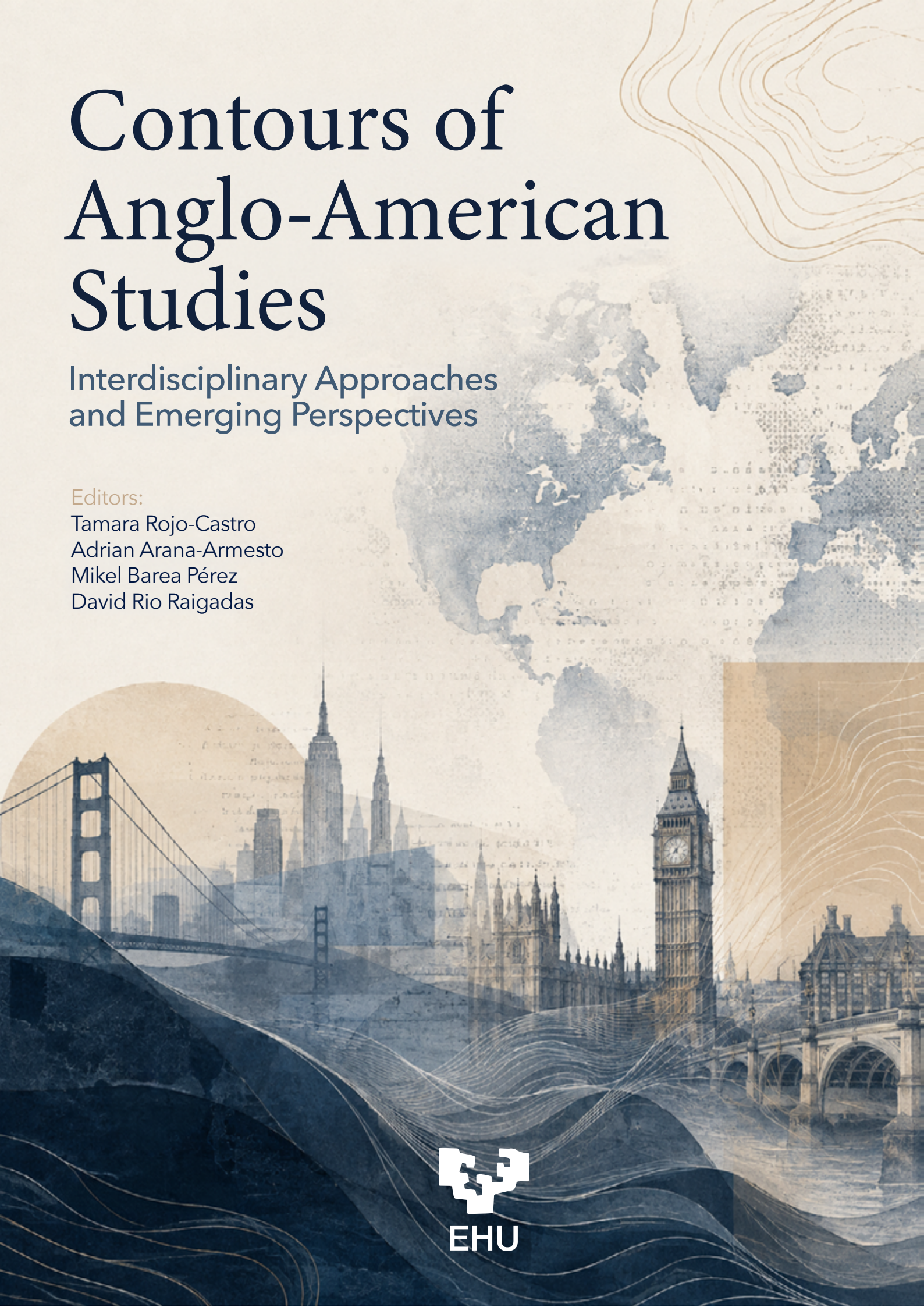
Contours of Anglo-American Studies

Interdisciplinary Approaches and Emerging Perspectives

Editors:
Tamara Rojo-Castro
Adrian Arana-Armesto
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CIP. Biblioteca Universitaria
Contours of Anglo-American Studies [Recurso electrónico]: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Emerging Perspectives / editors, Tamara Rojo Castro…[et al.]. – Datos. – [Leioa] : Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco = Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateko Argitalpen Zerbitzua, [2026].
1 recurso en línea : PDF (165 p.)
Modo de acceso: World Wide Web
ISBN: 978-84-1319-806-4.

1. Literatura inglesa. 2. Literatura norteamericana. 3. Inglés (lengua) I. Rojo Castro, Tamara, coed.

(0.034)820
(0.034)802.0

Leioa, 17 de septiembre de 2026.

© Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco
Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateko Argitalpen Zerbitzua

ISBN: 978-84-1319-806-4

This volume is dedicated to the memory
of Javier Ruano García,
whose generosity, commitment,
and dedication to AEDEAN
and the academic community will not be forgotten

Table of Contents

Preface 6

Part I. Literature and Culture

Sofía Anfoka Díaz
Between Projections and Reality: Theory of Mind and Identity Formation in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* 9

Lucía Aréjula Muñoz
Of Trans Mothers and Daughters: Mothering Practices in *The House of Impossible Beauties and Bad Girls* 14

Bárbara Arizti Martín
"We're Still Inside the Fucking Paradigm!": Flagging the Attention Crisis in *Birnam Wood* 20

Anesa Muslimovic Ortega
Of Beasts and Aliens: Animalization and Exotization in Bosnian American Literature 26

Ana Orbegozo Desdentado
Victorian Marriage and Tennyson's *Enid* 32

Belén Ozarín García
Algorithmic Borderlands and Transcultural Memory: Reading Caterina Edwards' *Finding Rosa* through the Lens of Digital Governance 38

Noelia Ramos-Soria
Nobody Cares for the Woods as I Care for Them: Treebeard, Keeper of the Eternal Green in *The Two Towers* (1954). 46

Iratxe Ruiz-de-Alegría-Puig
Susan Cooper (1813-1894): From "Plain Daughter of America" to Redemptive Nature Writer . 52

Lucía Samitier-Pérez
Art Does Not Imitate Life in Robin Chapman's *The Duchess's Diary* 60

ROUND TABLES

Antonio Ballesteros González, Natalia Carbajosa Palmero, Teresa Gibert & Dídac Llorens-Cubedo
T. S. Eliot, Verse Drama, and Plays by Poets at the Mercury Theatre. 67

Irati Jiménez-Pérez, Adrián Arana-Armesto, Naiara Berganzo-Besga & Tamara Rojo-Castro
Naturalizing Violence: Types of Oppression in the American West 71

Part II. Language and Linguistics

Marian Alves-Castro
A Corpus-Based Study of Ellipsis Patterns in Conjoined Wh-Questions in English 77

Elina Gatina & Isabel Oltra-Massuet
The Role of Metalinguistic Explanation in Grammar Acquisition: A Quasi-Experimental Study. 86

Alejandro Guevara-Guevara
Late Modern Essex Dialect: The Representation of Price and Choice Diphthongs in Charles Clark's Poetry 96

Marta Iravedra
From Language to Culture: Encouraging Intercultural Engagement in Final-Year Dissertations in English Studies. 103

Javier Pérez-Guerra & Yolanda Fernández-Pena
When Subjects Become Wild and Distant: Patterns of Agreement in Complex Noun Phrases 110

Paula Rodríguez-Puente
Another Turn of the Screw on the Development of *-ity* and *-ness*: Register and Language-Internal Constraints in Early and Late Modern English 120

Yonay Rodríguez-Rodríguez
Exploring the Use of Video Games for English Language Learning, Perceptions and Pedagogical Applications 128

Verónica Silva-Folgar
'Porque I Like Your Hair Long': Code-Mixing in Spoken Gibraltar English 138

Carmen Sumillera-Iglesias
Linguistic Capital and Language Policy: Examining the Role of English in South Africa's Historically Afrikaans Universities 145

René Tissens
"Ai was glad ta zit under ez sheäde, an' zwit was ez freut in my meuth": Representations of Face in Late Modern Devonshire Dialect. 151

ROUND TABLE

Julia García Quirós, Laura V. Fielden Burns & Gemma Delicado Puerto
Exploring ICT, Oral Production, and Learning Situations in Secondary EFL: Preliminary Findings from the *SLS4Teens* Project 160

Preface

Hosting the 48th Annual Conference of AEDEAN (Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo Norteamericanos) at the University of the Basque Country (EHU) from November 12th to 14th, 2025, was an outstanding milestone for our institution and a major endeavor that required a persistent effort from all involved. This was the second time the annual AEDEAN Conference has been held in Vitoria-Gasteiz; the first one was in 1990. Taking part in our first AEDEAN as the organizing committee has been a truly enriching experience. Although we had been told beforehand about the scale of the event, it nevertheless lived up to all our expectations. Our supervisors often recounted stories about the conference held in the 1990s, when the weather was reportedly terrible, a sharp contrast to the remarkably pleasant conditions we enjoyed during this edition. It has been a true honor to bring such a distinguished conference to Vitoria-Gasteiz and also a valuable occasion to demonstrate our commitment to promoting English studies.

Another particularly noteworthy aspect has been the significant growth in participation over time. The previous edition in Seville had already surpassed earlier conferences in terms of attendance, and this year's edition has certainly maintained that momentum. It is therefore highly encouraging to witness the steadily increasing interest that newer generations in Spain have shown towards Anglo-American Studies. It would not have been possible to organize this conference without the cooperation of the different branches that form the English, German and Translation Studies Department.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all those institutions and individuals without whose invaluable help and support this conference would not have been possible. First and foremost, we would like to thank the AEDEAN Executive Board for the trust they placed in us and for their continuous support and guidance throughout the entire process, especially to Javier Ruano García for his humanity, closeness, and work ethic. Likewise, we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the panel coordinators and all the peer reviewers who contributed to maintaining the conference's academic rigor. Among the many institutions involved, we would especially like to acknowledge the Faculty of Arts, the Vice-Rectorate, and the different research groups that collaborated in the event, particularly REWEST (Research on Western American Literature and Culture) and LASLAB (Language and Speech Laboratory). We are also deeply grateful to all those institutions outside the university that offered their collaboration, such as Artium Museoa, the Basque Museum of Contemporary Art. Moreover, the support and collaboration of the Technical, Administrative, and Service Staff were fundamental to the successful organization and smooth running of the conference activities. Finally, we would like to make a special mention of all the students at different academic stages who, in a remarkable gesture of generosity, kindly volunteered to help with and carry out the many essential tasks required for the successful running of the conference.

We consider it particularly noteworthy that there has been a balanced representation between the fields of Literature and Cultural Studies and Language and Linguistics.

The literature section of this volume, titled *Contours of Anglo-American Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Emerging Perspectives,* primarily focuses on contemporary approaches to literary criticism, cognitive theory, gender studies, and current ethical and social issues, featuring works on identity, queer motherhood, and contemporary crises. Meanwhile, the linguistics section brings together studies on syntax, grammar acquisition, sociolinguistics, and the historical variation of English, with particular attention to dialectal phenomena and linguistic change in Early and Late Modern English. In addition, several contributions explore issues related to language policy, code-mixing, and interculturality within educational and multilingual contexts. Finally, the section also examines the pedagogical potential of new tools and methodologies for English language teaching and learning, including video games and intercultural approaches.

Therefore, the volume seeks to demonstrate the inherent connection between literature, culture, and linguistics through language, as well as the liminal boundaries among these disciplines. These findings highlight the need for further research in this area, particularly research that promotes inclusivity, interdisciplinary approaches, and the examination of evolving and emerging modes of cultural expression.

The Organizing Committee

Part I

Literature and Culture

Between Projections and Reality: Theory of Mind and Identity Formation in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Sofía Anfoka Díaz

Independent Scholar
sofiaanfoka@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper offers a cognitive-literary analysis of Muriel Spark's novel by examining Miss Brodie's construction of a charismatic yet domineering identity through the cognitive frameworks of Theory of Mind and doubly embedded narratives. The analysis reveals how this identity is, in turn, both upheld and undermined by Miss Brodie's flawed application of Theory of Mind to her pupils, causing her to misattribute oversimplified mental states to them, thereby rendering her unable to anticipate their developing psychological responses throughout the novel.

Keywords: Cognitive Literary Criticism, Identity Formation, Narrative Cognition, Critical Theory

1. Introduction

Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) expertly personifies the contradictions inherent in authoritarian charisma through its titular protagonist: she is manipulative, controlling, and profoundly self-deluded. Set in 1930s Edinburgh, the narrative follows Miss Jean Brodie, a teacher at the Marcia Blaine School, who exploits her pedagogical power by indoctrinating a group of students, known as the "Brodie Set," with her subversive and unconventional ideologies. However, the novel's narrative structure distinctly sets to undermine this apparent control. The interspersion of proleptic scenes within the plot, appearing as early as the second chapter, forewarn Miss Brodie's fall from power at the hands of one of her own pupils, Sandy Stranger. Consequently, this leads to the loss of Miss Brodie's influence, or "Prime," and she is forced to leave the school "on the grounds that she had been teaching Fascism" ([1961] 2012, 125)[1]. Notably, upon learning that the perpetrator is one of her "Brodie Set," Miss Brodie steadfastly refuses to entertain any notion of Sandy's involvement, a delusion she carries to her deathbed. To that end, this refusal and blind faith in Sandy's supposed loyalty functions as a significant interpretive crux that invites a cognitive-literary examination of Miss Brodie's manipulative persona. As such, by analysing specific character interactions and narrative commentaries through Theory of Mind (ToM) and Alan Palmer's concept of doubly embedded narratives, this paper elucidates how Miss Brodie's constructed identity is fundamentally dependent on her ability to impose fixed mental states onto her pupils, thereby rendering her unable to anticipate or even acknowledge Sandy's betrayal.

[1] Page numbers are from the Penguin Essentials edition.

2. ToM and Third-order ToM

That said, before delving into the ways in which Miss Brodie enacts her domineering identity, it is necessary to establish the broader cognitive framework that informs this paper's analysis. In her work *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006) cognitive theorist Lisa Zunshine defines Theory of Mind (ToM) as the "ability to explain people's behaviour [and] ascribe to a person a certain mental state on the basis of her observable action" (2006, 6). In other words, this cognitive capacity enables not only the prediction of others' behaviour based on observable cues, but also presupposes the ability to track changing mental states and therefore update predictions accordingly. To that end, a correct ToM application involves what is colloquially referred to as "putting oneself in someone else's shoes," that is, recognising and acknowledging mental states that may differ substantially from one's own. Manipulative figures, however, often apply a distorted ToM. Rather than tracking and adapting to others' evolving mental states, they fixate and impose identities that strictly serve their rigid worldview, thus dismissing their autonomy as individuals. In the context of the novel, Miss Brodie exemplifies this misapplication; she does apply a certain degree of ToM to her pupils, but she does so in an attempt to control rather than understand. Instead of tracking their psychological development as the narrative progresses, she imposes rigid roles to them, thereby losing the ability to accurately infer their mental states, or their shifting perceptions of her.

Recognising such a misapplication of ToM depends on what Robin Dunbar terms Third-order Theory of Mind. Building upon Zunshine's framework, Dunbar situates ToM explicitly within readers' engagement with fictional narratives, defining it as the ability "to imagine how someone who does not actually exist might respond to particular situations" (1996, 102). Through this concept Dunbar emphasises the readers' capacity to attribute mental states to fictional characters and anticipate their actions within narrative contexts[2]. Crucially, Third-order ToM permits readers both to infer characters' cognitive capacities as well as detect misalignments between what characters believe about each other and their actual mental states. Dunbar's framework therefore proves essential for analysing Miss Brodie's constructed identity as it is through the application of Third-order ToM that the readers are able to recognise Miss Brodie's misapplication of ToM to her pupils. As the following textual analysis demonstrates, key interactions between Miss Brodie and her pupils coupled with strategic narrative commentaries effectively expose this cognitive distortion and question the legitimacy of Miss Brodie's controlling persona.

2.1. Miss Brodie's False Projections

Scenes of cognitive misalignment between Miss Brodie and her students emerge early in the narrative. During a walk through old Edinburgh, Sandy's mind is preoccupied with fantasising about the protagonist in the novel *Kidnapped*, while the other girls, Rose Stanley particularly, busy themselves naming passing car models. Observing this, Miss Brodie exclaims, "Rose, your mind is full of motor cars [...] I'm sure Sandy's mind is not on motor cars, she is paying attention to my conversation like a well-mannered girl" ([1961] 2012, 37). The narrative immediately undermines this confident assertion

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[2] The cognitive structure operates as follows:

First-order ToM: I think she is lying.

Second-order ToM: I think she thinks I'm lying.

Third-order ToM (fiction): I (the reader) think Sandy thinks Miss Brodie is lying.

by revealing Sandy's actual thoughts, "And if people take their clothes off in front of each other, […] it is so rude" (37). The significance of this interaction lies in the cognitive misalignment between Miss Brodie's confident, yet false discernment of Sandy's mental state and Sandy's actual thoughts. When exercising her ToM, Miss Brodie speaks with absolute certainty, there is no hesitation in her belief that Sandy is "paying attention" and is consequently a "well-mannered girl". However, this confidence does not stem from genuine observation, but from the projection of her own values. Since Miss Brodie's worldview dictates that attentiveness is essential to uphold respectable standards of propriety, she automatically assumes that Sandy's outward compliance reflects genuine attention. To that end, the narratorial intervention exposes both Miss Brodie's limited psychological acumen and Sandy's capacity to resist her teacher's imposed beliefs. Moreover, by exercising Third-order ToM, the reader also recognises that Miss Brodie's assertive projections are, albeit subtly at first, explicitly resisted by her pupil.

This pattern of cognitive misalignment recurs when Miss Brodie attempts to "inspire Eunice to become at least a pioneer missionary in some deadly and dangerous zone of the earth" ([1961] 2012, 62), warning her that she "will end up as a Girl Guide leader in a suburb like Corstorphine [although Eunice] was in fact secretly attracted to this idea and […] lived in Corstorphine" (62). Once again, Miss Brodie's ToM depends on projection rather perception: she imposes her own moral standards onto her pupils rather than attuning to their individual aspirations. Furthermore, the narrative explicitly contradicts this projected aversion toward being a "Girl Guide leader" by revealing Eunice's private thoughts, specifically her secret attraction to the very role Miss Brodie condemns. The narratorial intervention, therefore, underscores a persistent cognitive misalignment sustained by Miss Brodie's need to see her pupils as extensions of her worldview rather than autonomous individuals.

With the progression of the narrative and the continuous involvement of Miss Brodie in the lives of her students, the pattern of cognitive misalignment escalates significantly. By the novel's final chapters, Miss Brodie has adopted an extreme form of authoritarian projection. Although the 'Brodie Set' are at that point no longer under her direct tutelage, they remain subject to her relentless efforts at psychological homogenisation, as she attempts to dictate their futures entirely. That said, as Miss Brodie's drive to maintain absolute control intensifies, so does her pupils' resistance. This escalation becomes explicit when "it was plain that Miss Brodie wanted Rose […] to start preparing to be Teddy Lloyd's lover, and Sandy with her insight to act as the informant on the affair" ([1961] 2012, 109). In this case, Miss Brodie demands unfaltering compliance from Rose and Sandy with the roles she has designated to them, thereby maintaining total authority whilst disregarding their individual agency. Yet a mere page later, the narrator overturns this projection entirely stating that, "[i]t was Sandy who slept with Teddy Lloyd and Rose who carried back the information" (110). This inversion therefore directly undermines Miss Brodie's ToM in a manner consistent with the aforementioned pattern, her judgments remain rooted in rigid ideological projections rather than the accurate inference of her pupils' mental states. Miss Brodie fails to recognise that Sandy's intellectual acumen, the very "insight" she praises: "[y]ou have got insight, perhaps not quite spiritual, but you're a deep one" (107), would draw her to the Art master Teddy Lloyd rather than the passive Rose. Additionally, the narratorial commentary reveals the instability of Miss Brodie's authoritarian persona more overtly than in the examples mentioned earlier, for her pupils' divergence from imposed roles is no longer implicit but openly enacted. To that end, Third-order ToM accentuates how Miss Brodie's flawed ToM sustains her overbearing sense of self but also exposes the tension between her pupils' developing psychological responses and their resistance to her imposed roles.

2.2. Alan Palmer's Doubly Embedded Narratives

Furthermore, a nuanced cognitive analysis of Miss Brodie's domineering identity requires examining not only how she misapplies ToM to her students, but also how she, in turn, is perceived by her students, most significantly by Sandy. Alan Palmer's concept of doubly embedded narratives, introduced in *Fictional Minds: Frontiers of Narrative* (2004), provides the ideal lens for examining Sandy's perception. Essentially, Palmer defines this concept as "a character's mind as contained within another character's mind" (2004, 231). He further argues that characters' perceptions of each other's mental states are intrinsically linked to identity, claiming that, "a fictional character's identity consists, not just of his or her own embedded narrative, but of all the doubly embedded narratives of which he or she is the subject" (231). In other words, Miss Brodie's identity is constituted not only by her own self-perception but also by how Sandy, Rose, and others imagine her, their mental representations of her become an intrinsic part of her identity as a character. As such, this framework extends the aforesaid ToM analysis by showing that Miss Brodie's authority depends on a recursive loop; she projects rigid identities onto her pupils, and her pupils' recognition of those projections sustains her controlling persona. In particular, Sandy's character arc demonstrates this dynamic most accurately, as her evolving perception of Miss Brodie throughout the novel ultimately enables the betrayal that dismantles her teacher's authority.

2.3. Doubly Embedded Narratives in Sandy's Character Arc

During the walk through old Edinburgh that exposed Miss Brodie's misreading of Sandy's attention, the narrative also establishes Sandy as a remarkably perceptive individual in her own right when stating:

> Sandy looked back at her companions, and understood them as a body with Miss Brodie for the head. She perceived herself, the absent Jenny, the ever-blamed Mary, Rose, Eunice, and Monica, all in a frightening little moment, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie as if God had willed them to birth for that purpose. ([1961] 2012, 30)

Sandy's image of herself and her friends as a "body with Miss Brodie for the head" depicts Miss Brodie's role as distinctly authoritarian, while visually illustrating the cognitive hierarchy she has established, one in which Miss Brodie's mind functions as the overarching intelligence governing the group's collective body. It is crucial to note, moreover, that this image emerges from Sandy's own consciousness, revealing that Miss Brodie's identity is both self-constructed and sustained within Sandy's own mind. The narrative thus distinctly renders Miss Brodie's consciousness doubly embedded.

Furthermore, the image of Miss Brodie adopting an all-knowing consciousness is reiterated towards the end of the novel when Miss Brodie declares to Sandy, "I am his [Teddy Lloyd's] Muse but Rose shall take my place" ([1961] 2012, 120). Sandy, in turn, recognises this deluded sense of omnipotence and thinks to herself, "She thinks she is Providence, […] she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end" (120). This passage exemplifies the presence of doubly embedded narrative in the novel, as it embeds Miss Brodie's flawed ToM within Sandy's increasingly critical perception. Furthermore, Miss Brodie's declaration that "Rose shall take my place," accentuates how she attempts to erase the boundary between her own mental state and Rose's, treating her pupil as a

literal extension of herself rather than an autonomous individual. To that end, through this cognitive layering, the narrative reinforces that Miss Brodie's sense of self is not merely dependent on her own mental projections, but is also distinctly sustained by the interpretive frameworks of her pupils.

3. Conclusion

Ultimately, the aforesaid analysis demonstrates that the construction of Miss Brodie's dogmatic identity relies on two cognitive structures: her incomplete exercise of ToM and the doubly embedded narratives sustaining her authority in her pupils' minds, particularly Sandy's. Consequently, this cognitive framework significantly informs her reaction to the betrayal, specifically her refusal to acknowledge Sandy as the perpetrator. When Miss Brodie declares, "You, Sandy, as you can see, I exempt from suspicion, since you had no reason whatsoever to betray me, indeed you have had the best part of me in my confidences" (Spark [1961] 2012, 126), readers employing Third-order ToM recognise the mechanisms behind Miss Brodie's flawed reasoning. For Miss Brodie, betrayal is not merely an act of disobedience but one of outright rejection. In other words, to betray her would mean to discredit and reject the ideologically rigid mental states she continually projects, and by extension, challenge and undermine the identity on which her entire sense of self depends. The ToM she exercises cannot accommodate the possibility that Sandy's outward acquiescence conceals a divergent, resistant mental state. Furthermore, when she insists, "indeed you have had the best part of me in my confidences," she exposes her cognitive framework's fundamental rigidity, one that allows no space for revision, self-doubt, or acknowledgement of error. To that end, the significance of this cognitive reading lies in its ability to enable the reader to discern salient facets of character cognition that remain inaccessible to the characters themselves. In Miss Brodie's case, her incapacity to perceive and acknowledge the diverse mental states of her pupils not only blinds her to the identity of her betrayer but also catalyses the irreversible loss of what she most seeks to preserve, namely her prime.

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Of Trans Mothers and Daughters: Mothering Practices in *The House of Impossible Beauties* and *Bad Girls*

Lucía Aréjula Muñoz

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
lucia.arejula@uam.es

Abstract

In *Bad Girls*, Camila Sosa Villada's fictional self says of Auntie Encarna that "She was like a mother" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 15) and them, "her honorary daughters." (20) Her words echo those of Angel in *The House of Impossible Beauties* who declares "I'm here to be your mother" (Cassara, 2018, 139) to Daniel, one of her children. In this paper I will argue that *The House of Impossible Beauties* and *Bad Girls* represent a forthright example of effective mothering practices for trans individuals in the face of their familial abandonment. Theories on mothering and maternal work as those proposed by Adrienne Rich (1986), Sara Ruddick (1990) and Andrea O'Reilly's (2024) will be employed to demonstrate how trans houses adopt a caring system that compensates the maternal neglect and rejection experienced in their biological households and propels the development of new maternal possibilities for trans mothers.

