. The overall environment in the classroom felt very friendly, I could observe the friendly relationship between teacher and students, and among the students themselves. Furthermore, all of those students who arrived late seemed to know how to conduct

themselves, they joined their groups and set themselves on task immediately. It appeared that *Elizabeth* would not expect otherwise. It could be said that social rules particular to this classroom are at work which reflect the mutual understanding between the teacher and her students. Moreover, the lack of punctuality on the part of several students did not appear to affect the rhythm of the class. The teacher did not seem to question the capacity of those late students to get on task.

This second fragment 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. On this occasion the teacher himself had begun the class a quarter of an hour late. Except for three late arrivals, most of the students were already seated in the classroom at 10:00 waiting for their teacher.

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. She looks confused, there are people everywhere, and it is difficult to sight an empty chair where to put her backpack. All the sudden, her teacher appears in front of her. She smiles at him with surprise. The teacher greets the new arrival with—*buenas noches*— [good night] but no verbal response comes from the student. Her teacher's unexpected greeting confused her, at the same time her face flushed. She was embarrassed. She stood still unsure of what to do, or what to say. Her reaction was acknowledged by the teacher who smiled back at her with a wink. The teacher then directed attention to the activity going on in the classroom and briefly explained to her what to do. She joined the conversation with a group as she exhaled in relief. (Extract 47)

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. It seemed very significant that the late student appeared to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable for having arrived late. It would appear that punctuality was important for this student and that she

cared about her teacher and the class; her attitude did not seem to escape *Colin's* notice. He was able to appreciate his students' remorse at being late, and even though he acted his role of being a teacher by acknowledging the issue, he did it in a non-threatening way. Furthermore, 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 for permission to enter.

Indeed, in both cases, these teachers seem to respond to tardiness with some type of humor; as *Elizabeth* expressed it, 'I joke with them if they arrive late' (Extract 45), or in the case of *Colin* who greeted the student with 'buenas noches' and a wink (Extract 47). So then, it could be said that 'joking' about lateness could be an indirect technique to call attention to punctuality issues. Thus, on the one hand, these teachers might seem to be tolerant of their students' tardiness, but at the same time they could be using the event to direct attention to the issue. Teachers such as *Johnny Rodriguez* (Extract 43) seem to have the capacity to deal with tardiness in the classroom without losing their temper or sacrificing professionalism, defusing problems which could create tension in the environment and result in a negative effect on students.

Despite starting their classes 10 or 15 minutes late, the quality or efficiency of what went on in the classroom in terms of activities, students' participation, teaching/learning process, or mechanics of the activities did not seem to be diminished in particular. On the contrary, the class objectives as specified in both the lesson plans, which they facilitated to the researcher, were covered. Although it can be said that punctuality is the ideal for both students and teachers, on the occasion of these observations the classroom seemed to function well in spite of latecomers.

These findings seem to demonstrate that the ability to relativize can have a positive impact in the intercultural learning/adaptation process. As has been seen, *Colin*, *Elizabeth*, *Albert* and *Johnny Rodriguez* acknowledge that the value accorded to the concept of punctuality in the local ambit differs from that of their countries of origin. However, they are seen to be able to relativize their C1, in that they are not using it as a reference point for

local students. It can be argued that the ability to relativize worldviews allows individuals to see beyond the walls of their cultural reference points, giving them a broader understanding and other ways of viewing the world. Indeed, these foreign teachers appeared to have generally adapted to local circumstances, finding pragmatic solutions to ‘work out’ this aspect of cultural differences. Moreover, they seem to be dealing with punctuality as a discipline problem, as they might do at home, where lateness would be viewed as a problem at an individual level, unrelated to nationality. Thus, they are seen to be dealing with the issue within the normal parameters of the classroom, not as a cultural benchmark that separates superior and inferior ways of being.

Colin, Elizabeth, Albert and Johnny Rodriguez are seen at ease and actively engaged with the new environment. This seems to suggest that their desire to engage in the new social environment may have worked as the igniter that motivates their willingness to work things out. Thus, these social actors are seen to be making use of their social resources and abilities to construct and work out a new social reality—a reality that gives parameters for how to behave and how to deal with tardiness. These findings resonate with the theory analyzed in section 3.4.5 regarding the issue of cosmopolitan transformation discussed by Appiah (2006), Delanty (2009), Hansen (2011), Holliday (2013) and Scollon *et al.* (2012). These foreign teachers could be said to be making use of their skills to construct new cultural realities. In contrast to their portrayal of American teachers’ attitudes, these foreign teachers seemed to have found the ability to relativize their worldviews.

6.3 The Reality of the University of Guanajuato

In section 6.1, it was seen that the issue of punctuality created certain essentialist representations of Mexican students, according to the reports of the interviewees, who had noted these representations among their colleagues at the Language Department. Lack of ability to relativize was seen as a factor in the creation of negative constructions. The following section introduces research findings about the social realities of students which have a bearing on their behavior; there are contextual factors in play within the ‘small culture’ that should be understood—a fuller picture is needed to ‘construct’ the students.

This fuller picture involves several factors: students' mobility, the examination process at the Language Department and not less importantly, the purpose of language instruction in the University of Guanajuato.

6.3.1 Students' Mobility

Although I am familiar with university life in the Language Department, I wanted to explore perceptions of the issue of punctuality from the standpoint of the Department administration. During an interview with the Coordinator of the English Program, 'Susan', I mentioned that when conducting classrooms observations I had observed that some students seemed to be rushing around or be running late for class. So, I decided to inquire about this aspect of school life in the Language Department.

Regarding the issue of tardiness, 'Susan' explained that because students come from other campuses and from out of town, they are conceded a 10 minute tolerance period. In any case, most students have to deal with public transportation and the city traffic. Students coming from other schools where they have classes until the hour have to negotiate an earlier leaving time with the teacher of the class in question. This gives them a total of 20 minutes to travel from one campus to another. 'Susan' said that 'we are aware of students traveling times' and stated that she was conscious of the fact that the 'Uni has schools and faculties all over the city' (research notes, June 2010). For this reason, there is some degree of flexibility on the part of the teachers and the administration.

The rushing around of the students struck me from the first day on site—in fact, I registered this fact in my notebook while sitting by the main entrance to the Language Department:

'First day on site'

I approached a student who was sitting in one of those garden tables in the patio by herself. As I asked if I could join her, I explained that I was doing some research and asked her if she wouldn't mind chatting with me. I briefly explained the topic of my research. After a while, a

classmate who she had apparently been waiting for arrived. We chatted for another five minutes or so. After this time, very politely, she interrupted me explaining that they were going to grab a bite before their English class started. She explained,—today it's the only day we have time to eat breakfast, our classes start at 7 AM every day until 11 AM, which is the time when our English class starts. Then, we go back to the Law School for more classes... we don't get off until 2 PM, sometimes 3 PM. Today we can afford eating something! Please excuse us, but it was nice talking to you, your project sounds very interesting— (Research notes, April, 2010) (Extract 48)

'Rush hour at the language department'

I'm sitting by the kiosko²⁰, lots of students getting in and many others leaving the building. They are rushing, almost bumping into each other. It's five minutes past the hour (11 AM). Some are trying to eat something as they walk, others are buying food 'to go' in the kiosko, they must be going to other schools otherwise they wouldn't have enough time to eat from the kiosko to their classroom [...]. (Research notes, May, 2010) (Extract 49)

Both these fragments show students in their efforts to cope with their academic work and student life. These students are trying to deal with their work load, eating a bite on the way to school or eating something quickly before or after class. Though the administration is aware that students have problems of mobility, it was striking to see the rush first hand.

6.3.2 The Examination Process in the Language Department

The interview with the English Coordinator continued with another relevant contextual factor, the examination process. As *José* (Extract 44) and *Miguel* (Extract 48) reported, some teachers find students' lack of punctuality 'even for exams!' shocking. Consequently, I decided to ask 'Susan' about the examination process—she explained that this process is designed taking institutional regulations concerning students' rights into consideration. 'Susan' stressed that no student can be denied entry to an exam, and that the student has to assume responsibility for lateness. With over 1500 students per semester to test in a series of written and oral examinations, 'Susan' also agreed that it is probably better to

²⁰ The 'kiosko', or diminutive 'kioskito', is a coffee stand set up near the main patio of the school where all kinds of refreshments and snacks are sold.

accommodate latecomers rather than to reschedule exams for students (see Appendix VIII for a full description of the evaluation process). The degree of flexibility that is a ‘shock’ for American teachers, as *Miguel* and *José* report, is partly a result of institutional rules particular to the university context.

6.3.3 Students’ Priorities

Five of the teacher participants in this investigation talked about the role of English in students’ lives. From their perspective, the attitudes of the students have a large impact on class development. The following statements highlight this issue:

It is different for everybody, it depends, here, there is a mix of objectives, people do it for vacation, people do it for travel, people do it because of their degree, I think, in other places just to understand living in English. *Elizabeth* (Extract 50)

Most students just want to get to the sixth semester and finish and that’s it... at the beginning of the semester I ask them why they are learning English and what objectives they have, and most of them say because they have to or because job opportunities, some say that because their mother forced them to. *Colin* (Extract 51)

I’d say that forty *per cent* of our students don’t distinguish whether they like it or whether it’s pure obligation, twenty *per cent* can’t even give you an opinion about English, and the other forty *per cent* don’t want but to pass the class, and have no intention for using it once in their life! *Luisa* (Extract 52)

The way I see it, students are more interested in other subjects, they are more enthusiastic about their main subjects of studies, more than in English, which is compulsory. The ones I observe are more interested in learning English are the external people, not students from the UG, they seem to be more motivated, they’re the students who take English because they really want to learn. *Rosa* (Extract 53)

Most of the people who come from outside want to learn how to communicate, I mean, the ones who come from their own will, now the ones who come from the UG, probably eighty *per cent* are here just to fulfill the requirement. From those, maybe half will learn to like it and dedicate some time to learning it... some I doubt will ever see or use English in their lives. *José* (Extract 54)

These teachers observe that students have different needs and purposes for learning English. In the view of *Elizabeth, Colin, Luisa, Rosa* and *José*, the great majority of students have no immediate interest in learning English—in fact, two of them expressed the attitudes of students in terms of percentage points, while all of the teachers note that most of their students are in class for purely instrumental reasons. Teachers expressed that students see English as a ‘pure obligation’; they study it because of ‘their degree’, or ‘to fulfill the requirement’. Indeed, teachers seem to be suggesting that learning English is low on the list of priorities of their students at the University of Guanajuato. *Rosa’s* commentary was significant; she observes that ‘students are more enthusiastic about their main subjects of studies’.

In summary, the realities of the students at the University of Guanajuato are ignored to a certain degree. Problems of mobility, issues of the examination process and the question of students’ motivation to learn English seem not to be completely factored into the perceptions of the Department as a whole. Negative constructions of the students seem to be reinforced through denial of the realities they face—reflection on these realities might lead to a more accurate assessment, rather than the pessimistic image that students are late ‘even for exams!’ These findings resonate with a discussion by Kramsch (1993), who argues that contextual factors should be considered when constructing ‘culture’. It could be argued that some foreign teachers demonstrate a lack of ability to apply critical reflexivity. Were they to apply the principle of reflexivity, they might more easily understand the local reality and come to terms with their students’ behavior.

