

The constituting alterity in classes of English as a foreign language-culture: the Bakhtinian dialogical principle perspective / *A alteridade constitutiva em aulas de inglês como língua-cultura estrangeira: a perspectiva do princípio dialógico bakhtiniano*

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss how dialogicity which is present in the development of Brazilian students of English and their Irish teacher's discourse practices influences their subjectivities' constitution and expression in the classroom context. Based on some elements that make up the Bakhtinian dialogical principle we notice that the other's presence throughout the interactions with this study's participants represents the fundamental factor to reveal their viewpoints as well as to rebuild them before their interlocutors, which can guarantee significant moments for the appropriation of English as a foreign language-culture.

KEYWORDS: Interaction; Dialogism; Alterity; Subjectivity; English as a foreign language-culture

RESUMO

A proposta central deste trabalho é discutir como a dialogicidade existente nas práticas discursivas desenvolvidas por alunos brasileiros de inglês e seu professor irlandês influenciam na constituição e expressão de suas subjetividades no contexto da sala de aula. Fundamentados em alguns elementos que compõem o princípio dialógico bakhtiniano, percebemos que a presença do outro nas interações com os participantes deste estudo representa o fator determinante na revelação de suas posturas valorativas e, por conseguinte, em suas reconstruções frente aos interlocutores envolvidos, garantindo assim, momentos significativos de apropriação do inglês como língua-cultura estrangeira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Interação; Dialogismo; Alteridade; Subjetividade; Inglês como língua-cultura estrangeira

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First considerations

The fact that the Bakhtinian thought has been considered as the basis for a number of studies on the foreign language teaching-learning dialectics is not something new, as we can read, for instance, in Hall et al. (2005), Vitanova (2005), Marchenkova (2005), Figueredo (2007). This interest towards the theories developed by Bakhtin and the Circle, especially the conception about language as a social phenomenon, which is essentially maintained by verbal interactions and their historical and ideological elements, is simply the recognition that our understanding of the foreign language classroom has been extended by the dialogical perspectives that lead the discursive practices, their implications and contributions to the appropriation process of a foreign language-culture.

This way, the central aim of this article is to present one piece of discussion that belongs to a more comprehensive study about the dialogicity that permeates the interactions and discursive practices of seven¹ Brazilian learners of English and their Irish teacher.² Concerning these interactions, they took place throughout the course *Oral/Written Communication in English* offered by a private university in Goiânia, Goiás.

This paper also intends to discuss how the essentially dialogical discursive practices between the participants' language-culture (L1-C1) and the foreign language-culture (L2-C2), which is English for the Brazilian learners, can influence their subjectivities. Besides that, we aim at discussing the effects the *other* can have on the participants' identity constitution by virtue of the relevant interactional and dialogical opportunities they go through when using the foreign language (FL).

1. It is worth mentioning that the excerpt chosen to be discussed in this paper presents four students (Morgana, Sofia, Renata e Ana) and the teacher Jack. The participants' names are pseudonyms which have been chosen by them.

2. Although the teacher participant of this study comes from Ireland, he has been in Brazil for almost 40 years. Besides speaking Brazilian Portuguese very well, he has got a great deal of knowledge on Brazilian culture.

On the following topic, some principles that form the Bakhtinian dialogism are going to be discussed.

1 The Bakhtinian dialogical principle

Based on the interactionist perspective of language and on its sociohistorical and cultural values, Bakhtin states that the underlying dynamism of a language is ruled by a dialogic relations which “are relations (semantic) among any utterances in speech communication. Any two utterances, if juxtaposed on a semantic plane (not as things and not as linguistic example), end up in a dialogical relationship” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.117). The dialogical principle of the verbal interactions reveals itself throughout the productions and comprehension of meanings, which are filled with singularities that are always affected and changed by the relations developed by the *self* (speaker) and the *other* (addressee) who often “go through cross-definition and cross-penetration without confusing themselves” (BRAIT, 2005, p.80). In other words, these relations are distinctively noticeable by their original meaning construction, but they do not limit themselves to the replies of an ordinary dialogue made up by questions and answers. The dialogical principle is more extensive, more diverse and more complex (BAKHTIN, 1981, 1986, 1998; VOLOŠINOV, 1986). Although a certain speaker can be far away from his addressee in time and space, or they have never met each other before, it is still possible to establish a dialogical relation between them if only there is a confrontation or a convergence of meanings regarding their many viewpoints and opinions. The dialogical feature of language is, therefore, timelessness, for it does not restrict itself to here and now, but it can also arise from the intersections with the past (retrospective dialogues) and with the future (prospective dialogues). On the whole, the dialogical relations oppose themselves to the monological compositions, for the simple fact of thinking or speaking to himself already means that the subject has gone into a dialogical relation (CLARK & HOLQUIST, 1984; BRAIT, 2005; SOBRAL, 2005). Moreover, according to Bakhtin (1986, p.121), “The relation to *meaning* is always dialogic. Even understanding itself is dialogic.”