Keywords: Gender Studies, Queer Studies, Matrifocal Narratives, Mothering, Trans Narratives

1. Introduction

Joseph Cassara recuperated James Baldwin's famous quote "Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition" (2013, 96) to begin his section on Motherhood/Sisterhood in *The House of Impossible Beauties* (2018). Given that this quote and subsection appear in the very first page of the novel, it is undeniable that Cassara purposedly angled the tone of the novel to illuminate clearly the literary focus he was more interested in: trans mothering in ballroom culture's houses. Such an overt declaration of intentions, one that *The House of Impossible Beauties* shares with *Bad Girls* by Sosa Villada (2022), whilst daring at the time of publication of both novels, has become even more valiant for two literary productions deeply connected to today's U.S. Especially in a time where the president's perspective on "transgender lunacy" (Steakin, Scott and Reinstein 2025) has translated into a 2025 inaugural statement titled "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government" (The White House, 2025).

In the midst of this "restoration" backlash in which trans individuals have been caught, *The House of Impossible Beauties* and *Bad Girls* serve as reiterations of literature's widely known capacity to act as a site for resistance and refuge. As a site where continuity, deconstructions and reinscriptions can be accomplished, including those concerning the maternal practices exercised by trans mothers. In connection to this idea, this paper has as its central concern to demonstrate how both novels represent a forthright example of what mothering is, how mothering works and the formats it acquires in communities

which have resisted binary and traditional impositions regarding gender, sexuality and motherhood itself. To do that, the analysis takes advantage of the lives of the Xtravaganza House, as described in *The House of Impossible Beauties* —which follows its members in their coming of age story— and the lives of the Argentinian *travesti* women in *Bad Girls* where their journey conflates an uncanny, yet not unexpected, similar story to that of the Xtravaganzas[1]. Indeed, it shall be said that both Angel and Encarna will be "mother[s] of the freaks" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 22).

2. Maternal Neglect and Failure in Biological Families

Years before some maternal desire awakens in Angel and Encarna, they, together with the rest of these novels' characters, are compelled to undergo a *mothering-less* childhood experience acutely trespassed by their condition as trans women and queer men. In *The House of Impossible Beauties* Angel has a mother who rejects her and a father who commits suicide, Venus a neglecting mother involved in drugs, Hector a lack of parental figures, Juanito an absent father who —when he finally meets— rapes him, Daniel a drug addict mother and Tyler a family who prohibits his boyfriend from attending his funeral for being queer. Similarly, the childhoods of *Bad Girls* protagonists do not enjoy an alternative to this mothering failure. In fictional Camila's words: "I didn't belong to that family, I was exiled because of who I was, I wasn't mentioned in the pact my parents had made" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 62) "I don't know the words father and mother. I have no parents. I'm dead to them" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 141).

Cassara's and Sosa Villada's narration over these character's experiences confirm these families' failure at mothering effectively, or in other words, at taking care of their children in a way that does not hinder their psychological and physical development (Ruddick, 1990, 17). Consequently, these queer characters are forced to seek new mothering sources and mothering performances that "ensure that all children, regardless of whether the biological mother was present or available, would receive the mothering that delivers psychological and physical well-being, and makes empowerment possible" (O'Reilly, 2024, 11). This pursuit of new figures in the face of difficulties originated from biological families is, nonetheless, not unfamiliar for queer individuals who "go out into the world thinking that if they find someone who will love them—because their mother couldn't, because their father couldn't, because their god couldn't—if they go out and finally find someone who can, then everything is going to be set right" (Cassara, 2018, 184). This sense of familial failure and maternal abandonment is attested by scholars such as Trujillo and Burgaleta (2014, 167) or José Javier Torres Fernández who revising specifically the ballroom culture, in which the House of Xtravaganza takes part, commented that:

> if we recall that ballroom community members suffered from the homophobic and transphobic rejection coming from their nuclear families in addition to the systematic racism and sexism from society, it is clear why they had the urge to create alternative forms of families in which to care and trust one another. (2020, 165)

[1] Throughout this paper, the word *travesti* is used to refer to Sosa Villada's characters in *Bad Girls*. Closely following the words included in the preface of the novel, where the author explicitly establishes her desire to re-signify this word for the Argentinian community, this piece acknowledges and honors her wishes.

Throughout the novels, these characters remain aware of their mothers' position hindered by a motherhood institution that seeks to ensure that their potential for reproduction may remain under male control (Rich, 1986, 13) and by the diverse racial and socio-economic forces that complicate further their chances at providing effective care. Nevertheless, in an exercise of consciousness that almost encapsulates the maternal theory evolution of Rich-Ruddick-O'Reilly, Cassara and Sosa Villada refuse to engage in a justifying narration. They rather deploy a contextualized one in which individuals like Venus, Angel, Encarna or Maria are capable of recognizing that the conditions in which their biological mothers mothered were adverse (Ruddick, 1990, 332) and beyond their control (Ruddick, 1980, 343), but that they do deserve to receive some kind of mothering.

3. Mothering in Trans Families

Lacking biological effective mothering, Cassara's and Villada's characters metaphorically stand in the theoretical crossroad in which queer and mothering theories meet. In trying to build bridges between both disciplines, whose combination remains so far unexplored (Gibson, 2014, 12; Dozier, 2014, 131-132; Sardadvar and Miko, 2014, 153), Angel and Encarna particularly stretch the possibilities within the definition of mother and procure an answer that attempts to satisfy the house members' needs and the queer mothering theory's ones. Taking advantage of the openness that 'mother' as a category has gained over the last decades–Rich said women had been mothers without biological ties involved (1986, 32), Ruddick claimed that maternal work could "transcend gender" (1990, 44) and O'Reilly assigned mothering the capacity to challenge "normative understandings of motherhood, family, child-rearing" (2020, 30)–these novels take a firm step towards what could be understood as a queer sense of mothering, or rather, a trans mothering meaning.

In a Butler-like exercise, "mother" for Cassara and Villada is a category that

> ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, [like] gender [it] is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. (Butler, 1999, 179)

Their use of mother as a category with Butler's gender's characteristics, enables both authors to explore the limits of the Beauvoiran concept "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (2011, 293) to its maternal limits: "As it is with women so it is with mothers. Neither a woman nor a man is born a mother; people become mothers" (Ruddick, 1990, 52). Angel and Encarna choose to become mothers for their house daughters by repeatedly acting as one. They cannot claim themselves to be one just because they are women —some would chastise them by indicating they are not— neither can they do so by simply calling themselves mothers for, as recent theory has proved, mothering exceeds citation and requires reiterated acts.

Therefore, to prove that they are mothers mothering these motherless children, Angel and Encarna take their non-blood related children and nurture them through actions one may recognize as typical maternal work. In *The House of Impossible Beauties*, Angel protects her children by nourishing them, giving them a house where their identities may develop and consolidate safely, confronting anyone who may endanger them, pushing them forward to accomplish their goals... all of that while also reminding them constantly that she is their "mother". She says: "You don't even know where your mother is?" She

giggled [...] "Ay, nena, your mother is right next to you." (Cassara, 2018, 112) or "I am not here to be your friend. I'm here to be your mother" (2018, 139).

Similarly, Encarna also ensures their daughters' safety, builds family with them, provides physical and psychological care and as Camila, the narrator of Villada's novel, words it: "Encarna always prescribed rest. It was the biggest gift any of us had ever received: letting us sleep while she kept a lookout. We lived in her orbit. There was always something to eat at her house and we were often hungry. She'd welcome us with open arms and bread on the table" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 18). Encarna, just like Angel, does not merely build kinship with these women, but she adopts a maternal role with both the joys and tolls of it. Camila again says "Oh, wet nurse Encarna of the miraculous breasts. Oh Difunta Correa with aircraft oil tits, saintly patron of all those of us who found you in our ceaseless search for a mother, to find a mother to console us on our nights of regret, a mother to teach us not to suffer." (Sosa Villada, 2022, 112).

By accumulating these maternal acts, Angel and Encarna queer motherhood, for their acts transgress, interrogate and deconstruct not only the normative idea of how one may be said to be a mother, but also the normative causal relation biological woman-mother and the normative structures in which mothering traditionally occurs (Dozier, 2014, 128). Their mothering, which is liminal in its refusal to be simply one thing (Friedman, 2010, 111), however, exceeds queer terminology's limitations. Transgression and deconstruction are key for the understanding of the maternal practices they perform, but so it is the concomitant transgression, deconstruction and redefinition that they produce in relation to their gender. Encarna and Angel must be analyzed as mothers who are recognized as such for their practices, yet it must be also constantly recognized that they do so while simultaneously reconstructing their own gendered sense of selves.

4. M(other)ing

The mothering Encarna and Angel perform does not go unnoticed and in fact is effective for the lives of their children. Foremost, they recognize their position as daughters

> we were all daughters of the same mother, we'd been born to the same beast and drunk the same milk: that of our mother who gave birth to bitches and prostitutes, to pigs. Barren, bitter, parched, bad, ruined, lonely, sly, witchy, infertile bodies of the earth. (Sosa Villada, 2022, 69)

and additionally, they are also able to return their mothering back. Their children become aware of how their suffering is neither individual nor exclusive to them, but that their mothers must have experienced it as vividly as them. Consequently, as any child would do regarding their mother, they defend and protect them from a vicious and hostile cisheteropatriarchal racist world. Cassara writes:

> Venus came back with the pineapple soda. Juanito and Daniel stood on both sides of Angel now, like her army of children ready to protect her. Or if they couldn't protect, por lo menos, they would be right by her side. Mira, Angel wanted to say, look at my family now. Look at all this love we have for each other. (Cassara, 2018, 287)

However, the reconfiguration of mothering and its intersection with gender's own deconstruction in characters ventures in *Bad Girls* in a possibility not explored in Cassara's

novel. In *Bad Girls*, Encarna mothers simultaneously her adopted trans daughters and an abandoned baby who she first encounters in the park crying bereaved. "Auntie Encarna desperately quickens her pace: somewhere in the forest a child is suffering. It's winter in the Park, cold enough to freeze your tears" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 3). This quote narrates the first encounter between Encarna and who would be her son, TwinkleInTheEye, and advances what would become, not lightly said, the hardest endeavor in Encarna's life.

While still a child, Encarna makes TwinkleInTheEye aware of her battle for the mother title ownership; she points out: "And I am just as much your mother, even though I don't have an open wound between my legs" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 33) and TwinkleInTheEye confirms: "Yes, I know everything. She's my mommy and my daddy. Not many children are so lucky" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 160). Appallingly, Elizabeth Reed foreshadows with her analysis of queer mothers what will happen in the novel: given that "the borders of 'mother' as an identity are closely regulated through intergenerational communication and the transmission of the heterosexual-authorized meanings of 'mother'" (Reed, 2020, 46) any transgression to those is sanctioned. In Encarna's case so vicariously that she chooses to end both her and her child's life after being continuously hunted by others' discomfort with her gender and mothering performance.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper has aided in evidencing how the combination of both mothering and queer —more specifically trans— studies may accomplish the restructuring of the consecrated and seemingly unmovable categories of gender and mother in cultural and literary terms. Whether it is by filling a biological maternal void during adulthood or by mothering effectively while still a child, *The House of Impossible Beauties* and *Bad Girls*' characters evidence how queering motherhood or mothering is possible. If like Butler affirms, "The limits are to be found where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, the site where conditions are contingent, transformable" (2011, 27), trans women find those mothering and gender limits and "disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality, and ... [make use], as it were, [of] one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim" (Butler, 2004, 28) intelligible.

Encarna and Angel queer these limits, find in them transformative possibilities and force resignifications that turn their lives and their practices intelligible. They do that by going back to "What was left was the magic of travestis: cleaning the wounds with a cloth and warm water, swaddling her in blankets, doing her hair, and singing quietly. A very mundane kind of magic. The kind anyone might work, but seldom does" (Sosa Villada, 2022, 103); a work that prevents them from "losing children to those mean, straight street fights" (Cassara, 2018, 124).

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‘We’re Still Inside the Fucking Paradigm!’: Flagging the Attention Crisis in Eleanor Catton’s *Birnam Wood*[1]

Bárbara Arizti Martín

University of Zaragoza
barizti@unizar.es

Abstract

This article analyses *Birnam Wood* as a transmodern “narrative of the limit” through the lens of attention ethics. It argues that the contemporary permacrisis is rooted in a crisis of attention, manifesting in two forms: the predatory surveillance of billionaire Robert Lemoine and a deficiency of “attention-as-care” within the Birnam Wood gardening collective. While Lemoine instrumentalises attention for digital control, Catton avoids a simple dichotomy by exposing the activists’ own Macbethian ambition. Their environmentalism, unmoored from genuine care, proves insufficient against the destructive logic of techno-capitalism. Through its tragic denouement, the novel functions as a cautionary tale, suggesting that navigating systemic exploitation and ecological ruin requires a paradigm shift. Ultimately, *Birnam Wood* resonates with transmodernity’s call for a relational ethics of attention—grounded in presence and vulnerability—as the only viable response to a world defined by instrumentalisation and structural blindness.

Keywords: Ethics of Attention, Narrative of the Limit, Transmodernity, Permacrisis

1. Introduction

A. C. Bradley (2005) famously read *Macbeth* as a study of ruthless ambition. Eleanor Catton’s 2023 novel takes its title from the forest in Shakespeare’s tragedy. Set in 2017, it stages the encounter between Mira Bunter, founder of the guerrilla gardening collective Birnam Wood and Robert Lemoine, a US billionaire and former CEO of the drone company Autonomo. Their meeting dramatises the uneasy alliance between grassroots environmental activism and transnational capital, exposing how ecological concerns are co-opted by financial power. Lemoine’s deceitful offer to fund Mira’s group functions as a narrative catalyst that foregrounds the entanglement of idealism, opportunism and systemic corruption, culminating in catastrophe. The climax unfolds on a remote farm in Thorndike, where Lemoine —a kleptocrat involved in smuggling rare-earth elements— poses as an eccentric survivalist burying a luxury bunker. In a nod to Shakespeare, it is Birnam Wood’s move onto the property that brings about the billionaire’s demise, leaving a trail of destruction and death.

Birnam Wood is a literary response to the ethical failures underlying current global crises. Its quick tempo mirrors the “permacrisis,” a protracted period of deep tension

[1] A longer version of this essay has been published in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* (2026). DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2026.2619553. Research was funded by MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER, EU) (code PID2021-124841NB-I00), together with the Government of Aragón and the European Social Fund (ESF) (code H03_23R).

and instability. The crises underpinning the novel are the climate emergency, rampant inequality, algorithmic control and the corrupting power of techno-capitalism. Following Jean-Michel Ganteau, I argue that literature plays a vital role in this diagnosis, because "fiction shows, creates and performs frames that allow for the perception, hence the experience of crises and it does so by privileging singular, incarnated stories, as opposed to abstract discourse" (Ganteau, 2024, 21). He further defends that literature "has the power to make us *care*" (21; original emphasis), connecting caring with the essential practice of paying attention.

2. Theoretical Framework

Maggie Jackson and Yves Citton have studied the "inattention crisis" in the digital age. Jackson argues that a fragmented mind diminishes our ability to "see, hear and comprehend what's relevant" while also making us less inclined to subordinate ourselves "to a greater good" (Jackson, 2018, 21; Citton, 2017, 31). Citton distinguishes between an "economy of attention," which treats focus as a scarce, marketable commodity and an "ecology of attention," which promotes mindful, enduring attentiveness and shared sensibility. For Sandra Laugier and Silvia Caprioglio Panizza, attention is the basis for ethical responsibility because it links directly to care. Ethical attention, they argue, is concrete and engaged, focusing not on abstract ideals but on "this person, this animal, this blade of grass" (Caprioglio Panizza, 2022, 2). Alice Bennett analyses a growing body of international literature that explores attention as a response to the challenges of digital media. Some works, she suggests, present attention as a form of ethics and encourage responsibility in a globalised world by reframing attention as an act of "caring-for or waiting-on" (Bennet, 2020, 15). Bennett posits that "the attention that one gives to the other ... becomes an act of ethical decision-making" (16), a perspective that underpins my reading of *Birnam Wood.*

The turn to an ethics of attention is a key element of the emerging transmodern paradigm, which re-engages with modernity's ethical drive, not to restore universal principles, but to find bedrock values for a world defined by interconnected crises. Rosa María Rodríguez Magda distinguishes between "narratives of celebration," which reiterate the dominant techno-euphoric discourse of progress and "narratives of the limit," which are stories of fracture and resistance that expose systemic failure and demand a confrontation with uncomfortable realities. *Birnam Wood* functions as a typical narrative of the limit, exposing a failure of attention that takes two main forms: the excess of surveillance and the failure to deploy attention as care.

3. Surveillance and the Breakdown of Ethical Attention

Catton's critique of global crises begins with Lemoine, who embodies a distortion of attention into a mechanism of control. The novel's pervasive surveillance illustrates what Bennett calls "machine inattention": a "watchful but unnoticing gaze" that actively works against the "human care of noticing" (2020, 76). Lemoine's practices are an enactment of the shift from Foucault's disciplinary societies to Deleuze's societies of control, where pervasive digital technologies replace fixed enclosures. This is symbolised by the omnipresent drone, the epitome of machine inattention. Lemoine uses drones to protect his illegal rare-earth mining operation and to monitor the activists, establishing a pervasive digital control.

Lemoine's practices reduce attention to a quantifiable commodity to be exploited for profit—the destructive logic of the "economy of attention," contrasted with Citton's

"ecology of attention," which favours qualitative engagement over financial accumulation. This degraded attention is constantly audible in the novel's soundscape, where the buzzing of drones takes over the sounds of nature (234-235).

Significantly, Catton grounds Lemoine's lack of ethical attention in his personal history, revealing his emotionally deprived upbringing (2023, 225). The narrator explicitly connects this emotional void to his adult persona (227). The novel suggests that Lemoine's lack of empathy is not innate but learned: a direct consequence of a childhood defined by an absence of attentive caring that manifests in his adult embrace of surveillance as a tool for control.

4. Failed Ideals: Ethical Blindness and Environmentalism without Grounding

Birnam Wood resists a simplistic dichotomy between the ruthless, manipulative billionaire and the idealistic environmentalists. Catton reveals that the activists share a measure of Macbethian ambition with Lemoine. His undisguised avarice is mirrored by a similar self-serving ambition, manifesting as moral righteousness, ideological purity and rivalry.

This shared ambition is powerfully illustrated through the novel's recurring motif of sight, which ultimately reveals an underlying ethical blindness. The irony of the idiom "seeing eye to eye" is established early when Mira and Lemoine connect via his drone's lens, equating the characters in their shared self-interest and lack of genuine concern: "it seemed to occur to her that maybe she was being watched. She craned back her head and looked straight upwards, right into the lens and for a thrilling moment Lemoine felt that they were seeing eye to eye" (86). The irony is amplified when Tony Gallo, one of the guerilla gardeners, later uses the exact phrase in his utopian speech at a Birnam Wood assembly, highlighting the collective's failure to live up to its own idealistic principles: "how amazing, that two different people, with different values and different experiences and abilities and needs, that they could see eye to eye and live in such a way that brings out the best in both of them" (103).

If Lemoine's practices are an excess of attention-as-control, the activists' shortcomings reveal a failure to deploy attention as care. Despite their stated commitment to "solidarity and mutual aid," their self-centredness prevents them from forming an authentic community. Mira herself acknowledges this failure when reflecting on her friend Shelley: "She wished more than anything that she could reverse her course, convey more gratitude and sympathy, show more interest in Shelley's inner life; … in her monumental stupidity and self- absorption, she had only just figured that out" (51-52).

Birnam Wood's environmentalism remains an abstract ideal fixed on broad categories, neglecting the concrete and the familiar—a failure to enact ethical attention. Furthermore, Tony denounces how the collective is trapped in an excessive identitarianism that breeds competition, not cooperation, locking them into their differences:

> Any conversation on the left these days, it's always so competitive, it's always each person trying to outperform the person before them in terms of their oppressions or their lack of privilege or their personal trauma … You can dress it up in the language of sensitivity and social justice and blah blah blah, but the point of intersectionality isn't to learn how to *transcend* our differences, … the point isn't *solidarity*, it's about shoring up your brand, cornering the market, everyone out for themselves. (105-106; original emphasis)

By and large, the group's commitment to solidarity and mutual aid turns out to be an empty ideal, built upon self-centred ambition rather than genuine attention and care.

5. *Birnam Wood* as a Transmodern Narrative of the Limit

Birnam Wood functions as a transmodern narrative of the limit that confronts readers with the disastrous consequences of Lemoine's lack of scruples and his corrupt techno-optimism. Lemoine's panegyric on drones—a narrative of celebration—violently clashes with his unprincipled use of surveillance technology: "It would not be an exaggeration ... to say that this technology has the power to impact every sector of every economy of every country on the planet," he asserts before highlighting its applications "in agriculture, in law enforcement, in wildlife protection, in traffic management, in supply chain security, in border security, in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid, even just in personal peace of mind" (360).

This systemic failure of ethics is what Tony lashes out against, calling the neoliberal system Lemoine represents a "fucking paradigm" even the members of Birnam Wood struggle to escape (99, 106). The novel's climax is driven by Lemoine's dependence on technology, which fuels his illegal mining operations: "so long as there was a phone in everybody's pocket, so long as there was a screen in front of everybody's face, ... so long as there was avarice, so long as there was loneliness and envy and ambition and boredom and addiction, he, Lemoine, would be untouchable" (399). This forces readers to recognise themselves as "implicated subjects," as Michael Rothberg puts it: participants in the very structure Lemoine exploits.

The novel demonstrates how the self-absorbing attention of technology detracts from other- oriented forms of attention. Lemoine represents the isolation fostered by a system that makes people "entrepreneurs of themselves" (Han, 2024, 9), as the name of his company, Autonomo, illustrates. Against this backdrop, Han espouses the importance of building "meaningful relations that determine what is good, what is beautiful, what makes sense, what is valuable or desirable" (38). Tony explicitly acknowledges this, noting that in relationships "we do all sorts of things that radically challenge the neoliberal status quo: we make sacrifices, we put the other person first, we learn to compromise, we care, we help, we listen" (102). It is the transmodern paradigm of relationality—where attention reads as care—that can offer a way out of crises.

The novel contrasts toxic self-interest with genuine attention, particularly in its final act. Lemoine's decision to provide the environmentalists with acid to create team bonding—a dark parody of true community—is a harmful form of heightened attention that leads to tragedy when Shelley runs the owner of the Thorndike estate over. Paradoxically, it is Owen Darwish's funeral that helps turn the spotlight onto the importance of relationality. The loving attention Jill, his widow, receives reinforces the communal bond Han associates with rituals (2020). More remarkably, immediately after the funeral, Jill's attention dramatically shifts from private grief to selfless care. Mistrustful of Lemoine's version of her husband's death, she hears a girl's "terror-stricken cry for help" at the Thorndyke estate (419). The narrative highlights the dramatic shift in her attention: "All her grief had left her. All the confusion and second-guessing doubt that brought her to the farm was gone. Someone was in trouble. Someone needed to be saved" (420). Very tellingly, it is her sense of hearing that activates the call to attend. Jill shoots the billionaire dead and succeeds in freeing Tony, cornered by Lemoine after he finds out about his illegal project. Jill demonstrates that attention as care is a primal, instinctual reaction she cannot resist, even though she ultimately pays with her own life when she is shot by Lemoine's bodyguard.

Mira too undergoes a marked transformation before she's murdered at Lemoine's request. Spending time in seclusion with Shelley to cover up Darvish's death, allows her a new

outlook on their friendship, so far contaminated by ambition and neglect: "for a moment their friendship felt the way it used to, easy, affectionate, no doubt or blame, no hidden hurt, no overthinking" (362). This time is characterised by the performance of ordinary, embodied tasks, such as preparing meals and completing a jigsaw puzzle, which help Mira tune into sensation, displacing the abstract, ideological tone of their conversations.

This forced clarity triggers a process of atonement in Mira. The turning point is prepared by a powerful scene in the vegetable garden, where heightened sensory attention informs her decision to act (375). The visual evidence of Tony's suffering—looking "desperately unwell" (377)—brings about "a rush of benevolence towards him" (381) and prompts her to answer his plea for help. In her final moments of life, Lemoine's contempt for Tony is what gives Mira the strength "to spite him with the truth," realising that Tony—her onetime lover—makes her "feel like things were possible," like she "was possible," like "there was time" (411).

Birnam Wood ends with an ambivalent appeal for attention that seeks to disclose the ecological devastation caused by Lemoine while provoking further destruction. Tony is the only main character to remain alive on the very last page. Significantly, he was the sole member of Birnam Wood to oppose the dealings with Lemoine and is engaged in investigative journalism aimed at exposing the corruption of the super-rich. Severely wounded and fearing he will be framed for the massacre of the environmentalists, he engages in a paradoxical final act of self-preservation and self-immolation. He sets fire to the nets covering the leaching pits—a consequence of the illegal mining—so that: "somebody would *see* it, so that somebody would *notice*, so that somebody would *care*" (423; emphasis mine). The novel concludes with Tony praying "that somebody would come to put it out" (423) after the ancient trees around him catch fire. The thematic resonance of his plea is clear, since it connects seeing, noticing and caring, thus giving the overarching thesis of this analysis a final emphasis. His arson, which summons the destructive nature of fire, is a necessary step to finally transcend the prevailing systemic blindness, perfectly aligning with the novel's status as a transmodern narrative of the limit.