6.4 Cultural Labeling

This section introduces research findings which demonstrate the fluidity and complex nature of stereotypes. Findings appear to indicate that teachers and students are aware that the use of stereotypes introduces limitations and constraints when constructing people and ‘culture’. However, individuals were observed at times to put aside the inherently negative aspects of stereotypes, using them to joke about themselves in self-satires. It was found that the interviewees rejected the use of stereotypes to define the Other—indeed, the

interviewees argued that cultural labeling should be suspended, and that the Other should be seen as an individual.

The discussion of *CIE: A Mexican Spanish Teacher in a Multicultural Class in Guanajuato, Mexico*, which traces the issue of stereotypes, led individuals to problematize their use when constructing people or cultures. This became evident in a statement by Luisa, who expressed:

I think that we all have stereotypes and we all know that it's not correct because they don't always apply, stereotypes are not necessarily true. For instance, they say that Mexicans are unpunctual and I'm the most punctual person in the world, and I'm one hundred per cent Mexican! It's impossible to think that you know everything about everybody because every single person is different and you cannot possibly know how people are, how they act, even by the minute people can act and respond differently. (Extract 55)

Here, *Luisa* argues against stereotypical representations of individuals' behaviour based on national stereotypes. In her view, being punctual is a principle, and is more of a personal characteristic than a national trait. Thus, there is no one way of being, and habits, good or bad, do not belong to cultures, but to the individual. Moreover, it would appear that for *Luisa* 'culture' is not imprinted in the individual but it is in constant construction, as she put it 'every single person is different and you cannot possibly know how people are, how they act, even by the minute people can act and respond differently'. It could be said that the diversity within the individual person could be just as immeasurable as the diversity within any social group. Most of the teachers, including *Colin*, *Johnny Rodriguez*, *Elizabeth*, *José* and *Rosa* expressed similar opinions.

Students who participated in the focus group interviews (FG3, FG5 and FG6, in this case) reacted to CIE by stressing that the individual is not representative of a culture. These are some of their responses to CIE:

Aminda: It's too pretentious to say—I know all cultures—because people are not "cultures" [gesturing with hands]//**Joel:** [...] in every culture there are exceptions... because it's not the culture, it's people//**Researcher:** the individual?//**Joel:** Yeah, the person. FG3 (Extract 56)

With the statement ‘people are not cultures’, these students appear to disassociate the individual from a supposed cultural group. Contrary to the opinions of the teacher in the critical incident, the students seem much more likely to concede the individuality of each person. Echoing Aminda and Joel, Mariana and Juan Manuel expressed:

Mariana: [...] in the same country people are different... it’s more correct to say I know the person than I know the culture//**Juan Manuel:** from one person you cannot “know” [gesturing quotation marks] the whole country, it’s not a person, it’s a big country//**Mariana:** For example, we are Mexican [pointing at Juan Manuel], I like to talk, I like to smile all day, I like to make jokes and he’s a *very* serious person...[her emphasis]//**Juan Manuel:** I’m “German” [Gesturing quotation marks. Laughs]//**Mariana:** I like to laugh about very stupid jokes and he says –it’s very boring!–and we *are* Mexican and we *are* very different! [her emphasis] [...] not because you are Mexican, people should treat you based on that. FG6 (Extract 57)

Like Aminda and Joel, Mariana and Juan Manuel acknowledge that an individual should not be seen to represent the image of a ‘culture’. By drawing attention to their individual personalities, these students highlight the diversity of the individual person within the context of any given ‘culture’. By juxtaposing national stereotypes with their personal characteristics, Juan Manuel and Mariana joke about the validity of national stereotypes. Thus, because Juan Manuel is ‘serious’ he must be ‘German’, and because Mariana is talkative and cheerful, she *is* Mexican.

Fatima and Ulises also suggest avoiding national stereotypes to construct people:

Ulises: We’re not things we are people//**Fatima:** she cannot judge people only with the imaginable, she needs to look at the personality [...]// **Ulises:** Yes, when you are going to meet people you meet them for his personality not his country. FG5 (Extract 58)

These students seem to suggest that when meeting people from different cultural backgrounds, one should suspend preconceived ideas, or ‘the imaginable’, as Fatima puts forward. Instead, she suggests a construction of the Other based on ‘the personality’.

The general reaction to CIE seemed to be censure of the Spanish teacher. When this teacher remarked about two of her new students from the Czech Republic, ‘I don’t know how I’m going to treat them!’ every single student responded excitedly ‘like people!’ adding, ‘we’re not dogs’ or ‘robots’. Once again the idea that individuals can be culturally labeled according to nationality was problematized by the student participants. This extended to a reflection on nationality; as one student stated, ‘not because you are Mexican people should treat you based on that’ (Extract 57) and another, ‘when you are going to meet people you meet them for his personality not his country’ (Extract 58).

Thus, it could be said that overall, students’ discussions exhibited roundly cosmopolitan viewpoints; any form of cultural labeling based on nationality or supposed group characteristics was rejected out of hand. Focus group students highlight the importance of the individual personality and seem to adopt non-essentialist stances, although these stances have not been tested by travel experience or long term exposure to people from other cultural backgrounds (see Characteristics of Participants, Section 4.1.3).

As shown in the dialogue between Mariana and Juan Manuel (Extract 57), stereotypes were sometimes used playfully by students. In another interview, Luz Ma (FG9) joked about the stereotype of Mexican women as ‘quiet’, responding: ‘*You* say that because *you* don’t know me’, suggesting that she does not fit the ‘quiet Mexican woman’ stereotype. In fact, I was able to observe how *Johnny Rodriguez* plays with stereotypes. When conducting a class observation, I had the opportunity to witness (CO1) how the bonding between students and teacher can take place, creating understanding in an open, friendly classroom environment.

This is a small class, six students only. Teacher and students are occupying a small area of the classroom. Students have arranged their chairs near their teacher’s desk. This creates a very warm atmosphere. The topic of this class is ‘Important celebrations,’ the teacher briefly explains the activities they will be doing, and one of the celebrations they will be talking about is the ‘Cinco de Mayo.’ [...] the teacher describes another important event which is also celebrated in the US, and which involves the Irish community in the US, mainly in New York, that is, ‘Saint Patrick’s Day’. The teacher asked students whether they knew about this celebration, but no one seem to know about it. He asks students how they think Irish people celebrate this event. There

was no response. After a few seconds, he 'shows' students how they celebrate ['drinking gesture' with hand]. This provokes big laughs among students, after a few seconds, a student says—Of course! It makes sense, they are Irish!!—There are even more laughs. It takes a few seconds for the class to come to order, then the teacher proceeds to explain the next activity. The teacher plays a recording; the task is for students to fill in the gaps in their handout with the word they hear. Students listen to the recording twice. Next, they check the words as a whole group. The teacher then tells students that they are now going to read the same text out loud for extra pronunciation practice, saying —But I want you to do it LOUD, I want you to speak LOUD, LIKE A GRINGO!!!—This comment provokes some good laughs among students. There is a student however who has been looking down at the text, revising it, getting ready to read, but the second she hears her teacher's comment, she looks up. The comment seems to have caught her by surprise, she may have been unsure about the comment (although she could hear her classmates' reactions). But, she needs to look at her teacher's face and once she does it everything seems clear to her. She joins her classmates and teacher and laughs along with them. Students know what the teacher means, they know what they are supposed to do, and the next thing, they take a deep breath and continue to read out aloud,—like a Gringo!— (CO2) (Extract 59)

When I met with *Johnny Rodriguez* for an interview I asked him about his comment 'read out aloud—like a gringo!—' he explained:

Yeah, that wasn't so much for pronunciation, that's just more a joke, they're very quiet and I often find that when reading out loud, especially in the lower levels, they're just timid. I often remind them of the "gringo" stereotype, and kind of mock myself and play with those elements to provoke reaction, rather than when I scream like a gringo, speak loud. Again because I like to think, I tend to have a very good sense of humor about very reverent things. I'm not stating:—Stop being Mexican, be gringo like—not at all... (Extract 60)

Indeed, I could appreciate that the mood that *Johnny Rodriguez* was attempting to set up in the class with his use of stereotypes. He even mocked himself, ironizing his American side in order to 'provoke reactions'; the negative connotations inherent in the stereotype were played down. Thus, the 'Irish drink' or the 'gringos speak loud' were examples of humorous stereotypes used to get students talking. At another point in the interview, he described how students joke about the Mexican stereotype, by saying 'to be Mexican is to be "unpunctual"'. In the reconstruction above, it was very significant to observe the reaction of the student who was concentrated on her textbook, but felt the urge to look up at

the teacher the moment she heard the expression ‘like a gringo!’. As soon as she realized the expression had not been used in a derogative way, she gave a big smile. It could be said that stereotypes were used in this particular class as a mere strategy ‘to provoke reaction’ on the one hand, and overcome students’ inhibitions on the other.

In this case, *Johnny Rodriguez*’s use of stereotypes demonstrates their ambivalent nature. On the one hand, as Adler (2001), Nachbar and Lause (1992) and Schneider (2004) suggest, they may function as simple generalizations that are not necessarily harmful; on the other, the negative images contained in national stereotypes, the Irish drinker, the late Mexican and the loud ‘gringo’, have a clear implication of prejudice.

CIE provoked a good number of different reactions—another take on the content of this critical incident was expressed by *Miguel*. His reaction reflects some of the complexity of dealing with stereotypes: he himself easily falls into the trap of essentialist representations of the easy-going Mexican Self and the hard-working Anglophone Other.

Students know that there are exceptions, there are Americans who are corrupt, there are all kinds of people. I mean, we were talking about punctuality and I was telling them, don’t get the idea that all British are punctual, I have had colleagues, British, who arrive late and not one time, several times, so you see, you cannot refer to stereotypes. It could also be that because he got used to the local perception of punctuality here, it could be too. Punctuality and holidays are things that are of a shock for Americans, but then they learn to enjoy them because in their country they only get five days off a year, so Americans are very responsible with regard to work, they do not miss work, because they probably think,—No kidding, we have three holidays a year of almost three or four weeks each!—So, if they miss any extra days they feel ashamed. For instance ‘Claire’ [a British teacher] never misses a day... although she is hypochondriac, she’s always at the hospital... ‘Alison’ [an American teacher], never misses a day unless her children are sick, and ‘Jeff’ [an American teacher] never misses a day unless he’s sick... it does not matter where one goes, one has their culture and values well-founded... they might adapt to local cultural things, but this is not to say that they become one of them. (Extract 61)

For *Miguel*, ‘culture’ seems to be interpreted as a set of habits and values. He seems to be implying that some stereotypes have a grain of truth, though at the same time he warns that

individuals do not necessarily fit a national stereotype—in this case, he notes that ‘not all British are punctual’. Nonetheless, although it would appear that he concedes personal characteristic to the individual, he also seems to ascribe to the Mexican a stereotype of ‘tardiness’. Thus; Britons are not punctual because they ‘got used to the local perception of punctuality here’. However, this idea would appear to contradict his last comment ‘no matter where one goes, one has their culture and values well-founded’. Thus, as he goes on, he seems to ascribe characteristics to the individual based on nationality. The Americans and British are viewed as hard-working, responsible and punctual. Then again, from *Miguel’s* point of view, these values, whether personally or culturally driven seem to be inherent to the individual. American teachers might learn to tolerate or adapt to local practices, but this does not necessarily imply that their values have changed. *Miguel* makes an effort to explain Americans’ standpoint on the issues of punctuality and holidays by analyzing their cultural background; he tries to see things from their perspective. This becomes evident as he calls attention to the work ethic in the US, and identifies how this worldview has an impact on the way American teachers behave in regard to punctuality.

