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**DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA**

**Identities of Catalan Speakers of English:  
The Influence of the English as a Lingua Franca  
Paradigm**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Theoretical Background.....	4
2.1 Linguistic Identity: A Post-structuralist Approach.....	4
2.2 Identity in SLA and FL Contexts: Power, Agency, and Resistance .....	5
2.3 English as a Lingua Franca in English Language Teaching .....	9
2.4 English in Catalonia: FL Context .....	14
3. Research Framework.....	16
3.1 Research Questions.....	16
3.2 Interview Methodology.....	16
3.3 Participants.....	18
4. Analysis of the Results and Discussion.....	18
4.1 Power: An Issue of Confidence .....	19
4.2 Accent and Agency .....	21
4.3 Language Learners and Language Users .....	24
4.4 Other Matters .....	27
5. Conclusion.....	28
References .....	30
Appendix 1 – Interview Questions .....	32

## **Abstract**

This TFG explores the identity of four Catalan speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL) using a post-structuralist approach to language and identity, with the aim to reflect on the impact of globalization and the consequent positioning of English as Lingua Franca (ELF). To do so, a thorough review on the targeted topics including identity studies, both holistically and inside the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language (FL) contexts, ELF paradigm literature and a general description of the state-of-affairs of English Language Teaching (ELT) and attitudes towards English in Catalonia and Spain is given. This is followed by an analysis and discussion of the data proceeding from the interviews that the targeted individuals underwent. The main findings consist of descriptions of identity that follow the dynamics and characteristics stated by previous literature, namely power-related positionings, accent and agency issues and L2 learner/user labelling, which are consistent with what seems to be a clear influence of the ELF paradigm on the participants identities as English speakers.

**Keywords:** Identity, English, Catalan, ELF, EFL, SLA, ELT.



## 1. Introduction

The personal interest for this topic started during the last two years of the degree, when all the information and theory, together with different experiences, started to accumulate. It was in the course of these past two years where I realized that, before university, I never really had an opinion on being taught British English as the standard variety in language academies or school and tended to idealise the English native speaker. It was also amid this period where I was presented with new perspectives regarding English Language Teaching (ELT), especially in the Spanish-Catalan context. This was followed by a span of continual realizations that during the degree, some of my colleagues had serious issues passing the phonetics and phonology oral exams because of their strong first language (L1) accents, while others were struggling to pass the use of English-speaking exams because they hesitated rather often when speaking or could not retrieve 'complex' vocabulary due to their stress levels, consequently being considered to have low competence or proficiency in English. However, most of us had begun developing cultural knowledge of English and American culture even before the start of the bachelor's degree in English Language and Culture, consumed English media and literature on a daily basis and were exposed to English, both native and non-native varieties in different internet platforms, thus English was more to us than a foreign language already. Finally, a year ago I encountered Llurda's (2020) article on English as Lingua Franca (ELF). It was the first time I heard the concept of *Lingua Franca*, and even though I was aware that English was being used internationally, it was then when I realized the actual scenario and corresponding technical terms. That article was the trigger to many conversations with some university colleagues, especially regarding the accent issue discussed previously. In addition, for some of us, the experience with the English

language was culminated by our exchange semester, during the first semester of the last year of our fourth year of studies (2021).

Fast forward to writing the bachelor's final thesis, I started to read about linguistic identity. Soon I realized how interesting it could be to explore this field within my very own context as it dealt with all the topics mentioned above. Thus, this TFG is thought as a mini case study of some of my university colleagues. I decided on them for various reasons which I will now summarize briefly. The key factor was the accessibility I had to them as subjects for the research, as time and resources to write this thesis were scarce. Secondly, they all shared the same background in terms of courses attended, which consisted of both cultural and linguistic curricular subjects. By these means, they had the capacity to self-reflect on such topics from an academic and critical point of view. Finally, I was eager to listen to their experiences as now proficient speakers of English after four years of exhaustive instruction on the English language. Moreover, this whole scenario was placed inside a foreign language (FL) context which has been argued to be a promising field to explore in quite recent literature (Román, 2012). Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to explore the identities of the interviewees as Catalan speakers of EFL from an initial stage.

The theoretical framework for this project will be presented in the next section and consists of an introduction to sociolinguistic research on identity, followed by a discussion on identities in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and FL contexts. Next, there is a section devoted to the exploration of English as Lingua Franca (ELF), followed by a review of the current state-of-affairs of ELT in Catalonia, Spain, and the attitudes towards English found in this context. The research questions and methodology used to

perform the interviews are then introduced, together with the interview protocol and a brief description of the participants, followed by the corresponding analysis and discussion of the interviews and final conclusions.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Linguistic Identity: A Post-structuralist Approach**

The theoretical framework used for the present linguistic identity research stems from Norton's (1997) theory. Norton's contribution was not the first to discuss identity, but it set the base for a great amount of later work (Block 2007, Norton 2013, Dyer 2016). The paradigm was based on a post-structuralist conception of language and identity proposed by Weedon (1997). From a post-structuralist angle, identity is defined as complex and dynamic, which contrasts to the structuralist perspective that defends a more static approach; "a speaker's identity viewed through language was seen as fixed and as a product of certain social factors." (Dyer, 2016, p.104). Thus, in opposition to the structuralist fixed point of view, Weedon introduces a new approach to the understanding of identity defined as "a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak." (Weedon, 1997, in Block, 2007, p. 14). These dynamic identities or subjectivities are the subject of much debate in the literature (see Norton 2000, Block 2007, Edwards 2009, Norton 2012, Dyer 2016), the outcomes of which tend to support the existence of multiple identities within one individual (Edwards, 2009, p.2) and, most importantly, that individuals may shift between identities. For instance, Burck (2005) claims that "speaking several languages therefore has significant implications for individual's sense of subjectivity and their identity construction at several different levels." (Burck, 2005, p.31). Thus, the idea that