6. Conclusion: Towards an Ethics of Attention in Times of Crisis

Catton's eco-thriller flags the core ethical failure of the contemporary permacrisis: a distortion of attention that manifests as both illegal surveillance and a deficiency in deploying attention as care. The striking contrast between the billionaire and the guerrilla gardeners is dismantled as the novel reveals that both sides suffer from ethical blindness. Lemoine's reduction of attention to a tool of control is mirrored by the activists' failure to embody care, which ultimately undermines their own principles of solidarity. The irony of their "seeing eye to eye" graphically highlights the narrow line separating the callous billionaire and the self-proclaimed environmentalists.

Birnam Wood resonates with transmodernity's call to move towards a relational ethics of care and attention. A collective revision of the way we attend to the world is posited as the only way to avoid destruction and achieve positive transformation in the era of the permacrisis. Catton's tragic contemporary cautionary tale demands an urgent transition towards an ethically engaged paradigm governing our relationship to the planet, to technology, and to one another.

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Of Beasts and Aliens: Animalization and Exotization in Bosnian American Literature

Anesa Muslimovic Ortega

Universitat de València
anesa.muslimovic@uv.es

Abstract

This paper tackles the articulation of the migrant Other through the intersecting tropes of animalization and exoticization by delving into Ismet Prcić's *(...shards...)* (2011) and Aleksandar Hemon's *Nowhere Man* (2009). Drawing on Postcolonial Studies, biopolitics, and critical animal studies, the analysis explores the portrayal of the diasporic subject as suspended between visibility and invisibility, and humanity and bestiality. In *(...shards...)*, the protagonist is fractured by trauma and displacement, his war-induced PTSD rendering him progressively dehumanized through animalistic images, abjection, and bodily dissolution that frame the Muslim refugee as volatile, suspect, and a threat within the Western gaze. *Nowhere Man* focuses on Jozef Pronek, whose diasporic existence is marked by ironic hypervisibility, exotic fascination, and infantilization, positioning him as a "companion species" within neoliberal multiculturalism. Together, the novels show how animalization ranges from depicting migrants as threatening Others to domesticating them as mascots within the post-9/11 Western gaze.

Keywords: Bosnian American Diaspora, Animalization, Exoticization, Postcolonial Theory, Trauma Literature

1. Introduction

The representation of the migrant, especially but not exclusively in post-9/11 narratives, often defines them as being caught in a liminal position: neither fully accepted nor fully rejected, they oscillate between visibility and neglect, fear or fascination, turning into objects of either romanticization or estrangement. When referring to the migrant and their representation in literature, two main responses arise: animalization and exoticization. On the one hand, the animalized subject presents the migrant through the aesthetics of bestialization, portraying them as a threat, an uncontrollable danger, and emphasizing their abjection by characterizing them as dirty, uncivilized, or biologically inferior—features that culminate in their moral exclusion, placing them outside the category of "fully human," and justifying their neglect and violence against them (Oliver, 2009). Exoticization, on the other hand, romanticizes difference, portraying migrants as mysterious, alluring, or culturally rich, yet fundamentally different; an alien Other that generates curiosity and attraction yet also, simultaneously, rejection—a rejection largely based on their reduction to aesthetic, entertaining, or symbolic functions, and whose existence is filtered by the Western gaze: inaccessible yet hypervisible (Said, 1979; Ahmed, 2000). These, however, are not mutually exclusive but rather exist on a continuum, an intersection, or more precisely, a spectrum where the migrant may be subject to both coexisting processes that reinforce each other— constructing, treating, and narrating the Other in ways that deny them full humanity and agency (Bhabha, 1994).

The Bosnian migrant is not a stranger to this representation. Maria Todorova, in *Imagining the Balkans* (2003), concludes that the Balkans have systematically been othered in Western narratives, positioning the region as an exotic, peripheral, and often undesirable Europe. Framed as a space in-between, neither fully part of Europe nor separate from it, this geopolitical and cultural negotiation shapes both internal and external perceptions of countries in the region, as well as the individuals from these areas who migrate to Western countries. This process, which she labels Balkanism, is parallel to—though not identical to—Said's Orientalism (1979), and pathologizes the region as violent, tribal, and irrational. Coupled with the trauma that migration in the context of the Bosnian War (1992-1995) entails, reconfiguring them as an animalized and mysterious Other exempt them from all types of humanity, providing a fragmented, unreliable, and fragile vision of the Balkan subject, which further limits their adaptation and, in turn, isolates them.

In this paper, thus, I analyze two key autofictional novels in the new wave of Bosnian-diasporic authors*: (...shards...)* by Ismet Prcić and *Nowhere Man* by Aleksandar Hemon. I propose to examine the representation of animalization in the former and exoticization in the latter through three intersecting theoretical lenses: Said's Orientalism (1979), Mbembé's necropolitics (2003), and Haraway's theory of the companion species (2013), to see if the migrant escapes the boundaries of exclusion imposed by Western, American forces.

2. Animalization: Fragmented Bodies and Animalized Sensoriality in *(...shards...)*

2.1. Ritual and Compulsion: The Body as a Mechanism of Survival

To exhibit such first type of dehumanization, I take *(...shards...), opera prima* of Bosnian-American author Ismet Prcić, published in 2011. A deeply fragmented novel, as its title already hints*, (...shards...)* narrates the experience of a Bosniak—Bosnian Muslim—youth who migrates to California during the Bosnian War. The story, composed of fragments, disjointed memories, and multiple voices, reflects the trauma of migration and the impossibility of building a coherent identity—but rather, one that is unstable, irrational, guided by impulse rather than rationality (Matthes, 2013).

Such irrational, compulsive impulses find a space in the novel's conclusive scene, a stream- of-consciousness-like discourse constantly interrupted by the interjection ***BOOM*** (Prcić, 2011, 345), which fragments the narration and Ismet's train of thought, breaking it into pieces, shards, and escaping the human coherence expected from the subject. Such collapse in reasoning, together with constant repetitions, puts forward the discourse as a space where the migrant subject is rendered as a non-stable entity with diminishing subjectivity whose humanity collapses.

Its most evident reflection stems from the author's linguistic choices—in his portrayal of Ismet's body and his reactions in being held captive for 40 days in a "prison" after experiencing a psychotic episode in seeing himself without a support system, employment, and future in California. From the very beginning, Ismet's own voice reveals he is chained, trapped by the "collar of his prison uniform" (344), which constricts his breathing the moment "he is being led down a cavernous black corridor toward the holes" (344). Such hole of darkness, which stands for his cell, is presented as a zone of death in life, a space where the migrant is stripped of identity and agency—or what Mbembé (2003), from the necropolitic perspective, translates as a space where the State condemns him to a precarious life without dignity.

Once in his cell, he finds the button that constrains him, rips it off, and throws it around the cell and, from that moment on, engages in a compulsive behavior—a constant search for the button, repeating the pattern of throwing and retrieving it, which constitutes his sole survival mechanism. His search, however, unfolds with the character "[going] down on all fours [...] crawl[ing] around for as long as it takes until he stumbles upon it in the dark, picks it up, feels its edges bite into the flesh of his fingertips in that round familiar way" (Prcić, 2011, 345). His position, on all fours, equates him with animals, non-bipeds, a nonhuman position that signals a regression from upright rational thought to instinct-driven behavior (Oliver, 2009).

This is significantly emphasized by portraying him hyperventilating, suffocated by his posture, sweaty, frozen, unable to move and, simultaneously, unable to stop to contain his obsessive need to reach for the button so that he "keep[s] the mind busy and on-task [...] so it doesn't circuit itself" (Prcić, 2011, 345). A behavior he repeats throughout the 40 days of imprisonment, to the point of becoming a habit, this incessant search in an animalistic position emerges as a ritualistic and obsessive behavior that mirrors caged animals trying to impose order on chaos—a behavior that blurs the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman. Additionally, the button, read through Haraway's theory (2013), becomes a nonhuman companion that symbolically accompanies the protagonist allowing him to simulate control and preserve his mind amid collapse.

2.2. Linguistic Collapse and Fragmentation of the Subject

Overwhelmed by being in "the hole" surrounded by darkness as he feels the "ceiling [...] flaking and falling down on [...] him" as "[his] heart is climbing up his esophagus and into [his] throat, into [his] eye sockets, into [his] thoughts" (Prcić, 2011, 345), Ismet's compulsion and physical degradation embody the process of animalization: the body becomes the primary site of meaning once language and rationality collapse. The body reflects his distress, his loss, his turmoil, and his ultimate reliance on his reflexes in the face of fear and threat. This, Oliver (2009) deems abjection, the process by which somatic responses exceed rational control, rendering the subject both hyper-embodied and dehumanized. Rather than thinking since, as claimed by Ismet, he repeats the same pattern each day to keep his mind occupied, to keep the trauma of the past and his failed assimilation from haunting him, what remains is sensory overflow—a trembling organism whose "heart pumps hard but off beat [...] the air [escaping] out of [him] without [his] control" (301). This repetition, which the protagonist describes and performs, becomes a ritual of survival that he chooses over confronting human suffering, while also functioning as his only mode of expression, exposing a subjectivity shaped through animalization.

Hand in hand with the collapse of rational thought and Ismet's development of compulsive habits is the intensification of his animalized portrayal through increasingly precise sensory detail—especially through Ismet's imagined perception of his surroundings:

> "this pounding, this pounding of shells [...], this pounding rain, this pounding in my head, the pounding of memory, of bullets and tree limbs, the pounding of Mother, the pounding of red hair, the pounding of volatile muscles turning rigid in the fleeting world far below, down there, where into my (pounding) ephemeral ear the sidewalk shall whisper the truth." (346)

The linguistic saturation conveyed through the repetition of "pounding" and the rapidity of the discourse reveals a hyper-animalized sensory overload where the character is alert,

reactive, overwhelmed—under siege even when shielded from human stimuli. In this preference for isolation and the development of compulsive habits, it is possible to see how trauma, confinement, and displacement reduce him to a creature of habit, without language, logic, or autonomy. Instead, Ismet undergoes a psychological, rather than institutional, animalization, where his mental state and behavior regress to animal-like patterns under extreme conditions such as relocation or social judgement. In other words, his mental survival depends on his ability to become less human.

3. Exoticization: Hypervisibility, Colonizing Polyphony, and the Commodified Migrant in *Nowhere Man*

If in *(...shards...)* survival depends on the protagonist's descent into animality—a process of self-dehumanization that mirrors social invisibility—, Hemon's *Nowhere Man* inverts this trajectory by presenting a hyper-visible, translated, and commodified protagonist who exists only through the gaze of Western multiculturalism. Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon, who nonetheless describes himself as a global citizen (Peinado-Abarrio, 2023, 23), is especially known for his autobiographical portrayal of the migrant in his novels—a portrayal that is ironic, comedic, at times humiliating, yet inherently political. This mode of representation gives rise to what Peinado-Abarrio (2023) terms "the Hemonian displaced character" (1). Either cast as a posthuman figure or a radicant subject, the Hemonian protagonist moves through the absurd while consistently offering a critical commentary that exposes the Western power structures shaping the migrant Other's formation and adaptation (Helm, 2023). In this sense, Hemon neither idealizes the migrant nor confines them to a position of pure victimhood.

In *Nowhere Man* (2002), the main character, Jozef Pronek, a recurrent character in Hemon's short stories, is constructed through six different voices—none of which belong to the protagonist himself. Presenting him as lacking agency, Pronek is instead modelled by others—a multiple construction filtered through the experience and subjectivities of others— all of them American. This multiplicity of voices creates what might be called a colonizing polyphony (Spivak, 2010) where the migrant is spoken about but does not speak.

A clear example of this is the novel's third section, narrated by Victor Plavchuk, a Ukrainian-American citizen who encounters Pronek not in America but in Kiev. This section stages a rhetoric of control and containment—a language that domesticates, infantilizes, and aestheticizes Pronek, framing him as an object of curiosity and spectacle whose difference, rather than equality, is celebrated so long as it remains harmless (Bhabha, 1994; Blazan, 2004). Yet this sense of harmlessness is itself produced by Pronek's silence. What Victor reads as calm, understanding, or innocence is in fact muteness—a refusal, or perhaps an impossibility, of self-expression. Silence, therefore, becomes the space where empathy and hierarchy converge; where Victor can project his moral superiority, his need of taking care of Pronek, as well as educate him precisely because Pronek does not answer back, to the point where he equates him with animal species—such as doe—, highlighting some sense of connection between animals and migrants, both standing as non-fully human entities.

In this regard, the absence of language turns Pronek into the perfect companion. Rather than initially voicing his own experience, the migrant soaks Victor's complaints in, providing him with some kind of comfort that he could not find in other Americans he had told his life story to. Similarly, when Pronek, "in his broken English, with articles missing,

with subject, verb, and object hopelessly scrambled" (Hemon, 2002, 94) talks about his relationship with his father, Victor only feels envious and wishes it were his story—seeing Pronek "was the simple [version of] [him]" (131). This gesture is far from innocent but, rather, operates as a means of calming his own existential anger, projecting his fears into the protagonist.

On the contrary, as Sara Ahmed (2000) claims, Pronek is articulated through a stranger fetishism, where the main character, as the Other, becomes Victor's object of fascination—an object never allowed to speak for himself and whose existence makes sense in so far as it depends on the visibility that Victor, in their asymmetrical relationship, endows him with.

Yet tenderness and curiosity soon turn into disgust and an increasing distance and rejection once Jozef acquires a certain degree of independence, after realizing that Victor's story sounds "like American novel" (Hemon, 2002, 98) where Pronek is but a fictitious character in his story. An evident example of this stems as Pronek jokes about Victor's brother— prompting Victor to shout in frustration—, as well as when Pronek arrives with his own friends and Victor is merely placed as a companion to the migrant.

This signals a reversal of roles, with Victor, rather than Jozef, presenting himself as the companion species, a shift that exposes how his growing dependence, insecurity, and desire for recognition mirror the very dynamics of subordination he had previously imposed on Pronek. Nonetheless, the climax of this rejection arises as Pronek suggests to his friends— Victor included—that they eat pig brain (104). This gesture activates the figure of the sensory other: the migrant is presented as a strange body with repulsive customs from the Western gaze that no longer frames him as a passive pet but rather as a beast and, therefore, as an entity that has no place in the sympathetic multicultural contract that their asymmetrical relationship entailed. Hemon, in this paragraph, exhibits his mastery and control of the English language—and especially the aesthetic power of his words in evincing the rupture of the multicultural contract between the Balkan migrant and the Western subject—a frail contract as tolerance is only possible so long as the migrant remains tame and grateful.

To signal this, Hemon reiterates detailed sensory markers such as the color of Pronek's shirts, "predominantly Eastern European bleak" (82), his smell, "the musty smell of a lived life" (82), and the way he roasts his coffee, which Victor deems rudimentary:

> "He put a little pot with a long handle on the table between our beds. He dipped what seemed to be two razors attached to a wire, with a button between them, in the pot, then plugged the bare ends of the wire into a socket. I calmly realized that he was risking his life, along with my mental welfare, by doing that." (83)

These Orientalist markers convert Pronek into an exotic tableau, albeit one viewed with disgust, for Western consumption (Said, 1979; Todorova, 2023). These signifiers not only aestheticize difference but rather are physically embodied by the migrant, making Pronek knowable through the reinforcement of stereotyped perceptions of the Balkans as barbarian, primitive creatures—creatures that overflow the limits of what is acceptable from a human perspective.

And yet Pronek's exoticization is not merely limited to his silencing or cultural aestheticization. Hemon also sexualizes difference, filtering it through Victor's desire. His fascination with the "strange" turns into an eroticized domination, framing the migrant as a body over which he can exert control (Blazan, 2004; Helm, 2023). Pronek's ethnicized body, described in sensorial detail, becomes a site of both attraction and hierarchy—

what Haraway (2013) would call the "touch zone" between species (205), where intimacy and inequality coexist. Desire, here, reinforces control: Victor's need to possess the Other reduces Pronek to a companion defined only by his capacity to be desired.

Thus, in *Nowhere Man*, the migrant is translated into striking and consumable signs of difference. Pronek's tolerance is subjected only to his ability to remain tame. When it is shattered, a greater distance and rejection towards him arises—yet never a total exclusion, for, in the end, the migrant is never included as an equal in the narrative.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, both in *(...shards...)* and in *Nowhere Man*, the Bosnian migrant is trapped in a narrative that dehumanizes him, perceiving him through categories of difference in various registers: the bodily, the motor, the verbal, the compulsive, the symbolic—which handles all possible control to the Western subject, who models the migrant to make up for their needs. In neither of these narratives, however, a solution is proposed. Rather, both Prcić and Hemon seem to suggest that, so long as the representation and existence itself of the migrant operates within the animalization–exoticization spectrum, their humanity will remain purely conditional; a humanity that, like their own minds, fragments and disrupts the dominant narratives, paving the way for future alternative possibilities for the migrant—a claim that could likewise be extrapolated to their subsequent publications.

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Victorian Marriage and Tennyson's *Enid*

Ana Orbegozo Desdentado
UNED
aorbegozo@flog.uned.es

Abstract

The Victorian period saw many changes in the social and legislative standing of marriage. Coinciding with these, there was a heightened interest in the Middle Ages and specifically in tales of courtly love. In my research, I propose that literary medievalism served as an arena for debates about gender relations, with authors using an idealized past to stage and support their ideas about the subject. This paper will take Tennyson and his *Idylls of the King* as an example of the tendency, focusing specifically on the two poems about Geraint and Enid, which arguably present a conservative example of the perfect Victorian marriage.

Keywords: Victorian, Gender Relations, Marriage, Medievalism, Tennyson

1. Introduction

From 1850 and until his death in 1892, Alfred Tennyson served as England's Poet Laureate, enjoying the title for most of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). One of the ways in which he reflected and swayed contemporary trends was his interest in the Middle Ages. His epic sequence of poems, *Idylls of the King*, which was published progressively from 1857 until 1885, is a clear example of Victorian medievalism. This work retells the story of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, framing it with two odes, to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, and therefore linking the ideals of the medieval Arthurian cycle to the ideals of Tennyson's own time. For the most part, the *Idylls* are inspired by Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485), one of the key Arthurian texts in English literature. However, there is one poem in the sequence that has no parallel in Malory: the tale of Enid. Her story, which really starts off as her husband's story, appeared in two places in the Middle Ages, one was a French romance and the other Welsh one. The first had not yet been rendered into English in Tennyson's time, while the second had just been translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, as part of the Welsh *Mabinogion*. Guest's translation is itself an instance of Victorian Medievalism. As with any translation, some of her choices reflected the morals of the time, but they were mostly linguistic subtleties (Broome Saunders, 2020, 572). When Tennyson adapted the romance, however, he introduced major changes that completely shifted the point of the story, fitting it to his own concerns. To understand what these were, we may turn to the title that Tennyson's first idylls initially carried. They were two poems, each named after a woman: Enid and Nimue – who was later renamed Vivien, in consonance with the French tradition. Together, they were published as *The True and the False* (1857). The title echoes a common phrase in other Victorian texts: "the true wife". The phrase recurs in sermons and popular lectures, like John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, as well as in these poems themselves. We are led to believe that Tennyson is showing examples of true and false womanhood in his two idylls, with Enid being good, and Vivien bad. This is a mild simplification, but it is supported by the original title and the later progression of the *Idylls*, where we see an insistence on the ideas of loyalty and

truth, often embodied or challenged by the different characters (Ahern, 2004; Moy, 2014). Importantly, the only couple shown as happily married in the full epic are Geraint and Enid. And so, Enid is Tennyson's only example of a "true wife".

The concept itself was so recurring at the time, because marriage was a key subject of debate in the Victorian period. Several changes were coming to a head during Tennyson's time as Poet Laureate. One of the most notable was the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which allowed divorce under several circumstances. In the following decade, discussions recurred in Parliament about women's property rights and in 1870 a bill was passed, allowing them to keep their wages separate from their husband's property. By 1882, they were allowed to hold all sorts of property of their own, even within marriage (Griffin, 2003). This in turn encouraged middle-class women to join the workforce in the following decades, even though the change was gradual and began with a limited set of professions, such as nursing and secretarial work (Scott and Tilly, 1975, 38). If this were not enough, there had been debates around marriage already in the years leading up to Tennyson's success. Notably, there was a public discussion about the possibility of widowers marrying in-laws, which had filled the press with reflections about the nature of matrimony (Anderson, 1982). Besides that, from the 1830s, the so-called Oxford movement had been making waves, with several of its members declaring that, whenever possible, celibacy was preferable to clerical marriage. These affirmations were followed by a series of conversions to Catholicism from public figures like John Henry Newman, which caused moral panic and led to heated debates about Church doctrine, including the allowance for clerical marriage and, by extension, the spiritual value of marriage itself (Boneham, 2014). It is in this atmosphere that Tennyson writes and expands his poem about the ideal married couple, Geraint and Enid.

2. The Plot of Tennyson's *Enid*

The original tale, as rendered in the Welsh romance, has very little to do with marriage as a concept. It is the story of the rise, fall and return of Geraint as a famous knight. There are two movements in that story, corresponding broadly to Tennyson's two-part poem. The first half sees Geraint, a young and untried knight, proving his valour in a rather typical quest, in which he chases after a man who has insulted the queen, to seek reparations. Over the course of several adventures, Geraint discovers that this man has usurped the earldom of a city. Geraint challenges him, beats him, and restores the rightful earl back to his castle, thereby gaining the praise and love of the earl's daughter, Enid. In this section of the romance, there really is no mention of marriage and we only infer that Geraint has married Enid much later, when she is eventually referred to as his wife. Except for this detail, the story could as well present them as *paramours*. Besides, their love is by no means the main point of the plot. On the other hand, Tennyson's first half of the story, which he republished as "The Marriage of Geraint," adds a wedding revelry, as well as longer descriptions of the couple's first encounter. Moreover, the title itself is a clear indication of what the climax of the story is supposed to be.

In Tennyson, the whole first half is framed as a flashback, explaining the context for the second half's conflict. Therefore, from the beginning, Tennyson sets up his protagonists as married and focuses on the conflict that has come between them as husband and wife. This conflict, which he explains right away, stems from a misunderstanding, present also in the original text. In the Welsh text, after returning home with Enid, Geraint is so well-off and so in love with her that he forgets all his duties as a knight. His original quest granted him honour and fame, but now he neglects maintaining them. The thought of him

being disparaged by other knights for this laziness makes Enid melancholic, which leads Geraint to assume she must not love him anymore and might have fallen for another. In the original story, this spurs him into action. He decides to go on a quest with her, saying: "evil betide me, if thou returnest here until thou knowest whether I have lost my strength so completely as thou didst say" (1910, 163). It was a trope in medieval courtly love that the desire to prove themselves to their ladies would lead men to great deeds (Jaeger 1999, 198). Following that tradition, the Welsh Geraint proves himself through several adventures, until he encounters a supernatural trial, which once passed, grants him "warlike fame and splendour" that "lasted with renown and honour both to him and to Enid from that time forth" (1910, 184).

In Tennyson's version, this final adventure is nowhere to be seen. Instead, Tennyson focuses on smaller quests, all linked to Enid herself. This is because, in his rendition, the second part of the story is not a trial for Geraint to prove his strength, but for Enid to prove her constancy. This is made clear from the outset, as Geraint is not humiliated that Enid might not love him, but is in fact enraged that she might be unfaithful. The culmination of the pair's trials is not an achievement of undeniable worthiness for Geraint, but his statement that: "I will henceforth rather die than doubt" (Tennyson, 2004b, ll.736, 744). And so it is Enid who becomes the protagonist of Tennyson's story and must prove herself throughout. As I see it, she goes through four trials. The first takes place when they set out on their quest. Geraint tells his wife to wear her worst dress and not speak to him. It is clearly a cruel commandment, but more specifically, it denies Enid the two main comforts of a traditional wife: to be loved and to be materially provided for. Still, she does not complain. Over the next lines of the poem, the couple encounter two enemy lords: Earl Limours and Earl Doorm. Tennyson invents a back-story for the first, who is but a stranger in the Welsh romance. Here, we are told that he was once in love with Enid, whom he met at her father's court. In the present, the Earl still loves her faithfully and tries to convince her to betray Geraint and run away with him. He is promising Enid the steadfast love that her husband denies her. Still, Enid is unmoved, repeating that she loves only Geraint. The second Earl, Doorm, is also charmed by Enid. He is a rich man and he offers her a beautiful dress and a banquet, providing her with the material comforts that Geraint has deprived her of. Again, Enid refuses. Finally, while they are in Earl Doorm's court, Geraint is injured and taken for dead. In fact, he pretends to be dead, to see what Enid will do. She mourns him bitterly and refuses to eat, drink or interact with any man, saying: "I never loved, can never love but him" (l.708). It is only then that Geraint finally accepts that his wife is faithful and so, he reveals that he had been alive all along and reconciles with her.

This is an interesting final trial for Enid, because love after death was an important concern in the Victorian period. It was often discussed whether or not married couples would be together in the afterlife, with many poems dedicated to this idea. Even priests argued in favour of it, occasionally against scripture, as was the case of Charles Kingsley, who put aside certain passages in the Gospel of Matthew (1894, 231) in order to assert that "our love is spiritual, and therefore able to express itself in any state of existence" (106). Mourning periods in Victorian times were notoriously strict, with eighteen months being the bare minimum expected of a widow (*Manners and Rules,* 1898, 243). Enid fits right in with this ideal. And not only this ideal: Tennyson's depiction of her, which gives her more scenes and chances to shine than the original story, closely follows the cast of the Victorian "Angel in the House". This infamous character comes from an 1854 poem by Coventry Patmore, but it really describes the Victorian image of womanhood as a whole. The phrase was first used for that purpose by Virginia Woolf, who described the suffocating standards that women were held to at the time, highlighting how "utterly unselfish" the angel-lady was supposed to be (1942, 237). Her wording echoes Victorian intellectuals, like John

Ruskin, who described the ideal woman as "wise," not in order to surpass her husband but "to never fail from his side" (1888, 122). This is exactly what Enid does throughout Tennyson's poem: she unselfishly devotes herself to staying with her husband.

