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Is English important in your life? A collaborative experience in a secondary school

Abstract In this chapter, we describe a collaborative action-research project involving an ethnographer, an English teacher and secondary school students in the production of videos about the role of English in the youths' lives. Building on the principles of language socialisation and imagined communities, the analysis of the videos produced by the students foregrounds the connections between their socialisation into English, their sense of present and future investment in English learning activities and their engagement with imagined communities of YouTubers and Instagrammers. Social media, digital platforms and private after-school language colleges emerge as central in young people's English language learning trajectories, alongside their formal education. We conclude that collaborative action-research initiatives might provide teachers, researchers and students with opportunities to connect youths' in- and out-of-school practices and engage them in more meaningful English learning experiences.

Keywords: language socialisation, imagined communities, digital platforms, ethnography, collaborative action-research, English learning.

1. Introduction

As is introduced in the chapter by Moore (this volume), the municipality where IEP! took place was located in the industrial belt surrounding Barcelona. During the 1970s, it became the place of residence for large communities of migrant workers from other regions of Spain, as did many other towns and cities located near large urban centres in Catalonia. A short walk through the streets of the town leaves one with a first impression of its architectural characteristics: large apartment blocks without balconies, few green spaces and surrounding highways that act as borders. On this short walk, one also realises that the language most prevalent in the social life of the town is Spanish, while Catalan is less seen and heard. This is evident in the voices of merchants or in the large number of graffiti and tags in the public space that somehow vindicate the working-class spirit that impregnates the town.

Globalisation has changed the social and linguistic realities of cities on a global scale and the municipality at the focus of our research is no exception.

The languages that circulate in its streets are not only Catalan and Spanish; the linguistic repertoires of more recent transnational migrants coexist with historical forms of bilingualism, which have been reconfigured within an increasingly global and interconnected world. However, beyond languages as abstract entities, speakers symbolically and materially position themselves through the social value attributed to their linguistic repertoires (Pennycook, 2006). In this process of social and linguistic reconfiguration, the role of English is central. English is a language that is socially accepted as useful, politically neutral, and its learning is extensively perceived as somehow guaranteeing more successful schooling and future employment (Flors Mas, 2013; Garrido & Moore, 2016; Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014). English is also a compulsory school subject in Catalonia from the age of six.

2. The ethnographic project: English as an element of social differentiation

The relationship between linguistic repertoires and social and educational success has always been close. Not only in Catalonia, but in any linguistic community, speaking or not speaking a language, or doing so in a particular way, carries embodied social meanings that are impossible to dissociate from linguistic practices and their agents (Corona & Block, 2020). In Catalonia, for example, a lack of proficiency in Catalan has important consequences for school results (Serra & Paladurias, 2010). Even in contexts such as the one where our research was conducted, where Catalan is rarely present outside of schools for some young people, its symbolic value is very important. While Spanish is commonly the socially shared language, Catalan is the language of institutional prestige (see Masats et al., 2017). In this negotiation of linguistic value, English occupies an increasingly important place (Patiño-Santos & Codó, 2021).

The ethnographic project that we have carried out as part of IEP! responded to a scenario described by Aitor, a 14-year-old boy who collaborated with the project. During one of the evening walks around the city with Víctor Corona, the first author of this chapter, following the Global StoryBridges activity he took part in (see chapters by Moore, this volume; Moore & Hawkins, this volume; Zhang & Llompart, this volume), Aitor commented: “Nadie aprende inglés en el instituto. Para aprender hay que ir a una academia privada” (“Nobody learns English in the high school. To learn it you must go to a private language college”). This statement is produced in a context where English is taught for at least three hours per week in secondary education. Keeping in mind that knowing English

is an element of social differentiation (see Moore, this volume; Patiño-Santos & Codó, 2021), it is not our intention in this chapter to avoid questioning this phenomenon. Rather, it is our hope that students' ethnographic work might help complexify these language dynamics.

In this chapter, we present an ethnographically-driven, collaborative action-research (Nussbaum, 2017) experience carried out jointly between a university-based researcher (Víctor Corona), a secondary school teacher (Jorge Solans) and secondary school students around using and learning English out of school. The chapter is organised as follows. In the next section (Section 3), we present a conceptual framework for understanding young people's language use and language learning. In Section 4, we present the methodological approach taken in collecting and analysing the data. In Section 5, we introduce the main characteristics of the collaborative action-research project, and the particular task proposed to the pupils studied in this chapter, that consisted in a video-production in which students reflected on the role that English played in their lives. Section 6.1 presents an overall description of the young people's resulting videos, which is developed in more detail in Section 6.2, where we analyse three of the videos produced by the students and their connections with the typical conventions of digital platforms and their communities of users and followers. Finally, in Section 7 we offer some final reflections on young people's perceptions, socialisation and investment in learning English, and on the challenges that these findings raise for researchers and teachers.

3. Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework articulates the principles of language socialisation (Garret & Baquedano-López, 2002; Ochs, 2000; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, 2011; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) with research on imagined communities (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001). Language socialisation explores how language use and language learning relate to processes of becoming a competent and active member of specific communities (Ochs, 2000). Early approaches to language socialisation focused on the transmission of language and of specific social and cultural conventions from more expert community members to children and other novices. Current approaches, however, acknowledge that socialisation processes are not merely transmissive, but collaborative and multidirectional, and that they take place throughout our entire lifespan, across a range of social experiences and settings, and include multiple modalities along with language.

Most studies on language and cultural socialisation have focused on documenting practices of socialisation in tangible communities which can be directly observed, such as families, educational communities, neighbourhoods and work communities (for example, Vallejo, 2020). However, technological advances, transnational movements and digitally-mediated communications have expanded our sense of community beyond physical or territorially-bounded limits. In an increasingly global and interconnected world, the prevalence of digital spaces and digitally-mediated interactions in our daily lives has also had a significant impact on people's access to, connection with and sense of membership in non-tangible communities.

The concept of imagined communities, coined by Anderson (1991), refers to people's sense of affiliation with "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241). These imagined communities include engagements with non-tangible social groups that extend beyond our direct local relationships. In his seminal work, Anderson proposes nations as examples of these imagined communities, in the sense that although we will never get to meet and interact with all of our fellow compatriots, the existence of a sense of community lives in the minds of each of us (Anderson, 1991). Imagined communities also include future relationships with transnational communities that for now exist only in our imagination. Indeed, as the internet and social media allow people to connect around the globe, the scope of what can be imagined and of possible selves and affiliations broadens significantly (Appadurai, 1996). These imagined communities, such as young people's membership or desire to become members of certain urban movements or professional collectives (e.g. YouTubers, Instagrammers, influencers), can have a strong impact on their identity building and actions, including their current investment in language learning and their learning trajectories. Therefore, exploring young people's current or future identification with imagined communities can elucidate issues relating to their identities and enhance our understanding of their language socialisation, language use and investment in language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

Despite their non-tangible nature, imagined communities have defining regulations and requirements for participation, which determine what prospective members should accomplish to gain membership. In this sense, learning specific languages (e.g. English) and displaying particular forms of languaging and other embodied actions can be perceived as a means of preparation for and of gaining membership of specific communities.

In light of our data, the notion of imagined communities provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of youths' sources of language socialisation

and language learning in and beyond the school, as grounded in their current and future affiliations to transnational communities with specific codes and conventions, and of processes in which identity building, desires, play and creativity (see also Moore et al., this volume) have a central role in their engagement with English use and learning.

4. Methodology

As we have already mentioned, this chapter presents an ethnographically-driven, collaborative action-research (Nussbaum, 2017) study that took place in one of the secondary schools that participated in the IEP! project. From a methodological perspective, ethnography, one of the central tools in anthropology, is informed by both deep observation of specific contexts, and careful reflection on what is being observed. The observer is generally positioned as a participant of the community with a defined role, and subjectivity, far from being reduced, is conceptualised as a central resource for the production of knowledge. This chapter is the result of a collaborative experience that builds on observations gathered from the perspectives of a university-based ethnographer (Víctor Corona) and a secondary school English teacher (Jorge Solans), who worked together to implement a classroom project from an action-research approach. The other two authors (Claudia Vallejo and Emilee Moore) contributed to the interpretation of the data and subsequent theorisation. The collaborative work between researcher and teacher allowed these identities to be modifiable and exchangeable on many occasions, as the researcher took on the identity of teacher in the classroom activities studied, and the teacher approached the data gathered as expert analyst during discussions.

In this sense, ethnographic work is, above all, about establishing human relationships, as participant observation inevitably brings about long-term dialogue and co-existence. Following the French sociologist Jounin (2016), it is impossible to be gods or chameleons when doing observation, which means that we cannot see without being perceived, nor can we blend in like a chameleon. Our beliefs and ideologies play an important role in the relationships we establish with other people, and ethnographic research is no exception. In this project, researcher and teacher were fortunate to create a positive, collaborative relationship based on the shared belief that language learning must always be anchored in contextualised language use, and that research on language learning can be a tool for educational improvement.

