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Codó, Eva. «The intersection of global mobility, lifestyle and ELT work : a critical examination of language instructors' trajectories». Language and Intercultural Communication, Vol. 18 Núm. 4 (2018), p. 436-450. DOI 10.1080/14708477.2018.1482905

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Publication reference: Codó, Eva (2018) The intersection of global mobilities, lifestyle and ELT work: A critical examination of language instructors' trajectories. For Moyer, M. (eds.) "Language, Mobility and Work". Special issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication* 18(4): 436-450.

The intersection of global mobility, lifestyle and ELT work: A critical examination of language instructors' trajectories

Eva Codó

This paper examines the intersection of one form of contemporary mobility, i.e. lifestyle mobility, with the ELT industry. It draws on the discursive analysis of a small corpus of life story data produced by native English language teachers of different ages residing in Barcelona. Through their own personal and professional accounts and rationales, it seeks to comprehend how they construct their work experiences in the light of previous professional trajectories, prior expectations and future mobility plans, but also against the backdrop of a highly precarised job market. The article argues that the 'backpacker' language teacher is certainly a reality but also a contemporary cultural myth that works to disguise a complex humanscape of relocators of different ages and aspirations who face difficulties fitting in an industry that expects docile and inexperienced bodies and a local market where nativeness enables quick access to teaching jobs but only to unskilled and temporary ones. The younger informants narrate biographies in flux and a sense of life stagnation or development to which commercial ELT may be differently instrumental. This article challenges assumptions about the value of (native) English in the work field and how easily work experience and qualifications travel around for middle-class professionals.

Keywords: ELT industry; lifestyle mobilities; language work; precarious employment

1. Introduction

This paper explores one form of contemporary global mobility that is entangled with the increased availability of types of flexible, unstable and precarious language-centered jobs: English language teaching (ELT) work. More specifically, the paper focuses on understanding the narrated lived experiences of native English-speaking young, middle-aged and old-age women and men residing in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain) who move –or have at some point moved– around the world teaching English as in-company or private ELT instructors. These are easy-to-access jobs that usually require little training and/or experience. They are embedded in global language ideological inequalities that value native English speakers over non-native ones (Piller and Takahashi, 2013), and are grounded on the fetishisation of English

worldwide as a tool that will guarantee professional success and upward social mobility (Niño-Murcia, 2003; Ricento, 2015; Park, 2016). The reasons for many native English speakers to take jobs abroad as ELT instructors are primarily not economic but linked to the desire to 'see the world' and embody a late modern cosmopolitan disposition (Hannerz, 1996).

The work possibilities offered, by among others, the ELT industry construct a new class of workers, Ducan's (2007) *working tourists*, driven by the dual motivations of work and play. However, in this paper I will adopt the more encompassing term *lifestyle mobilities* (Cohen, Duncan, & Thulemark, 2013) to refer to the process by which increasingly significant numbers of mostly middle-class people of all ages decide to relocate to a different place whether temporarily or permanently searching for a different, more 'satisfying' way of life (O'Reilly and Benson, 2009). Typical destinations in Europe are large metropolis, such as London, Paris, Rome or Prague, the rural areas of France and the coastal areas of Spain, among others.

Despite its relative recent nature and its embeddedness in the conditions of globalisation and late modernity, lifestyle mobility represents a continuation of old themes, like the Grand Tour, colonialism, travel and escape (Duncan, 2007). For O'Reilly and Benson (2009), the emergence of this type of mobility is linked to economic privilege in the West, flexibility in working lives, the reflexive assessment of individual opportunities (Giddens, 1991), a drive for individualisation and self-realisation (Bauman, 2004) and the generalised ease of transportation. In some cases, lifestyle mobility involves permanent or semi-permanent settlement in a particular location, and in other cases, it is structured around multiple temporary relocations around the globe. The availability of ELT jobs, even if underpaid and exploitative, allows 'lifestylers' or 'lifestyle relocators', as I will alternatively refer to them, to make a living in their selected destination as they experience its 'culture' and way of life.

This paper brings together different research strands that have investigated language, mobility and work processes in the contemporary world. First, it relates to critical explorations of lifestyle mobility/migration (Cohen *et al.*, 2013) which, to date, have only superficially

investigated the role of language and work in shaping these new forms of movement. Secondly, the paper is also connected to sociolinguistic explorations of language in the new economy (Heller & Duchêne, 2012) and language as labour (Boutet, 2012; Dlaske, Barakos, Motobayashi & McLaughlin, 2016; Urciouli & LaDousa, 2013). Finally, it builds on political economy and critical perspectives on applied linguistics (Block, 2017) and on the language teaching industries (see Bruzos, 2017, for the case of Spanish), and more specifically, on ELT as a major global industry (Neilsen, 2009; Stanley, 2016).

This paper is organised as follows. First, a conceptual discussion is presented of the main characteristics of lifestyle mobilities, with a special section devoted the issue of work in processes of mobility. The field of ELT as a global labour market merits special focus. In the following section, the data and context of the study are presented. The fourth section contains the analysis of the data. The article ends with a few reflections on the importance of the findings presented for understanding the value of ELT in relation to individual trajectories, rethinking the construction of English as a 'global' commodity and challenging a certain claims about lifestyle relocators put forth in the literature.

