English Language Teachers' Lived Experiences on Social Class-ification*

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Abstract

The exploration of school English language (EL) teachers' experiences in their teaching workplaces has mainly revolved around beliefs on effective teaching, resistance to labels, burnout, resilience, and accountability. The research agenda described in this chapter aims to disrupt this status quaestionis by exploring from a decolonial stance how EL teachers have lively experienced classificatory, dispossessing, and marginalizing acts perpetuated by school administrators' internal colonial thinking, all of which put them in vulnerable or privileging social places resulting from power disputes over the control of their multiple existence areas. This exploration intends to provide a clearer understanding of coloniality-driven relations of exploitation, domination, and conflict in ELT settings from decolonial lenses.

Keywords: EL teachers; colonial thinking; lived experiences; social classification; teachers' workplaces.

* This chapter draws on my doctoral research project at Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación (DIE-UD) and offers an overview of the locus of enunciation, description of emerging trends in a review of literature (profiling), and explanation of my research interest concerning English language teachers' lived experiences and subversive actions on social classification under a decolonial stance and its contributions to education and English language teaching in Colombia.

Introduction

Hearing the voices of private and public school English language (EL) teachers regarding their experiences in their teaching sites has mainly focused on aspects such as identity construction, beliefs on effective teaching, resistance to labels, burnout, resilience, and accountability (Armenta, 2023; Ghoreyshi & Tahriria, 2021; Méndez-Rivera, 2018; Rizqi, 2017; Roohani & Dayeri, 2019; Üney & Dikilitaş, 2022). These works unveil top-down unequal power relations, carelessness, and discursive practices that downplay EL teachers' subject positionings and agentic capacities coming from different entities such as policymakers, government laws and plans, and school administrators. Nonetheless, discussions rooted in social terms involving social classification and exclusionary acts to EL teachers such as stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination are not openly reviewed in these studies. Struggles of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) female low-income teachers of color in schools, for instance, can be widely and explicitly discussed.

As far as a deep revision of literature involving trends and history—i.e., my profiling on scholarly work on social classification experiences by EL teachers—is concerned (López-Páez, 2024), little research has been conducted to explore how EL teachers have experienced the aforementioned dispossessing and exclusionary acts of social classification based on the resulting power distribution over the control of their race, gender, work/class or subjectivity/epistemology in their workplaces (Garcia-Ponce, 2020; Mackenzie, 2021; Nascimento, 2019; Neupane, 2022; Nur *et al*., 2022). Such an exploration becomes relevant in current times pervaded by neoliberal ideologies adopted by school managers, EL teachers themselves, and even students. These phenomena entail thought and discourses geared towards a new spirit of global capitalism, marketization in the English teaching industry, global power of English, English-only bilingualism plans, linguistic instrumentalism, Western certifications to prove language proficiency, and the performance measurement of native English speaking teachers versus non-native English speaking teachers (Block, 2012; Hsu, 2015; Kramsch, 2014; Kubota, 2011; Lengeling *et al*., 2014; Norton & De Costa, 2018; Park & Lo, 2012; Pennycook, 1999).

Exploring EL teachers' lived experiences on social classification also has its importance in the context of modern/colonial ideologies that impinge on English language teaching (ELT) in Colombia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Structures, institutions, and systems of power such as bilingual policies, EL institutes, schools, EL pedagogy, and EL teaching and learning identities (Castañeda-Peña, 2018; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021) have all been pervaded by the modern/

colonial matrix of power in Colombia. This Euro-USA-centric global model of power has installed different mechanisms such as social classism, globalization, whiteness and racism, patriarchalism and misogyny, embodiment, and methods that are realized in the form of L2 urban centered, English-only policies and L2 standardization, native speakerism, de-gendering, normalized bodies, and "ef-fective" L2 teaching and learning respectively (Castañeda-Peña, 2018). Such colonial devices are intended to be set as single, total, and universal. They not only exclude but obliterate the existence of those EL teachers who do not comply with such an ideal imposed by hegemonic praxis, ontic, and episteme. This thus constitutes a dispossession and coloniality of their power, being, and knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2018; Lugones, 2008; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2000b).

Examining social classification lived by EL teachers at their workplaces and their political actions towards it can serve as a mechanism to both spot and denounce colonial situations and heal colonial wounds. Said investigation can allow us to unveil how modern/colonial thinking and its architecture has long impinged on L2 education in the South, how the school as an institutional body has contributed to perpetuating hierarchies following this logic, and what political actions (Colombian) EL teachers employ to re-exist, resist, and subvert the status quo in such workplaces. Likewise, taking heed of EL teachers' lived experiences of social classification over their race, gender, work/class, and subjectivities/epistemologies is relevant when there is a space for analyses with scopes of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) among these areas of existence.