the individual may be shifting identities when shifting languages is implemented, and focus falls on how multilingual speakers use their languages with the aim to understand what processes, if any, these individuals undergo as a consequence of using more than one language. In addition, the post-structuralist perspective accounts for the essentiality of taking the social world into context. As argued in Norton (1997), “most of the authors note that identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes.” (Norton, 1997, p.419). Hence, this TFG adopts the post-structuralist perspective that language is understood as a social practice in which identity is constructed and negotiated (Norton, 2012, p.1). By these means, exploring linguistic identity brings a complex scenario of, on the one hand, analysing different individuals and their identities on the basis of, for example, self-reflection (Burck 2005), and on the other hand, exploring the relationship between the individual identities and language use inside a specific context. In other words, this approach installs the focus on the individual (Dyer, 2016), but that is in terms of self-reflection and without forsaking the individuals’ relation to the social world (Norton, 1997, p.410).

## **2.2 Identity in SLA and FL Contexts: Power, Agency, and Resistance**

It has been argued that language is “carrier of national and cultural identity” (Burck, 2005, p.27). Taking this conception of language, understood as more than a sole system of signs (Norton, 2012), and, in addition, the bearer of other factors beyond the scope of language per se, it can be argued that when a new language is being learned, the acquisition process is not that of the language alone, but also of extralinguistic information, such as social context or cultural cues. As Norton (2012) claims, “learners are seen as members of social and historical collectives who appropriate the practices of a given community, rather than as individual language producers.” (Norton, 2012, p.3).

Hence, the exploration of linguistic identity within the SLA context, often focuses on how a learner may feel about acquiring not only the language, but also the dynamics that may be encountered within the classroom or society in which they are placed, namely institutions in which the languages may be learned such as language academies and schools or, on the other hand, communities.

These various dynamics, specifically within society and among other speakers, are often analysed from a power perspective. Power dynamics are not only a key theme in linguistics but is also a well-established element of study in neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and politics. As Dyer (2016) claims, “post structuralists argue that the signifying practices of societies are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogenous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power.” (Dyer, 2016, p.2). For instance, linguistic identity has often been related to ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation topics (see Norton 2000 and Burck 2005), which are arguably related to power-based issues. Nevertheless, in this thesis, the focus is on the power dynamics in general, and within relationships inside the SLA and FL contexts in Catalonia (Spain), to which we will turn to now, and the topics of gender, race, or ethnic issues, though interesting and highly relevant, will not be tackled in depth as they fall beyond the scope of this TFG.

Now, focussing on power dynamics within SLA and FL contexts, it is argued that “what is of central interest to researchers of second language identity is that the very articulation of power, identity and resistance is expressed in and through language.” (Norton, 2012, p.1). In a multilingual environment, for instance, the subject positioning, in terms of power, may be key to the identity construction process. Norton’s (2012)

understanding of power and identity relates to the effect of possible social interaction in a given situation. As argued in Norton and Toohey (2011), “an individual can be simultaneously the subject OF a set of relationships (e.g., in a position of power) or subject TO a set of relationships (e.g., in a position of reduced power).” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 417). The learner found in a power subject position will be cherished and “encouraged to engage in social interaction” (Norton, 2012, p.2). On the other hand, the learner that is found in a powerless position will suffer from marginalization causing limited chances of interaction and hindered identity construction or negotiation (Norton, 2012, p.2). Burck (2005), follows the same argumentation and defends that within the multilingual context, individuals position themselves between several languages, but this positioning is conditioned by “power relationships”, as mentioned in Norton (2012), and “institutionalized practices” (Burck, 2005, p.33).

When applying this theorisation, it can be seen that power-based relationships can be “either coercive or collaborative” (Norton, 1997, p.419). By these means, coerciveness could be argued to be found inside the scope of powerless positioning, and collaboration inside the scope of powerfulness position. These dynamics can be observed both in the small scale such as in the relationships between speakers (considering L1-L1, L1-L2 and L2-L2 contexts) or the large scale such as in the mentioned ‘institutionalized practices’ (Burck, 2005). In regard to native – non-native encounters (L1-L2), key scenario for this TFG, it is argued that “cooperativeness tends to be the rule” but that is not always the case (Mauranen, 2018, p. 110). Moreover, past research shows that the dynamics between these encounters fluctuate, and that the English Native Speaker (ENS), may assume a secondary, almost-passive position or, on the other hand, may “assume patronising or uncooperative interactional modes” (Carey, 2010 in Mauranen, 2018, p.110). In terms of

institutionalized practices, an example would be that the exploration of the role of teachers in SLA contexts, who by means of vocation, may empower their students (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p.418) or on the other hand, by means of “customary classroom materials and activities, as well as powerful societal discourses” may “constrain students’ possibilities for claiming desirable identities” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p.418).