3. The Heroine

Two of the moments Tennyson invents for Enid to shine in are nursing scenes. In the first, Geraint has been wounded and the heat of midday is beating on him, so he stops their journey to sit under the shade of a tree. The Welsh romance only tells us that "the maiden stood under another tree" (1910, 175). In Tennyson's poem, however, Geraint falls dramatically from his horse and Enid must come to his rescue: "tearing off her veil of faded silk / … [she] bared her forehead to the blistering sun, / and swathed the hurt that drain'd her dear lord's life" (2004b, ll.514-516). Her attentions are described in terms of selflessness, almost to the point of martyrdom, with the hyperbolically "blistering sun" burning her unveiled head. There is later another scene where, instead of leaving him to physicians, as she does in the original, Enid nurses Geraint herself, even after they have reached the court:

> [She] tended on him there; and there
> Her constant motion round him, and the breath
> Of her sweet tendance hovering over him,
> Fill'd all the genial courses of his blood
> With deeper and with ever deeper love (ll.923-927)

This is the unselfishness Woolf described as a need to "sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" (1942, 237). The way Enid comforts Geraint, even when they are lost on the road, also has an echo of Ruskin's female ideal: "wherever a true wife comes, the home is always around her" (1888, 121).

The other characteristic Tennyson highlights in Enid, adding details that were not in the original, is her piety. When Geraint clashed with other knights on the road, the Welsh Enid worried for him and rejoiced in his victories (1910, 164-66), but there was no mention of her praying. Tennyson's Enid, on the other hand, "[does] not dare to watch the combat, only breathe / short fits of prayer, at every stroke a breath" (2004b, ll.154-55). We are told that, throughout the whole journey, "she was ever praying the sweet heavens / to save her dear lord whole from any wound" (ll.44-45). This corresponds with Ruskin's recommended education for a woman, which should teach her not theology, but only "to strive that her thoughts of piety may not be feeble [...] nor her prayer languid" (1888, 126). Enid is a beacon of humble piety and as such, she maintains a constant link between her husband and God, a typical trait of the Angel in the House as Gilbert and Gubar described her. In their seminar study of Victorian writing, they observe how the original heroine, like her successors, seemed to "interpret the divine for her poethusband" (2020, 22). According to this ideal, in the first poem, we are told that Geraint loved Enid "as he loved the light of Heaven" (Tennyson, 2004a, l.5).

The typical image of Geraint and Enid is of her riding in front of him, which is their arrangement on the road. Throughout their adventures, Enid always sees danger coming, because she is riding up to it first, but she agonises about whether or not to warn Geraint, because he has commanded her not to speak to him. In Tennyson's version, we clearly see her attempts to warn him without disobeying and we see, also, that when she *does* disobey, she immediately apologises and accepts his anger. This dramatises the problem

that John Ruskin, and Victorian society as a whole, presented women with: "how is the guiding function of the woman reconcilable with a true wifely subjection?" (1888, 119). Enid has to balance caring for her husband, helping him, and obeying his unreasonable commands. Tennyson presents her as the ideal wife because she manages, incredibly, to do so. It is her constancy and unselfish devotion, despite being denied love and comfort, that wins Geraint back at the end of the poem.

4. Conclusions

Overall, Tennyson presents and reinforces a conservative and idealised view of marriage and of wifehood, during a period when these were unstable concepts. He transforms a medieval story about knightly fame into a parable about the demands of married life, shifting the focus from the knight to his lady. Although she becomes the true and heroic protagonist of the story, however, Enid is used to uphold a system whereby women were supporting characters in the lives of men. Tennyson's poem highlights Victorian gender roles, exemplifying what a true woman and wife should be like, even if he takes his heroine on a quest and makes her central where she was once marginalised. This Victorian Enid represents a far more enticing and dangerous ideal than the original courtly lady: the morally laudable heroine, who proves herself through submission. She is the "immensely charming" (1942, 237) angel that Virginia Woolf would later struggle to stray from.

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Algorithmic Borderlands and Transcultural Memory: Reading Caterina Edwards´ *Finding Rosa* Through the Lens of Digital Governance

Belén Ozarín García

Universidad de Burgos, Universidad Isabel I
belen.ozarin@ui1.es

Abstract

This paper investigates the transcultural construction of identity in migrant female subjects in Caterina Edwards' fiction, reading her Italian-Canadian protagonists alongside contemporary algorithmic regimes that structure women's care work on digital platforms. Utilising Wolfgang Welsch's (1999) theory of transculturality and Homi Bhabha's (1994) "Third Space," the analysis conceptualises identity as fluid, negotiated, and situated within intersecting spaces of migration, language, and platform-mediated labour. Integrating Silvia Federici's (2004) critique of gendered reproductive labour and Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006) intersectional account of belonging, the article examines how algorithmic management in care platforms encodes historical hierarchies of gender, class, race, and migration into datafied profiles, ratings, and risk scores for female workers. Through close readings of Edwards' narratives, the study argues that her transcultural heroines anticipate and contest contemporary forms of digital governance, illuminating how migrant women narrate agency within socio-technical systems that both exploit and render legible their care labour.

Keywords: Transculturality, Migration, Gender, Algorithms, Care Work

1. Introduction

The intersection of migration, gender, and digitality represents a critical locus for feminist theory and literary criticism in the twenty-first century. Recent research demonstrates that the rapid expansion of digital infrastructures, ranging from biometric border controls to algorithm-driven labour platforms, fundamentally reshapes how migrant women negotiate, narrate, and contest their lived realities across socio-technical domains. Over seventy percent of migrant women are now processed using digital technologies that perpetuate surveillance and automated classification, thus reinforcing structural inequalities and systemic exclusion. Yet these same women have historically employed narrative strategies to assert agency, recover silenced histories, and resist erasure within systems that seek to render them legible only through reductive categories.

These studies are largely produced by feminist, migration, and science-and-technology studies scholars who conduct qualitative and ethnographic research with migrant women, often in collaboration with NGOs, community organisations, and advocacy groups. Researchers such as Alexopoulou (2025) on digital welfare regimes and Heberer (2024) on migrant care workers and social media platforms interview women who work in domestic and care sectors, asking how they experience surveillance apps, algorithmic scheduling, and digital documentation procedures. In other words, the data are created through

dialogic practices with migrant women themselves, not only through official statistics or corporate dashboards, even if these women's narratives are subsequently mediated by institutional frameworks and policy discourses.

This emphasis on co-created narratives is crucial when we connect it to the broader regime of unpaid care work in which women are often trapped, even when they are not formally "care professionals." For example, in the case of Caterina Edwards, the Canadian-Italian writer and daughter who narrates her care of her mother Rosa as she develops Alzheimer's, the work of caregiving is not framed as a professional duty but as a moral and familial obligation rooted in patriarchal structures. Edwards herself describes years of balancing caregiving with her own work and family life, illustrating how women are expected to absorb the emotional and physical labour of care without professional recognition or remuneration.

The relevance of the earlier studies on migrant women and digital infrastructures becomes apparent when we see how Caterina Edwards' situation is not an isolated domestic drama, but part of the same structural pattern that shapes migrant care workers. In both cases, the burden of care falls on women, whether as unpaid family carers like Edwards or as low- paid migrant workers in domestic and home-care platforms. Digital infrastructures, be they apps that track labour hours, biometric systems that regulate migrant status, or digital records that document care recipients—do not eliminate these patriarchal divisions; instead, they reconfigure and often reinforce them, making women's labour more measurable, more controllable, and yet no less invisible.

For this reason, the data produced by feminist researchers with migrant women are politically and ethically significant: they reveal how care is not only a question of personal choice or love, but a gendered and racialised form of labour that is embedded in the very architecture of digital migration and welfare systems. By documenting the narratives of women who resist simplistic categorisation and contest their position as mere "subjects" of surveillance, these studies show that care is at the heart of contemporary struggles over agency, visibility, and justice—whether the carer is a migrant professional on a platform or a daughter like Caterina Edwards, who performs caregiving not because of professional training, but because a patriarchal structure continues to demand it from her.

Caterina Edwards, one of the foundational voices in Italian-Canadian literature and the first Italian-Canadian woman writer in western Canada, constructs transcultural female protagonists who navigate in-between spaces of geography, language, memory, and cultural heritage. Her memoir *Finding Rosa* (2008) offers particularly prescient insights into how migrant women negotiate belonging, silence, and agency within structures, both historical and algorithmic, that threaten to erase their complex subjectivities. The text chronicles Edwards' four-year journey caring for her mother Rosa, an Italian refugee suffering from Alzheimer's disease, while simultaneously travelling to Istria (now part of Croatia) to excavate suppressed histories of ethnic cleansing, displacement, and gendered violence that shaped Rosa's life. This dual narrative, one of caregiving in the present and other in historical recovery in the past, demonstrates what this article terms "memorial thickness," a literary practice that insists on contextual complexity, emotional nuance, and the irreducibility of human experience to data points.

This article argues that Edwards' literary representations of transcultural female identity in *Finding Rosa (2008)* anticipate and critically clarify the contemporary datafication of migrant women's care work on digital platforms, where algorithmic systems reproduce historical patterns of surveillance, erasure, and exploitation. Based on Wolfgang Welsch's (1999) theory of transculturality, Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space, Silvia

Federici's (2004) feminist critique of reproductive labour, and Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006) intersectional framework of belonging, this analysis explores how Edwards' narrative strategies embody forms of resistance that speak directly to algorithmic governance of women's bodies, data, and labor in platform economies.

By positioning Edwards' memoir alongside contemporary research on algorithmic management in care work platforms, this article reveals deep structural continuities between the forms of erasure that Rosa experiences and those that contemporary platform workers confront in what might be termed "algorithmic borderlands."

The transcultural condition, as theorised by Welsch, provides the primary analytical paradigm through which identity is conceptualised not as fixed or dualistic but as fluid, hybrid, and relational- a framework that proves equally applicable to understand how migrant women navigate both literary and algorithmic borderlands. Through close readings of five key passages from *Finding Rosa*, this article demonstrates how Edwards' memoir functions not merely as documentation but as speculative resistance, offering alternative epistemologies of visibility, belonging, and agency that directly contest the logic of datafication that structures contemporary platform care work.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Transcultural Theory to Algorithmic Critique

Wolfgang Welsch's (1999) theory of transculturality offers a critical alternative to traditional and multicultural models of culture by conceptualising identity as inherently fluid, hybrid, and relational. Rather than conceiving cultures as homogeneous, bounded entities or as discrete units coexisting in a multicultural mosaic, Welsch argues that contemporary identities arise from the interpenetration of multiple cultural trajectories shaped by migration, global interdependence, and ongoing exchange. Individuals no longer "belong" to a single, monolithic culture; instead, their subjectivities are constituted through continuous processes of interaction, translation, and appropriation.

The transcultural subject, in this sense, embodies overlap and entanglement, resisting essentialist notions of origin and purity at both the societal and individual levels. Such a framework is particularly clarifying for reading Edwards' representation of Rosa as a figure of transcultural liminality—displaced from Istria, never fully integrated into Canadian society, linguistically hybrid, and permanently "in-between." At the same time, Welsch's emphasis on fluidity foregrounds the violence of contemporary algorithmic systems that seek to arrest this dynamism by fixing migrant women within rigid classificatory regimes. Digital labour platforms demand categorical clarity: workers must present stable national identities, standardized credentials, and quantifiable performance indicators that efface the translational labour, cultural competence, and adaptive capacities that define transcultural subjectivity.

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space further refines this account of liminality by theorising a site of cultural negotiation where meaning and identity are constantly produced through translation, mimicry, and resistance. The Third Space disrupts binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or home/host, revealing identity as performative, contingent, and politically generative. When applied to the conditions of platform work, however, the Third Space acquires a coercive dimension: the algorithmic borderlands of digital care platforms instantiate a more punitive "algorithmic Third Space," in which migrant women become hyper-visible as data while remaining structurally misrecognized as subjects. Ratings, rankings, and risk scores position them in a precarious in-betweenness—continuously surveilled yet denied robust labour protections or recognition

of the complexity of their care work. Here, the creative potential of Bhabha's Third Space is curtailed; hybridity is translated into standardized data points emptied of context.

Silvia Federici's (2004) feminist historiography clarifies the political economy underpinning this process. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici shows that capitalist development depended on a "patriarchy of the wage" that devalued unwaged reproductive labour while extracting surplus from women's bodies and care work. In today's platform economies, as Rodríguez- Modroño (2024) argues, care and reproductive labour undergo renewed commodification and algorithmic rationalisation. Far from dismantling gendered exploitation, platforms intensify it through surveillance, performance metrics, and punitive rating systems. Migrant women, in particular, are penalised when caregiving responsibilities generate gaps in availability, as algorithms automatically downgrade their profiles and restrict access to future work.

Finally, Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006) theorisation of intersectionality and the politics of belonging elucidates how these mechanisms operate across multiple axes simultaneously. Belonging is not merely an affective attachment but is structured by political projects that decide who counts as a legitimate member and under what conditions. An intersectional view shows that algorithmic systems do not reproduce gender, class, ethnicity, or migratory status in isolation; they synthesise them into integrated regimes of exclusion. Migrant women platform workers are thus doubly and triply positioned —as women, as migrants, and as low-paid carers— within datafied infrastructures that encode and amplify historical hierarchies under the guise of neutral computation. Read alongside Edwards' narrative strategies in *Finding Rosa*, this framework reveals how the memoir already anticipates and resists the logic of algorithmic governance: by insisting on the "memorial thickness" of Rosa's subjectivity, Edwards contests the very impulse that seeks to reduce migrant women to manageable, legible, and exploitable data points.

3. Literary Borderlands and Algorithmic Frontiers: Edwards' Narrative Practice

In *Finding Rosa* (2008), Edwards frames her mother as a refugee with a "suppressed past," whose "hardships and frequent displacements are repeatedly unspoken or erased in public memory and historical record" (Edwards, 2008, p. 10). Describing her reconstruction project as an "archaeological dig," Edwards acknowledges that "the site itself is scattered and the fragmented clues often need to be conjured in order to make sense of a life, a village in ruins, a people dispersed across the world" (Edwards, 2008, p. 10). This archaeological metaphor positions memory work as material labor requiring excavation, patience, and imaginative conjuring when evidence is incomplete—a stark contrast to datafication's promise of comprehensive capture and permanent storage. Edwards' narrative approach directly contests digital migration systems that transform lived experience into standardized data points, stripping away contextual nuance, emotional complexity, and narrative coherence (Nikunen & Talvitie-Lamberg, 2022). Platform algorithms reduce care work to quantifiable metrics of response time, task completion, and customer satisfaction, rendering invisible precisely those qualities—patience, empathy, cultural competence, emotional attunement— that Edwards laboUrs to preserve through archaeological narrative practice. Her insistence on memorial "thickness" and the necessity of conjuring offers an implicit critique of reductive systems, suggesting that resistance to algorithmic reduction lies in asserting the right to narrate experience in all its irreducible particularity.

At a pivotal moment, the narrator observes, "Taking her mother's measure, she says, I must become no one" (Edwards, 2008, p. 45). This Homeric allusion to Odysseus' strategic

disguise as Outis operates on multiple registers: it captures Rosa's cognitive erasure as Alzheimer's strips away her sense of self; it reflects the historical erasure of Italian refugees from Istria whose stories remain marginal to official Canadian and Italian national narratives; and it reveals the daughter's recognition that truly comprehending her mother requires temporarily relinquishing her own fixed identity to inhabit the liminal space of "no one." The reference suggests "a subjectivity marked by erasure and invisibility—not only in Rosa's lived experience but also in her daughter's process of understanding and representing her" (Edwards, 2008, p. 45).

Yet unlike Odysseus' chosen tactical protection, becoming "no one" constitutes an imposed condition for migrant women. Contemporary platform workers experience parallel erasure— hyper-visible as racialized, gendered bodies under constant algorithmic surveillance, yet simultaneously rendered invisible as complex human subjects with rich interior lives, sophisticated cultural knowledge, and legitimate claims to recognition and justice. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2024) documents this "hyper-visibility paradox" in platform work, where female workers experience both excessive exposure through constant monitoring, ratings, and evaluations, and simultaneous loss of professional recognition, as algorithms render them visible primarily through vulnerability and precarity rather than skill or expertise.

Rosa's repeated plea, "I want to go home," transcends clinical symptomatology to become an existential statement. Edwards writes: "Those suffering from Alzheimer's often wander. They do not get lost. They are lost, permanently. And since everything around them is unrecognizable, they search for a place of certainty and familiarity that they and we call home" (Edwards, 2008, p. 89). This notion of being "permanently lost" encapsulates radical displacement beyond geographical migration—an ontological condition of unrecognition where "home" becomes an irretrievable state of coherence and belonging rather than a physical location. The passage emphasizes "the impossibility of recognition and belonging" (Edwards, 2008, p. 89) for subjects caught between multiple linguistic, cultural, and temporal registers. This resonates profoundly with Bhabha's (1994) theorization of the Third Space, where migrant subjects inhabit perpetual in-betweenness that resists resolution into either origin or destination. Platform algorithms demand precisely the categorical fixity that Rosa's experience contests —stable national identities, consistent addresses, predictable availability patterns— constituting epistemic violence against transcultural subjects whose identities are fundamentally characterized by multiplicity, mobility, and transformation.

During Rosa's funeral, even the priest confuses her name with her daughter's, "failing to recognize her true identity" (Edwards, 2008, p. 203). This ritual error "serves to highlight the community's—and by extension, society's—misrecognition, which compounds Rosa's invisibility even at the moment meant to affirm her life story" (Edwards, 2008, p. 203). The passage devastates through simplicity: at the culminating ritual designed to honor Rosa's life and integrate her memory into communal history, the officiant cannot correctly name her. This final misrecognition prefigures algorithmic "false positives" that disproportionately affect migrant women's access to asylum procedures, social services, and labor markets (UNHCR, 2023). Both priest and algorithm reproduce erasure through standardized protocols incapable of accommodating the complexity of migrant women's lives, demonstrating how institutional actors —however well-intentioned— participate in systematic misrecognition when operating within rigid classificatory frameworks.

Finally, Edwards documents care's corporeal dimensions with visceral specificity —sleepless nights, emotional regulation, the physical demands of bathing, feeding, and moving an aging body— insisting on embodied labour's irreducibility to abstract metrics or

quantifiable outputs. Rodríguez-Modroño (2024) argues that platformization of care work intensifies the historical devaluation that Federici (2004) identifies, now mediated through computational systems that render invisible the relational, affective, and embodied aspects that constitute care's value. Algorithms cannot comprehend patience, empathy, or emotional attunement as skilled labor because these qualities resist quantification. Edwards' feminist historiography parallels Federici's recovery of reproductive labor as central to capitalist accumulation, illuminating how contemporary datafication threatens to erase the very dimensions of care work that Edwards labors to make visible through memorial and narrative practice.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The close readings presented above demonstrate how Edwards' narrative strategies in *Finding Rosa* function as anticipatory critiques of contemporary algorithmic governance. Her archaeological approach to memory contests datafication's promise of comprehensive capture; her representation of becoming "no one" clarifies the hyper-visibility paradox of platform surveillance; her documentation of permanent displacement challenges algorithmic demands for categorical fixity; her recording of misrecognition prefigures algorithmic bias; and her insistence on embodied care labor resists the quantification logic of platform management systems.

Yet Edwards' memoir does more than merely critique—it also models alternative epistemologies and practices of resistance. The act of writing itself becomes a form of what Lockhart *et al.* (2023) call "feminist counter-strategies" in digital spaces: practices that refuse algorithmic reduction and assert alternative forms of visibility and recognition. By creating a complex, multidimensional portrait of Rosa that exceeds simple categorisation, Edwards contests the logic of datafication avant la lettre, demonstrating that migrant women are not merely data points to be processed but subjects with rich interior lives, complex histories, and the capacity for creative self-fashioning.

Edwards' narrative also demonstrates what Yuval-Davis (2006) terms "transversal politics"—forms of solidarity that cross boundaries while remaining rooted in particular experiences and committed to shared values. The memoir's movement between personal caregiving narrative, historical investigation, and political critique enacts a transversal methodology that refuses disciplinary or generic containment. This methodological promiscuity—Edwards draws on memoir, historiography, travel writing, medical discourse, and family saga—parallels the intersectional analysis that Yuval-Davis advocates, recognising that migrant women's experiences cannot be understood through single-axis frameworks.

Moreover, Edwards' attention to linguistic plurality and translational labour provides crucial insights for understanding how algorithmic systems disadvantage migrant women. Throughout the memoir, Edwards moves between Italian, English, and Istrian dialects, so as to demonstrate how linguistic hybridity functions both as a marker of transcultural identity and as a source of vulnerability. This literary attention to linguistic politics proves strikingly relevant to understanding algorithmic discrimination in platform work, where speech recognition systems and natural language processing algorithms exhibit systematic bias against non-native speakers, particularly women with accents that diverge from standardised linguistic norms. The algorithm, unable to comprehend code-switching or multilingual competence as forms of skilled communication, instead interprets linguistic difference as deficiency or incompetence.

Finally, Edwards' memoir suggests that literature itself functions as a form of resistance to reductive systems of representation—whether those systems are nationalist historiographies that erase Italian refugee experiences, medical discourses that reduce dementia to symptomatology, or algorithmic management systems that reduce care work to performance metrics. By insisting on narrative complexity, Edwards affirms what might be termed a "right to opacity," the right to be complex, contradictory, and irreducible to simple categories. This literary ethics of complexity provides a powerful model for contemporary struggles over algorithmic governance, suggesting that the most effective resistance lies not in demanding inclusion within existing systems but in asserting alternative forms of being, knowing, and belonging that those systems cannot capture.

This analysis has demonstrated how Caterina Edwards' Finding Rosa provides critical resources for understanding and contesting the algorithmic governance of women's care work in contemporary platform economies. Through close readings of five key passages, the article has revealed deep structural continuities between the forms of erasure, surveillance, and misrecognition that Rosa experiences and those that contemporary platform workers confront in algorithmic borderlands. The transcultural condition that Welsch (1999) theorises —characterized by hybridity, fluidity, and cultural overlap— finds itself constrained by algorithmic systems that demand categorical clarity and resist ambiguity. The Third Space that Bhabha (1994) identifies as a site of creative cultural negotiation becomes, in platform economies, a zone of precarious in-betweenness where women are simultaneously hyper-visible and systematically misrecognized. The reproductive labor that Federici (2004) analyzes as central to capitalist accumulation undergoes new forms of commodification through platform intermediation, while the intersectional politics of belonging that Yuval-Davis (2006) elaborates manifest in compound algorithmic discrimination.

Yet Edwards' memoir also suggests resources for resistance. Her narrative practices—the cultivation of memorial thickness, the assertion of linguistic complexity, the representation of embodied care, the insistence on irreducible particularity—provide literary models for contesting datafication. By demonstrating how her narrative maintains Rosa's complexity despite systematic erasure, Edwards offers a form of feminist hope that proves relevant for contemporary struggles over algorithmic governance. Her work reminds us that identity is not merely inherited or algorithmically assigned—it is narrated, contested, and continuously redefined through acts of creative resistance.

Moving forward, both literary scholars and platform governance researchers might benefit from attending to the intersections between narrative representation and algorithmic management. Edwards' transcultural feminism suggests that the struggle for recognition, dignity, and self-determination that Rosa wages in the memoir anticipates the struggles of contemporary platform workers navigating algorithmic systems. Her work demonstrates that literature can function not merely as a mirror reflecting social reality but as a critical tool for imagining alternative forms of visibility, belonging, and justice. In an age of increasing datafication, Edwards' insistence on narrative complexity, memorial recovery, and embodied experience provides vital resources for resisting algorithmic reduction and affirming the irreducible humanity of migrant women's lives.

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Nobody Cares for the Woods as i Care for Them: Treebeard, Keeper of the Eternal Green in Tolkien's *The Two Towers* (1954)

Noelia Ramos-Soria

University of Vigo
noelia.ramos@uvigo.gal

Abstract

This paper explores the environmental consciousness in J. R. R. Tolkien's Fangorn Forest, with special attention on Treebeard as its otherworldly keeper. Whether the author manifested his fluctuating thoughts towards the Celtic, the "fair elusive beauty" (Letters 168, #19) he refers to is well-experienced in his Secondary World through the intrinsic Perilous Realm concept imbued by liminality. This essay will conduct a comparative analysis of three key chapters: *The White Rider*, *The Road to Isengard* and *Treebeard* alongside secondary sources including the *Dinnshenchas of Eó Mugna*. Tolkien's assertion in The Two Towers "Nobody cares for the woods as I care for them" (TT III, iv, 463) acts as a model for the author's environmental ethics and a relevance of nature in Middle-earth that proves the ancient roots of this practice, tracing it back to Celtic folk.

Keywords: J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Fangorn Forest, Celtic Otherworld, Fairy

1. 'Things-Celtic' and the Eco-Imaginary in Tolkien

Ecocriticism within the *The Lord of the Rings*, can be considered as "an ever-present background to the characters and actions of Middle-Earth" (Butler, 2022, 2). The word 'environmental' as stated in the *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED], points out something "connected with the natural conditions in which people, animals and plants live" (2026, 1). Within the 'environmental', the 'ecocriticism' paves the way as "the study of the relationship between literature and its physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, 2). This contributes that the applicability of mythopoetic fantasy to environmentalism can be possible by making trees walk or animals talk.

