Positioning Masculinities and Femininities in Preschool EFL Education

Positioning Masculinities and Femininities in Preschool EFL Education seeks to describe and interpret how masculinities and femininities are communicated in the preschool EFL classroom and is aimed at discussing whether those masculinities and femininities are likely to have an impact on the preschoolers' learning of English as a foreign language. Preschoolers' classroom interactions taking place in a Colombian kindergarten, videotaped from 2004 to 2006, are analysed via ideas of 'positioning gender in discourse' and of 'gender as discourses of multiplicity'. Thus the analysis follows Feminist and Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) principles. Findings reveal three salient patterns. Firstly, the discursive construction of teacher-like figures shows that both female teachers and girl-teachers are seemingly undermined by subtle discourses in which boys resist and aim at suppressing female powerful positions. Secondly, the data indicates that there are instances in which gendered-friendship networks bring into place an egalitarian position where both masculinities and femininities cross traditional boundaries. Finally, the analysis of talk around EFL text/content unveils subject positions taken up by the preschoolers to align and contest power positions drawing on gendered discourses. Drawing on these findings and the formulation of transformative actions, the conclusion discusses the implications for educational practice and future research in the highly situated context of young children's gendered 'second language learning' practices.

Posicionamiento de masculinidades y feminidades en la enseñanza preescolar de inglés como lengua extranjera describe e interpreta cómo las masculinidades y feminidades se comunican en el aula de preescolar donde se enseña inglés como lengua extranjera; discute además si dichas masculinidades y feminidades tienen algún impacto en el aprendizaje de esa lengua que tienen los preescolares. Se analizan interacciones en el aula, grabadas en video desde el 2004 al 2006, a través de ideas sobre el 'posicionamiento del género en el discurso' y de 'género como discursos múltiples'. En este sentido, se siguen principios del Análisis Feminista y Postestructuralista del Discurso (AFPD). Los hallazgos revelan tres tipos de patrones. En primer lugar, la construcción discursiva de figuras profesorales demuestra que las profesoras y las 'niñas-profes' son marginalizadas por discursos sutiles mediante los cuales los niños resisten y suprimen posiciones femeninas superiores. En segundo lugar, los datos señalan que hay momentos en los que redes de amistades construyen posicionamientos egalitarios en los que tanto masculinidades como feminidades cruzan los límites normativos de género. Finalmente, el análisis de charlas alrededor de textos y contenidos de la lengua extranjera dejan ver posiciones que adoptan l@s preescolares con el fin de alinearse o de subvertir otras al recurrir a diversos discursos de género. Con base en estos hallazgos y en algunos planes de acción transformativos, se discuten, en la conclusión, implicaciones de orden educativo e investigativo en el contexto situado de prácticas de aprendizaje de segundas lenguas.

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Positioning masculinities and femininities in preschool EFL[1] education

Introduction

Contemporary second language research has been tinged with a 'social turn' approach (Block, 2003). The idea underlying this social concern deals with the understanding of the fluid social identities of the language learners. In that sense, during the last decade, a wealth of research has examined *in situ* how the variable gender is related to specific contexts of language learning where myriad types of identities are constructed and contested (Norton, 2000; Norton and Pavlenko, 2004). Surprisingly, most of this research interest has not been focused on studying the interface between gender and language learning in preschool contexts where English is taught and learnt as a foreign language (but see Castañeda-Peña, 2007 and 2008). This study posits, with respect to traditional paradigms of second language rersearch, that gender identity could be thought of as a key analytical category to understand what goes on in the foreign language classroom.

Two distinctive features flow from the title of this research: *Positioning masculinities and femininities in preschool EFL education*. Firstly, this study aims at putting – let us say 'positioning' – 'gender' in the picture regarding second language learning in the context of preschoolers learning English as a foreign language. In that sense, this is an exploratory study. Secondly, a key aspect of this study is the nature of its methodology and methods. Preschoolers' classroom interactions are analysed via a feminist, poststructuralist and discourse analysis lens based on principles of 'positioning gender in discourse'. This study is also exploratory in that sense. Although such methodology and methods have already been used in educational contexts and others like the workplace (Baxter 2003), it appears – to my knowledge at the moment of writing this research report for *Signo y Pensamiento* – that this research is a pioneer in the field by using Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA for brevity), a new methodology to ascertain gender and language, in the study of second language learning.