Nevertheless, as Norton (2012) claims, the learner may use their agency to change the position inside the given standards by means of resistance. Therefore, while “larger structural constraints and classroom practices might position learners in undesirable ways, learners, with human agency, can resist these positions in innovative and unexpected ways” (Norton, 2012, p.5). Examples of resistance are often related to the conservation of the speakers’ relationship to their communities and culture (Norton, 2012, p.5) often followed by keeping characteristics of their L1 (mainly associated with accent issues) (Vitanova, 2005), and other practices such as avoiding being positioned as an English Second Language (ESL) learner (Norton, 2012, p.5). Regardless, “resistance to marginalizing discourses may be compromised by students’ ‘phenotypical features, their gender or sexuality, their language and accent [which] are not chosen, not wholly malleable through discourse.’” (Luke, 2009, p.293 in Norton & Toohey, 2011, p.435). Thus, it seems that contexts of interaction and beliefs of language teaching, among others, are conditioning factors for power positioning, in which learners find themselves. Nevertheless, learners may resist the given guidelines and/or expectations in which they are positioned, negotiating their L2 identity.

### **2.3 English as a Lingua Franca in English Language Teaching**

Nowadays, English is the language most studied in the international context and there are many factors that account for this, but it seems that the most determining ones are the economic, political, cultural, and military power of the USA (Llurda, 2020). This positioning of the English language has created a scenario in which the number of non-native speakers (NNSs) of the language surpasses the number of native speakers (NSs) (Llurda, 2020). This state of the art is key, as it means that English has become a global *Lingua Franca*. Due to this status, changes within the ELT paradigm have appeared, together with new identities for English speakers and learners, who have started using English as the vehicular global language.

Cook (2007) argues that there are two main theoretically established goals to learn English; the first one is ‘external’ and consists of learning English to use it outside the academic environment, hence by consuming English media, literature or travelling (Cook, 2007, p.238), the second one is ‘internal’ and is defined as relating to “the students’ mental development as individuals: They may think differently, approach language in a different way, be better citizens, because of the effects that the L2 has on their minds” (Cook, 2007, p.239). Teaching aimed at the acquisition of the ‘external’ goals (characteristic of the EFL paradigm) was the focus during the twentieth century, thus the objective of the learner was to be able to communicate with the NS (Llurda, 2020), and the need to acquire English in the most native-like way possible was established, almost as an ideology (Mauranen, 2018). Globalisation, and the growing awareness of it, then triggered a change in perspective (Mauranen, 2018, p.106). With English becoming an instrument of communication between a variety of NN English-speaking communities, the traditional aim of “rendering the implicit goal of SLA as a kind of double



monolingualism” (Mauranen, 2018, p.107) began to be questioned. Thus, a shift from the long-established methodology for ELT, EFL, to an ELF perspective came about. The main differences between these two paradigms are thought to be flexibility and adaptability (Llurda, 2020, pp. 203-204). Within ELF, language is an instrument, a way of communication between different communities with a focus on mutual intelligibility and intercultural competence. In addition, being a ENS is no longer automatically attributed to a type of language competence and becomes a social construct. In other words, it is argued that there is no acknowledgement of a valid linguistic quality that can distinguish the ENS from the NN English speaker, thus, being native is not considered an identity trait anymore (Llurda, 2020, pp.205-206). Nevertheless, it is fundamental to be aware of the fact that ELF, although being “the principal use of English today” (Mauranen, 2018, p.107) cannot be understood as a methodology per se, but as an emerging paradigm that is still heavily debated and the source of much research. Therefore, ELF and EFL can be compared by means of their goals and/or understanding on how ELT should be approached as in Cook (2007) or Llurda (2020), but methodologies per se cannot be juxtaposed, as ELF does not have one yet.

The new conceptualization of the English speaker and the changes in the goals of learning English found in ELF are portrayed in Modiano’s (1999) reformulation of the three concentric circles classification proposed by Kachru (1986) (Llurda, 2020, p.204). Kachru’s (1986) model was created with the aim to explain “the type of spread, the pattern of acquisition, and the functional domains in which English language is used across cultures and languages” (Kachru, 1985, p.12 in Al-Mutairi, 2020, p. 86) and consists of three different concentric circles, namely the Inner circle, the Exterior circle, and the Expanding circle. In general terms, the Inner circle contains the countries in which

English is the main language such as The United States and United Kingdom (among others), the Exterior circle contains the countries with “British colonial ties” (Al-Mutairi, 2020, p. 86) and the Expanding circle contains those countries in which English is taught as a FL, “mainly for the purpose of communicating in English with the Inner and Outer Circles” (Al-Mutairi, 2020, p. 86). The main change in perspective, present in Modiano’s (1999) reformulation and parallel to the ELF proposal, is, again, in the need to stop “relating the ownership of the language to the countries in the Inner Circle” (Al-Mutairi, 2019, p. 86) as it “re-establishes the notion that the language is the property of specific groups, and that correct usage is determined by experts who speak a prestige variety” (Modiano, 1999, p. 24 in Al-Mutairi, 2020, p. 86 ). Thus, in Modiano’s (1999) proposal, the Inner circle hosts the English speakers that can communicate effectively with both NSs and NNSs, the Exterior circle is argued to contain those English speakers that encounter difficulties communicating effectively in an international environment and, finally, the Expansive circle englobes those English speakers that are still learning the language. Interestingly, this reformulation can be argued to be proof that in this new perspective that ELF presents, the ENS figure is unidealized and the multilingual context of those who use English in to communicate with the international community and not only ENS, embraced. In addition, the role of the listener is given significant importance, as this figure is no longer considered an ENS exclusively, but anyone who has the ability to comprehend many different varieties of the language.