This fragment serves to highlight the complexities of making sense of ‘culture’ at many levels: in the negotiation of ideas, concepts, personal experience and social discourses. The process of construing ‘culture’, as shown in *Miguel’s* narrative seems to be a process of continuous deliberation—making assertions, re-stating them, re-evaluating those assertions, and then trying again. In this extract, *Miguel* makes use of stereotypes in order to describe a general group characteristic; these stereotypes are modified only slightly in the process of analyzing the individual.

No theorist denies that stereotypes are a tricky business (Scollon *et al.* 2012; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009; Schneider, 2004; Holliday *et al.* 2010 and Holliday, 2011 among many others), and indeed *Miguel’s* discourse demonstrates some of the difficulty of dealing with them. Indeed, *Miguel* demonstrates a certain lack of sophistication in his handling of stereotyped national characters. *Miguel* seems to be practicing the same sort of essentialist representations on his colleagues that he and other teachers condemn in representations of Mexican society. It seems that none of the teachers are able to

completely escape the negative influence of stereotypes in their construction of the Other, no matter how much they struggle to do so.

6.5 The Political Tinge of ‘Culture’

Thus far, these findings would appear to suggest that students (and some teachers) reject the use of stereotypes to describe the individual. However, this section introduces research findings that demonstrate that stereotypes can have an impact on students’ construction of Americans and American ‘culture’. In this case, the construction of ‘culture’ is argued to be influenced by global, socio-economic and political discourses, which in turn can lead to Othering of American people/culture. In other contexts (see Section 5.3) the students were seen to hold cosmopolitan views—this did not appear to be the case with their construction of the American Other, as the interviews with teachers seem to indicate.

When asked whether a teacher’s cultural background impacted students’ perceptions, the teacher participants said that cultural background did not seem particularly important to their students. They reported the exception of American teachers, who are sometimes viewed through negative affective filters by the students.

Elizabeth acknowledges that some students show a certain negative attitude towards English language learning.

I think there’s rejection towards the Americans because of their history with Mexico not too much with the British, and in my experience I don’t get any of that kind of thing, not so far, even though we are allies of the US. I find that the attitude is different maybe that is more towards the Americans and maybe it’s because of Bush and because of the wars and the aggression I think that might be a possibility, not to say that all American people are like that. (Extract 62)

She relates students’ negative attitude to the history between the US and Mexico, also calling attention to ‘the wars and the aggression’ on the part of the US.²¹ Nevertheless, she problematizes the notion of generalizability by signaling a difference between the individual and their national origin, remarking ‘not to say that all American people are like

²¹ The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq involving US forces were relatively recent events at the time of this interview.

that'. She describes how she has found a way to work things out with students, by communicating with them and defusing any negative reactions.

Much like *Elizabeth*, *Johnny Rodriguez* expressed:

It was a particularly tough time but I think we cannot be blind to that, a particularly tough time in the US, we were seen as very bellicose we were seen as a very boring country, the world images were very, very negative [...] in previous semesters [...] I really felt that one of my students had some kind of hostility towards me, at some point I did sense it was some kind of hostility towards 'gringo culture'²² [...] I think that the best you can attain is to neutralize the hostilities of preconceived notions, neutralize English the subject [...] you can neutralize it in the classroom, be sensitive of how sensitive students can be about it, teachers themselves, really at the end of the day, the only objective is that they learn English, its structure, a particular program. (Extract 63)

His comment suggests that the military actions performed by the US had an impact on students' conception of American society; this has played a role in the development of feelings of hostility towards America, and also Americans as individuals. He speaks of 'neutralizing' preconceived ideas which students may have created around the language, and possibly around the foreign culture. *Johnny Rodriguez* seems to think that this 'neutralization' should be pursued so that the pragmatic objective of teaching/learning the foreign language can be achieved. He believes that teachers should be sensitive to how students feel about this 'cultural' issue; he himself recognizes the hostility to 'gringo culture', but the end goal is to teach English despite hostility.

Such conceptualizations and feelings of resentment towards Americans in the local environment have also been noticed by *José*, *Albert* and *Colin*.

José talks about the issue of the military power of the US:

The Americans, are considered as invaders... but it doesn't mean that Americans are going to invade the world, or that they're going to become the owners of the world! But, this is the negative way in which students view Americans. (Extract 64)

²² 'Gringo' is a term applied to Americans and other foreigners in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. It has a generally deprecatory character, although this varies by speaker and situation.

Albert also observed:

The only real stereotype is that Canadians are kind of polite which isn't really so bad... a lot of them have very bad stereotypes of the US. Actually, there's one very funny story because I was, like, but—Haven't you had American teachers? Are they the stereotype?—And one of my students was kind of like,—No, but all of the American teachers here are hippies—[laughs]. But they still definitely, they have much stronger stereotypes of the US than Canada which kind of makes sense, because the US is so prominent. I really don't think they had preconceived notions... I feel that I'm treated mostly as an individual. (Extract 65)

Albert observes that students have 'stronger stereotypes' of Americans; this is not the case for him as a Canadian. It is significant how *Albert* finds this understandable because 'the US is so prominent'. He finds that because of his nationality, he is not affected by 'preconceived notions' of the students, and that he is generally treated as an individual.

Colin confirms being better accepted for not being American. *Colin* sees this as an advantage, as it gains him more respect and easier acceptance:

It's nice in a way, for what I've seen Mexicans view Europe, not just England, Europe, as kind of, I don't know how to put it, but they view Europe like having, like having high culture, and high standard, and Europe is the old continent, and there's this whole group of ideas about Europe, and Mexicans' kind of attitude towards the US is very, very different. [...] But because I come from Europe and from England, lots of Mexican people have these ideas, kind of misconceptions and stereotypes, me being English, and me being European, and in some way, I think Mexicans think that Europeans are kind of superior, and it kills me to say that, especially in the class there is kind of a bit of respect as well, because I'm not American, and there has always been this friction between Mexico and the US and there's been more acceptance maybe too but also because they don't know so much about England and Europe, and it seems a bit further away and there might be this kind of distance between us two. (Extract 66)

Colin observes that Mexicans see Europeans as 'having high culture', a 'high standard', and as being 'superior', notions which he characterizes as 'misconceptions' and

‘stereotypes’. As flattering as these positive stereotypes might be, he seems to feel uncomfortable about them. *Colin* notes that students give him an extra measure of respect and acceptance ‘because I’m not American’—this is based on distance, in *Colin’s* view: ‘because they don’t know so much about England’. As favorable as the image projected onto him might be, *Colin* does not seem to wish to be ‘constructed’ by his students on the basis of a stereotype. It could be said that in general he rejects the use of stereotypes as a guiding principle in the construction of the Other. This must be done by more honest means, he appears to be saying.

The findings presented in this section would appear to suggest that individuals’ conceptualization of and response to Others can be influenced by socio-political factors present at both the local and global level. Several teacher participants note that the political-economic relationship between Mexico and the US appears to have an impact on the way students construct/view Americans. This notion resonates with the theory presented in Section 3.3.1, 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). As described by the foreign teacher participants in this investigation, students’ global positioning seems to affect their construction of the Other, an issue that resonates with the theory discussed in Section 3.5.3 regarding the issue of Othering. British and Canadian teachers confirm being better accepted and getting more respect for not being American. In most cases, the teacher participants seem to be able to negotiate a disassociation of the English language from the negative image it holds for some students.

6.6 Summary of this Chapter

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how the use of stereotypes impacts the construction of the Other. The complexities of the use of stereotypes became evident in various ways: at times their use takes the form of mere concepts, but then may be broadened to a more or less active Othering: students are Othered for being late, Americans for being embodiments of ‘gringo culture’, while Europeans are seen positively as being culturally superior.

As was seen, the ability to relativize C1— to resist the notion that things work in a certain way in the UK, the US or Canada—played a major role in learning/adapting to a new cultural environment: this was evident in the way Elizabeth, Colin, Albert and Johnny Rodriguez dealt with the issue of punctuality. The issue of punctuality was not so important per se, but served as a lightning rod for the interviewees’ opinions to reveal their constructions of ‘culture’. These four foreign teachers seemed to be able to evolve away from their cultural references, adapting to the local context in a way that American teachers were reported not to be able to do. Thus, they avoided ‘culture shock’, engaged more easily with the small culture in their classrooms and appeared to be generally more at ease in the local environment. The opposite of this ease in the new environment can also occur, as described in section 3.3.4; the lack of ability to relativize C1 and the expectation of finding the familiar in the strange place may be said to be features that spark the anxiety and stress characteristic of ‘culture shock’.

Contextual factors that should come into play in the construction of the student Other are sometimes ignored (Kramsch, 1993). This is found to sometimes lead to the cultural Otherizing of Mexican students, or culturism (Section 3.5.3), in that the lateness of students is viewed as an essentialist characteristic: ‘they are late even for exams!’ two of the interviewees reported hearing from American colleagues. However, this ignores the social realities that students confront: issues of transport, the administration of the examination process and the students’ own priorities when learning English. It appears that teachers, foreign and local, have not factored these contextual elements into their constructions of the students.

The participants in this investigation struggle in various ways to construct ‘culture’; they are very aware of the risk of labeling, but they lack the sophistication to completely reject images of the Other generated by the discourse of stereotypes. The student interviewees appeared to show a cosmopolitan sense: ‘people are not cultures’, as one student put it. However, their seeming cosmopolitanism remains to be tested in the real world. In fact, it was reported by teacher participants that students’ constructions are influenced by the negative image they hold of an American Other. This was seen to have an

impact on English as a subject in the Language Department; ELT is complicated by the negative stereotypes that students construct around the figure of the American English teacher. British and Canadian teachers were the object of a positive construction—students viewed them as more politically acceptable.

Chapter 7: Social Use of Language

In Chapter 6, constructions of the Other were considered as manifestations of stereotypes; the issue of punctuality was seen as a reference point when evaluating the local ‘culture’. In a similar way, it was seen that the Mexican view of the US was politically tinged, generating the image of a negative American Other. The current chapter continues by introducing findings related to another 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. As was the case in Chapter 6, 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. Negotiating meaning between L1/C1 and L2/C2 was exemplified in reactions to a critical incident where a student unwittingly used an explosive racial term in the classroom.

The discussion in this chapter draws on data from discussing *CID: An American in Mexico* and *CIC: A Korean English Language Teacher in NY* (Appendix V), and classroom observations.

