

Chapter 2

Gender & ELT⁷

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The road I have traveled along

We constantly have ideas about gender. Education in general does not escape from these gender ideas, which become stories and experiences. All classrooms are inhabited by gender stories. This book shows a number of stories (drawn from our research) which, in veiled ways or not, interweave in ELT. We are talking about gender stories inked on the skin of those who teach English as a foreign language and inked on the skin of those whose job is learning. They are gender stories that either heal us as gendered subjects or trouble us throughout our lives. We have also witnessed some of those gender stories as ‘researchers.’

I am a man of a certain age, and despite the years which have passed since then, I still remember the first minutes when I stood in front of my first language students: it was a second-grade class where I was going to do my teaching practice. I was 17 years old:

7 This chapter draws on my research program entitled Identity, Power and Inequality in ELT and on my work as research advisor over two decades for undergraduate, graduate and doctoral studies in the following Colombian universities: the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia and Universidad Santo Tomás. I have also been the co-advisor of a doctoral dissertation at Universidad de Los Andes.

8 ELT stands for English Language Teaching and not only includes the formal teaching/learning of English but also teacher education and associated topics.

[...] fantasy is not so endless. I immediately suffered two public 'humiliations' after I was introduced to the class. One girl, who was sitting at the front desk, exclaimed '¡Another *practicante!*' (Another trainee teacher) and two seconds later Camilo, who was messing around the class with an old Mazzinger action figure in his hand, loudly blurted out '¿Eres *volteado?*' (Are you a fag?). It only took me a few milliseconds to start blushing and even less for my male ego to plummet towards the floor. The class teacher, Anita, a shrewd woman, cleverly explained to the whole class that the only thing I needed to become a teacher was my diploma. She also explained that I was going to be in charge of the English classes. She added that they were very lucky to have a male English language teacher and that it was all right for men to teach children of their own age. Those words were my lifeline" (Castañeda-Peña, 2009a, p. 14).

In that moment, I knew I had to undertake an academic study of gender (Castañeda-Peña & Soler, 1998). Later, I knew I had to relate such gender concern to English language teaching and learning (e.g. Castañeda-Peña, 2008, 2009b, 2010, 2018 y Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017). I would also author and co-author teaching materials for the kindergarten, primary, secondary and university levels which took gender issues into account.

I have taught undergraduate and graduate seminars and research courses where the focus has been the interphase between (gender) identities, language and language pedagogies. The discussions in those seminars and courses were the origin of most of the chapters in this book. These discussions about gender in ELT still continue.

Towards the local establishment of a multi-faceted investigation of gender issues in ELT

There is empirical evidence to show that a blindness to gender and sexual issues still exists in applied linguistics to English teaching and teacher education at both a domestic and global level. In general, in Colombia, "[...] the school is regarded as a space for socialization where heterosexual identities and orientations are consolidated and assumed as a necessary destiny" (García, 2007, p. 10). The Mexican ethnologist Lagarde (2012, p. 18) makes us see that

Within the framework of various historical, anthropological, sociological, and legal theories, the category of patriarchy has been resignified by feminists and other social scientists and then turned into a multidisciplinary analytical theory of forms of social organization (practices, relationships and institutions), based on the domination by the male gender of the female gender, which rests, in turn, on the supremacy of man, men and masculinity, over woman, women and femininity, which are placed in a position of inferiority and subordination. Patriarchy implies forms of intergeneric and intrageneric domination. It also includes the domination by some men of others and of some women by other women. Patriarchal domination is based on the conditions of sex-gender and age and other conditions of power.

In this respect, I agree with that Mexican ethnologist and other feminist and pro-feminist voices that “gender is a category anchored in sex, [and therefore] the transformation of sexuality is essential because it is the basis and nucleus of patriarchal generic domination ” (Lagarde, 2018, p. 20), not only in the school but other cultural contexts in which we find ourselves. We live, therefore, in times when there is a tremendous need to approach a “biopolitics of the now” (Puar, 2007, p. xix), a need for an ‘undisciplined’ linguistics applied ‘to the emerging’ (Moita Lopes, 2010) which would potentially explain gender and sexuality in ELT.