In Tolkien's oeuvre, this is considerably conveyed in *Leaf by Niggle* (1945), where Niggle spends his entire life to the painting of a single tree. Alike, in *The Silmarillion* (1977) through Telperion and Laurelin. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), in the woodland of Lórien where Legolas claims the place is "the fairest of all the dwellings of my people" (*FR* II, vi, 435). In *The Return of the King* (1955), the author writes that the White Tree of Gondor is "gently uprooted…and in June it is found laden with blossom" (*RK*, VI, v, 972).

Much has been said about the topic but scarce through the lenses of paganism. The first claim lies in the reclamation of Isengard, by breaking the dam to reclaim and cleanse the nature of Saruman's evil, that serves as a proof to criticise the malevolent effects of industry. By portraying trees as something worth fighting for the destruction of nature, the readers "become responsible for preserving and protecting the trees in their own lives" (Ulstein, 2015, 7). Next in order, the significance of trees in the narrative by Middle-earth's multi-

sensory landscape that breathes "a primary world reality into his secondary world frame, yet delivered through a prism of fantasy" (Campbell 2014, 440). The theory of "sub-creation" of nature in a Secondary world as part of this 'eco-critical' view led the reader to look at nature anew, to see "things as we are (or were) meant to see them" (*OFS* 67). Ultimately, the 'sub-creation' as is induced by Tolkien's beloved Anglo-Saxons or, better said, their ancestors, the Celtic-speaking peoples "from whom the British take their name" (Lehning, 2021, 21).

This paper examines the Celtic Irish influences on Tolkien's Fangorn as wholesale. Drawing on Tolkien's so-called "Celtic library" as Oronzo Cilli indicates in *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist* (2019), this proposal contemplates *The Metrical Dindsenchas* from *The Book of Leinster*. Considering Tolkien's familiarity, there is room to explore any possible influences or echoes in his work. If Fangorn seem to deliberately mirror the classical portrayal of the Celtic Otherworld, it would not be illogical to look for some traces of the *Eó Mugna*. Whether there is no evidence that Tolkien drew any inspiration from Celtic material, this fact does not invalidate the historical plausibility that he was familiar with it, as he had a sheer interest in the preservation of ancient sources in a moment which modernity was taking over tradition. This hypothesis can be backed by his letter to Milton Waldman, through "the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic" (*Letters,* 167, #131), which demonstrates that he had some kind of positive opinions toward Celtic tradition even though these contradictions "may be felt in the lack of studies on Irish sources" (Swank, 2025, 27).

2. The Secondary World and the Celtic Otherworld

When discussing Tolkien's Secondary World, he takes a nuanced approach. In Typescript 'A' of *On Fairy-Stories* (1947), Tolkien relates the *Primary* and *Secondary* world by stating that the reality of men and Elves is the same though valued differently and henceforth, exemplified "through a prism of fantasy" (Campbell, 2014, 440). This fantasy is brought alongside the "perils ever present" (*OFS*, 15) or the *Perilous Realm* the author refers in the essay by recalling the idea that faërie is not just the Elves but a hostile land.

This vision recalls the Celtic Otherworld, a realm with its own laws or a place inhabited "by supernatural beings and exhibiting supernatural characteristics" (Carey, 1987, 1). In Celtic folk, the *Otherworld* was conceived as a spirit world "shared and magically juxtaposed with the primary, everyday world" (Burns, 2005, 53) and of course, a place that once you enter, "you meet the guardian somewhere within the grove" (Danu, 2014, 40).

3. Fangorn Forest

3.1. What is *Fangorn*?

Fangorn is one of the oldest locations in Middle-earth and dates to the early days when the Elves began communicating with the trees. As Andoni Cossio and Martin Simonson convey, the forests "have frequently evoked supernatural atmospheres" (2020, 10). This notion is transported into Treebeard by emphasising the ethereal quality Fangorn possesses:

> In my own land, in the country of Fangorn,
> Where the roots are long,
> And the years lie thicker than the leaves
> In Tauremornalóme
>
> (*TT* III, iv, 469)

This arboreal setting is first introduced when Merry and Pippin escape from the Uruk-Hai. Tolkien describes the forest as dark and tangled and with "a queer stifling feeling... as if the air were too thin or too scanty for breathing" (*TT* III, iv, 461) showing the transition between the mundane and supernatural. In *The White Rider* and *The Road to Isengard*, Gimli remarks "I do not know which daunts me more: Fangorn, or the thought of the long road through Rohan on foot" (*TT* III, v, 490) by adding a couple of lines later they were warned against it. In Celtic mythos, forests act as gates to the beyond and this own conceptualisation through the ethereal landscape is exemplified in the "dark" and "tangled". Similarly, Legolas remarks "It is old, very old... so old that almost I feel young again" (*TT* III, v, 491). This "old, very old" evokes timelessness and memory becoming a threshold where the landscape responds to the supernatural.

3.2. The Ents

Tolkien offers enough background of the Elves and Dwarves but little on the Ents. In a letter to Naomi Mitchison, he refers to them as "Onod-rim, the Ents" (*Letters* 196, #144). In a 1963 letter to Colonel Worskett, he declares the Ents were created "without premeditation or any previous conscious knowledge" (*Letters,* 351, #247). In a similar vein, in the *Appendixes*, he mentions that the term *Ent* is rooted from Old English. In *The Silmarillion* (1977), in *Of Aulë and Yavanna*, Tolkien affirms the Ents were conceived by Yavanna to take care of the natural world. Given that nature cannot resist aggression, Yavanna's desire for justice is conveyed in her desire that trees "might speak on behalf of all things that have roots and punish those that wrong them" (*Silmarillion,* 2013, 34). In *The Two Towers*, after the liberation from Wormtongue's influence, Théoden inquires:

> What are they, Gandalf?" Gandalf's responds: "They are the shepherds of the trees... You have seen Ents, O King... Did you think that the name was given only in idle fancy? Nay, Théoden, it is otherwise: to them you are but the passing tale. (TT III, viii, 480)

Similarly, in *Treebeard*, Tolkien shows the nature of the Ents by stating that:

> The Ents were as different from one another as trees from trees: some as different as one tree is from another of the same but quite different growth and history; and some different as one tree-king from another, as birch from beech, oak from fir. (TT III, iv, 493)

In Celtic folk, trees are conveyed as liminal entities and "as potent symbols of the Otherworld" (MacLeod, 2012, 28). For this reason, the beech, fir and birch can be associated with Tolkien's Secondary or Perilous Realm. The beech alludes to memory and wisdom and is thought to possess ancestral knowledge. The fir is revered as a symbol of immortality and eternity, while the birch is linked to protection and transformation.

4. Treebeard

4.1. Who is Treebeard?

Treebeard is the embodiment of Fangorn and often portrayed as the oldest of Ents, serving as the guardian of Fangorn. This arboreal being has existed in Middle-earth since the First

Age and is perceived as the "story's best spokesman" (Dickerson *et al.,* 2011, 119). In a letter to Peter Hastings, Tolkien refers that "Though he has a great memory and some earthly wisdom, he is not one of the Wise, and there is quite a lot he does not know or understand" (*Letters,* 207, #153). Notwithstanding, there is an alternative interpretation. Though this figure may not be the most knowledgeable, he is clearly the brightest Ent and the most experienced of Fangorn. This is proven through the author's recurrent allegiance in the book through *shepherd*, *ancient* and *wise*.

In 1956, Tolkien addressed to Mr. Thompson asserting he wrote the *Treebeard* chapter "without any recollection of any precious thought: just as it now is" (*Letters,* 250, #180). Whether this would prove the tree may not have a functional role, Tolkien's own claim for Treebeard "nobody cares for the woods as I care for them" (*TT* III, iv, 463) makes it evident.

4.2. Embodiment

Tolkien writes a physical description for Treebeard that retains some of the archetypes of the Otherworldly guardian through "A large Man-like…at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. The large feet had seven toes each" (*TT* III, iv, 463). This "at least fourteen foot high" among the "man-like almost troll like" exemplifies a figure with a massive, robust that seems to make of him a part of the land he defends. Similarly, the word *sturdy* emphasises the Ent's muscularity, which is remarkably alike to that of the Celtic guardian, described as strong and solid, capable to defend any sacred location.

Tolkien characterises Treebeard as having a "sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots" (*TT* III, iv, 463). This portrayal aligns to the Celtic guardian, frequently said to have well-groomed beards and therefore, fostering the bond between wisdom and the natural world. The eyes are the third distinguishing feature. Tolkien goes into detail hinting at the importance of the eyes rather than any other physical characteristic by "They were brown, shot with a green light… One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking" (*TT* III, iv, 463). The colour "brown" is associated with strength and wisdom. This is related to the "green light" that evokes the oscillating hills and forests of the beyond. The eyes are described as *deep* and *penetrating* referring to the Celtic guardian's capacity to sense other peoples' souls.

4.3. Path Guidance

Pippin asks Treebeard who is he and he answers "'I am an Ent… Fangorn is my name" (*TT* III, iv, 464), embodying the forest itself. As a guardian he states "And I am doing the asking. You are in my country. What are you, I wonder? (*TT* III, iv, 464). Once it is apparent the hobbits do not show malevolence, he decides to lead them to a safer location. This guidance is marked by the offering of food and shelter as evidenced in *The Two Towers* by "I can give you a drink that will keep you green and growing for a long, long while" (*TT* III, iv, 467).

This guidance is also marked by Treebeard's power over his domain where trees, shrubs, and plants make way for him: "'As the old Ent approached, the trees lifted up their branches, and all their leaves quivered and rustled'" (*TT* III, iv, 470). This perspective provides additional evidence for the conviction that Treebeard, as an Oak tree acts as "the king of the trees" (Blamires, 2005, 107).

5. The Great Oak Tree and *Éo Mugna*

In Tolkien's *On Fairy-Stories* he states that each "leaf, oak and ash and thorn is a unique embodiment of the pattern" (*OFS* 66). The term *Oak* derives from *Duir* and the term *Druid* means "strong seer or strong in knowledge" (MacLeod, 2018, 23). This terminology might have been of the author's inspiration to recall him by its name as *Tree* refers to trees and *Beard* alludes to his age yet; above all, these ones are associated with *Old* and *Wisdom*.

The Great Tree of Mugna or *Eó Mugna* is regarded as one of the most significant trees, rendered in the *Lebor Gábala Érenn* manuscript. Originally, there were five sacred trees that aroused from the berries given by the giant Trefuilngid Tre-eochair to Fintan Mac Bochra. This oak, described as 115 feet tall, with a smooth, light grey trunk that spots some fissures in the bark, meant leadership, strength and protection. The *Dindshenchas* poem 23 provides additional details concerning the personal attributes of the tree:

> Eó Mugna, great was the fair tree,
> high its top above the rest;
> thirty cubits —it was no trifle—
> that was the measure of its girth.
> Three hundred cubits was the height of the blameless tree,
> its shadow stretched a thousand cubits
> in secrecy it remained in the north and east
> A hundred score of warriors —no empty tale—
> along with ten hundred and forty
> would that tree shelter —it was a fierce struggle—
> till it was overthrown by poets.
>
> (*vv*. 1-12, 149)

The adjective *great* marks the tree's extraordinary size, while "high its top above the rest" shows its towering stature. "It was no trifle" with its hundred-cubit shadow symbolize protection and authority. The mention of "north and east" may allude to sacred sites in Irish mythology.

Though apparent association among these two trees may be discarded, further analysis proves the contrary as both trees function as a protective barrier and fortress by offering food and shelter. Treebeard holds a balance in nature through his immense statue and ancient knowledge that allows him to safeguard his domain against devastation. Eó Mugna's connection to the sacred waters of Connla's Well imbues the tree with spiritual meaning and ancient wisdom, in a similar way Treebeard's though his long-lived perspective that enables him to recognize and respond any thread.

6. Conclusion

Fangorn is provided with an insight into the Celtic Otherworld through its twisting atmosphere and landscape that evokes a reasonable distortion once mortals set up there. This arboreal setting, thereby, can be conceived as both a natural setting and mythologized place, another "part" of Tolkien's Secondary world. The creatures that dwell there, the Ents are the ones created and called to protect the olvar, showing these the reverence these ones have towards nature.

Treebeard's liminality resonates with the Celtic druids that also revered and protected nature. The tree's encounter with Merry and Pippin mirrors this "Celtic initiation" where

the crossing through the supernatural requires worthiness. This *liminality*, as preserved in the *Dindshenchas*, parallels with Eó Mugna as both arboreal figures are regarded as ancient, wise and tree-herds.

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Susan Cooper (1813-1894): From 'Plain Daughter of America' to Redemptive Nature Writer

Iratxe Ruiz-de-Alegria-Puig

Independent Scholar
iruiz.de.alegria@irakasle.eus

Abstract

This study examines Susan Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1850) as both an early work of American ecological consciousness and a paradoxical gesture of cultural and environmental restitution for the settler-driven destruction—initiated most prominently by her grandfather, William Cooper, founder of Cooperstown—that devastated her native Otsego Lake region. Although long overshadowed by Thoreau's *Walden*, Cooper's nature journal achieved notable early success and offers a meticulous year-long record of local flora, fauna, climate, and human practices. Attentive to the accelerating ecological transformations around her, Cooper sought to educate readers about indigenous species and to rewild pre-settlement landscapes, thereby anticipating contemporary concerns with conservation, sustainability, and inclusivity. Drawing on Lawrence Buell's 'environmental imagination,' Barry Lopez's concept of a 'dignified response to the land,' and Annette Kolodny's 'gardens in the wilderness', this investigation argues that *Rural Hours* transcends domestic nature writing, helping to shape a distinct American cultural tradition and proposing a narrative of environmental redemption through renewed ecological awareness.

Keywords: Restorative Nature Writing, Redemption, American Environmental Tradition, Environmental Restitution

1. Susan Cooper, *Rural Hours* and its Reception

At the intersection of early American environmental thought and frontier history, this study argues that Susan Cooper's *Rural Hours* stands as both a sophisticated account of ecological change and a morally charged reflection on the legacy of settlement. Far from being a simple nature journal, the text reveals Cooper's nuanced understanding of conservation and environmental transformation while also offering, paradoxically, a form of redemption for the destruction and displacement that marked the Otsego Lake region—a landscape shaped in part by her own family's pioneering activities. By confronting this complex inheritance, Cooper articulates a restorative vision that encourages renewed ethical engagement with the natural world.

1.1. Habitat and Surroundings

Place stood at the heart of what mattered to Susan Cooper[1]. She was born in Westchester County, in southeastern New York, along the Hudson River, on April 17, 1813. However,

[1] Timothy Sweet, "Global Cooperstown: Taxonomy, Biogeography, and Sense of Place in Susan Fenimore Cooper's Rural Hours," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 17, no. 3, (2010): 541-566.

she lived much of her adult life in Cooperstown, on the western shores of Lake Otsego, in Otsego County, New York state.

Cooperstown takes its name from William Cooper who, in addition to being a prominent land speculator and an eyewitness to the conquest, resettlement, and transformation of the North American forest, was also Susan Cooper's grandfather. Consequently, Fenimore Farm was located on the traditional homelands of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—including the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora, and, later, the Wyandotte and Delaware peoples. Their deep historical presence in the region surfaces repeatedly in *Rural Hours*, where Susan Cooper acknowledges both their long stewardship of the land and the profound disruptions brought by colonization[2]. One passage in particular reveals her awareness of this layered history and the human cost of settler expansion, as she reflects on the springs and wooded hillsides surrounding her home:

> When standing beside these unfettered springs in the shady wood, one seems naturally to remember the red man [...] we feel assured that by every fountain among these hills, the Indian brave [...] must have knelt ten thousand times. [...] It was but yesterday that such beings peopled the forest, beings with as much of life as runs within our own veins, who drank their daily draught from the springs we now call our own; yesterday they were here, today scarce a vestige of their existence can be pointed out among us.[3]

As for her early life, Cooper was the eldest child to survive infancy. When she was four years old, the family was forced to abandon their farm because it was no longer financially sustainable. At the age of thirteen, she moved with her family to Europe, where the cost of living was lower[4]. Since her father, James Fenimore Cooper, was then establishing his literary career, they believed he would be able to pursue it more successfully abroad, and the family remained in Europe for seven years. During this period, they lived in or travelled through England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and Italy.

On returning, after those phenomenal years exposed to old wild nature, she found everything had changed in her Otsego County. She felt a deep sense of nostalgia upon witnessing the deforestation, erosion, increased flooding, and above all the proliferation of invasive plant species and the loss of biodiversity. In *Rural Hours*, she articulates this shock and sorrow with lucid precision, documenting the scale and consequences of ecological disruption:

> Mature trees, young saplings, and last year's seedlings, are all destroyed at one blow by the axe or by fire: the spot where they have stood is left, perhaps, for a lifetime without any attempt at cultivation, or any endeavour to foster new wood. One would think that by this time, when the forest has fallen in all the valleys, when the hills are becoming more bare every day, when timber and fuel are rising in prices, and new uses are found for even indifferent woods, some forethought and care in this respect would be natural in people laying claim to common sense. The rapid consumption of the large pine timber among us should be enough to

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[2] L. Rochelle Johnson. "Susan Cooper's Reckoning with Native American Dispossession." YouTube video, 6:54. Published November 16, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0937u6q9cw

[3] Susan Cooper, *Rural Hours* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 57-58.

[4] L. Rochelle Johnson. "Recovering Susan Fenimore Cooper's Environmentalism." YouTube video, 13:53-14:16. Published March 13, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eDbXacs07Q

> teach a lesson of prudence and economy on this subject. It has been calculated that 60,000 acres of pine woods are cut every year in our own State alone; and at this rate, it is said that in twenty years, or about 1870, these trees will have disappeared from our part of the country.[5]

She never married. She lived with her sister, and later with her niece. She was very accomplished; her parents were extremely supportive of Cooper's education. Her mother was her primary teacher, and, from her maternal grandfather, she received botanical instruction[6].

Testament of their generosity and devotion to Susan Cooper was her mother watching the plants and birds and taking notes for her towards her *Rural Hours* project, while she was out taking care of an ailing aunt. From her father's side, a banner on Cooper's bedroom intended as an advertisement of *Rural Hours* to be hang on a bookshop on the day of the publication speaks volumes of the admiration for his daughter[7].

It is worth mentioning that Cooper spent time corresponding with scientists towards *Rural Hours*. She put to them her doubts about anything she wanted to claim or her concerns about the accuracy of the scientific information with which she was providing the readers. A number of those letters have survived, among others, the ones addressed to zoologist and physician James De Kay. She also attracted the attention of Charles Darwin, who was notably impressed by her work on invasive species and wrote to a colleague inquiring about the identity of 'that lady,' who was none other than Susan Cooper[8].

1.2 Publishing *Rural Hours*

Susan Cooper shared a publisher with her father, James Fenimore Cooper. *Rural Hours* was published in an illustrated edition; such an expensive edition would not have been produced without confidence in its success[9]. In addition, the illustrations were drawn from a previous publication, more particularly from the six-volume encyclopaedic natural history of New York, a highly scientific compendium, a clear sign that the editor viewed her work not as a decorative description of nature, but as a scientific contribution.

Unexpectedly for contemporary readers, Susan Cooper's environmentalist warnings predated those of the authors traditionally associated with the awakening perception of environmentalism in the United States, such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, or Aldo Leopold among others[10]. As a matter of fact, Cooper's most acclaimed oeuvre was anonymously published in 1850, four years before transcendentalist Thoreau's experiences in the woods near Walden saw the light. Besides, it went through six printings before *Walden* saw a second one. In any case, there is no proof that she read *Walden*. It is also

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[5] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 113.

[6] L. Rochelle Johnon, "Walden, Rural Hours, and the Dilemma of Representation," in T*horeau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writings*, ed. Richard J. Sneider (University of Iowa Press, 2000b), 186-187.

[7] Johnson, "Recovering," 28:21.

[8] Johnson, "Recovering," 35:00.

[9] Johnson, "Recovering," 44:00.

[10] L. Rochelle Johnson, "Placing Rural Hours," in *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*, ed. John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington (University of Utah Press, 2000a), 64-85.

unknown whether Thoreau read *Rural Hours* in its entirety although he does reference Cooper's discussion of 'loons' in his journals[11]. According to L. Rochelle Johnson[12], a leading authority on Susan Cooper's work, the only certainty is that Thoreau knew of her existence and that they were two authors doing a similar work at the same time.

Although Cooper's first writing was a novel, *Elinor Wyllys*, published in 1845 about a modest character and a philanthropy lover, she is best known for her 1850 book, *Rural Hours*, a journal over the natural and human communities of Cooperstown. She wrote it over the course of two years, made her nature observations, and put them together. As far as the content is concerned, *Rural Hours* resonates with the cycles of time, the seasons, the motion, the movement, and ultimately, the experience of time through place. Cooper often slows the narrative pace to invite readers into a more attentive contemplation of colour, form, and atmosphere. This impulse is evident in her careful description of the lake and its surrounding hills:

> Our own highland lake can lay no claim to grandeur; it has no broad expanse, and the mountains about cannot boast of any great height, yet there is a harmony in the different parts of the picture which gives it much merit, and which must always excite a lively feeling of pleasure. The hills are a charming setting for the lake at their feet, neither so lofty as to belittle the sheet of water, nor so low as to be tame and common place; there is abundance of wood on their swelling ridges to give the charm of forest scenery, enough of tillage to add the varies interest of cultivation; the lake, with its clear, placid waters, lies gracefully beneath the mountains, flowing here into a quiet little bay, there skirting a wooded point, filling its ample basin, without encroaching on its banks by a rood of march of bog[13].

Rural Hours enjoyed considerable early success, going through nine unabridged editions during the nineteenth century before Cooper was advised, in 1887, to remove material that publishers believed would no longer interest contemporary readers. Responding to this editorial pressure, she produced an abridged edition that eliminated over 40 percent of the original text. Johnson's 1998 edition of the full text of the original 1850 *Rural Hours* made Cooper's complete work available for the first time since 1876[14].

Written as a year-long journal beginning in spring, Cooper's literary portrait of life in Otsego County documents its flora, fauna, climate, human communities, and their everyday practices. Although long neglected for the very qualities that had initially contributed to its popularity —its simplicity, directness, meticulous natural history, and above all its humility— the work today offers essential insights into ongoing conversations about wilderness preservation, sustainability, and social inclusiveness. Its attentiveness to ecological detail and its insistence on close observation resonate strongly with current environmental concerns.

Although numerous authors —predominantly men— were writing about the American landscape during her time, Cooper was distinctive in her sustained commitment to

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[11] Johnson, "Recovering," 37:49.

[12] Johnson, "Recovering," 45:21.

[13] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 69.

[14] Sweet, *Global Cooperstown*, 516.

documenting environmental change within a single locale at a moment when such transformation was occurring with exceptional speed.

2. The New American Tradition: The Daughter as Cultural Symbol

2.1. Plain Daughter of America

Susan Cooper's work is intimately entangled with the construction of the New Nation and the American Renaissance (1836-1855), as she is indeed the legatee of the author of a new hero-myth literature emphasizing new settlers' unbeatable deeds[15]. Her writing reflects a conscious effort to preserve and extend his father James Fenimore Cooper's ideals especially the moral and cultural superiority of American values over European ones. As Lucy B. Maddox argues[16], James Fenimore Cooper often portrayed daughters in his novels as moral guardians and inheritors of the American project. Cooper internalized this role, both personally and professionally, positioning herself as a 'plain daughter' who upheld domestic virtue and national identity, which confers upon her a certain power. Likewise, Cooper's role illustrates the limitations placed on women writers in the nineteenth century. She often published under pseudonyms or anonymously to avoid competing directly with her father and in order to conform to gender expectations of modesty and simplicity[17]. Nonetheless, her works also subtly critique and expand the space available to women in American literature.

2.2. The Hudson River School

During this period, American artists and writers shared a heightened awareness of their role in shaping a new national identity and presenting it to the world. Landscape became a primary medium through which this identity was imagined. Within this cultural context, the Hudson River School—founded by Thomas Cole, a close friend of James Fenimore Cooper—offers a useful parallel to Susan Cooper's literary project[18]. While Cole translated the American landscape into sweeping visual narratives, Cooper chronicled the emerging settler society in prose; together, their work contributed to a shared cultural celebration of the young nation[19].

Cole's paintings reveal a deep concern with the fragility of the natural world and the moral costs of unchecked progress. His depictions of ruins and decaying structures symbolise both material and ethical erosion under the force of settlement. Through the Romantic sublime, he emphasised the autonomy and majesty of nature, suggesting that it commands respect rather than domination—a stance that aligns closely with

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[15] L. Rochelle Johnson, and Daniel Patterson, *Susan Fenimore Cooper: New Essays on Rural Hours and Other Works*. (University of Georgia Press, 2001), 95.

[16] Lucy B. Maddox, "Susan Fenimore Cooper and the Plain Daughters of America," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1988): 135.

[17] Maddox, *Susan Fenimore Cooper*, 136.

[18] L. Rochelle Johnson, "Lecture: Susan Fenimore Cooper & the Hudson River School." YouTube video, 08:14. Posted by Fenimore Art Museum, n.d. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlHFFkyqIMU

[19] L. Rochelle Johnson, *Passions for Nature: Nineteenth-Century America's Aesthetics of Alienation*. (University of Georgia Press, 2009), 66-111.

Susan Cooper's ecological sensibilities. Cooper, well-versed in picturesque aesthetics[20], understood that landscapes carry cultural memory: the continual advance of American 'progress' leaves visible traces of environmental destruction, but also emotional and historical residues of sorrow and grief.

This sensitivity resonates with Barry Lopez's idea that storytelling helps us reconnect with the land. Although Lopez writes from a later and distinctly different cultural and environmental context[21], his notion of a 'dignified response to the land' nevertheless offers a productive framework through which Cooper's writing can be read: an ethic of humility, attentiveness, and reciprocity that recognises the land as a companion in human existence.