Consequently, this research has a twofold exploratory purpose. On the one hand this study seeks to describe and interpret how masculinities and femininities are communicated in the preschool EFL classroom. On the other hand, this study is aimed at discussing whether those masculinities and femininities are likely to have an impact on the preschoolers' learning of English as a foreign language. This report is in four parts. The first is concerned with the contextual, theoretical and methodological conditions leading to the development of the study. The second summarizes some of the procedures used to conduct

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1. EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language

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the study. The third part then proceeds to discuss the findings and briefly outlines some suggested transformative actions. Keeping in mind results and transformative actions, the last part proposes pedagogical and research implications in which, I foresee, FPDA studies play a key role.

Context and background to **the study**

English as a foreign language is a school subject that dominates the educational panorama in Colombia. It has displaced other Modern Foreign Languages such as French and maintains a high status at primary, secondary and higher educational level. However, there are not, at present, national guidelines for an EFL preschool curriculum in Colombia. Nor are there figures to indicate how many private or state kindergartens there are in Colombia providing EFL as a school subject. There is also a noticeable lack of statistics revealing how many of these institutions may be described as bilingual. Moreover, there is a lack of information showing how bilingualism operates within them. Anne Marie de Mejía (2004: 389), in a brief report about bilingual education regarding what she calls Colombian majority language contexts, concludes by saying that 'there is a great variety between the programmes and practices of the different private bilingual schools in the country which makes generalisation difficult'.

This lack of information appears to be a subject of considerable fascination especially now that Colombia has started a journey, in the middle of rancorous arguments, towards a language policy embracing bilingualism. Yet this points to something of a paradox. Indeed becoming bilingual might appear to be a lifeline for many sectors in Colombia but there is still a keenly felt need to understand what to be bilingual really means and implies for most Colombians. The outcome of this debate has many potential answers and perhaps a way – within a variety of ways – in which this debate could be explored is by understanding how real Colombian language learners, inmersed in Colombian contexts, are positioned and how they experience 'power' when they learn a new foreign language such as English.

Poststructuralists have studied how positioning operates in specific contexts. For example, Mauthner (2002) describes discourses of companionship and friendship in her study of 'sistering discourses' where the researcher pins down moments of role reversal among sisters demonstrating shifting positions. Walkerdine (1998), Francis (1997, 1998), Davies (1989) and Davies and Banks (1992) seem to be more related to the research topic investigated here.

In her *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender* Davies (1989: 91) investigated the interpretation that preschool children made after listening to the reading of feminist tales and found 'from descriptions of the children's play and from the responses to the stories that male power equals domination in public spaces, particularly of females but also of smaller boys'. In her study with Banks (1992), the two authors, using the same reading method, identified four positions children constitute in their discourses as a response to feminist stories.

First, there is an incontestable difference between males and females. Second, there are differences that could be negotiated. Third, 'things' performed by the other sex are important and valuable and could be taken up by the opposite sex. Finally, there should not be differences between males and females. Davies and Banks (1992: 23) conclude that in spite of the fact that some children use alternative discourses to resist dominant discourses of gender inequality, they are not 'able to translate those alternatives into their lived reality because their patterns of desire are imbricated in story lines which give substance to inequitable social structures'. Francis' research results (1997 and 1998) seem to resonate somewhat with these findings. She asked groups of primary school students to organize some role-plays in which specific professional positions of adult work were to be distributed/negotiated. Results show gendered discourses of innate inequality as well as discourses of equal opportunities ruling the

social organization of the activity. Francis also uses interviews and topic discussions with the primary school children.

A major difference between Davies (1989) and Francis' research (1998) compared with my research is that I attempt to study only naturally-occurring interactions in the classroom that are unguided in terms of topic; those interactions simply occur. This could be interpreted as a 'plus' since the topic of 'gender' has not been pre-set in the classroom.

In a nutshell, the feminist poststructuralist agenda could be situated within the reflexive interplay of a number of principles that respond to grand narratives, the univocal and unitary meaning and the fixed identity of subjects defended by a modernist-feminist thought. Baxter (2003) points to a feminist poststructuralism that celebrates the interplay of contesting theoretical positions, the co-construction of multiple versions of meaning *in situ* and the discursive positioning of subjects that mutually, adversely or contestably craft multiple shifting identities in discursive localised contexts.