However, the Bakhtinian dialogical principle could hardly be understood entirely if we did not consider what he understood for ‘word’ and the implications of its use in the verbal interactions. For Vološinov,

The word is an ideological phenomenon par excellence. The entire reality is wholly absorbed in its function of being a sign. The word contains nothing that is indifferent to this function, nothing that would not have been engendered by it. The word is the purest and most sensitive medium of social intercourse.[...] No cultural sign, once taken in given meaning, remains in isolation: it becomes part of the *unity of the verbally constituted consciousness*. [...] Word is present in in each and every act of understanding and in each and every act of interpretation ones (p.13-15).

To be more precise, Bakhtin and Vološinov (1981, 1986, 1998; Vološinov, 1986) argues that the word is associated to life, for it is part of an interactional process in which the speaker and the addressee, historically and culturally situated into specific communication contexts, can share values socially instilled. It is by this communicative process that speakers turn the words into life, and their values embodied in what is said are put face to face, consequently, a dialogue with society values is set up. For this reason, the word is a living ideological product that can be found in any social situation, and it is able to express the subject’s world view by confronting the words of his consciousness with those ones from the surrounding reality, that is, between what is internal and the ideologically external. Concerning this issue, Vološinov (1986, p.41) adds that “each words, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces”. This way, when the word is put into a context that gives it life, it cannot be considered neutral or devoid of ideological values and conceptions. In other words, the dialogical nature of a word provides it with both a socio-historical aspect and a ‘point of view’, which is implicit to its achievement and also guided by a set of evaluating critical values that come into the human spheres where all their activities take place, and that implies a very privileged context of ongoing communication, that is, the verbal interaction. From these meetings, the whole universe of signs is built, and each sign

(word) with its ideological load becomes part of the subject's verbally constituted consciousness.

When we think about the word as a dialogical and ideological sign, we also think of all the elements that go with it and give life to it such as the communicative and interactive dimensions, by which the word is uttered and turned into a concrete utterance. In the Bakhtinian thought, the notions of concrete utterance and uttering process are intertwined in a way that the utterance is conceived as concrete for not being a sheer linguistic abstraction, which lacks meaning and social reality, but it is a unique and live expression whose forms and meanings are defined by context, interaction, history and culture. By stating that “The meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context”, and “there are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts of its usage” (Vološinov, 1986, p.79), we realize that the concrete utterance can only be alive in the uttering process, which is sustained by verbal interactions and imbued with the historical and cultural aspects of the participants who often connect themselves to “previous utterances and future utterances, producing discourses and making them move” in a continuous dialogical relation (BRAIT e MELO, 2005, p.68). Bakhtin supports this idea when he points out that

Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects. Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication (1986, p.91).

Based on the implications of the dialogical principle and, consequently, on the inseparable characteristic of the verbal interactions, when we discuss about speech genres (the oral and the written ones), we inevitably take into consideration all the elements related to Bakhtin's dialogism. For this reason, we understand speech genres as the varied ways of using a language in several spheres where the humans act. In other words, the concrete and unique utterances produced in different communicative contexts are marked by specific contents or by a singular verbal style, which are shaped by the choice of lexical,

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 7 (1): 67-86, Jan./Jun. 2012.

phraseological, grammatical and compositional resources that are historically and culturally situated within the linguistic system. According to Bakhtin (1986), the speech genres are infinitely diverse as they are incorporated to the endless diversity of human activities such as the public life utterances as well as the ordinary, institutional, artistic, scientific and philosophical ones. Furthermore, as the environments develop and become more complex, the speech genres can be transformed in order to adjust themselves to their speakers' communicative needs.