7.1 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*. 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 67)

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 ‘disagrees’ with the use of the formal *usted* and the informal *tu*.²³ From his vantage point, the dissimilarities in use between the two forms *tu* and *Usted* symbolize

²³ Modern Spanish has two forms of address to a single person: a formal ‘Usted’, used in general for persons of respect, and the informal ‘tu’ denoting familiarity.

differences in the degree of respect accorded to individuals. This is a worldview which leads him to qualify the use of *usted* as inegalitarian, 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. 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 she 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 68)

As I inquired whether she 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 69)

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* disagrees with 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. It could be said that *Colin* and *Elizabeth* fail to arrive at a self-problematization and self-understanding of the beliefs they have about their own ‘culture’. 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 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 70)

However, *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'.

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. These findings resonate with the theory regarding the challenges faced by ELT professionals working abroad when being confronted with L1 transfer into L2 (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Valdes, 2001 and McKay, 2002 among others). 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. As discussed in Section 3.1.2, this view could be said to have a hint of cultural imposition (Phillipson, 1992; 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 these localized forms. This seems to coincide with the theory that views intercultural learning as a developmental process, as discussed in Section 3.3.4. 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.

7.2 '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 learn 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 71)

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. Nevertheless, some people allow the *tu* form and still command respect. *José* adds to 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 72)

José'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 73)

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 74)

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* (Extract 67) and *Elizabeth's* (Extract 68) 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 75)

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 some times that you should have between people (Extract 76)

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 CID, two other participants contested the idea that social

distance is not being 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 77)

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 78)

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. Social distance is observed, so the opinion presented in CID should not be observed as a rule.

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'²⁴ 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

²⁴ Wang Lao Shi Hao in Chinese translates as 'Teacher Wang, Hello.' Wang = teacher's family name, Lao shi = teacher, Hao = hello.

because of my background I kind of like it. I don't know... (Extract 79)

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*, *José* 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 80)

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 81)

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.

When conducting class observations I was able to appreciate that all teachers, local and foreign, allow their students to use the *tu* form with them and/or call them by their names. 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 (Extracts 75 and 76). 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), 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 Sections 3.1.1 and 3.3.1—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.

7.3 A Local Expression: ‘The Negrito’

Thus far, the findings seem to suggest that foreign teachers are unwilling to negotiate their notion that ‘we are all equal’. This attitude would appear to suggest that they lack the capacity to relativize this view even in the face of a linguistic reality which is readily understood. However, when talking about use of the word ‘negro’ in Spanish, foreign teachers displayed more capacity for reflexivity, recognizing and accepting the perspective of the locals.

When conducting an observation of *Colin’s* class (CO11), I witnessed an event in which a student used the expression ‘nigger music’ in an attempt to explain a particular type of music that *Colin* did not seem to be familiar with. This is what *Colin* responded when I brought it up during the interview:

Researcher: I thought you were going to faint from the description of your student by referring to ‘nigger music’...//**Colin:** And I didn’t really address it. I kind of said something, like, ‘You can’t say that’, in other classes I’ve talked about it. I find it difficult in lower levels. But in other classes we’ve talked about it. [...] and I ask them to go find out, what does the word ‘nigger’ mean, where does it come from, when can you use it? Or not use it? [...] but you are right that was a tricky moment. And really didn’t really deal with it. Sometimes it’s difficult we don’t have time//**Researcher:** Do you think that higher levels are better to approach these issues? //**Colin:** I think they would understand it more

because they have developed the language skills and we can talk about it, in English and Spanish, because language is one problem because us talking now, it is a really complex conversation if you try to put this in the classroom it would be massively difficult, also once that students know more of an idea of language and understanding English and they would be more in a position to compare and... with the lower levels it would be more difficult— I would be *telling* them without having this knowledge transfer and understanding [his emphasis]. (Extract 82)

Colin's immediate reaction upon hearing the student was one of shock to the point of paralysis, at least for a few seconds. Although he recovered quickly enough to elucidate that 'you can't say that', it was, as he expressed it, a 'tricky moment'. Although *Colin* did not approach the issue in depth in this particular class, he describes encouraging his students to become ethnographers, 'to go find out, what does the word 'nigger' mean, where does it come from, when can you use it? Or not use it?'. Thus, it could be argued that *Colin* is encouraging critical analysis, trying to position students so that they can understand the connotations of this expression from the perspective of Others, in this case with reference to a taboo expression. *Colin* appears to believe that the language proficiency of students could be a concern when approaching culturally related matters. As he remarked, 'us talking now, *it is a really complex conversation* if you try to put this in the classroom it would be *massively difficult*' [my emphasis]. It could be said that regardless of the language proficiency of students, it might be the complexities of talking about cultural issues that concerns *Colin* the most.

Albert responded to the critical incident involving *Colin* with the following observations:

For that, I kind of noticed that because like from Spanish the word is almost the same, that has happened in my class. I think I would at least be able to understand that the student didn't have nearly the same intention, actually one thing I've noticed is that, you have, what is the chocolate milk bar that you have? What is it... 'Negrito'? When I first saw that, and you have the African, actually the first time I saw that I was a little bit shocked, a little bit surprised. So I don't think [...] and also it's also different in Canada, but like I said, I don't think I would flip out exactly. I'd definitely explain that you cannot say that [...] I definitely have explained different taboo things, even to say 'Negro' would be very taboo. Even between the US and Canada, yeah, well in Canada you still shouldn't say it. But there was a writer who wrote a book it was kind of black Canadian writing about the experience of

slaves going from Africa, to the US to Canada and it was called *The Book of Negroes*, the book of 'Negroes' that all of them had to sign when entering Canada. So, it has this historical document that had bases for the title but they had to change the name whatever it was published in the US because it's very politicized. (Extract 83)

Albert acknowledges the differences in use of the expression 'negro' and 'negrito' in the local environment, remarking that it is a cognate, but that the word differs in terms of its intensive meaning. He uses his observational skills to pick up the contextual cue provided by the picture on the vending machine. *Albert* takes the hint that the diminutive 'negrito' is not a taboo expression in the local context, though the term is not acceptable even in the title of a history book in Canada.

Like *Albert*, *Johnny Rodriguez* compares and contrasts the English speaker's view of the expression with the local one:

[...] it's very strange because there's even a singer here of 'Reggaeton' that is 'Nigger'. So, it's very much harder, it's a word right now, they don't understand the circumstances and cultural implications of it. Am I imposing my culture by telling them do not use this word in the United States? No, I don't think so, I think that's just giving them tools to succeed and survive if one is going to Memphis or one goes to West Virginia you don't want them to go using that word [...] but in America unfortunately still dealing with the very theme of racism and 'Nigger' is just one of those words where in particular contexts is OK and another contexts is just pretty wrong [...]. (Extract 84)

Johnny Rodriguez acknowledges the need to tell students that the word is taboo in the US, but notes at the same that it would be difficult to stop students from using it. He observes that the expression has some currency with students because a trendy singer uses the name, 'it's a word right now', he comments. *Johnny Rodriguez* is sensitive to local circumstances, but states that he would not be imposing his 'culture' by making students aware that there are other social environments where the expression is not acceptable. He continues by making a distinction between US and local sensibilities to race:

Here, there isn't much race, there are [social] classes, it's still nebulous. But I don't believe there's a lot of racism necessarily, I've seen it, I've seen it to a degree, skin tone, people being treated differently but it's not

a taboo here, it just isn't. I read the cartoon, some Americans when they comment, when they happen to see the cartoon, what's the comic book? *Memín Pinguín*? There's a place by the dealer 'Del Sol' that has this mask, and—Good Lord it's incredibly offensive to the black American!— [...]//**Researcher**: Oh right, someone else mentioned the vending machines with the "Negrito" picture on it...//**Johnny Rodriguez**: Yeah, but it's not intended as such because we are in a different social context and one can't travel the world imposing their own social order, it's their own...and some do, some really do, it is funny too, because I think poor people, why don't you take this opportunity to see outside of your own self and all you seek is yourself, what a waste of an opportunity (Extract 85)

So then, from *Johnny Rodriguez's* perspective, cultural sensitivity should be a two-way process. In the same way that he believes his students should be aware of the use of sensitive words in foreign environments, he also seems to believe that the Other should become aware of local usages and intended meanings within the local environment. *Johnny Rodriguez* is frankly critical of those Americans whose reactions and attitudes indicate a lack of ability to recognize other cultural realities. As he stated, '...we are in a different social context and one can't travel the world imposing their own social order, it's their own'.

Elizabeth spoke about using deliberative ways of building meaning, by means of communicating, asking and listening, instead of jumping to conclusions:

That was a different perspective [her emphasis]. I would ask him or her to define it,—what is your concept of 'nigger music'? I'm not sure what that means'—So, I would ask him to define it//**Researcher**: Is it possible that he was simply translating 'música negra'?//**Elizabeth**: Exactly, exactly, I don't think you should judge people when you hear that kind of thing, because the word 'Nigger' has been acceptable in... in that kind of society, and I think that kind of freaking out by that? I think it's important to ask people what they mean by that first//**Researcher**: In every culture there are taboo topics and taboo words//**Elizabeth**: Yes, but those terms change, they change from time to time. [Her emphasis] (Extract 86)

All of these teachers expressed feeling a little shocked when they first heard the Spanish expression 'negro' used. Likewise, the display on vending machines which have a 'negrito' character and the images in the comic book *Memín Pinguín* (see Appendix VII) were

disturbing for them. With time, they were eventually able to distinguish the affective meaning attached to the use of this word, which they observe is not derogatory.

All three teachers are able to recognize the way in which these words are delivered by Spanish speakers, without offensive intentions, or racist connotations. They seem to be capable of differentiating the local use of the word ‘negro’, while contextualizing its use in the local environment. However, although the adjective ‘negro’, and its diminutive ‘negrito’ might not be considered politically incorrect expressions in Spanish, as *Rosa* observed during the interview, ‘like any other adjective, it could be used with a negative intent’.

It might be conjectured that the amount of time spent immersed in the local environment is a considerable factor in understanding meanings implicit in local practices; thus, many visitors would probably have to spend an appreciable amount of time in the local environment in order to come to an accurate sense of how the word ‘negro’ is used. In this particular case, it might be relatively easy for the outsider who has not spent time in the local environment to reach the conclusion that Mexican society is racist, based on the iconic ‘el negrito’ caricature, which promotes chocolate cakes sold in vending machines. The affective connotations of local use are not grasped so quickly by the outsider, who may instead apply their own ways of viewing the world.

All three teachers are able to differentiate the casual use of this potentially explosive expression by the student. *Elizabeth* agrees with the researcher that the student may have been translating the phrase literally from Spanish. Likewise, *Johnny Rodriguez* comments on the existence of a ‘Reggaeton’ recording artist who uses the term as his commercial name in Latin America, pointing out that the student might have used the word in this sense, almost instinctively as a label for the type of music being discussed. All these teachers agree that when engaging in cross-cultural communication, individuals should be wary of taboo topics and terms, as these could be a cause of misunderstandings. Nonetheless, *Johnny Rodriguez* and *Elizabeth* observe that establishing what these might be is rather difficult, given the fact that language, along with society, is in constant evolution.

Elizabeth observes that making good use of communication can provide key clues to the avoidance of misunderstandings.