Research addressing said phenomenon must be framed within different geo and bodypolitics of location and knowledge, specifically from the Global South. According to De Sousa Santos (2016), the Global South does not only entail a geographical representation referring to people living in the southern hemisphere, but a metaphor depicting such people's resistance to overcome suffering caused by global capitalism and colonialism. This metaphorical south also exists in North America and Europe representing marginalized populations such as "undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, sexism, and Islamophobia" (De Sousa Santos, 2016, p. 19). We as researchers can profit from this type of politics to understand situated phenomena related to social classification given our historical processes of power distribution are different from those of the Western and European world.

This chapter is organized into four sections. First, I start with a short background of me and my teaching experience, from which my locus of enunciation is made explicit, making salient the presence and effects of social class-ification in my personal, academic, and professional journey. I comment on socio-economic situations that both deprived me of and led me to start working at a

prestigious Catholic private school. I also state multiple situations related to conflict relations over nativeness, in which a native speaker teacher was privileged in terms of academic workload and pay. These situations also relate to practices of exploitation due to gender classification, specifically differential treatment of male primary teachers over female ones. Likewise, events of classification based on race, focusing on the failed recruitment process of a female teacher of color, as well as control over my being, domination from students' parents, and mandatory catholic gatherings are also commented on.

Subsequently, I describe my research interest while I make explicit the colonial situations and unpack initial conceptions underlying my topic of investigation. I assert that Quijano's (2000a) theory of social classification can inform and theoretically support social classification experiences of EL teachers in their workplaces based on their resulting roles and unequal power distribution after relations of domination and exploitation over the control of their race, work/class, gender, and epistemologies. Next, I talk about the dilemmas that I have faced throughout my research topic selection and delimitation path such as the changes from the Bourdieusian (1984, 1986) notion of social class framed within critical theory to a broader social classification theory (Quijano, 2000a) under the decolonial option paradigm. Then, I draw on my research profiling work of scholarly work on social classification. There, I account for the historization and conceptualizations of the category according to different geo and body-politics of knowledge such as Black feminism, critical theory, and the decolonial project paradigms. Similar concepts such as social stratification and social place are defined in this section before unveiling the research gap in the body of literature on social classification experiences lived by EL teachers. Afterwards, I detail my research agenda to address the research voids found in the previous section.

Among the various actions in my agenda, I comment that my research will be inscribed in the decolonial option and will be set forward through border thinking lenses framed in the Global South. Through this epistemological stance, I intend to explore the lived experiences of EL teachers regarding social classification and carry out with them political actions to resist, re-exist, and contest unequal power distribution over the control of their race, gender, class, subjectivities, and epistemologies in their workplaces. Finally, I conclude with the contributions that this research work can afford within the ELT field and general education. Some of those contributions state that ELT can profit from a clearer understanding of experience-based relations of exploitation, domination, and conflict in EFL settings under decolonial lenses. These teachers' lived experiences are those that are not only remembered but embodied and may well allow them to heal wounds that possibly come from modern/colonial situations. Also,

the ELT field can identify and reflect on the barriers that EFL teachers of different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, histories, epistemologies, colors, dissidence, affiliations, and inscriptions face when teaching English in Colombia in order to take political action to subvert such status quo from their locations.

Locus of Enunciation

I was born in Ibagué, Tolima, a relatively small city compared to Bogotá, the capital. After graduating from a 2-stratum (lower middle class) public school, I enrolled in a B.A. in English at Universidad del Tolima, a public university in my hometown. Almost by the end of the degree, I started working as a part-time teacher at a private English institute to help myself pay for the last semesters and transportation, as well as to start gaining some teaching experience. Once I graduated, some acquaintances asked why I would not start to work at private schools while I prepared and waited for the government to release calls for the teacher contest in order to work full-time for state schools. However, I remember that my answer was that I would rather not work in those schools because they asked for expensive Western international proficiency test certifications (Canagarajah, 2006), on top of a degree. Many colleagues had told me about the mistreatment of teachers by supervisors and school owners, as well as the dense work environment, and these things did not happen in the English institute. Thence, I continued working in that institute for another year, even when every so often I was not assigned courses due to low enrollment.