Thus, the multifaceted nature of language, its ideological signs imbued with varied meanings which are built throughout concrete utterances, is also alive in the multiplicity of voices, that is, in polyphony, which dynamically contributes to its dialogical style. In other words, by defining polyphony we understand that dialogism is built by the interaction of multiple voices that are in fact the subjects' consciousnesses, which create their own discourses and represent the singularities of their sociohistorical and cultural worlds. This way, every voice is marked significantly by an autonomous viewpoint, but despite its own life, the voices can only be consolidated in the dialogue with other voices, that is, in the interdependence of individuals' consciousnesses that maintains the social relations among the subjects (BAKHTIN, 1986, 1998; CLARK & HOLQUIST, 1984; BRAIT, 2005; BEZERRA, 2005).

In Bakhtin's conception (1986, 1998), even though the voices are unique, the *self* is only able to form and recognize his image by means of a communicative and interactional process with the *other*, and this means that the *self* can only exist in the dialogue with other *selves*. When the *self* interacts with other voices and consciousnesses, he defines himself and reflects his individuality as well as his identity characteristics, that is, by a dialogical relation the speakers express mutually their personalities, opinions and ideals. Bezerra (2005, p.194) upholds this idea by saying that "I project myself on the *other* that also projects himself on me, our dialogical communication demands that my reflection be projected on him in the same way as his can be projected on me." That implies the *self* understands himself when he looks at the *other*, and despite all the differences between them, the communicative process can only be established by the interaction of their voices and meanings, that is, by their dialogical relation.

In addition, Bakhtin (1986, 1998) emphasizes that the continuous evolution and changes every human being goes through characterize the subjects and their voices by an unfinished aspect, for the value which is given to the *other*, the one who can speak and answer for himself, transforms language and social reality in an inexhaustible source of interactions and dialogues. The only voice that sounds without the presence of another voice or consciousness manifests itself deaf to the *other's* voice, his perspectives and responses, in fact, it is finished in itself by its own authoritarianism.

By taking into account our previous discussions, Bakhtin's dialogical principle often highlights the important relationship between the speaker and his addressee, that is, one of the most crucial aspects in the achievement of a concrete utterance is the fact that it is addressed to someone who can be a subject directly involved in the verbal interaction (a concrete addressee) or even a subject that does not take part directly in the communicative process (a supposed addressee), for instance, a specific reader to whom a newspaper article addresses to. In any case, it is the addressee throughout the dialogical process that makes the utterance live and, therefore, concrete. Moreover, another important aspect in Bakhtin's theories concerning the concrete utterance is its occurrence by virtue of an occasional responsiveness from the *others*, for the theoretician states: "the role of these others, for whom my thought becomes actual thought for the first time, [...] is not that of passive listeners, but of active participants in speech communication. From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.94). Hence, by making up his concrete utterance, the speaker always takes into consideration how his speech is going to be understood by the addressee, and for this reason the speaker chooses consciously the appropriate compositional procedures and linguistic resources. This way, there will certainly be different relations of power throughout the dialogical process, which will involve the interlocutors of the enunciation in such a way that will also impose on them the linguistic forms to be used, the intonation and the gestures, the semantic complements of communication and the styles that will constitute their utterances (BAKHTIN, 1986; Vološinov, 1986).

According to this Bakhtinian conception, there is a strong belief which conceives dialogism not only as a process marked by harmonious thoughts and opinions, for the verbal communication itself implies conflicts, relations of dominance, resistance and adaptation. The sign ideological constitution shows us that ideology is a reflection of social structures and, for this reason, when we think of a language, we also think of relations of power. Therefore, the Bakhtinian perspective does not only remove the passivity from the production and comprehension of concrete utterances in the dialogical relation between the speaker and the listener, but it also emphasizes that the dialogue developed by interlocutors is not always conciliatory and consensual (YAGUELLO, 1992; CLARK & HOLQUIST, 1984; VOLOŠINOV, 1986).

On the next section, we are going to contextualize and discuss the extract that presents the interactions and discursive practices of our participants.

2 Looking at the English class by the Bakhtinian dialogical principle perspective

The extract we are going to read refers to the main implications of a discussion about the comic strip *Roger, the Dodger*, which was brought to class by Jack, the teacher. First of all, Jack asked his students to make up a story based on the pictures and thereby they would fill in the speech bubbles that were empty. After checking his students' production, Jack handed out the story original version, which caused an essentially dialogical interaction by which the participants (Jack, Morgana, Sofia, Renata and Ana) reveal their identity attitudes towards gender issues (male and female).