By enhancing students' sensitivity to the use of language which could be considered offensive in the ambience of the Other, the teachers make a contribution to their surroundings. It could be said that they are encouraging reflexivity, while motivating critical self-understanding. Also, a problematization from the perspective of the Self as related to the Other takes place in the teachers' discussion. As *Johnny Rodriguez* poses the question 'Am I imposing my culture by telling them do not use this word in the United States?', he answers in the negative, saying that he is giving the students information they need to 'succeed and survive'. This pragmatic view draws attention to the level of openness in the discussion at both the local and the global level. It suggests that individuals are able to be critical and open in addressing issues, even though these issues may be affectively complex.

In this section I have outlined how the foreign teachers *Albert*, *Johnny Rodriguez* and *Elizabeth* are able to try to see from the perspective of the Other; they were seen learning from and with the local world they are part of, observed and interact with it—they are able to construct a new reality in its own right, avoiding a judgmental attitude. It could be said that this was achieved through their ability to relativize their worldviews. Their attitudes evidenced the capacities for learning, they demonstrate the human capacity to perceive, criticize and appreciate differences from 'the normal'. This resonates with the theory regarding the cosmopolitan imagination portrayed by Delanty (2006, 2008, 2009), Hansen *et al.* (2009); Hansen (2011), Holliday (2011, 2013) and Stevenson (2003). All recognize that a dialogic process in which different parties with different worldviews can engage in the cosmopolitan dialogue. Thus, foreign teachers help students become aware of crucial differences in language use, while the students engage the foreign teachers in a dialogue of local meanings.

7.4 Reflective Dialogue for Local and Global Social Construction

The final section of this chapter presents findings related to the beliefs of students and teachers 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’.

In section 5.2 it was discussed that students recognize the value of respect as a universal principle which can be enacted in different ways across cultures. Similar opinions were expressed when discussing *CIC: A Korean English language teacher in NY*. Most of the student participants in this investigation seem to share the opinion that sentimental/affective acts may be expressed in different ways, not merely a conventional ‘I love you’ or ‘will you marry me?’. The following extract serves to highlight the students’ imaginings of different ways of enacting romantic events:

José: Maybe here in Mexico is like—I want you for a night—maybe. And she felt like if her way was strange, but it’s just *another way* [his emphasis]. Maybe in the USA [...] they think they have to hear that the man loves the woman or the woman loves the man, but maybe in Korea they have to intuit to really know that it’s the correct person to getting married//**Brenda:** I think they don’t say ‘I love you’ because they can *show it* in other ways [her emphasis]//**Researcher:** But do you think that one way is really better than the other?// **All three students:** No! [in unison]//**Brenda:** It’s not good or bad, it’s just, in Korea is one way, in the USA is another way, in Mexico is another, so we should respect all different ways to say ‘I love you’ or to show love. FG2 (Extract 87)

Like this group of students, most of the student participants in this investigation (FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG7, FG8) acknowledge that differences in cultural practices can be a cause of misunderstanding. However, Brenda highlights that each way should be

recognized not as better or worse, but merely as different; as she put it, ‘in Korea is one way, in the USA is another way in Mexico is another so we should respect all different ways to say *I love you* or to show love’. This attitude suggests a critically open view in that different cultural practices are understood and appreciated.

Caro, Luz and Ana (FG4) also believe that although it is normal to be surprised when cultural practices differ from one’s own, one should be wary of over-exaggerated reactions:

Caro: That’s aggressive! OK you are surprised because in your culture things happen in different way, but these exaggerated reactions?! I think one thing we have to learn is to respect other cultures and to learn more about them. [...] but to me it would be more interesting to ask—Why? How do you feel these ways we do in Mexico?—not this—Oh! my God!—
//**Luz:** If you don’t agree just shut up don’t say anything, don’t be rude!
//**Ana:** There are other ways to express what you are thinking you don’t have to be so exaggerate and make this so big. FG4 (Extract 88)

From the perspective of these students, individuals should be more attentive and respectful towards Others’ cultural practices and towards persons. Indeed, it was very significant to observe Luz’s extreme suggestion to ‘shut up, don’t say anything’. Their discussions seem to show tolerance towards cultural differences. Moreover, just like this group of students, most of the students’ immediate reaction (FG1, FG2, FG7, FG8, FG9) was concern that the Other should be allowed to save face. This was clearly expressed in the statements of these students:

Jesús: We have to be careful with our words, our expressions... no culture is better than another, they’re just different//**Ilse:** especially because we don’t want to hurt the person. FG8 (Extract 89)

Karla: Maybe she [the Korean teacher] felt insulted, maybe more like bad, offended, or misunderstood. They [the American teachers] overreacted because there exist thousands of ways to say ‘I love you’. FG1 (Extract 90)

Laura: I think we have to take another reaction for something that makes you [...] feel is wrong, you don’t have to say or tell in the moment, it’s like discrimination. Because it’s one’s own way to live, it might be different, and every country, even in the same country, is different. FG7 (Extract 91)

The reactions of the students could be said to demonstrate a moral concern for how best to respond to, regard and treat Others. Several students added their voices to problematizing the lack of ability of individuals to see things from the perspective of the Other. The following examples are provided because they comprise what most of the students (FG1, FG2, FG3, FG4, FG5, FG8, FG9) expressed; they serve to illustrate this point:

Joel: That reaction was intolerant, I think [...] I know some very cool Americans, but mostly, they're very close-minded and everything has to be right... their way, they are the standard//**Aminda:** Like if you are not blue, and red and white you are *so* strange [her emphasis]//**Elda:** I think that when we are in a group with people from different cultures, we have to be prepared to be confronted with difference//**Joel:** but in the same country, if we are from different places in the same country, we could have problems for understanding other people. FG3 (Extract 92)

Karla: Maybe [the Korean teacher] felt insulted, maybe more like bad, offended, or misunderstood//**Emmanuel:** For me, I think that we have to understand the other culture, we have to put ourselves in their shoes. The Korean teacher could've said —Why do YOU say 'I love you', you should show it instead— [...] the way they [the American teachers] could have reacted like wanting to know more but not just for rejecting//**Alejandro:** Yeah, because the Americans are used to be right, to impose their standards. FG1 (Extract 93)

Fatima: I think that they were very wrong because if you are in a room with different people from different countries you have to respect their opinion and other customs. I think they could do that in a respectful way//**Paco:** certainly it's different but it's their form to say 'I love you'//**Ulises:** The New Yorker's, in their opinion, is the correct way//**Fatima:** She [the Korean teacher] was more open-minded than the Americans. FG5 (Extract 94)

These students' opinions seem to suggest that an individual's reality could work as a screen that blocks and discourages the recognition of other ways of being; individuals may view 'their way' as central to their reality. Aminda gives a case in point of this blockage of recognition of other ways of being, as she says, 'Like if you are not blue, and red and white you are *so* strange' (Extract 92) or as expressed by Ulises, 'The New Yorker's, in their opinion, is *the* correct way' [my emphasis] (Extract 94). However, Joel is able to discern that negative reactions to difference are not exclusive to differences across 'cultures', but that they could also occur in the way individuals react or deal with difference 'in the same

country' (Extract 92). Emmanuel (Extract 93) goes so far as to imagine a reversal of the roles in the CIB: 'The Korean teacher could've said—why do *YOU* say 'I love you', you should show it instead'. Emmanuel's comment draws attention to the challenges in responding to statements about culture. It is facile to view one's own 'culture' as superior, the students seem to be saying; it is less so to remain behind the fine line of a more open worldview.

These findings resonate with the studies conducted by Osler and Starkey (2003) and Szerszynski and Urry (2002) (see Sections 3.4.7.2 and 3.4.7.3), who discovered that young individuals showed affective ties to other countries and places. In the view of these scholars, this attitude demonstrates a sense of cosmopolitan citizenship and/or global belonging. In the same line of thought, these scholars were led to conclude that young people learn the skills of cosmopolitan citizenship—or cosmopolitan values, as put forward by Nussbaum (1996) and Hansen (2011)—within their homes. The fact that the student participants in this investigation lack extensive traveling experience echoes this discussion. This finding confirms Nussbaum's (1996) theory of concentric circles, which argues that individuals can engage as citizens of the world beginning at the center within their homes. The concentric circles may then expand to include neighborhoods, nations and eventually the entire world.

Within the overall discussion, students problematize that saying 'I love you' is the only way to express this sentiment, recognizing that the Other also has ways to express this. The students seem to find value in the Other's way, and acknowledge that they could learn from the other culture. This is clearly stated in the words of Vianey and José:

Vianey: We have to take notice what each culture's beliefs are and take the best part for us//**José:** and maybe if you want to be different about the tradition of your country you can use another way to tell someone 'I love you'. FG2 (Extract 95)

Students seem to envision new patterns and even modification of those that already exist, although they seem to acknowledge that it might not be easy. Students' discussion showed that they are of the opinion that individuals can learn from the Other. However, from their

viewpoint, this requires the ability to analyse things from the perspective of the Other. Students' discussions could be said to demonstrate their ability to be engaged in a process of reassessment of assumptions and conventions, stimulated by juxtaposing and comparing familiar concepts with those of other 'cultures'. This seems to suggest that students believe in the transformation of individuals and 'cultures' as a result of encounters with the Other. However, they seem to recognize that this can be difficult, as their learned behavior and assumptions may be challenged in the encounter with the Other.

Like these groups of students above, *José* 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 96)

In *José'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, *José* 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 97)

Contrary to *José*, *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 98)

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 99)

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 100)

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’.

José 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 101)

José'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'. *José* 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 *José, 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 5.3.

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!— //**José:** 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 102)

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.

7.5 Summary of this Chapter

In this chapter, I have attempted to evidence the participants' struggles to construct 'culture' within the context of certain features of language use. 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. Nevertheless, although their discussion in this respect might be perceived as a lack of ability to distance themselves from their worldview, the capacity of the foreign teachers to reflect openly and recognize from the perspective of the Other became apparent in their discussion of the local expression *negro* as it is understood in the Spanish-speaking local context. Thus, 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 8: Conclusions and Implications

8.1 The Research Question

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. The philosophy of cultural cosmopolitanism, as displayed in the enactment of these orientations, implies the negotiation of cultural knowledge. Indeed, Rumford 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' (2008, p. 14).

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’.

8.2 General Conclusions

As detailed in Chapter 1, this thesis 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. 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 thesis that the construal of ‘culture’ is influenced by multiple sources of knowledge; indeed, negotiating these sources of knowledge can be challenging for the individual. Nonetheless, individuals **are** seen to be entering into the process of negotiation, sometimes with more success than others, and **do** possess the capability to negotiate these multiple sources of knowledge. 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.

The findings presented in this thesis 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, 3.4.4, Figure 3.3). Thus, I would relate the findings in this thesis 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; 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 3.3, 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 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, Kramsch, 1993, 1998a; Scollon et al. 2012). As has been highlighted throughout the findings chapters, 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 three findings chapters 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. 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. 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.

8.3 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 thesis 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 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, 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 latecomer students, new social conventions when offering/refusing food, 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.

In a similar way, Mexican teachers and students evidenced the potential for transformation, even in their home environment, as a result of exchange with the Other. I was able to appreciate several cases of these small transformations, for example, Luisa, who felt that the practice of complaining about bad goods or services might be adopted from England—she thought of this as an improvement that could be made in Mexican life. Miguel and Rosa also thought that the American ‘culture of complaint’ might be an improvement in Mexican consumer life. The students, despite their insistence on tradition in regard to their teachers, could also envision learning from the Other. This could be seen in their cosmopolitan reactions to several of the critical incidents.