2. Work, lifestyle and the ELT sector

2.1. Lifestyle mobilities

Lifestyle-driven mobilities are a growing phenomenon. They constitute a dynamic and privileged form of mobility which forces us to see the fields of migration and tourism as partially overlapping and deeply interconnected. These mobility practices are linked to the expansion of utilitarian and expressive individualism (Hayes, 2015) and to post-modern identities, defined by choice and consumption and increasingly seen as 'life projects' rather than as givens (Giddens, 1991). They must also be understood against the backdrop of the replacement in people's life value systems (Huete & Mantecón, 2012) of material

considerations (economic stability and physical security) by symbolic aspirations (experiences, quality of life, etc.).

To give sense to their experiences, lifestylers construct stories of escape in which life prior to their mobility is presented as dull or stagnant, and where life after relocating is defined by tropes of the 'good life' (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009). They usually present their decision as a route to a more fulfilling, self-satisfying way of life, though that may be imagined in disparate ways. It may involve the rural idyll, a slower pace of life, a spiritual and community ethos, or simply a world of leisure and relaxation (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009).

Residential relocation is constructed discursively as the possibility of 'starting anew' (Hoey, 2014), of reinventing oneself. '[Lifestyle] migration is thus aspirational, not only in the sense of what it holds in store for you, but also in terms of what you can become' (O'Reilly & Benson 2009, p. 5). The quest for self-realisation is linked to a reclaiming of a sense of personal agency. Many lifestylers present themselves as pioneers, courageous individuals who take risks and are in control of their lives (Benson, 2009). Rather than a finished process, lifestyle mobility is an ongoing project that continues long after the moment of relocation. It usually involves the re-organisation of one's life, often in terms of a more satisfying work-leisure balance, and materialises in the different decisions that are made in the process of settlement and social incorporation into the new society.

2.2. Work to travel, travel to work

In the lifestyle mobility literature, work issues have only peripherally been discussed. The common rhetoric is that this form of mobility is driven by anti-materialist pursuits. Accordingly, labour issues tend to be presented as peripheral and people's status is the new country 'no longer expected to be read through occupation' (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010, p. 54). Often, work appears only in relation to the reasons for relocating, as a stressful and dissatisfying professional career is presented as the main motivation for moving. Additionally, a large number of lifestyle relocators tend not to be employed, either because they are retirees or live

off savings (Huete & Mantecón, 2012). When employed, a substantial number own their own businesses, frequently serving other foreign residents, as in the Costa del Sol in Spain (Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010). Frequently, they work in the informal economy because they lack the appropriate work permit or business licence. In the case of large cities, such as Barcelona, young professionals often find jobs in language-intensive industries (Alarcón, García, Garzón, Samper & Terrones, 2006), such as tourism and hospitality establishments, call centres or language schools. It is to this sector that I will now turn.

The precarious, 'economy class' nature (Stanley, 2016) of most ELT jobs around the globe has been examined mainly from the perspective of the ELT field. Scholars have focused on the lack of professionalism of many ELT instructors, and of the sector more generally, and its impact on the profession's self-imagination. In the oft-quoted paper by Thornbury (2001) who, incidentally, was an EFL teacher in Barcelona, teaching English as a foreign language is described as 'vacational work of dubious legality' and even as a 'slightly disreputable thing to do' (p. 391); EFL educators are presented as 'barefoot teachers' (p. 392); and the practices of some EFL teachers are described as 'the "backpacker school of teaching" in which teacher and learners simply talk about things that concern them' (p. 395). A great deal of discussion has revolved around whether ELT constitutes a profession or an industry (Goulding, 2016) and whether it is regarded by practitioners as a possible career path. In this vein, Johnston (1997) examined the biographical narratives produced by 17 teachers of English in Poland (mainstream education and commercial ELT) and showed that they did not envisage teaching as a long-term career but rather as a 'permeable occupation that is easy to enter and leave' (p. 704). Stanley (2016) used ethnographic methods to investigate the motivations, and professional and personal perspectives of ELT instructors at accredited private-sector language schools in Australia. She showed that, despite the instability and precariousness of their jobs, teachers were motivated to enter the sector because of the multicultural atmosphere of schools, and were also drawn by the flexibility allowed by the seasonal character of jobs. Stanley

emphasised how distant the collective imagination of ELT (as 'easy to do work') was from reality (complex skilled work requiring substantial affective labour), as many of the teachers were expected to 'go the extra mile' not only by preparing materials, but also by engaging in peer mentoring and out-of-class pastoral care with students.

The precarisation and flexibility inherent to most ELT jobs are described by Goulding (2016) as 'atypical work' (p. 110). Such work is 'characterized by heterogeneous employment relationships such as part-time work, work on call (zero hour contracts), fixed term, night and weekend work, temporary employment and multiple jobs' (Buhlmann 2012, quoted in Goulding, 2016, p. 110). In that paper, Goulding stresses the conditions of institutional and professional marginalisation of many ELT practitioners around the world (he portrays them as members of 'the global precariat'), but also brings to the fore the professional and personal disjunctures experienced by ELT instructors in contexts where the economic conditions of the job are optimal (e.g. the Gulf countries). In those settings, teachers experience a fracture between their material lives on the one hand, and the stagnant taint of their daily practice and lack of career prospects on the other.