We thus present a corpus of chapters that show our journey; their sources are to be found in the shaded cells in the tables. Tables 1, 2 and 3 list, in chronological order, the different studies which have been incorporated into our research and approach it from different standpoints. Additionally, these studies of the interface between gender and ELT highlight a growing body of knowledge around three major concerns in this field: i) themes, ii) research contexts and iii) methodologies.

Table 1 Studies done by undergraduates

STUDY	AUTHOR(S)	YEAR
"Writing practices of boys and girls at the Liceo Val"	Carolina Camacho	2002
¿Te vas a tirar? Study of the campaign to promote the use of condoms (<i>condón pilo</i>): an analysis of the discourse	Pámela Munévar Aquite	2009
<i>Expresiones de los jóvenes homosexuales frente a la discriminación al interior de su círculo social</i> (Opinions of young homosexuals about discrimination in their social circles)	Yury Constanza Bonilla Melo July Liliana Beltrán Tibambre	2010
<i>Masculinidades Seme y Uke: Posicionamientos en el anime de tipo shonen-ai Gravitation</i> (Seme and Uke masculinities: Positionings in the <i>shonen-ai Gravitation</i> -type mangas)	Silvia Lorena Ayala Ramírez Jair Sánchez Vásquez	2010
"Mientras los hombres trabajan las mujeres planchan" (While the men work, the women iron) A discursive analysis of a textbook for boys and girls. Windows 6	Laura Marcela Moreno Novoa	2011
<i>Estudio descriptivo del lenguaje empleado por parte de los estudiantes de la Facultad de Comunicación y Lenguaje de la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana para referirse a los hombres homosexuales</i> (Descriptive study of the language used by students at the Faculty of Communication and Language at the Javeriana University to describe homosexual men).	Natalia Ospina Góngora	2011
"Los colores del arcoíris van juntos pero no se mezclan" (The colors of the rainbow go together but they do not blend). Ethnographic study of the discursive practices of homophobic endo-discrimination in ambits like the gay bars and discos in the district of Chapinero	Maira Alejandra Forero Pedraza Nelson Felipe Castañeda Rojas	2012

<i>Experiencias narrativas de aula de estudiantes javerianos/as gays y lesbianas</i> (Narratives of experiences in a classroom of gays and lesbian students at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana)	David Felipe Díaz Fontecha Mariana Escobar Gómez	2013
<i>Narrativa autobiográfica de un profesor de inglés abiertamente homosexual</i> (Autobiographical narrative of an openly homosexual English teacher)	Nicolás Enrique Salazar Gutiérrez Karen Lucía García Nossa	2014
<i>Razones potenciales tras la omisión de representación de género (LGTBI) en los materiales didácticos utilizado en las clases de inglés intermedio de la LLM de la PUJ</i> (Potential reasons for the omission of LGTB gender representations in the didactic materials used in intermediate-level English classes from the B.Ed in Modern Languages at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana)	Lina Katherine Tenorio Rodríguez	2015
<i>Experiencias narrativas en el aula L2 de estudiantes javerianos de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas relacionadas con prácticas heterosexistas</i> (Narrative of experiences, related to heterosexual practices by students of Modern Languages in an L2 classroom at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana)	Camila Arias Briceño Ricardo Alfonso Díaz Eljaiek	2015
<i>“Exponerse es heavy”</i> (Exposing yourself is heavy), narrative of experiences of learning by LGBT students in line with the contents of classes in foreign languages	Paula Alejandra Galeano Bohórquez Juan Felipe Sánchez Guzmán	2016
<i>Discursos heteronormativos y no heteronormativos en aulas de L2 en colegios de Bogotá</i> (Heteronormative and non-heteronormative discourses in L2 classrooms in Bogotá)	Jean Carlo Durango Vega Margarita Rosa Moyano Escobar	2016
<i>English language teachers’ pedagogical practices in relation with their gendered identities construction</i> (Prácticas pedagógicas de profesores de inglés en relación con la construcción de sus identidades generizadas)	Ángela Milena Rodríguez Ávila	2018