The ELF theoretical framework raises different issues, some more theoretical, such as identity construction, and others more practical, as the challenges behind implementing such an approach in the classroom by means of creating a methodology, which will not be tackled. Regarding identity construction, as previously considered,

language carries cultural identity (Burck, 2005, p.27). ELF is not a variety of English but a context of communication, hence, it does not have an established culture per se. In ELF, identity and other pragmatic conventions are negotiated in each communicative encounter (Mauranen, 2018, p. 114) in basis of the given context, which may consist, for instance, of language proficiency levels, environment and L1s, among others. Importantly, ELF speakers are “normally multilingual, and thus have at least one other language at their disposal” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 109), as a consequence, they will often “engage in multilingual language-crossing” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 109). On the contrary, in the traditional framework, EFL, there is an underlying culture that comes with learning English, which is nationalistic (either English or North American). Thus, the aim is to acquire, together with the language, a focused set of cultural characteristics and overall pragmatic values, arguably away from the multiculturalism embraced in ELF. By these means, there is a considerable shift between paradigms, not only on the possibility to access a given culture, but also in the strong aim ELF has to overcome nationalistic barriers (Llurda, 2020).

Another factor that is also essential for the discussion of identity is the change from the conception of the speaker from language learner to language user that the ELF paradigm proposes. Second language users (SLUs), also labelled as *new speakers* (O'Rourke & Pujolar, 2013, in Llurda, 2020), was a term coined by Cook (2002) and includes those individuals that use English outside the classroom for real-life purposes (Mauranen, 2018, p.107). This new concept was born out of the necessity, as argued by Mauranen (2018), “when people use ELF they are L2 users but not learners” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 113). Consequently, the concept of the ‘eternal learner’ (Burck, 2005) resurfaced. The ‘eternal learner’ conceptualization is the result of a situation in which the speaker is

attributed a “permanent, inescapable learner identity whenever an L2 is at stake: all engagement with the language is an opportunity – or duty – to learn” (Mauranen, 2018, p.113). In other words, because the target of the EFL paradigm is for an L2 to become native-like, the learner seems to always be considered that, a learner of the L2. By this means, the “identity transition from learner to user does not take place.” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 113).

When these two concepts are analysed from a power perspective, the ‘eternal learner’ position can be argued to be reductive and limiting, as in the SLA and/or EFL contexts, the learner is usually considered a deficient communicator (Filth and Warner, 1997 in Mauranen, 2018) who is still inside this learning process even when achieving a proficient level of the language. In addition, as argued by Llurda (2020), labelling someone as a learner of a language exclusively by the fact that it is not that person’s native language, creates a situation in which the subject needs the validation of the native speaker to participate in communication (Llurda, 2020, p.206). On the other hand, the language user is placed as a speaker who has agency and empowers themselves by means of stepping out of institutional or societal expectations of language learning and language use. Most importantly, this resistance or agency seems to be closely related to accent issues, especially towards the decision of acquiring one of the “neutral accents” in English, namely Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) (Wells, 1982, p.10), or choosing not to. As argued in Wells (1982), “our pronunciation reflects our self-image (...) one’s accent is a part of one’s personal identity” (Wells, 1982, p.34), thus if the situation in which the EFL/ELF speaker decides to consciously avoid using one of the argued neutral accents, an example of resistance, based on identity construction, is arguably shown. This decision to not adopt the neutral accents seems to be the rule in the

ELF paradigm, which promotes intelligibility over ‘sounding native’ (Llurda, 2020), and is arguably one of the most important traits of identity construction within the field.

## **2.4 English in Catalonia: FL Context**

Catalonia (Spain) is a bilingual territory, “the Spanish Constitution states that Spanish is the official language in the State, and it acknowledges that there are local or regional co-official languages in those bilingual territories” (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 665). Catalan is one of the mentioned regional languages and it is the co-official language in Catalonia. By these means Catalonia is, officially, a bilingual territory in which “94.4% of respondents understand Catalan with 64.7% reporting being able to write, read, listen and speak in this language; on the other hand, 99.8% of interviewees understand Spanish, with 97.5% of participants being able to command the four skills” (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 665).

In Catalan schools, Catalan has been used as the language of instruction since the Act of Linguistic Normalisation was approved in 1983 (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 665). However, students also learn Spanish, which is also used as a medium of instruction, and a foreign language, English. Taking the Common Framework of Reference for the Languages (CEFR), students should achieve a B1 level in English by the age of 16, when compulsory education finishes, and a B2 level if completing the Baccalaureate (non-compulsory 2-year course to enter University) (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 665). Nevertheless, Spaniards are known to be ‘bad at’ or at least not extraordinary when it comes to FL’s skills, probably due to a resistance to other cultures and the unknown, which may be causing a hindered situation for language acquisition and consequent construction of an L2 identity (Pellegrinelli et al., 2010, p.2).

Nevertheless, it seems that for Catalans, the situation may differ slightly due to the bilingualism present in the community. It has been argued that due to the long history of language contact and coexistence of Catalan and Spanish, Catalans “are said to be more aware of their linguistic choices” (Pellegrinelli et al., 2010, p.25). Significant research on language attitudes in Catalonia has been conducted, but the vast majority has focused on the Catalan-Spanish relationship, without tackling the attitudes towards English (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 664). In Fernández-Costales et al.’s research (2021), a group of Catalan teenagers constituted by locals and migrants was studied, aiming to shed some light on their attitudes toward English. The results showed that these were positive, reflecting “the interest of students to communicate in this particular language and connect with speakers and language communities” (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, pp. 672-673). Nevertheless, when comparing the migrants and local’s attitudes, they found out that the migrant’s attitudes towards English were better than the local’s attitudes. The researchers argue that this situation was reported before in other Spanish contexts, and that it may be a result of the status of the Spanish language in the international scene, which is still quite influential and maintains an important presence in international communication, the internet, and the media (Fernández-Costales et al., 2021, p. 673). By these means, although Catalonia has its particular situation towards language, it does not seem to affect the attitudes towards English much, and Catalans seem to resemble more the rest of the Spanish population than their migrant counterparts. In addition, and briefly tackling the language policy issue, in Spain, certain proficiency of English may be required to start a new job position or get a degree, acting as a “gatekeeper to educational and employment opportunities” (Román, 2012, p.4). However, due to the status of Spanish as an influential language, Spanish speakers may

not feel the same necessity to acquire English as speakers of a less influential language would feel. By these means, the motivation Spanish speakers may have to acquire English might be affected negatively by this situation, resulting in resistance towards learning English as described in Pellegrini et al. (2010) and Fernández-Costales et al. (2021).