In Baxter's opinion (2003) feminist poststructuralism draws on re-visited versions of principles of feminism (the universal cause, the personal is political and the search for a common voice) and principles of poststructuralism (the scepticism to universal causes, the contestation of meaning and the discursive construction of identity). Positioned together, those principles would imply, for feminist poststructuralism, revisiting the subjective, the planning of deconstructive projects and the assertion of potential transformative projects.

Subjectivity is approached by Hollway (1984: 227) 'through the meanings and incorporated values which attach to a person's practices and provide the powers through which he or she can position him- or herself in relation to others'. Positioning as part of the expression of subjectivity seems not to be an individual effort and, in that sense, Hollway (1984: 228) goes on to say that 'subjectivity is a non-unitary and non-rational product'. This resonates with the way Davies and Harré (2001) define positioning by invoking

some research in which subjects are conceived of by discourses inhabited by them. In their allusion to the discursive production of subjectivity, Davies and Harré (2001: 264) add that positioning is 'the discursive process whereby selves are located […] as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines'.

This implied that in the data-analysis there were chances to locate moments in which classroom interactions could be part of 'reflexive positioning' (when one positions oneself) or such interactions could be amounted to 'interactive positioning' (what others say or do positions oneself). This was clearly reflected in the study. For example, in terms of interactive positioning, turns of speaking were distributed by the EFL teacher positioning her students in role. Once students were in role, they experienced how powerful or less powerful their reflexive positioning was in contrast with the interactive positioning instigated by their classmates. These two 'categories' of analysis, within the FPDA approach, equipped me with the necessary tools to observe how teacher-like figures are discursively constituted. Consequently, the positioning of girl and boy-teachers becomes paramount to interactive and reflexive positioning.

However, as cautioned by Davies and Harré (2001: 264), 'it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional. One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoingly produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production'. This orients my examination of the data in which communication appears not to come into existence detached from the circumstances; rather, let us say discursive practices, in which it is produced. In short, borrowing Hollway's words (1984: 236), 'discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people'. I would also add that those positions are in relation to other discourses and to how those discourses could be endorsed or subverted (Sunderland *et al*, 2002).

As a result, Feminist Poststructuralism situates my research project in the realm of deconstruction

as understood by Derrida (1978). In the classroom interactions, I started to look at the preschoolers' experiences 'of themselves as subjects who are constructed within discourses, practices and power relationships' as Baxter (2003: 33) has pointed out. This deconstructive look was paramount to visualise patterns in the discursive practices of the preschoolers and to organize the data coherently according to specific topics: girl and boy-teachers, bounded/unbounded femininities and masculinities, and endorsement/subversion of gendered/non-gendered texts. The data was studied from a situational and relational point looking for power relationships that might be unnoticed at first sight.

In the spirit of feminist poststructuralism this means that unheard voices in the preschool EFL classroom will be, using Baxter's rationale (2003: 37), 'heard clearly alongside those of more dominant […] undercutting and potentially overturning the status quo'. This was achieved aiming at suggesting a number of transformative actions which I hope will make the foreign language classroom a better and more comfortable place for the language learners (especially the female ones) allowing them to construct their identities as bilingual learners.

The study

Seeing the Colombian context in which second language learning is most likely to occur (e.g. classroom-based learning), the data was gathered from classroom interactions with a focus on the discursive construction of gender identity and its impact on the preschoolers' learning of the target language. Consequently, this research is about gender in relation to second language learning. The pilot study took place in the 'Sunrise Kindergarten' and the main study in the 'Goldmedal Kindergarten' (not their real names). The pilot study contributed to understand that the feminist, poststructuralist and discourse analysis lens was appropriate to conduct the study, for that reason I will concentrate on the findings of the main study in the last two sections of this paper.

The databases

The whole study comprises three video databases made out of more than 600 video clips for both pilot study and main study. A clip is understood here as a portion of a video identified as analytically relevant. Clips were obtained by using a process of video segmentation. Additionally, a clip is a self-contained unit marked by the initiation and ending of an interaction or series of interactions unified by a theme. Clips are grouped in collections created according to the dates on which the lessons or school activities were videoed. Consequently clips have various lengths. The 'Sunrise Kindergarten' video database has a total of 95 video clips. The 'Goldmedal Kindergarten' video databases were filmed by a paid person and at times by me in 2004, 2005 and 2006. They contain 499 video clips. Finally, I named the clips trying to capture their content.