In the study described in this chapter, ethnography was also employed to motivate students to notice, contemplate and investigate linguistic

phenomena that they take for granted. In this sense, ethnography was not only a basis for collaboration or a method of data collection, but also an epistemological stance, as one of the characteristics of our collaboration was that the students in Jorge's English class participated as researchers, actively producing the data that is analysed in this chapter. The aim was to establish connections between what they did within the school premises and the practices that they carried out in other spaces. This ethnographic work was intended as the first stage in a youth-led participatory action-research (YPAR) process (Ozer et al., 2010), in which students would explore their uses and learning of English, thinking strategically about how to build new and better opportunities for using and learning English in and beyond school, and then implement and evaluate these changes (Anyon, et al., 2018). This process had to be suspended due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden switch to remote learning in March 2020, and thus remains a task pending for research following on from IEP! (see Moore, this volume; Moore & Morodo, this volume).

In the following section, we describe the collaborative process and the task set for students in more detail.

5. A project inside and outside of the classroom

After four weeks of observation by Víctor in Jorge's secondary school English classroom, they met to discuss the design of a project in which students could reflect on the role that English played in their lives. The resulting task was for students to record very short videos in pairs or groups of three members, in which they answered various questions. To record the videos, it was decided to incorporate the use of students' mobile phones, which were already naturally present in the classroom. The intention was that the videos be as simple as possible, without much editing. To prepare the videos, students had to previously write scripts defining the place where they would record their videos, the communicative situation to be recreated (e.g. an interview), the proposed questions and the answers.

The activity motivated the students from the very beginning, and they even proposed digital applications with which they could edit their videos and began designing their settings early on (e.g. InShOt, VivaVideo). A particularity of action-research projects is that they are integrated into existing classroom dynamics (Nussbaum, 2017). Consequently, the project was designed in accordance with the regular English class schedule and usual flow. Indeed, as Jorge explained, recording videos was not an unusual task in his classes, as

this process allowed students to collaboratively create communicative products that prompted them to look for editing tools, be creative and mobilise various skills. Video-recordings were also material that could be used to assess students' pronunciation and oral fluency in the foreign language, features that can be extremely challenging to observe in class due to the number of students and the limited time available.

The intention when designing the activity was to create a clear and simple task, while not limiting students' options, allowing them ample freedom in terms of production and editing. What guided the making of the videos were the following four questions:

1. Has English affected your everyday life? Why (or why not)?
2. Where and when do you use English outside of the school?
3. What things have helped you to learn English?
4. How do you think English will affect your future life? (job, trips, etc.)

These questions respond to the objectives of the IEP! project (see Moore, this volume), but are also the result of prior ethnographic observations. These observations pointed to the need to carry out tasks in which students could put into practice their communicative skills in English, relating them to their interests and preferences. The intention was also that the students could interrogate and reflect on their own linguistic practices related to their context and daily uses. For Jorge, in addition, this proposal had affordances in terms of class motivation by offering students the possibility of recording the videos in spaces beyond the school.

Summing up, the purposes of this task were diverse. On the one hand, we wanted to create an audiovisual product in the English class that could be evaluated following curricular objectives, including the students' digital skills involved in the production and editing of videos. On the other hand, we wanted to understand, from the students' perspective, the value of learning languages – English in this case – in and outside of school. All in all, the aim was to open a space to listen to students' concerns and interests and to generate meaningful classroom learning. In the following section, we describe the outcomes of this task.

6. The young people's video productions

This section of the chapter begins with a general description of all the videos produced by the young people. It follows with the in-depth analysis of three of the productions.

6.1. General description of the videos

Altogether, the class produced 19 videos. Given that the instructions for the activity were quite open and that the students were free to choose the setting, context and dialogue (the only condition was to address the four given questions, see Section 5), the resulting set of videos range from one-and-a-half minutes to five minutes in length and include some entertaining and ingenious productions. While allowing us to see to what extent English is important in the lives of these youth, this task also allows us to investigate how these videos constitute, in themselves, a material representation of the students' social context. A feature of particular interest was that, in order to give their videos certain 'realism', the young people addressed an 'imaginary' audience following the conventions of different out-of-school situations.

An element that emerges in virtually all the videos is that students consider English as a language that will play a key role in their future. English is often alluded to as "the international language", or as "a universal language". In their plans for the future, which according to the content of the videos range from working in a shop or in other services, to going to the university, English occupies a privileged place (see also Moore, this volume). Some students also mention, among their objectives, obtaining an official certificate in English, such as the Cambridge English First or Advanced certificates (see also Flors Mas, 2013).

While English is generally perceived as important for the young people's future, their answers diverge significantly when referring to its role in the present. The vast majority describe English as relevant as it allows them to watch videos or series in their original version with subtitles, or to interact with players from other parts of the world in online video games. Listening to music and reading comics or manga also emerge as activities in which the use of English has a significant role (see also Moore, Vallejo et al., this volume; Muñoz, 2020), as does communicating with students from Greece with whom the pupils had been engaged in a translocal project as part of their school English classes (see Pratinestós & Masats, this volume). While the vast majority say that English occupies a certain place in their everyday lives, there are also students who state that English is not at all significant in their daily comings and goings.