ELT is one of the most emblematic fields in which English-speaking 'working tourists' have inserted themselves globally over the past 30 or 40 years, in parallel with the rising of English as a global commodity. This form of employment is grounded on and at the same time reinforces ideologies of native speakerism, purism and authenticity still associated to standard English. Despite sustained efforts in academia to legitimise 'non-native' teachers (Llurda, 2005) and decenter UK and US English, the impact of these discussions on the language teaching industry has been minimal (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

As refers to the connection between global mobilities and ELT work, it has been stated rather than examined in the relevant literature. Stainton (2018) is one of the first authors to do so. She introduces the term TEFL tourism to refer to 'a person who travels outside of their usual environment to teach English as a foreign language, whose role shifts between tourist,

educator and educatee at various points in their trip' (p. 2). TEFL placements are connected to tourism because travelling is one of the main motivations and actual practices of TEFLers (the informants surveyed by Stainton were all young (22-30) and taught English for a period of 1-2 years). Despite multiple connections, there are a number of dissimilarities between Stainton's population and my informants. One difference is that TEFL work placement takes place after my informants relocated to Barcelona and not prior to that. This is one of the reasons why use the term lifestylers (and not other terms) to refer to them, as their main motivation for arriving in Barcelona was the city itself and not a specific job offer. Another one is that the tourist side is less prominent in my data than the lifestyle considerations, as my interviewees had been in Barcelona for a sustained period of time and most of them envisaged to stay permanently in the city. Third, Stainton's population is exclusively young, while I have representatives of different ages. In that sense, my data set is more similar to Wilson's (2004), who investigated American METs (Migrant English Teachers) in Guadalajara, Mexico. His sample includes temporary and longer-term relocators. Among the former are recent college graduates on the search for experiences and a cosmopolitan boost to their CVs; among the later, middle-agers trying to overcome a personal or professional crisis, and retirees taking advantage of lower standards of living who do ELT work as voluntary work.

3. Data and context

In this section I provide information on the nature of the data set on which this paper is based and procedural details on data collection. The second part will outline the social context framing the data, i.e. the field of ELT in the city of Barcelona.

3.1. Data and methodological procedures

The data examined in this paper forms part of a corpus of eleven biographical narratives of mobility that were collected by the researcher between 2012 and 2015, as part of a larger project on language, mobility and identity.[1] The population researched came from a variety of

countries, both the global North and the global South (Argentina, Colombia, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Tunisia, the UK and the US). They were accessed through personal contacts, and in a few cases, through other informants.

Most participants had in common that they had chosen to settle in Barcelona (whether temporarily or more permanently), not for professional or personal reasons (e.g. love), but because they were attracted to Barcelona and its way of life, or as part of a larger personal project to 'see the world'. Most of them had arrived by themselves with few or no contacts in the city. Six of the eleven interviewees were from English-speaking countries. One was an early retiree when she arrived in the city, and had never worked as a language teacher. The remaining five reported having held ELT jobs at some point during their stay in Barcelona, and most of them, also in other parts of the world. It is on the stories of these five lifestylers that this article is based.

Four of my focal informants are female; one of them is a male.[2] Three are from the UK, two from the US and one from Ireland. They all hold university qualifications in the fields of linguistics and the humanities. They belong to three distinct age groups, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of participant information

Name	Nationality	Arrival in Barcelona	Age	Age group
Suzanne	US	1974	early 70s	Old age
Peter	Irish	2010	late 30s	Middle age
Mary	British	2005	early 40s	Middle age
Patty	British	2008	late 20s	Young age
Carol	US	2007	late 20s	Young age

All the narratives had a life story orientation and were collected by means of unstructured, ethnographic interviewing (Heller, Pietikäinen & Pujolar, 2018). They all lasted a minimum of

one hour and unfolded in Spanish or English depending on interviewees' choice (only Suzanne, who had lived in Barcelona for over 40 years, chose Spanish; the rest chose English; none chose Catalan, the co-official local minority language). The thematic focus of the interviews was the informants' decision to relocate to Barcelona, as well as their experiences of settlement, and their aspirations and future life plans. The interviews were, thus, not designed to elicit data on the ELT industry or interviewees' accounts of their past or present work experiences, but, significantly, these issues came up spontaneously in most narratives. However, this topic took up varying amount of interview time depending on the informant. In some cases, I obtained lengthy and reflexive discussions of the world of ELT in Barcelona and in other parts of the world; in other cases, I only got passing references to jobs taken up and quit, but with little reflexivity.

My engagement during the interviews was complete. I tried to create a more 'symmetrical' stance than tends to be the case in these situations. For example, I also contributed personal anecdotes and reflections given the focused biography nature of the talk exchanged. My knowledge of the language learning sector in Barcelona as well as my experience as an ELT teacher and as a foreign resident abroad facilitated the exchange of ideas; the fact that I had some kind of personal connection to all informants (as they were friends of friends or of work colleagues) eased interaction and allowed me to carry out ethnographic follow-ups of some of the people, places and language schools mentioned.

A biographical narrative analysis of interviews was carried out, focusing on the rich points of intersection between mobility considerations and the affordances/limitations of the ELT sector. The following questions guided my inquiry: (1) in what ways does the narrated lived experience of ELT differ among mobile informants of different ages? (2) how does the world of ELT structure informants' processes of mobility and geographical relocation, and vice-versa, that is, how do mobility aspirations structure informants' relationship to ELT?