The video materials used in the main study were videotaped in the Goldmedal Kindergarten, located in Zipaquirá, a municipality 25 kilometres north of Bogotá. The history of this small town is displayed in its old buildings in Spanish colonial style and by its main tourist attraction 'The Salt Cathedral': an underground Catholic temple built inside a salt mountain. The economy of the 'Zipaquireños' and 'Zipaquireñas' depends strongly on salt exploitation from the mines, which also add chimneys and a grey and white tone to the landscape. Zipaquirá was once known as the "Manchester of Colombia" because of the many private salt refineries.

All the EFL staff at the Goldmedal Kindergarten are female and have a university degree. Preschoolers and teachers have Spanish as their first language. I sent out letters to the teachers and Academic Coordinator explaining what my project was about and asking for their consent to have their classes videoed randomly. All agreed. Even though the principal had informed parents about the presence of a person filming the classrooms, I also sent out consent forms to parents explaining that their children were going to be filmed and that their chil-

dren's interactions were going to be used to explore the discursive construction of gender. Additionally I explained that those results could eventually be published, revisited with more research interests and that the identities of their children and of the school were going to be kept anonymous. All parents returned signed consent forms.

Transcription

I used *Transana*[2] to organize the video material into collections. Those collections contained the video clips. The clips were coded (Seale, 1999) according to the 'key analytic themes' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) which in the databases appear relevant to answer the research questions (construction of girl-teachers and boy-teachers, gendered discourses and comments around gendered text/content). These topics were also reaffirmed after conducting the pilot study with data from the Sunrise Kindergarten and after studying a small sample of data taken from the Goldmedal Kindergarten – analyzed elsewhere (Castañeda-Peña, 2008). A total of 226 clips with 'significant moments' (Baxter, 2003) were transcribed which became the actual 'material' of the research – the remaining clips appeared not to be sufficiently telling (e.g. students just colouring, pasting or cutting out in which interactions are limited due to the nature of the EFL task) or the 'noise' level would not facilitate the transcription process. The transcribed clips amounted more than 300 pages of video transcription.

Results: The (re) construction of gendered identities and language learning

I should also add that the body of material collected for the research included informal observations on site. Institutional documents and pictures taken from the Goldmedal Kindergarten and a collection of e-mail exchanges with questionnaires also complement the material along with face-to-face interviews with the Principal and the EFL teachers.

Only excerpts taken from the transcription of the clips became the actual focus of analysis of the research at a descriptive level where the allocation and distribution of turns were paramount to identify how the interlocutors were positioned in the interactions. The face-to-face interviews and the answers to the questionnaires were also fully transcribed and translated and approved via e-mail by the teachers. This interview/questionnaire data was used at an interpretative level which is polyphonic. Last but not least, I should highlight that the English spoken by all the research participants was not modified.

The following sections will discuss how the data seems to portray the construction of gendered identities via gendered discourses that possibly affect the learner identity of preschoolers studying EFL.

Gendered teacher-like identities and EFL learning

The data demonstrated that both boys and girls become constructed or are self-constructed as the 'articulate knower' at certain moments turning into boy-teachers and girl-teachers. There is evidence in the data that this happens discursively both where the children are called upon and when they volunteer, e.g. situations in which the preschoolers use, with no differentiation, 'managerial styles' normatively assigned to either women or men.

In particular these styles include the use of mitigated language (normatively a feminine style) and short, precise directives (normatively a masculine style). Sometimes they use a combination of both styles. Interestingly, this unfixed 'managerial' style has also been recently highlighted in discussions of women's talk in the workplace[3].

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2. *Transana* is software to conduct qualitative analysis. It has been designed to allow researchers to work with large collections of video. In spite of the potential use of *Transana* for video data analysis, I felt more comfortable using its transcription tools only.
3. See the work of Holmes (2006).

Teacher-like behaviours were also found at the non-verbal level (e.g. eliciting answers without uttering questions but using body-language). Both Spanish and English are used alternately to achieve such subject-positioning.