### **3. Research Framework**

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

After reviewing the previous literature and establishing a theoretical background, the following research questions were decided upon:

- (1) Which are the main characteristics of the linguistic identity of Catalan Speakers of English?
- (2) Is this linguistic identity characterization influenced by the ELF paradigm? If so, to what extent?

#### **3.2 Interview Methodology**

The interview structure, as well as the majority of the questions, are based on Burck's (2005) research on speakers' linguistic identity in multilingual settings. By these means, the interviews followed a 'semi-structured' dynamic, which permitted the researcher to inquire into various topics that are argued to construct the speaker's identity, and the method of interviewing used was that of circular and reflexive questioning (Burck, 2005, p.35). The interviews consisted of three distinct parts. The first part was used to set the context of the participant and the questions revolved around stative information such as age, gender, personal linguistic situation, and English learning background. The second part dealt with the identity of the speaker within the learning environment, in this case (mainly) within the University context. Finally, the third and

last part of the interview consisted of questions reflecting on their identity as English Speakers outside the learning environment, regardless of what that scenario consisted of for each participant, together with more abstract questions prompting reflection towards the topics discussed. By having three separate phases there was the possibility to, firstly, compare the participants according to their background (both related and non-related to English) and personal characteristics, if needed. Secondly, comparing the participants' identities as English learners versus as English users and finally, extracting other relevant characteristics of their identity as English speakers.

The interviews were conducted between the months of March and May (2022). The volunteering participants were told that they were going to undergo a 35-minute interview (approximately), regarding their relationship with the English language and that it would be structured in three different parts; contextual, within the learning environment and outside the learning environment (the interview questions are given in appendix 1). The participants were instructed to explore the different topics freely and to provide personal anecdotes if necessary. Before the start of the interview, they were informed that conversation would be recorded and, consequently they all signed consent forms granting their permission to use their interviews as data for the study. In addition, as the thesis' vehicular language is English, they were asked to undergo the interview using English, but with the freedom to use their L1 if needed.

As per the analysis of the data extracted from the interviews, the method used was based on the grounded theory approach, following Burck's (2005) methodology. Nevertheless, the full interviews were not transcribed, only those parts that seemed relevant for quotation during the analysis and discussion. By these means, the sentences



that alluded to a particular theme or topic relevant to the TFG were coded (Burck, 2005, p.42) and the different topics resulting from the coding were analysed separately.

### **3.3 Participants**

The interviewees (N=4), with a mean age of 22, all reported Catalan and/or Spanish as their L1 and are proficient (C2 level CEFR) in English, moreover they are fourth year students of the English Studies Degree at a university in Barcelona. The participants have been studying English language and culture for four years, which includes a common background of history of the USA and the British Isles, English and American literature, grammar, syntax and English phonetics and phonology, among other related subjects. Two of the interviewees (M.C. and L.T.<sup>1</sup>) had spent a semester abroad in an English-speaking country, Scotland, and Ireland respectively, as part of an exchange program, while the other two interviewees had never lived abroad.

## **4. Analysis of the Results and Discussion**

The main themes that appeared in the interviews were those of power, closely related to confidence issues, accents, code switching, and reflections towards the positioning on the L2 learner or user label, together with bare identity construction observations. Although all of these themes are equally interesting and deserving of further discussion, due to the length of this TFG and the focus on the ELF in the literature review, only three will be discussed extensively, namely power, accent and L2 learners or users. Nevertheless, a brief consideration of other relevant themes that came up can be found in the last section.

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<sup>1</sup>The names of the participants are not going to be shared and they will be identified by the initials to keep their privacy.

#### **4.1 Power: An Issue of Confidence**

During the interviews, the participants were required to reflect on situations in which they felt the most and the least powerful while using English. To prompt this reflection, they were given the chance to explore their different experiences with the language, both inside and outside the learning environment, for instance when attending a class, travelling or if applicable, while living abroad. Starting with the reflections inside the learning environment, there were instances of insecurities and low self-esteem when taking part in meta-linguistic focused courses. For instance, both M.C. and A.B. reported struggling in courses focused on phonetics or oral production of the English language, and feeling self-conscious about their English, especially regarding their accents. This does not seem to be a consequence of the accent per se, as in M.C.'s case, she claims to have always felt comfortable and confident speaking in English and is often praised by her native-sounding accent, whereas in A.B.'s case, he claims that he is aware of the influence of his L1 in terms of accent, but still confident in his English skills. Nevertheless, they both felt anxious. For the other two interviewees, no differences in confidence were reported between meta-linguistic or content-focused courses.

