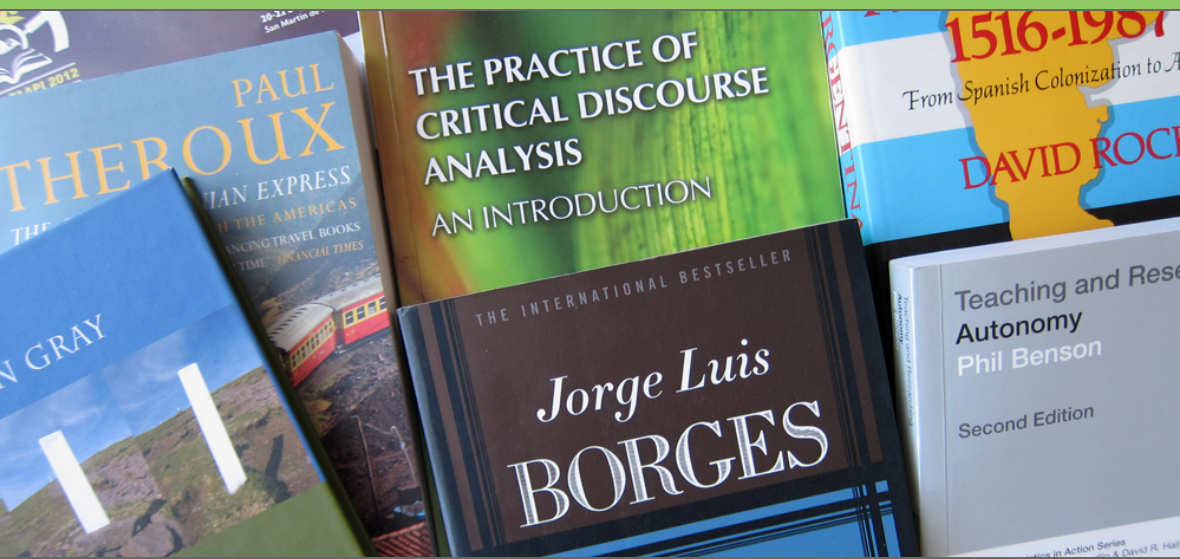


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Editorial introduction

After a successful launch in May 2013, we are now sharing the second issue of AJAL. According to Banfi (2013, p. 26), AJAL, as part of new forums in Argentina, “is an auspicious event that will hopefully mark the beginning of a new era in academic publications in our midst.”

Banfi’s (2013) contribution signals the need for networks which allow ELT professionals to share their practices and research. ELT in Argentina offers a wide range of conferences and workshops through which colleagues can disseminate their work. While these events should be encouraged under a critical view and high standards, we would like colleagues to write about their work. We feel that conferences and isolated talks could reach a wider audience if presenters shared their experience, research, and theoretical views in writing. In so doing, their contributions will not be only synchronous, but asynchronous, and, as it is the case of AJAL, will be part of an archive which will attest to the endeavours of individuals, research teams, and institutions.

Through AJAL we seek to co-construct quality professional networks. These networks may also provide professional development for novice and experienced teachers and trainers, and experts in our field. Blind reviewing is an excellent experience since it promotes critical perspectives, reflection, and an opportunity to learn to accept and benefit from criticism. Reviewers’ comments are usually constructive and their aim is to help authors improve the quality of their own work, highlight their strengths, and help us all see how readers may approach a contribution. It also helps achieve democratic processes since big names, whatever that means in our arena, receive the same treatment as neophytes in the world of academic writing and publishing.

This issue opens with an original contribution by Livia Carolina Ravelo who shares her semiotic analysis of *Maus*, a war comic by Art Spiegelman based on the Second World War and the Holocaust. Ravelo, however, asserts that in *Maus* “there are as many wars as anecdotes being retold.” The author includes an introduction to semiotic analysis and summarises the language and characteristics of comics, a genre, in our views, rather unexploited in language education (for an example see Liu, 2004, and Norton, 2003). Readers will find quotes in Spanish without a translation to English. This has not been arbitrary; it is an invitation to engage in code-switching and multilingualism. In addition, Ravelo’s contribution may be seen as a word of encouragement to those

colleagues interested in Literature and discourse analysis without the need to include direct classroom implications.

The second and third original articles illustrate the international interest AJAL is generating little by little. In this opportunity, Kenyan authors Alice Kiai and Geoffrey Maroko, cross the Atlantic to share with a wider readership their research interests and findings.

Based on her doctoral thesis, Alice Kiai examines teachers' perceptions of teachers' guides which are inseparable companions to textbooks. Her contributions start by offering a description of ELT in Kenya and the intricate publishing context of her study. Although it is different to other contexts, it may resonate with what we experience as practitioners and trainers when it comes to engaging with publishers and our views on teaching practices which seems to depend on coursebooks solely. Are teachers seen as part of a Fordian model to education? To what extent have we contributed to this view? Do teachers' guides and other published materials contribute to deskill teachers?

Geoffrey Maroko's article may be useful not only to trainers who lead academic writing seminars but also to all teachers who seek to share their interests with colleagues through the medium of writing or those who are in the process of writing their postgraduate dissertations. Moroko introduces us to different aspects of authorial stance and voice through the examination of six masters dissertations following a genre-based approach. Inspired by Moroko's contributions and based on our editing experience, we would like to argue that the teaching of a faceless passive voice has been overused and misused in some contexts in Argentina. It seems to be that the use of the pronoun "I" should not be found in our writings and therefore we can read authors who express their views through "It is believed that" when, in fact, a straightforward and supported "I believe that" is more accurate and logical.

The landscape of AJAL reaches Mexico through a contribution by González Quintero and Roux Rodríguez. These colleagues investigated rater variability in EFL writing. They approached this task from a mixed-methods research perspective and the participating raters were two EFL teachers from a small-size, private high school in northeast Mexico. The authors pose this question: "Are there significant differences between the scores assigned by raters to the same papers?" The answer to this question is an invitation to make room for introspective moments in our professional development so as to assess our conceptions of the writing process and language learning at large.

The last article in this issue takes us to examine initial language teacher education programmes by focusing on the Practicum. From a reflective perspective, Flavia Bonadeo shares her personal experience as a Practicum tutor at a tertiary institution in the province of Santa Fe (for a similar experience see Braun, Cheme Arriaga, & Monserrat, 2012). Driven by an interest in reducing trainees' anxiety and maximising collaboration,

reflection, and the first years of teaching, the author describes her explorations of setting up and using a virtual classroom with a group of future teachers. Bonadeo highlights the high participation rates of trainees and their willingness to learn in a virtual learning environment despite economic and technical constraints. This article illustrates how Web 2.0 tools have started to permeate language teacher education, and that if we wish teachers to incorporate new technologies in their practices, these technologies need to be explored and manipulated by trainers and trainees in their pre-service programmes.

In our materials review section, we are proud to include two book reviews. First, Gabriela Tavella reviews a collection of contributions edited by Estela Braun from Universidad Nacional de La Pampa in 2011. As the reviewer, puts it “[e]ach chapter is a thorough introduction to the topics included in this publication, an excellent starting point for further reading.” What we value about this book is that it is the product of Argentinian ELT professionals writing about their experience and expertise. And second, María Alejandra Soto reviews Wedell and Malderez’s book recently published. Their accounts and views illustrate a critical view of our field and a bottom-up approach to change.

If you are the author of books or any other materials aimed at teacher education and recently developed in Argentina, do not hesitate to contact us at ajaleditor@faapi.org.ar so that we review your work.

Finally, we would like to close our editorial by thanking our reviewers, whose insightful comments to authors and generosity helped us with our first volume: Liliana Anglada, Cristina Banfi, Anne Borsinger, Piera Carroli, Gloria Carrozo, Erika Chrobak, Neil Cowie, Suzanne Eggins, Gillian Lazar, Mario López-Barrios, Georgina Ma, Cristina Mayol, Mariza Méndez, Mariana Montaldo, Oscar Montoya, Mónica Pérsico, Luke Plonsky, Melina Porto, Gabriela Racca, María Alejandra Soto, Gabriela Tavella, Ema Ushioda, Yong Yi, Amanda Zamuner, and Sandra Zappa-Hollman.

Darío Luis Banegas and Raquel Lothringer

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Semiotic analysis of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: A war comic with an open ending

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Abstract

This paper proposes a semiotic analysis of some aspects of *Maus*, a war comic by Art Spiegelman, which is about Vladek Spiegelman's life (Art's father and survivor of the Jewish Holocaust) before, during and after Nazi Germany (1933-1945). This analysis explores the variation or continuity of the different signs which make up the language of comics, conceived as traces of varied recoverable discourses (Verón, 2004). For example, Spiegelman's characters are anthropomorphic creatures, with an animal head and a human body, whose hybrid identity gives rise to multiple readings, such as the need for a deconstruction of the victim's identity, the absence of any kind of sentimentalism and a new narrative about the classic confrontation "victim-murderer."

Keywords: Maus; war comic; semiotic analysis; the language of comics; recoverable discourses.

Resumen

Desde una perspectiva semiótica, este artículo se propone analizar algunos aspectos de la historieta de guerra *Maus* de Art Spiegelman, que es la historia de Vladek Spiegelman (padre del autor y sobreviviente del Holocausto judío) antes, durante y después de la Alemania nazi (1933-1945). Se indaga sobre la variación y continuidad de los signos del lenguaje historietístico que, leídos como huellas de discursos subyacentes (Verón, 2004), dan origen a interpretaciones diversas. Tal es el caso de los seres antropomórficos, con cabeza de animal y cuerpo humano, cuya identidad híbrida suscita múltiples lecturas, como la necesidad de deconstruir la identidad de la víctima, la ausencia de sentimentalismo, y se ensaya una nueva narrativa sobre la clásica confrontación "víctima-victimario."

Palabras clave: Maus; historieta de guerra; análisis semiótico; lenguaje historietístico; discursos subyacentes.

THE GENERAL OBJECTIVE of this paper is to present a semiotic analysis of some comic strips from the historical war comic *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman. Regarding the comic strips selected, they can be seen in the links provided in brackets for the sake of appreciating in detail the signs under analysis.

In this comic the characters are anthropomorphic creatures, with an animal head and a human body: the Jews are mice; the Germans are cats; the Americans are depicted as dogs, while the Poles are shown as pigs.

Spiegelman's work illustrates the life of his father, Vladek Spiegelman, who was a Holocaust survivor from Auschwitz. The reader is also allowed to discover the most intriguing and painful details of the author's life, his nightmare and trauma for having been the son of two survivors from Nazi Germany (1933-1945).

Methodology

The semiotic analysis was applied to the two volumes of *Maus*. However, only some comic strips—thought as having the greatest illustrative potential of the different constructs proposed—have been discussed in the present paper.

In this paper a sign is conceived as a conventionalised element which makes up the language of comics (such as the modulated or contour line, the presence or absence of colours, shadows, shots, etc.) as well as any other symbol which was either created or incorporated by the author (for example, the masks that some of the characters wear).

Regarding the methodological framework, Eliseo Verón's definition of *sign* as well as his notion of *operations* guided the analysis in question. The signs were explored in the corpus focusing on their continuity or variation, which eventually triggered the construction of varied hypotheses on the kinds of relationships that could exist between them.

Each sign is read as a trace for many valid discourses. What is more, the process of recognising signs in a specific semiosis allows us to infer which possible meanings could have been assigned to them in their instances of generation:

Una superficie textual está compuesta por marcas. Esas marcas pueden interpretarse como las huellas de operaciones discursivas subyacentes que remiten a las condiciones de producción del discurso y cuya economía de conjunto definió el marco de las lecturas posibles, el marco de los efectos de sentido de ese discurso. De modo que las operaciones mismas no son visibles en la superficie textual: deben reconstruirse (o postularse) partiendo de las marcas de la superficie. (Verón, 2004a, p.51)

In *La semiosis social* Verón (2004b) argues that in any stretch of discourse, the instances of production and recognition of the signs in a semiosis give rise to two differentiated kinds of grammar, known as grammars of production (when constructing a text) and grammars of recognition (when reading a text). These grammars assign meanings to the signs that make up the semiosis:

La semiosis está a ambos lados de la distinción: tanto las condiciones productivas cuanto los objetos significantes que nos proponemos analizar contienen sentidos. (...) Entre las condiciones productivas de un discurso hay siempre otros discursos. Las relaciones de los discursos con sus condiciones de producción por una parte, y con sus condiciones de reconocimiento por la otra, deben poder representarse en forma sistemática; debemos tener en cuenta reglas de generación y reglas de lectura: en el primer caso hablamos de gramáticas de producción y en el segundo, de gramáticas de reconocimiento. (p. 129)

The notion of *operations*, defined by Verón (2004a, pp. 51-52) as a methodological concept, establishes the existing relationship between discourse and its social and historical conditions. As social conditions leave visible marks on the discursive surface, these operations may be reconstructed.

The basic model for an operation is made up of three components: the *operator* (or mark), the *operating element* (the sign that refers to the operator) and the relationship that is held between these two, for example, intertextuality, cataphoric and anaphoric reference, etc.

The Language and Characteristics of Comics

Reading comics might allow the readers to be completely absorbed in their reading and their imagination can be carried away even against their will. The power of comics relies on the fact that they are entertaining, and their characters are those heroes and heroines we might easily feel identified with. Besides, the power of words and images creates a non-conventional atmosphere which helps us read in a pleasant and unique way.

When we read comics, the words and the images are inter-related and complement each other in such a way that we can even read texts through images. Words might appear as part of a narration or inside *balloons*, when the characters are speaking, and also inside *clouds*, when they are thinking about something. Steimberg (1977, p.24) claims that words are, in some cases, replaced by simplified mental and conventionalised images, such as a light bulb to indicate a brilliant idea or little stars which denote pain, among others. What is more, the non-conventionalised image allows the reader to make

different kinds of interpretations since no explicit message is being stated. Consequently, the power of the image is capable of connoting as many messages as readers are able to read.

Eco (2005) claims that the comic is an exponent of mass culture, which establishes its own semantics. In other words, comics have specific signs or conventions which constitute a language of their own. Speech balloons and boxes are used to indicate dialogue and to impart establishing information, while panels, layout, gutters and zip ribbons can help indicate the flow of the story. The use of text, ambiguity, symbolism, design, iconography, literary technique, and other stylistic elements of art help build a subtext of meanings or semantics.

Among the conventions and signs that make up the language of comics, we find kinds of shots, framing, and angles, the line, the presence or absence of color, among other signs which are also shared by other types of genres or languages, such as the language of television, the cinema, and graphic language (Barbieri, 1993).

Regarding types of shots, the extreme wide shot (EWS) is the one in which the view is so far from the subject that he is not visible. In the very wide shot (VWS) the subject, even if visible, is not the focus itself since the emphasis relies on placing him in a certain environment. The wide shot (WS) shows a subject who takes up the full frame, contrary to the mid shot (MS), which shows some part of him in more detail while still giving an impression of the whole subject. Another shot which allows us to highlight details is the close-up, in which a certain feature or part of the subject takes up the whole frame. The extreme close up is one that shows extreme details. The cut-in shows in detail some part of the subject, except his face.

Concerning angles (elements taken from the language of the cinema which facilitate the reading of comic squares), there are great varieties, which help build an interesting, peculiar perspective on the subject that is being framed. In addition, the angle selected can allow the reader or the audience (television, cinema) to make different hypotheses about what is being depicted. The common types of angles are: the normal angle, high camera angle, low camera angle, canted angle (on a slant), reverse angle, subjective camera angle (from the point of view of the subject; the way the subject sees things), and objective camera angle (the way an objective party or outsider is supposed to see things). Angles that look up or down at the object that is being framed (instead of being on the same level) make up the so-called tilt shots, which are more dramatic than straight-angle shots.

A downward tilt shot is used to observe action over a large area or to create a psychological impression of inferiority or weakness. Conversely, an upward tilt shot lends an impression of superiority, awe, or size.

Barbieri (1993, p.27) also provides useful information about the different kinds of

lines that might be found in any comic strip, which have different kinds of meaning. The line itself can represent an object, for example, a cord or the arm of a person in a childlike depiction of a human silhouette. It can also be the contour of an object, which is the case of a circle that represents a ball. The line can be either pure or modulated. The first type is used to draw and delimit objects. Consequently, it also allows us to distinguish one object from another. The modulated line adds an extra meaning compared to the pure one. For example, the thin line that delineates the pages of a book reminds us that they are made of paper. The thick line that composes the edge of a table tells us about its thickness and inclination. What is more, the modulated line can also let the reader visualize different textures, materials, shadows and illumination. Finally, the presence and absence of colour will also add several meanings which should be interpreted in each particular comic.

Comics as a profitable and valid genre in the transmission of history

Even though comic strips are said to narrate and represent fiction, they can also be a valid genre in the transmission of real stories, which is the case with the so-called historical comics.

In his article *La trama histórica y el problema de la verdad en la representación histórica* (Historical emplotment and the problem of truth in historical representation), Hayden White (2003, p.193) claims that in traditional historical discourse there is a crucial difference between the interpretation of historical facts and what is being narrated about them. This difference is based on the existence of a real discourse (as opposed to a fictional one) and a true discourse (contrary to a false one). All interpretations are understood as comments about events, whereas any historical narration is presumed to be inherent to the facts themselves. In other words, historical narrations are claimed to be real as they are based on critical study and analysis of the historical data derived from the facts.

So, is it possible to transmit history through a genre that presupposes the existence of fiction? (which is the case of comic strips) and, if so, will this narration be as valid as any other historical narration?

In *Hecho y figuración en el discurso histórico* (Fact and figuration of historical discourse), Hayden White (2003, p. 57) states that the Jewish Holocaust (1941-1945), for example, can be narrated through any kind of genre, including comedy and parody. However, when considering moral and ethical criteria, the selection of certain genres to represent some historical facts might be found inappropriate by the audience, which is exactly what happened to *Maus* when this first appeared in 1986. There were unpleasant repercussions from Jewish Diasporists, such as Israelis and Poles (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 125). What is more, the philosopher reminds us that any representation of the Holocaust

is not the Holocaust itself.

The philosopher's thought might provide a tentative answer: It is indeed possible for the comic to represent historical facts as its representation will be as valid as any other which is derived from a *serious* genre.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a revolutionary war comic on the Jewish Holocaust

Art Spiegelman was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1948. His parents were Polish Jews who had survived Auschwitz. Art was raised in the United States and went to the Academy of Arts University in San Francisco. Because of deep depression he was hospitalised and, shortly after he was released, his mother, Anya, committed suicide. His passion for comics allowed him to undergo some sort of catharsis and he created some comics which were eventually compiled in *Breakdowns* (1977). Nonetheless, he would strike an emotional balance in *Maus*, a masterpiece which reveals his own truth and perception of facts in a more objective way.

Maus is the story of Vladek Spiegelman, Art's father and survivor of Auschwitz. Pablo de Santis (1998, p. 46) defines it in a simple, clear way: '*Maus* is not just the narration of a survivor but the way in which the survivor's son understands his father's story and is able to live with it.' Spiegelman worked on his piece for more than ten years, and in 1992 it became the first comic book to win a Pulitzer Prize Special Award under the category non-fiction. He is considered a pioneer in representing the Jewish Holocaust in a narrative and visual genre such as the comic.