As I had enrolled in a master's degree that year and had to have an easy-access population for my seminar tasks and research work besides helping myself financially, I decided to pay for the international proficiency test and get all the required papers to apply for an English teacher position in an upper-middle-class private school and submitted my application.

In the multi-staged recruitment process, the school managers, consisting of full-time psychologists, an academic coordinator, and the principal, a sixty-something-year-old lady, gathered with all eight applicants and started interviewing us. As this was a catholic and conservative school, just like most of the private schools in Ibagué, one of the stages dealt with general questions about family background, neighborhood, marital status, certifications, and spare time. Somehow, I was selected, along with another teacher, and overcame that filter. She was a female teacher of color (Lugones, 2014; Nascimento, 2015) who I used to come across at the university where I studied. In one of our chats during the pre-hiring phases, she told me she was there because in the private school where she worked previously school administrators decided not to renew her

eleven-month teaching contract even though she had done things right throughout the school year.

The last stage was an EFL teaching skills test and a micro-class before the school managers and six students. The day after that, one of the managers called me to tell me I had passed, and I had to start the new staff entry processes. I worked at that school for a year and a half. Every morning, all students, teachers, and managers had to gather in the hall to pray, even if some students and teachers, like me, did not like it. Afterwards, I remember we would start classes using textbooks from a Spanish publishing house (Canagarajah, 1999; López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2023) and students had to buy two books in one bimester, sometimes causing me to be left behind in content coverage. The students were well-disciplined and smart. Besides the multiple projects and extracurricular activities, tenth and eleventh graders had to attend courses for IELTS and ICFES preparation as the school was the leader in that matter in the municipality and wanted to maintain that ranking.

I loved every class with my primary students and enjoyed collecting data for my seminar tasks and research work. However, one of the negative things I observed and still remember clearly in my mind is the differential treatment the school principal had with some teachers over others. For instance, she used to praise, give good schedules, and allow early exit to the English teacher for grades ninth to eleventh, a native white male English speaker from the USA (Kumaravadivelu, 2016), who had started to work there some years before me. His wife, a female English teacher from Colombia who had been working there long before, helped him to get into the school, according to her. He did not have to attend or engage in certain activities and responsibilities. For instance, he was not told to attend the daily gathering to pray at the beginning of the shift. Nor did he have to assist primary and secondary students in the lines at the end of the shift before they were picked up by their parents or school minivans. Despite the lack of obligations in his shift, this native speaker teacher was paid even more than the rest of the teachers. Usually, many of us nonnative speaker teachers criticized these privileges that the school administrators gave him. Unfortunately, we would just keep quiet as we knew the school administrators were the heads and bosses, and our job could be at risk if we denounced something related to this issue of native vs. non-native speaker teachers.

Another differential treatment I noticed by the principal, the academic coordinator, and even the psychologist was related to male vs. female teachers (Acker, 1988). On the one hand, female teachers, either from primary or secondary grades, had to assist students more often than male teachers. They were explicitly told to be with students during recess, help them with their meals, and organize

them in lines after recess was over. Ironically, though, they would be subjected to plenty of scolding and were told off over things related to students' behavior, and personal presentation. As for primary and preschool female teachers, they were given an even larger workload. It is worth noting that there were no male teachers in preschool. Female primary and preschool teachers were mandated to lead more projects than secondary male teachers, as well as take students to the restrooms and assist them in the dressing room after the swimming lessons, for instance.

Male teachers, on the other hand, were not told to do such tasks. We were not told off much and the sporadic scoldings we received were more related to academic issues such as content coverage and paperwork. In general, our tasks were limited to content teaching rather than caregiving work. These unequal power distributions and relations led me to reflect that the school principles of equality, justice, and an environment of nondiscrimination did not match the inner power dynamics that the teaching staff was faced with.

As for my direct case, I felt that two aspects made my work environment heavier and affected my being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). On the one hand, I was regularly told to cut my curly hair even though I did not consider it to be long (Fanon, 2008), as the school coordinator thought it was a bad example for primary and secondary students and would somehow influence their haircuts. Nonetheless, I started to cut it shorter as I considered it was a prestigious school that had to maintain its status, and I was part of it. On the other hand, in personalized parents' meetings, the parents seemed to want me to favor their children and tell me how to do things. Even though I was relatively new to the school, I started to think that they said these things to all teachers, taking advantage of their socioeconomic status and their positions as customers of the school (Nur *et al*., 2022).

I had to leave the school as I needed time to finish my thesis, and once I graduated from the master's degree, I started to work at the same university where I work now. However, I still carry in my memory and body the nice and not-very-nice experiences of my previous job (Alerby *et al*., 2014).