Reflections around confidence in regard to the interactions with ENS appeared in all of the interviews: "It's not that I am self-conscious or that I feel intimidated by the fact that the person is native but certain part of my brain just wants to make sure to demonstrate my learning abilities or my skills." (L.T.), or "speaking with native speakers I get humbled (...) I know I'm never go be speaking like that." (M.C.). For all four interviewees, interacting with an ENS seems to create some kind of nervousness and even lack of confidence. B.H. recalls travelling to the UK, London specifically, and feeling "like an enormous annoying thing." She claims that it was the lack of sympathy from the

people she interacted with prompted her to try and be the most accurate and fluent she could while speaking English, but the result still being a feeling of “walking on eggshells” and overall embarrassment. Nevertheless, these types of situations are something that all interviewees recall happening more often some years ago, before they achieved a proficient level of the language. For instance, both L.T. and B.H. reflect on their acceptance journey towards these feelings: “I think I’ve become more accepting of the things that I can get wrong as a non-native speaker, and more accepting too of the fact that even natives get their language wrong” (B.H.). B.H. also explains that she used to be quite judgemental of people that made mistakes while speaking in English, even with herself, but that with time she acknowledged that the same ways he could make mistakes in her L1, she could make mistakes in her L2 (English). Yet, most of the interviewees claim to feel more relaxed and confident when interacting in English with non-ENS by the fact that in the latter case, the interlocutor is someone who has acquired English as an L2 as well, and consequently, is allegedly aware of the struggles of acquiring and using a new language. For instance, L.T. claims to “feel more relaxed with non-native people because they understand my issue or all that is behind the process of learning a language, I find that I have the tendency to express myself in a freer way.” By these means, powerfulness using English seems to be mainly found, for the present interviewees, in situations in which they are not being judged by the way they use their English but also when they can freely express themselves.

After analysing the participants’ answers, it can be argued that almost all the reflections within the power theme revolve around issues of confidence and comfort. As argued in the literature, the focus on identity in SLA often is found on how the learner feels about acquiring the targeted language and the different dynamics that appear in the

classroom or within society itself. Hence, what could be extracted from the reflections just given, in comparison to the theoretical framework, is that when the dynamics are positive, meaning that the subject feels comfortable enough to use the language and express themselves, the subject stands in a powerful position and enjoys learning and communicating, as argued by Norton (2012). By these means, when the subject is inside a classroom where errors are not a cause to self-consciousness or when the interaction in English is with a cooperative interlocutor, the speaker will feel comfortable and consequently use English, resulting in the chance to construct their identity as L2 speakers. On the contrary, when the dynamics are not favourable and instances of judgements, criticisms and/or uncooperative interactions appear, this sense of self that is being built will be hindered. Though not mentioned in the literature review, this situation accurately portrays the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen and key for the SLA paradigm, which argues that:

The affective filter acts as a barrier to acquisition. The filter is up when the acquirer is unmotivated, lacking in confidence, or concerned with failure. The filter is down when the acquirer is not anxious and is trying to become a member of the group speaking. (Du, 2009, p. 162).

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that subjects have agency, hence the power to alter these dynamics and relationships in which they are positioned.

## **4.2 Accent and Agency**

When asked about accents, many strong opinions were given, some especially political, and others related to what seems to be a close approach to the ELF paradigm, either conscious or not. In order to situate the reader, it may be useful to state that M.C. and B.H. claim to have an RP English accent, whereas L.T. believes her accent is quite neutral but has General American English (GA) accent tendencies, finally, A.B. explains

that his accent is not to be labelled as either RP or GA and that sometimes it may be quite influenced by his L1.

The affirmation that all the interviewees seem to agree upon is that sounding native-like when speaking in English is not the ultimate achievement for language learning. When asked about the relationship between intelligibility and native accents there is unanimity on the importance of intelligibility prevailing over acquiring or forcing an English native accent. Interestingly, for A.B. speaking English with a L1 accent makes “the language richer”, as it shows the importance of the globalization of English, and the vast amount of people that have it as their L2. Moreover, for him, having a non-native accent has never been an issue or a topic he has given much consideration to. On the other hand, M.C. claims that having a RP-like English accent is something she takes pride in; she explains that accent has been something really important to her throughout the years and that she is “a bit obsessed with sounding native.” Nevertheless, when asked about her opinion on English speakers that have strong L1 accents, in this case Spanish or Catalan, she claims that she considers that to be somehow a personal choice and she is not judgemental of people who decide to keep their L1 accents. By these means, she argues that accent adds to intelligibility but is not a barrier to being understood per se. This opinion is also found in L.T.’s reflections; “it’s not as if it makes it impossible to understand them [speakers with strong L1 accents] but I do feel that certain things should be corrected as they are part of the rules of the language”. In addition, there seems to be a tendency in most of the interviewees of a journey of acceptance towards non-native English accents. Hence, in general, the starting point for most of the interviewees seems to be the idealization of the ENS, and consequently the native accent, but this is followed by a growing awareness of the cultural baggage of the language and the impact of

globalization. Importantly, these feelings seem to have transformed into what could be defined as tolerance or open-mindedness towards diversity, key characteristic of the speaker of ELF (Llurda, 2020). As B.H. claims:

I think it's difficult to let go of thinking that we need to speak English in a native-like way, so I would be lying to myself if I said that I've never judged anyone for their accent, because I have (...) but I think I've grown more accepting of that and I don't value the accent as much.

Most importantly, in terms of identity, for B.H. specifically, having a native accent is not something natural to her and speaking English with one may feel like a performance or at least not something realistic, but closer to a facade, resulting in her not trying to have a native-like accent out of personal choice.

This overall awareness goes hand in hand with various reflections on the relevance of accent, either L1 influenced or native, found in-between a rather political debate. Inside these politically oriented reflections appear the lack of acknowledgement of English native accents outside of the RP and GA scope have. L.T. claims that:

We believe that the only correct or ultimate way to learn English is to have a British accent or an American accent, but we forget, or we fail to see that there are so many variants that are non-standard English and are still correct.