In the realm of identities, including gender identities, Moita Lopes (2002) observes that they are shaped inside and not outside the discourse, and there is, above all, a necessity of understanding them as productions from historical and institutional specific places, for they are produced in the heart of specific discursive practices, being substantially dependent upon social relationships. From Moita Lopes' perspective (2002, p. 63), "it seems to be useful if we metaphorically think of social identities as mosaics or kaleidoscopes that change themselves in the diverse discursive practices where we act". Thus, the interactions and

the dialogue between the participants' L1-C1 and L2-C2 lead us to see how their identities are built and shaped by their discursive practices throughout their interactional processes, whose emphasis is on the perception the participants' *selves* have about the *other*. Their comments after reading the original version of *Roger, the Dodger* were as follows:

Extract 1

1. Jack: Any comments on the story?
2. Morgana: I liked it!
3. Jack/Morgana: What did you like about the story, Morgana?
4. Morgana: It shows how men is so lazy!(sic)
5. Jack: Some men are so lazy, and useless?
6. Sofia: Sometimes!
7. Morgana: And useless! (laughter)
8. Jack: But there's a guy who came in who's able to cook!
9. Morgana: Yeah, but he's not from the family!
10. Jack: Not from the family.
11. Morgana: Children and husbands want you to do everything for them, they want you to cook, to wash//
12. Jack/Morgana: It sounds like you're talking of personal experience! (laughter)
13. Jack: So, what's the solution here in this *Roger, the Dodger*? They found the solution, didn't they? They found a guy, a man//
14. Morgana: Yeah, but you can notice his suitcase, it's flourish! (laughter)
15. Jack: Walter is his name. Yes, it's flourish! Very good, very good, so what's that mean?
16. Morgana: It means he's half and a half! (laughter)
17. Jack/Morgana: What do you mean by half and a half?
18. Morgana: He's half a man and half a woman, so he can do both parts, he's no problem doing it!
19. Jack/Morgana: Ok, but a real man doesn't cook or doesn't do the housework?
20. Morgana/Jack: Not a real man, a real macho man doesn't do it!
21. Jack: A real macho man does not because of somebody else, who's gay, probably, do the housework, do the cooking, what do you think?
22. Renata: Do you think like that in Ireland? How does it work there?
23. Jack: How does it work there? Does it work like in Brazil?
24. Morgana: No, we don't usually take men maids in Brazil.
25. Jack: But the story is about prejudice, isn't it? It's about how we treat people who are gay, yes?
26. Renata: I think that in Brazil if we take someone, a man, usually, that is kind, that is a gentleman, and people say "Oh, he's gay!", just because he is sensitive, and, for example, a man, not a woman, likes arts, likes things like that, and they say "Oh, he's gay!, it's because of Brazilian men!
27. Morgana: That's a stereotype!
28. Jack: But it is a stereotype, yeah? And the prejudice..., I think, would you accept that? Maybe your opinions are more tolerant, I don't know.
29. Renata: I think so.

30. Morgana: *I don't think we're not tolerant, yes, we are. I think we can deal very well, but we separate them, they are gays. It's like ..., it's not prejudice, no, no, no. It's like, we treat them just the way they want to be treated.*
31. Jack: *Yes, but you separate, the world separates ... and not necessarily..., let me tell you//*
32. Ana/Morgana: *How do they want to be treated?*
33. Morgana/Ana: *Normally.*
34. Renata/Morgana: *Do you think we treat them normally?*
35. Morgana/Renata: *I do. I have a lot of gay friends.*
36. Renata/Morgana: *You do, but not lot of people.*
37. Ana: *Brazilian people.*
38. Jack: *In general.*
39. Sofia: *In general.*
40. Morgana: *I think we accept them, I think we do.*
41. Jack: *Let's talk about English teachers, men, what per cent of English teachers are gay? Men?*
42. Sofia: *Various English teachers at university is. (sic)*
43. Morgana: *Half of them! (laughter)*
44. Jack: *I would say more, yes? And, why?*
45. Morgana: *Especially the ones who have a British accent!*
46. Ana/Morgana: *I agree with you! (laughter)*
47. Jack: *I don't agree with you!*
48. Morgana/Jack: *You don't count!*
49. Jack: *I don't count! Ok, all right, so tell me more!*
50. Morgana: *But that's a fact!*
51. Jack: *Of course, it's a fact. Yes, it is. Probably not only English teaching, but probably Literature, Portuguese, Spanish also//*
52. Ana: *But Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry//*
53. Morgana: *Straight men, macho men.*
54. Sofia: *Macho men!*
55. Ana: *They're espada³, sword! (making gestures and showing what it is) (laughter)*
56. Jack: *It's very interesting! I'm going to ask you something, hold on, yeah?//*
57. Ana: *I know a ..., he's a Mathematics teacher, and he's gay, so there's an exception to every rule!*
58. Jack: *So, it's true about teachers in general, ok?*
59. Ana: *I just remembered him! He's assumido! How do you say it?*
60. Jack: *He came out of the closet... Yeah, ok, all right, so, we won't ask about women, will we? Women, teachers of English? I haven't heard anything!*
61. Morgana: *Why not?*
62. Ana: *No problem, at all!*
63. Jack: *Not problem at all?*
64. Sofia: *We are perfect! We are normal! (laughter)*
65. Jack: *Ah, you are normal? No per cent of lesbians among them? No?*
66. Jack: *She (pointing to Renata) wants to tell us a story.*
67. Renata: *I was shocked ..., and I was a little bit shocked because it happened at this time in this century, then, he's a hairdresser, and he was invited to go to a church, I think it was a protestant,*