These moments in my life allowed me to figure out that (at least) in private schools not everything revolves around socioeconomic matters. The construction and negotiation of our identities is not solely related to social class, but our gender, race, and subjectivity positionings are also contested (Garcia-Ponce, 2020). Usually, the experiences that teachers have to tell have been silenced, and many teachers have been deprived of denouncing (Nascimento, 2019). In fact, there surely are many teachers like me who unfortunately did not do anything in the face of those actions.

These situations led me to pose my locus of enunciation, that is, to think, speak, and produce knowledge from the space where I am located (Mignolo, 2007). The actions in this politics of location allow me to speak from my body, which is marked by history, experience, and conflict (Menezes de Souza, 2019). Thence, my locus of enunciation is specifically that of a former private school teacher affected by the school administrators' modern/colonial thinking that classified (EL) teachers over different areas of their existence (Quijano, 2000a) such as race, gender, work/class, and subjectivities. Following this enunciation, I undertake the decolonial option to engage with teachers who have been socially classified in their teaching workplaces in Colombia over their aforementioned areas of existence.

As part of my pedagogizations involving praxis, reflection, relationality, and action (Castañeda-Peña & Méndez-Rivera, 2022; Walsh, 2015), my actional standpoint is to unveil and provide political actions to subvert differential treatment led by hierarchies and classifications based on exploitation and domination over the aforementioned areas of existence. These actions are not intended to empower them but to collaboratively work with them towards processes of reflection and discussions that allow them to re-exist and contest exclusionary acts based on a modern/colonial-driven unequal power distribution (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

While it is important to hear the voices and lived experiences of EL teachers, I consider it is also paramount to take heed of the counteracting political actions of teachers against hierarchization and unequal power distribution. This is done within relations of exploitation and domination intended to subvert and resist such domination. This endeavor entails an inquiry into the roles and places in the control of different areas of their existence, such as class, gender, race, and subjectivity. Finally, it is equally vital to reflect on the fact that we as EL teachers surely have many things to tell and show based on the experiences we have lived in our teaching work settings as well as to investigate on the aware or unaware identity transit they go through while being dominated and exploited in their workplaces.

Now, for the sake of itemizing my locus of enunciation as a researcher, I feel that, from now on, I must explicitly state the dilemmas I went through as an initial doctorate student with myriads of tensions and uncertainties (Méndez-Rivera, 2020). When I first entered this doctorate in education, majoring in ELT, my research proposal dealt with the aim of examining EFL students' negotiation of social class identities in the EFL classroom. My purpose was to unveil how hidden class-based inequalities and struggles are reproduced in the classroom considering Bourdieusian (1986) notions of class.

This initial research interest emerged after finding out how this socioeconomically stratified world is pervaded by globalization and neoliberal ideologies (Block, 2012; Norton & De Costa, 2018). I was interested in unveiling how these mindsets, practices, and discourses based on marketization and individual competitiveness affected ELT material as well as teachers' and students' subject positions. Thus, I conducted the abovementioned profiling exercise (i.e., a deep review of literature) aimed at determining how social class was conceptualized, how class identities were addressed in the ELT field, how EL students and educators negotiated their class identities, and, ultimately, how such class subject positions impacted EL teaching and learning.

Crucially, though, several events happened causing not only the scope and conceptualization of my research interest, but also the paradigm I was standing in, to shift. One element that influenced these changes was that over the course of the first and second semesters, after being exposed to my teachers' seminar talks and discussions, the reading materials based on decoloniality and postcoloniality, and the conclusions of my profiling work, I pondered that I was undertaking social class under Western epistemologies. I discovered that the social class theories, concepts, and research body I was drawing on were highly pervaded and put forward by Euro-USA-centric body-geopolitics of knowledge. Thence, I started to feel that embracing a decolonial turn would be appropriate and could afford my research work the shift in epistemological stance that was needed.

Another phenomenon that motivated my shift of paradigm and body-geopolitics of knowledge of my research topic was remembering my lived experiences back at the private school I mentioned in the section about my locus of enunciation. I realized that such events did not merely emerge out of discursive practices mediated by unequal power relations (oppression) due to hierarchical positions between school administrators and teachers; rather, they were colonial situations (Grosfoguel, 2011), as the characteristics of such administrators' treatment, ideologies, decisions, and discourses based on oppression/exploitation followed a modern logic and a global racialized Euro-USA-centric capitalist model of power (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2000b).