3. From Wilderness and Possession to Awareness & Restitution

Building on the cultural and ecological sensibilities discussed above, Annette Kolodny's metaphor of 'gardens in the wilderness' helps articulate how Cooper reimagines the frontier landscape. Instead of viewing wilderness as a feminised, passive space awaiting male conquest, Cooper presents it as a place of potential harmony where domestic values and ecological care can coexist. Through this lens, her work recovers women's experiences as active participants in frontier life, revealing how their perspectives have been marginalised or erased in dominant narratives of American expansion[22].

Rural Hours thus functions not only as evidence of Cooper's early environmental awareness but also as a complex meditation on historical responsibility. Rooted in the Cooperstown region—shaped profoundly by her own family's pioneering legacy—the text becomes a paradoxical form of testimony and restitution. Cooper acknowledges the environmental transformations and displacements brought about by settlement while simultaneously seeking to cultivate renewed appreciation, ethical engagement, and ecological sensitivity. In this sense, her journal offers a redemptive perspective: by observing and recording the land with care, she attempts to reconcile a painful past with a more conscientious future.

This movement from historical awareness to ethical engagement provides the foundation for the final section, which examines how Cooper's work anticipates later ecological thinking and contributes to a broader project of cultural and environmental recovery.

4. Work of Recovery: Gusto for American Nature & Rewilding

Extending the concerns addressed in the previous section, and framed through Lawrence Buell's notion of the 'environmental imagination,'[23] Cooper's writing challenges

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[20] Johnson, "Lecture," 19:42.

[21] Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (New York: Open Road Media, 2013), 305.

[22] Tina Gianquitto, "The Noble Designs of Nature: God, Science, and the Picturesque in Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours*," in *Susan Fenimore Cooper: New Essays on Rural Hours and Other Works*, ed. L. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 169-190.

[23] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

anthropocentric views and foregrounds the agency of the natural world[24]. She proposes a model of environmental attention that encourages readers to reconsider human responsibility toward ecosystems and to recognise the interconnectedness of all living beings. Her understanding of the transformative power of literature positions *Rural Hours* as an early catalyst for ecological thought.

Moreover, Cooper anticipates contemporary ecological concerns—particularly those associated with rewilding. Deeply aware of the rapid changes occurring in her homeland and conscious that these shifts formed part of a broader global pattern, she sought to educate readers about the native species that once flourished before extensive human disturbance. By inviting readers to imagine earlier landscapes and envision their potential restoration, Cooper cultivates a sensibility oriented toward ecological repair. Her writing thus becomes an act of creative recovery: an attempt to find and foster beauty in damaged places.

Taken together, these reflections position *Rural Hours* as a foundational text of American environmental consciousness—one that integrates aesthetic, ethical, historical, and ecological insights into a unified vision of what responsible relationship with the natural world might look like.

5. Conclusion

Taken together, this analysis demonstrates that Susan Cooper occupies a far more consequential position in nineteenth-century American environmental thought than her long critical neglect suggests. *Rural Hours* emerges not simply as an early example of women's nature writing, but as a text that actively reshapes the imaginative and ethical frameworks through which a young nation understood its landscapes. By reclaiming Cooper's role as both an inheritor and a quiet reformer of American literary tradition, the study reveals how she challenged the dominance of masculinised frontier narratives and offered instead a model of attentiveness, restraint, and ecological responsibility.

The dialogue established between *Rural Hours* and the visual aesthetics of the Hudson River School further clarifies Cooper's acute awareness of environmental vulnerability. Rather than celebrating the sublime as a symbol of national destiny, she reads the changing landscape as a site of moral urgency, insisting on the cultural and ecological costs of expansion. This recognition situates Cooper within an early lineage of American environmental consciousness—one that foregrounds care, historical memory, and ethical reciprocity with the land.

Through the combined lenses of Buell's 'environmental imagination,' Lopez's 'dignified response to place,' and Kolodny's re-evaluation of domesticity as ecological stewardship, the study illustrates how *Rural Hours* functions as a radical intervention into prevailing nature discourse. Cooper does not merely describe the natural world; she redefines how it should be seen, valued, and ethically approached. Her narrative, far from ornamental, proposes a mode of national self-understanding grounded in humility rather than dominion.

Ultimately, the article concludes that *Rural Hours* offers a redemptive vision in which ecological damage is met not with resignation but with a deliberate cultivation of knowledge, intimacy, and wonder. Cooper's contribution lies precisely in her capacity to

[24] L. Rochelle Johnson, "Susan Fenimore Cooper's 'Rural Hours' and the 'Natural' Refinement of American Culture," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 7, no. 1 (2000c): 47-77 https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/7.1.47, 59.

make beauty visible in threatened places, and in doing so, to prompt a more thoughtful, morally engaged relationship between Americans and their environment. Her work therefore stands as a foundational, if long overlooked, text in the evolution of American environmental ethics.

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Art Does Not Imitate Life in Robin Chapman's *The Duchess's Diary*

Lucía Samitier-Pérez

Universidad de Salamanca
samitierlucia@usal.es

Abstract

This paper examines Robin Chapman's reinterpretation of the duchess in his novel *The Duchess's Diary* in contrast with her portrayal in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote* Part II. While the Spanish author depicts her as an evil avid reader, the English novelist extracts her character from fiction and transforms her into a historical subject and an active narrative agent, revealing the truth and complexity of her innermost self. To support this analysis, the study first draws on previous theoretical frameworks regarding textual relationships (Genette 1982, Doležel 1998), arguing that Chapman's novel seems to resist established typologies and instead may exemplify, following Saint-Gelais (2011), the category of transfictional captures. Hence, it can be revealed that *The Duchess's Diary* may be understood as an illustration of the continuing influence of Cervantes' production in other works, while accomplishing the postmodern endeavour of giving voice to those who have been silenced, as in the case of early modern women.

Keywords: Don Quijote, The Duchess, Rewriting, Transfictionality, Robin Chapman

1. Textual Relationships in *The Duchess's Diary*

The Duchess's Diary, first published in 1980, imagines a real woman behind the fictional character created by Miguel de Cervantes in the second part of his *Don Quijote* and allows her to speak for herself. Through her own diary, she can both tell her own story and reveal a complexity and humanity that Cervantes' fiction denied her. As stated in the preface of Robin Chapman's work, this is the fictional diary of "a young woman who had unwittingly become the model of a person known only in her fictional form" (Chapman 1985, 8), clarifying that this premise is itself a creative invention rather than a historical claim. Characteristic of the postmodern tendency to revisit and challenge canonical texts which, in the words of Linda Hutcheon (2002), is often "not nostalgic [but] always critical" (89), this novel becomes an act of correction. It demonstrates that the second part of *Don Quijote* has not faithfully represented what Chapman treats as real life, and it restores a sense of truth after an exaggerated and evil portrayal of the duchess has been popularized. By giving voice to the woman behind the fiction, *The Duchess's Diary* not only re-examines Cervantes' narrative but also maintains it alive in contemporary culture. Chapman's novel thus encourages us to reflect on the vast possibilities in the categorization of this literature that quotes, alludes, corrects and/or continues Cervantes' major creation.

To better understand the nature of the literary dialogue created between *The Duchess's Diary* and *Don Quijote*, it seems necessary to turn to the second half of the twentieth century, when Gérard Genette introduced the term *transtextuality*, defined as "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" and distinguished five types of such relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality,

hypertextuality, and architextuality (Genette 1982, 1-5). This discussion concentrates on two of these categories: intertextuality and hypertextuality. Intertextuality refers to the true presence of a text within another, for example though quotations or allusions, and hypertextuality designates the specific relationship between a later text (hypertext) and a previous text on which it is based (hypotext), which the former transforms.

From this broad notion of intertextuality, Saint-Gelais (2011) develops the concept of transfictionality: "le phénomène par lequel au moins deux textes, du même auteur ou non, se rapportent conjointement à une même fiction, que ce soit par reprise de personnages, prolongement d'une intrigue préalable our partage d'univers fictionnel" (7).[1] Hence, transfictionality concerns the transfer and expansion of a diegetic universe (its characters, settings or events) across distinct works, often from different geographical and/or historical contexts. In line with this, Doležel (1998) notes that postmodernist rewritings of classic works challenge the original fictional world by modifying certain characteristics or details while reproducing it, thereby engaging in a creative dialogue (223). *The Duchess's Diary* exemplifies these processes, but it also complicates this established theoretical background since Chapman's novel does not reproduce Cervantes' fictional world (the one inhabited by Don Quijote and Sancho), but rather reconstructs a supposed real world in which the duchess is treated as an historical figure who has been fictionalized by Cervantes in his Part II, exercising a transgression of the border that separates fiction from reality.

Developing this framework further, different attempts have been made to categorize the circulation and intertwinement of characters, stories, and fictional worlds. Pardo García (2018) proposes a triangular model of transwriting, a concept that merges Saint Gelais' transfictionality with Doležel's notion of rewriting. He presents the three vertices of the triangle as three different processes: imitation or faithful reproduction, transfiction or expansion, and rewriting or transformation (57-59). However, Chapman appears to resist such broad categorization: while *The Duchess's Diary* functions as a transfiction by extending the life of Cervantes' characters, it also operates as a rewriting that reclaims the voice of a previously silenced character, which offers a new interpretation and perspective on the original text.

So how can hybrid cases be categorized? To overcome this limitation, and following Saint-Gelais' terminology (2011), the term *transfictional captures* is proposed. He names as *capture* the phenomenon of a source text being absorbed by a later text and through which the author of the original text is fictionally transformed into a character within the later narrative, appearing in the characters' level (229-36). On this basis, transfictional captures would be the narratives that extract characters from fiction, for instance, from *Don Quijote*, and situate them within the realm of reality. Since Chapman re-embeds Cervantes' duchess in an apparent historical reality, his work differs from traditional adaptations or sequels: it does not merely continue a story but relocates its components in another level. This paper will, therefore, examine the transformation of Cervantes' work into an active participant in a new narrative, *The Duchess's Diary*, where it is reread and reinterpreted in a postmodern dialogue, embodying the endurance of the Spanish author in the literature of our time.

[1] "The phenomenon by which two or more texts, whether written by the same author or not, are connected to the same narrative, either by reusing characters, continuing a storyline, or building upon a common fictional universe" (my translation). All subsequent translations of quotes in the footnotes are my own unless otherwise stated.

2. Correcting the Duchess: From Character to Author

The duchess is one of the central characters of Part II of *Don Quijote*. Together with her husband, she welcomes the knight and his squire into their palace in order to deceive them and ridicule their delusions. The duke and duchess's familiarity with Cervantes' text after reading Part I allows them to orchestrate a farce to laugh at Don Quijote since "con grandísimo gusto y con deseo de conocerle le atendían, con prosupuesto de seguirle el humor y conceder con él en cuanto les dijese, tratándole como a caballero andante" (Cervantes, 2015, 958).[2] Actually, the couple succeed in turning their guests into actors in a cruel performance and their castle into "a kind of laboratory where two poor souls, Don Quixote and Sancho, are vivisected," as Vladimir Nabokov artfully observes in his *Lectures on Don Quixote* (1983, 67), where he also characterizes the duke and duchess as "mere enchanters" and "two smiling tigers [who] purr and plot" (63), highlighting their deliberate abuse masked by humour. This work provides a close reading and analysis of Cervantes' novel where the ethical dimensions of Part II are examined, and where Nabokov argues that the aristocrats' amusement is far from harmless: they design elaborated humiliations that exploit the vulnerabilities of their guests, revealing a darker dimension within the Spanish text, in which the cruelty of the nobles signals their moral corruption (62-72).

However, even if both the duke and the duchess participate in the deceptions staged for the knight, the noblewoman is the one that theatrically directs them, making her the central architect of the farce. Hence, she emerges as malicious and clever because she knows to perfection Don Quijote and Sancho, their aspirations and their desires and, encouraged by an education and social position that enable her "to confine Don Quijote physically and impose her interpretations of literary texts on him and on others" (Triplette, 2018, 94), she decides to use her literary knowledge to manipulate them. Moreover, the duchess's intelligence and literacy make her uniquely dangerous since, as José María Paz Gago (2007) observes, her knowledge "le permite tratar a la andantesca pareja según aquellos arcaicos códigos literarios que don Quijote ha tomado como modelo para su conducta" (179).[3] Her power, therefore, lies in her interpretive authority, inspired by her role as reader: the duchess's mastery of literary codes grants her unusual control over the narrative, considering she is a female character within a literary and social tradition that typically relegates women to passive roles. Yet her power is exercised through cruelty (Cruz, 2009, 370; Friedman, 2009, 197) as in multiple occasions she delights in deception and the reader encounters her dying of laughter, or "perecida de risa" (Cervantes, 2015, 985), because she uses her intelligence to humiliate. Also, she is able to anticipate the knight and his squire's reactions based on what she has read, which provides the means to mislead them, ensuring their participation in her cunning performance.

For these reasons, the duchess of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* can be seen as intellectually superior, but emotionally deficient and it is this combination of wit and cruelty that seems to have inspired Robin Chapman to reimagine this character. In his novel *The Duchess's Diary* the protagonist acquires agency beyond the production of evil farses, becoming a subject and granting her with the sensitivity and personality she lacks in the original Spanish novel. Besides, the fact that Chapman's duchess is named could be considered the

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[2] "They welcomed [Don Quijote] with great enthusiasm and curiosity, choosing to support everything he said and treating him as though he truly was a knight-errant."

[3] "This enables her to engage with the knight and his squire according to the old-fashioned literary conventions that Don Quijote has adopted as the guiding principles of his behaviour."

writer's first step towards a more profound and humanised character. María Isabel (known as Maribel) is "a young woman who had unwittingly become the model of a person known only in her fictional form" and who "believed herself to have been recognizably misrepresented in the fiction" (Chapman, 1985, 7). This introduction of the protagonist (and writer) of this story shows the corrective ambition of Chapman's novel: a character previously considered cruel and heartless has been "deliberately chosen to demonstrate that she has feelings, that she bleeds when wounded" (Friedman, 2009, 199), and thus, that she possesses depth and vulnerability, that she is more than what has been publicly exposed about her.

One of the primary ways through which Chapman explores this humanity is Maribel's relationship with her husband. Through her diary, the reader witnesses a woman who is mistreated and relegated to a subordinate position, bringing to the fore the patriarchal norms of early modern Spain that considered women weak in body, mind and spirit (Bolufer, 2009; Smith, 2006). In line with this, the English author expands the brief mention in Cervantes' novel of the duchess's leg sores into a sustained motif of abuse, making visible the violence she endures, which was reduced to a passing detail in *Don Quijote*. In Part II, a servant confesses to the knight that the duchess undergoes a very common medical procedure of her time: "dos fuentes que tiene en las dos piernas, por donde se desagua todo el mal humor de quien dicen los médicos que está llena" (Cervantes, 2015, 1115).[4] In Chapman's novel, however, it is Maribel herself, speaking in third person, who discloses said information, regaining power over her wounds: "these open secrets which you've all whispered about, [her] indelible marks of chronic bad blood, she only appears sane in public, can only be kept quiet in private because she's drained continually of the melancholy, spleen, black bile poison of her innermost self" (Chapman, 1985, 13). As Edward Friedman (2009) observes, the duke's cruelty "gives Chapman the chance to scrutinize the conditions under which women, and notably married women, were forced to operate in early modern Spain" (203) and, in fact, the portrayal of this and other examples of violence in the novel help to underscore the systemic oppression of women while also allowing the duchess to emerge as a subject with agency. Additionally, the diary form intensifies this perspective because her private reflections reclaim her experience from the authority of both husband and society, and thus, this confessional quality elevates her from a mere participant in the duke's life into a narrative agent that critiques the social constraints of her time.

Chapman further develops Maribel's autonomy through her intellect and, more precisely, through her conversations with Cervantes himself, who appears as a character in the novel, establishing a rupture of the barrier between fact and fiction that emphasizes both the fictionality of what is considered real and the reality of what is considered fictional (Saint-Gelais, 2011, 234). The duchess is not only an avid reader, but also a perceptive critic, which makes these discussions very interesting since she offers her own insight. In her many talks with Cervantes, they often fall into literary discussions where she demonstrates that she can read critically, deciphering what is behind the writing process. She is even capable of anticipating the distorted portrayal of her that Cervantes will create because she knows that the writer "embellishes so much that after a while you cannot tell where reality ends and fiction begins" (Chapman, 1985, 52). As illustrated in the preceding example, the metatextual relationship between Chapman's novel and Cervantes' work seems obvious: both the duchess and the Spanish author in their meetings dissect the

[4] "Two streams running down her legs, carrying away the excess of whatever ill humour the doctors claim has built up inside her body."

novel in the same way as academics do in their critical analyses. Therefore, *The Duchess's Diary* "hace de la crítica literaria parte esencial del argumento y abunda en reflexiones sobre el quehacer del escritor" (Castells, 1998, 405),[5] it transforms literary criticism into narrative substance, into plot.

More importantly, Maribel's love for books is magnified by Chapman because his duchess transcends the role of reader into that of author. While Cervantes acts as a translator of lived experiences, the duchess takes up the pen to reclaim authorship of her own life. Her decision to write arises as both an act of necessity and resistance to confront the injustices she has suffered and the diary, then, becomes her instrument of survival and reflection since, in her words, "if you can look from a distance however short then you can understand and if you can understand then you are not mad" (Chapman, 1985, 43). By recording her story, then, Maribel gains agency and moves from passive subject to active creator, and she is even able to escape her oppressing husband initiating a symbolic and physical journey, after the publication of *Don Quijote Part II*. She decides to part all by herself with the aim of confronting Cervantes: the man who had been her friend and with whom she had shared long literary discussions had ultimately betrayed the duchess by reducing her to a caricature in the second part of his work. However, when she finally arrives at his door, he is already dead. Remarkably, the duchess seems to no longer need closure or recognition from him: she has now found peace in herself through her storytelling and no longer depends on a man (whether it is her husband or friend) or on the narratives they create about and around her, she even claims: "Each time I see the duchess mentioned my determination increases but I no longer feel desolated or outraged. My indignation is strong and coherent now" (101).

Through the process of writing, the duchess transcends her role as merely a wife and a character in someone else's fiction and becomes a writer. Consequently, *The Duchess's Diary* both develops and brings to the front her character and her journey from a silenced, misrepresented figure to an autonomous author. In doing so, it exemplifies the postmodern impulse to revise and revisit canonical texts, defined by Adrienne Rich (1972) as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18), offering new perspectives that challenge established narratives.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, *The Duchess's Diary* not only restores agency and voice to a character who was silenced and misunderstood in Cervantes' original novel, but also serves as a vivid example of how literature can question the boundaries between fact and fiction. In *Don Quijote*, the duchess is presented as cruel and evil because she deliberately uses her knowledge as reader of the first part of the Spanish work to create a farce with the only aim of ridiculing Don Quijote and Sancho. In Chapman's novel, through the act of writing her own diary, or what is the same, her own perspective of the story, her individuality is asserted, revealing a depth and agency that was entirely absent in her original portrayal. The choice in format allows her to reclaim authorship and correct the inaccuracies of Cervantes' novel: because her writing is established as intimate, reflective and subjective, it also creates a counter-narrative to the chronicle presented in *Don Quijote*.

[5] "[It] turns literary criticism into a central element of the narrative, while also offering insight into the art of writing."

Moreover, by engaging directly with its source text, *The Duchess's Diary* generates new layers of meaning and interpretation around Cervantes' most famous and internationally recognized novel. The various textual relationships that are created between both novels enable the exploration of the literary postmodern dialogue between different works as well as between different fictional levels. In this sense, Chapman's work could be analysed as a transfictional capture of *Don Quijote*, since it combines the reproduction of the Spanish duchess in a later text and the crossing or rupture of the fictional border between her and Cervantes. These connections exemplify not only the transformative and corrective power of postmodern fiction but also a sincere homage to previous literary works and their narrative strategies. Thus, Robin Chapman's *The Duchess's Diary*, by reclaiming the duchess's voice and reinterpreting her character, demonstrates that classic literature and, more precisely, Cervantes continues to live and evolve not as a static monument, but as a dynamic source of dialogue and reinvention that bridges past and present, and even fiction and reality.

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ROUND TABLES

T. S. Eliot, Verse Drama, and Plays by Poets at the Mercury Theatre

Antonio Ballesteros González, Natalia Carbajosa Palmero, Teresa Gibert & Dídac Llorens-Cubedo

UNED, Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena
aballesteros@flog.uned.es
natalia.carbajosa@upct.es
gibert@flog.uned.es
dllorens@flog.uned.es

Abstract

As a playwright, T. S. Eliot aimed to revive verse drama for contemporary audiences. *Murder in the Cathedral* was successfully produced at London's Mercury Theatre in 1935, inaugurating various seasons of "plays for poets," before and after the war. W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Anne Ridler, Norman Nicholson, Christopher Fry and Donagh MacDonagh wrote plays for the Mercury. They differ in their style and orientation, but they are indebted both to Eliot's ideal of a modern verse drama and to his early dramatic work.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, Contemporary Verse Drama, Influence, Mercury Theatre

1. Introduction

T. S. Eliot's criticism evidences a consistent interest in the concept of verse drama and its twentieth-century practice. He produced numerous essays on the topic —including "The Possibility of a Poetic Drama" (1920), "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (1928) and "Poetry and Drama" (1951)— where he discussed ritual and rhythm, the relationship between drama and other arts or forms of entertainment (ballet, music-hall, film), the traditions of Greek and Renaissance drama, the most suitable type of verse for contemporary audiences, or his own experience as a poet-playwright.

Twentieth-century verse-drama has produced scarce criticism. We should mention Donoghue's *The Third Voice* (1959) and Hinchcliffe's *Modern Verse Drama* (1977). More recently, Morra's *Verse Drama in England, 1900-2015* (2016) has connected the most significant contemporary verse plays with social developments, politics, religion, and music, and, in *Modernists and the Theatre* (2021), Moran has examined the tension between elitism and populism in Eliot's drama.

Eliot is a giant of twentieth-century poetry, but he also wrote seven plays, all staged: *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). His drama exerted a limited but significant influence. *Murder in the Cathedral* was first produced at Canterbury Cathedral and later transferred to Ashley Dukes's Mercury Theatre in London, where it enjoyed considerable success and

contributed to establishing the venue as a centre of contemporary verse drama regularly programming "plays by poets". Mercury Theatre patrons had the opportunity to see W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* (1937), Anne Ridler's *The Shadow Factory: A Nativity Play* (1945), Christopher Fry's *A Phoenix Too Frequent* (1946), Donagh MacDonagh's *Happy as Larry* (1946), and Norman Nicholson's *Old Man of the Mountains* (1947). To these forgotten plays we turn, with the aim of characterising and rediscovering the contemporary verse-drama movement in Britain[1].

2. Politics and Class

Auden and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* was directed by Rupert Doone, with music by Benjamin Britten. It was the second collaboration between the great writers, who composed an evocative text in the vein of Eliot's verse drama. The play focuses on the character of Ransom, a renowned climber. Like Eliot, the playwrights exploit the poetic connotations of the language of apparently unpoetic characters, such as Mr. and Mrs. A., whose discourse of people to whom nothing happens is reminiscent of the choruses in Eliot's *The Family Reunion*. The couple's cyclical interventions in verse underline the poetic capacity of everyday conversational speech. They use different varieties of poetry, sometimes with a tone and imagery evoking Eliot's.

The play also contains political connotations relating to British colonial politics and the conflict produced by the irrepressible appeal of glory, metaphorically connected with the ascent of F6, an almost inaccessible mountain, the epicentre of competition and ambition. There is a contrast between Ransom, a sort of redeemer of the popular classes, and Gunn, a character filled with colonialist prejudices. The play brings forth an ironic and unsustainable apology of England as a colonial superpower.

On a stage divided into two boxes, alternatively lit, the use of light creates an oneiric and haunting atmosphere. Eliot's influence can be perceived in this dramatic intimacy and some specific passages, such as the conversation between Ransom and the Abbot in Act II, Scene I, which reflects Becket's doubts, temptations and sense of fate in *Murder in the Cathedral*, a paradigm also suggested by the chorus containing demonic imagery, which takes the learned audience back to the Women of Canterbury's choruses in Eliot's masterpiece.

Be that as it may, it can overall be stated that the real protagonist of Auden and Isherwood's play is the flexible use of dramatic language, both in indistinct poetry and prose, inserted within the mainstream of that brief and climactic splendour of poetic drama produced at the Mercury Theatre.

3. Religion, Nature and Art

Among the verse plays premiered at the Mercury in 1945, Ridler's *The Shadow Factory* and Nicholson's *The Old Man of the Mountains* illustrate different ways of approaching both an aesthetic and a Christian ideal, with Eliot's example as a catalyst.

Ridler was mostly known as an editor for Eliot at Faber and Faber. *The Shadow Factory* opens in the expressionist, double setting of a drab factory where the director appears

[1] This contribution relates to the research project "Critical Reassessment of T. S. Eliot's Verse Drama: Influence, Evolution, and Perception" (TEATREL-IEP, PID2023-151837NB-I00).

detached from the "shadows," workers only perceptible behind a screen. The atmosphere is at the same time realistic and surreal, with a no-time, no-place air. The stage suggests the spiritual void of post-war London, especially regarding the female workers.reminiscent of *The Waste Land*'s typist—and their menial jobs. The wartime concept of "shadow industry" relates the play's aesthetic with a specific social situation which affected mainly women (Wasson, 2010, 104), and which is shown in the characters' verse. Moreover, the play depicts the physical and moral devastation of post-war civilization, as opposed to the hope for salvation that comes through art and religion.