Moreover, she argues that she is aware that this situation is a result of the economic and cultural power and influence that the UK and the United States have internationally, and that this situation should be emphasised: "I want to mention that teachers or people expect you, the learner, to speak with a British or an American accent. I think that is really important to highlight these expectations I consider them to be basically colonial." (L.T.). These ideas are shared by B.H. who emphasises the role the University had in her understanding that there was more outside the British and American accent dichotomy being taught in schools and language academies. In addition to this, she emphasises that

at some point she even judged native varieties as non-native, as they fell outside the neutral accents (Wells, 1982) she was being taught, which now concerns her as he assumes this might be the situation for English learners outside of the linguistically knowledgeable contexts.

As mentioned in the previous section, subjects, in the theorization of power and identity, have agency. What seems to be the agency demonstrated by the interviewees of this TFG is the consensual acknowledgement that the dynamics in which they were positioned during their learner years are a product of a set of historical and social factors that need to be, at least, acknowledged. By these means, the participants interviewed here agree that in the Catalan/Spanish paradigm for ELT there is a need to promote diversity of accents and other regional characteristics of English varieties including ELF (understood as English used in non-ENS conversations), in an attempt to escape the actual idealization of, first the ENS in general, and secondly the monopoly of British and American English varieties. Moreover, they acknowledge that the individual may choose consciously not to acquire a native accent, as that may not feel natural or faithful to the identity they have created, among other reasons.

### **4.3 Language Learners and Language Users**

With the intention to explore the *new speaker* or L2 user (SLU) identities discussed in the literature review, the participants were asked whether they still considered themselves learners of the English language. At first, the answers seemed to be strongly divided; affirmative for two of the participants (positive identification with the learner label) and negative for the other two (negative identification with the learner

label). Nevertheless, after further exploration, some doubts rose for the first two participants, and their learner label seemed to be questioned for the first time.

Starting with the participants that, from the start, did not consider themselves L2 learners anymore, we find L.T.'s reflection on the topic. Although L.T. acknowledges that learning is a never-ending process, she claims that she may have stopped actively learning the language, which comes with the finalization of the learner label for her:

Right now I am sort of stagnant. I may learn new words from time to time or I may learn how something I already used was not properly used but that's not as it was when I started, so definitely I do not consider myself an English learner.

An identical argumentation is found in B.H.'s answer as she argues that she does not feel like she is learning English anymore, and she's just maintaining her level; "it's not that I practice English, it just happens in my life, like another language I use to express myself, it's not something that I have to learn now".

On the other hand, the two participants that strongly consider themselves English learners, seem to do so as a result of the argument 'there is always room to improve'. For M.C., this thought seems to apply even to her L1 as she argues that she is still learning new words and expressions in Catalan for instance, hence it can be argued that in her case, the learner label is understood holistically. The exact same comment is also found in A.B.'s argumentation; when asked if he considered himself an English language learner his answer was a quick and confident "yes of course!". In spite of these first reactions, especially in M.C.'s case, when the follow up questions inquired about their feelings when traveling or living abroad, together with scenarios in which English needed to be used for communicative purposes in a social environment, they seemed to shift in a moderate fashion, towards the realisation of their L2 user identity, of which they did not



seem to be completely aware of. For instance, M.C. observes that she uses English to journal and to talk to herself and that she constantly code switches when speaking, to the point where some of her Catalan friends mock her. In addition, she claims that when angry, the first swear words that come to her mind are often in English and that at certain point her relatives noticed a change in her L1 accent after starting the English studies degree. Yet, when asked again about her learner or user status, she argues that she is still not proficient or good enough still. In A.B.'s case, there seems to be some kind of barrier that is a consequence of not having lived abroad or travelled that much, implying that he has not had the opportunity to use English outside the learning environment that much. It seems to be this situation that places him in the exclusively learner positioning still.

Although L2 learner or L2 user can be argued to be labels, with no further meaning or aim than to categorize, it is true that it seems a matter of one's conceptualization and perception of themselves. What could have been expected, by means of the literature, is that those participants who had never or hardly ever used English outside the learning environment, considered themselves learners, whereas the ones that had social relationships in which English was the vehicular language or had lived abroad would consider themselves users. Yet, that has not been the case in the data collected for this analysis. In other words, it does not seem that achieving a near-native level on the language or even living abroad, among others, are determining factors for the speaker to consider themselves either a user or a learner. As seen in this analysis, the counter examples of the expectations would be M.C. who has even lived abroad, but still considers herself an English learner, even though she describes dynamics and understandings of the language that could be well considered to be inside the scope of what is understood as an L2 user. And on the other hand, B.H., who has never lived abroad

and does not use English that much outside the learning environment, but thoroughly considers herself an L2 user and also argues fulfilling the L2 user characteristics. On the contrary, L.T. and A.B. would fall closer to the expectations and would portray the effect living abroad and using English in social environments quite often, among other factors, has on jumping from L2 learner to L2 user.