From an FPDA perspective we saw that investing discursively in gendered teacher-like identities brings distinct power relationships into play, which are taken up or experienced differently amongst preschoolers. We demonstrated that both female teachers and girl-teachers appear to be undermined by subtle discourses in which boys offer resistance. The boys seem to suppress powerful positions gained by or given institutionally to the female members (e.g. girl-teachers and the female EFL teacher, respectively) during either a whole EFL lesson/activity or a particular stage thereof. This might be fuelled by both the boys and the girls as on some occasions the girls appear to legitimate the boys' discourses. However the boys' positioning to reconfigure a site where female power is prominent should prompt the Goldmedal Kindergarten to start planning a 'gender as discourses of multiplicity' policy in their EFL curriculum. To say how they should do this would be beyond the scope of this brief report. I would hope however that through the research offered here, those at the Goldmedal Kindergarten – and others – might become more aware of how teacher-like gendered identities are manifested in their own classrooms and often pass unnoticed. This would also be relevant to other preschool EFL contexts where similar constructing of girl-teacher and boy-teacher identities pertains.

In fact, I did discuss the topic of gender policy with the principal, TM (Teacher Mónica), asking her straightforwardly if there was any gender policy in the Goldmedal Kindergarten. But for her the only differentiation between boys and girls lies in the colour of the aprons they wear as uniform. In her words,

All the activities are the same for them [girls and boys]! *What I have, seen and changed, for example – but this might not be relevant for your research – is the aprons, they are blue for the boys and the girls wear red but they all wear the same colour overalls, and they participate in the horse-riding activities, gardening, farming, swimming, everything is the same, yes!* [A_o6_TM_Interview]

It could be assumed – probably rightly – that behind TM's words there is a 'gender equality' discourse tinged with a 'liberal feminist approach' in the sense that 'early childhood staff are advised to create gender equity by encouraging girls to participate in traditionally male activities and by encouraging role reversal between boys and girls' (Mac Naughton, 1998: 150). However, the FPDA perspective demonstrates that, though pupils may play in less gendered-differentiated ways (e.g. with building blocks or toy cars), preschoolers – mainly boys – appear to resist 'dominant' practices of female power. This is marked discursively as a social practice. Thus, at the Goldmedal-Kindergarten classrooms, boys 'play the fool' and 'have a laugh' to do masculinity. They also seem to be 'attended to', especially by the female EFL teachers. So, by examining the competing discourses within the EFL lessons where girl-teachers and EFL teachers are challenged, FPDA illustrates that in fact there is a counter discourse – that of gender differentiation – competing with the institutional discourse of gender equity. The gender differentiation discourses seem to be unaltered; for example, not a single girl-teacher is constructed as 'Miss'; boy-teachers are not told off when self-positioning as the 'anti-sub-teacher'. 'Staff cannot passively wait for children to absorb non-sexist messages from the world around them' (Mac Naughton, 1998: 167) or, from the perspective of this research, to equalize power positions as a social practice.

Some transformative actions

Thus early childhood EFL staff might need to:
  • Be aware of the way gendered identities operate in the classroom. This means staff need to be aware of the burden carried especially by the girl-teachers who lead or participate in EFL

activities. Such a burden varies depending on the construction of the interactions and on how the girls position themselves or are positioned by teachers and female and male classmates.

• Make leader-positions available for both boys and girls, as sometimes classroom participation could be 'monopolised' by girl-teachers, and because of this, access to the use of the target language.

• Make other options – let us say 'subject positions' – available in the EFL lesson to those who might be discursively and normatively constructed as 'anti-sub-teachers' whether they are boys or girls.

• 'Encourage children to understand how their actions and reactions affect other children's power to do what they want to do and be who they want to be' (Mac Naughton, 1998: 168) in the EFL lesson. This could be done in the pupils' first language but anyway EFL activities could be planned bearing this in mind.

Gendered discourses and EFL learning

The data from the Goldmedal Kindergarten indicate that gendered discourses, embedded and/or reflected in the social practices of the preschool EFL students, inform them with gendered categories that split preschoolers off into two opposed groups (e.g. girls vs. boys). This also seems to be an already ingrained way for the students to feel and sense the world around them in the target language. However, it was also found that the construction of EFL learning occurs in the social construction of gendered friendship networks where there is an egalitarian ethos for both masculinities and femininities. This was demonstrated through the use of 'private games' during the development of a few literacy EFL activities where the construction of assertive femininities and masculinities competed, individually or collectively, in showing the preschoolers' EFL knowledge.