3. Ana uses the word 'espada', which is the Brazilian Portuguese word for the term 'straight' in English to indicate a heterosexual person, but she translates it into English literally by saying 'sword'.

and the person that invited him was his client. So he arrived there, he sat in the bank, and he was waiting for her to come and to talk to him. And she passed by and didn't go, and didn't say anything. And, then, he kept waiting to see what was going to happen there. And, finally, a guy arrived and asked him to get out of the church.

68. *Morgana (astonished): Oh, my God!*

69. *Renata: And he asked "Why?", "Because we don't think you're going to be very welcomed, you're not welcome". And he said it was the first time he was very humiliated, and he started crying, and that's why he doesn't believe in God, and he said a lot of things. I was pretty shocked!*

70. *Morgana: And why did she invite him?*

71. *Jack: Yeah, why did she invite him?*

72. *Renata: Yes, why did she invite him? Just to say something, to be good, you see, to be nice, "I'm going to church..."//*

73. *Morgana: Instead of that, I think she was cruel!*

74. *Renata: She was cruel! It wasn't a long time ago!*

75. *Jack: So, but the reason why he wasn't accepted in the church was his orientation, the fact that he was gay?*

76. *Renata: Yes, it was his way.*

77. *Jack: Very sad, isn't it?*

78. *Renata: In a place like that, in a church!*

79. *Renata/Jack: And why do people become gay, is it the way they were raised?*

80. *Jack: It's not easy to understand.*

81. *Morgana: It's hard!*

82. *Jack: It's hard. All right, let's move on, because we have no answers, really.*

The learners who participate in this interaction are initially led to make their comments about the story, and Morgana is the first one to show her point of view not only by saying that she liked its original version (turn 2) but also criticizing the roles played by men in family relationships (turn 4). Morgana's opinion is shared in a certain way by Sofia (turn 6), for she agrees with the fact that men are sometimes 'lazy' and 'useless' concerning housework. Morgana adds by saying that "*Children and husbands want you to do everything for them, they want you to cook, to wash*" (turn 11) and then she is interrupted by Jack's speech (turn 12) which suggests that Morgana's opinion is directly related to her personal experiences.

It is worth noting that throughout the first utterances, Jack, Morgana and Sofia hold a dialogue with cultural rules that traditionally control the distribution of men and women's roles and how these roles have to be carried out within family relationships. Morgana and Sofia represent thereby the female viewpoint that disapproves of men's unwillingness to help with the housework, and this behavior thereupon reflects a non-egalitarian relationship

with women regarding home responsibilities, and that places them in an inferior level when compared with the *other* who represents the male gender, reinforcing even more his hegemony. In other words, according to this cultural perspective, the woman is the only one responsible for housekeeping such as cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, and also for taking care of her husband and her children's education. These are facts dialogically questioned by the learners in their discussion about the comic strip. Vološinov (1986, p. 95) explains this dialogical matter among the many cultural viewpoints by stating that “*Any utterance*, no matter how weight and complete in and itself, is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication. But that continuous verbal communication is, in turn, itself only a moment in the continuous, all-inclusive, generative process of a given social collective”. That is, the participants' utterances always reveal to a greater or lesser degree some of their socially constructed experiences, and it is worth observing that there are certainly some of the learners' L1-C1 (Brazilian Portuguese) values and beliefs being conveyed throughout their discursive practices in their L2-C2 (English).