Source: Own

Table 2 Graduate research projects

RESEARCH PROJECT	AUTHOR(S)	YEAR
Understanding EFL women-learners' discourses and online foreign language socialization	Adriana Castañeda Londoño	2011
Femininities and masculinities expressed at the university level: Gender, language and learning	María Ximena Rojas	2011
Children as subjects with rights: Discursive strategies in EFL Colombian textbooks for children	Diana Marcela Herrera Torres	2011
LGBT students expressing gender in the EFL classroom	Francisco Rondón	2013
Teachers' gender-related beliefs and pedagogical practices: Experiences in single sex EFL classrooms	Laura Malagón Cotrino	2015
Unveiling Students' reflections while using Critical Feminist Pedagogy (CFP) in discussions	Jorge Eliécer Chaparro	2016
Gender inequality in oral participation: Exploring eighth graders' discourses in an EFL classroom	Lorena Muñoz Caicedo	2016
EFL students' construction of social identities through gender-based short stories	Catherine Benavides-Buitrago	2016
The emergence of the Third Space and gendered subjectivities in the EFL class	Jonathan Delgado	2019

Source: Own

Table 3 Doctoral dissertations

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION	AUTHOR(S)	YEAR
Learning how to make room for gendered practices in teaching English as a foreign language: A multiple case study	Claudia Mojica	2017
<i>La interculturalidad crítica en los programas de formación inicial de docentes de lenguas extranjeras en el contexto latinoamericano contemporáneo</i> (Critical inter-culturality in programs for the initial education of foreign language teachers in the context of contemporary Latin America)	Carlo Granados-Beltrán	2019

Source: Own

Themes

Gender and sexuality representations in textbooks is a favorite theme at the undergraduate level. Along these lines, such aspects as the support for and omission and challenging of the gendered content in textbooks are investigated. Undergraduates show an interest in a gender approach to class contents. Their investigation of different kinds of activities and interactions is mostly done from the didactic standpoint. They also explore the novel field of how students with both normative and non-normative genders and sexualities experience language learning. At the postgraduate level, the most common themes of gender research are pedagogies and practices, materials, beliefs, rights and identities.

Research contexts

Both the public and private spheres are investigated. In the public sphere, they examine the development of tasks and exercises, the language used by the students and teachers and, especially, teacher-education and in-service teachers. In the private sphere, they study the autobiographical and narrative space.

Methodologies

The most common methodologies selected are content analysis, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and feminist and poststructuralist discourse analysis, along with ethnography, autobiography and narrative.

Towards dislocations in Gender & ELT future studies

In this section, I would single out a “thinking-in-motion” approach to the three gender & ELT concerns presented above in such descriptive way. By “thinking-in-motion”, I mean, as Wallerstein says (2005), that there is a felt need for utopian thinking not only in the social sciences but also in studies of the interface between gender/sexuality in ELT. This ‘utopian thinking’ includes ontological, epistemological and biopolitical movements and could

‘dislocate’ established knowledges in the field. The movements are not linear but they cross each other and overlap. In this chapter I will refer to the first two (e.g. ontological and epistemological considerations). Such thinking-in-motion may support an ‘undisciplined’ Applied Linguistics to study ELT in relation to gender and sexuality.

Ontological considerations

Education interweaves human relationships. Heterosexual and non-heterosexual people are part of that interweave, on which an ideologically heteronormative system has been forcefully imposed.

In the past, students and teachers in the world of ELT were thought of as genderless (and, to a certain extent, they still are). In other words, the theories of ELT only dealt with linguistic knowledge and ignored the reality of people’s embodied identities and other social, emotional and cognitive features. The rules for learning a foreign language were regarded as universal (which still applies to for some theorists). From an intersectional standpoint, that implied that language learners’ embodied identities did not have a race and by extension their beliefs, social class, cognitive skills, first language, among others, did not exist either. At that time, genders of any kind were not taken into account in language teaching: the student was regarded as an abstract entity.

This idea of genderless subjects still prevails, insofar as heteronormativity is thought of as something which is given and inevitable. That is, language teaching rests on the assumption that the gender of men and women is biologically determined and universal. In the world of ELT, this reflects “the dichotomous and linear legacies of modernity which posit a fixed sexual identity that is immune to the situational and historical circumstances which shape human experience” (Medina, 2018). This notion of an ‘imagined heteronormative community’ (Puar, 2007) has even consolidated a collective view of what the Colombian State is or should be, and, consciously or unconsciously, the teaching of English strengthens it.