Art Spiegelman began working on *Maus* at the beginning of the '70s in New York. At that time Vladek was not keen on the idea of talking with his son about his past life and his wife's death since he believed that in order to survive it seems to be necessary to forget. As a consequence, this comic started with a fight between a father and son, a metaphorical war for the existence of some narration about the Holocaust. After harsh insistence, Vladek finally agrees on having those conversations which would eventually be transcribed into the form of words and images.

Maus was first published in an underground magazine called *Funny Animals* in 1972. Then it also appeared sporadically in some other magazines until the author founded *Raw* in 1980, where this historical comic became popular. Sometime later *Maus* was edited as a complete story in two volumes. The first, *Maus. A survivor's tale. My father bleeds history* (1986) and the second, *Maus, a survivor's tale. And here my troubles began* (1991). As mentioned earlier, the peculiarity of this comic is that the characters are anthropomorphic creatures, with a human body and the head of an animal. Each nationality or ethnicity is represented by an animal: Jews are depicted as mice; Germans as cats; Americans are represented by dogs. The Poles are pictured as pigs and the French, as frogs.

Spiegelman is not only the author but also the intratextual narrator and co-protagonist of *Maus*. In order to write and design the storyline, Art records long conversations with his father in Lego Queens and also in their summer house in the Catskills Mountains. These conversations, full of flashbacks, some memory slips and also interruptions are found intact in the two volumes; even though they are not about the Jewish Holocaust, they allow the reader to gain knowledge about the characters' feelings, thoughts and trauma.

These conversations help also to identify three main narrative frames which get intertwined in a natural way: the first one is the author's narrative frame (for example, when Art transcribes the tapes); the second, the frame story (when Art interviews his father and records their conversations) and the third is a story within the story, which depicts Vladek's life in the Nazi Germany.

Analysis Presentation

Implications of Spiegelman's animal allegory

Although Spiegelman resorts to an animal allegory to design his characters, the plot is narrated in a realistic way. Not only do the characters speak like human beings but they also have human bodies, and walk, feel and think as if they were human. Huyssen (2002, p. 131.) claims that in this way some mimetic approach to trauma is generated as the animal representation prevents sentimentalism or devastating compassion on the reader's part.

It is worth mentioning that, despite the fact that the characters are hybrid, they do not identify themselves with their animal identity. This is clearly seen when Vladek and his wife, Anja, are hiding in a basement and she, being a mouse, gets scared because of a rat (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 147). Neither do the Germans recognise themselves as cats. For example, the hybrid cats use dogs when they are searching Jews and these dogs do not attack them, as it would naturally happen if they were real cats (Ibid., p. 111).

Each representation illustrates the social role of each ethnicity under the Nazi domain. The choice of a mouse to stand for a Jew seems to be accurate for it depicts how the Jews were forced to behave and the way they were conceived by Hitler. Jews were forced to hide in basements, in sewers; they ate rotten food if they managed to eat anything; they were sent to ghettos, where they were made to live under unhealthy, inhumane conditions; they were used as if they had been rats by Josef Mengele, German SS officer and physician in the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz.

There are some strips in which the Jews are drawn with a tail, which highlights the animal identity. However, when tragic events are depicted, such as death, torture, or an instance of *selection* (Jews were made to line up; the selection consisted of choosing the healthiest ones to work in camps) the Jewish characters do not have a tail. On the

contrary, their naked bodies show human genitals, a sign which reminds us that the victims are human. The suffering is experienced by human beings, not by the supposed inferior race that Hitler tried to impose through his racial laws. As a consequence, it could be inferred that when tragedy is portrayed, the characters are drawn in such a way that the human condition is always highlighted. (http://wilsonknut.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/maus_2_024.jpg).

In one escape situation, a wide shot shows Anja and Vladek running away from the Gestapo (<http://sites.psu.edu/gongol30s/files/2012/09/maus1.jpeg>). Both characters are wearing a pig mask, since they want to pretend they are Polish, so as not to be caught and eventually sent to a concentration or work camp. Despite their effort to survive, their chances are very slim because Anja looks like a Jew due to her Semitic features; in Vladek's words: "I was a little safe. I had a coat and boots, so like a Gestapo wore when he was not in service, but Anja—her appearance—you could see more easy she was Jewish." (Ibid., p.136).

In this instance, Anja is drawn with a very long, J-shaped and white tail, which makes it noticeable in the darkness of the streets depicted. This sign may be read as the *punctum* of the square (Barthes, 2005, p. 59). Her tail seems to be a sign which gives away the Jewish condition of the protagonist in the Nazi era, a period when the Jews were conceived as an inferior race, and compared to rats or other filthy vermin. It may also be stated that Vladek's narration is clearly illustrated by the tail, which will immediately catch the reader's attention because of its colour and size. In addition, the same sign that connotes the character's Jewish condition is also the one that reminds us that Anja is a mouse in Spiegelman's world.

In conclusion, when the characters are behaving like mice, the animal identity is reinforced by the presence of some specific signs.

Regarding other social groups, the Poles are represented as pigs, probably because the pig is *non-kosher* (i.e. unclean) for Jews. In other words, the Torah forbids the consumption of this animal.

Female Poles are drawn as strong, vigorous pigs, always scared of the Gestapo and SS German officers. They do appear as secondary characters in the comic strips about Auschwitz-Birkenau (also known as Auschwitz II, the largest concentration and extermination camp in Poland), where the Polish women were hired as *kapos* (security guards).

Following the domination chain of cats and mice, the Americans are drawn as dogs. Americans were portrayed as the means of salvation for Jews. The comic strips in which they appear show them rescuing survivors from the concentration camps.

In only one instance, a French victim appears in a concentration camp. The animal chosen was a frog, probably because *frog* is a derogative term to refer to the French and

would remind the reader of all the years of anti-Semitism in France.

In the background of three scenes, some other animals such as a rabbit or a deer appear, being almost invisible to the eye when scanning the comic squares for the first time. Nevertheless, their presence somehow reminds us that Jews were not the only victims sent to concentration or work camps. Homosexuals, prostitutes, political prisoners and the disabled were also murdered. These apparent imperceptible signs increase the powerful effect of the documentary account on the Shoah (Hebrew term for Jewish Holocaust).

In *Metamaus* (2011), Spiegelman explains that “the cats and mice just came as a set, part of all the Tom and Jerry comics and cartoons that I grew up with” (p. 118). On the issue of the cat/mouse metaphor, the cartoonist adds “I liked working with a metaphor that didn’t work as an endorsement of Nazi ideology, or as an implicit plea for sympathy, like, Aw, lookit the cute defenseless little mouse.’ (...) but I didn’t put the mice necessarily at the total biological disadvantage that the metaphor otherwise implies.” (p. 118).

Regarding the choice of the pig to represent the Poles, Spiegelman asserts that his metaphor was somehow able to acknowledge his father’s opinion of Poles as a group:

(...) The Slavic races, including the Poles, were not meant to be exterminated like the Jews but rather worked to death. They were slated to be the master races’s work force of slaves. In my bestiary, pigs on a farm are used for meat. You raise them, you kill them, you eat them. If you have mice or rats on the farm, there’s only one thing to do which is kill them before they eat all your grain. So my metaphor was somehow acknowledging my father’s dubious opinion of Poles as a group. (Ibid., p. 121)

I’m just making a book that uses Hitler’s pejorative attitudes against themselves. (...) And considering the bad relations between Poles and Jews for the last few hundred years in Poland, it seemed right to use a non-Kosher animal. (Ibid., p. 125)

In his latest book, Art Spiegelman does not provide arguments about other species selected for his animal metaphor. However, even if it may be thought-provoking to know the author’s explanations, the reader is not obliged to accept them. Following Verón’s methodological framework, the configuration of signs in their instances of production presupposes the designation of certain meanings which, by no means, implies that the same meanings should be recovered in the instances of recognition.

Why choose anthropomorphic creatures to represent the protagonists? By choosing

animals, there is a denial of the human condition; all the social groups were forced, due to historical variables, to behave as if they were animals, giving place to an apparently never-ending form of domination. Humanity was forbidden, there was no room for it in the Third Reich. However, as illustrated in the analysis, the author is clever enough to highlight either the human condition or the animal identity of the hybrid creatures depending on what kind of situation is being portrayed, by including some specific signs in his strips.

This denial of the human condition is highly intertwined with the need to dehumanize the victims and to deprive them of their identity, to the extent that in Auschwitz the victims were tattooed with an identification number on their left forearm. Jews were killed as if they had been vermin, such as rats, fleas or roaches. Extermination was carried out by means of Zyklon B¹, a pesticide used in all extermination camps², originally tested on Russian prisoners of war.

Meanings of *the mask*

In some specific cases, as in the one previously described, the characters cover their face with a mask. This mask is hiding their real Jewish identity, which would only make them die.

In *Mein Kampf*, a book presumably written by Adolf Hitler in 1924, when he was imprisoned in Landsberg, the Führer develops in detail the notion of mask; he argues that Jews live in disguise, pretending to be what, in fact, they are not. He claims that once their mask falls down what is actually seen is simply a Jew. Consequently, Germans need to be aware of their ability to manipulate reality and to deceive others.

A Jew is and remains a parasite, a sponger who, like a pernicious bacillus, spreads over wider and wider areas as some favourable area attracts him. The effect produced by his presence is also like that of the vampire; for wherever he establishes himself, the people who grant him hospitality are bound to be bled to death sooner or later. Thus the Jew has at all times lived in States that have belonged to other races and within the organization of those States he had formed a State of his own, which is, however, hidden behind the mask of a 'religious community', as long as external circumstances do not make it advisable for this community to declare its true nature. As soon as the Jew feels himself sufficiently established in his position to be able to hold it without a disguise, he lifts the mask and suddenly appears in the character which so many did not formerly believe or wish to see: namely that of the Jew. (Hitler, 1939, p.238)

The life which the Jew lives as a parasite thriving on the substance of other nations and States has resulted in developing that specific character which Schopenhauer once described when he spoke of the Jew as ‘The Great Master of Lies’. The kind of existence which he leads forces the Jew to the systematic use of falsehood, just as naturally as the inhabitants of northern climates are forced to wear warm clothes. (Ibid. p. 238)

This metaphorical use of the mask is also seen in Spiegelman’s work, a sign which might connote different kinds of meanings.

In the second volume of *Maus*, Art can be seen lying on his desk (Spiegelman, 1991, p.41). (<http://theperiodicfable.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/art-spiegelman-maus1.jpg>). This image shows the first narrative frame, the author’s time, the nineties. He feels defeated despite the fact that *Maus* has become a real success worldwide and has been translated into more than fifteen foreign languages. In this square, Art has a human face covered by a mouse mask. This mask is a link to Auschwitz, to the concentration camp where his father has survived. He has never been there; however, he is tied to the past. This sign, the mask, takes the reader to another narrative frame, the story within the story, which takes place during the Nazi Germany.

This use of the mask may show not only some conflict regarding the construction of Art’s own identity, but also a link to a past from which it seems to be impossible to recover and survive.

This hypothesis about this inevitable link to the past is supported by the presence of some other signs in the square, such as the view of the concentration camp from the window, the flies (only found in seventeen squares and always surrounding rotten corpses) and the pile of corpses on the floor.

Art Spiegelman’s trauma has made him take up therapy sessions. His therapist, Pavel, is also a Holocaust survivor who is always depicted with a human face and a mouse mask. There is no reason to wear such a mask. Hitler lost his war; he has already been rescued. Even if for different reasons, both the analyst and patient seem to be unable to solve the same key conflict: the fact of being still linked to Auschwitz, for having either been deported to Auschwitz or having been a listener to this traumatic event.

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his functions as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place. (Laub, 1992, p.222)

The depiction of the theory of the Aryan race in Spiegelman's images

In the Nazi period, Hitler wanted to impose the theory of the Aryan race, which would allow for an accurate distinction of pure or Aryan Germans, whose genealogy trees did not have any Jewish ancestors.

In his article *The Nazi ideology and its roots*, Frankel (2000, p. 29) develops Hitler's theory of the Aryan blood. Having some Jewish origin implied being impure, having contaminated blood. A real German was not supposed to have Jewish blood.

Germans were expected to take care of their health and physical appearance, since their main objective was to marry only Aryan people to procreate in order to help build an Aryan nation.

According to Peter Adam (1992, p.11), the art of the third Reich portrayed the values of blood and soil (in German, *Blut und Boden*), and ideology which focuses on ethnicity and homeland, establishing a relationship between the individual's Aryan ancestry and their nation, cultivating the values of rural life.

Paintings and sculptures were said to be realistic and the images of men and women were heavily stereotyped. The commonest image was that of the nude men, which highlighted the ideal stereotype of the Aryan race (beauty, health and aesthetics). Highly recognised artists were Adolf Siegler (painter), Josef Thorak and Arno Breker (sculptors).

Modern music was disregarded; on the contrary, classical German music was the only choice, such as Richard Wagner and Hans Pfitzner's.

Spiegelman's cats are well-built, with an angular face, always wearing their military uniform, which would guarantee their pure ancestry since a German officer's roots were thoroughly analysed before serving as German officers.

The cover of Chapter 3 *Prisoners of War* (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 41) (http://www.fultonschools.org/teacher/cooney/Maus_files/POW.JPG) shows two German officers. Both cats could be clearly confused with human characters, especially the one which does not have whiskers. What is more, this human cat is the one who wears the swastika on his arm, a symbol which would remind Nazis "to be good". Besides, it may be inferred that this cat depicts the purest Aryan stereotype since his eyes are highlighted in white, probably representing light eyes. This is not the case in other depictions of cats.

In *Maus*, the crucial role of nationality in the Nazi Germany is also treated. In the comic only one German cat is not depicted as Aryan (Spiegelman, 1991, p. 50), his facial complexion highlights his presumably impure blood. This cat's face truly shows an animal in despair for he is a prisoner in a concentration camp despite having been born in Germany. During their conversation, Art asks his father if the prisoner in question was really a German. Vladek simply explains that there were also German prisoners and that this prisoner for the Germans was Jewish:

Art: “Was he REALLY a German?”

Vladek: “Who knows...it WAS German prisoners also...but for the Germans this guy was Jewish (*sic*)” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maus_volume_2_page_50_panels_3-4.png).

In this exchange, the term *German* becomes controversial. In the Nazi era being a German implied being Aryan, not having any suspected Jewish roots. Jews would never be considered Germans in spite of having been born in Germany and despite the fact they have never been deprived of their German citizenship. They would even keep their citizenship when the so-called Nuremberg laws came into force in 1938.

In Art’s exchange the word *really* emphasizes the existence of different types of Germans: the Aryans on the one hand, and the Germans who would have some Jewish ancestors and, as a consequence, be regarded as Jews.

In Spiegelman’s world there are no female cats. Most of the storyline refers back to Auschwitz and most of the events illustrated took place in concentration camps. This absence is coherent with the historical setting since Aryan women would never approach any concentration camp; their role was to take care of their families and to give birth to Aryan children. The women who were in concentration or work camps were female guards, for example, Irma Grese and María Mandel. These two women, famous because of their cruelty and hatred, did not fit into the social stereotypes imposed in Nazi Germany, to the extent they were conceived as non-women. Consequently, they could work in the camps.

One should not assume, as is often done, that Nazi sexism concerned only superior women and Nazi racism concerned only inferior women. Both Nazi racism and sexism concerned all women, the inferior as well as the superior. The “birth achievement” demanded of acceptable women was calculated carefully according to the numbers of those who were not to give birth. And the strongest pressure on such acceptable women to procreate, to create an orderly household for husband and children, and to accept dependency on the breadwinner perhaps came not so much from the continuous positive propaganda about “valuable motherhood,” but precisely from its opposite: the negative propaganda and policy that barred unwelcome, poor, and deviant women from procreation and marriage and labeled either disorderly women or single women with too many children inferior. Thus, racism could be used, and was used, to impose sexism in the form of increased unwaged housework on superior women (Bock, 1993, p. 163).

On the other hand, women who became or were to become targets of negative race hygiene tended also to be those who did not accept, could not accept, or were not supposed to accept the Nazi view of female housework, whose main features can be traced back to the late eighteenth century. Sexism, which imposed economic dependency on superior

married women, could be used, and was used, to implement racism by excluding many women from the relative benefits granted to desirable mothers and children and forcing them to accept the lowest jobs in the labor-market hierarchy in order to survive. (...) Racist-sexist discourses of many kinds have portrayed socially, sexually, or ethnically alien women as non-women, and thus as threatening to the norms for all other women (Ibid., p.164).

Conclusion

Art Spiegelman has represented in an original and valid way the Jewish Holocaust (1941-1945), contributing with a legitimate piece to the so-called Jewish Holocaust literature.

This comic, easily recognised by its allegorical component, might be said to expose the atrocities committed by the Nazis and the deep suffering of their victims by resorting to an animal allegory, which describes how the social groups were forced to behave, and the consequences of their behaviour. However, it is more than that. To start with, the choice of animals denies the apparent impossibility of portraying the Jewish Holocaust since Spiegelman's creatures are not human and find no referent in the world of reality, since no creature with an animal head belongs to this world.

We encounter a special use of comics, a genre which originally used to presuppose the existence of fiction, and can be used to narrate real stories through words and visual elements triggering an innumerable number of readings, emotions and thoughts. Consequently, *Maus* validates this special use of comics by transmitting an exemplary memory (Todorov, 1995) which contributes to the collective memory of the Jewish people in the first place and also to humanity.

Spiegelman manages to transmit his father's memory by including specific signs which might offer multiple interpretations and by making them prevail when necessary, combining elements whose illustrative power seems to be natural, obvious, and intrinsic to the masterpiece itself. Furthermore, the author resorts to the inclusion of original documents to validate the realistic environment pictured in every scene, such as family photographs, and his own comic *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, which was created in 1972 as some kind of autobiography, where Spiegelman is seen wearing the stripped uniform of the concentration camp and eventually taken to a mental hospital. Considering what has been mentioned, *Maus* IS a document in itself.

As an exemplary memory transmitter, this comic narrates Vladek's story and allows readers to reflect on the Jewish Holocaust. Its mimetic approach as well as its allegorical component arouse some possible unprejudiced understanding of the Shoah and the Nazi period.

Lack of resentment will eventually result in understanding (not necessarily

acceptance), a requirement to learn from what once happened so as to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future, and to live in the present without being anchored in the past. Art Spiegelman's mouse mask does not allow him to transcend. He cannot move; he cannot survive his trauma. The same seems to be true for Art's therapist, Pavel.

Spiegelman's work is an invitation to some critical thinking, which breaks the typical confrontation *victim-murderer*. All the protagonists were victims of one of the cruelest historical periods in the history of humanity. The Jewish Holocaust has not only affected the Jewish community as a whole but also the Germans who did not share the views of the perpetrators of such atrocity.

The choice of animals which have been drawn with a few strokes, and the absence of morbid drawings might prevent the reader from experiencing anger, hatred, or compassion. Consequently, a more objective reading may arise. Spiegelman's images seem to have a soothing effect or impact on the reader's emotions when compared to authentic photographs of survivors, for example.

Maus is a war comic. A war comic is a special genre which emerged and gained popularity after World War II (1939-1945). Which war does Spiegelman's comic depict? World War II? The Nazis against the Jews? The ceaseless conflict between Art Spiegelman and his father for having been unable to understand each other? Vladek's war with himself for not wanting to talk about the Holocaust? Art's inner war for being tied to the atrocities of the past? In *Maus* there are as many wars as anecdotes being retold.