3.2. The social context: The ELT sector in Barcelona

The popularisation of commercial ELT began in Barcelona in the late 1970s and 1980s. Until then foreign language education had been an elite cultural practice. It was mostly articulated around national institutes for culture, such as the local branch of the British Council, founded in 1940s, or the North American Institute, founded in 1951, and around selected language schools, such a Berlitz, established in Barcelona at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1960s, the first state-funded language school (*Escola Oficial d'Idiomes* or EOIs) opened in the city. These educational establishments, of which there are currently six in Barcelona, offer subsidised language education for adults. Their curriculum is officially regulated. Most of them are dedicated to teaching English, French and German. In 1953, the first university language center was established, linked to the University of Barcelona, with the aim of offering quality foreign language training to university students and academics.

Apart from EOIs, national institutes, and university language centers, there is a plethora of language schools whose teaching quality varies. Some are consolidated, accredited establishments with a number of branches; others consist of only one school, often located in peripheral neighborhoods, with dubious reputation. Most language schools offer classes for kids, teenagers and adults, although recently, some chains specializing exclusively in children have become very popular as they advertise more attractive (and supposedly effective) methodologies. Traditionally, language schools have preferably recruited native speakers of English, although in most cases there has been a combination of native and non-native teachers given the high demand for language instruction. As in other national contexts, private-sector ELT jobs are exploitative and precarious. Salaries are extremely low (often teachers are paid by the hour with unpaid preparation/correction time) and working hours are long (mostly in the evenings).

Some commentators have identified the existence of a 'linguistic bubble' in the field of ELT in Spain, which they attribute to the economic crisis (Vidales, 2014). Catalonia, in the north-east, where Barcelona is located, is no exception (Ibáñez, 2015). In Spain, the number of

private language schools grew by 33% during the period 2011-2014 (Vidales, 2014). The reasons are to be found in high unemployment rates, which have spurred people to train in foreign languages in order to gain a more competitive professional edge, and are also linked to the requirement to accredit a B1 or B2 level of a foreign language to be awarded a university degree under the Bologna scheme. This has led to the burgeoning of low-cost language schools of dubious teaching quality (Vidales, 2014). After this succinct overview of the sector in Barcelona, I will now turn to data analysis.

4. Narratives of mobility and of ELT intertwined

As stated above, this paper discusses the intersections between individual trajectories of global mobility and the field of ELT, defined as a worldwide industry with limitless capacity for flexible employment. More specifically, it seeks to comprehend the ways in which lifestylers construct their work experiences as English language teachers in Barcelona in the light of their previous professional experience, prior expectations and future mobility plans, but also against the backdrop of what is a highly stratified global teaching market. The type of data collected, with informants from different age groups (and thus, including some with relatively long and consolidated professional careers) and having arrived in Barcelona at different points in time, enables me to throw new light on the world of ELT and what it does (or does not do) for those involved in it.

I will begin by focusing on the effect of age on the expectations and narrated experiences of the informants. A quick inspection of the data reveals a marked contrast between the passing references to work, and to ELT experiences more generally, of Patty and Carol, in their late 20s and the detailed and problematizing accounts of labour insertion (with a central place accorded to ELT) of middle-aged Mary and Peter, as well as of Suzanne, now a retiree. For one thing, this contrast calls into question the 'monochromatic' and stereotypical image of the fun-oriented, unworried ELT instructor portrayed in the literature. The world of ELT is, as we

shall see, populated by educators with dissimilar professional trajectories (some of whom, highly qualified and with successful prior careers) whose aspirations and interests may differ substantially from those of the young, carefree instructor portrayed in the literature.

4.1. Stratification, segmentation and inequality in the ELT world

The three narratives told by the 'older generation', that is, Peter, Mary and Suzanne shed light on different facets of the geographical, historical and socio-professional structuring of ELT, both locally and globally. Both Suzanne and Peter produced highly reflexive depictions of ELT as profession and industry, as they had had longer involvements with the sector. Mary, in turn, did not focus her story so much on the field of ELT, but more generally, discussed her difficulties to find a relatively stable and decently-paying job in Barcelona.

Peter, Irish, in his late 30s, has taught English in Europe, Latin America and Asia. His first experience in the field of ELT was in South Korea, where he moved after he was offered a language teaching job. In his account, he decided to take up this position after a traumatic experience (a severe car crash) made him re-think his entire life. He decided he wanted to travel and 'experience something' rather than be stuck in Dublin, where 'nothing was going on'. He construes himself as an authoritative voice in the field of ELT, given his experience around the world. One aspect that emerges clearly from his story is the geographical hierarchisation of ELT in terms of income and work conditions, as discussed in the literature. Peter describes an uneven work field where the global circulation of workers is not random but structured by age, economic conditions and intercultural considerations (probably also gender, though he does not discuss this). Peter divides the world into two regions, namely East Asia/ Middle East, were ELT is a prestigious work field and salaries are high, and the rest, where language teaching is generally precarious and low paid. In his account, choice of teaching destination depends on personal and economic goals. For example, he describes a specific ELT path for recent UK (male) graduates whereby Europe is a temporary stop-over on a longer journey to the high-paying destinations mentioned above to be able to pay off student debts. However, Peter also

problematises ELT jobs in the ‘better-off’ areas drawing on his own traumatic experience in South Korea, a society he found too culturally distant to integrate into. So, the picture of the ELT industry that emerges is fairly dim: there is always a ‘downside’ to it, whether it is in the form of low income and exploitative work conditions, or as cultural stress.