Two teachers, José and Colin, expressed reservations about change that might come as a result of cultural imposition. José 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 ‘standards’ 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 Bennett (1986), 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, students always come to class on time, teachers are addressed as equals, by their first names, classes are never canceled on holidays and homework is always done—in general, America might serve as a model. This contrasts with the ethnorelativist reality of the teachers of the Language Department, where punctuality is negotiated with the students, teachers are addressed with formal usted, and classes are canceled for Mother’s Day. 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. Another outcome of negative attitude was reported erratic behavior—students reported a teacher throwing himself on the ground and pounding his fists in frustration. There were reports of a teacher so obsessed with punctuality and classroom discipline that he was termed ‘the Nazi teacher’ by students.

The findings support the view that stereotypes contain prejudicial messages which lead to Othering (Holliday, 2011; 2013). This was seen to be the case on both sides of the national fence between Mexico and the US; Mexican students acquired an Othered image

as constant latecomers, while the Othered image of the Americans was ‘owners of the world’, ‘invaders’ or ‘bellicose’. Indeed, these national images seem to be a stumbling block on the way to what I would characterize as a natural tendency of the participants towards an open, cosmopolitan worldview. The students’ positive stereotype of the English as culturally ‘superior’ and Canadians as ‘polite’ demonstrated the slippery nature of stereotypes. Though not as negative as the Othered American image, these images could also be seen as essentializations.

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, p. 87) remarks, ‘shared human capacities such as thinking and telling stories [...] form a ground for cosmopolitan-minded relations’. Throughout this thesis 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 seem to be ‘assists’—the individual is assisted in constructions of the Self and the Other by a cosmopolitan orientation.

8.4 Final Considerations on the Research Question

In Sections 8.2 and 8.3 above, 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 thesis; 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 12) 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 thesis. Looking back at the two incidents that motivated me to explore the topic of this thesis, 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.

8.5 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 (this was visited in Chapter 2), 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. As seen in Section 6.4, 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 from Section 7.4, 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.

Throughout the investigation process, telling of individual stories functioned as an important tool for the exploration of constructions of ‘culture’. This storytelling process could be repeated in the classroom in order to ‘draw out’ an unselfconscious dialogue with students, encouraging and exploring their reflexivity. 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 could be a successful recipe for introducing ‘culture’ into the classroom.

Throughout this thesis, 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. A striking example of self-reflection during the interview process was José and Vianey’s (FG2) deliberation on how respect is enacted in Mexico as compared to Japan. The cosmopolitan tradition foresees precisely this type of modest

transformation through self-reflection, Delanty (2009, p. 9) and Hansen's (2011, p. 8) 'incremental reconfigurations'.

A further implication suggested by the data gathered in this investigation is the necessity of a revision of students' attitudes towards English language classes at the University of Guanajuato. As mentioned in Section 6.3.3, students must take English language classes in order to complete their degrees—indeed, many students report being in classes only because of University requirements. However problematic lack of student interest may be for the ELT practitioner, teachers from the US face an additional challenge because of negative images of that country.

The teacher participant Johnny Rodriguez reported sensing 'hostility' because of events in Iraq and Afghanistan; Elizabeth also noted 'rejection towards the Americans [...] because of Bush and because of the wars and the aggression'. Even before these events in the Middle East involving US military forces, a certain negativity has existed due to the complicated long-term relationship between Mexico and the US; as Colin put it, 'there has always been this friction between Mexico and the US'. Thus, teacher participants can be said to view the problematic relationship between the US and Mexico as a reality, one that can affect the classroom. Undoubtedly, the negative image of the US colors students' perceptions of English language classes and presents a problematic issue for the American ELT practitioner; the approach to this problem has often been to disassociate English from the USA. As Johnny Rodriguez put it, 'I think that the best you can attain is to neutralize the hostilities of preconceived notions, neutralize English the subject'. It seems that this is an area where a cosmopolitan-informed disassociation of persons from their country of origin would be a desirable goal—this might in fact go hand-in-hand with an equally desirable disassociation of English from any inner circle cultural vestiges, 'freeing it up', so to say, for communication between persons from diverse backgrounds.

Several implications for teacher training programs are suggested by the data gathered in the course of the investigation. A primary consideration is the lack of preparation of teachers to deal with issues of 'culture' in the classroom. As remarked above, several teacher interviewees confessed to avoiding cultural issues in the classroom,

citing reasons such as: ‘I think culture takes care of itself’ (Johnny Rodriguez), ‘how are you going to manage that [culture] on top of everything else’ (Colin) or ‘it’s impossible to give a list of do’s and don’ts’ (José). 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. A glance at Appendix III (Interviewee’s Backgrounds) confirms that several foreign teacher participants who are cited in this thesis 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’. Therefore, the question of how to prepare teachers to confront ‘culture’ in the classroom poses itself, but also the question of whether the type of training engendered by the widely-discussed theories of Hofstede and Turner and Trompenaars (see Section 3.5) is at all effectual. It could be argued that a new model for preparing teachers to engage in ‘culture’ in the classroom is necessary. 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 to motivate reflection and stimulate discussion had a similar principle: the participants would be drawn out of themselves, questioning the ideas they hold about the Self and the Other. In any case, it would seem that a dialogic process is more effective than the earlier approach of comparing and contrasting ‘cultures’, which led so easily to essentialist representations, including national stereotypes. An immediate measure to bring ‘culture’ into the classroom might be for Language Department

teachers to share their personal stories of living, working or studying abroad with their students.

8.6 Limitations

As was seen in the findings chapters, 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).

8.7 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 remarks, can be done ‘anywhere, anytime, and of virtually anyone or any process, as long as human social behavior is involved’ (2008, 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, as mentioned in Chapter 2. The State of Guanajuato has the

fourth highest emigration rate nationally, and has traditionally been a state with high levels of emigration (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2012).²⁵ 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.

The context of an institution, such as the Language Department of the University of Guanajuato, allows the study of many different types of phenomena that take place within it. One example is a recent Ph.D. thesis by Mora (2012), which explores how students, teachers and administrators at this institution construct the English teacher’s professional image. The question of people’s constructions and projected images (in Mora’s sense) could provide a rich amount of material for further research.

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.

²⁵ National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics.

8.8 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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Appendix II: Welcoming Letter, Language Department



A LOS ALUMNOS DE INGLÉS Y CURSOS SABATINOS

500-600

EL PERSONAL ACADÉMICO Y ADMINISTRATIVO DEL DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS DE LA DIVISIÓN DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANIDADES CAMPUS GUANAJUATO, TE DA LA MÁS CÁLIDA BIENVENIDA AL **SEMESTRE ENERO-JUNIO 2012** DE ESTE AÑO LECTIVO. Quienes integramos esta Institución nos proponemos hacer el mayor esfuerzo en beneficio del aprendizaje del idioma al que te has inscrito.

PARA QUE LOGREMOS TUS PROPÓSITOS Y LOS NUESTROS, DEBES TENER EN CUENTA QUE:

***1. SI ACUMULAN QUINCE O MÁS FALTAS EN EL TURNO MATUTINO, U ONCE FALTAS O MÁS EN EL VESPERTINO; TU CALIFICACIÓN FINAL BAJARÁ 2 PUNTOS.**

2. DEBERÁS TENER LIBROS PROPIOS PARA TUS CLASES DE INGLÉS, para que los objetivos pedagógicos se cumplan y no se violen las disposiciones legales relativas a la reproducción ilícita de textos con derechos reservados. **NO SE PERMITIRÁN ALUMNOS EN EL SALÓN DE CLASES SIN SUS RESPECTIVOS LIBROS, NI CON COPIAS DE LOS MISMOS, DEBERÁS TENER TUS LIBROS PARA LA FECHA QUE TU MAESTRO TE ESTIPULE.**

3. Sólo podrás presentar exámenes si muestras tu CREDENCIAL DE ESTUDIANTE O TU CREDENCIAL DE ELECTOR.

4. Con un costo adicional de \$120.00 (23 de enero-29 de febrero) podrás afiliarte en el Centro de Auto-Aprendizaje de Idiomas CAADI, Laboratorio de Cómputo y Laboratorio de Japonés donde podrás estudiar idiomas de forma autónoma. Es importante que sepas que sólo tienes hasta el 29 de febrero para realizar dicho pago, a partir del 1 de marzo, tendrá un costo de \$760.00 por cada uno de ellos. Para mayor información puedes visitar el CAADI. Horario el CAADI: L-J de 8AM-PM y V de 8AM-3:30PM.

5. NOTA: En caso de hacer trampa durante los exámenes (copiar, sacar diccionario) se te aplicarán las sanciones correspondientes del Estatuto Académico de la Universidad de Guanajuato.

6. La venta de libros será a partir del día 30 de enero al 1 de febrero con horarios de 9AM-6PM para las clases entre semana y el día 4 de febrero 11AM-2PM para los cursos sabatinos. Estarán afuera del Auditorio de este Departamento.

7. El último día de clases para el curso semestral será el 25 de mayo y para los cursos sabatinos el 2 de junio.

8. No habrá clases los días 2 de feb. Y 20 de marzo debido a juntas pedagógicas de todos los profesores del área de inglés.

9. Los exámenes de escritura se realizarán en tu clase y en la hora correspondiente. Los parciales y los finales tendrán diferente horario, serán avisados con anticipación por su profesor. Las únicas fechas para la realización de los EXÁMENES EN EL ÁREA DE INGLÉS

SON LAS SIGUIENTES:

	PROGRAMA SEMESTRAL	PROGRAMA SABATINO
Primer examen de escritura:	9 de feb. (a la hora de clase)	11 de feb.
Segundo examen de escritura:	23 de feb. (a la hora de clase)	25 de feb.
Primer examen parcial:	15 de marzo: en los horarios indicados	17 de marzo
Tercer examen de escritura:	26 de abril (a la hora de clase)	28 de abril
Cuarto examen de escritura:	17 de mayo (a la hora de clase)	19 de mayo
Examen final:	28 de mayo: en los horarios indicados	2 de junio
Exámenes orales:	4, 5, 6 y 7 de junio de 8:30 a 5:00 p.m. (alumnos eligen su horario)	2 de junio

ATENTAMENTE

“LA VERDAD OS HARÁ LIBRES”

Guanajuato, Gto. 23 de enero del 2012

SECRETARIO ACADEMICO DE LA DIVISION DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANIDADES

DR. CARLOS ARMANDO PRECIADO DE ALBA

*** If you accumulate fifteen absences in the morning turn or eleven in the afternoon turn, your final grade will be lowered 2 points. (Researcher’s translation).**

Appendix III: Interviewees' Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Nationality	Marital Status	Gender	Teaching Experience	Education	Experience living in a foreign country
Elizabeth	British	Divorced from a Mexican with two children born in Mexico	Female	14 years. English Coordinator 'Off Campus'	MA in Business	Mexico, USA and Italy
Albert	Canadian	Single	Male	8 years	BA in Business	Mexico, Middle East and Asian countries
Johnny Rodriguez	American	Single	Male	12 years. Former English Coordinator	N/A	Mexico
Colin	British	Married to a Mexican with two children born in Mexico	Male	6 years	MA TESOL	Mexico
Luisa	Mexican	Single	Female	6 years	MA TESOL	The USA and the UK
Miguel	Mexican	Married to a Mexican 2 children	Male	11 years. English Coordinator	MA TESOL	The USA
José	Mexican	Married to a Mexican with two children	Male	27 years	MA Social Sciences	The USA
Rosa	Mexican	Divorced from a Mexican with three children	Female	10 years	MA TESOL	The USA
Susan	American	Married to a Mexican with two children	Female	6 years. English Coordinator	MA TESOL	Mexico

Appendix IV: Elizabeth's Classroom Observation (CO12)

Class Observation

Date: 14/11/11 Class: 600 No. Students: 19 F 10 M 9 Time: 10 AM Teacher: E

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 'tawano' JR 'drink' gesture - IRISH
 Comments: L1/L2 T L1/L2 T

St. I have to put some special 'pomada' T: Don't spend all your 'quincena' in case you have to buy the cake next week.
 T Cream? special cream?