#### **4.4 Other Matters**

As seen in the literature review, one of the main ideas that the post-structuralist theory for language and identity defends is that subjectivities are dynamic (Weedon, 1997) and that in multicultural environments, shifting from one language to another may convey a simultaneous shift of identity (Burck, 2005). In the data from the interviews many instances of dynamic identities and even shifting identities were present. The role of consuming English-spoken media (music, podcasts, You Tube videos, literature, etc.) was thoroughly present in all instances and can be argued as fundamental to the different dynamics the interviewees had as English speakers. For instance, code shifting, understood in this case as using English words or expressions while maintaining a conversation in the L1, was mentioned by all the interviewees, and was argued to be considered part of their identity. In addition, it was emphasised that due to the constant use of social media platforms, famous for their internet culture content (often humorous in a very distinguishable way and presented in English) some participants felt funnier in English than in their L1 due to the relation between language and humour they had created; “I think that my personality varies (...) it has different tints within each language and I say that for me English is like the funny language, the one that I can most silly be” (L.T.). Other instances of feeling different when using English compared to using the L1 were observed. For instance, B.H. argued feeling more academic in English than in her

L1, L.T. commented on feeling less vibrant when using English than her L1 and, finally, M.C. commented on feeling freer when expressing herself in English than in L1; “I feel as if by writing it in English I sort of detach myself from the person that everyone knows and that I’m used to being around with other people so I’m able to express myself (..) without constraints”. By this means, it can be argued that the dynamic subjectivities and identity shifts proposed by the literature were extensively proven by the experiences and reflections provided by the interviewees.

## **5. Conclusion**

The main themes that came up in the data were those of power, accent and L2 learners/users, thus, the characterization of these three topics could be argued to be the main items that construct the identities of the participants of the interviews as Catalan speakers of English, answering the first research question of this paper. In more detail, it has been observed that power dynamics are, indeed, present in their identity construction as English speakers, and that overall, they seem to be tightly related to confidence issues. In addition, this same power discussion relates directly to the debate towards accent, but in this case, regarding the expression of resistance and agency. Thus, it has been observed that some speakers choose not to use one of the argued ‘neutral accents’ (Wells, 1982), RP or GA, as a conscious aversion towards the imposition of it, breaking from the EFL standard practices. In addition, there is evidence for the identity jump from language learner to language user, but the exact reason this happens is still in need of further research. Most importantly, these targeted topics are not only present, but fundamental in the discussion of the ELF paradigm, and consequently it can be argued that ELF is allegedly making an

impact towards the acquisition of English in FL contexts and consequently towards the identity construction of the speakers.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the interviewees were strongly linguistically biased due to their English Studies students' background and this factor might have been the origin of the instances of agency discussed in their experiences. By these means, it seems that linguistic awareness acted as a source of empowerment for them. Consequently, it would be interesting to inquire about the same topics in other Catalan individuals, also proficient speakers of English, but not linguistically biased, to see how they construct their identities and to what extent these differ from the ones described in this TFG. Herewith, it can be argued that by understanding the changes in the identities occurring due to the influence of the ELF paradigm, new perspectives could be introduced in the ELT methodologies implemented in classrooms with the aim to place learners in the argued powerful positions, for instance by embracing multiculturalism and promoting the development of agency and confidence.

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## **Appendix 1 – Interview Questions**

### **Part 1: Contextual Information**

- State age and gender (optional).
- How many languages do you speak? With what kind of fluency?  
Spoken/Written?
- Which language/s do you consider your first language?
- Which language do you use at home (parents, partner ...) and with friends?
- Could you tell me your circumstances of learning English? When did you start (age), where (school, academies), how it developed?
- Were you forced to learn English at some point of your life? How did that affect your interest in the language?
- What is your current situation regarding English (where do you use it, with whom, with what aim, English level both certified and not certified)?
- How does your English level make you feel? How does being multilingual/bilingual make you feel? Do you ever receive positive/negative comments about it? How do you feel about monolingualism then?

### **Part 2: Speaker's Identity Inside the Learning Environment**

- Do you still consider yourself an English learner?
- Do you use English inside University? With whom/ In what context?
- Do you talk in English with your peers in a class setting? How does it feel?
- Is there any difference regarding how you feel about your English in different courses? For instance, compare a course in which the study of the English language is not the target with one in which it is (e.g.: Literature course vs. Phonetics course), do you feel more comfortable in one of them, does your fluency speaking English change (maybe there is no difference)?
- Have you ever felt self-conscious about your English accent? Do you think you have an accent (RP, GA, SP, CAT)? If so, how do you feel about having that accent? Have you had any unpleasant experiences related to this (both with teachers and/or peers during the English-learning period)?
- What do you think about English speakers who have a strong SP/CAT accent?
- Have you been told or taught not to hesitate while speaking in English? In what context/Who taught you not to?
- Do you think having a RP/GA accent helps people understand you? (Compare using English in Catalonia vs. outside the country/traveling situations).

- What is more important for you, intelligibility, or sounding native? Are they related concepts in your opinion? Do you think sounding native is the only way to be understood?
- Do you think it is important to acquire a native English accent when learning English? From 0 - 5 can you rate the importance? (0 is none, 5 is fundamental)
- Has your opinion on any of these topics changed over time?

### Part 3: Speaker's Identity Outside the Learning Environment

- Do you feel like an English Language Learner, just a speaker of the language or both?
- How do you feel regarding your English when you travel?
- Have you ever lived abroad and needed English to communicate? How did you feel about your English? Did it change over time?
- Have you noticed any differences on how you feel when you speak with a native English speaker to someone who is not a native speaker?
- Does your fluency change depending on the context?
- When do you feel the most and least powerful speaking English?
- Do you think your identity changes when you switch to English? Reflect on social media too.
- When feeling a strong emotion (love, anger) do you ever use English? Do you swear in English? Does it have the same strength as in your L1?
- Would you say there are feelings you have in one language but not in another?
- Do you think you think/behave differently in English than in Catalan?
- Do you ever talk to yourself in English?
- Does English influence your other languages? Do you ever mix up words?
- Is your sense of humour the same in both languages?
- Do you value the languages differently?
- Do you feel positioned in two cultures? Has this changed over time?
- How has your identity changed (as an English Speaker) over the years? Have there been advantages/disadvantages?