All the videos were made in English, although some of them include, more or less intentionally, shots in which jokes or instructions in Spanish can be heard. These shots mirror practices that can be observed within the students' English class at school, where Spanish or Catalan serve as languages of task management; that is, as languages that allow students to agree on the message they want to convey in English (Masats et al., 2007).

The emergence of these plurilingual practices is also evident in the use of approximate expressions in the target language (Bange, 1992). For example, a group argues that “English is the first idiom in the world”. Their laughter makes it evident that they know that something in the expression is not ‘correct’, but that it can be understood within the overall context. The videos also show that students do not have a homogeneous command of the target language. Some of them have lower fluency and need to read the scripts or use short, easy-to-memorise sentences to record their videos. Other students do not need to read and display more complex vocabulary and spontaneity in their speech.

This diversity of proficiency levels may have different explanations. However, allusions to “the academy” – that is, private after-school English colleges – frequently appear, and this is described as a key space where students speak and learn English. This is the case in all three of the videos analysed in Section 6.2. The students’ school English class also emerges in some of the videos, including in the three productions considered in Section 6.2, in which they mention school explicitly and/or refer to their exchanges with the students in Greece with whom they had connected thanks to their teacher. However, the importance given to after-school English colleges, a private resource, may be a way of understanding how inequalities are built in our schools in regard to the acquisition, or lack of acquisition, of socially relevant competences such as foreign language skills, an issue we return to in the concluding section of this chapter.

6.2. Followers: An imagined audience

As previously explained, the task to be carried out by students was free enough that they could imagine or recreate the communicative situation that seemed most appropriate to them. Digital platforms including Instagram or YouTube seemed to provide students with the perfect imagined audience to produce their videos for – an audience that, while probably fictitious, provided them with the rationale for using English in a natural way. The audiovisual material usually produced within these platforms has certain rhetorical elements and a characteristic structure that the students seemed to know and manage comfortably.

A main feature of videos posted to YouTube or Instagram is that they are often addressed to a virtual imagined community known as ‘followers’ or ‘subscribers’. A follower or subscriber is someone who assiduously follows the content posted by a person on these digital platforms. Being a follower or subscriber means that one will receive a notification every time the person being followed uploads new content. The number of followers or subscribers someone has constitutes symbolic capital – capital sought by content creators. Having a significant number of

followers or subscribers does not only symbolise that the content that is created is interesting. Digital platforms often pay those content producers who manage to generate a large and loyal audience, since they also represent a captive audience for the advertising that both accompanies and is embedded in the audiovisual content. Consequently, the goal of the audiovisual productions posted to these platforms is often to obtain the highest possible number of viewings and the highest possible number of followers or subscribers. For doing so, content creators use a series of visual and linguistic conventions to attract viewers, conventions that also emerge in the videos produced by the students for their English class task.

We now analyse the structure and content of three of the 19 videos created by the students, beginning with Joan (JOA, pseudonym) and Leire (LEI, pseudonym), in Extract 1. The script and discourse of Leire and Joan's video follows the structure of a YouTube channel, and it begins with a screen showing the name of their invented production company. The video lasts for three minutes and 37 seconds.

Extract 1

01 ((screen with the name of an invented production company,
 02 coined from JOA's name, as music plays in the background; transition
 to screen with LEI and JOA seated side by side, facing camera))
 03 LEI ((arms wide open in salute/embrace, see Image 1)) hi: followers
 04 welcome to a new video of our youtube channel.
 05 JOA yeah. (.) today i am here with my friend leire (.) say
 06 hello leire
 07 LEI hello sweeties.
 08 JOA for asking four questions that you always write us in
 09 twitter. (.) there are-
 10 LEI shut up joan i want to start right now.
 11 JOA okey okey so: [((moving hands in circular motion,
 12 fingers pointing, indicating transition to next
 13 screen)) we star:t.
 14 LEI [((moving hands in circular motion, fingers pointing,
 15 indicating transition to next screen)) we star:t.
 16 ((transition to screen with text 'FOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT
 17 ENGLISH', followed by transition to screen with 'Has English
 18 affected your everyday life? FIRST QUESTION', see Image 2))
 19 LEI sincerely no. (.) the only thing that could affect
 20 this language in my everyday life is my knowledge on
 21 makeup cause i only watch videos of this in english.
 22 (.) they are better that the spanish ones.
 23 JOA in my case it's a bit different. (.) english has a big