Individual - Collaborative work
 St. Knocks twice, walks in 18" late
 T (Pat on the back) Your brother?
 St. He's parking the car
 T Oh He's parking the car
 St. Yes

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

st why in some words Am take out the /u/?
 T Dishonour, behaviour
 St I lived in Cebya a year and a 'middle'.

Interview Behavior Asking for permission

Appendix V: Critical Incidents

Critical Incident A: A Mexican Student in Japan

Luis was awarded a scholarship to study in Japan for one year. On his return, at the request of his classmates who wanted to know about his experience, Luis told them about the places he had visited and the people he met, then he said—One thing which called my attention was how Japanese people tend to look down when they speak, they don't make eye contact...—as he described this, he was interrupted by one of his classmates who said,—Why not!? What's wrong with that!?

Critical Incident B: A Canadian National in Saudi Arabia

There were eight teachers attending a seminar about 'Teaching with video and film' at a university in New York City. There were four local English teachers from New York and three visiting teachers from abroad, one from Sweden, one from Korea and a Mexican one. The topic of discussion was 'Proposing marriage'. The teachers were instructed to write a dialogue corresponding to an event of this kind. Everybody coincided with the same ideas, a dialogue which included phrases such as—I love you, will you marry me?— and—Yes, I will!—. In regard to the place where an event of this kind might take place, there was also an agreement among the participants. These ideas of a venue and events included a fancy restaurant, a ring hidden in the dessert, champagne, romantic music playing in the background, and others.

However, one of the teachers from NY asked the teacher from Korea whether it was the same in her country—No—the Korean teacher replied,—in Korea, the man never tells the woman 'I love you'—Immediately after that, the same local teacher inquired— But, how does the woman know that the man loves her?—The Korean teacher responded in a rather poetic, mystical tone—You just know...— —That is horrible!—was the comment by the American teacher, and she continued—but, it's so sad, not to hear from a man that *he* loves you...?! It's too sad!—In an attempt to break down the over-excitement the teacher from Sweden intervened by asking—Oh, and how does the man propose?—The Korean teacher explained—This is also done in a suggestive way. The man says something like 'I

hope that one day we can wake up together...’ —This time, all four local English teachers exploded with disgust, it was difficult to identify who was speaking as they overlapped each other. Their comments were: —Oh my Gosh, if a man tells you *THAT* here [in the US]—,—he wants to sleep with you...!—,—... it means that he just wants to have sex with you!—all through these comments one comment resonated nonstop—That’s just horrible!—.

Critical Incident C: A Korean English Language Teacher in New York.

Hans, an English teacher from Vancouver, Canada spent two years working in Saudi Arabia. In that country, he described, it is a custom for men to hold hands when walking next to each other. He expressed—At first, it made me feel very uncomfortable, but I learned to put a good face on it because I didn’t want to offend anybody—.

Critical Incident D: 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!—.

Critical Incident E: A Mexican Spanish Teacher in a Multicultural Class in Guanajuato, Mexico

I once had the opportunity to observe the class of a friend who teaches Spanish in an international school in Guanajuato. She had students from all over the world. After having observed her class, we sat down to talk about her experience working in a multicultural classroom. She expressed,—I know every culture. It’s very difficult, I have to control

everything. For example, I never put a German to work with a Japanese student because Japanese are very quiet and Germans are very impatient with them. I can put the Japanese with the Americans, this is a good combination because Americans are ‘jokers.’ The Brazilians like to tell jokes, so I never put them with the Germans because Germans don’t like jokes they react like, ‘yeah, real funny!’ It’s difficult, it’s very difficult! They don’t know it, but I have to control everything to assure that things work well and create a good environment. But you know, next week I’m getting two students from the Czech Republic and I have *NEVER* had students from there, this is my first time... I don’t know how I’m going to treat them. I don’t know what I’m going to do!—

Critical Incident F: Complaining in Mexico

—I was constantly having problems at the grocery’s store because I didn’t understand in my mind why customer services wasn’t a priority, so I would constantly get annoyed every week!—It’s what a colleague once told me as she described her experience living in Guanajuato, she continued—I went to the store, and deal with the Mexican grocery system and people, I would say ‘Oh my goodness, let’s go to the customer service and complain!’, and I constantly wanted to go to complain and demand my rights and such and tell them this or that, and why they don’t have the product, or why they told me they were going to have a product... why the price is different and why... and my husband would be like — Oh, no, no, no, let’s not— And for me I come from a culture where complaining and demanding your service is OK... and he never wanted to complain... and I couldn’t understand why if there is a customer service desk, in Mexico... people don’t really complain as much or it doesn’t, the attitude isn’t... and I finally passed that but it used to be a point of frustration for me.

Appendix VI: e-mail Communication

Hi Ileri,

Thanks for this information about your research project. The topic is very interesting to me, and I think it's something that is especially important in our program right now. With the "new" program and teachers using their own copy packets rather than the textbooks, our students are not exposed to much cultural variety. I've noticed that when teachers prepare quizzes and materials for their students, the content is usually about places, people, and customs in Mexico. It's a shame, because the textbooks include a variety of readings and listenings that are of international interest.

I thought that you were going to observe my class on Thursday. When we spoke on Wednesday, I said you could come that same day or the next day, and I mentioned, the last two weeks are not good times to observe my classes. Next week, on both Monday and Wednesday, we have quizzes (one is to make up for this week when my students asked not to have a quiz two days after returning from vacation) and oral presentations. The students will be graded on their presentations, and I think that having a stranger in the class will make them more nervous, and would not be fair for them. I don't expect many, if any, students to come on Tuesday, which is mother's day. Thursday is student's day; all classes are cancelled that day, and I don't have Friday classes. During the last week of classes we will be finishing up oral presentations and doing listening practice for the final exam on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. On Thursday, the last day, we will have a party.

I'm sorry this won't work out these last two weeks, and it seems like you will be leaving before the fall semester starts. Thanks again for explaining your project. It sounds interesting, but I think you will need to observe any group of students more than once to get a true idea of the intercultural communication and negotiation that goes on in the classroom. Also, I think that observing students during the very beginning or end of a semester is generally not a good idea for a variety of reasons.

Good luck with your project.

Barbara

> Date: Fri, 6 May 2011 10:32:33 -0700

> From: irerisw@yahoo.com

> Subject: research project

> To: barbaradavoli@hotmail.com

>

> Dear Barbara,

> It was good to see you the other day. I thank you for agreeing to let me observe your class. I thought I would briefly describe to you what my research project is about before I actually come over to observe your class. As you know I am currently studying my PhD at the University of Christ Church Canterbury and I will be in Guanajuato for three months as part of my data collection process for my research project.

> My research looks at the broad issue of culture, more specifically the issue of intercultural communication. I want to explore how English language teachers and students deal with the issue of culture. How do they construct the notion of culture? So then, my intention at this first stage is simply to observe what is going on in the English language classroom and try to analyze students' process of negotiation between their native culture or cultural reality when confronted with the learning of a foreign language/culture. I should mention that all gathered information will be used and revised only by me, it is for my PhD research project for the University of Christ Church Canterbury and most importantly, all of the sources will be kept anonymous. I will not make any reference to names in my study. The purpose of the observations is not to evaluate any aspect of the teachers' performance or method but rather merely to observe the complex issue of

> intercultural communication.

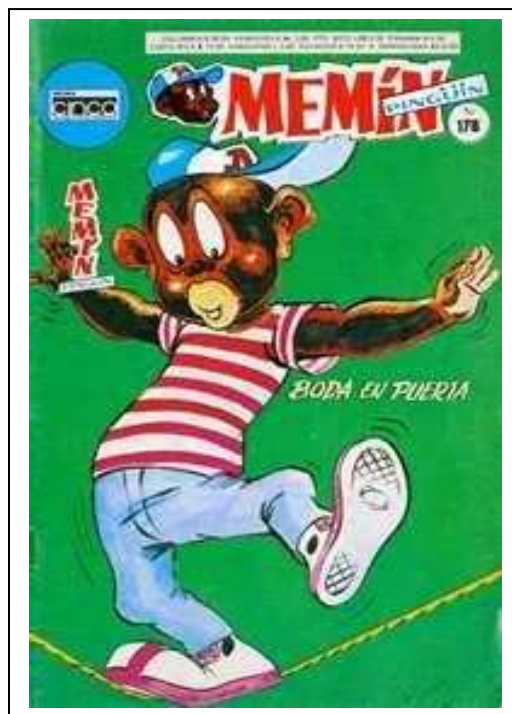
> Could you confirm the day, time and class you would prefer me to observe?

> I appreciate your help and support in my research project. Your participation is very valuable for my investigation.

> All the best,

> Ileri

Appendix VII: The 'Negrito' and 'Memín Pinguín'



Appendix VIII: English Language Evaluation

The English class is evaluated in the form of 10 quizzes, 4 writing exams, 2 reading and listening exams and 1 oral exam. The quizzes are applied every week by the teacher, in class, and take approximately 5 to 10 minutes. After students complete the quiz the class continues as normal.

The 4 writing exams are applied by the teacher, at the regular hour of the class, over the course of the semester. Students have one hour to write an essay which varies in length from 150–250 words, depending on their level. Some students might take 30 minutes to fulfill this task, while others might take the whole hour. For those who arrive late, no extra time is provided; exams are collected at the hour. Students can leave the class after finishing their exam. The two reading and listening exams are referred to as midterm and final exams respectively. These exams are applied simultaneously in all of the schools and departments of the University of Guanajuato where English classes are taught. These exams are scheduled at a different time from the regular class schedule and are applied by an English teacher (not necessarily the class teacher) and in a different classroom. Examination day starts at 8 AM and lasts until 8 PM, with a lunch break from 2 to 4, exams being applied every hour. At the end of the day, all teachers collect their exams from the English coordination to take them home for grading. This exam has two components, reading and listening and it is to be completed in one hour. Students are given 20–25 minutes to complete the first part of the exam, which is reading. After this time has passed, students are interrupted to proceed with the listening section. The listening section involves listening to a recording in order to complete 3 to 4 tasks. Students listen to the recording 3 times and are given a few minutes after every time the recording is played to complete the exercises (i.e. fill in the gap with the word they hear). This section takes about 20 minutes to complete. After completing this section students can return to the reading section, if they have not finished it. The listening task is done in the second part of the examination, anticipating the problem of having to replay a recording for latecomer students. If students arrive late for the reading section, this affects only the student and not the mechanics of the examination process. Students must assume full responsibility for tardiness, losing credit if they miss the listening section or did not have sufficient time to complete their exam.