Spiegelman's last square shows the marble slab of his parents. This last square is not framed, the slab imposes itself and the lack of frame demands an open ending. Vladek and Anja are dead but their death does not stop their memory, which will live on in their descendants and also in this war comic with an open ending.

Notes

1. For more information on Zyklon B, resort to http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206400.pdf.
2. For more information on concentration and extermination camps, read http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/05/death_camps.asp.

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Am I a robot? English language teachers on teachers' guides

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Abstract

Teachers' Guides were part of a wider textbook study that I carried out in Kenya (2008-2012), where both Students' and Teachers' Books undergo vetting for Ministerial approval. While this endorsement is important, there is, equally, a need to explore the responses to materials from the perspective of the end-users of the product. The aim of this article is to examine teachers' views on Teachers' Guides for secondary school English in Kenya, where English is a Second Language. Face-to-face teacher interviews (2010) provided more nuanced data than a preliminary survey questionnaire (2009), indicating rare or selective use of guidebooks for various reasons. Teacher insights into guidebooks are potentially useful to other teachers, teacher trainers, materials developers and regulatory bodies.

Keywords: materials development; textbooks; teacher development; teachers' guides; textbook policy.

Resumen

Dentro de un estudio sobre el uso de libros de texto en Kenia (2008-2012), las guías para docentes fueron una parte del mismo. En Kenia, los libros para los estudiantes y las guías para docentes deben ser aprobados ministerialmente. Mientras que este apoyo es importante, también es importante explorar la evaluación de aquellos que emplean dichos materiales. El objetivo de este artículo es examinar las miradas de los docentes de inglés sobre las guías docentes para la escuela secundaria en Kenia, donde el inglés es una segunda lengua. Las entrevistas realizadas arrojan el uso selectivo o bajo de las guías para docentes debido a varias razones aquí discutidas. Las opiniones de los docentes son relevantes para otros colegas, formadores, autores de materiales, y entes reguladores.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de materiales didácticos; libros de texto; guías para docentes; regulación de libros de texto.

...you are supposed to be acting like a robot, and I think that is not teaching... maybe it should be written in such a way that it gives the teacher the freedom to set the agenda himself, based on whatever he is going to teach.
(T11 on Teachers' Guides)

THESE WERE MEMORABLE words spoken by a secondary school teacher of English in Kenya in 2010. I elicited teachers' views on Teachers' Guides as part of a wider textbook study that responded to the call for textbook research to go beyond an examination of the materials alone (Johnsen, 1993; Harwood, 2010). Teachers' Guides were part of this wider exploration that encompassed views on textbooks from curriculum developers, publishers, authors, teachers and learners. My findings prompted me to conceptualise this paper primarily because my perceptions about the guidebooks, which were initially shaped by data from a preliminary questionnaire completed by teachers (2009), underwent a shift and gained in depth and complexity in the course of my main study (2010). The interview data generated from teachers in 2010 showed that the Teacher's Guide proved to be a far less clear-cut subject than the written responses from questionnaires had led me to expect.

In this paper, I begin by providing a background to the status of English in Kenya and an overview of the educational publishing context within which the Teachers' Guides under study were developed. Next, I examine the relevant literature on Teacher's Guides and elaborate upon the methodology adopted in the study. I then discuss the findings pertaining to Teachers' Guides, and, finally, I conclude with insights gained on the subject arising from teacher-responses in this study.

Background

In this section, I provide a brief background of English in education in Kenya, and an overview of the educational publishing context within which the Teachers' Guides in question were produced and are being used.

Status of English in Kenya

Kenya, a former British colony (1920-1963), has now existed as an independent country for 50 years. In this culturally and linguistically diverse nation of sixty-nine languages (Lewis, 2009), there are two official languages: Kiswahili, a lingua franca within the Eastern African region, and English. Both are compulsory subjects within the school system; however, English is the medium of instruction in schools from Class 4 (around age 9), following mother-tongue instruction in the formative years. As Muthwii (2002) reports, the language policy has been interpreted by stakeholders in view of their own understanding of it, the resources at their disposal, and their beliefs about what is best

for their learners within the wider socio-educational context.

It is also worth noting that in a linguistically heterogeneous nation, such a policy poses the challenge of skewing resources towards development of English language materials, and inequity. Children in urban areas and those of higher socio-economic status or of ethnically mixed backgrounds may have earlier and greater access to English in a variety of domains compared to their counterparts from relatively homogeneous areas and/or of lower socio-economic status. Nonetheless, English plays a major role in education, for official purposes and as a vehicle for general upward mobility. In the secondary school English syllabus, English is described as the pre-eminent language of international communication, whose importance cannot be overemphasized (KIE, 2002).

The Educational Publishing Context of the Study

Multinationals and local companies, which include ex-and existing parastatals¹, university presses and church presses, among other stakeholders (The World Bank, 2008) are part of the publishing scene in many Anglophone African countries. Educational publishing in Kenya was initially marked by domination of foreign (British) publishing houses in the pre-and early post-colonial years. While stakeholders rightly sought to move towards the development of local and locally relevant materials in the early post-independence years, the procedures that were put in place resulted in state dominance through parastatal publishers, which did not promote a vibrant and competitive educational publishing environment (Chakava, 1992; Muita, 1998; Pontefract & Were, 2000; Rotich, 2000, 2004).

Chakava (1992) provides a brief history of the shift towards state monopoly in the mid-1980s, a period that marked the onset of the current education system² and the entrenchment of textbook development and supply procedures that were skewed in favour of parastatal publishing houses. The curriculum development body, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), would form subject panels, develop materials and publish them through parastatal publishing houses for supply to public schools, leaving little room for local private and multinational publishers.

In the last decade or so, textbook procurement and supply in Kenya has been undergoing market liberalization, resulting in new opportunities and challenges in a globalizing world. Among several factors associated with globalization cited by Gray (2007) are the deregulatory policies of economic neoliberalism and marketization of areas of life that were previously state preserves. Indeed, Stridsman (1999) notes that the decreasing role of state and parastatal organisations in production processes and the devolution of responsibility for education from central to regional and local levels are two trends that have been causing a shift in materials design programmes from state to

commercial and from single to multiple textbook systems in Africa.

In Kenya, these trends resulted in the national textbook policy on publishing, procurement and supply (MOEHRD, 1998). Fuelled by global trends, donor conditions, and private sector pressure, the 1998 textbook policy signalled the beginning of what was intended to be a more level playing field for all stakeholders. It outlined the background of textbook supply, spelt out the vision of textbook development, procurement and supply, provided policy guidelines, advised on textbook management, and promoted liberalization and commercialization of the book trade (MOEHRD, 1998; Muita, 1998; Pontrefract & Were, 2000; Rotich, 2000).

Publishers are now required to meet various content and technical requirements during submission of manuscripts for vetting to the curriculum development body (KIE), which organises evaluation of materials. The textbooks that score highest are recommended to the Ministerial Textbook Vetting Committee (MTVC) for award of approved status. A great deal of publishing occurred in the four-year period following the 2002 curriculum review. It was during this period that the materials under study were developed. Under the textbook policy, a maximum of six textbooks per subject could be approved for schools, and public schools were expected to make their choices from the approved list.

Positively, this policy intended to promote price rationalization in a more liberal market, promote development of higher quality materials and enhance a reading culture. Negatively, encoded within it were the dangers associated with economic neoliberalism. For instance, Simam and Rotich (2009) observe that the high cost of submission of manuscripts for vetting and approval can be detrimental to local publishers who may not have as strong a financial base as multinational publishers. This, then, describes the existing educational publishing context, the onset of which resulted in the materials discussed in this paper.

The Place of Teachers' Guides within the Textbook Policy

The MoE, through their annual list of approved books for schools, provides easily accessible guidelines to schools on selecting textbooks for their learners. Rotich and Musakali (2005) critically examine the process of evaluation and selection of textbooks for approval and make some recommendations for improvement. They explain that manuscript submissions for vetting must be accompanied by Teachers' Guides, which are evaluated against the following criteria:

- Diagnostic assessment exercises
- Provision of additional content for the teacher
- Activities to support multi-ability learning

- Suggestions to use low-cost or no-cost materials
- Clarity of writing and presentation of text
- Clear cross-referencing to the textbook
- Clear methodology and support for pupils with special learning difficulties.

One of my research participants from the curriculum development body (KIE) clarified that if the Teachers' Guide does not pass at the evaluation stage, then the entire submission fails. In other words, there cannot exist a scenario where the Students' Book has been approved without the accompanying Teachers' Guide having successfully met the evaluation criteria. These regulations ostensibly propel publishers to strive to develop quality Students' Books and Teachers' Guides.

Literature Review

Citing previous research by Coleman (1985) and Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991), Hemsley (1997) acknowledges that literature with a specific focus on Teacher's Guides is scanty. In exploring existing perspectives, I established three main themes: the functions of Teachers' Guides, availability and use of guides, and evaluation criteria.

Functions of Teachers' Guides

Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) explore five functions of Teachers' Guides:

- To state the purpose of the teaching material and their underlying methodological rationale
- To encourage the development of teaching skills
- To provide guidelines on how to use the materials, and on the course as a whole
- To demonstrate practical use of the materials
- To offer guidelines on the linguistic and cultural information required for their effective use.

The important role of Teachers' Guides in professional development is generally not disputed, and several researchers have commented on what this entails (Coleman, 1985; Loewenberg Ball & Cohen, 1996; McGrath, 2002; Nunan & Lamb 1996). Teachers' Guides not only potentially strengthen content knowledge, provide extra content, and raise awareness on new approaches to teaching, but also promote reflective practice, thereby providing an impetus for positive change. Coleman (1985), however, points out that there is a dearth of information on the attitudes of non-native speaker teachers

of English towards textbooks and Teachers' Guides. More recently, other researchers from English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts have contributed to this area. This paper, therefore, adds to the growing body of knowledge on Teachers' Guides by examining the views of secondary school teachers of English in an ESL context.

Availability and Use of Teachers' Guides

Availability of teachers' guides. Moulton (1994) observes that textbook research in developing countries has stemmed mainly from an interest among World Bank staff to "determine the relative impact of textbooks on student achievement." She notes that in the USA, in comparison, textbook research stems from the pedagogue's interest in knowing "what influences teachers' use of textbooks and how use varies among teachers." Indeed, in my own textbook research experience, crucial information on textbooks in Africa was mainly sourced from World Bank reports, news reports and a few published articles and book chapters by researchers and publishers. In developing countries such as Kenya, where government and donors fund public education, it is not surprising that there has been a focus on the question of availability/lack of textbooks, since this is an important factor in considering which aspects of education will receive prioritization and, subsequently, funding. In developed countries, the discourse tends to stem from a quest to understand better the role and use of textbooks.

In Kenya, the targeted textbook: student ratio was 1:2 in 2010, at the time of my study (MoE, 2010), with the eventual aim of achieving a 1:1 ratio. Encoded in this, perhaps is the assumption that the availability of the Students' Book presupposes availability of the Teachers' Guide; however, commercial publishers may not view Teachers' Guides as an important area of investment. In their study of *English Book 1*, a high school textbook used in Iranian high schools, Soori et al. (2011) found that among the comments by teachers was that the Teacher's Guide was available only initially, when the book was first published and prescribed. This is an indicator that although Teacher's Guides may be a requirement for Ministerial approval, commercial publishers may publish them only once, upon initial approval, and in low quantities. Students' Books, on the other hand, bring in high returns and are generally readily available throughout the life of the textbook.

Use of teachers' guides. As Moulton (1994) notes, even in educational contexts where taught content is tightly controlled, teachers still use materials differently, and the task of the researcher is to find out why this is so. This paper therefore sheds light on teachers' views of their guidebooks in an ESL context where textbooks, in general, have received little attention from teachers and researchers.

Hemsley (1997) indicates that the extent to which Teachers' Guides fulfil their

general functions is closely linked to the teachers who use them. Teachers undergo different training experiences. In some instances, trainee teachers are often discouraged from following textbooks and relying on Teachers' Guides (Loewenberg Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988). Teachers also develop and hold different beliefs about language teaching and learning, and have different levels of skill and confidence.

Researchers acknowledge that guidebooks are often dismissed or rarely consulted (Nunan & Lamb, 1996), or their suggestions are ignored (Nair, 1997). It is therefore significant that Hemsley (1997) suggests one more function of Teachers' Guides: their role in developing the teacher towards self-reliance and away from overt guidance. Some guides provide systematic guidance (Cunningsworth, 1984), while others basically provide answers (Sheldon, 1988); therefore, teachers are likely to use and respond to them differently at different stages in their careers. This helps explain some of the negativity associated with the use of guidebooks, namely that since Teachers' Guides range in the degree of explicit guidance offered, they are unlikely to satisfy all the needs and wants of teachers who are at different stages in their professional development.

Positively, Good (2001) indicates that the majority of teachers use Teachers' Guides and consider them a valuable resource. Similarly, in his exploration of cultural representations in Iranian ELT textbooks, Aliakbari (2004) notes that the systematic instructions found in Teachers' Books can be very useful for inexperienced or untrained teachers. Equally, drawing an example of a trained native speaker teacher and an untrained non-native speaker teacher, Hemsley (1997) suggests that the guide may serve to deskill the former, while building the skills and confidence of the latter. The native/non-native speaker paradigm has, of course, been questioned in recent times, with Graddol (2006) suggesting a reformulation of Kachru's (1985) three circles of English into a representation of the community of English speakers based on levels of proficiency.

Teacher feedback on their use and views of guidebooks will, clearly, be partially defined not only by the content of a particular guidebook, but also by the individual's beliefs, attitudes, training and teaching experience gained over time. These factors work together with contextual and other mediating factors in helping to explain why Teachers' Guides may be viewed ambivalently, or yield a wide range of perspectives from users even when they are part of a set of materials that have been vetted and approved by a regulatory body. This leads to the third major strand of research on Teachers' Guides, which is evaluation.

Evaluation of Teachers' Guides

Some studies have provided descriptions on how to evaluate Teachers' Guides. Cunningsworth and Kusel (1991) and Hemsley (1997) both advocate global/general

and local/detailed evaluation. At the global level, it is suggested that evaluation should include the views in the guide on the nature of language and the language learning process, as well as the extent to which the guide develops teachers' awareness and understanding of language and teaching theory and practice. At the local level, areas for evaluation include objectives, content, cultural loading, correction and testing, procedural guidelines, language and lesson evaluation, and advice on the unpredictable.

Gearing (1999) indicates that the main reasons for evaluating Teachers' Guides are to help in textbook selection, raise awareness of the content of the guidebook and its effectiveness, and to generate ideas for improvement. She further notes that few of the available textbook checklists focus on Teachers' Guides, perhaps because they are assumed to target an experienced audience. Gearing (1999) indicates that the evaluation criteria may be obscure for those who lack experience and confidence, yet these are the teachers who are likely to benefit most from guidance. She therefore suggests a checklist that takes cognisance of the different levels of experience and language proficiency among teachers. Zabihi and Tabataba'ian (2011), in their study of three Teacher's Guides used in Iran concluded that although teachers differed in their use of guidebooks, even experienced teachers desired more useful guides.

Finally, Ansari and Babaii's (2002) have focused on the evaluation of EFL and ESL textbooks and have proposed universal features of ESL/EFL textbooks based on an examination of ten evaluation checklists and reviews respectively. Content presentation is one of the suggested universal features, and among its specifications is satisfaction of the syllabus to the teacher. This entails providing supplementary material, a guidebook, and giving advice on methodology, including theoretical orientation and keys to exercises.

This discussion of the literature shows that teachers of English work in varied educational-publishing contexts and their use and views of materials must be understood in the light of these contexts. As Graddol (2006) observes, the traditional and, perhaps stereotypical, categorizations of English users are being challenged. It is important to interrogate and articulate the views of teachers of English across the globe. As indicated, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on Teachers' Guides, and in particular it provides perspectives from secondary school teachers in an ESL context where English is, officially, the medium of instruction from Class 4. In addition, it provides a perspective from a context where textbook development has undergone a shift from state monopoly towards market liberalization in the last decade, and where Teachers' Guides must meet certain thresholds in order to achieve Ministerial approval of the entire textbook package.

Methodology

Introduction

The wider study from which I have developed this paper was aligned to the constructivist paradigm. Interpretation of data relied upon close examination of textbook content as well as an exploration of views from curriculum developers, publishers, authors, teachers and learners. As such, meanings developed interpretively as the research proceeded (Richards, 2003). Although the main study included these various stakeholders, this paper focuses, in particular, on the responses of teachers to Teachers' Guides drawn from their responses to a preliminary survey questionnaire in 2009 and their subsequent interview responses in 2010. It is worth noting that while responses from other participants also shed light on Teachers' Guides, this paper focuses on presenting an in-depth examination of teachers' responses to Teachers' Guides derived from these two instruments.

Approach

I had a choice of seven secondary school English textbooks drawn from publishers whose English language textbooks were either fully (Form 1-4) or partially approved by the Ministry of Education between 2002 and 2006. At the onset of this period, a new national syllabus had been released. The syllabus was phased into schools on an annual basis, and new materials were concurrently developed, evaluated and approved. Among the submissions, only two publications were eventually approved at all class levels (Form 1-4). My choice of materials for study was not, however, based on full approval at all class levels; it was a function of teachers' feedback on the textbooks they actually used in the classroom. This arose from the preliminary survey questionnaire (2009) which shed light on the textbooks that participants most frequently used. The adoption of a case study approach allowed for a degree of flexibility in the research design since case studies are transparadigmatic and therefore amenable to mixed methods since they do not prescriptively guide the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

Data Generation Instruments

Questionnaire. In 2009, I arranged to have a preliminary survey questionnaire distributed to accessible secondary school English teachers. I overcame the challenge of an anonymous questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2010) by including an optional final page for interested participants to include their names and contact details, and to detach if they so wished. I intended to overcome the inherent weaknesses of questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2010; Munn & Drever, 1999) in my main study, where I adopted a qualitative approach. The questionnaire sought information on a range of issues including access to

textbooks, choices and selection procedures, strengths and weaknesses of the materials, and interpretation of syllabus concepts. It specifically addressed the Teachers' Guides in Q. 9, which sought information of the textbook that teachers had identified as the one they most frequently used with learners across all levels taught.

9. a) If you use the Teacher's Guides for the series you have rated above, have you found them helpful? Tick (✓) as appropriate.

Yes ☐ No ☐

- b) If yes, describe in what ways they have been helpful.
c) If not, explain why not.

Semi-structured interview guide. Later, in my main study, I developed a semi-structured interview guide in order to elicit further information from teachers. I adopted a format that included introductory questions as icebreakers, followed by content questions and probes, and an opportunity for teachers to express any additional views they had (Dörnyei 2007). I specifically asked teachers to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the series they most frequently used, including their views on Teachers' Guides.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Accessible secondary school teachers were mainly those attending holiday classes towards undergraduate and Master's degrees. These teachers were drawn from one private and two public universities in Kenya between May and August 2009. The questionnaires were distributed with the aid of a research assistant and colleagues in the various institutions, given that I was away from the research site at the time. By August 2009, 400 questionnaires had been distributed to teachers, and by October 2009, I had received 103 responses. The responses from these participants formed the basis for subsequent decisions on choice of materials for study. In turn, this informed my selection of a narrower sample for teacher-interviews and subsequent qualitative analysis of data.