By asking the learners about the male character who takes over the housework in the comic strip (turn 13), Jack allows them to show their perceptions about the new character, Walter, who is the *other* represented by a homosexual. His image starts being shaped from the very moment Morgana identifies him in the story as being the ‘flourish briefcase owner’ (turn 14), that is, the one who is “*half and a half*” (turn 16) and does not care about doing all the housework. Morgana's speech surely presents a number of stereotypes responsible for shaping the identities of a homosexual man. Undoubtedly, we believe that some of her perceptions have been created in accordance with numberless social and discursive practices from her macro- and micro-cultures which have possibly stemmed from generalizations and labeling as well as from lack of a critical consciousness towards human behavior diversity. Moita Lopes (2002, p.33) reinforces this issue by observing that “the participants are aware of their connection with sociohistorical events as we all write and speak from a particular moment and a singular place, that is, from specific histories and cultures”.

For this reason, when Morgana says that “*No, we don’t usually take men maids in Brazil*” (turn 24), she suggests that, by taking into account the Brazilian macro-culture, the male and female genders have different and unshared roles, that is, each one has his/her own place and function in society. According to Morgana’s cultural judgment, if those social roles which must culturally be carried out by the female gender are in fact taken on by a male gender representative, it means that he is not a real man but the representation of a third sexual orientation which does not follow the rules, for “*Not a real man, a real macho man doesn’t do it!*” (turn 20). For Morgana, the fact that the homosexual takes over the housework in the comic strip is something coherent once “*He’s half a man and half a woman, so he can do both parts, he’s no problem doing it!*” (turn 18). From her critical viewpoints, Morgana shows us how the identity of the homosexual *other* has been built by following the influences of her cultural and discursive universe.

Jack and Renata’s speeches, “*But the story is about prejudice, isn’t it? It’s about how we treat people who are gay, yes?*” (turn 25) and “*I think that in Brazil if we take someone, a man, usually, that is kind, that is a gentleman, and people say “Oh, he’s gay!”, just because he is sensitive*” (turn 26), highlight the issue of how the identity of the *other* who is homosexual has been based on stereotypes and bias. It seems that Jack and Renata’s perceptions might be the likely notions that change Morgana’s viewpoints in turns 27 and 30. In conformity with the Bakhtinian thought, the individual’s subjectivity is formed within verbal interactions with other subjectivities, which in turn contribute to the individual’s identity construction and renovation. In other words, the *other*’s discursive practice is able to influence and change my own discourse and thereby reshape my identity position (MOITA LOPES, 2002; SILVA, 2005). This is what we can notice in Morgana’s communicative behavior (turn 30), which turns into an unbiased viewpoint about the *other* when she says, for instance, “*I don’t think we’re not tolerant, yes, we are. I think we can deal very well [...] It’s not prejudice, no, no, no*”, and when she mentions the fact she has many gay friends who are treated in a ‘normal’ way (turns 33 and 35). The dialogues produced by Jack and Renata not only present their impressions about the *other* and the ideas underlying the comic strip as they also lead Morgana to recognize the presence of

stereotypes around the homosexual character: “*That’s a stereotype!*” (turn 27). According to Moita Lopes (2002, p.95), “the alterity shapes what we say and at the same time how we notice ourselves in the face of what the *other* represents to us”. In Bakhtin’s conception (1986, p.94), “world views, trends, viewpoints, and opinions always have verbal expression. All this is *other*’s speech (in personal or impersonal form), and it cannot but be reflected in the utterance”. Under this circumstance, it is possible to understand the influence of Jack and Renata’s utterances in the redirection of Morgana’s opinions.

Following the discursive sequence, the *other* represented by the homosexual man acquires a new social identification, which is the teacher of English, especially the ones whose linguistic variety is similar to the British (turns 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46). Once again, stereotypes transcend the identity construction of the male teacher of English. In spite of emphasizing the fact homosexuals can also be met in other subjects, Jack’s specific speech (turn 51) suggests that the homosexual teacher is often encountered in courses of Letras, and his opinion is supported by Ana (turns 52 and 55), Morgana (turn 53) and Sofia (turn 54) who associate the heterosexual teacher to other courses such as Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. Ana, for instance, characterizes him by using the expression ‘*espada*’ (turn 55) which, despite the literal translation ‘sword’, refers to her L1-C1 and her cultural values related to a man’s masculinity and virility. Not even the exceptions presented by the interaction participants, for example, the mathematics teacher known by Ana (turn 57) and Jack himself are able to promote discussions to demystify the stereotypes around the homosexual *other*, as we can read in turn 58, “*So, it’s true about teachers in general, ok?*”.