These events in institutions such as schools have long been commonly researched under the critical theory paradigm. Studies of this kind usually link these phenomena to power structures, oppression, and social inequalities. They have not been undertaken by scratching the actual colonial racialized, genderized, and whitening roots and motivations underlying teachers' classification based on unequal power distributions which end up affecting their identities in ELT settings and the way they contest such domination (Walsh, 2015).

Scholars addressing unequal power relations, critical pedagogy, and social justice under critical theory lenses, for instance, have often failed to realize, acknowledge, and address hidden dynamics related to practices of racialization and genderization operating under a colonial matrix of power (Walsh, 2015). Said coloniality-driven actions can sometimes be the base and motive of often-visible issues related to inequality, power relations, and identity and should thus be examined in depth.

Bearing these situations in mind, my research agendas would make a big shift. I would not merely be exploring the social class identities negotiation of EL students or teachers. I realized that what I actually wanted to investigate was how colonial legacies impinge on ELT and what political actions agents undertake to subvert such hierarchies and social classifications based on their gender, race, work/class, and subjectivities/epistemologies (Quijano, 2000a). Specifically, I aim to investigate how we EL teachers have been classified based on different areas of our existence and what political actions we engage in to contest such classifications and unequal power distribution (roles) in the control of such areas within our teaching. All these processes are to be carried out from a decolonial and intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991; Mignolo, 2011) since, as stated above, the critical theory paradigm cannot account for the racialized, gendered, classed, and epistemicidal practices of classification set forth by a modern/colonial logic and architecture.

These shifts in my research work were not without their costs. First, it is clear that we humans are sometimes reluctant and uncertain about leaving our comfort zone and certainties. I started the first semester with an already fixed and seemingly final idea of what I wanted to investigate, supported by critical theory, specifically Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) notion of class. But then I had moved to a different genealogy of knowledge—the decolonial turn. Furthermore, throughout the seminar encounters I used to see how my classmates were advancing in their concepts, categories, and objectives, whereas I was just starting to read and understand the discourses, epistemologies, and ontologies of decolonial thinkers; however, with my endeavor, along with the help and feedback of my teachers Pilar Méndez, Harold Castañeda, and Carmen Guerrero, I am strengthening the understanding, development, and scope of this research interest and problem.

Research Interest

Bearing in mind the aforementioned locus of enunciation based on my personal, working, and research experience, I draw on Aníbal Quijano's (2000a) theory of social classification under a decolonial stance and border thinking. On the one hand, the decolonial option is a framework developed by pioneer thinkers

such as María Lugones, Ramón Grosfoguel, Aníbal Quijano, Catherine Walsh, Walter Mignolo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Arturo Escobar, and Enrique Dussel. This framework is geopolitically located in the Global South, specifically Latin America and the Caribbean, and emerged as an action-oriented option to the rhetoric of modernity (development, novelty, salvation, and progress), as well as to Marxist-dialectical materialism (Mignolo, 2011). In this sense, it seeks epistemological justice by acknowledging that just as there are different cosmologies, there are more ways of being and producing knowledge that can be embodied and representational—i.e., treating material symbols and land as part of humanity as well as prioritizing affect and practice over facts, positivism, rational cause/effect explanations, norms, systems, and separation of the known from the knower, of nature from society, and of reason from body (Canagarajah, 2023; Quijano, 2000b).

Decoloniality intends to confront and delink from hegemonic universalized Western and Eurocentric knowledge production, such as normative social sciences like anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and (applied) linguistics. These delinking actions ultimately aim to emancipate subalterns from the logic of modernity/coloniality in order to allow them to think as well as produce and distribute knowledge outside of the conditions set by its hegemonic forces.

Decoloniality thus exists because of coloniality since the sixteenth century when the colonial matrix of power was established (Quijano, 2000b). Coloniality refers to the long-standing patterns of control and domination by the modern world system, a new model of global power that developed after the colonization of America (Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000b). This system brought about Eurocentric and Western capitalist models of subjectivity, economy, authority, and knowledge intended to be totalizing and universal. It depicted non-European (Amerindian, African, Asian) civilization, aesthetics, reason, and knowledge as past, inferior, and primitive knowledge that needed to be modernized and saved in order to bring about progress, novelty, and development. Coloniality and modernity are then inextricably interdependent.

This modern/colonial narrative classifies peoples into different places of value according to their "level" of ontology (existence; being) and epistemology (knowledge). According to this narrative, for instance, White European heterosexual Catholic individuals are placed on the top of a social class pyramid where Indigenous males, Black females, or African slaves are at the bottom. The space that exists between the former holding power and the latter with subaltern marginalized positioning is called *colonial difference* (Mignolo, 2009).