Forty-four (43%) survey questionnaire participants expressed willingness to participate further. I sub-classified them according to the textbook series predominantly used (Table 1). Based on their questionnaire responses, I developed a profile of the teachers including their gender, experience in years, class levels taught and academic qualifications. In planning for fieldwork, I considered these and other factors such as time (First Term, 2010), location and the resources available. However, my actual sample depended upon the willingness of schools and teachers whom I approached to engage with me. I eventually interviewed a corpus of 21 teachers.

Data Analysis Procedures

Questionnaire item No. 9, which dealt with the Teacher’s Guide, had two parts - one closed and one open-ended. I obtained frequencies for the closed questions and organised the comments from the open-ended question thematically, per textbook (Appendix A). Similarly, I thematically analysed the interview responses from the teacher interviewees and categorised the findings into positive and negative perceptions of Teachers’ Guides (Appendix B).

Results

The Preliminary Survey Questionnaire yielded 103 responses. The findings indicated that at the time of the survey (2009), teachers had not necessarily settled on a particular coursebook for use in all classes, but they identified the textbook series they predominantly used as follows:

Textbook series	Publisher	Used most frequently (N:103)
Head Start Secondary English	Oxford University Press-EA	37 (36%)
New Integrated English	Jomo Kenyatta Foundation	35 (34%)
Advancing in English	Longhorn Publishers	9 (9%)
Excelling in English	Kenya Literature Bureau	8 (8%)
New Horizons in English	East African Educational Publishers	1 (1%)
Unidentified	—	13 (13%)

Table 1: Frequency of use per Textbook Series

Of these participants, 101 responded to Q. 9a, which sought to know whether teachers found the guidebooks helpful or not. Ninety-one teachers (90%) indicted that they found Teacher’s Guides helpful in one way or another, while only ten (10%) indicted that they did not. Teachers then went on to justify their responses based on the publication that they used most frequently in all the classes they taught. A categorization of their comments according to particular Teachers’ Guides is reflected in Appendix A. This shows that teachers who found Teachers’ Guides helpful did so based on provision of methodological guidance, provision of answers, identification of potentially challenging areas, provision of extra exercises and content, and the perceived potential to boost teachers’ confidence. Those who did not find guidebooks helpful cited factors such as lack of detail, lack of additional content and exercises, the need for teachers to respond to whatever issues learners’ raised, and to be involved in materials preparation. Although teachers expressed both positive and negative views of Teachers’ Guides,

the overall perception from the questionnaire, garnered from Q. 9a, was that teachers overwhelmingly (90%) viewed guidebooks as a helpful resource.

The second phase of my work, however, revealed the complexity of teachers' views. During this stage, I generated interview data from 21 teachers who had indicated that they primarily used Head Start Secondary English (36%) or New Integrated English (34%) in the survey questionnaire (Table 1). My subsequent qualitative inquiry revealed that some teachers had changed their textbook preferences over time. Interviews yielded slightly more negative than positive comments about Teachers' Guides. Several views recurred among participants, while others, though unique to the individual, were quite strongly and passionately expressed. Because participants often added that they rarely used the guides, they tended to make generalised statements about Teachers' Guides that they had used in the course of time. The views of the interviewed sub-set are analysed and discussed in the section below.

Discussion

Appendix B summarizes the main ideas on Teachers' Guides that emerged from teacher interviews. It reflects the general and specific, positive and negative views of teachers. The qualities assigned to guidebooks cannot be viewed as uncontroversially positive or negative; indeed, different teachers often expressed diametrically opposed views on a single issue arising from their experiences, which had evolved over time, their beliefs and practices. In this section, I have isolated the main themes and presented the positive and negative perspectives of Teachers' Guides as expressed by the 21 teacher-participants.

Availability of Answers

The provision of answers in Teachers' Guides was a recurring theme, often linked to other themes in teachers' responses. Firstly, some teachers expressed the view that the traditional role of the guidebook was to provide answers, and therefore they expected little else in terms of guidance from this resource. In addition, their experiences with materials had led them to believe that provision of answers, was, in fact, the main function of guidebooks. Secondly, and closely related to this, were comments by teachers who commented appreciatively on the availability of answers in guidebooks; however, their views were greatly diluted by those who took issue with the accuracy of the answers provided. Finally, teachers viewed the Teacher's Guide as a resource to use when faced with controversial points to which they had no clear answer. Under such circumstances, the availability of answers sometimes caused the guidebook to be viewed as an arbiter; however, teachers pointed out that even then, guides were not always helpful in solving points of dispute. I discuss each of the angles related to availability of answers in

Teachers' Guides next.

Teacher's guide as 'answer book.' Teachers who viewed guidebooks quite simply as answer book expressed what is, perhaps, a deeply- ingrained view of the Teachers' Guide. This view was often tied to their habitual manner of using the resource. T3 tended to call the guide an 'answer booklet' (and indicated that his use of this term was a result of influence from mathematics teachers in his school), but acknowledged that the materials contained more than answers in the form of guidance to teachers. The views from the following three teachers are indicators of rather low expectations of Teachers' Guides:

What is the traditional concept of the teacher's guide?... the Teacher's Guide is for answers only. They hardly use it to refer to anything else... probably the listening comprehension. (T13)

...for example, Head Start - there is an assumption that a teacher has the schemes of work, so the scheme of work is supposed to take care of the teaching process. Then maybe all that you get from the guide is maybe just answers to the exercises given... (T1)

...although it is a TG, it doesn't guide too much. It only gives answers. (T5)

T5 went on to explain that since, in his view, the guidebooks focused on answers, it followed that they did not actually guide much. He indicated that what was more important than answers was provision of information on how the teacher should proceed.

The guide should tell you how you are supposed to progress...that is why it is there...how much you want to give the students; how much you want to give yourself...not necessarily give answers or have a lesson plan. (T5)

Nonetheless, three teachers appreciated the methodological guidance found in Teachers' Guides. T4, a *Head Start* user, indicated that he found the pre-reading content quite relevant since he usually engaged his learners in pre-reading activities during reading lessons. T9 and T16 both noted that although they rarely used guidebooks for answers, they found the methodological suggestions helpful. Other teachers, who delinked their responses on the issue of guidance from provision of answers, expressed generally positive views of the Teacher's Guide as an aid to planning.

Quality of answers. Three teachers cited the availability of ready answers as a positive aspect of Teachers' Guides. Although these teachers appreciated inclusion of answers,

the quality of the answers, was, conversely, one of the most frequently cited reasons for dissatisfaction with Teachers' Guides. Teachers who expressed dissatisfaction indicated that sometimes the answers or ideas were too general, inaccurate, or had typographical errors. Several teachers expressed particularly strong reservations about the responses to grammar questions.

... in the answer booklet sometimes they give wrong answers... this is a wrong preposition... if you are a teacher and you are following the answer booklet, then definitely you'll mark the sentence wrongly. (T3)

Head Start, the main problem is that the Teacher's Guide has many errors, so you cannot totally rely on it...certain ideas are not correct. Mainly answers. You find like if it is grammar, you find the answers given are not correct. Not all, but in certain areas. So that is the major weakness with the Teacher's Guide. (T5)

I don't use them much...there is a time I used Guide to *Head Start* Book 2 and there are some instances where I could really differ with what was there...I believe I am not badly off in grammar...not every teacher will be like me. There are people who will need to check all the time. (T7)

Guidebook Answers as Arbiter. Teachers indicated that they turned to guide books when faced with disputed and controversial points. In such cases, guidebooks were viewed as helping to boost the teacher's level of certainty about a response. Teachers who indicated that they use guides under such circumstances were also keen to point out that they otherwise rarely used this resource.

I rarely use it. I mainly use it when in doubt. (T20)

So when you find where you are torn between two answers – which one is correct – so that's when I go to the guidebook. But it is not my handbook. (T7)

... I find that the exercises that I give, the answers to me are automatic. I understand the exercises. Mostly I don't refer to the guide for answers but mostly when I come to the guide is when we find a controversial issue. (T18)

T18 went on to cite a grammar topic on gerunds and verbs, which had been controversial, and had recently required her to refer to the guide.

You know sometimes, you feel like you are the one who could be wrong – so it is better for us to get it from the guide...you have to get the difference between a gerund and a verb. I think it was a controversial sentence whereby the word conserve is a gerund and conserve is a verb, so you are convincing the students it is a gerund, and they are supporting themselves fully it is a verb, so you as the teacher, you have to go and get the right answer from the guide. (T18)

Teachers, however, also indicated that the guides were often unhelpful in providing straightforward solutions to controversies, among them T3, who, in seeking to differentiate ‘answer booklets’ from guidebooks, concluded that the lack of straightforward answers was a characteristic to be expected of guidebooks. Others, like T17, had come to the realisation that it was important to explore learner perspectives, notwithstanding the responses provided in the Guide.

...once you give a composition, will you just go to the answer booklet and mark? And even the sentences may vary...for us [English teachers], they are actually guidebooks, but for them [mathematics teachers], they are answer booklets. (T3)

You find yourself cornered if you tend to follow the TG. The students will definitely doubt your answer...and if you look at it critically, the student is correct...the TG sometimes...it is debatable...They normally give an answer. If there is another answer that could be grammatically correct, they don’t write about that... (T17)

Aid to Planning

Teachers’ Guides were regarded as an aid to planning. Four teachers expressed this view, and it was predominant among users of *New Integrated English*, but most profusely expressed by T12, who had used other textbooks and finally settled on *Excelling in English*.

The Teacher’s Guide is used in most cases for preparation of schemes. (T20)

It has samples of lesson plans; how to organise your work during the lesson. (T18)

...[the guide gives] insight of what to expect in class, and how to introduce a topic...it gives me the time limit—how many lessons would you expect for this lesson—so that I’m able to plan ahead. (T19)

...they have their objectives—specific. They have the learning aids. It is like a lesson plan. With it, you don’t need a lesson plan. It tells you everything to do...The others are just wastage of time, really...but these ones, they give you the objectives direct; the specific objectives... “At the end of the lesson, the learner should be able to”...they give you the activities for introduction and even suggest other activities. They tell you what to do all the time. (T12)

T11, on the other hand, expressed strong opinions on the possible mechanization of teaching through use of Teachers’ Guides. He viewed use of the resource as a causative factor in leading to boring, ineffective and robotic teaching, and thus presented an overall view of the guide as a deskilling agent.

...you know, the TG is more mechanical...by that I mean you are supposed to be acting like a robot, and I think that is not teaching, because if you start teaching like that, you’ll find yourself very ineffective... I see it as making me to be a boring teacher. Yes. (T11)

Basis for Direction

Teachers indicated diverse ways in which the Teacher’s Guide served as a prompt and thereby offered direction to them. T6 viewed it as a “pedestal” from which he, the teacher could expound upon issues while taking into account the level of his particular learners. T12 also recognised the important role of the teacher, despite his great enthusiasm for the *Excelling in English* Teachers’ Guides.

...look at the learners again; see what else you can bring in...alter some bits here and there, or where they have said this activity, you can skip that and bring in a different one to cater for the needed information. (T12)

T10, who did not express strong pro-guide book sentiments acknowledged the importance of Teachers’ Guides in a context where teachers are trained in different

institutions and diverse stakeholders are involved in textbook processes, ranging from syllabus designers to textbook evaluators. He therefore regarded the guidebook as a resource with the potential to provide direction amid the potentially diverse views that often inform textbook content.

T19, on the other hand, appreciated prompting in terms of provision of insights into what to expect in class, how to introduce a topic and references to where particular content could be found in other books in the series.

While these comments show that teachers appreciated different types of direction offered in Teachers' Guides, there also existed strongly opposing views.

In their responses, some teachers underscored their sense of their own professionalism in explaining why they seldom used Teachers' Guides. They were confident about the training they had received and their knowledge of the subject. Similarly, other teachers indicated that they had discovered that they could do without the guides.

When you have trained in this area, it is not usually very hard to get what you are looking for. And therefore it is very easy, without that guide, to get these concepts. (T8)

...I'd say I really didn't use the guide as such because I really felt I was a specialist in that area. That's why I had to leave it because I felt whatever was being taught was below par. So for me I didn't consult the guides as such. I did what I felt was relevant... (T14)

In other instances, teachers noted that they felt guidebooks were unnecessary and indicated that the reason for this was tied not only to their perception of themselves as competent practitioners, but also to their desire to project competence to learners. Reliance on Teachers' Guides was viewed as a threat to the teacher's self-perception as a competent professional and it raised the spectre of learners' doubting their teachers' competence.

I'm not a fan of Teachers' Guides, so in the first place I don't even refer to it... I had this quarrel with a colleague...because this colleague was asking for the Teacher's Guide. And it's like that was a prerequisite for going to class. Then I challenged this teacher that that ka-small [emphasizes the diminutive] exercise that the boys and girls have done, you are not able to assist them to correct the same until you carry the Teacher's Guide? And then there was that quarrel again, up and down, but then at the end of it all I think we agreed with the colleague that for sure, when you become

dependent on the Teacher's Guide, supposing you are posted to a school where there is none, what are you going to do? And supposing the boys know, they realise that *Ala!* [expresses surprise] Even *Mwalimu* [teacher], when he gives us these exercises, he doesn't have ready answers for the same. He has to rush to the staffroom to look for the same. How does it impact on the learner? (T13)

The possibility of lack of availability of guides, which T13 so succinctly raises in relation to teacher-dependency on materials, was also raised by three other teachers as a reason why teachers do not use guidebooks.

Availability of Extra Information

T15 and T18 were teachers who expressed the opinion that guides were helpful because they had extra content. Teachers had in mind extra information on topics covered, detailed explanations on suggested answers, and extra exercises. Teachers who appreciated availability of such information were predominantly users of *New Integrated English*. T18, who indicated that she has a few special students, noted that the guide also had suggestions on how to handle different types of learners; however, T15, also a user of *New Integrated English*, indicated that there was insufficient focus on weaker students.

It has some extra work that is not in the text. You can find another exercise that is not in the text in the guide. You can use it to give surplus work in class. (T18)

With *New Integrated English*, they have some exercises that are in the Teacher's Guide that are not in the Students' Book...it is appropriate...but not to the low-average student. (T15)

T18 also noted that learners sometimes used guidebooks to confirm their answers while working independently. As such, she felt that Teachers' Guides ought to contain much more detailed explanations about the suggested responses.

Three of the four teachers who expressed the opposing view-that the materials lacked extra content-were predominantly users of *Head Start*.

They should give extra information – not the one in the textbook...stuff which is a bit harder, the university stuff - so that at least you understand the topic better...let them remind you of such things. (T3)

They should provide more examples and detailed examples. (T9)

They should add more reference material because sometimes you deal with a topic and you were hoping to find some more information in the Guide and you go there, you find there is nothing they have extra on that particular topic. (T17)

These responses show that apart from providing a range of possible answers, teachers expected guidebooks to carry detailed information, examples, and extra work suitable for learners with a range of abilities. The lack of extra information made guides unattractive as a potential resource for teachers.

Source of Content for Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills

The 2002 national curriculum review emphasized the inclusion of listening and speaking skills within the integrated English/literature-in-English curriculum that is characteristic of the teaching and learning of English in Kenyan secondary schools. This emphasis was subsequently reflected in national examinations from 2006. Consequently, these skills have received greater attention in teaching, learning and research since then. Four teachers, among them those who claimed not to use Teachers' Guides often, cited the listening and speaking section as an area that led them to refer to the guidebook. In particular, they sought guidance in teaching listening and speaking skills. They pinpointed 'listening comprehension' passages (the materials do not have accompanying audio content), as a specific point of reference for them in Teachers' Guides.

If I were to use the Teacher's Guide, it is to use that story...listening comprehension. Those are the ones you might find me using. (T11)

...I only look at it when it comes to some aspects like listening and speaking... (T7)

...mostly when we come now to use the guide is when we have the listening comprehension because it is always in the Guide, then you read it to the students. (T18)

The teaching and testing of listening and speaking skills, and the development of learners' communicative competence remains a growth area, and one in which teachers clearly feel the need for more guidance.

Design

Design was an area in which teachers made quite specific comments about particular materials. T12, who had used several other Teachers' Guides, commented that the *Excelling in English* guidebook was the 'most beautiful' he had ever seen. As indicated above, he appreciated the format of the guides due to their resemblance to a lesson plan, including specific objectives, activities and learning aids.

With it, you don't need a lesson plan. It tells you everything to do. (T12)

Meanwhile, in terms of cross-referencing, T17 preferred *New Integrated English* to *Head Start*.

I think in terms of the design...they could co-relate pages that are in the text with the ones that are in the guidebook for teachers. (T17)

Insights from the Study

As explained in the first section, I was motivated to explore teachers' perceptions of Teachers' Guides mainly because the findings from my qualitative research provided much more depth, and a better feel of the strength of the participants' opinions, than I had initially experienced from my initial questionnaire to teachers. Although several issues recurred, face-to-face interviews provided much richer and more nuanced data, with examples from actual teacher experiences with guidebooks and suggestions for improvement. For this reason, the adoption of mixed methods worked well in first identifying potential issues and subsequently allowing room for alternative and competing views. This approach led me away from a neat, but probably inaccurate binary view of Teachers' Guides.

The key factors that underlie teachers' perceptions of Teachers' Guides arising from the discussion are as follows:

- Past experiences with guidebooks

Based on prior experiences with guidebooks, teachers have certain over-riding expectations of what to expect in a guidebook. When these basic expectations are not adequately met, they express dissatisfaction; however when they are positively exceeded, especially in comparison to other available guidebooks, teachers express strong satisfaction.

- Professional self-concept

Teachers' own beliefs about what is expected of them in terms of subject knowledge sometimes dictates the extent to which they find guidebooks useful. Teachers who

believed they had strong competence in certain areas of language indicated that they did not need to refer to guidebooks in handling these areas.

- Desire to project competence

For some, the guidebook boosts their confidence, while for others it becomes a resource only when faced with controversial issues. Conversely, some teachers discourage their colleagues from referring to the guidebook, believing that over-reliance projects one's inadequacy and is poor preparation for the possibility of teaching in resource-scarce schools. These are twin sides of the same issue, perhaps simply approached differently. In both instances, the teacher desires to gain professionalism and competence and project the same to learners.

- Level and nature of teacher experience

Some teachers use guidebooks less frequently over time, while for others, their early experiences in schools that lacked Teachers' Guides prepared them to teach without reference to such a resource.

- Topic

Teachers, even experienced teachers and those who rarely use guidebooks, occasionally refer to Teachers' Guides. This occurs mainly in regard to topics that have led to controversial responses, or where the Teacher's Guide contains specific information, such as listening comprehension passages, which are required to address content in the Students' Book.

Conclusion

Teachers value Teachers' Guides for diverse reasons depending on their beliefs, expectations and needs. These findings are of importance to curriculum developers, teacher trainers and materials developers. Even where textbook approval by the Ministry of Education hinges upon the Teachers' Guide meeting certain laid-down criteria, it is equally important for authors and publishers to gain insights from teachers in order to truly meet the needs of the consumers of their products.

This study has drawn upon views from teachers in the ESL context described above. All participants were local teachers, who are themselves second language users of English. Teachers of English in EFL contexts, whose experiences have evolved in different educational publishing contexts are likely to offer other perspectives, which are worth exploring.