24 presence in my everyday life. (.) as you know leire (.)
25 i go to an english academy twice a week and i watch a
26 lot of content in digital platforms like netflix or
27 instagram in this wonderful language.
28 ((transition to screen that reads 'Where and when do you use
29 English outside school? SECOND QUESTION'))
30 LEI the only place where i use english outside the school
31 is whe:n i make videos with joan for this wonderful
32 youtube channel.
33 JOA in my case it's again different as you know
34 leire (.) I have so friends english. (.) and the only
35 way to communicate with these friends is by english.
36 (.) talking in instagram chat yeah instagram chat.
37 ((transition to screen that reads 'What things have helped you
38 learn English? THIRD QUESTION'))
39 LEI besides watching makeup videos other things that have helped me
learning english is watching movies on netflix in this language.
40 JOA in my case () thing that they have helped me in
41 this process of learning a lot of things in this
42 wonderful language that is english are different. (.)
43 going to an english academy twice a week. (.) and a
44 second thing talking with my friends- with my greek
45 friends on instagram.
46 ((transition to screen that reads 'How do you think English
47 will affect your future? FIRST QUESTION'))
48 LEI i think that english will be very important in my life
49 because i want to work as an airhostess a job where
50 english is essential.
51 JOA in my job english will be very important too because i
52 want to be a politician and english in this job it's a
53 tool that is completely necessary because talking in
54 english you can communicate you can work you can do
55 things with partners of other countries like for example
56 netherlands or france.
57 LEI and here ends our video.
58 JOA we hope that you liked it so:
59 LEI [((arms wide open in salute/embrace)) bye bye sweeties.
60 JOA [(bye bye sweeties.
61 ((transition to a screen with their school's logo, followed by
62 a screen with the logo and a slogan from the Catalan government
63 that reads '7,5 Milions de futurs', translated as '7.5 Million
64 futures'))



Image 1. Leire greets their imagined audience both verbally and with physical gestures (line 3)

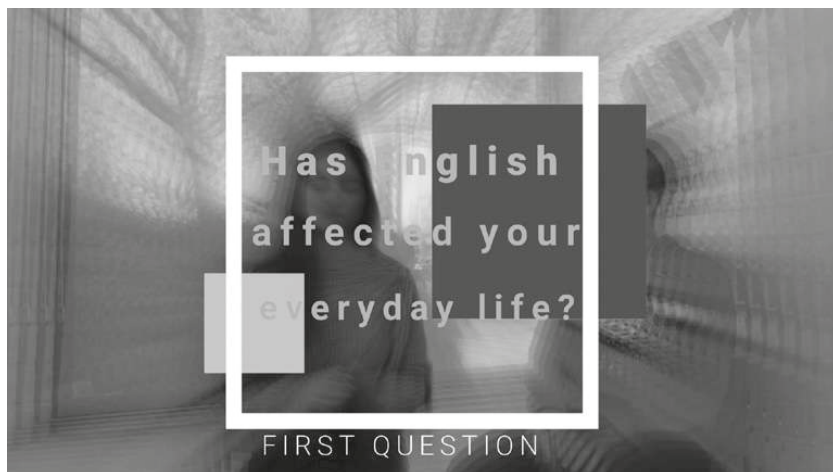


Image 2. The first question appears on the screen (lines 17–18)

From the beginning, we see that Joan and Leire's video is aimed at a community Leire refers to as "followers" (line 3) – that is, an imagined community that frequently follows the content offered by them on their imagined YouTube channel. The genre of YouTube videos includes a section called 'intro', which corresponds to the moment when the theme and content of the video is presented for the audience in a brief and catchy way. In this case, with the visual support of transition screens (e.g. Image 2), Joan and Leire refer to the importance of English in their lives in response to the constant questions they supposedly receive on Twitter (lines 8–9), another digital platform, which implies that the YouTube content that they offer is framed within a pre-existing dialogue with these imagined followers. The close relationship that has been established with this imagined community of followers is also suggested by Leire's reference to them as "sweeties" (line 7) and her greeting them with open arms symbolising an embrace in line 3 (see Image 1), a feature that recurs in other students' productions (for example in Extract 2).

In order to be attractive, the content posted on digital platforms must be original and innovative. In line with these conventions, Joan and Leire try to impregnate their interactions with humour. In line 10, for example, Leire interrupts Joan with a "shut up" to take the floor and begin the presentation of the core content. Joan offers a reaction ("okay okay") to the interruption, after which he and Leire mark a transition verbally ("so we start", in overlap) and non-verbally, moving their hands in a circular motion with their fingers pointing towards the screen that is about to emerge (lines 11–15). After this, Joan and Leire respond to the questions from their followers which appear on written screen transitions, which make their responses more agile and the content more visual, also in line with the conventions of the genre.

The relevance of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or Twitter emerges not only in terms of shaping the students' productions and creation of an imagined audience; in their responses, we can also observe that their learning of English in out-of-school contexts is closely related to these platforms. Both Leire and Joan claim that a main source of their socialisation in English is their participation in digital communities (YouTube and Instagram chat) that they use to communicate transnationally with friends – for example with the group of Greek students with whom they had connected through their school English class (see also Pratinestós & Masats, this volume), and from their consumption of digital audiovisual productions (on YouTube, Netflix and Instagram). Their use of an informal, vernacular English register also relates to the particular features and cultural conventions of the digital communities where they have been socialised.