Mignolo (2011) insists that decoloniality is not to be taken as an alternative modernity but as an alternative to modernity and as one of several options that

can be embraced by "all those who find in the option(s) a response to his or her concern and who will actively engage, politically and epistemologically, to advance projects of epistemic and subjective decolonization and in building communal futures" (p. 28).

On the other hand, following decolonial research perspectives, border thinking is "an epistemology from a subaltern perspective" (Mignolo, 2002, p. 71). These epistemic processes emerge in the context of coloniality in order to resist and respond to Euro-USA-centric modern/colonial thinking, domination, and orientation to knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2011). Thus, by thinking from the outside of the modern world system, I intend to denounce how EL teachers are classified within ELT, specifically in teaching work settings that follow a modern/colonial logic. These denunciations are accompanied by political actions such as collaborative discussions and reflections geared towards resistance, re-existence, and contestation to hierarchies and classifications based on colonial relations of domination and conflict over their areas of existence.

According to Quijano (2000a), social classification refers to the historical conflicts for power relation distribution over the control of areas of social existence such as work, sex, subjectivity, and authority. Power distribution from this perspective is not pregiven by nature, but constituted by relations of exploitation, domination, and conflict. These relations are formed out of the victories or defeats in people's disputes over the control of the areas of social existence.

Under this perspective, I conceive of social classification as the resulting roles and power distribution bestowed to individuals (EL teachers, in this case) after disputes and relations of exploitation, dominance, and conflict over the control of their gender, race, work/class, and subjectivities/epistemologies at their workplaces. Within that power distribution, teachers end up being socially classified differently. These classifications construct social differences. The resulting roles of teachers in the control of their areas of existence based on relations of domination, exploitation, and conflict (disputes for power), though, are not static or ahistorical. Teachers can be socially classified, declassified, and reclassified. In other words, they can have different roles and places in the control of their areas of existence in particular historical times and spaces, such as, for example, ELT settings.

This theory was set out as a counterpart of the Eurocentric theory of social classes. The notion of social class outlined by Marx and historical materialism only accounted for one area of social existence (work and classes). This theory was based on eighteenth and nineteenth century capitalist European society's experience and thoughts about their only differences of power, that is, people's

roles in the control of modes of production and in the control of authority/the state, both of which served world capitalism.

Social class theory was thus reductionist, ahistorical, positivist, and naturalist (Quijano, 2000a). It was reductionist as it did not account for the other areas of social existence wherein power relations are conformed, i.e., the primacy status of relations of production was the base of all power relations. It was ahistorical as it did not take into account specific individuals' social classes in specific historical times, but rather static, totalized, and based on European thinking; it was positivist as it was merely based on empirical, scientific evidence and rational cause/effect explanations for power distribution processes; and it was naturalist given the fact that people were supposed to be classified according to innate characteristics and not as a result of disputes over the control of social areas.

The theory of social classification was developed after setting forth the analysis of colonial/modern Eurocentric capitalism. This theory intends to better conceptualize the classification of people around the idea of race within this new global Eurocentric capitalist model of power after the sixteenth century when America was constituted (Quijano, 2000b). However, one of my main arguments is that in present times, schools, and institutions that still follow the modern/colonial racialized capitalist model of power help perpetuate hierarchical power distribution among EL teachers, making them fulfill different roles and take different places based on conflicting relations of exploitation and domination over the control of gender (sex), class (work), and subjectivity (knowledge and race). It is this differential power distribution that socially classifies them.

It is worth noting at this point that I do not intend to adopt the theory as a whole but rather make a delinking move. I intend to re-semanticize the term *sex* since, as Lugones (2008) argues, "Quijano implies a patriarchal and heterosexual understanding of the disputes over control of sex, its resources, and products" (p. 78). In other words, Quijano addresses gender from a modern capitalist Eurocentric perspective which downplays the struggles and power of colonized women (of color) as well as sexually dissident women.

I also intend to employ intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) among the aforementioned areas of existence for which EL teachers dispute control. This action is carried out to avoid the homogeneity of a separate categorical analysis that fosters the invisibility of dominated victimized teachers and entails a dominant representation in the category, namely the hierarchy among groups.