From an FPDA perspective we could argue that this type of positioning emerges because for both girls and boys being bilingual is a major asset:

a position of 'empowerment'. We saw before that English has a privileged status in Colombia. Given this context, even young children of 6 or younger fully acknowledge such position. It is interesting to compare this with other contexts where girls are constructed as better at languages. Relevant references might be Sunderland (2004) ('Girls as good language learners') and Epstein et al (1998) (boys are the ones who fail plus a general view of issues in gender and achievement in education). Young children seem to recognize early on that second language learning is associated with identity traces in which gender, race and class might all be interconnected. Hruska (2004) reveals a context of preschool pupils in which bilingual girls could not be part of female friendship networks because not having English as their first language had a lower identity status – culture and social distance might be relevant as well. The lack of access to such networks had a negative impact in the language development of those who were thus marginalized. Little research exists however on how this highly situated construction of the bilingual identity as a prestigious one operates in other preschool EFL Colombian contexts. There might be an avenue for investigating across contexts here especially when there are new national language policies at stake.

The findings in this research further suggest that at the same time other discourses of 'approval' represent, especially for the girls of the Goldmedal Kindergarten, a source for subject-positioning themselves more powerfully and making their EFL experience in the classroom more positive and, for some of them, more comfortable. Those positions achieved discursively allow girls to access social practices normally attributed to boys. This is variously interpreted by the staff. For instance, there is evidence of 'naughty and playful' girls! At times girls are 'scolded' and they also seem to be constructed as not good (English) language learners. At times the situation appears to be the opposite. The FPDA approach also demonstrated how the boys of the Goldmedal Kindergarten were driven by discourses of resistance within the

EFL classroom interactions. Basically, what they were resisting was the subject positions taken up by girls or women in regard to the EFL activities and content of the lessons. Those discourses of masculinity were instanced by ridiculing stereotyped representations of femininity and by establishing opposition to activities not normatively carried out by males.

Once again, these findings demonstrate the urgent need of a 'gender as discourses of multiplicity' policy within the EFL curriculum of the Goldmedal Kindergarten. It is interesting to see that when boys construct themselves as 'naughty and playful', while doing gender work in terms of social practices attributed to discourses of masculinity, they are listened to, attended to and even to a certain extent, praised. However, this is not the case for some girls who access 'masculine sites' where it is not problematic to take up positions normatively attributed to boys (e.g. 'girl-fighter'). As was mentioned, these girls might be read differently from the boys by the EFL teachers. In this sense, forms of teacher-student discourse that construct the girls as 'deviant' from normative constructions of female-learner identity in the EFL classroom need to be contested (Talbot, 1998) by discourses of 'gender equity'.

Some transformative actions

Overall, in relation to gendered discourses and EFL learning, early childhood EFL staff might need to:

• Heighten their awareness and skills at spotting 'significant moments' in which gendered discourses emerge in classroom interaction either in the preschoolers' mother tongue or in their target language. Beyond spotting these discourses in the pupils' interactions, early childhood staff might need to assess ways to bring about transformations in the social practices that preschoolers manifest in their gendered discourses when they – both girls and boys – are positioned in sexist and discriminatory situations. This seems to be a daily life situation for the girls rather than for the boys.

• Bridge the gap between discourses of gender differentiation that benefit boys and reprimand girls. This means that if boys are attended to when being naughty and playful, girls should be given the same opportunity to be listened to when they take up such positions, as girls might be constructing other facets in the spectrum of their gendered identities.

• Learn how to read gendered constructions of identity during EFL lessons/activities. The fact that, for instance, girls do not conform to traditional discourses in education about the 'female learner' does not necessarily mean they are not good EFL learners. This could well be another way to understand other gendered discourses that orient boys' positioning and gender identity construction. Alternative positions made available for the pupils through careful activity design might be helpful although the surfacing of gendered discourses could be thought of as 'unpredictable'.

Teacher talk/Student talk around gendered text/content and EFL learning

The FPDA analysis substantiated the fact that categories such as 'endorsement' and 'subversion' – coming from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective and a tentative model of analysis (Sunderland, 2000 and Sunderland *et al*, 2002) – reveal subject positions taken up by preschool girls and boys to align and contest power positions drawing on gendered discourses.

It is important to emphasise that EFL text/content might not have been conceived of initially as gendered but could be made gendered in classroom interaction, as the data demonstrated. The FPDA approach also unveiled how at times the teacher talk and the student talk around gendered text/content positioned a few preschoolers disadvantageously with respect to other students. Some students appeared to be given fewer EFL learning opportunities as they were silenced by both pupils and the EFL teacher. For other preschoolers, talk around gendered text/content seems to offer a springboard to accessing powerful positions and

to working to maintain gender-identity and EFL-learner-identity.