Cumbrian-based nature poet Norman Nicholson wrote *The Old Man of the Mountains* under the influence of *Murder in the Cathedral.* Nicholson's play describes a biblical episode from the First Book of Kings. Elijah was a prophet who confronted King Ahab, performed a miracle by bringing a child back to life, and mediated with God to stop a persistent drought. Nicholson transplants the story and the characters almost literally to his native Cumbria, with some alterations: he adds two allegorical characters, the Raven and the Beck (a stream), who act as a solemn chorus and fill most of the verse parts, while realistic characters tend to speak in prose; he bestows more human qualities on Elijah than those of the biblical character by introducing self-doubt about his own powers; and he manages to turn the story into a plea against the industrialization of rural England, the greed that destroys traditional ways of living as well as the environment.

4. Love, Marriage, Death and Rebirth

In 1958, when Eliot was asked whether he considered that his writing had influenced Fry and other dramatists, he replied, "While modesty makes me reject any such claim, vanity makes me hope that it might be true" (qtd. in Matthews, 1974, 168). Both Fry and MacDonagh acknowledged Eliot as their predecessor, sought his literary advice (as attested by their correspondence), received his generous support, and enthusiastically contributed to his campaign to foster in the wider public a taste for verse drama. Their dramatic works were inspired by Eliot as practitioner and theorist of the genre, though they felt free not to adhere strictly to his views.

Fry's *A Phoenix Too Frequent* opened at the Mercury in April 1946, followed by MacDonagh's *Happy as Larry*, after its Dublin premiere. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, Fry and MacDonagh enjoyed critical, popular, and commercial success with two comedies dealing with love, marriage, death and rebirth.

A Phoenix Too Frequent features three characacters: the recently widowed Dynamene, her maidservant Doto, and a handsome soldier named Tegeus and renamed Chromis. Set in ancient Greece, but with a modern flavour, this amusing one-act comedy is based upon the short tale of "The Widow of Ephesus." In fact, instead of a misogynistic satire on the fickleness of women, Fry's rewriting of the story —first told by Petronius and retold in the seventeenth century by the divine Jeremy Taylor— is a celebration of love and an assertion of life's triumph over death. The play, written in blank verse, has been restaged on numerous occasions, its revivals including television adaptations in various countries.

MacDonagh chose the ballad meter to write *Happy as Larry*, his first and best-known play, a verse drama though not a poetic drama. Rather than seeking poetic effect, the Irish poet and playwright created an experimental farce written in "Dublin *patois*" (qtd. in Browne, 1957, 13) a clever satire rich in fantasy and crazy humour, offering a surreal comic world that draws on a rich web of intertextual references to expose human folly while affirming renewal and freedom.

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Naturalizing Violence: Types of Oppression in the American West

Irati Jiménez-Pérez, Adrián Arana-Armesto,
Naiara Berganzo-Besga & Tamara Rojo-Castro

University of the Basque Country (EHU)
irati.jimenez@ehu.eus
adrian.arana@ehu.eus
naiara.berganzo@ehu.eus
tamara.rojo@ehu.eus

Abstract

The American West has long constituted a mythic framework shaping narratives of conquest, heroism and expansion. This roundtable interrogates its ideological foundations by examining how cultural productions have normalized interconnected forms of oppression based on race, gender, species, and environment. Drawing on ecocriticism, animal studies, Gothic studies and feminist theory, the contributors analyze canonical and postcanonical Western texts, landscape aesthetics, multispecies representations and Hollywood cinema. From ecological devastation in nineteenth-century frontier narratives to the Gothic haunting of colonial landscapes, from the symbolic reconfiguration of nonhuman animals within settler colonial ideology to the stereotyping of Latinx women on screen, this discussion exposes how cultural forms have reflected and produced systems of domination. By foregrounding intersectional and transnational perspectives, it reconsiders the Western as a contested cultural space and calls for more ethical, inclusive, multispecies reimaginings of the American West.

Keywords: American West, Settler Colonialism, Ecocriticism, Animal Studies, Feminist Theory

1. Introduction

The American West occupies a central place in the cultural imagination. Often mythologized as a space of rugged individualism, infinite opportunity and heroic conquest, it has also been used as fertile ground for narratives that romanticize expansion and reinforce colonial ideologies, which ultimately naturalize systematic forms of oppression. This roundtable seeks to critically examine the multiple layers of oppression embedded in the cultural productions of the American West, focusing particularly on how these works have historically marginalized or exploited certain bodies and voices, both human and nonhuman. Our shared aim for this roundtable is to dismantle the persistent myths surrounding the American West by highlighting how race, gender, species and the environment have been represented to serve settler colonial and patriarchal enterprises.

2. Violence, Eco-Injustice, and Gender Subversion in Revisionist Westerns

The first speaker examines the violence towards women, nature and non-human animals in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, applying

gender studies and an ecocriticism. Both novels, written in 1985 and set in the nineteenth-century American West offer the opportunity to examine the interplay among history, cultural myths, and social structures, deconstructing romanticized frontier narratives to expose the atrocities against women and the natural world.

From an ecocritical perspective, the study traces a movement from first-wave environmental focus to second-wave social critique, particularly eco-injustice. It analyzes the symbolic roles of buffalo, antelope, dogs, and wolves, showing how the murder and disappearance of iconic species reflect ecological and cultural transformation. Buffalo hunting is presented as a nostalgic yet destructive practice emblematic of human greed and irreversible ecological loss; the replacement of buffalo by antelope underscores a failure to learn from past devastation. Both authors highlight exploitative resource practices and stress the need for an ethical recognition of the intrinsic value of all living beings.

Finally, the speaker examines McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* and the previously mentioned works applying Toril Moi, Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theories. This approach reveals how both authors critique hegemonic gender roles, subvert canonical Western conventions, and empower women characters. Employing an intersectional lens attentive to race and class, the paper argues that especially McMurtry challenges patriarchal systems and contributes to a revisionist transformation of the genre.

3. The American (Frontier) Gothic: Dismantling the Colonial, Oppressive, and Exploitative Patriarchy in the American Frontier

The second speaker explores how American Frontier landscapes, from an ecofeminist and ecoGothic standpoint, reveal the role of colonial patriarchy in the exploitation and degradation of the female, racialized, and bestialized body and the natural environment. These landscapes also register the experience of women and other minorities under the violent structures of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal society. Drawing from Indian captivity narratives, Puritan narratives, slave narratives, and Western and Post-Western stories, the study offers a brief historical overview of the evolution of the American Gothic, emphasizing the Frontier Gothic and the American West. As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds well explains, "frontier Gothic texts are those that invoke uncanny fear or terror through the active participation of their wilderness, or liminal, or borderland settings. […] those settings so unsettled and unsettling—their locations [being] haunted by their histories" (2017, 128), an approach especially relevant to U.S. history.

Susan Kollin notes that "the popular Western emerged in the nineteenth century and developed out of the dime-novel tradition, which provided the formula for its plots and characters. The stories were usually situated in lands that extend west of the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast and typically took place between 1865 and 1900, roughly the time Turner set as the closing of the frontier" (2016, 5). Nevertheless, as many new Western and Post-Western scholars have indicated, there are many "problems and limits [with] Turner's frontier thesis," as well as with the ensuing American Western Frontier Myth (Kollin, 2016, 7). As it happens, Turner's contention ultimately fails to offer a cohesive, inclusive, and integrative framework for U.S. history, as its focus on English American settlers overlooks the Gothic histories of Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and women of all cultural backgrounds (Lemerick qtd. in Kollin, 2016, 7).

Adopting an ecofeminist and ecoGothic standpoint, this paper argues that analyzing Gothic landscapes in representative postcolonial works reveals, denounces, and resists the violent

structures of colonial and capitalist patriarchy, foregrounding the interconnection between Gothic bodies and their environments.

4. Nonhuman Animal Oppression in the American West

The third speaker argues that nonhuman animal oppression was central to the settler colonial project, materially enacted and ideologically entrenched through cultural production. Drawing on animal studies, ecocriticism, and oppression studies, the paper examines how the settler's imaginary reconfigured nonhuman animal life—its meanings, uses, and representations—to reinforce colonial hierarchies and legitimize Manifest Destiny.

While many Native American cosmologies understood nonhuman animals as kin and spiritual agents, settler ideologies redefined them as property, resources, and symbols of wilderness to be tamed. This ontological rupture paralleled and reinforced the domination of Indigenous peoples and land. Cultural works naturalized this shift. In literature, Owen Wister and Zane Grey romanticized the cowboy ethos, depicting nonhuman animals as loyal tools or obstacles, whereas Willa Cather offered more nuanced, though still settler-framed, representations.

Painting by Frederic Remington and Charles Marion Russell portrayed conquest scenes in which nonhuman animals appeared as threats or trophies. Photography contributed to this mythos: Edward S. Curtis exoticized Native relationships with nonhuman animals, while William Henry Jackson depicted landscapes and animals emptied of original inhabitants. Entertainment spectacles such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West show dramatized domination over bulls, horses, and buffalo as civilizational triumph. Early cinema, including *The Vanishing American* (1925) and *Stagecoach* (1939), aligned nonhuman animal imagery with frontier progress.

These cultural forms not only reflected but produced settler ideology, redefining nonhuman animals to justify exploitation as natural, inevitable, and heroic. Recognizing this entanglement is essential for dismantling settler myths and imagining ethical, multispecies futures.

5. The Difficulty of Changing Hollywood's Oppressive Stereotypes of Latinx Women Characters

The fourth speaker addresses Hollywood's stereotypical representations of Latinx women, shaped by the male gaze and colonial nostalgia. Within the myth of the American West as conquest and rugged individualism, Latinx women have been cast as alluring and dangerous, echoing colonial fantasies of the exotic "other." This paper analyzes the persistent "spitfire" trope—hypersexual, volatile, and fiery—as a mechanism of systemic oppression shaping perceptions on and off screen.

Through a historical overview grounded in Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, this paper examines how mainstream cinema has constructed and sustained stereotypical images of Latinx women from the 1920s to the present day. Early stars such as Dolores del Río and Lupe Vélez were confined to roles that emphasized exoticism and erotic appeal, reinforcing fantasies deeply tied to the colonial past of the American West. In the 1930s to 1950s, actresses like Carmen Miranda were further typecast as hypersexual and emotionally erratic figures. Even when figures like Rita Moreno emerged in the 1960s to challenge these norms, they remained limited by the narrow roles Hollywood allowed.

The 1970s and 1980s saw these patterns continue, especially as the American film industry responded to economic pressures by relying on familiar stereotypes. Latinx women were depicted as seductresses or threats—characters whose desirability was often juxtaposed with their supposed unpredictability. This narrative directly mirrors the legacy of the American West mythos, where Latinx women were exoticized and framed as obstacles to white male dominance.

While the 1990s and 2000s introduced globally recognized figures like Jennifer Lopez, Salma Hayek, and Sofía Vergara, their success came with persistent objectification. Their ethnic features, accents, and sensuality became markers of "otherness," continuing a legacy of fetishization rather than celebration. These portrayals, though seemingly glamorous, uphold an enduring cinematic bias.

Beyond the screen, these myths manifest as real-world consequences: shaping beauty standards, contributing to workplace discrimination, and exacerbating mental health struggles among young Latinx women. This paper argues that the myth of the American West remains embedded in Hollywood's representation of Latinx women, and until it is fully dismantled, the oppressive legacy of these stereotypes will continue to echo through both media and society.

6. Conclusion

The contributions for this roundtable have revealed that the conceptions and myths related to the American West have long depended on intertwined systems of oppression that have shaped depictions of race, gender, species and the environment. Through the analysis of different cultural formats such as literature, film, photography, painting and popular entertainment through feminist, ecocritical, gothic, postcolonial and animal studies perspectives, this roundtable has exposed how these cultural productions have legitimized violence, exploitation and exclusion and, consequently, have naturalized settler colonial and patriarchal ideologies. Moreover, these contributions have also demonstrated the potential of revisionist and critical approaches to challenge dominant frontier myths, recover marginalized voices and bodies and imagine more ethical, inclusive and multispecies methods of understanding the American West and its cultural legacy.

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Part II

Language and Linguistics

A Corpus-Based Study of Ellipsis Patterns in Conjoined Wh-Questions in English

Marian Alves-Castro

University of the Basque Country (EHU)
marian.alves@ehu.eus

Abstract

This study investigates three ellipsis patterns in coordinated wh-questions in English, assumed to be underlyingly biclausal: backward ellipsis (*When and where will you meet Peter?*), forward ellipsis (*When will you meet Peter, and where?*), and across-the-board ellipsis (*They will meet Peter, but I don't know when and where*). Focusing on the presence of argumental wh-phrases, the analysis draws on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and combines close qualitative inspection with relative frequency counts. The aim is to identify potential asymmetries in how wh-arguments are distributed across these three constructions. The observed patterns receive a natural explanation under an incremental processing account: ellipsis configurations that do not require the processor to revise the syntactic structure or the argument relations established earlier in the sentence impose a coger processing burden and are therefore more frequently attested. These findings point to a systematic link between ellipsis type, argument presence, and processing load, and they motivate future experimental work.

Keywords: Coordinated wh-Questions, Ellipsis, Argument Structure, Incremental Processing, Corpus Linguistics

1. Introduction

Example (1) below illustrates three ellipsis patterns in coordinated wh-questions in English: ellipsis in the first conjunct (1a), the second (1b), or both (1c). Strikethrough marks elided material.

(1) a. [$_{CP}$ when ~~will you meet Peter~~] and [$_{CP}$ where will you meet Peter] (backward ellipsis, BE)
b. [$_{CP}$ when will you meet Peter] and [$_{CP}$ where ~~will you meet Peter~~] (forward ellipsis, FE)
c. They will meet Peter, but I don't know [$_{CP}$ when ~~they will meet Peter~~] and [$_{CP}$ where ~~they will meet Peter~~] (Across-the-board ellipsis, ATB-E)

These three constructions have received uneven attention in the literature. While conjoined wh-questions (CWHs) of the type illustrated in (1a) have been widely discussed (see Gračanin-Yüksek 2017 for an overview), the construction in (1b) is typically subsumed under discussions of CWHs, and that in (1c) has largely been examined in the context of sluicing with multiple remnants (Barros, 2014; Richards, 2001).

Following standard assumptions for single-fronting languages like English, I analyze CWHs as biclausal constructions (Lipták, 2012; Gračanin-Yuksek, 2017). This analysis is widely accepted for cases like (1b). In the literature, a parallelism is typically drawn between (1b) and (1a), which are analyzed as sharing an underlying biclausal structure and differing only in the directionality of the ellipsis operation. Two primary arguments support this

clausal architecture over a wh-phrase-coordination account (the latter typically reserved for multiple-fronting languages). First, the degraded status of examples such as **What and to whom did you give?* follows naturally if each conjunct is a separate clause leaving a different argument position unrealized (**What did you give?* and **To whom did you give?*); by contrast, simple wh-phrase coordination would not predict this selectional restriction. Second, sentences like *What and when did you eat?* license the so-called *at-all* reading (i.e., "What did you eat, and when did you eat at all?"). As Gračanin-Yuksek (2007) argues, the unavailability of the *it*-reading (where the second conjunct is interpreted as "when did you eat it?") suggests that each wh-phrase heads its own CP with an independent event structure. I extend the biclausal-plus-ellipsis analysis to (1c).

Turning to the status of wh-phrases, Lipták (2012) observes that wh-adjuncts occur naturally in CWHs of the type in (1a). However, wh-arguments (roughly, subjects and direct and indirect objects) are not universally accepted; among the speakers who do permit them, acceptance is restricted to arguments of optionally transitive predicates (i.e., those that allow for implicit arguments). Building on this observation, the present analysis adopts an exploratory approach that pays particular attention to the presence of argumental wh-phrases and combines qualitative examination with descriptive quantitative observations based on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, Davies, 2008-). The main aim is to identify recurring patterns, relative frequencies, and asymmetries across the constructions, without formal statistical modeling, and to highlight tendencies that can motivate future, more systematic work.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces the corpus study: a description of the methodology (2.1) is followed by the presentation and discussion of the results (2.2). Section 3 presents the conclusions.

2. The Corpus Study

2.1. Methodology

Using the search tool on COCA, I looked for the sequences in (2).

(2) a. and {when/where/why/how}{.|?}
b. and {what/who(m)/to who(m)}{.|?}

The strings considered relevant were formed by the conjunction *and,* and a wh-word from the sets in (2a) and (2b) followed by period or question mark, as these punctuation marks may be used to signal the end of a question. Importantly, punctuation is not treated here as an independent pragmatic variable, but as a corpus-based diagnostic for the structural position of the wh-phrase.

Concordance lines for each search string were manually filtered. Tokens were coded as relevant only if (i) they contained the wh-words in (2), excluding cases with complex wh-phrases (e.g., *how much/many*, *how often*, *in what ways*, *what kind of*, etc.), and (ii) they functioned as genuine interrogatives seeking an explanation linked to a preceding discourse unit. Tokens were excluded if used rhetorically or metalinguistically, or if *and* functioned as a turn-initial filler or hesitation marker rather than a discourse connective. Borderline cases, including sentences of dubious grammaticality, were conservatively excluded.

The figures in Table 1 below show that there is a clear frequency imbalance between adjunct and argument sequences, the former occurring far more often than the latter. Similarly, it is observed that adjunct sequences tend to occur more frequently with a period

than with a question mark, suggesting greater use in embedded contexts, something that has also been observed for BE in the literature (Lipták, 2012; Gračanin-Yuksek, 2017; Alves-Castro & Garcia-Palomino, 2026). Argument sequences, on the other hand, show a less clear preference for a punctuation mark over the other.

Table 1

Relevant tokens for all the sequences under study

wh2=adjunct	Relevant tokens	wh2= argument	Relevant tokens
and why?	638	and what.	7
and why.	852	and what?	0
and where?	94	and who.	5
and where.	113	and who?	8
and when?	132	and whom.	1
and when.	293	and whom?	0
and how?	120	and to who(m).	34
and how.	180	and to who(m)?	16

The virtual absence of *whom* likely reflects its scarcity in American English. Similarly, while a search for the sequence [*and what?*] returned 530 concordance lines, none were relevant; its high frequency in the corpus is primarily due to its use as a rhetorical device. In contrast, sequences with *why* are significantly more frequent than those involving other wh-adjuncts. This prevalence likely stems from pragmatic reasons, as the need to ask why something occurs is a common communicative function, resulting in a much higher number of these cases in the corpus.

2.2. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the frequencies for FE and ATB-E patterns when wh2 is an adjunct separately.

Table 2

Relevant examples (FE and ATB-E; wh2=adjunct)

wh2=adjunct	Tokens FE	% in the dataset	Tokens ATB-E	% in the dataset
and why?	*571*	*89.50*	*67*	*10.50*
and why.	790	92.72	62	7.28
and where?	*44*	*46.81*	*50*	*53.19*
and where.	62	54.87	51	45.13
and when?	85	64.40	47	35.60
and when.	*226*	*77.13*	*67*	*22.87*
and how?	78	65.00	42	35.00
and how.	*135*	*75.00*	*45*	*25.00*

With the exception of [*and where*] sequences, where the two patterns show similar frequencies, the FE pattern is notably more prevalent. Given that the three ellipsis patterns under study are strongly influenced by discourse and pragmatic factors, comparable frequencies were not necessarily expected. Accordingly, the relatively low number of attested cases of ATB-E should not be straightforwardly interpreted as evidence of its marginality, but may instead reflect the more constrained discourse and structural environments in which it tends to occur. I will now consider the FE pattern in some more detail and turn to the ATB-E pattern below.

In sentences involving FE and an adjunct wh2, the first wh-phrase (wh1) may function as either an adjunct or an argument. Consequently, the constructions will display adjunct-only, (3), or mixed coordination, (4). Table 3 summarizes the distribution of these two patterns across the datasets.

(3) a. and knows when a preacher stumbles in prayer, and why. (FIC 1994)
b. when you plan to achieve it, and how. (BLOG 2012)

(4) a. But who is going to command all these forces, and how? (SPOK 1991)
b. What can my baby eat and when? (WEB 2012)

Table 3

Status of wh1 (FE pattern; wh2=adjunct)

	wh1=arg. (mixed)	%	wh1=adjunct (adjunct-only)	%
and why?	*468*	*81.96*	*103*	*18.04*
and why.	676	85.57	114	14.43
and where?	26	59.10	18	40.90
and where.	*43*	*69.35*	*19*	*30.65*
and when?	63	74.10	22	25.90
and when.	*181*	*80.09*	*45*	*19.91*
and how?	62	79.49	16	20.51
and how.	119	88.15	16	11.85

In this pattern, mixed coordination clearly outnumbers adjunct-only coordination. The proportional difference between adjunct and mixed patterns is large across sequences, except for [*and where?*], where the counts are closer. This contrasts sharply with the BE pattern, in which adjunct-only sequences overwhelmingly predominate over mixed and argument-only configurations (see Lipták, 2012; Gračanin-Yuksek, 2017; Alves-Castro & Garcia-Palomino, 2026).

The results in Table 3 suggest not only a preference for FE when an argument is questioned, but also a preference for placing the wh-argument in the wh1 position. This is further supported by the relative scarcity of tokens in which wh2 functions as an argument, (5), (Table 4).

(5) a. … (when it is okay to kill in warfare? and who?) (FIC 2002)
b. I must carefully consider my responsibilities in deciding what I will disclose and to whom. (ACAD 2010)

Table 4

Status of wh1 (forward ellipsis; wh2=argument)[1]

wh2	wh1=adj. (mixed)	%	wh1=arg. (argument-only)	%	Total
and what.	1	100	0	0	1
and who.	2	50	2	50	4
and who?	2	100	0	0	2
and to who(m).	13	42	18	58	31
and to who(m)?	4	27	11	73	15

As shown, *what* and *who(m)* are rare or absent, while the PP *to who(m)* is more frequent. In all relevant examples, the wh-argument preceding the ellipsis site (wh2) is optional in the relevant sense, confirming previous observations. This restricts the constructions to predicates that can license an additional argument without prior commitment, while predicates with fixed or saturated argument structures strongly resist them, explaining the marginality of argumental wh-phrases in this position.

The rarity of such cases therefore reflects not an accidental gap in the corpus, but a structural incompatibility between argument selection and the incremental licensing conditions imposed by the construction, an incompatibility that may be further reinforced by processing considerations, as will be seen later.

Turning to the ATB-E pattern, where ellipsis applies to both conjuncts and leaves only the coordinated wh-phrases overt, (6) gives examples with two adjuncts and (7) with mixed coordination.

(6) a. Do they make mistakes? When and why? (BLOG 2012)
b. that Suharto has to go. It's only a matter of how and when. (SPOK 1998)

(7) a. Should I confess myself of such a dream? And to whom and when? (FIC 1997)
b. A cop's been shot. (sighs) Who and where? (TV 2014)

Table 5 shows the results returned by the corpus search for this pattern when wh2 is an adjunct.

[1] In all tables, sequences with total 0 are omitted. Sequences with very small counts (N<10) are reported descriptively.

Table 5

Relevant examples (ATB ellipsis; wh2=adjunct)

wh2=adjunct	wh1=argument (mixed)	%	wh1=adjunct (adjunct-only)	%
and why?	27	40.30	40	59.70
and why.	20	32.26	42	67.74
and where?	8	16.00	42	84.00
and where.	3	5.90	48	94.10
and when?	6	12.76	41	87.24
and when.	7	10.45	60	89.55
and how?	6	14.30	36	85.70
and how.	6	13.33	39	86.67

Overall, combinations in which both wh1 and wh2 are adjuncts clearly outnumber those where wh1 functions as an argument. This predominance is consistent across sequences and aligns the pattern more closely with BE while distinguishing it from the FE pattern.

Table 6 below shows even lower counts when wh2 is an argument; given the small numbers involved, these results are best treated as suggestive rather than conclusive.

Table 6

Relevant examples (ATB ellipsis; wh2=argument)

	wh1=adjunct (mixed)	%	wh1=argument (arg-only)	%	Total
and what.	5	83.3	1	16.7	6
and who.	3	75.0	1	25.0	4
and who?	8	100.0	0	0.0	8
and whom.	1	100.0	0	0.0	1
and to who(m).	3	100.0	0	0.0	3
and to who(m)?	1	100.0	0	0.0	1

The presence and distribution of wh-arguments in the three constructions just presented may be explained (at least in part) as arising from differences in processing difficulty. Table 7 below summarizes the processing expectations for the three patterns of ellipsis under investigation, considering the status of the two wh-phrases as either arguments or adjuncts in all the possible combinations (4 in total). Configurations expected to be more demanding for the processor are marked with a '$', while those anticipated to be relatively easy to process are marked with a '✓'. This coding allows for a direct comparison of relative processing difficulty and its potential influence on argument realization across the different ellipsis patterns and argument positions.

Table 7

Processing cost across ellipsis patterns

Possible combinations	BE	FE	ATB-E
wh1(adj)-wh2(adj)	✓	✓	✓
wh1(adj)-wh2(arg)	$	$	$
wh1(arg)-wh2(adj)	$	✓	
wh1(arg)-wh2(arg)	$	$	$

Sentences that can be processed incrementally are expected to impose a coger processing load on the system. In incremental processing, syntactic structure is built and interpreted online, and speakers and hearers commit to representations as early as possible (Levelt, 1989; Bock, 1995; Purver *et al.,* 2004; Baumann, 2021). Given this, coordinated wh-adjuncts are not expected to increase processing load in any of the ellipsis patterns under study because their interpretation does not create additional dependencies or retrieval costs beyond those already present in the argument structure. In other words, their optional status makes them more tolerant of delayed interpretation. Consequently, these constructions tend to be more widely accepted by speakers and appear more frequently in the corpus.