Categorical logic, that is, the separate analysis of categories such as Black, low-income, Indigenous, or female, perpetuates homogeneity, selects as norm the privileged actor in the dichotomy of the category, and distorts the phenomena

that are in between and thus not clearly seen (Lugones, 2008). In other words, if I were to separately analyze, on the one hand, EL teachers' social classification based on the category of work/class—whose dominant actor entails the typical middle-class White heterosexual male—and, on the other hand, the classification based on the category of subjectivities/epistemologies—whose dominant actor entails modern/colonial thought—I would be missing how working poor Black homosexual female teachers who generate knowledge based on southern Indigenous thought are socially classified in their workplaces, which are ultimately the entities or phenomena that exist in the intersection.

Research Profiling

Considering all the shifting events depicted in the section about my locus of enunciation, I conducted a profiling exercise (López-Páez, 2024), that is, a deep revision of literature, taking into account these paradigm shifts. This examination of scholarly work on social classification allowed me to see that social classification has been conceptualized in different terms and under different geopolitics of knowledge. For instance, social classification is conceptualized under the critical theory paradigm as one of the foundational principles of social life and processes of naming the world in which language, law, and the state play a key role (Bourdieu, 1986). In this process, words and signs play a key role as social actors utilize them contemptuously as a device to construct other social objects. Thence, individuals have historically felt the necessity to classify themselves and others given the long-lasting labels assigned to them by top stakeholders such as law and nation-builders; in this sense, the state is the most powerful classifier. This desire to form social groups and classes leads to classification struggles for symbolic power comprising cultural, economic, and social capital in a determined field. Research studies under this Bourdieusian tradition in the ELT field are mostly qualitative and conducted in the USA and UK. This research body is framed through sociocultural approaches to examine the structure-agency dichotomy, students, and teachers' negotiation of class subject positions and struggles for symbolic capital (Hunt & Seiver, 2017; Kanno & Vandrick, 2014; Sommers, 2007; Oza *et al*., 2022; Vandrick, 2014).

Under this critical theory paradigm, a closely related—yet more ancient—term is that of social stratification. Marx (1972) argues that social stratification is created after the emergence of and struggle between two different economic groups of people with distinct relationships to the means of production. One class of people owns productive property (the bourgeoisie) and the other is comprised of those with non-ownership of capital who work for others (the proletariat). This unequal control over modes and forces of production (stratification)

leads to exploitation rather than a collective achievement of societal goals and results in class struggles and revolution. Not surprisingly, in my profiling exercise, I could not account for research studies examining how EL teachers are socially classified according to their relations of production.

Unlike Marx, Weber (1968) noted that the division of society was based on more than just people's ownership or non-ownership of capital. Instead, stratification comprised the existence of different communities that share distinct levels of the dimensions of class (a person's economic income), status (a person's prestige and honor), and political power (a person's accomplishment of goals despite oppositions) within the same community due to unequal power distribution. This entails that within the same community, small groups are formed according to the ranks they share in terms of class, status, and power. Interestingly, though, little to no research has been conducted to analyze EL teachers' social classification in their teaching work settings under a Weberian or Marxist perspective.

A term that may resemble and supplement the absence of the concept of social classification is that of "social place," which is greatly employed in Black feminist thought (flores, 2021; Lozano, 2010; Lugones, 2008; Kilomba, 2019; Ribeiro, 2017). Social place has been increasingly undertaken in the past two decades and has largely been conceptualized under decolonial and border thinking lenses as the place that women of color—or the other of the other—occupy in society. According to the modern/colonial White Catholic capitalist heteronormative patriarchal thinking, these others do not have a place of talk (locus of enunciation) and occupy an excluded social place from which the modern/colonial individual can profit. Collins (1986) refers to the Other as the "outsider within," and argues that in the social pyramid, White heterosexual men are on the top. Below them are White women, followed by Black men, and, finally, Black women at the bottom. This thus leaves Black lesbian women annulled and obliterated (Doctorado Institucional en Educación sede UPN, 2023). Although there is, to the best of my knowledge based on my profiling work, no research exploring EL teachers' experiences of social classification under this framework, scholarly work dealing with social place has been generally conducted in the Global South. It exhorts Black feminist analytic frameworks to contest racism and exclusionary practices as well as to disrupt whitening pedagogies while subverting modern/colonial capitalist heteronormative thinking (Kilomba, 2016; Ribeiro, 2017).