It is worth noting the way Jack is disconnected to the homosexual identity, that is, as not belonging to the group of gay teachers of English and, therefore, he is an exception who does not follow the general rule. In this case, however, we can notice that this disconnection might simply be a reflection of asymmetric relations of power which permeate the teacher and his students’ relationship. The way Jack speaks (turn 47) opposes the way Sofia, Ana and Morgana speak (turns 42, 43, 45, 46), and his speech consolidates his authority figure before them and, undoubtedly, this fact guarantees his exclusion from the social class of homosexual teachers. Morgana’s statement (turn 48), “*You don’t count!*”,

corroborates this issue and, as a result, it gets Jack's confirmation (turn 49), "*I don't count! Ok, all right, so tell me more!*".

These enunciation events remind us of the fact that in our interactions with the *other*, we know what we can or cannot say and that depends, above all, on how we are placed in our social identities. This way, Bakhtin (1986, p.96) points out that "the addressee's social position, rank, and importance are reflected in a special way in utterances of everyday and business speech communication". Likewise, it is worth observing that the dialogue projected by the participants' social voices regarding the homosexual identity of some male teachers does not include a discussion about lesbian teachers. The question which comes up in Jack's speech (turn 60) is not even taken forward once Ana and Sofia's cultural evaluation defends that the *other* represented by the female teachers of English is "perfect" and "normal", so they can hardly fit in this kind of social identity as there are no examples or information to uphold this fact, as we can read in Jack's speech (turns 60 and 65). Ana and Sofia's recognition that the *other* is normal and perfect might be a way they found to express their own gender identities, which means that they belong to a group of heterosexual teachers of English. Following this reasoning, Ana and Sofia's identity placement implicitly shows cultural views that do not consider the homosexual *other* as being someone "normal" and "perfect".

The dialogical aspect of the interactions turns to a different direction when Renata starts narrating a story which is especially relevant for her as she wants to share with her interlocutors an event that is related to the discussions produced by the group. When it comes to narration as a discourse genre, Moita Lopes (2002) states that the act of narrating does not only belong to the interactional contexts, but it also adjusts itself to the interlocutors' communicative aims. Besides that, it is by means of narration that the narrator's *self* and his interlocutors' *selves* are shaped and placed before the story characters as well as the interlocutors involved in the interactional process. Moita Lopes (2002, p. 159) adds to this point that "by telling stories identities are being built throughout the simple act of telling them, or these identities are being reshaped at the moment the stories are being told. This aspect draws our attention to the fluid nature of identities".

Furthermore, it is by narrations that the speaker's voice joins the story characters' voices, and that creates thereby a discourse within a discourse, an utterance within an utterance. For Bakhtin, the narrator's utterance includes other utterances in his own composition. Although he associates his own discursive unit with different utterances, he has the commitment to keep them, "while preserving (if only rudimentary form) the initial autonomy (in syntactic, compositional, and stylistics terms) of the reported utterance, which otherwise could be not grasped in full" (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.116).

Taking into account our previous discussions, we notice that the event narrated by Renata, which emphasizes a homosexual hairdresser being treated badly in a protestant church (turns 67 and 69), evokes reactions of great perplexity and indignation among the main interlocutors, Morgana and Jack. Morgana's speeches, for example, turns 68, 70 and 73, "*Oh, my God!, [...] Why did she invite him? [...] I think she was cruel!*", and Jack's (turns 71 and 77), "*why did she invite him? [...] Very sad, isn't it?*", express compassion for the man humiliated in the church, a place that should welcome people and not reject them in Renata's cultural judgment (turn 78). It is worth observing that in this part of the interactional process there were identities which revealed characteristics of sympathy towards the *other* who was treated unfairly by the simple fact of having a different sexual orientation. Nevertheless, we also notice how contradictory the participants' discourses are throughout this very moment of interaction, for they had just expressed prejudiced and pejorative views against the *other* represented by the homosexual. By reflecting about the mosaic metaphor proposed by Moita Lopes (2002), we infer that this identity contradictory nature unveils the vicissitudes every human being can go through in his life time, showing that it is not possible to stabilize one's subjectivity as his own constitution depends on a "continuous and immediate exposure to multiple discourses about who we are as well as to a human life viewpoint which is multiple, plural and at the same time fragmented" (MOITA LOPES, 2002, p.15). Renata's story reflects, therefore, what Bakhtin states about the expressiveness within the dialogical process, for

When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive bakhground of the addressee's perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar

with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies – because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance (1986, p.95).