Interestingly, what appears as relevant for these young people in their choice of digital content is not the fact of learning English, but the content that is available in this language. Leire explains that she follows makeup video channels in English not because they are in English, but because they are better than the ones in Spanish (lines 19 to 22).

Meanwhile, Joan claims to have a different relationship with English than Leire does, a phenomenon that was also observed throughout the ethnographic work in the students' English classroom. Joan is a very active student, not only on social media but also in his local community, within and beyond the school, where he participates in any initiative that he perceives as meaningful for his personal development. He frequently refers to his political interests, talks openly about his political inclinations and feels fully identified with the Catalan independence movement. As he explains in lines 51–56, his goal is to be a politician and he considers English as a key tool for his future political endeavours, foregrounding his ideological construction of the 'universal' value of English as a tool to communicate with colleagues from "other countries like for example Netherlands or France" (lines 55–56). Previously, in lines 48–50, Leire had also expressed the importance of English for her future life as an airhostess.

Thus, both Leire and Joan's investment in English learning and use can be better understood in light of the imagined communities they place themselves within, both in the present, as imagined YouTubers and overall users and consumers of social media, and in the future, as part of professional collectives that, they assume, need English to communicate and work.

The second video analysed was produced by Alaitz (ALA, pseudonym) and Amaia (AMA, pseudonym) (Extract 2). Alaitz and Amaia also use the format of a digital platform, in this case Instagram, to create an imagined audience that asks them questions about the role of English in their lives. The video lasts for one minute and 43 seconds.

Extract 2

01 ((opening scene with ALA and AMA seated side by side, ALA does 'duck
 02 face', See Image 3))
 03 ALA [((arms wide open in salute/embrace))
 04 hi: guys.
 05 AMA [((arms wide open in salute/embrace)) hi: guys.
 06 ((music can be heard and different Instagram style images of the two girls
 07 flash on the screen))
 08 ALA today we prepared a video for you how english affects in our

09 lives eh: because you request a lot in the comments.
10 AMA we speak english in the school in the academy that we go two
11 days for week.
12 ((video cut, new frame))
13 AMA these are the questions that you put in our instastories that we
14 are going to answer today.
15 ((video cut, new frame, then a written question - "what would you like to
16 do in the future" - appears in the upper left corner of the screen, with a
17 space below with the word 'reply', chat style; ALA reads from mobile
18 phone; see Image 4))
19 ALA james charles asked what will you like to do in the future.
20 ((a new question appears on the screen - "where you learn english?"; ALA
21 continues to read from mobile phone))
22 ALA elise asks where you learn English.
23 ((a new question appears on the screen - "why do you speak English very
24 good?"; ALA continues to read from mobile phone))
25 ALA and carolina asks why do you speak english very good.
26 ((video cut, new frame))
27 ALA also we speak with people of °()° [((laughs))
28 AMA [((laughs))
29 ((video cut, new frame))
30 ALA also we speak with people of greece that we met on exchange.
31 AMA oh yes i want to come back.
32 ((video cut, new frame))
33 ALA but amaiia we don't learn english only in the school or academy
34 (.) we also watch videos of makeup in english.
35 AMA yes we got a lot of videos of this because the uk people explain
36 better than the spanish.
37 ALA in spanish. [((laughs))
38 AMA [((laughs))
39 ((video cut, new frame))
40 AMA and wait we watch videos we also watch a tv series netflix
41 ALA oh yes i really forgot we start watching you a famous serie in
42 uk and now in spain because is translated to spanish.
43 AMA we recommend this series a lot to the people that like drama and
44 ()
45 ((video cut, new frame))
46 ALA talking about the future eh: we will do the first certificate
47 and the advanced.
48 AMA because we need these titles to work and do the degree that we
49 want.
50 AMA [((arms wide open in salute/embrace)) bye see you in the next.
51 ALA [((arms wide open in salute/embrace)) bye see you in the next.



Image 3. Opening scene with Alaitz doing duck face (lines 1–2).



Image 4. Amaia reads a question on her phone, as it appears on the upper left-hand corner of the screen (line 19).

Alaitz and Amaia ensemble a myriad of multimodal elements within their audiovisual performance (pop music, still images, text on the screen, mobile phones, face and body gestures), to create an overall product that complies with the characteristics of YouTube videos. The embodied resources that the girls display, such as their salute with wide-open arms, which resembles the one used by Leire in Extract 1 (see Image 1) or the so-called ‘duck face’ (see Image 3), function as visual cues to situate the audience of the video within the community of consumers of this type of content. Through these embodied cues, and similar to Leire and Joan in Extract 1, Alaitz and Amaia perform as a couple of celebrities who are producing this video in response to their followers’ insistence (lines 8–9).