Suzanne, in turn, speaks of a different kind of segmentation of the field, which is historical in her case. She is now in her 60s and arrived in Barcelona in the 1970s, much earlier than the rest. In her more than 40 years of work, she has experienced first-hand what she calls the ‘degradation’ of the sector, that is, the progressive precarisation and instabilisation of the field. She and her partner arrived in Barcelona during a round-the-world backpacking trip and they decided to stay. Suzanne’s partner got a job in the language center of a well-known business school, a job she describes as ‘those from early on; those that were very well-paid’. The ELT sector in Barcelona, which experienced a sustained expansion after the 70s, got increasingly precarised during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This can be attributed to different causes: the steep demand for English language teachers combined with the increasingly large pool of native English speakers relocating to Barcelona and thus available for teaching, after Spain joined the EU in 1986 and the city hosted the Olympics in 1992; and the generalised precarisation of the ELT industry worldwide.

As in many other cities in the world, permanent positions for ELT instructors became scarce in Barcelona, and the salaries enabled teachers to, in Suzanne’s words, ‘pay the bills but not to earn a living’. She was director of studies of a language school, but after three years of temporary contracts, she was made redundant. Her professional instability coincided with and was fed by her personal and economic vulnerability as a result of divorce, and the fact that her husband was not paying child support for her three kids. Suzanne took up as many odd teaching jobs as she could until she was able to access a stable position as a personal/editorial/language assistant to a research physician at a major Catalan hospital. Thus, she was eventually able to quit survival language-school jobs which she claims to love but which she refers to as ideal for

young people, who are ready to teach English 'in exchange for a glass of wine'. To this, she opposes the stable and better remunerated teaching posts 'like yours', referring to my university lecturer position in an English department. So, we observe in her account how settled-down relocators are forced to adapt to historically changing work conditions and find ways of accessing better-remunerated jobs as the sector, once well-paid and stable, becomes increasingly precarised.

The third informant in this group, Mary, in her early 40s, establishes a similar distinction between private-sector ELT and mainstream English language education. However, she brings a new element into the picture: the need to acquire unexpected additional capitals (in this case linguistic) for successful professional insertion locally. Mary was a speech therapist and teacher trainer back in the UK. She and her husband decided to leave Birmingham and move to Barcelona because they fell in love with the city, and more specifically, with the seaside neighborhood of La Barceloneta, where they bought a tiny apartment. Mary narrates having 'ended up' doing language-school teaching in Barcelona because that was 'really the only thing that was available' given the fact that she did not speak either Catalan or Spanish fluently and thus could not access a secondary school teacher post (which she tried to, according to her narrative). In short, the field of English language teaching is presented by all three informants as having become highly segmented, both geographically and professionally, with private-sector ELT in Barcelona as the most precarious, insecure and exploitative form of teaching, and local mainstream education as the aspiration for many. Yet, as Mary soon found out, being able to hold down a stable teaching post in the Catalan educational system requires investing in the capitals required, a type of investment that she did not expect before moving to Barcelona and that at the time of interviewing (eight years after her arrival) she stated having been unable to make.[3] Her story reveals that, despite possessing a prized language capital such as English, this skill alone is not enough for successful, i.e. stable and well-remunerated, professional insertion in a new society. This realisation calls into question many assumptions about the

value of English in the work field and challenges some of the claims made about how well work experience and qualifications 'move around' even for citizens from the industrialised countries of the west. These reflections call for a thorough analysis of not just travellers' capitals, but of the structure of the work market in the recipient society.

4.2. Finding a professional niche but paying a price

Over time, the three 'older' informants, that is, Peter, Mary and Suzanne have managed to find a professional niche that has enabled them to circumvent the unsettled work conditions of language-school ELT. The case of Suzanne we discussed above. Mary found a job working in the self-access center of a private university, where 'there wasn't a pre-requisite to know Catalan or Spanish' and Peter became an in-company teacher, where he reportedly enjoys more freedom than in a language school. However, both Mary and Suzanne have had to pay a price in exchange for their stability. Suzanne's trade-off has been personal rather than professional. She got a permanent position and was able to earn a nice retirement pension, but the precariousness of ELT still endures in her life.

Extract 1: 'My network is disintegrating'[4]

1	S:	the thing i:s I had friends that were teach or rather I HA/VE friends that that ARE teachers of English but when the peop- the::: the economy- er it began to be impossible to earn a living as an erm teacher of e::nglish/
2	E:	uhu\
3	S:	erm le:: they left\
4	E:	oh/ they left\
5	S:	yeah\ (.) and so the other day I thought er er Sa:m/ he is in England\ (.) another one/ is in England\ another one/ i::s i::n the US\ another one's/ gone to Germany\ (.) and another o:ne/ and so I said oh well\ because I wanted to go to the cinema/
		((both laugh))
6	S:	and I wanted to go with someone\ right/ (.) and I said erm let's see/ (.) it's not that I don't have friends here bu::t I ha::ve well I can count them with my hands right/ and they also have their networks that sometimes overlap wi:th wi:th with mine and sometimes don't\ a::nd and now er I've got one friend that'll probably leave/
7	E:	good[ness!
8	S:	[next year because she is not able to find a job

The picture that emerges from Suzanne's narrative in (1) is one of progressive social isolation. One after another, her friends leave the city and her social network fades away, 'disintegrates', as she says at one point. Her professional 'success' is rare in her circle, and as we see, the tone

of her narrative becomes one of restrained bitterness. Although her talk is not charged with overt negative emotions and she is able to even laugh about the situation, the listing mode she adopts over turns 5 and 6 constructs a suffocating personal atmosphere (notice my expression of sympathy in turn 7). Later on, Suzanne discusses the story of a friend that was fired and found a job at a small university in the UK.