As the focus was on the talk from preschoolers and EFL staff around gendered or gendered-made text/content, the fact that such interest ceased at specific stages of an EFL lesson/activity and the fact that at times gender was not even noticed became significant for the analysis. I would also like to argue that although the talk around gendered or gendered-made text/content cannot be predicted since teaching and learning are highly situated in specific classrooms, it is still possible to argue a potential impact in terms of EFL learning and the development of other general learning and social skills (e.g. giving opinions, disambiguating meaning, rephrasing, etc).

Some transformative actions

• All this might probably suggest EFL staff working with very young children should:
be aware of the talk that pupils construct around gendered text/content and the 'sense(s) of self/ selves' they engage in as gendered social practices. This means paying attention to the subject positions that are made available and/or denied to pupils during classroom interaction. Although most talk seems to occur in the preschoolers' first language, this still seems to affect access to performing EFL tasks and to the use of the target language.

• Be fully aware of the gendered discourses promoted in the classroom as part of the EFL content. Activities in which 'gender equity' discourses are brought into play do not necessarily guarantee that preschoolers will understand and put into practice 'equity'. Careful activity-design with gendered text/content might provide contexts in which pupils could 'appropriate' or experience subject positions that go beyond the traditional dual and gendered reality they might be used to experiencing on a daily basis.

• 'Voice' gendered text/content illustrated in EFL teaching and learning materials – this means both to 'endorse' and 'subvert' 'progressive' and 'traditional' EFL text/content. This could make pupils aware of gendered-based alternative and powerful subject positions. Moreover, to 'voice' text/content that has been made gendered. As was recognised by one of the EFL teachers, talk around text/content could foster the development of other cognitive and social skills that contribute to the co-construction of knowledge in the context of the EFL lesson, regardless of the use of the first language.

In addition, elsewhere (Castañeda-Peña, 2006) I have argued that in terms of the contents of ELT (English language teaching) textbooks, gender equality may well have come to be thought of as one of the criteria for textbook selection – even for the writing of EFL materials. However, the findings in the Goldmedal Kindergarten – there have been similar results with adult language learners in Portuguese, Greek and British contexts (see Sunderland *et al*, 2002) – have a broader implication potentially applicable to other Latin American and worldwide contexts at all ELT levels (e.g. primary, secondary and post-secondary education): There is no way to predict how ELT-textbook contents, whether gendered or not, will in fact be taught. By the same token, it is perhaps over-ambitious to establish how they are going to be talked about either by students or by teachers.

It is not easy – and it is not my intention – to make generalisations about how, in terms of gender, 'progressive' and 'traditional' ELT textbooks are talked about by both teachers and students. It is only in institutional contexts where ELT textbooks could be piloted or – having been adopted – adjusted to ELT gender-equality practices. Gender, teacher-talk and student-talk should only be seen as supplementary criteria for ELT-textbook choice and adaptation if this develops from an understanding that 'learning' in the (English) language lesson also comprises – among other things – the way individuals invest in power relationships, positioning each other in discourse on the basis of 'gender as discourses of multiplicity' and how they make sense of the gendered world in two languages.

Conclusion and implications

Keeping in mind the research results and the localised transformative actions above, I would like to propose that the understanding of masculinities and femininities in preschool EFL education and from an FPDA perspective implies at least three features.

Firstly, that 'gender as discourses of multiplicities' orientates the establishment of social practices, which are not necessarily fixed within and between social groups. I understand both 'establishment' and 'social practice' as non-static categories of analysis. The data obtained from the Goldmedal Kindergarten appear to indicate, for example, that preschoolers' teacher-like discourses are accepted but also contested. This positions the pupils variously in terms of power relationships. This positioning also implies having access or being denied access to the use of the target language.

Secondly, 'gender as discourses of multiplicities' appears to create affiliations to maintain 'fluid' social practices. This means that in the Goldmedal-Kindergarten classrooms, for example, having 'races' as part of the EFL teachers' instructional designs could make – but might not make – available positions of 'equity' in which both masculinities and femininities are positioned at the same 'level' with the intent of constructing a friendship network. This co-construction could end up in the establishment of friendships and of discourses such as the 'nice girls' (Reay, 2001) or the 'sweet little girls' (Benjamin, 2002). In this case, however, the 'peer-approval' discourse appears to take the form of a gender equality and egalitarian discourse. Pupils who draw temporarily on this discourse maintain a fluid affiliation to the friendship network and create learning opportunities to foster their EFL learning cooperatively. It should be noticed though that in the context of the Goldmedal Kindergarten, but probably in other educational subjects and contexts too, coming 'first' would also imply a position of higher status identity in relation to pupils – or groups of pupils – who are runner-ups.