There is a need to take an “altruistic leap” (a dislocation) and move from there to the recognition of others in order to engage in present and future social struggles, that is, we must turn our gaze from the genderless subject to the gendered subject or the subject of sexuality. Sabsay (2016), supporting

the ‘new sexual-democratic turn’, calls on us to think of “sexuality as a right to which an individual becomes entitled, qua sexual subject or a subject of sexuality” (p. 3). To certain extent, the liberal idea of the subject (including the person’s gender and sexuality) becomes conventionally accepted by most people. Sabsay (2016, p. 3) would argue that the conventional idea of the subject is limited to the neoliberal subject, the one who is mobilized by the ideology which current liberal policies depend on, which is, in fact, an updated version of the ontology of the individual found in traditional liberalism.

This means that there is a shift from the subject with a fixed, binary gender to one who is ‘the tolerated subject’ (another dislocation). In current ELT, there appears to be a growing recognition of those other ‘gendered/sexualized subjects’; proof of this are some of the authors in this book, who call for gender issues to be included in the curriculum.

However, it is also evident that gay and lesbian students suffer from unpleasant experiences when they learn English, as they, intentionally or not, become the target of discrimination and pathological discourses which revolve around the idea that they are “disgusting” (see Rondón 2012). These learning environments thus become unhealthy in the face of these one-dimensional and universalizing attitudes to non-normative sexualities like gay and lesbian. There is still a long way to go (another dislocation) in relating the experiences of those other ‘gendered/sexualized subjects’ who study and teach foreign languages, like intersex and transgender people, who are excluded from this one-dimensional view (see Ubaque and Castañeda-Peña, under revision). We agree with Sabsay (2016) when she argues that

“... on the surface there seems to be a liberalizing trend in terms of the expansion of key liberties and the ‘acceptance’ (or toleration) of sexual and gender diversity, primarily in the so-called advanced democracies of Europe and North America, but also globally. However, what we are seeing is that the ostensibly progressive discourses, law and policies associated with this liberalization are actually creating historically new modes of sexual regulation, which in fact condition the ways in which sexuality and gender are currently understood, perceived, and experienced” (pp. 8-9).

The explicit ‘curricular tolerance’ that has begun in ELT -- particularly in our country, where other ‘gendered/sexualized subjects’ are now acknowledged in course contents, class activities, etc. -- can be dangerous if a colonial

situation continues to be maintained in a contemporary way by the subtle renewal of colonialist discourses, actions and attitudes towards the other.

This colonial situation -- which Grosfoguel (2011, p. 15) calls “the cultural, political, sexual and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups, with or without the existence of colonial administrations” persists not only because of the instrumentalization of tolerance to achieve an apparent acceptance of genders and sexualities but also because of the obstinate emptying of the embodied identities of peasant people, Blacks, those in transit to other genders or those with different physical and cognitive abilities, etc., when they are learning or teaching a foreign language such as English.

I would like to offer a tentative approach to this discussion of Applied Linguistics in the teaching of English by examining how the subject has been changed from the *ego conquero* to the White, male *ego cogito*. In my view, this change is currently seen in the way certain persons are treated in ELT as abstract subjects, tolerated subjects (e.g. Other ‘gendered/sexualized subjects’) and non-existent or ignored subjects (Black, peasant, rural, etc.).

To better understand this development in ontological terms, it is necessary “to analyze two central dimensions of reality: on the one hand, it is necessary [...] to conceptualize the social agency, understood –in the Foucaultian sense-- as the discursive practices that historicize the subjects who no longer possess a stable identity and demand a reconceptualization of their identity. On the other hand, it is necessary [...] to understand the processes of meaning, through which situated subjects attribute meaning to social experience in specific territories and situations” (Medina, 2018, p. 1).

English language teachers, school directors, policy makers, parents, researchers and language learners tend to choose a kind of nationalist exceptionalism in ELT, where “exceptionalism is not used to mark a break with historical trajectories or to claim the emergence of singular newness. Rather, exceptionalism makes a gesture towards narratives of excellence, nationalism, a process whereby the population of a nation comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity” (Sabsay, 2016, pp. 4-5). In ELT, we ignore the teaching/learning experiences of people subjected to degrading discourses, who apparently do not exist: those who are fat, tattooed, blind, Black, indigenous, gypsy, sissy or tomboy, those other ‘gendered/sexualized subjects’ (another needed dislocation) who also learn and/or teach a foreign language.