Extract 2: 'My friend misses it here but she comes from time to time'

1	S:	they gave her er a:: goo::d e::r/
2	E:	=compensation\
3	S:	compensa::tion\ and er everything was very le:gal and very (.) very good (.) but she says I'm going back to England (.) and now she's the::re/ and she's wo::rking/
4	E:	and she's/ was it easy for her to find a:: job/
5	S:	yes yes yes\ well not the first year bu:t/
6	E:	and is she working in he field o::f-
7	S:	teaching [English\ yes yes
8	E:	[English language teaching
9	S:	yeah yeah
10	E:	for foreigners\
11	S:	yes\ at a small university there\ and she's super happy and ok\
12	E:	and was [it useful/
13	S:	[she misses it here but she comes from time to time\

This new extract illustrates vividly how the disjunctures mentioned by Goulding (2016) shape these English instructors' biographies. In the previous extract, we have seen how the 'you can't have it all' mood invades Suzanne's life. Her friends, in turn, are torn between the place they miss (and where they have tried to live) and the place where they have finally been able to settle down professionally (notice how in turn 5 Suzanne backgrounds her friend's difficulties to initially find a job in the UK, and instead, emphasises her positive well-being in turn 11).

Mary's story is slightly different. She has had to invest in her education in order to be able to secure a university lecturer position (she is an adjunct now). She first completed a master's degree in education and is currently finishing her PhD. The toll of relocation has been both professional and personal for her. Her narrative is driven by feelings of bitterness and anger despite her current work stability.

Extract 3: ‘When I came here all my qualifications disappeared’

1	E:	so you got the job at the self-access centre
2	M:	erm and really thanks to Joan and certain changes within the institution I can now go back to teaching a teacher trainer I also used to be a teacher trainer actually in England for what’s called the certificate of education programme for basically teachers who had come from vocations but wanted to get a teaching certificate so yes I used to I did teacher training with [name] University who were connected to my further education so we became a further and higher education institution so that’s how I started to do so when I came here all of that disappeared you know all that kind of-
3	E:	at the beginning but then it came back/
4	M:	it’s seven years\
5	E:	yes seven/
6	M:	well six years so I started at the self-access centre in 98 no when did I come/ I came in 2005 I got the job in 2007 I’ve been here about six years then I think it’d be seven in June yes\

We see in (3) how the story that she chooses to tell is not one of professional success, but one of helplessness and frustration. In spite of the time that has elapsed, Mary continues to thematise her inability to find a job in Barcelona commensurable with her ‘lots of professional qualifications’, as she states at one point, and foregrounds how her training and experience ‘disappeared’ upon her relocation. Her on-going distress is visible when I try to jointly construct with her a happy ending for her story in turn 3 which she refuses to align with by immediately reiterating how long it has taken her to reach professional stability. Let us now turn to the case of Peter.

Very critical with the language-school sector, Peter deliberately chooses to teach in-company classes and adult professionals rather than children. In the following fragment, he expresses the rationale for this decision.

Extract 4: ‘You’re not dealing with some guy looking over your shoulder’

1	E:	=so working for companies then is::/ (.) a little bit bette:r/ I understand/ o::r\
2	B:	e:::m/ well I just prefe::r/ dealing with a:dults::\ e::h/
3	E:	=ok\ and in terms of::/ (.) [( )
4	B:	[not dealing/ and you’re more a::h\ there’s mo:re/ (.) autonomy\ I don’t mean/ [autónomo\ (.) like/ freelance\ but\
5	E:	[that’s true\

6	E:	=no no no:\
7	B:	=the autonomy\ you're not dea:ling/ with some guy\ looking over your shou:lde:r/
8	E:	that's true\ ye:s\
9	B:	you've got four years experience/ and he's treating you/ like you're:\ (.) two year olds\ don't know\ (.) you know more than hi:m/ (.) e::m\ (.) so there's a lot of free:dom in i:t/ (.) you go::/ you do your cla::ss/ you fini:sh\ you go and leave\ (.) and that's it\

Although in turn 1 he does not clarify whether 'work is better' teaching in-company classes (by which I was trying to get at salaries), he foregrounds freedom of action as the main difference. He views himself as not fitting the prototypical language-school employee: young, unskilled and inexperienced. Previous to this excerpt he had said, 'I feel a bit older; people do what I'm doing in their twenties, when they finish college'. This self-portray frames not only his refusal to abide by the controlling behavior of language-school owners (turn 7) and what he considers infantilizing practices (turn 9), but also his self-positioning as more experienced than most of them.

To sum up, the three stories presented so far, and especially Mary's, challenge the idea that material considerations and career/professional aspects are not important for lifestylers. We have seen how middle-agers, no matter how much they enjoy and want to continue living in Barcelona, are not satisfied with whatever entry-level, bill-paying, low-status ELT job they happen to find. Instead, they try hard to find stability and decent work conditions and to be able capitalise (at least partially) on their past experience or qualifications. However, this is not without personal consequences for them, as we have seen in Suzanne's feelings of loneliness and Mary's enduring frustration.