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Notes

1. Fully or partially state owned enterprises through which the government acts indirectly.
2. Eight years in primary school, four years in secondary school and four years at university (8-4-4).
3. Appendices, [click here](#)

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Learning about author positioning in written academic discourse

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Abstract

Graduate students are usually not sure of the appropriate stance to take in relation to their writing. Even style guides provide little information regarding authorial positioning in academic texts. This paper describes a study in which frequency and usage of features of marking writer stance were compared between selected dissertations in Kenyan Public Universities. It was found that humanities dissertations preferred personal pronouns and the third person while science dissertations mainly chose the 'faceless' agentless passive voice. Suggesting that choices for such features in dissertations are a function of the epistemology and ideology of the disciplines, the paper proposes a genre-based approach to teaching those preparing to write their dissertations.

Keywords: stance; point of view; positioning; disciplinary culture; voice.

Resumen

Los estudiantes graduados generalmente no están seguros de la postura adecuada a adoptar en relación con sus escritos. Las guías de estilo incluso proporcionan poca información sobre posicionamiento autoral en textos académicos. Este artículo describe un estudio en que se compararon frecuencia y uso de características de la postura del escritor entre disertaciones en universidades públicas de Kenia. Se encontró que en las disertaciones de Humanidades existe una preferencia por los pronombres personales y la tercera persona mientras que en las disertaciones de Ciencia principalmente se eligió el punto de vista de agente pasivo 'sin rostro.' Con la sugerencia de que las elecciones por tales características son una función de la epistemología y la ideología de las disciplinas, este artículo propone un enfoque basado en el género para la enseñanza de la escritura académica.

Palabras clave: postura; punto de vista; posicionamiento; cultura disciplinaria.

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WRITING IS AN integral activity at university. Hyland (2013) argues that universities are about writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are the heart of everything done at the university. Postgraduate students and their lecturers must gain fluency in the conventions of academic writing in English to understand their disciplines, to establish their careers or to successfully develop their learning. One such convention is the writer's ability to employ the socially appropriate features of marking *stance* in their discourse communities a term used to describe the process by which identities are produced by socially available discourses (Davies & Harre, 1990).

Literature Review

As graduate students write their dissertations, they are probably not adequately prepared in terms of the protocol of constructing credible representations of themselves in their texts. Hyland (2002b) for instance, points out that writers construct identities that are not supported by the discourses and practices of their disciplines. The assumption here is that writing practices in the disciplines are not the same. Bartholomae captures this well:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. (Bartholomae 1986, p. 4)

To position themselves appropriately in relation to their work, students should be able to describe the features of stance marking explicitly. This implies trying to understand the practices of real students communicating in real disciplines by describing and analysing relevant texts. Hyland (2013) adds that students can only marshal support, express collegiality, and negotiate agreement by making linguistic features which connect their texts with their disciplines. The present work will be focused on attributive possession. Heine (1997) states that attributive possession appears to present a relatively simple structure: it consists essentially of two NPs linked to one another in a specific way. Accordingly, work on attributive possession has focused mostly on the way the two NPs are linked.

Coming back to writer stance, it is noteworthy that it is accomplished through a range of features. For instance, writers can position themselves very close to their work by using the exclusive personal pronoun (*I*) or distance themselves from their work by using personified point of view constructions or the third person point of view. It

is argued that the stance a writer assumes, reflects the ideology and epistemology of the discipline they come from (Ivanič, 2001; Stapleton 2002; Tang & John 1999). This assumption developed from the view that written academic discourse makes a rhetorical appeal to the reader, seeking to persuade them to accept the writer's viewpoint rather than simply stating neutral facts (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Latour, 1987; Myers, 1990). Yet this area is still under-researched (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999; Charles, 2006; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tang & John, 1999). In fact, Hyland (2005) also testifies that the issue of writer stance is new in writing research.

Writer stance is intertwined with the notions of *averral* and *attribution*. Regarding averral, writers are assumed to aver all the propositions in the text and thus take responsibility for their veracity, unless they are attributed elsewhere (Hunston, 2000). On the other hand, when an attribution is made, a proposition is credited to a source other than the writer and responsibility is assigned to that person or entity (Hunston, 2000). It is the writer who chooses whether, when and to which sources to attribute propositions. But are such choices possible when the writers, arguably, lack adequate exposure to writer stance marking strategies?

Apparently, writer stance in academic writing remains a poorly understood field. It is not clear how writers should incorporate their own personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements, or assessments in the texts that they produce. Yet the process of writing involves creating a text that we assume the reader will recognise and expect, and the process of reading involves drawing on assumptions about what the writer is trying to do (Hyland, 2013). In fact Hoey (2001) likens this to dancers following each other's steps, each building sense from a text by anticipating what the other is likely to do. This paper makes an effort to unpack the notion of writer positioning in dissertations. Accordingly, it provides initial answers to the following questions: What are the features that writers use to position themselves in relation to their work? What patterns emerge in the application of those features in humanities and science dissertations?

Methodology

Six dissertations were analysed in this study; three were drawn from the humanities field while the other three were drawn from the science disciplines. Becher's (1989) taxonomy that categorises disciplines into soft and hard respectively was used in the stratification and selection. The following table gives a summary of the selected dissertations.

Soft disciplines				Hard disciplines			
Discipline	Institution	Code	# of copies	Discipline	Institution	Code	# of copies
History	Kenyatta University	AHT	1	Chemistry	Moi University	SCH	1
English	Maseno University	AEN	1	Botany	Egerton University	SBT	1
Sociology	University of Nairobi	ASC	1	Agricultural Engineering	Jomo Kenyatta University	SAE	1

Table 1: Sample of dissertations

The sampling procedure used for the selection of the six dissertations was based on the population of all the MA dissertations produced at Kenyatta, Maseno and Nairobi universities, and all the MSc dissertations produced at Moi, Egerton and Jomo Kenyatta universities during the 2007/2008 academic year. Only 2007/2008 academic year was considered in order to avoid the possible influence(s) of generational and diachronic changes in the nature of this genre. But one critical decision that was made was how to draw a sample of six dissertations from a large ‘universe’. In line with the purposes of the study, non-probability sampling, which comprises a series of non-random procedures for selecting the elements of the sample, seemed to be appropriate (Ary, Jacob & Rzavieh, 1996). To be more specific, a convenience sampling procedure, which includes picking the required sample from available cases, was used to select the six texts for this study. Obviously, the success of such procedures depends on the knowledge, expertise, and sound judgement of the expert (Ary et al., 1996).

It should, however, be noted that the selected dissertation from each of the six universities may not be typical of dissertations in the particular university and/or disciplinary culture. Each discipline in a university must still have ‘integrity’ of its own though the study showed that disciplines belonging to the same disciplinary culture displayed certain common ways of expressing writer stance. As such, the selected MA dissertations, for example, were not radically different from one another. According to Becher (1989) and Belcher (1994), such an approach simplifies what are, in fact, innumerable disciplinary differences. Therefore, there was need to uncover these general tendencies. Accordingly, as Hyland (2005, p. 181) argues, ‘a large corpus does not necessarily represent a genre better than a small one, particularly if it is used to study high frequency items.’

All writer stance-marking features were extracted from the six dissertations following three types of reporting clauses based on the notions of *averral* and *attribution* according to Sinclair (1987), Hunston (2000) and Charles (2006). The three types are distinguished according to grammatical subject. In the first clause type, the reporting clause has a grammatical subject made up of a noun group with human reference. In the selected dissertations, reporting clauses with the *first person singular* (*I*), the *first person plural* (*We*) and the *third person with human reference* (e.g. *the researcher*) as subject

belonged to this category. In the second clause type, the grammatical subject is made up of a noun group with non-human reference from which becomes the personified point of view—in which the writer's work is *personified* (e.g. *The study* investigated...). The third clause type has no agent in the subject position. This is the *agentless passive* point of view (e.g. *It was established that...*). This process of elicitation came up with five features of marking author stance namely: First person singular (*I*), first person plural (*We*), third person (with a human subject), personified, and agentless passive points of view. These are illustrated as follows (note that the features in question are italicised)

- a) First person singular (*I*) point of view: *I* am deeply indebted to many people without whom this research work could not have been possible. (SCH)
- b) First person plural (*We*) point of view: In this study, *we* seek to examine the linguistic means that Ogola uses in addressing the social issue of gender. (AEN)
- c) Third person (with a human subject) point of view: This was a very sensitive variable and *the researcher* could not go about asking whether they participated in the unrest or not. (ASC)
- d) Personified point of view: *The study* investigates the contribution of factors such as colonialism and the level of education to the political participation of women. (AHT)
- e) Agentless passive point of view: The cuticles of the female nematodes near the neck *were ruptured* and the body tissues *pushed* out gently. (SBT)

The analysis of features of marking stance involved a manual count of the distributions of each type of feature per dissertation. The emerging patterns were tabulated and, where applicable, converted into percentages. This process was complemented by a qualitative analysis of how each feature was actually used in the study corpora. In this analysis, I was able to establish the general tendencies characterising the use of stance marking features in the selected dissertations. Consequently, deductions were made, followed by discussion.

Results and Discussion

The selected dissertations were closely read to identify all features of marking writer stance. A manual count of the features was done and their frequencies determined. The results are summarised in Table 2.

N = 1399	Science dissertations					Humanities dissertations				
	SCH	SBT	SAE			AEN	ASC	AHT		
	Frequency			Total	%	Frequency			Total	%
1 st Person (I)	6	17	9	32	2.29	9	89	16	114	8.15
1 st Person (We)	2	-	1	3	0.21	37	20	14	71	5.08
3 rd Person	2	1	1	4	0.29	10	37	6	53	3.79
Personified	14	8	38	60	4.29	53	41	30	124	8.86
Ag. passive	104	163	301	566	40.46	59	203	110	372	26.59

Table 2. Distribution of stance signals in the study corpora

Table 2 reveals that the agentless passive was the most frequently used form with a frequency of 67.05% in both disciplinary cultures followed by the personified point of view with a combined incidence of 13.15% across the cultures. The preponderance of the agentless passive can be expected given that writing within the sciences discourse community requires the writer to maintain a detached stance (Ivanič, 1998; Lester, 1993). Hyland (2002b) further argues that style guides and textbooks commonly portray scholarly writing as a kind of impersonal, faceless discourse, and that EAP teachers direct students to remove themselves from their texts. This follows from the fact that this advice is easily found in numerous textbooks and style guides for both L1 and L2 writers:

The total paper is considered to be the work of the writer. You don't have to say 'I think' or 'my opinion is' in the paper. Traditional formal writing does not use *I* or *we* in the body of the paper. (Spencer & Arbon, 1996, p. 26).

To the scientist it is unimportant who observed the chemical reaction: only the observation itself is vital. Thus the active voice sentence is inappropriate. In this situation, passive voice and the omission of the agent of action are justified. (Gong & Dragga, 1995)

In general, academic writing aims at being 'objective' in its expression of ideas, and thus tries to avoid specific reference to personal opinions. Your academic writing should imitate this style by eliminating first person pronouns...as far as possible. (Arnaudet & Barrett, 1984, p. 73)

Propositions with human agents (i.e. first person singular (*I*), first person plural (*we*), and third person) recorded less frequent occurrences with *I* being the third most frequently used form at a combined incidence of 10.44%, while the third person and first person plural form (*we*) had a combined frequency of 9.37%. However, across the two disciplinary cultures, text ASC recorded the highest incidence of first person pronoun (*I*) at 89 occurrences. This may be partly attributed to the narrative schema adopted in her *Methodology* section which finds the pronoun *I* the most natural option to use. This further shows that the writer is confident to align herself with the procedures she had adopted in her study. Similar views are expressed by Hyland (2002b) where it is noted that author prominence is a way of displaying disciplinary competence and emphasising the writer's unique role in making fine qualitative judgements. An argument can be made to the effect that the choice of *I* is a demonstration to the readers that personal choices have been made and that other researchers could have done or may do things differently.

The following examples show how the three points of view were actually expressed in the study corpora.

I would like to thank my course mates ..., and ... for their encouragement during the study. (SBT)

In this study *I* employed two main methods of data analysis ... (ASC).

We may also view social movements then, as a more or less persistent and organised effort on the part of a relatively large number of people to bring or resist social change. (ASC).

The researcher opted for an exploratory in order to have the flexibility to report on an array of issues concerning the unrest at the Mwea scheme.

Table 2.0 also indicates that science dissertations recorded the highest incidence of the agentless passive at 40.46% of all occurrences. This means that within the sciences, there is a tendency for authors to detach themselves from the propositions they make. This trend emphasises the action and obscures the agent. The table also shows that first person (*I*) and (*we*) and the third person narrator points of view are the least preferred in both disciplinary cultures though the patterns in the science disciplines are markedly low. There seems to be an even distribution of the features of marking stance within the humanities domain though the first person plural (*we*) and third person points of view appear to be the least preferred.

Having presented the overall patterns of the options of projecting stance in the entire study corpora, I now present the distributions of the stance-marking features across the rhetorical divisions of the selected dissertations.

N=1399	Prelims	Introduction	Literature	Methods	Findings	Conclusions	Total
1st Person (I)							
Science	31	1	-	-	-	-	32
Humanities	48	2	2	52	9	1	114
1st Person (We)							
Science	2	-	-	-	-	1	3
Humanities	3	8	9	-	51	10	71
3rd Person							
Science	1	1	-	-	1	1	4
Humanities	1	4	13	6	23	6	53
Personified							
Science	6	9	18	7	17	3	60
Humanities	17	45	23	16	13	10	124
Ag. Passive							
Science	36	29	100	249	101	51	566
Humanities	22	41	54	32	158	65	372

Table 3. Distribution of stance features in the rhetorical sections of dissertations

Table 3 shows that all rhetorical sections recorded occurrences of stance-marking features with *Methods*, and *Findings* rhetorical moves recording the highest cases. It is also notable that the science dissertations recorded few or no occurrence of the first person (*I*) and (*we*) and the third person in all rhetorical moves except *Prelims*. This is in contrast with humanities dissertations which had higher incidences of the features in the same rhetorical sections. An example of first person narrator point of view drawn from the study data is presented below:

I declare that this is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university. (AHT).

Atkinson (1990) presents a strong case for the first-person writing style in clinical case studies and scientific writing in general. He offers the following reasons to support his case:

- Writing in a first person invites the reader into the room and makes him/her feel more engaged in the process.
- The first-person emphasises agency (who is doing what). It is used when the writer needs to point out how valuable his/her project is to an academic discipline or to claim a unique perspective or argument.
- The first-person is used for clarity because trying to avoid the first person can lead to room and makes him/her feel more engaged in the process.

- (d) The first-person reflects the writer's world-views, beliefs and values as a human being, therapist and writer.
- (e) The first-person positions the writer in the text. In some cases, one needs to explain how research builds on or departs from the work of others.
- (f) Case studies are often written and read as narratives.

(Atkinson, 1990, p. 102)

There appears to be a preponderance for the personified and agentless passive points of view in both disciplinary cultures in virtually all rhetorical sections. While humanities dissertations generally recorded higher distributions of the personified point of view across the rhetorical sections, the science dissertations display a predominance of the agentless passive. The following examples demonstrate agentless passive and personified points of view respectively.

In the preparation of the research design, *helpful advice was received from Mr* (SCH). (Agentless passive)

My sincere thanks also go to their leaders especially Hon. ... and Dr ... who were very resourceful. (ASC). (Personified)

It is evident from the table that the agentless passive had the highest incidence at 249 occurrences in the *Method* rhetorical section. This trend has support in the literature. Hyland (2001) for instance points out that many style guides advise academic writers to use the agentless passive in recounting the procedures involved in research.

The five stance marking features have been variously commented upon in the literature. For instance, the first person point of view is generally used in writing acknowledgements in a research genre. This is where writers thank supervisors, cited authors, classmates, friends and the family, roughly in that order of occurrence. As Hyland (2002b, p. 1106) argues, '*Acknowledgements* is obviously one of the most explicitly interactional genres of the academy, whose communicative purpose virtually obliges writers to present themselves and their views unreservedly.' To achieve this goal, he recommends the use of personal pronouns. But Kuo (1999) warns that when *I* and *we* are used to make a claim, they carry much greater threat to face, and are potentially points at which the writer exposes themselves to attack by the readership. Perhaps that explains why these personal pronouns were sparingly employed in the six dissertations in this study. However, such conflicting views suggest the need for more research in this area.

The preference for the agentless passive and personified points of view suggests that academic writing requires a high level of objectivity which the third person and the personal pronouns *I* and *we* may not achieve. As Harold (2007, p. 25) points out, such impersonal forms of expression ‘allow an author to strategically retreat to the background in order to foreground the findings.’ On his part, Harwood (2005) notes that the agentless passive point of view may be adopted to criticise existing knowledge or practice, a strategy which he calls ‘negative politeness.’ He adds that using the personified, agentless passive, and third person points of view may be seen as modesty and caution exercised by inexperienced writers in pointing out gaps in existing knowledge and practice.

The agentless passive and the personified points of view indicate avoidance of what Hyland (2002b, p. 1103) identifies as a ‘potentially problematic role of writer – as – thinker’, a role which carries accountability for the propositions expressed. This is expressed in the examples that follow.

The goodness of fit between the observed and the simulated streamflow *was found* to be better for larger basins. This *is thought* to be as a result of the nature of the model. (SAE).

This work proved conclusively the importance of Co deficiency in ruminants and showed that the resulting disorders were in fact, due to a deficiency in vitamin B₁₂. (SCH)

However, Tang and John (1999) and Clark, Cottey, Constantinou, and Yeoh (1990) argue that where the agent is left out or where a non-human subject is personified, the power wielded by the authorial presence is very little. Hence, students are in a position of weakness relative to those who assess their work. Thus, feeling that they do not have the expertise to enable them to assert their identities in a discourse community, the writers adopt roles which carry the least information about themselves as individuals.

The use of *we* suggests the need to diminish writer responsibility in propositions that may be amenable to attacks by other scholars. Indeed, Harwood (2005) notes that the use of inclusive *we* minimises the threat to the face of the readership when making a claim or criticism because of implied objectivity. It should be used to describe the practices or beliefs of the community as a whole. With the *we* including the writer and the readers (in this case, the dissertation supervisor), it is as if it can describe propositions and hypotheses the writer would expect the readers (who are supposedly members of a discourse community) to endorse. According to Tang and John (1999), the assumption is that the audience is sufficiently competent and well versed in the literature to be able

to follow the argument and arrive at the same conclusions. Similar views are expressed by Ivanič (2001, p. 15). He points out, “when someone uses a particular discourse type, they identify themselves with the interests, values, beliefs and power relations which are associated with it.”

Conclusions

This paper has indicated that propositions may range from being assertive and authoritative to being tentative and faceless depending on the point of view adopted by the writer. The rhetorical section of the dissertation also has a role in the choice of stance-marking feature.

Secondly, writer stance is apparently a socially constructed feature. The influence of a community of practice in which the writing takes place is evident. Patterns of use do not exist in isolation but are part of the communicative routines of academic disciplines. This means that stance marking is apparently intimately connected to the different epistemological frameworks of the disciplines and the way they understand the world.

Thirdly, the various stance marking features discussed above are purposeful in the dissertation genre. Thus, cultivating the best stance signaling practices will entail an understanding of the communicative functions associated with each feature and the relevant propositions where it occurs.

Also, given the disparities even within the same disciplinary culture, stance marking options are not only influenced by the conventions of a disciplinary culture in which the dissertation is being written, but also are creations of the writer. Writers make personal choices deviating from disciplinary norms to probably meet their ‘private’ rhetorical purposes.