Thirdly, 'gender as discourses of multiplicities' turns out to be a framework useful to disclose detrimental educational practices used to maintain masculinities and femininities as binary, invariable and 'inevitable'. Having said this, it is important to recognise that, especially in the case of EFL staff, children might vary in their use of gendered discourses at different times simply because they are accessing or taking up different subject positions discursively. At moments both boys and girls were 'silenced' in the Goldmedal Kindergarten. However, assertive preschool girls appear to be read negatively when they take up powerful positions that construct them as naughty and playful. Underlying this, there might be an EFL teachers' discourse of the ideal language learner. This 'ideally' conceived learner becomes problematic within an FPDA perspective aimed at studying gender, EFL learning and early childhood, as I will briefly discuss below.

Traditionally, in Teutsch-Dwyer's words (2001: 176), second language 'acquisition' theories have 'assumed an idealized and abstract 'learner''. And although some studies have been 'applied' to real second language learners, the data taken from the Goldmedal-Kindergarten classrooms also suggests revisiting prevailing paradigms influencing second language theories and research (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; Schumann, 1986) with concepts of power (Norton, 2000) and gender, race and class (Pavlenko et al, 2001; Norton and Pavlenko, 2004) to redefine what counts as second language learning not only in the context of this research but in multiple cross-cultural situations.

As second language learning is highly situated and occurs in very fluctuating situations and conditions where power relationships and positioning are at stake, it is not advisable to view the learners as 'unidimensional, ahistorical individuals whose language use and language acquisition are to a large degree influenced by a set of often clearly discernible characteristics (including sex), on the one hand, and a set of social variables in language learning, on the other' (Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001: 176). Rather, to position 'gender as discourses of multiplicity' in terms of masculinities and femininities within second language theories, could contribute to laying open, for instance, how (English) language learning

and gendered discourses are articulated differently in specific contexts: for this particular study that context is the preschool EFL classroom.

I would like to argue that the FPDA point of view contributes to seeing second language learning as a 'practice' in which gendered discourses operate (and intertextually compete), situating interlocutors, or participants' voices – let us say preschool EFL learners' voices – in different subject positions. Thus subject-positioning would be the result of power distribution being used to structure not only interaction in the EFL classroom but also the learners' own experiences of such power having an impact on their own linguistic development of the target language. Therefore, within an FPDA perspective in relation to the study of – but not exclusively of – EFL learning and early childhood, it might be appropriate to talk about 'second language learning practices'. This assumption would contribute, firstly, to demystifying the background concept of an 'ideal' or 'abstract' learner who is, additionally, de-gendered in traditional second language acquisition theories and research. Secondly, such an assumption would also contribute to our realising that second language learning should not be divorced from the subject-positions for which learners compete through discourses occurring within the EFL classroom in which gender – in the particular case of this research – and other 'factors' such as race and class may play a significant role.

'Second language learning practices' are a construct that reflect fluidity and multiplicity and would be worth studying in future research within an FPDA perspective. This would explain from a feminist and poststructuralist point of view second language learning phenomena such as – but not limited to – the use of the first language, the use of non-verbal language, code-switching and code mixing and their articulations with aspects of gender, class and race. This could be obviously attempted in cross-cultural studies that involve different educational EFL levels (e.g. primary, secondary and higher education) in Colombia, Latin America and other areas. Simultane-

ously, the range of research could be broader if considering multiple contexts in which there are only males, only females or a mixture of research participants experiencing 'gender as discourses of multiplicity'. I also believe that FPDA provides a new research avenue, as a research framework and as a research tool, for those interested in the study of the relationship between (English) language learning across contexts (e.g. EFL, ESL (English as a Second Language) and MFL (Modern Foreign Languages)), gender and young children. Potentially, FPDA could also be useful for conducting similar studies in bilingual and multilingual contexts and, finally, FPDA studies could make language policy makers aware of the role of gender in second language learning.

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