The protagonists read the questions supposedly sent by their followers from their mobile phone, but these also appear written on the upper part of the screen (Image 4). As this celebrity-style performance continues, it incorporates new questions from imagined followers who ask Alaitz and Amaia why they speak English so well. In their responses, the girls make reference to their school and to attending an after-school English college twice a week (lines 10–11). Similar to Leire and Joan, in lines 30–31 they also make reference to speaking with the Greek students they connected with and visited as part of a project in their English class (see Pratginestós & Masats, this volume). Finally, they refer to watching videos about makeup as important factors for learning English (lines 33–36), similar to what Leire and Joan expressed in the Extract 1.

Using digital platforms like Instagram (‘Instastories’, line 13) and watching series on Netflix (line 40) also emerge as central elements in the development of Alaitz’ and Amaia’s English language skills. Furthermore, in line with their imagined status as influencers, and in compliance with the dialogic nature of their video, Alaitz and Amaia include a recommendation of a Netflix series for their followers in their video (lines 41–44).

Finally, the girls also frame their learning of English as an investment in their future studies and jobs, stating that they will sit for the Cambridge English First and Advanced certificates (lines 46–49).

This video is considerably shorter than the one by Leire and Joan in Extract 1, but the two productions share similar features in terms of style and content, including, for example, the use of text to present the questions and the gesture – opening arms fully in a sort of embrace – with which they open and close the interviews. In the images (screenshots) that we have included, it can be observed how the youth skilfully include these and other multimodal features and conventions of the digital communities in which they have been socialised and within which they position themselves.

Finally, we analyse a video produced by Alicia (ALI, pseudonym), Hayat (HAY, pseudonym) and Dunia (DUN, pseudonym) (Extract 3). Alicia, Hayat and Dunia also build their video based on the rhetorical conventions of Instagram or YouTube, with the particularity of presenting a challenge for their imagined followers. The video lasts for two minutes and 49 seconds.

Extract 3

- 01 ((opening scene with three girls standing together, see Image 5))
 02 DUN hi gu:ys we are alicia hayat and me dunia and today we are going
 03 to do a draw collaborating with the cambridge english academy.
 04 (.) we are going to do a challenge that consists in eh: explain
 05 our experience with the english and how we use it in our day
 06 ah:m in the time that we have to: go up with electric stairs.
 07 (.) eh if someone of us can eh: say all the things during the
 08 time that she's in the stairs she win. (.) eh: someone of you
 09 can ehm came to the trip with us eh: for this you only have to:
 10 follow us in instagram and here in youtube.
 11 ((video cut, change of scene in which HAY and ALI are going up the
 12 escalator, HAY reads questions from her mobile phone))
 13 HAY alicia has english affected your everyday life?
 14 ALI eh it doesn't affect me much because i: i speak spanish everyday.
 15 (.)
 16 HAY eh: where and when do you use it.
 17 ALI quick quick ((laughs)) when? (.) in the academy (.) in the
 18 english classroom.
 19 (.)
 20 HAY okey. (.) what things has helped you to learn english.
 21 ALI eh: eh in the academy. ((laughs)) o sea the academy. (.) english.
 eh: eh in the academy. ((laughs)) i mean the academy. (.)
 english.
 22 HAY how do you think english will affected you in the future.
 23 ((HAY and ALI are almost at the top of the escalator))
 24 ALI eh eh eh happy ((laughs)) o sea no ((laughs))
 eh eh eh happy ((laughs)) i mean no ((laughs))
 25 ((HAY and ALI reach the top of the escalator and get off))
 26 ((video cut, new scene with ALI and HAY getting ready to go up the

27 escalator, ALI reads questions from her mobile phone))
28 DUN tres hala.
three come on.
29 ALI has english affected your everyday life?
30 HAY no because i don't need it?
31 ALI where and when do you use english outside of school?
32 HAY in the english academy?
33 ALI what things have helped you to learn english?
34 HAY e:h taught in the english academy and english class.
35 ALI how do you think english will affect your future?
36 HAY ye:s to work and do other things and travel.
37 ((HAY and ALI reach the top of the escalator and get off))
38 ALI una dos y tres. (.) dunia.
one two and three. (.) dunia.
39 HAY dunia has english affected your everyday life?
40 DUN yes because sometimes i speak with my greek friends and i use
41 it.
42 HAY where and when do you use english [outside school?
43 DUN [ehm: i use it speaking with my friends and some films and series
44 that i saw.
45 HAY what things have helped you english- [learn english.
46 DUN [eh: my english academy and the series.
47 HAY how do you think english will affected you in the future.
48 DUN very important for my work and my future.
49 ((DUN and HAY reach the top of the escalator and get off; change of frame
50 to close-up of all three))
51 DUN hi guys we expect that you like a lot our video (.) we think is
52 a very original video a:nd very funny too we expect that you
53 have a great time seeing us (.) a:hm please sub- ah: for
54 participate in the draw you have only to be followers in our
55 instagram (.) and nothing more.
56 ALI please subscribe in our youtube channel.
57 HAY we will say the winner of the draw in the- in our instagram
58 account.
59 DUN bye bye
60 ((they all blow a kiss))