Lastly, stance marking is highly versatile. Several levels can be established that give writer stance its character. For instance, at the disciplinary cultural level, there are a number of common practices regarding stance marking. Narrowing the focus, a dissertation produced in a particular discipline reveals peculiar stance signaling characteristics. This means that to understand the stance marking feature, the various levels must be included in the picture.

Implications of the study

This paper proposes a genre-based approach to those writing or preparing to write their dissertations. The categories of author positioning emerging in the present analysis can be used by supervisors and their supervisees to inform themselves of the options characteristic of their disciplinary culture and/or disciplines. In other words, they will be able to understand the choices one can draw from to most effectively express their intended meanings. In a follow-up activity, the supervisees could take partial or

complete authentic texts from their own disciplines and identify the categories of the feature, occurrences, and rhetorical functions. Through this exercise, the supervisees will be able to determine the variation, in usage, of the stance marking feature. For practice, learners may rewrite propositions in an article, term paper, or section of a dissertation from another discipline so that it reflects the style in their field of expertise. This exercise will raise the consciousness of the students to the stance-marking types appropriate to their communities of practice.

For further research, there is a need to generate more empirical evidence to not only specify stance marking features but show how they should be exploited in disciplinary academic writing. More data drawn from theses in a variety of disciplines should be subjected to further analysis including interviewing writers and their supervisors on their stance preferences.

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Exploring the variability of Mexican EFL teachers' ratings of high school students' writing ability

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Abstract

EFL teachers generally use scoring rubrics to assess students' writing seeking to rate consistently and objectively so that assigned scores reflect students' abilities rather than other unrelated factors. Research has found that raters' judgment varies, depending on their linguistic, educational and professional/personal background. This study investigated the degree of difference among the scores of two Mexican raters of academic papers written in English as a foreign language by six high school students. Data came from two sources: 18 scored papers and raters' comments during a semi structured interview. Results indicated that although the raters' backgrounds were very similar, their judgments differed as a result of their personal perceptions of writing, scoring rubrics and writing assessment.

Keywords: EFL writing; rater variability; rater background; foreign language writing assessment; writing assessment.

Resumen

Los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera generalmente utilizan rubricas para evaluar la escritura de sus estudiantes de manera objetiva y consistente. Estudios han encontrado que los juicios de los evaluadores varían dependiendo de sus antecedentes lingüísticos, educativos, y profesionales. El presente estudio investigó si existían diferencias en los puntajes de dos evaluadores mexicanos de textos escritos en inglés por seis estudiantes mexicanos de bachillerato. Los datos se obtuvieron de dos fuentes: los 18 ensayos evaluados y una entrevista semi estructurada con los evaluadores. Los resultados indicaron que, aun cuando los antecedentes de los evaluadores eran muy similares, sus juicios acerca de las habilidades de los escritores diferían como resultado de la diferencia de sus percepciones personales sobre la escritura, las rubricas y la evaluación de la escritura.

Palabras clave: Escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera, variabilidad del evaluador antecedentes del evaluador, evaluación de escritura en lengua extranjera, evaluación de escritura.

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH as a foreign language are increasingly using different kinds of rating scales to assess students' writing. Rating scales are thought to facilitate teachers' interpretation of the quality of students' writing performance, especially after extensive training (Weigle, 1994). It is desirable that raters rate consistently and objectively so that their ratings reflect students' ability. Rating, however, is a complex and error prone process. Research has found that raters' judgment of the same texts often varies. A number of studies have investigated this variable behavior of raters through the use of the Rasch statistical model (Engelhard, 1992; Kondo-Brown, 2002; Mayford & Wolfe, 2004). The model, however, is not only difficult to interpret and use by EFL teachers; it is intended for large-scale testing situations.

Other studies have used alternative statistical analysis combined with data from questionnaires and interviews. Hamp-Lyons (1989), for example, has found that writing assessment is affected by distinct factors, such as the nature of the writing task, the scoring procedures, and the characteristics of the raters. Raters also differ when they judge the writing ability of students depending on their linguistic (Shi, 2001) and educational background (Mendelsohn & Cumming, 1987).

This study focuses on the ways in which the raters' background influences their judgment of the writing ability of EFL student writers. Specifically, it examines the ways in which two raters score the same set of papers written by EFL high school students and the rationale of their judgments. The following section presents a review of the literature on the relationship between raters' background and their rating behavior.

Literature review

The assessment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing is a field that seeks objectivity, validity and reliability among its practitioners for the benefit of language students and for language program development. It is an area that makes an impact on student and teachers' lives because many life-changing decisions may be made depending on assessment results. As Hamp-Lyons (2002) explains assessment is not value-free and it cannot be separated from who the writer is and from the undeniable effects of "washback" (p. 182) on teaching and learning. However, writing assessment faces difficulties in attaining the validity and reliability needed because scoring procedures will always be subject to human judgement therefore making fair and accurate assessment of student writing difficult to actually reach (Pearson, 2004, p. 117).

...If raters A and B disagree on how to rate an essay, how can the final score (e.g., an average score or a total) be fair or meaningful to the writer? Similarly, if a rater scores one way when fresh and another when fatigued, how can a student whose paper is read when the reader is tired be rated

fairly? (Pearson, 2004, p.124).

Therefore the variability among raters judgment is a matter of concern in EFL writing instruction. Scoring rubrics have been studied to find out if raters using them differ in the levels of leniency or severity (McNamara, 1996). Raters respond to different aspects of writing and they do so with some internal consistency depending on, for example, their experiential background and their views on the students' linguistic and rhetorical backgrounds (Hamp-Lyons, 1989). Raters also judge students' writing ability differently depending on their academic background and sex (Vann, Lorenz & Meyer, 1991); and the training received (Weigle, 1994; Cushing, 1994).

In a recent study conducted by Wiseman (2012) 8 raters were examined as well as their decision making behaviors when rating 78 academic papers. Their ratings were analyzed to describe the degree to which raters were consistent in their ratings of English as a Second Language (ESL) writing by using a mixed methods approach: quantitative and qualitative analysis. The author concludes that

think aloud protocols showed that depending on their background, individual raters engaged with the text or prompt type. Rater background, which might be regarded as another facet of ego, seemed to contribute to raters' expectations of criteria for narrative vs. persuasive essays (Ibid, p. 169).

Rasch Analysis suggested that moderate-lenient raters differed from those stricter in their focus of attention when rating. Severe raters tended to concentrate on the performance descriptors rather than engaging with the text or the writer. It is also concluded that raters may also benefit from performance feedback as a means to analyze rating performance for any necessary adjustments.

Another factor that seems to influence raters' judgment is their linguistic background. Studies conducted in English speaking countries have compared the scoring behaviors of non-native speaker (NNS) and native speaker (NS) raters. Findings of these studies are mixed. In some cases NNS were more severe than NSs (Santos, 1988). In other cases NNS were more lenient than NS in different aspects of writing (Brown, 1995). These results could exemplify how distinct background traits corresponding to each rater can be part of writing assessment variation.

Professional experience is another variable that influences the judgment of raters. This variable includes the educational experience of the raters, their previous teaching experience, and the level of assessment experience, among others. In relation to educational experience, studies have found that the raters' academic discipline impacts

their ratings of EFL students' writing (Mendelsohn & Cumming, 1987; Santos, 1988). Mendelsohn and Cumming (1987), for example, examined the differences between the ratings of engineering professors and ESL professors. Their findings indicated that engineering professors attributed more importance to language use than to rhetorical organization in rating the effectiveness of ESL papers. ESL professors, on the other hand, attributed more importance to rhetorical organization. In another study, Santos (1988) investigated the scorings of 178 non-ESL professors of two ESL students' written compositions. These professors were in the fields of humanities and social sciences (96) and physical sciences (82). Results indicated that the physical science professors were more severe in their scores than the humanities and social science professors.

Raters' perceptions of writers are variables approached by Johnson and Van Brackle (2012) in a study in which raters holistically assessed 358 essays. Raters of these papers were required to take a training assessment course and focus on errors made by African American English (AAE), English as a Second Language (ESL) and standard American English (SAE) writers. Raters were assessors of the Regent Writing Exam at the University of Georgia and therefore part of a large-scale assessment practice. Writers were sophomore students who were required to obtain a passing grade on this writing test to continue their university studies. Each paper received 65-72 ratings. Data found indicated that the 3 different types of writers received distinct ratings and were the AAE who received stricter ratings of errors. Researchers conclude that linguistic discrimination may be present in raters' scores and that raters may find themselves "annoyed" (Ibid, p.46) by the careless errors of AAE writers.

The years of L2 writing instruction experience have also been found to have an influence on raters' scorings. In a study conducted by Shi, Wang and Wen (2003), 46 English teachers from three universities in China were asked to evaluate ten essays written by English majors, and to justify their scores for each essay with qualitative comments. Findings indicated that the most experienced writing teachers gave significantly lower scores than the teachers with less experience in 4 out of 10 essays. Analysis of the qualitative comments on the 4 essays suggested that the experienced teachers made more negative comments on organization, language fluency, ideas and general language. In a different study, Khaled Barkaoui (2010) described how rater background and teaching experience in comparison to the type of rating scale influence rating variability. Participants in the study included 11 novice and 14 experienced raters who scored 12 ESL essays with a holistic and analytic rubric. Results suggested that type of rubric had more impact on rating than rater experience. When rating holistically, rater attention focused on written piece while analytic rating focused on rating scales and criteria.

From a different perspective and with a different research purpose, other studies

have focused on comparing inter- and intra-rater scoring and how their processes vary. Considering that inter-rater variability focuses on how scores vary from one rater to the other and that intra-rater variability describes how a single rater can vary scores on a single paper, Saxton, Belanger and Becker (2012) describe the inter- and intra-rater reliability when using an analytic rubric that focused on writers' critical thinking skills. Two female raters, who shared equal background information and teaching experience, took part in a rating protocol for this study. Data revealed that both raters were consistent in their intra-rater scoring performance and showed that raters reached acceptable inter-rater reliability when using the rubric. Researchers concluded that training could help raters attain consistency when using a scoring rubric.

Most of the studies on assessment of writing have focused on ESL students in English speaking countries. Information on how NNS rate EFL writers in non-English speaking countries is scarce. Additionally, more information on raters' perceptions and personal use of a rubric is necessary in EFL assessment. The present study investigates the judgments of two Mexican EFL teachers rating the papers of six high school students who were not their pupils. The study aims to explore the raters' rationale for ways in which they judge the students' writing abilities. The research questions to be responded by the study were:

1. Are there significant differences between the scores assigned by raters to the same papers?
2. What are the raters' views on writing ability?
3. What are the raters' views on the use of scoring rubrics to assess students' writing?

Hamp-Lyons (1989) suggested that, as in other human endeavors, research on writing assessment must use a context embedded approach. In this study, therefore, we assumed that raters' views and behaviors could only be interpreted in the context of the specific situation in which they were involved. No attempt was made to measure the effect of a factor to obtain generalizations, but rather, to allow an intensive view of individuals and the many factors that influenced their behaviors.

Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach with the central premise that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). According to Cresswell (2013), this is a relatively new method that allows researchers to combine distinct types of data and fill in the gaps that one type or another type may

have. Experts have described the concept of the mixed methods approach as one that allows for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected in a single study sequentially and concurrently allowing for different scientific inquiry to be approached (Cresswell et al., 2003 cited in Glówka, 2011). This study collected data through scored essays and a semi structured interview to raters. Essays were scored using statistical analysis methods (quantitative methods) while interview transcripts were analyzed with a qualitative approach. This mixture of methods allowed for data in this study to be analyzed from both perspectives and cross-reference information found. The following sections explain the details of the approach used.

The Raters

Raters were two EFL teachers, one male and one female, who were selected from 6 EFL teachers of a small-size, private high school in northeast Mexico. They were selected because of their similarity in cultural background, mother tongue and professional experience. In the literature review these dimensions of raters' background are considered important sources of variability in writing ability judgment. We chose the participants in such a way as to minimize variability. Although they were part of the teaching staff of their school, neither of them were the writers' instructors at the time of the study. The raters' names were replaced with codes to preserve their anonymity.

To obtain background information from the raters, a background questionnaire was answered in Spanish at the beginning of the study. Rater A was a 37-year old female teacher who had 4 years of teaching experience and a BA in Communication Sciences, a Diploma in Marketing and a Diploma in Teaching Competencies. She also held an In-service-Certificate of English Language Teaching (ICELT).

Rater B was a male teacher of 31 years of age and 5 years of teaching experience. He had a BA in Communication and Public Relations, a Diploma in Teaching Competencies, a Band 1 Certificate in the Cambridge Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) and the Cambridge In-service Certificate for English Language Teaching (ICELT).

Both Rater A and Rater B had experience working with high school students. Also, they both considered writing an important skill to develop in language learners. Rater A considered that writing provides students with the opportunity to use verb tenses, vocabulary and other language forms in a more formal way. She held a form-focused view of writing as an activity that allows students to practice a specific language form previously learned in class. Rater B, on the other hand, stated that writing is important because it is the visual way in which language is represented. He considered that writing should be done in an organized and coherent way. This instructor viewed writing as an opportunity to communicate rather than to practice language forms.

The raters did not receive any kind of preparation or training prior to the study. They

accepted to blindly rate 18 papers written by 6 high school students during an advanced general English course, taught by one of the researchers. They relied on their judgment and experience to assess the papers, using a predetermined analytic scoring rubric.

The Writing Tasks

Student writers participated in three different writing tasks as part of their English language class. For each task, they were required to develop a descriptive essay of 150-180 words (see writing prompts on Appendix A). Students had opportunities to engage in classroom discussions and brainstorming activities, prior to the writing task. Writing activities took place in the school language laboratory with Internet access. Once students had brainstormed their ideas and had prepared an outline, they developed their papers on a previously created personal weblog. If the writing task was not finished during class time, they were required to finish the composition at home and to upload their work.

Scoring Rubric

Raters were provided with an analytic scoring rubric (Cushing, 2002) to assess several aspects of students' writing. The rubric was adapted from Jacob's et al. (1981, cited in Cushing, 2002) and focuses on 5 aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (see rubric on Appendix B). Each aspect was graded using a 1-6 scale in which 1 indicated the lowest and 6 the highest performance. The scoring rubric was familiar to the raters who had previously used it to assess their students' writing.

Data Collection Procedures

Before initiating the data collection activities, raters were given information on the purpose and procedures of the study. Then they were asked to sign an informed consent and to fill-in a background questionnaire, both written in Spanish. The raters were given a separate, copied set of 18 papers to grade, a copy of the writing prompts given to students, and a copy of the 6-point analytic scoring rubric. They were given two weeks to independently score the papers. Scores were directly written on each paper. Neither names nor any other personal background information of the writers was shared with the raters.

To explore the influence of raters' factors on their judgments, raters were interviewed by one of the researchers, once the scoring was finished. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and lasted approximately 15-25 minutes. Interviews followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allow for more flexibility in terms of question structure and follow-up responses of the interviewee (McDonough & McDonough,

1997; Nunan, 1992) which might allow for more interview engagement between the interviewer and interviewee.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of data involved four stages. First, descriptive statistical analyses (the mean and standard deviation) as well as paired samples t-tests for the writing scores given by both raters were conducted. These statistical analyses were calculated to compare the score means and standard deviations of the two raters and determine if there were significant differences between the scores given by Rater A in comparison to Rater B for the 18 papers written by the high school students. In a second stage of analysis, we entered the scoring data into a commercial spreadsheet to create a line-chart that allowed visual representation and analysis. The third stage consisted in identifying aspects that could explain the contrasts in the scores given by the raters to each of the writers for the three writing tasks to design a set of interview questions. Finally, we examined the responses given by the raters to the interview questions to identify aspects of their background that influenced their judgment and scoring behavior. To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview, the researchers analyzed transcripts independently to identify themes then results were cross-referenced and agreed upon.

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Results

Table 1 shows the scores assigned by the two raters to each paper written for the three writing tasks. Only the total scores were considered in the statistical analyses.

Rater A	Task 1	Category	Writer A	Writer B	Writer C	Writer D	Writer E	Writer F
		Content	6	4	4	6	4	4
		Organization	6	6	4	6	4	5
		Vocabulary	6	5	5	5	5	6
		Language	6	5	5	6	6	6
		Mechanics	6	5	4	6	5	6
		TOTAL	30	25	22	29	24	27
	Task 2	Content	6	6	6	6	6	4
		Organization	6	6	6	6	6	4
		Vocabulary	6	6	6	4	6	4
		Language	5	6	6	4	6	4
		Mechanics	5	6	5	4	6	4
		TOTAL	28	30	29	24	30	20
	Task 3	Content	6	5	6	6	6	1
		Organization	6	6	6	6	6	1
		Vocabulary	6	6	6	6	6	1
		Language	5	6	6	6	6	1
		Mechanics	6	5	6	6	6	1
		TOTAL	29	28	30	30	30	5
Rater B	Task 1	Content	4	4	4	4	4	4
		Organization	5	4	4	5	4	3
		Vocabulary	4	4	4	6	4	3
		Language	5	4	3	6	4	3
		Mechanics	4	4	3	6	4	3
		TOTAL	22	20	18	27	20	16
	Task 2	Content	4	4	4	6	5	2
		Organization	5	4	4	6	5	1
		Vocabulary	4	5	4	6	4	3
		Language	4	5	4	6	4	3
		Mechanics	5	4	4	6	4	4
		TOTAL	22	22	20	30	22	13
	Task 3	Content	5	4	4	5	4	4
		Organization	4	4	4	5	4	4
		Vocabulary	4	4	4	4	4	4
		Language	4	4	4	5	4	3
		Mechanics	4	4	1	4	4	4
		TOTAL	21	20	17	23	20	19

Table 1. Scores assigned by the raters on each task

Are there significant differences between the scores assigned by raters to the same papers?

Table two summarises and compares the means and standard deviations of the ratings of

Rater A and Rater B on the three papers for each of the six EFL student writers. Means ranged from 16.00 to 29.00. Rater B provided lower scores (Group M score of 20.70 vs. 26.11) than Rater A. Although both raters judged that the papers written by Fiona (M of 16.00 Rater B vs. 17.33 from Rater A) had more flaws, they differed in their judgment of the papers with fewer weaknesses. While Rater A assigned the highest scores to the papers written by Albert (M of 29.00), Rater B assigned the highest scores to the papers written by Daniel (M of 26.66). Equally important is to point out that Rater B was more consistent in his scoring. While he obtained a Sd. of 3.71, Rater A was less consistent, obtaining 6.10 as a Sd.

Writer	Rater A		Rater B	
	M	Sd	M	Sd
Albert	29.00	1.00	21.66	0.57
Beatriz	28.66	1.15	20.66	1.15
Charlie	27.00	4.35	18.33	1.52
Daniel	27.66	3.21	26.66	3.51
Emma	28.00	3.46	20.66	1.15
Fiona	17.33	11.23	16.00	3.00
Group M	26.11	6.10	20.70	3.71

Table 2. Comparisons of the scores assigned by Rater A and Rater B

Scoring inconsistency of Rater A is visually represented in Figure 1. Inconsistency in the judgment of the writing ability was particularly evident in the scores assigned to the papers written by Fiona, which ranged from 5 to 27 points.