4.3. The affordances of ELT work: Paying for one's bills (or maybe not)

I will now turn to the construal of the affordances or limitations of ELT by the younger informants, i.e. Patty and Carol, in particular in relation to their global mobility processes and relocation to Barcelona. In (5) below Patty explains how, when she moved to Barcelona from Granada with some friends, she was happy to find a job at a language school.

Extract 5: 'I do love it but I'm ready for something else'

1	P:	[..] erm what did I do when I got here/ I basically partied a lot/ I found a really good school/ (.) which is where I work now/ (.) English school (.) where I met Louise/ [a common acquaintance]
2	E:	right right
3	P:	er they treated me well/ and let me be myself/ but at the same time [I
4	E:	[how how did you find the school?
5	P:	erm when I got here I got a list of all the all the English schools and rang them all (.) and said are you looking for anyone/ and I got a few- different interviews actually interviews for English Schools (.) hardcore (.) it took about three hours and I had three interviews that's because they are quite (.) specific with the kind of person (.) they want\
6	E:	right\
7	P:	I think they had quite specific ideas of what kind of person they needed at that time because it was quite a team\
8	E:	I see\
9	P:	so:: (.) so yes\
10	E:	( )
11	P:	I just told them I'm leaving/ (.) I do love it but I'm ready for something else
12	E:	now/ you are leaving/ you just told them\ what are you going to do now/
13	P:	=I don't know
	((Eva laughs))	
14	E:	you're:: (.) fed up with the job
15	P:	=not fed up you know when things just come full circle\
16	E:	right\
17	P:	I need a change\
18	E:	you wanna move on\
19	P:	I think I can do other things I know it's not the best economic moment to change jobs but I know there's a lot of things I could do I just want to explore or maybe go- or maybe teach but now I live in [name of city]/
20	E:	oh you live in [name of city]/ wow that's a long way
21	P:	so I have a boyfriend now from [name of city]
22	E:	oh okay
23	P:	this is why (besides) because he has a business in [name of city] and doesn't like Barcelona at all.

Although Patty portrays a more positive image of ELT than the previous informants, we note how she takes up some of the same arguments as before when for example she foregrounds in 'they let me be myself' at the language school (turn 1). She seems to echo Peter's words about language school management 'looking over your shoulder', which did not happen in her case. By contrast, relationships at Patty's school are described in more horizontal terms (as a 'team')

than in Peter's account. Despite her satisfactory ELT experience, which was ideal for the life stage she found herself at ('partying a lot', turn 1), she has now decided to quit her job. We see how she links this professional transition to a general reorganisation of her life, both personally and geographically. She is now in a stable relationship and is 'ready for something else' (turn 11), among which, she tells me later, consolidating a promising music career. She seems keen on closing off the carefree, partying stage of her life to which, allegedly, language-school teaching belonged (turn 15). However, she does not abandon the idea of teaching altogether (turn 19). Like the informants in Johnston (1997), Patty's narrative depicts private-sector ELT as a 'permeable profession that is easy to enter and leave' (p. 714) at different moments in one's life, but which, generally, seems at odds with long- or medium-term life goals.

Carol's story is quite different. Her experience with ELT in Barcelona was rather short-lived. After graduating in Linguistics in the US, Carol envisaged a professional career teaching English to Spanish migrants in California. With that objective in mind, she narrates having decided to go to Mexico to learn Spanish. She lived in Oaxaca and in Mexico DF, where she taught English to make a living. After that experience she decided to pursue her graduate studies 'because just with an undergraduate degree I couldn't do much' and searched for a place which offered an MA degree programme in English for her, a suitable PhD programme for her Mexican boyfriend at the time, and the opportunity of seeing the world and continue to learn Spanish. That is how and why she landed in the Barcelona area. When she finished her MA programme, and after a brief teaching experience, she decided to move from the peripheral residential city she lived in to the center of Barcelona. That geographical relocation opened up new work possibilities for her.

Extract 6: 'I made more money working in a bar than teaching English'

1	C:	[…] after that I taught English in the summer- summer courses (.) then I started working in (.) bars (.) in Barcelona when I moved to Barcelona\
2	E:	okay so you didn't think you'd continue being a teacher of English\ I mean how is that kind of/
3	C:	how is that transition/
4	E:	yeah exactly from being a teacher to being a:::

5	C:	it was more money working in a bar than than and: at the time I wasn't interested 'cause I wasn't interested in teaching English I was more concerned in making enough money to support living in the city- in Barcelona and be able to pay [tuition (for next year)
6	E:	[right (.) did you have experience working in bars?
7	C:	a little bit (.) but I mean I find: it was really strange you don't really need a lot of experience to start and then they teach you everything (.)

In (6) Carol goes back in time to self-reflect about her life choices and their consequences. She explains how when she decided to quit teaching she had no professional concerns and focused exclusively on the economic aspect of work (turn 5). She became a night time bar tender, which allowed her to make good money. However, later in the interview she regrets that choice ('Now if I could do it all over again I would do it so differently'), because her lifestyle was at odds with academic study ('I stopped just 'cause I wanted I I'm so interested in finishing my studies now'). Teaching seems a better option now than in the past ('I'm going to try to just apply in just any English institute just to start off and then see where that takes me', she claims at one point). So, like Patty, Carol seems to be approaching a different stage of life, where different considerations come into the picture. One of them is the possibility of relocating somewhere else (e.g. Argentina, her boyfriend's native country) or going back to California, where she hopes to find employment as a community college TESOL teacher working with Spanish-speaking migrants. Her life story, rather than lineal, seems to take a circular shape, and English language teaching, despite precarious and low-paid, starts making sense again in the light of her inability to focus on her PhD, and her desire to 'build up a cv' to enhance her employability.