Epistemological considerations

Speaking of these ontological considerations, Sabsay (2016, pp. 4-5) notes the supremacy of the “gender exceptionalism which has dominated the history of Western feminism. Current forms of exceptionalism work or are furthered by attaching themselves to, or being attached by, nonheterosexual, homonormative subjects ‘stuck’ [...] to various subjects”. The above indicates that studies of these questions use gender, as a ‘variable’, “to give the reader an idea of how representative their sample is as regards this variable” (Block, 2003, p. 84). In gender studies, this approach fails to understand that cultures, societies, institutions and ELT are discursively structured (a multi-faceted dislocation). Hence, most of the chapters of this book understand that the interface between gender and ELT is a discursive issue and they analyze it in those terms. “[Gendered] discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site for this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist” (Weedon, 1997, p. 40).

Several trends stand out in these discursive analyses of the interface between gender, language and communication. Harrington et al (2008) list seven methodological approaches to these issues: sociolinguistics and ethnography, corpus linguistics, conversational analysis, discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis, feminist and poststructuralist discourse analysis, and queer theories. Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006) present a general feminist methodology for communication, divided into conversational analysis, critical discourse analysis, poststructuralist discourse analysis and transversal discourse analysis. This last methodology is ideologically linked to the third feminist wave (another dislocation). Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006, p. 163) make the following point:

Third-wave feminists cannot be entirely separated from the politics of the 20th and 21st century. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001, the contemporary exportation of democracy which parts of the Western world are engaged in, threats of terrorism and terrorist acts, as well as a range of civil wars, show how difficult but also how vital it is for third-wave feminists to build new alliances and webs of understandings. We believe in the creative recombination of the old and the new.

We certainly could not agree more with the idea of “recombining” methodologies in innovative ways, in accordance with the circumstances (a multi-faceted dislocation). At the time of writing this chapter there is a pandemic whose consequences for oppressed persons are unthinkable. The idea of methodological bricolage as “an emancipatory research construct” (Kincheloe, McLaren and Steimberg (2011, p. 167) seems useful. “In a contemporary sense, [bricolage] is understood to involve the process of employing [...] methodological processes which are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (p. 168). Biglia (2015, p. 30) proposes that “breaking the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy and knowing how to choose the most appropriate techniques for and approaches to the objectives of research and the specific context in which it occurs, is an open challenge in feminist studies” (another dislocation). It is important to bear in mind that the decolonial turn in the 21st century (e.g. Chicano literature, Black feminism, the philosophy of liberation, among others) “proposes [for example] the co-investigation and theorizing which draws on community actions led by organic intellectuals from the same communities and activists committed to struggle and resistance” (Curiel, 2015, p. 57) (another dislocation). This is what Ortiz and Arias (2019) call a “decolonial doing”, based on communal reflection and reciprocal talk (another dislocation). It is an informal and democratic approach which Haber (2011) calls “Non-methodology” (another dislocation).

This is the great epistemological challenge which decolonial feminist ideas (Lugones, 2008) face and it is relevant to those interested in the interface between gender and ELT. It should be the motto for co-research (with, not about, the other), see Grosfoguel (2016).

Concluding thoughts

The narratives in this book, together with the previous considerations about dislocations, form a thought-provoking proposal for easing the oppression of those who teach and learn English as a foreign language. They should also help current researchers to find ways to heal the ignored subjects and acknowledge their ‘existence’. This decolonial approach is an ethical and biopolitical necessity. As Sabsay (2016) says, “the study of sexuality suggests a trenchant

reinterpretation of the biopolitics of queerness as well as the intractability of queerness from biopolitical arrangements of life and death” (p. 3).

There is an urgent need to engage in a critical and decolonial analysis of the ways in which gender identities are treated in ELT and study how EFL students and teachers adopt, resist and define their position as subjects (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) and the resulting power relationships (Baxter, 2003) in the interactions in classrooms and the materials used in courses and communicative contexts outside the language classroom, etc.

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