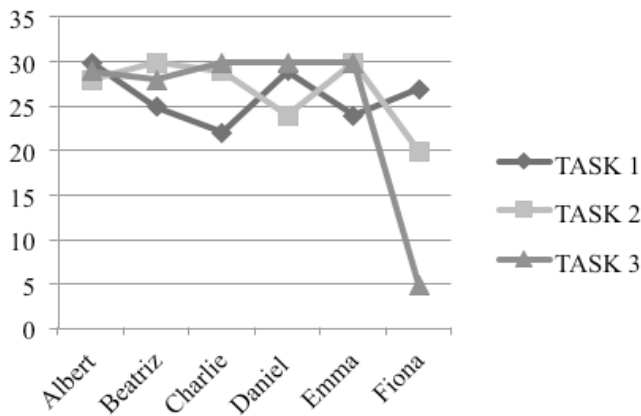


Figure 1. Score results of Rater A

Rater B was more consistent in his judgments of the students' writing abilities as is shown on Figure 2.

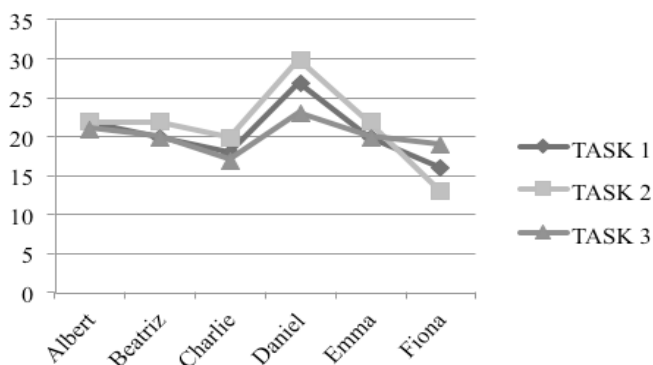


Figure 2. Score results of Rater B

To compare the means of the scores assigned by the two raters, a t-test was used. The t-test assesses whether the means of two groups of scores are statistically different from each other. Results indicated that the scoring of Rater A is significantly different from the scoring of Rater B, $t(34) = 3.2109$, $p < .05$. The researchers are 95% confident that the mean difference lies between 0.8214 and 10.0675. These results suggest that the raters' assessment varied greatly even when given the same written samples and the same scoring rubric.

On Task 1, Rater A gave higher scores on every aspect in comparison to Rater B. Both Raters followed the same descending and ascending patterns of scores on every student, except on Fiona who received 27 points from Rater A and 16 points from Rater B.

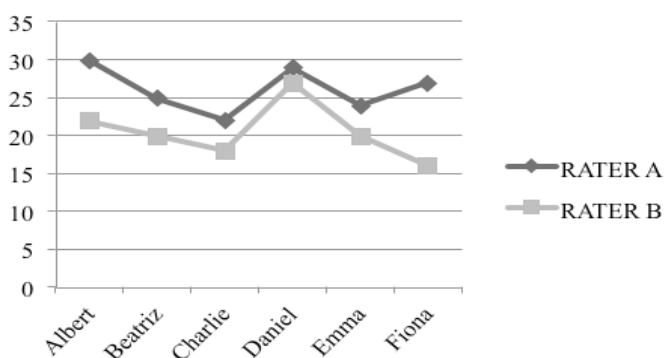


Figure 3. Ratings for Task 1

On Task 2, Rater A (20 points being the lowest) provided higher scores to every student than those given by Rater B (16 points being the lowest score). Figure 4 depicts the differences in scores given to Daniel. Rater B gave a higher score (30 points) to Daniel than Rater A (24 points).

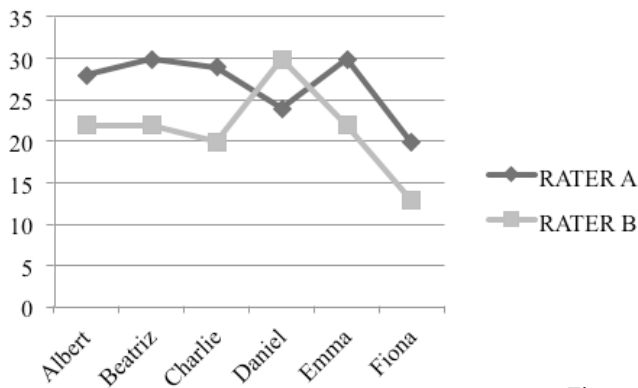


Figure 4. Ratings for Task 2

For Task 3, Raters disagreed again in their scoring. Rater A provided higher scores on all of the papers except the ones written by Fiona. In this case, Rater B assigned 19 points to her paper while Rater A assigned 5 points.

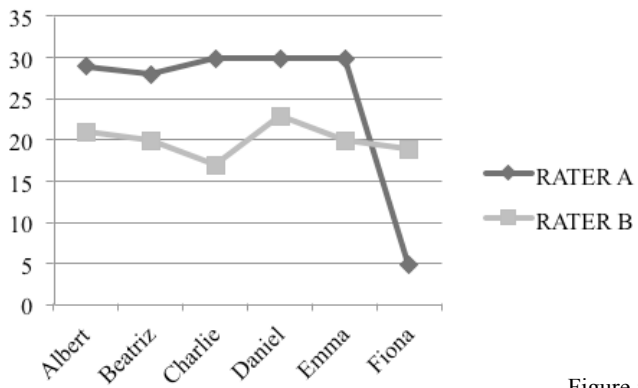


Figure 5. Ratings for Task 3

In sum, the response to the first research question is that there were significant differences between the scores assigned by Rater A and Rater B to the same papers. The raters' background -in terms of age, teaching experience, and educational experience- were similar. They were also part of the same teaching staff in the same private high school. However, differences were found among their views of what writing ability is and on the concept, purpose and use of scoring rubrics to assess writing. It is the researchers' belief that these differences in writing assessment and rubric use perceptions could have influenced rater variability and rating scores. These perceptions are further discussed in the following section.

How do raters define writing ability?

Rater A was a Mexican female with five years of EFL teaching experience. During the

interview she indicated that she viewed writing ability as an essential part of foreign language competence. She considered that “*language development is incomplete without writing.*” Furthermore, Rater A complained about the scarce attention given by other teachers to developing their own and their students’ writing ability. The following is an excerpt of her comments.

Teachers do not teach their students to write and they themselves do not know how to write. We are at a disadvantage because we do not know how to write. It is important for our students to know how to develop a composition and what language structures to use.

Rater A felt great responsibility for teaching students how to write correctly in English and she considered that high school students need to learn how to write distinct types of texts -from letters and emails to essays-, according to their level of English language proficiency. In general terms, Rater A associated writing ability with the correct use of grammar and correct use of each writing genre.

Rater B, on the other hand, was a Mexican male teacher with four years of EFL teaching experience. The interview transcripts revealed that he considered writing as “a more structured way of thinking” and that, to write properly, students need to be aware of the purpose of the text and the target audience. Writing ability, according to his views, takes a long time to develop. He attributed more importance to the ideas that student writers try to express, even when they still have limited grammatical competence. Rater B associated writing ability with the capability of communicating ideas to a particular audience.

In spite of the similarity of their professional backgrounds, native language and years of teaching experience, the raters’ views on what writing ability is were very different. While Rater A associated writing ability to the correct use of language structures, Rater B viewed writing ability as the capacity to communicate, in the process of acquiring the foreign language.

When asked what they thought of the writing ability of the specific writers they assessed, Rater A responded that students had good use of language structure and vocabulary, although they did not organize their work properly and did not consider the target audience they were writing for. She added that some did not show they had planned before writing. In spite of the weaknesses identified in the students’ papers, Rater A was lenient compared with Rater B. The reason could be that students were demonstrating good use of grammar, the most important trait of writing ability, from her point of view.

Rater B found that the students he assessed for the study did not meet the needs

of their audience because they had not written for an audience in the first place. In his opinion, students had written for themselves rather than for a reader. Rater B gave lower scores than Rater A, probably because he was expecting not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic and discourse competence.

What are the raters' views on the use of scoring rubrics to assess the students' writing?

During the interview the raters were also asked about their views on the use of scoring rubrics. Rater A reported that she regularly used rubrics to grade her students' writing. She considered rubrics as easy-to-use tools that make the scoring procedure more objective by allowing the rater to set aside students' variables. The following is a segment of her comments.

A rubric is a guide that can help you assign a grade because we can tend to be subjective depending on whom we are grading. The rubric allows you to focus on the actual writing, rather on the students.

Rater A indicated that, when scoring the essays for the study, she gave more importance to the correct use of the grammar. This comment seemed contradictory to the use of a rubric in which various components or traits of writing are included.

Rater B commented that he was familiar with the use of rubrics for different purposes and that he used them differently, depending on the class. If in a lesson he emphasized a specific language structure, then he would focus on the use of that structure when scoring. If during lessons organization, content and other text-level aspects were reviewed during lessons, then his scoring would focus on those aspects. Rubrics, in his opinion "...are tools for objective assessment and they facilitate your job when assessing writing because you have specific parameters to follow. It is more objective than just giving a grade based on what I consider good."

Rater B also affirmed that the use of rubrics encourages fair grades for students because it eliminates the influence of the students' personal traits. While grading essays for this study, he found that writers had not written for an audience and he suggested including the aspect of 'target audience' in the scoring rubric.

Discussion

This study was conducted to find out if there were differences in the scores given by two Mexican raters to the same papers written in English as a foreign language. Their views on what writing ability is and their views on the use of scoring rubrics to assess writing were also explored.

Significant differences were found among Raters' scores in spite of the similarity in their professional backgrounds. First, Rater A assigned higher scores than Rater B. Second, Rater A's ratings seemed to be more varied and less consistent, while Rater B had less variance in his scores. These findings suggest that rubrics are not enough to produce homogeneous scores and that assessment judgment is influenced by distinct factors.

Results of this study comply with those found by Wiseman (2012) in which two distinct types of scoring, lenient and strict, depended on raters' background and perceptions of text and task prompt. In this study, it is the researchers' belief that rater score variation (one stricter than the other) depended on participants' perceptions of the concept of writing and what is expected from students at different levels of proficiency. Therefore, it may be concluded from these results that raters' perception of writing and student expectations are also part of scoring variation. The rater who associated writing ability with good use of grammar was more lenient than the rater who associated writing ability with discourse and sociolinguistic competence. Also, Rater A focused more on only one of the writing traits included in the rubric, while Rater B focused on a writing trait that was not included in the rubric. These results support the claim that the use of holistic or analytic scoring rubrics does not avoid the influence of a variety of factors in the raters' scoring behavior (Shi, 2001).

In this study, raters had similar background traits but differed in their perceptions of writing and written tasks. Results of this study suggest that background characteristics of raters may not influence score variability, but instead their rationale of writing and what to expect from writers. Therefore, these results can be differentiated from those found by Mendelsohn and Cumming (1987) and Santos (1988) in the personal and professional background of raters had influence on rating variability. Additionally, this study echoes the results from Barkaoui's study (2010) in the sense that we believe that teaching experience was not a determining factor in rating variability. Instead other factors had more impact on variability than teaching experience. The researcher found that type of rubric used impacted variation while we consider raters' personal perceptions to be determinant.

Finally, although only inter-rater variability was analyzed in this study, intra-rater reliability is an issue that should also be approached. As demonstrated in the study by Saxton, Belanger and Becker (2012), both types of rater analysis could be compared to explain the dynamics of both processes. Therefore, future research could focus on explaining the intra- and inter-rater assessment processes of specific writing tasks in an EFL context and compare them with others found in distinct language programs in the same context and seek to explain the variances found to suggest possible ways of obtaining fair and accurate ratings. Additionally, it could be worthwhile to focus on the

impact of different types of scoring rubrics and how these types of rubrics can result in more reliable ratings.

Conclusions and Implications

Results of this small-scale exploratory study allowed us to conclude that the use of scoring rubrics to assess EFL writing does not ensure homogeneity in an assessment process. Furthermore, similarity in raters' professional background, teaching experience, age and first language does not always imply similarity in their scoring behaviors. Other factors such as writing instruction and writing assessment training could possibly lessen the variability in scorings as found in studies by Saxton, Belanger and Becker (2012); Weigle, (1994) and Cushing (1994). These variables, however, were not within the scope of our study.

The variability found in the raters' scoring behavior has at least two implications for EFL writing teachers. First, the use of rubrics to assess the students' writing ability is useful for both students and teachers because it may enhance the quality of instruction and they may get students to think about the criteria on which their work will be judged. Scoring rubrics, however, are not a panacea. Ultimately, rating is complex and human behavior is multi-determined. The second implication is that although rubrics facilitate grading and communicating expectations to students, no scoring rubric fits all needs. Deciding on the best rubric to use for a specific writing task involves deep analysis of program goals and above all it involves training raters in its use.

Finally, this study involved two raters and therefore results cannot be generalized to other situations. The study, however, could shed some light on the issues involved in EFL writing assessment and the use of scoring rubrics. This insight can aid other instructors in comparing their specific context to that described in this study and seek for the best results in their everyday assessment practice.

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Appendices (available online)

[Appendix 1](#)

[Appendix 2](#)

Using a virtual classroom in the Practicum: Innovations and enhanced practices

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Abstract

This article intends to communicate some of the activities developed in a Practicum context in an English Teacher Education Programme. It describes and assesses some didactic choices aimed at promoting reflection, collaboration and dialogue, such as forums, collaborative writing and triangulation in assessment. Besides, it proposes that virtual classrooms may maximise the potential of these practices.

Keywords: practicum; virtual classroom; collaboration; reflection; dialogue.

Resumen

El presente artículo da cuenta de algunas de las prácticas de enseñanza que forman parte de un proyecto de Residencia de la formación docente en inglés. El punto de interés son las intervenciones didácticas que intentan promover la reflexión, la colaboración y el diálogo, como por ejemplo los foros de discusión, la escritura colaborativa y la triangulación al momento de la evaluación. Se explora además cómo el uso de un aula virtual en la plataforma Moodle puede incrementar el potencial de estas prácticas.

Palabras clave: residencia; aula virtual; colaboración; reflexión; diálogo.

THE PRACTICUM PROPOSAL this article intends to portray, apart from being in keeping with both the jurisdictional teacher education curriculum and the institutional policies¹, also purports to respond to the intensity that characterises trainees' first teaching experiences. There is a lot in these experiences which is singular, and a lot which is shared: while their singularity is determined by the trainee's individual history and by the school and community culture(s) where they carry out their teaching, it is also true that most trainees share a combination of expectancy and uncertainty, regardless of their local context. One of the concerns of Practicum tutors is precisely how to address the novelty of the experience with all its challenges and dilemmas. My intention is to share those features of our Practicum project which are especially aimed at helping student-teachers enter the teaching profession in a state of hope and confidence and which involve explicit, purposeful dialogic practices of reflection and collaboration.

Since 2010, and as part of an institutional initiative, two tutors have been in charge of the Practicum - one is a teacher of English and the other a teacher of Psychology, Pedagogy and Philosophy². In brief, the Practicum in our programme involves a three-week classroom observation period, interviews to the English teacher and other school staff, the design of a project, day-to-day lesson planning in the framework of that project, feedback sessions with peers and tutors and a reflective account of the experience in the form of a narrative essay. Due to curricular constraints, this process does not last longer than four months. It is time, precisely, one of the factors that make this Practicum experience particularly intense for both trainees and tutors.

It was in an attempt to deal with the hustle and bustle of this process that in 2011 we decided to create a virtual classroom in the school Moodle platform. When we started it, we did not fully appreciate its potential; our main aim at the time was to make the submission and return of unit and lesson plans more systematic. The virtual classroom, however, would gradually allow for different forms of communication and different modes of collaborative work.

Moodle and the Practicum Virtual Classroom

Moodle is a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which allows teachers to create anything from forums where to share ideas to complete distance-learning courses. In our institution a number of teachers have opted for blended-learning, which means their Moodle virtual classrooms are intended to support regular class work. The choices available to teachers in this respect are diverse: one can select Moodle resources such as wiki texts, which permit collaborative writing, for instance, or other types of tools which provide more controlled, individualised practice and/or testing, such as questionnaires.

Given the complex, multidimensional nature of the Practicum, most of the tasks we have included in our virtual classroom purport to promote collaborative work, interaction

and ubiquitous learning; there are forums where to exchange lesson plans, materials and teaching ideas in general, wiki texts where to keep a record of the Practicum experience and a repository of articles and websites trainees can find useful, among other tasks.

Martin Dougiamas (2013), one of Moodle developers, has identified five features of VLEs which seem to enhance the social, collaborative construction of knowledge: the possibility for all participants to alternate between teacher and learner roles, the chance to learn by creating something (for others), as well as by observing others do and create, the opportunity to give and receive feedback to/from peers and the teacher's possibility to adjust the course while it is in progress in response to the learners' needs.

These benefits are coherent with our Practicum project and even though none of them is exclusive of VLEs, we have found they can be maximised in the context of the virtual classroom, especially when other resources (time and personnel, for instance) are scarce. A case in point is open, full time access to everyone's production through the use of forums and wikis which facilitates immediate feedback originating from and expanding in several directions.

In the following sections I intend to describe the alternative built-in teaching and learning facilities this ubiquitous learning environment offers and to explore the connections between this resource and the principles that illuminate our Practicum proposal – namely, collaboration, reflection and dialogue. The decision to present practices and principles in an alternate fashion in this account is based on the belief that theory and practice neither precede nor exceed each other and that teachers can adopt and/or develop their teaching principles when they are able to theorise upon their own practices.

Dialogue and Collaboration

In the section *Tasks and Activities* in the virtual classroom there is a forum whose main purpose is the submission of unit plans, lesson plans and teaching materials. Each trainee is expected to participate in the forum by sharing the plans and tasks for their lessons; they usually do so by attaching a Word file to the forum entry. Tutors generally add comments in the same Word file and post their feedback in a new forum entry, as a response to the student's. The context of the forum and the message-response logic already make this activity dialogic; however, the potential for meaningful communication can be extended in several ways.

One of the advantages of this teaching facility, the forum, is that the exchanges capture the process of construction of unit and lesson plans, the changes and adjustments it involves. Plans are rewritten in response not only to the tutors' feedback, but sometimes also to fellow trainees' comments and suggestions. Apart from these explicit contributions, more subtle, 'invisible' conversations take place: each and every trainee

can access their classmates' projects, lesson plans and materials and the tutors' feedback and focus their attention on a particular feature, or many, which helps them frame or improve their own proposals. It is typical that trainees share the same theme for their projects, for instance, or that they borrow and adapt a classmate's worksheet, or that they discuss and agree on the most appropriate way to explain a grammar item. It has lately been the case that student-teachers placed in identical courses in the same school have developed units of work together, and these involved shared lessons, exchange of letters and collaborative writing between their two groups of students.

The opportunity to browse through classmates' work and borrow anything from simple ideas to specific materials is based on two principles: trust and cooperation. It is crucial that both trainees and tutors believe everyone is going to do their best, but not necessarily on their own: both the tutors' feedback and the classmates' learning processes serve as scaffolds for each student-teacher to achieve their learning goals. This assumption transforms the virtual classroom participants from individuals into a learning community.