The oral exam is applied at the end of the semester. This exam is applied only in the Language Department, so that all students from the University of Guanajuato have to come to the Department to take their exam. The oral examination is done in four days, starting at 8 AM and lasting until 6 PM daily, with one hour for lunch, 2 to 3 PM. All the English staff as well as teachers from off-campus are required to collaborate in the oral examination process. It is an intense process that involves examining about 1500 students. Every oral exam takes about 10-15 minutes, and students are examined in groups of two or three by two English teachers. The exam consists of three sections: a brief interview (one student at the time), a picture description (one student at the time) and a conversation between the two students. All students have to register and schedule a place. If a group of students miss their turn, it is unlikely that the English coordinators are able to accommodate them at another time, because of the difficulty and effort involved in rescheduling. In any case, it is the full responsibility of the students to be on time for their exam.

Appendix IX: Coding System Interviews

Students' Interviews

Focus Group	Teacher's Initials and Class Level	Students' Pseudonyms	Date	Time	Length	Words
FG1	AL/800	Karla, Emmanuel, Alejandro	17 May	19:00	1:06:54	2,130
FG2	EL/400	Brenda, José and Vianey	21 May,	14:00	47:26	2,523
FG3	JR/400	Aminda, Elda and Joel	18 May,	10:00	57:31	2,544
FG4	CO/700	Luz, Ana and Caro	19 May,	11:00	1:10:46	2,240
FG5	MI/400	Paco, Ulises and Fátima	18 May,	12:45	32:28	1,129
FG6	MI/400	Mariana and Juan Manuel	19 May,	13:00	29:03 (batteries)	1,620
FG7	JO/600	Laura and Lulú	17 May,	1100	43:56	1,616
FG8	RO/800	Jesús, Lilia and Ilse	23 May,	11:00	54:46	1,210
FG9	LU/400	Luz Ma, Verónica	16 May, (Veronica 20" only)	11:00	41:30	2,411
		Total: 24 Students				17423

Teachers' Interview

Interview Teachers	Date	Time	Length	Words
Rosa	20 May 2011	11:00 (Starbucks)	1:02:53	6,346
Elizabeth	24 May 2011	11:30 AM	49:56	5,391
José	25 May 2011	11:30 AM	50:51	5,199
Johnny Rodriguez	27 May 2011	10:00 AM	58:03	6,672
Colin	27 May 2011	11:30 AM	1:08:10	6,533
Albert	6 June 2011	11:00 AM	1:13:22	7,571
Miguel	6 June 2011	10:00 AM	1:17:12	9,835
Luisa	26 June 2011	11:00 AM (Starbucks)	1:45:44	12,893
Susan	27 June 2011	11:00 AM (Starbucks)	30 minutes interview	Notes
Total: 8 Teachers				54094

Appendix X: Coding System Class Observations

Class Observation	Teacher	Level	Students	Date	Time
CO1	Johnny Rodriguez	400	6	10 May 2011	9:00
CO2	Johnny Rodriguez	400	4	11 May 2011	9:00
CO3	Miguel	600	26	9 May 2011	10:45
CO4	Miguel	500	14	10 May 2011	11:45
CO5	Luisa	400	6	5 May 2011	10:00
CO6	Luisa	400	8	12 May 2011	10:00
CO7	José	600	8	11 May 2011	10:00
CO8	José	600	10	16 May 2011	10:00
CO9	Albert	700	20	16 May 2011	17:45
CO10	Albert	800	10	17 May 2011	17:45
CO11	Colin	300	28	7 May 2011	10:00-12:00 Saturday Class
CO12	Elizabeth	600	19	14 May 2011	10:00-12:00 Saturday Class
CO13	Rosa	800	8	5 May 2011	10:00
CO14	Rosa	700	6	9 May 2011	10:00

Appendix XI: A Fragment of Johnny Rodriguez's Interview

Minutes 27' to 37', a fragment of the interview with Johnny Rodriguez discussing Critical Incident D.

Researcher: Can I ask you to read this other incident? [Critical Incident D: An American in Mexico] [27'55"] This has to do with something that this foreign teacher noticed when first arriving to Mexico.

Johnny Rodriguez: These are interesting. 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, but time in a country or multiple countries...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. I've seen teachers here, amazingly creative... I've seen them lose enthusiasm for groups for the entire semester, and really not enjoying going to the classroom... One particular teacher here has such high standards, and he's always disappointed in the classroom, and ends every semester just really hating the English teaching because students do not reach the standards of this teacher...it is sad. But...we've always puzzled about...mmm [29'49"] my type is very different very open and flexible...This teacher's student evaluations are always stellar, but this teacher has been called the 'Nazi teacher' by students, students are *afraid of* this teacher, *in-ti-mi-da-ted!* [His emphasis] and yet the evaluations are always excellent, we always puzzle at that, how much that has to do with the students' sense that a teacher should be that raging authority or that aloof authority, strange.

Researcher: That reminds me, there has been the case where in the "Students' Teacher Evaluations", some teachers have been called racist. This is my concern, teachers are dealing with cultural differences, because it is *your culture* and *students' culture* [my emphasis], how can we create this understanding, you wonder how much it had to do

with... that... what a teacher may have said was misinterpreted by students... should it necessarily be interpreted as being racist?

Johnny Rodriguez: We had one case of a particular teacher, again, when I was in the position in the coordination, some striking things that I saw were that being a successful teacher in another circumstance does not necessarily make you a successful teacher within the confines of this school. Our own institution has a culture of its own, the state, this city has its own culture, learners do bring their sensitivity into it. I like to think, again, I seriously believe if one is not sensitive to people around them, if one is not a people person, one should not be in the classroom. Some administrator office would better suit that kind of nature, you have to have the personality to be in the classroom to be attentive, to allow all of the difference that occurs. When one teacher in particular was accused of being racist for comments and attitude, when it was not at all the case, not at all, a very open teacher, very, very naïve to the Mexican culture, very naïve as to local ways, and he was very struck by the notion of nicknames based on physical features. So in his own attempt to bridge that gap he started nicknaming students on what he thought was OK...he used their physical features, and came up with some rather offensive ones, the blue-eyed boy, beautiful blonde, blue eyes... thinking this... I'm adapting to the culture... time after time it was repeated that the students were not being very patient with him, and he was blundering in his attempt to connect with the kids. It was actually...to state it truly, a very racist thing, and that was an incredible failure! And it was a shame because there are teachers, even present teachers going on to harbor...and not necessarily foreign teachers, who harbor prejudices that are sometimes very evident. But this wasn't the case with this teacher, but it was just that it didn't function because students themselves brought their own prejudice too and there was a crash in the classroom. But again raising awareness with students in general that there are other cultures and they should be open to that... particularly if they have a foreign teacher in the foreign language classroom there will be differences, and again, I think, something that I've always wanted to implement but we never did very well, I think teachers here... foreigners are kind of hired on the side with little training... it takes a little holding them by the hand and walking them around, showing them the place, the city, and talking to them about traditions, and original customs and students' sensitivities, often times I think teachers are hired because of their present paper work and that says little about

character in the classroom.

Researcher: [35'00"] That makes me think of... for many years English language teachers were hired to teach *their culture*, I speak English and I teach them *my culture* [my emphasis]. Do you think that, somehow, that belief is still there? Can you perceive this?

Johnny Rodriguez: You can, I have seen a shift not in the school because unfortunately we are still based on the old patterns, it's still not retired, unfortunately. But I've seen a shift in textbooks, in the internet, it's not so much what to do correctly in my country, but when you travel to different countries you hear crazy different customs, when you are in India do not do this when you are here do not do that. There is a greater global awareness that every community has its own set of rules. And it can be fascinating and interesting, I've seen that in some textbooks, it's not so much—when you go to England do this—but like things not to do in a different country, and it's not viewed comically, but it's viewed as culture interest.

Researcher: You don't think that it is too much stereotyping at times?

Johnny Rodriguez: It can be because one can... it's easy to generalize about cultures; at the same time, I don't think I'm doing my students a disservice when if, I make them aware of physical gestures that they should not use in the US, the universal "OK" [gestures with hands] they should not use in particular middle eastern countries, that's a fact, I don't think that's stereotyping. I think it is another way, a way to raise students' awareness. In fact, people are different, communities are different, national cultures are different.

Appendix XII: A Fragment of a Focus Group Interview (FG)

Minutes 41:49 to 55:42, a fragment of a focus group interview with students discussing Critical Incident E.

Researcher: I'm going to read another incident to you. [Critical incident E: A Mexican Spanish Teacher in a Multicultural Class in Guanajuato, Mexico]. What are your thoughts about it?

Aminda: It's too pretentious to say—I know all cultures—because people are not “cultures” [gesturing with the hands]...it is but, it's like to say—you Japanese go to the Mexican, and talk about beans and talk about rice, OK?—,—OK!—...the students are people.

Joel: I think, it is, not pretentious...but I do...my believe...I do...I think she should be more open-minded, and believe that other people from other cultures mix...//

Aminda: Yes, they can negotiate communication.

Elda: I don't think that teacher has ethics...//

Joel: It could be possible...but in every culture there are exceptions...because it's not the culture, it's people...//

Researcher: the individual//

Joel: Yeah, the person. I don't know... I'd do it in a different way, but she's the teacher.

Researcher: But, how about the other comment,—Next week I am going to receive two students from the Czech Republic. I have no idea how they are, I don't know what I'm going to do with them, how to treat them?—What would you say to that?

Aminda: like normal...!//

Joel: like people, they are not robots, or like people from the Czech Republic, I mean, they are people!//

Aminda: here we are in Mexico and//

Joel: she is using her stereotypes concepts that she has about the culture, and she puts the culture to the person, [48:03] like, you're Mexican, you have to be happy...if you're not, you are weird... You have to wear sombreros and wear mustache//

Elda: here one teacher, my Italian teacher said—When I came to Mexico I expected to see Mexican people wearing a serape and a big hat—...//

Joel: I hate it when people say that!//

Aminda: in Italy when they say—Mexican people—everybody thinks of the...//

Joel: ...a man sleeping under a tree cactus...?!//

Aminda: ...or the hacienda//

Joel: a lot of my friends, foreign ones, say that Mexico was not like what they expected. That they expected like ranches with three houses, and sand all over the place... and that we all ride horses and that women wear long dresses...//

Researcher: How to react to that?

Joel: The first time is OK, but the second and third time it's annoying for me!

Researcher: For the same reason we probably shouldn't do that to other people//

Joel: like the Japanese people with the kimono or...//

Aminda: it bothers you, it may be hard...but you must say...—OK [breathing deeply]—//

Joel: ...calm down...//

Aminda: I am Mexican, BUT...//

Joel: It's different than the way you look at our county.