Image 5. The girls introduce the challenge of their video (line 1)

By way of introduction, Dunia presents the workings of the challenge in lines 2–10. Basically, each of the girls has to answer as many questions as they can about the importance of English in their lives while going up a moving escalator. The challenge consists in answering all the questions before reaching the top. Their imagined community of viewers is able to participate in a draw to go on a trip with the girls (line 9) by subscribing to the girls' YouTube channel or becoming followers on Instagram (lines 10 and 53–55).

The girls' answers are very much in line with what their peers had explained in other videos, placing private after-school language colleges and their school as key spaces for English learning and use (lines 17–18, 21, 32 and 46).



Image 6. Dunia answers the questions while going up the escalator, constantly arranging her hair (lines 38–48)

To a lesser extent, their social activities, including speaking with their Greek peers (see Pratinestós & Masats, this volume) and audiovisual consumption through digital platforms, also play a role in their development of English skills, namely in Dunia's case (lines 40–41, 43–44 and 46), as do their imagined futures, in which English is perceived by Hayat and Dunia as important for both traveling and work (lines 36 and 48), while for Alicia it is not so (line 24).

An original element, in comparison to previous fragments, has to do with their perception that English has no current impact on their lives, as they claim not to use it (Alicia, in line 14) or need it (Hayat, in line 30) beyond the academic sphere. In this sense, their current investment in learning English in and out of school seems to relate more to their imagined futures than to their current daily actions.

One final observation has to do with the girls' embodied actions. They straighten their hair (Image 6), send smiles and blow kisses to their followers (line 60). These embodied actions are quite common in the videos produced

by the students – not only in the three that we have analysed here – and are significantly more frequent in the productions by girls than in those by boys. This might suggest that the conventions of digital platforms and the challenge to attract more followers are linked to displays of explicit sexuality. While this issue is not developed in this chapter, it certainly requires more in-depth attention.

7. Conclusions

All in all, we consider that the project was meaningful for all the participants involved, both in terms of the results – that is, the production of the videos – and the process through which they were achieved. Ethnographic observations by researcher and teacher have allowed us to document how the task actively engaged the youth. The creation of the scripts produced intense discussions regarding the importance of English, but also of other languages. These discussions were carried out, for the most part, in Spanish, but some groups also ventured into speaking in English while working on the task and engaging in these reflections. Classroom projects like the one we have presented here seem conducive to the incorporation and development of digital skills and digital literacies which permeate students' daily lives and interactions.

The analysis of the three extracts suggests that, to a large extent, these students have been socialised into English through their engagement with imagined communities of YouTubers, Instagrammers, and users of other digital platforms. Despite their non-tangible nature, these imagined communities are very much at the heart of the English practices and conventions that these youth skilfully display in their videos. Furthermore, the perceived relevance or usefulness of English for the students, and their investment in the learning of the language in and especially out of school, are illuminated by tracing the young people's present and future affiliations to imagined communities. These are possibly more significant to their learning of English than their face-to-face practices and interactions.

Students' affiliations to imagined communities where English is perceived as playing a key role emerge in many forms: in the transnational, digitally mediated relationships they establish with other youth across the globe (in this case, with the Greek students with whom they have carried out a project and an exchange as part of their English class, see Pratinestós & Masats, this volume); in their consumption and production of audiovisual products using a myriad of digital platforms; and in their imagined professional lives and desires for future mobility. As these imagined communities give students a sense of direction and

influence their current language learning trajectories, researchers and teachers might do well in better acknowledging students' out-of-school engagements and practices of language socialisation, and building bridges across school and everyday English uses.

In this sense, the experience of creating and implementing this English classroom project has proved to us that languages are important to young people; not only English, but the whole plurilingual repertoire with which they live and consume digital media, among other uses. The message we extract from this experience is that while English is important for students' lives, schools need to provide them with renewed motivation and learning challenges. Public schools should react to the finding that private language colleges are considered by young people to be a key space to learn English 'for real'. To accept this would be to accept the perpetuity of educational inequalities and the commodification of English as cultural capital limited to those who can afford private after-school instruction. Tackling and reversing this situation is a major enduring challenge facing researchers and teachers.

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