Apart from the feeling of confidence the peers' support adds to the Practicum experience, we believe cooperative work at this stage of teacher education enhances the chances these prospective teachers will be better prepared to work with their colleagues and be part of an institutional project in the near future. It has been acknowledged that isolation, and thus frustration, is one of the problems teachers encounter; according to Murray (2010, p. 3), "[t]eachers all around the world face similar challenges due to the very nature of school environment. They teach their classes independently from other colleagues, which makes them feel isolated." In addition, working long hours at several different schools makes it difficult for teachers to be fully integrated into each and every institution's ethos. We are far from assuming that virtual work will noticeably improve these conditions; however, teachers who have had the experience of team work in a ubiquitous learning environment might have more and/or better strategies to put up with the challenge of teaching as part of a community. What we can firmly assert at this point is that the exchanges that take place in this virtual environment permit searches, cooperative projects and learning processes that would not be possible had we not had total, twenty-four-seven accessibility on the one hand, and a profound trust in cooperation, on the other hand.

Dialogue in Planning

It is through dialogue also that student teachers manage to comprehend the culture(s) that characterise their groups of students and propose relevant teaching practices for them. These dialogic exchanges may take diverse forms: interviews to school personnel, informal conversations with students, weekly meetings with tutors and peers, among

others.

I have already suggested that one valuable exchange facilitated by the virtual classroom is the conversations trainees and tutors engage in when they write and comment on each lesson plan. When participating in these virtual conversations both tutors and trainees operate on the assumption that, even though they represent different parties, they are equally interested in the particular teaching project. In this sense, it is worth noting that the Practicum here is not envisaged as a stage where the student-teachers need to display the teaching knowledge and abilities they have acquired along the course for the tutors to judge. Much to the contrary, tutors are active participants in the construction of the trainees' teaching proposals and this stand seeks to be coherent not only with the Practicum teaching approach but also with the approach trainees are encouraged to practice.

We adhere to a task-based approach to teaching (Estaire & Zanón, 1994): trainees are expected to design teaching projects based on the process to accomplish a real-life, communicative task. Each lesson they plan, then, is a stepping stone in the construction of the selected text; several genres have already been explored: a leaflet, a game, a recipe, a video game review, a year book, among others. There are two features that become crucial when planning within the task-based framework: functions and strategies. Reflecting upon the communicative functions involved in the accomplishment of the task helps student teachers depart from the structuralist approach to grammar most of them have experienced as learners; and carefully planning the learning strategies their students can resort to when working on the task intends to respond to the contexts where these trainees teach: secondary schools struggling to integrate their newly-arrived students³. In a nutshell, these are the tenets of the teaching approach promoted in the Practicum: real-life tasks, meaningful communication, student autonomy and assessment that inform teaching.

When it comes to lesson planning, we agree with Gloria Edelstein (2012) when she claims that a lesson plan is both a hypothesis and a statement. It is a statement because in order to plan a lesson one needs to take a stand: the lesson plan reveals the teacher's view of language and learning, her beliefs as regards teaching and the ethical value she perceives in what she teaches. From a different but related perspective, planning can be seen as a hypothesis making process because the didactic options – the tasks, the materials, the interaction patterns – need to respond successfully to the multifarious circumstances that may unfold during the lesson. Complex, unique, multidimensional, tense and unanticipated as teaching practices seem to be (Edelstein, 1996, p. 17), we believe that only a thick but open text can capture a new teacher's plans. Thick in the sense that there should be a description of the context and circumstances that make the teacher's epistemological, theoretical and didactic choices worthy and justifiable; still,

there should be room for alternatives and this is what makes the plan an open text.

The lesson plan under this light, then, works as a very detailed map which offers several possible routes. It is a map that should always be designed with the Other as one's guiding star (Edelstein, 2012): the Other is the students, those whose learning experiences we purport to enhance and maximise. In this sense, we follow Holliday (1994, p. 162) when he postulates that a teacher is both an ethnographer and an action-researcher: one who carefully considers the classroom and school cultures in order to develop a plan that seems appropriate on the basis of her observations. The author speaks about a becoming-appropriate methodology because the observation-action process works in a spiral fashion and is never complete: "An appropriate methodology needs to incorporate both how to teach and learning about how to teach. Indeed, it is too simplistic to call it 'appropriate' methodology: it is in effect always a 'becoming-appropriate methodology' (p. 164). Holliday's point is particularly relevant in this Practicum project because trainees need to exercise their cultural sensitivity in order to develop units of work and plan didactic interventions that are pertinent to the particular group they are teaching.

As it can be seen, planning is the site where a number of diverse exchanges take place; when planning trainees do not only overtly interact with their tutors, the classroom teacher and/or their classmates, they also engage in less obvious, yet profound, (self) reflective conversations aimed at reconciling their observations and their intentions with a constellation of possible outcomes.

Assessment as Dialogue

As I have already stated, one of the cornerstones of our Practicum proposal is formative assessment, assessment that illuminates teaching and learning, as opposed to measuring them. Each trainee's project should include an assessment built-in facility that allows them to monitor the progress, make adjustments and act upon difficulties. Some of the principles of formative assessment are communicable learning objectives, negotiated criteria to assess their attainment and communication all along the process (Anijovich, 2010, pp. 16 – 17), and we intend our students to actually experience these principles during the Practicum so that they are better able to understand and practise them. As soon as the semester starts, we ask trainees to identify the specific practices, strategies and techniques they would like to receive feedback on when teaching and record them in a shared wiki document in the virtual classroom. This results in a set of criteria that can be used to assess the student-teachers' performance both formatively and summatively. Some of the items selected by the trainees are: the use of the blackboard (handwriting and distribution of information), voice quality and volume, the ability to deliver and clarify instructions and some more complex practices such as being able to

handle unpredictable circumstances and focusing more on students' learning – rather than on their own performance only. Needless to say, we add other items we consider important, especially during the day-to-day of the practice teaching period, and on the basis of this list we discuss the past lessons with trainees and help them plan the lessons to come. When the time comes for us to decide on a mark for each student teacher, these criteria are useful as well.

Even though it is tutors who have the final say on the trainee's Practicum mark, the assessment process and its conclusion incorporate several voices. Trainees' voices are present at each and every stage of the Practicum and they are recorded for self and tutors' assessment by means of two different but related texts: journals and narrative essays. Each trainee keeps a record of her practice teaching experiences in a wiki text in the virtual classroom that can be accessed by peers and tutors. These observations encompass the trainee's feelings, reflections, doubts and questions and are usually coloured by the intensity of the process they are going through – they are spontaneous and the topics are diverse. The final narrative essay, on the other hand, is expected to arise from a process of reflection once the practice teaching experience is finished; while the journals are aimed at recording first-hand experiences, the essay is intended to communicate the new understandings the Practicum has brought about for each student teacher. These essays are posted in a forum in the virtual classroom and can be presented to the programme staff and students once a year.

The tutors also keep observation journals in the mode of wiki texts where they record their impressions, reflections and possible courses of action after watching a trainee's lesson. These collaborative documents condense important insights to be considered when assessing the process summatively and are a practical tool to share concerns and plans even when colleagues have little time to meet at school. The classroom teachers' voices are also heard when the time comes to decide on a mark for the trainee: these teachers write a report on the trainee's performance following a semi-structured questionnaire. The different participants' perspectives, which are systematically recorded, contribute to a practice that is also a feature of formative assessment: triangulation. According to Alvarez Mendez (2001, p. 16), "[t]riangulation plays a major role in guaranteeing justice in the exercise of assessment, in which each interested party is entitled to present their arguments" (my translation). The crossings between journals, essays and reports give tutors rich evidence on the basis of which they can arrive at a summative judgment of a very complex and intense process.

Non-conclusive conclusion

I have shared some of the features of a Practicum project which is far from being flawless; only by writing this account and consulting related bibliography I have spotted

areas that can be strengthened.

It is fair to acknowledge that different student teachers respond differently to the teaching strategies I have described; while some do profit from virtual exchanges, for example, others are more inclined to face-to-face sessions – which, unfortunately, due to curricular and budget constraints, are not as many as we would like. The number of new graduates who remain participants in the virtual classroom, and sometimes even active, is remarkable, however. This confirms, in my opinion, teachers' urgent need to be part of a community and the potential of virtual environments, in spite of their shortcomings, to strengthen teachers' assurance and sense of belonging.

Last but not least, it is worth highlighting that this project responds to the peculiarities of our teaching context and that it would be unwise to suggest replicating it in other institutional and jurisdictional contexts without any adaptations. Nevertheless, I am certain that the principles that guide the practical choices in our Practicum plan – collaboration, reflection and dialogue - can also illuminate other similar emerging projects and that the practices originated in those principles are open to adjustments and other teacher trainers can make them fit their own plans.

Notes

1. Instituto Superior del Profesorado N° 8 “Almirante G. Brown”, in Santa Fe (Santa Fe, Argentina).
2. Given the fact that both my colleague and I have worked on the construction of this Practicum proposal and that it is supported by the institution, I will use the first person plural “we” in order to acknowledge the collaborative and communal spirit of this project. The first person singular “I” will be used to acknowledge responsibility for opinions, hypotheses and conclusions which are solely my own.
3. The National Education Act (2006) made secondary education compulsory for every teenager in Argentina.

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Book reviews

Hacia una didáctica del Inglés para niños en escuelas primarias

E.N. Braun (Compiladora), Santa Rosa, Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 2011;
ISBN 978-950-863-151-0

This book compiled by Estela Braun is divided into seven chapters which tackle different aspects connected to the teaching of English at primary level, each written by recognized EFL professionals in Argentina. It starts with a prologue written by the compiler who clearly states how the book was born. It is the result of a professional development course carried out for primary teachers in the province of La Pampa. She points out the fact that teaching English to learners at primary school is a completely different endeavour from that of teaching English to older students. It is worth mentioning that even though the title of the book is in Spanish, it is entirely written in English.

Leonor Corradi opens the book by laying special emphasis on the idea that we are *educating through* English. An enormous responsibility is being placed on language teachers, we are not merely teaching a language but we are educating for the contemporary world. She also refers to the teacher's role and she places critical reflection at the core. Reflective teaching will promote professional development. If students are educated within this environment, they are more likely to transfer this openness to other areas of learning. The ideas embodied in this first chapter perfectly summarize the role of the foreign language teacher when teaching children today.

The following chapter is about the use of literature in the young learners' classrooms. The authors, Griselda Beacon and Ana María Cendoya, mention the benefits of including literature in the young learners' classroom. It contributes to the development of communicative competence, intercultural awareness and critical thinking. In other words, literary texts help the development of children's cognitive and affective side. The whole chapter is worth reading as it provides the theoretical background for the importance of confronting young learners to literary texts of various types.

Chapter 3 expands on many of the ideas expressed in the previous one. María Mercedes Pérez Berbain and Andrea Blawdziewicz de Caillón write about *Story-*

telling in the EFL Classroom. The authors state the reasons why story-telling should be included in the language classroom and the importance of including recognition and production activities after the telling of the story. Appendices showing sample activities are included.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is not left aside. It was a very good decision to include the basics of implementing CLIL approaches in foreign language classes at primary level. Estela Nélide Braun and Romina Cheme Arriaga highlight that CLIL caters for different learning styles; students learn by doing, they are asked to solve meaningful and authentic activities. Assessment, a very controversial aspect within CLIL's agendas, is also tackled within this chapter.

Pronunciation is also referred to in the book. Is it relevant in a primary context, how can it be incorporated? Lilián Ariztimuño and Mauro Cóccaro answer this question by cogently addressing the importance of teaching pronunciation at an early age. They back their ideas by stating biological and neurological factors as well as psychological, personality, sociocultural and input aspects. Pronunciation should be incorporated to the syllabus and classroom activities aimed at promoting intelligible pronunciation should be designed.

In Chapter 6, "Bridging the gap: technology and EFL classrooms," María Laura García, briefly explains the advantages of incorporating technology in the EFL classroom. She considers aspects such as how to evaluate a website according to your own teaching context and she provides a list of possible websites to consult.

The author of the last chapter, Sonia Suárez Cepeda, refers to the "the developmental sequences observed in the acquisition of English as a first language (L1), which involve semantic and morphosyntactic processes". Then she turns to second language learning and she connects chunking to implicit and explicit knowledge. The chapter ends with an analysis of a traditional young learners' tests in terms of the use of explicit and implicit learning.

This book was entirely written by Argentine EFL professionals; the authors are sharing their own ideas about professional development in the Argentinian context. Each chapter is a thorough introduction to the topics included in this publication, an excellent starting point for further reading. To conclude, I would say that this book is a must-read for any teacher involved in the teaching of English at primary level. It can be an excellent tool for both trainees and in-service teachers.

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Understanding language classroom contexts: The starting point for change

M. Wedell and A. Malderez, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, Pp. x + 238, £63.34/US\$104.50, ISBN 9781441198372 (hbk); £20.95/US\$34.15, ISBN 9781441133076 (pbk); US \$17.81.00/US\$28.79, ISBN 9781441102454 (Kindle Edition)

“The thing about context is that it is easy to take it for granted.”
(Wedell & Malderez, 2013: 7)

Would anyone deny the fact that teaching and learning are context-embedded activities? Probably not. Yet, the contextual dimension of education is frequently forgotten (Fullan, 2007). Educational change implementation is often based upon considerations other than the context or the main players within it. Attempting to describe schools and classrooms, however, entails an understanding not only that the classroom context (and what goes on within) depends on a myriad of visible and invisible interconnected variables, but also that context itself helps shape such variables in return.

It is the existence of such cohesive but complex interrelationship that *Understanding Language Classroom Contexts* explores. In this stimulating book, Wedell and Malderez remind us that what takes place in the language classroom is simultaneous and immediate, and also unpredictable; it is concrete and overt, yet abstract and covert. Above all, the book reminds us that only through a conscientious consideration and a thorough understanding of the complexity of any classroom context can educational change be successfully initiated and implemented.

The brief Introduction outlines the book as a whole and presents its main structure. The rest of the book is divided into ten chapters. Each of these follows a similar organisation: a) an introduction, which makes a good entry point to the key concepts under discussion; b) a series of reflective tasks that invite the reader to relate the contents of the book to their own contexts and personal experience; and c) a summary and final task for further reflection, all intermeshed with theoretical and practical considerations. In addition, each chapter includes a substantial bibliography.

Chapter 1 invites readers to make sense of their own teaching contexts. To help them do so, the authors provide an overview of a typical language classroom setting, which is the starting point for the analysis of the visible and invisible layers that permeate classrooms and that are the key concepts described later on. Context is here presented as “dynamic” and “evolving”, and therefore only partially described. The chapter also introduces the relevant distinction between BANA (British, Australasian and North American), and TESEP (Tertiary, Secondary and Primary) as two types of contexts affecting current English teaching (ET) realities (p. 13). Finally, the authors describe

the core components of context – namely, people, place and time – and the extent to which each of these impinge both teaching and learning.

In Chapter 2, Wedell and Malderez conceptualize the notion of culture and its relation to language and language classrooms. The main goal of this chapter is to understand culture as pervasive and affecting all “the visible layers of any context” (p.30). The authors begin by exploring their own definitions of culture and move on to elaborate on the notion from a historical perspective, reviewing both traditional and more recent definitions. The relevance of this detailed discussion of the term resides, in my opinion, in an enhanced understanding that culture(s) can be learned, that people generally belong to more than one (dynamic) culture simultaneously, and that there are classroom cultures embedded within the wider cultures of the organizational and/or national culture of a particular group. Most importantly, the authors argue that for a deeper understanding of how culture influences language teaching and learning, what matters is the process of stopping to think about cultural influences, more than the product of such process (p.52).

Chapter 3 looks at language and languages in education. Here, Wedell and Malderez discuss three main concepts: the language of everyday communication (LEC) and the language-as-subject (LAS); languages in contexts; and the role of English as a global language (Graddol, 2006). The first part of the chapter focuses on LEC and learning from a socio-cultural perspective. A discussion of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding ensues, with a view to exemplifying how these are crucial in enhancing teaching and learning in a LAS context. Next, the authors discuss the different linguistic profiles that countries adopt, elaborating on the concepts of monolingual and multilingual societies, and analysing how such profiles relate to language use and the ET context. Last, the authors proceed to describe the global importance of English and how this affects the different ET contexts around the world, together with the reactions this generates. All this discussion anticipates the shift culture-method-approach introduced in the following chapters and the suitability of ET methodologies for the contexts where they are adopted and implemented.

In effect, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the relationship between contexts and teaching methodologies. The authors provide a basic presentation of the developments of ET methodologies through the decades, and briefly look at those methods and approaches that have been most influential, ranging from Grammar Translation, the Audio-Lingual Method, and Humanistic Approaches, to the emergence of the communicative approaches that, to a greater or lesser extent, shape most language classrooms today. Wedell and Malderez explore why methods change, discuss how the changing perceptions of language and subsequent related research have evolved, and show how all this has affected the world of ET. A more experienced reader might perhaps at this point doubt

the inclusion of what might be rendered a rather unnecessary explanation. However, it is also relevant to remember that any ET methodology should be appropriate for the (social) context within which it is to be used (Holliday, 1994). This was probably the guiding principle behind the inclusion of these chapters in a book that stresses the importance of understanding contexts in order to introduce well-informed changes.

Subsequent Chapters 6 to 8 focus on teachers and learners and the way in which they relate to each other. The chapters look at how the people involved in teaching and learning can not only create their own cultures and contexts but also be the products of such contexts. This is, from a very personal perspective, one of the most significant contributions of the book. In these chapters, the authors differentiate between the more obvious physical context of the classroom—the spatial features, the materials, the equipment, class size, school location and so on—that build it; and the more complex and hidden “mental context”, realized by the cognitions—that is, “(the) context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language teachers draw on” (Borg, 2006: 272), the emotions, expectations and motivations, interests and styles that the people in the classroom might hold and share. Wedell and Malderez make a relevant claim by pinpointing how all these variables affect the relationship between language learners and language teachers, and how they can turn teachers into learners and learners into teachers.

Chapter 9 looks at context in relation to the planning and implementation of curricular changes, the second nodal point in the book. Here, educational change is analysed from the perspective of time and as involving a cultural change. Under the premise that the process of implementing an educational change cannot be successfully completed without the active involvement of teachers (Fullan, 2007; Wedell, 2009), the authors contrast changes that are originated at a larger, national scale, with those that are teacher-initiated classroom-centred changes. They conclude by proposing a parallel learning model that seeks to envision change as an “evolutionary process” (p.217) that must be planned bearing the needs of the people involved, placing teachers and learners at the centre, and policy makers and planners at the outer extreme of an education onion (p.218).

The final chapter summarizes the main contents, concisely bringing together the two main topics of the book: context and change. The authors’ final claim is that educational contexts are complex constructs and that the starting point for change lies in the ability to understand and support the different learning processes that take place in such contexts. Most importantly, Wedell and Malderez advocate the adoption of a more horizontal perspective towards educational change, in which the hope-for outcomes are the result of the interaction of all of those involved (teachers, learners, local and national educational leaders) and of informed joint decisions.

To conclude, the authors have written a thought-provoking book in which they provide an easy-to-read yet very insightful account of the close interconnection that exists between educational contexts/cultures and educational change. The book is surely correct in arguing that the starting point for change should lie inside the culture of the classroom. Through the different chapters Wedell and Malderez manage to engage the reader in a stimulating conversation, creating in the latter a feeling of involvement, which is undoubtedly one of the main strengths of the book. I have greatly enjoyed reading it, not only because of the friendly conversational style adopted by the authors and the interactivity offered through questions and prompts for personal reflection, but also because it challenged some of the assumptions I hold about my own teaching context. I would strongly recommend it for anyone wishing to understand and address the role context plays in language teaching and learning.

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