In sum, the stories of Patty and Carol illustrate how, rather than fixed, the attractiveness (or lack of it) of ELT jobs is in flux, and is relative to informants' personal circumstances and professional expectations linked to mobility/stability considerations. For Patty, it made sense to take up an English teaching job to pay for her partying in Barcelona; by contrast, for Carol it did not, as she could make more money serving drinks. After a few years, their perspectives swap. Whereas for Carol going back to teaching was a way to build up a coherent cv for future

relocation and focus on academic issues, for Patty, it was time to try something else in line with her more stable life outside the city. We see how as they both approach their thirties they become more reflexive about the impact of mobility and employment on chances of self-realisation and the accomplishment of life aspirations.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has argued that the global circulation of people moved by a desire to 'experience' new cultures and relocate to destinations with a 'more satisfying' pace of life cannot be understood as detached from the availability of flexible and temporary work positions, many of which in the service sector. This study has focused on one particular work niche, i.e. the language-teaching field, where the existence of a large pool of educated native speakers of the language, in this case of English, who are on the move globally feeds into the precariousness of the industry. For the relocators, the field of language teaching offers relatively quick access to a survival job; however, there is little on offer beyond that. The biographical narratives presented confirmed the description of private-sector ELT jobs available in the literature: unskilled, low-paid, and 'atypical'. Although informants' experiences ranged from highly negative (and even traumatic) to fairly positive, all of them described a 'permeable' world defined by high turnover rates and flexible labour.

However, the purpose of this paper was to go beyond these descriptions and into the lives of ELT instructors, not as instructors but as people with particular histories. The fact that data was not collected only among ELT teachers enabled me to also understand the experiences of those who had quit the language-school sector. In that sense, the value of the study lies in unveiling what sense commercial ELT work made to informants at what moments in their lives and for what kinds of trajectories of mobility; what strategies they followed to escape the precarious world of ELT and continue to make a living in their chosen destination; what investments they had to make and how they felt in relation to all this. This study has aimed to

show that the 'value' of private-sector ELT jobs cannot be ascertained in isolation from the biographical circumstances of the incumbents, and that a life story perspective can provide key insights into this.

One of the conclusions of the study is that the 'backpacker' language teacher is certainly a reality but, in many ways, also a contemporary cultural myth that has saturated the collective imaginary. This myth works to disguise a complex *humanscape* of relocators of different ages, trajectories and aspirations who face difficulties fitting in an industry that expects docile and inexperienced bodies, and a local market where nativeness enables quick access to jobs, but only to unskilled and temporary ones. These findings call us to reflect on commonsensical assumptions about the advantages accrued to fluent competence in English. As Ricento (2015) claims, English language ability by itself 'opens' very few doors, and is certainly not conducive to employment in the skilled professions (p. 37). Even when English is an asset, other languages may be needed for speakers to be able to capitalise on their English. This is not unlike findings in the world of language and work. As a case in point, Lønsmann (2014) illustrates how access to the higher-ranking positions of a Danish multinational depend on speaking Danish fluently besides English. The data also shows that qualifications and/or experience do not travel well, even for migrants from advanced societies. This is especially the case if labour insertion takes place is in a society, like Catalonia/Spain, where unemployment rates are extremely high and where many jobs are still accessed through personal contacts (Codó, 2015). Finally, this investigation challenges some of the claims made in the literature on lifestyle mobility, which too often describe a world of relocators driven only by experiential and symbolic considerations. This paper shows that material and professional concerns do not play a negligible role for informants, as they devote significant narrative space to discussing their work-related anxieties and frustrations even long after relocation. The stories of the younger informants, in turn, illustrate that lifestyle mobility is an ongoing quest that is constantly being redefined. They narrate biographies in flux whose course is shaped by work

opportunities, love relationships and a particular sense of life stagnation/development to which ELT may be differently instrumental.

Appendix

Symbols used in transcripts

P: participant name
(.) short pause (0.5 seconds)
( ) incomprehensible fragment
a:: lengthening of vowel or consonant sound
[turn overlapping with similarly marked turn
(( )) characteristics of speech delivery
- self interruption
= continuation of utterance after overlapping
\ falling intonation / rising intonation

Notes

[1] The original project was titled 'Multilingualism and Mobility: Language Practices and the Construction of Identity (FFI2011-26964)'. It was headed by Dr. Melissa Moyer and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2012-2014). My thinking about ELT owes a great deal to my recent involvement in another research project (APINGLO-Cat, FFI2014-54179-C2-1-P) of which I am principal investigator. This project is also financially supported by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2015-2018).
[2] All the name appearing in this paper are pseudonyms.
[3] Having a Master's of Education similar to the PGCE in the UK is required to be able to become a regular English teacher at state-funded secondary education in Spain. However, it may not be necessary to teach at fully private schools. This may be the reason why Mary does not refer to this other requirement in her story.
[4] Extracts 1 and 2 were originally in Spanish but are provided here in English (translated by the author) for reasons of space.

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