Finally, social classification under the decolonial paradigm is relatively more recent than under other paradigms. Since the beginning of this century, it has been conceptualized as unequal power distribution based on relations of exploitation/domination/conflict, leading to socially classifying peoples according

to their final roles in that power dispute (Quijano, 2000a). This resulting unequal distribution of population creates categories that in turn constitute hierarchies (De Sousa Santos, 2018). This colonial-driven, power-centered conception of social classification has lately been shared by Mignolo (2016), who adds a colonial difference component, arguing that such classifications are organized by the codification of differences between conquerors and the conquered and presuppose a naturalization and hierarchization of such differences.

Several studies in the Global South dealing with decoloniality have examined the modern/colonial architecture, ideologies, and tensions that still impinge on the ELT field, specifically affecting teacher education (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Granados-Beltrán, 2016), ELT pedagogies (Carvajal-Medina *et al*., 2022; Castañeda-Peña & Méndez-Rivera, 2022; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021), and teachers' knowledge (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021;). Although it was not directly part of their agendas and purposes, none of these studies have delved into how EL teachers have experienced social classification due to their race, class, gender, and subjectivities, as well as their actions to subvert such colonial acts.

Figuring out EL teachers' lived experiences in terms of social classification in their teaching work settings seems like an overlooked and blurry research topic under different paradigms and traditions. Thence, as part of this study's research agenda, I intend to address such voids in research by exploring under a decolonial paradigm the lived experiences of EL teachers regarding social classification in their teaching labor settings and unveiling the political actions they utilize to subvert that status quo. The working question guiding my research is: *How do EL teachers navigate day-to-day social class-ification in their workplaces?*

According to Alerby *et al*. (2014), a lived experience deals with more than merely bringing back memories; it deals with showing, recalling, and enacting what we have ingrained in our body. These experiences are more deeply marked both in our memories and our bodies as a result of dispute and resistance to power. In this sense, the types of teachers' experiences that I wish to delve into are those that are not only remembered but embodied. Such practices may well allow them to heal wounds that possibly come from a modern/colonial situation. It is worth noting that I will employ storytelling in order to carry out the aforementioned healing actions.

As explained earlier, this research work will be set forward through border thinking lenses as it intends to generate knowledge opposing modern/colonial thought and is geopolitically located in the Global South (Mignolo, 2002). One of the border thinking actions is conducting research stages and establishing objectives from the perspective of the subject-teachers. In other words, rather than inquiring about the teachers, I will explore with and from their lived experiences

aspects related to how they have been socially classified due to their gender, race, class, and subjectivities, including their epistemologies. Moreover, as noted earlier, I will employ intersectionality to avoid the homogeneity of separate categorical analysis that invisibilizes the struggles of dominated teachers and entails the dominant representation of the category. With this intersectional work, I will also unveil the ways in which teachers are differentially classified socially in more than one area of existence.

This research also intends to perform delinking (Mignolo, 2007) in two ways. The first entails delinking from modern/colonial ways of doing research and moving towards a geo- and body-politics of knowledge representing a decolonial epistemic shift when approaching a decolonial social classification theory, instead of Eurocentric theories of social class. Secondly, within the same epistemological paradigm shift, I intend to sub-delink from Quijano's theory of social classification, as explained earlier, by rehumanizing and replacing Quijano's (2000a) original terms with people's areas of social existence, such as the preference of the term *gender* over *sex*.

Contributions

This study has the potential to contribute to not only the ELT field along with teacher education programs, but also education in Colombia in general. To begin with, ELT can benefit from this work by obtaining a clearer understanding of relations of exploitation, domination, and conflict in EFL settings under decolonial lenses. Furthermore, the delinking from social class theories undertaken by Eurocentric modern/colonial thinking in which one category such as social class is solely examined, for instance, disrupts the Western and Eurocentric body-geo-politics of knowledge. This can add to the research body on L2 education and decoloniality, intersectionality, and border thinking.

In the same fashion, this work contributes to the field adopting a decolonial stance by unveiling the legacies of a colonial matrix of power that identifies differences with inequalities and naturalizes hierarchization of such differences. It can help identify the barriers that EFL teachers of different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, histories, epistemologies, colors, dissidence, affiliations, inscriptions face in teaching English. It also helps to identify how these barriers can be overcome in order to strive for more inclusive and equitable pedagogical strategies for teaching English. Furthermore, this work informs school managers on how teachers are classified and how hierarchies operate within institutions wherein modern/colonial organization and architecture are still present.

Finally, this work can contribute to shedding light on how EFL teachers' subjectivity is manufactured within Colombian EFL. It can unveil teachers' political actions to subvert, negotiate, and resist relations of exploitation and domination. It can also unveil the identity transition the teachers went through, perception of their selves, and subject positions in their EFL teaching setting.

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