It is worth highlighting that it was not only the way Renata organized her discursive practice (turns 67, 69, 72, 74, 76, 78), but, above all, the many dialogues and their social voices within the narrative construction that possibly lead us to believe in the production of different images about the *other*. That is, the story narrated can lead the participants to reflect about the importance of learning how to respect and recognize the *other* in his dignity and moral integrity.

Renata's question, "*And why do people become gay, is it the way they were raised?*", (turn 79), however, did not find a way among her interlocutors to be discussed (turns 80, 81 and 82). Concerning this very issue, we agree with Nelson (2006, p. 224) about the necessity of theorizing sexual identities in the language classroom, "not as an inner essence that can be expressed or suppressed, but as relational acts produced by means of interactions". If the interactional process is responsible to make and negotiate meanings among the subjects, it is important to understand that social identities are not born with individuals and, therefore, they do not represent a biological or a hereditary fact, but social and cultural creations that take shape in subjects' discursive practices and in the way they place themselves towards the *other's* discourse.

Final remarks

Based on our discussions about the interactional and dialogical processes carried out in the English lesson investigated, we believe that by moulding the *other* in our discursive practices, we simultaneously express the cultural values and beliefs which represent us and, above all, our willingness of acceptance or rejection in relation to him. Within every interactional process, though our voices reflect our subjectivities, there is no way to forget that we are subjects historically and culturally defined, and for this reason, Bakhtin (1981, p.294) argues that "language is not a neutral medium that passes

freely and easily into the private property of the speakers' intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others”. This way, the dialogical discursive practices developed throughout the foreign language classes can help us not only on unveiling the biased and ethnocentric views as they can also provide us with opportunities to learn how to respect the *other's* choices so that the dialogue between the classroom participants' L1-C1 and L2-C2 can become an effective way to guarantee more coherent discussions about the sociocultural images of those involved in the interactional process.

When we think about the classroom of English as a foreign language-culture and, above all, about the social subjects that make it up, it is inevitable not to think about the ongoing formation of their identities when they face the *others* who can be their mirrors. In addition, it is in the production of a foreign/second language discourse that the classroom members project their identities and relate themselves both in time and in a social space with different *others* who allow them to take on particular positions as subjects. For Maher (2002), this is both a multifaceted and a contradictory process as the participants either wish to oppose themselves to the *other* or be in accordance with him. Concerning the teaching and learning of English, it is no longer possible to conceive them as processes guided by only linguistic and communicative knowledge as it is crucial to know how to deal with the identities involved in them as well as their instability, that is, the continuous fluidity that makes the subjects slide spontaneously into different forms which represent themselves. Thus, the foreign/second language classroom is, in fact, similar to an arena where we normally expect a clash of identities, which reveal themselves imbued with diverse ideological loads.

Hence, we turn again to the Bakhtinian thought about the dialogical relations as tension spaces between the utterances, that is, as a large struggling space between different social voices and their “truths”. Bakhtin (1986) and Vološinov (1986) supports the idea that both convergence and divergence can arise from the dynamics of dialogism, but, above all, all voices are equal and none of them should suppress the expression of any other one. With

regard to the extract discussed previously, the fact the *other* has taken on different social representations such as a man, a woman, the comic strip homosexual character, the homosexual male teacher of English, the heterosexual female teacher of English and the homosexual hairdresser shows us that although they could not answer their interlocutors' voices, they were able to develop dialogues that overcome frontiers of space and time. The importance of this diversity that characterized the discussions can be realized in the projection of many looks to the *other* and on how the constituting alterity is strongly present in the foreign language teaching-learning dialectics, for it is by means of the *other* that the *self* can not only recognize himself, but also present, identify and change himself in the verbal encounters with his interlocutor; and, it is by means of this dialogicity mediated by the foreign language that its appropriation can be achieved effectively.

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Received February 28, 2012

Accepted June 16, 2012