Concerning mixed patterns, constructions that allow arguments to be integrated immediately, such as the mixed FE pattern with wh1 as an argument, (4) above, are also relatively easy to process, which may explain the preference for this ellipsis pattern over BE when arguments are questioned. This preference can therefore be understood as reflecting general pressures toward incremental satisfaction of argument structure. This contrast between FE and BE thus aligns with independently motivated processing asymmetries between arguments and adjuncts in online sentence planning and interpretation (e.g., Levelt, 1989; Hawkins, 2004).

On the other hand, the low frequency of the FE configuration with an argument as wh2, (5a), may be explained again as a violation of incremental processing, as the verb's argument appears only after the first conjunct has been processed. The processor must re-evaluate the partially built event and revise earlier structural commitments, incurring a processing cost. Obviously, the same problem arises in the case of the coordination of two arguments. However, it must be noted that, when arguments are not so tightly tied to the predicate's argument structure (as is the case of optional arguments), the need for reanalysis is reduced. This also explains why in the corpus *to whom* occurs as wh2 in FE more frequently than other arguments, (5b).

In BE, the interpretation of the first conjunct can only be completed once material in the second conjunct is encountered, (8). This entails a form of non-incremental processing, since crucial information needed to identify the role of wh1, particularly when it is an argument, is deferred. Delayed licensing of arguments is known to incur higher processing costs, as mentioned above. As a result, BE is less compatible with wh-arguments, while remaining relatively acceptable with adjuncts.

(8) What and where did you eat? vs. Where and what did you eat?

Something similar happens in the case of the ATB-E pattern, (7). Even though the elided material is readily accessible in the preceding discourse, the presence of adjuncts remains

unproblematic whereas the presence of arguments gives rise to patterns similar to those found in BE. Incremental processing predicts difficulty because the parser must keep two wh-fillers active with no overt structure to attach them to, and only resolves their roles retroactively. When the wh-phrase is an argument, the processor will have to revise an already settled representation (the antecedent clause) in order to be able to link the wh-phrase to an argument position in the recovered TP.

3. Conclusion

Drawing on data from COCA and previous research on BE, this study has explored three ellipsis patterns in conjoined wh-questions in English, with a particular focus on the presence of arguments in these constructions. The analysis revealed differences in frequency across the patterns and an irregular distribution of arguments. In general, constructions that combine maximal structural identity with minimal processing effort are favored. Among the patterns examined, those involving the coordination of wh-adjuncts align most closely with this description.

Processing effort was measured in terms of compliance with incremental processing. Thus, the observed distribution of wh-arguments can be naturally accounted for by incremental processing: configurations that allow ellipsis to be resolved through straightforward structural reuse, without requiring revision of previously established argument relations, are more easily produced and comprehended, and consequently more frequently attested in corpus data. A clear correlation emerges between the frequency of the different ellipsis patterns, the presence of arguments, and their associated processing costs.

The natural next step is to test this hypothesis experimentally, providing a more direct assessment of how processing constraints shape argument realization in ellipsis constructions.

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The Role of Metalinguistic Explanation in Grammar Acquisition: A Quasi-Experimental Study

Elina Gatina & Isabel Oltra-Massuet

Universitat Rovira i Virgili
elina.gatina@estudiants.urv.cat
isabel.oltra@urv.cat

Abstract

Metalinguistic Explanation (ME)—the explicit articulation of grammatical rules in language instruction—has long been associated with metalinguistic knowledge and awareness, yet its precise contribution to grammar learning remains underexplored. Although major SLA frameworks, including Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, Swain's (2006) Output Hypothesis, DeKeyser's (2003) Skill Acquisition Theory, and Ellis's (1994) Interface Hypothesis, support the role of ME in grammar acquisition, studies rarely isolate its specific impact in formal secondary education. This quasi-experimental study addresses that gap by examining whether ME, independently of input quantity, task type, and instructional time, enhances grammar acquisition among two *Bachillerato* groups (N=46). The experimental group received explicit ME-based grammar instruction, while the control group followed an input-based approach. Repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect, with only the ME group demonstrating substantial gains in accuracy. These findings provide contextually grounded evidence for the effectiveness of ME-driven explicit grammar instruction in secondary EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Grammar, Explicit Instruction, Metalinguistic Explanation, Metalinguistic Knowledge, Metalinguistic Awareness

1. Introduction

Metalinguistic Explanation (ME) refers to the explicit articulation of linguistic rules during language instruction (Shintani and Ellis, 2013). By making form–meaning relationships transparent, ME aims to support learners' conscious engagement with grammar. It is closely associated with two central constructs in second language acquisition (SLA): metalinguistic knowledge, understood as explicit rule-based understanding of grammar (Andrews, 2007), and metalinguistic awareness, the capacity to consciously notice and regulate language use (Gombert, 1992; Bialystok, 2001). Following Ellis (2004), the present study conceptualizes metalinguistic knowledge as declarative understanding and metalinguistic awareness as reflective control over linguistic form, treating ME as an instructional tool that activates both.

Recent empirical research has renewed interest in the pedagogical potential of ME, showing that explicit metalinguistic instruction can enhance grammatical accuracy and promote engagement with form, particularly when integrated into meaningful communicative tasks (e.g., Shintani *et al.,* 2016; Bozorgian and Yazdani, 2021; Delgado-Garza and García Mayo, 2025). However, most studies have been conducted with adult or university-level learners and frequently center on written corrective feedback.

Comparatively little is known about how adolescent EFL learners in secondary school contexts respond to ME during oral grammar instruction, or about its impact on specific grammatical targets.

This gap is especially relevant in the case of English gerunds and infinitives, a well-documented source of difficulty due to irregular verb complementation patterns. In input-rich yet time-constrained classrooms, learners may not encounter these forms with sufficient clarity or frequency to internalize them without explicit support. Despite their complexity, few classroom-based studies have systematically examined the role of ME in facilitating their acquisition at the secondary level.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the effect of ME on the acquisition of English gerunds and infinitives among adolescent EFL learners in a formal secondary school setting. By isolating ME as an instructional variable and measuring its impact on a specific grammatical target within a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design, the study provides focused classroom-based evidence on the role of explicit metalinguistic instruction in communicative grammar teaching and contributes to ongoing discussions on the interface between explicit knowledge and grammatical performance.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Metalinguistic Explanation

Building on the conceptualization of ME introduced above, this section situates metalinguistic explanation within broader theoretical discussions on explicit knowledge and grammar development, focusing on how it operates cognitively and instructionally in second language learning.

Although metalinguistic knowledge and metalinguistic awareness are analytically distinguishable, research suggests that in classroom settings they function along a continuum of conscious linguistic processing (Jessner, 2008; Roehr-Brackin, 2018). When learners articulate rules, justify choices, or respond to metalinguistic prompts, declarative understanding and reflective control interact dynamically. ME can therefore be understood as a pedagogical trigger for this interaction.

Several SLA frameworks support the pedagogical value of ME. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) posits that conscious attention is essential for input to become intake; ME increases the salience of grammatical features that might otherwise remain peripheral in meaning-focused interaction. Swain's Output Hypothesis (2006) further emphasizes the role of production in prompting analytical reflection, particularly when learners are required to explain or reformulate their linguistic choices. DeKeyser's Skill Acquisition Theory (2003) highlights that declarative knowledge acquired via ME can be proceduralized through repeated practice. Complementary perspectives from Input Processing Theory (VanPatten, 2002) and dynamic grammar models (Larsen-Freeman, 2015) indicate that ME is most effective when embedded in meaningful communicative contexts.

Empirical studies corroborate these theoretical claims. ME improves explicit grammatical knowledge and accuracy across age groups and contexts. Shintani and Ellis (2013) found that written ME enhanced learners' explicit knowledge of articles. Bozorgian and Yazdani (2021) reported better long-term accuracy in high-school EFL learners receiving ME-based corrective feedback. Recent research with younger learners and task-based contexts confirms that ME facilitates noticing, reflection, and the transition from declarative to

procedural knowledge (Ryu and Choi, 2024; Fiorenza and Travers, 2024; Delgado-Garza and García Mayo, 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that ME, when systematically applied, can effectively support the acquisition of challenging grammatical structures in secondary education.

2.2. Teaching Gerunds and Infinitives with ME

Gerunds and infinitives constitute a particularly suitable domain for examining the effects of ME. Their complexity derives from lexically constrained verb complementation patterns and subtle semantic contrasts (e.g., *stop doing* vs. *stop to do*), as well as their distribution across multiple syntactic environments. Because these forms are only partially predictable and often low in perceptual salience, learners may struggle to derive stable generalizations from exposure alone.

Explicit instruction has been shown to be especially beneficial for grammatical features that require restructuring rather than simple lexical expansion (DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2008). ME supports learners in categorizing verb classes, articulating semantic distinctions, and applying rule-based reasoning across contexts. Empirical research focusing specifically on gerunds and infinitives reinforces this rationale. Ruiz (2023) reported significant gains among secondary EFL learners engaged in ME-based tasks such as collaborative rule formulation and guided error analysis. Yamazaki (2018) observed that peer-led form-meaning mapping activities enhanced Japanese learners' grammatical judgment and accuracy. Loewen, Erlam, and Ellis (2009) and Lyster and Saito (2010) showed that explicit instruction promotes better long-term retention of complex verbal complementation, especially for forms that lack salience or do not reliably emerge from input alone.

Despite growing evidence supporting explicit grammar instruction, relatively few studies have isolated ME as the primary instructional variable in curriculum-embedded secondary classrooms targeting a comprehensive range of gerund and infinitive structures (Shintani and Ellis, 2013; Roehr-Brackin and Tellier, 2019). By examining ME within a quasi-experimental secondary setting, the present study contributes focused evidence to ongoing discussions on the relationship between explicit knowledge and grammatical performance.

3. The Study

This study evaluates the effectiveness of ME in improving grammatical accuracy in a secondary school EFL context, focusing on the instruction of English gerunds and infinitives. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study systematically compares two instructional conditions by manipulating the presence of metalinguistic explanation (ME), contrasting an ME-based instructional condition (experimental group) with an input-only condition (control group). The study addresses the following research question:

— **RQ:** Does metalinguistic explanation enhance students' grammatical accuracy in the use of gerunds and infinitives?

- **H1:** Students receiving ME will outperform those receiving input-only instruction in tasks targeting gerunds and infinitives.
- **H0:** No significant difference will be found between groups.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at Lestonnac L'Ensenyança (Tarragona, Spain) by the first author. Participants were two intact Bachillerato Year 1 classes (ages 16-17, n = 46) following the same syllabus, with productive proficiency estimated at B2 level. Although students had previously encountered gerunds and infinitives, this was the first systematic treatment of these structures during the academic year.

4.2. Design, Procedure and Instruments

This study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design to examine the effect of metalinguistic explanation (ME) on learners' accuracy in the use of English gerunds and infinitives. For this purpose, the two intact classes were randomly assigned to an experimental group (n = 22) and a control group (n = 24).

Both groups participated in a 60-minute lesson structured as follows: pre-test (10 minutes), input phase (20 minutes), text-based activity (10 minutes), free production task (10 minutes), and post-test (10 minutes). Instructional time, lexical content, and task sequence were identical across groups, with the only independent variable being the presence (experimental group) or absence (control group) of explicit metalinguistic explanation.

The instructional target comprised gerunds and infinitives across contexts covered in Unit 10 of *Gateway C1*, including verb complementation, gerunds after prepositions, infinitives after adjectives, and infinitives of purpose. To ensure controlled exposure, both groups worked exclusively with printed materials and had no access to the coursebook.

During the input phase, the experimental group received a structured rule summary explicitly explaining gerund and infinitive use, including metalinguistic terminology and students generated their own examples to reinforce rule internalization. In contrast, the control group completed parallel exercises covering the same verbs and structures in the same sequence, but without rule explanation or grammatical terminology; verb forms were provided, and learners reconstructed sentences using contextual cues.

In the subsequent text-based phase, the experimental group completed a gap-fill task requiring selection of gerund or infinitive forms, whereas the control group read the same text in completed form and focused on meaning comprehension through discussion, without manipulating forms. Both groups then engaged in a pair-based interview task designed to elicit oral production of target structures, with no corrective feedback provided.

Grammatical accuracy was measured through a 15-item open-ended sentence completion task administered as both pre-test and post-test. Instructions avoided metalinguistic terminology, asking students simply to complete sentences with a verb of their choice, covering the full range of gerund and infinitive structures addressed during instruction. To ensure clarity and validity, the test was reviewed by five experienced native English-speaking teachers. All tests were completed individually under timed conditions (10 minutes), and responses were later analyzed for grammatical accuracy using identical criteria across groups.

Data collection occurred during a single session per group. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and all responses were anonymized in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

5. Results

This section presents the quantitative findings addressing the main research question: whether instruction incorporating metalinguistic explanation (ME) leads to greater improvement in the use of gerunds and to-infinitives than input-based instruction alone. The analysis is based on pre-test and post-test scores from the experimental group (n = 22) and the control group (n = 24), for a total of 46 participants.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with Testing (pre-test vs. post-test) as the within-subjects factor and Group (experimental vs. control) as the between-subjects factor. The dependent variable was the grammar test score.

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of Testing, $F(1, 21) = 41.944$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.176$, indicating overall improvement from pre-test to post-test across groups. A significant main effect of Group was also found, $F(1, 21) = 6.044$, $p = .023$, $\eta^2 = 0.109$, suggesting performance differences between instructional conditions. Crucially, the Group × Testing interaction was significant, $F(1, 21) = 22.951$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.130$, demonstrating that gains over time differed by instructional type.

Table 1

Anova: Student Groups and Tests

Within Subjects Effects

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Group	90.011	1	90.011	6.044	0.023	0.109
Residuals	312.739	21	14.892			
Testing	145.102	1	145.102	41.944	< .001	0.176
Residuals	72.648	21	3.459			
Group ✻ Testing	106.920	1	106.920	22.951	< .001	0.130
Residuals	97.830	21	4.659			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

Post hoc comparisons clarified these effects. The improvement from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant overall (mean difference = –2.568, $t(21) = –6.476$, $p < .001$).

Table 2

Post Hoc Test - Testing

Post Hoc Comparisons – Testing

			95% CI for Mean Difference					
		Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	SE	df	t	p_{tukey}
Pretest	Posttest	−2.568	−3.393	−1.744	0.397	21	−6.476	.

Note. Results are averaged over the levels of: Group

Note. Tukey corrected p-values are not appropriate for repeated measures post-hoc tests (Maxwell, 1980; Field, 2012).

Between-group comparisons at post-test showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group by 2.023 points on average (95% CI [0.312, 3.734], $t = 2.458$).

Table 3

Post Hoc Test - Group

Post Hoc Comparisons – Group

			95% CI for Mean Difference					
		Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	SE	df	t	p_{tukey}
Experimental	Control	2.023	0.312	3.734	0.823	21	2.458	.

Note. Results are averaged over the levels of: Testing

Note. Tukey corrected p-values are not appropriate for repeated measures post-hoc tests (Maxwell, 1980; Field, 2012).

Pairwise comparisons further confirmed that the groups did not differ at pre-test (mean difference = –0.200), but diverged significantly at post-test (mean difference = 4.246, $t(42) = 5.157$, $p < .001$).

Table 4

Post Hoc Test - Group and Testing

Post Hoc Comparisons – Group ✻ Testing

			95% CI for Mean Difference					
		Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	SE	df	t	p_{tukey}
Experimental, Pretest	Control, Pretest	−0.182	−2.828	2.464	0.943	32.967	−0.193	.
	Experimental, Posttest	−4.773	−6.457	−3.089	0.607	41.103	−7.857	.
	Control, Posttest	−0.545	−3.124	2.033	0.913	30.257	−0.597	.
Control, Pretest	Experimental, Posttest	−4.591	−7.169	−2.013	0.913	30.257	−5.027	.
	Control, Posttest	−0.364	−2.047	1.320	0.607	41.103	−0.599	.
Experimental, Posttest	Control, Posttest	4.227	1.581	6.873	0.943	32.967	4.484	.

Note. P-value and confidence intervals adjusted for comparing a family of 6 estimates (confidence intervals corrected using the bonferroni method).

Note. Tukey corrected p-values are not appropriate for repeated measures post-hoc tests (Maxwell, 1980; Field, 2012).

Descriptive statistics illustrate the magnitude of these changes. The experimental group improved from M = 6.91 (SD = 3.74) to M = 11.68 (SD = 2.70), a gain of 4.77 points. In contrast, the control group showed only a modest increase from M = 7.09 (SD = 2.91) to M = 7.46 (SD = 3.23), a gain of 0.37 points.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptives

Group	Testing	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Experimental	Pretest	22	6.909	3.741	0.797	0.541
	Posttest	22	11.682	2.697	0.575	0.231
Control	Pretest	22	7.091	2.910	0.620	0.410
	Posttest	22	7.455	3.233	0.689	0.434

The descriptive plot visually confirms the interaction pattern, with a markedly steeper improvement trajectory for the experimental group.

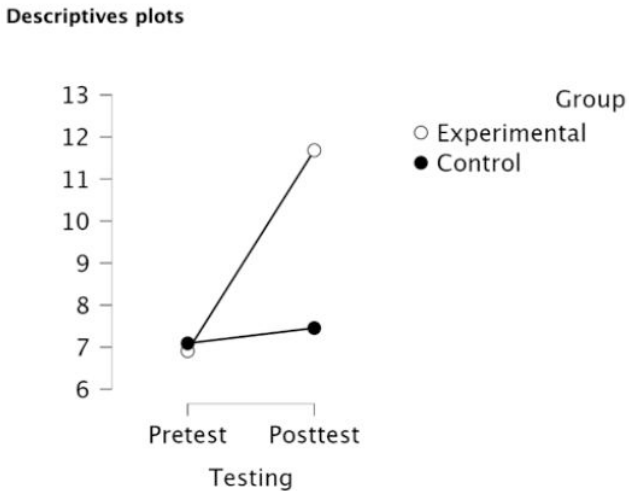


Figure 1

Descriptive plots

6. Discussion

The experimental intervention aimed to determine whether metalinguistic explanation enhances learners' grammatical performance in the use of gerunds and infinitives, with results clearly supporting this claim. Although both groups improved over time, the experimental group showed substantially greater gains, as evidenced by the significant interaction between instructional type and testing phase. Crucially, the absence of differences at pre-test and the significant divergence at post-test indicate that the observed gains cannot be attributed to initial group disparities or test familiarity, but rather to the instructional treatment.

These findings align with theoretical accounts that emphasize the role of conscious attention and explicit knowledge in second language development. From the perspective of the Noticing Hypothesis, metalinguistic explanation may have facilitated learners' attention to form–meaning relationships that are not perceptually salient in input alone. Similarly, Skill Acquisition Theory predicts that declarative rule knowledge, when practiced, can become proceduralized, resulting in greater accuracy. The markedly larger gains observed in the experimental group suggest that ME supported this transition from explicit understanding to controlled performance.

The results are also consistent with previous empirical research showing that explicit instruction can yield stronger gains for complex and low-salience structures. Gerund and infinitive complementation represents a domain where input alone may be insufficient due to irregular verb patterns and subtle semantic contrasts. In such cases, explicit rule articulation appears to provide learners with a cognitive framework for organizing and applying grammatical knowledge more efficiently.

Importantly, the magnitude of the improvement in the experimental group, compared to the minimal gains in the control condition, suggests that exposure and practice alone do not fully account for the development observed. Rather, the structured integration of metalinguistic explanation seems to have amplified learning outcomes within the same instructional timeframe. This supports arguments that explicit instruction can play a facilitative role in formal classroom contexts, particularly where curricular time is limited and grammatical accuracy is a pedagogical priority.

7. Conclusion

This research evaluated the effect of metalinguistic explanation on secondary EFL learners' accuracy in the use of gerunds and infinitives. The findings indicate that learners who received explicit metalinguistic instruction achieved substantially greater gains than those exposed to input-only instruction, supporting the facilitative role of explicit knowledge in the acquisition of complex grammatical structures.

Beyond confirming the effectiveness of ME for verb complementation, the study contributes contextually grounded evidence from a secondary school setting, a population often underrepresented in SLA research. The results suggest that when systematically integrated into classroom practice, metalinguistic explanation can enhance grammatical accuracy within limited instructional time, without being incompatible with communicative goals.

Overall, the findings indicate that metalinguistic explanation is not merely compatible with communicative classroom practice but can significantly enhance grammatical development when systematically implemented. In the context of secondary EFL education, where learners are still consolidating foundational grammatical knowledge, ME appears to be a particularly effective instructional tool. This study is subject to certain limitations, including the absence of a delayed post-test to determine the long-term durability of the observed effects, and the fact that class timing was determined by the school schedule, with groups attending sessions at different times of the day. Future research should address these limitations, examine the long-term effects of ME, conduct comparative studies on other grammatical structures, and explore how learners of different proficiency levels respond to ME.

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Late Modern Essex Dialect: The Representation of PRICE and CHOICE Diphthongs in Charles Clark's Poetry

Alejandro Guevara-Guevara

Universidad de Salamanca
alejandroguevara@usal.es

Abstract

This paper explores the representation of the PRICE and CHOICE lexical sets in two nineteenth-century Dialect Literature (DL) poems by the Essex writer Charles Clark: "John Noakes and Mary Styles" (1839) and "The Trip to Tiptree" (1842). Framed within third-wave sociolinguistics, the study treats dialect respellings as sociolinguistic variables and analyses them through the lenses of indexicality and enregisterment. The analysis traces where PRICE and CHOICE are respelled and where they are not, in order to assess how relevant they are to the dialect. Results show highly consistent <oi/oy> respellings for PRICE and strongly marked, variable respellings for CHOICE, supporting the interpretation of an enregistered PRICE-CHOICE (near) merger in Late Modern Essex dialect.

Keywords: Essex Dialect, Enregisterment, Respelling, PRICE, CHOICE

1. Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed an increasing literary interest in regional speech varieties across England. Within this broader cultural movement, dialect writing became a powerful medium through which local identities were stylised, commodified, and circulated. Far from offering transparent phonetic transcriptions, literary representations of dialect often constitute socially meaningful stylisations that contribute to the social recognition of particular linguistic features (Hodson, 2017, 1-2).

This paper examines the representation of the PRICE and CHOICE lexical sets in two poems by Charles Clark, a nineteenth-century Essex poet whose work occupies a central place in the documentation and literary construction of the Late Modern Essex dialect. Charles Clark (1806-1880) was a farmer, amateur printer, antiquarian, and book collector "synonymous with Essex, particularly his local area of Great Totham." (*Finding Charles Clark,* n.d.). His writing and dialect work were materially embedded in local print culture, especially Clark's best-known dialect work, *John Noakes and Mary Styles (1839).*

The analysis is framed within the third wave of sociolinguistic studies (Eckert, 2012), which argues that "variation does not simply reflect, but also constructs, social meaning" (87). In particular, the concepts of enregisterment (Agha, 2003) and indexicality (Silverstein, 2003) provide the theoretical foundation for interpreting Clark's orthographic practices. From this perspective, the respellings of PRICE and CHOICE are especially relevant, as these two lexical sets display overlapping and occasionally interchangeable non-standard spellings in the dataset. This makes them particularly suitable for examining how phonological similarity is exploited in written representations and how such variation may acquire social

meaning. The data will be checked against glossaries and dictionaries that offer qualitative information about the dialect.

Accordingly, this paper addresses two research questions: firstly, how are the PRICE and CHOICE lexical sets represented in Charles Clark's poems? Secondly, what sociolinguistic conclusions can be drawn from these representations, especially regarding the indexical meanings and potential enregisterment of PRICE/CHOICE as features of Late Modern Essex dialect?

2. Dialect Writing as a Source for Study

The nineteenth century is widely recognised as a turning point in the literary use of non-standard English. Hodson (2017) argues that this period saw "a proliferation and elaboration in the literary uses of dialect beyond anything seen before" (1). Early in the century, only a limited set of regional voices tended to appear in fiction, often attached to minor, comic, or stereotypical figures, but as realist prose developed its concern with representing different social strata, both the range of dialects and the range of dialect-speaking characters expanded. Beyond their literary and cultural value, dialect writing constitutes a source of evidence for the study of regional speech. While they cannot be treated as transparent phonetic records, they are an invaluable source of (socio)linguistic information, allowing us to observe how certain linguistic forms were represented, evaluated, and circulated.

Within this broad range of texts, scholars have found it useful to distinguís between Dialect Literature (DL) and Literary Dialect (LD). Shorrocks' well-known classification defines DL as texts written entirely in dialect and "aimed essentially, though not exclusively, at a nonstandard-dialect-speaking readership" (Shorrocks 1996, 386) and LD as texts "aimed at a general readership" (386) in which the bulk of the narrative is in standard English but selected characters speak in dialect. In other words, LD refers to passages of non-standard speech typically confined to particular characters or framed episodes, while DL designates texts in which dialect constitutes the main narrative medium. Following Shorrocks' distinction, the two poems selected for análisis can be classified as DL.

Within the studies of dialect writing, the present study focuses on dialect respellings. Jaffe (2012) defines dialect respellings as "non-standard spellings that reflect some phonological features of a speech variety" (205). It is therefore worth stressing that, unlike other categories such as eye dialect or allegro forms, dialect respellings are typically used to represent phonological variation linked to regional or social dialects (206). For that reason, the analysis treats these spellings as the most direct orthographic evidence for how PRICE and CHOICE variation can be studied in Clark's works.

3. Indexicality and Enregisterment

This paper is situated within what Eckert (2012) labels as third-wave of variation studies, which "focus on the social meaning of styles in ways that allow for linguistic variables to be studied within layered, rather than single, communities" (Clark, 2013, 442). It is when linguistic variation and social meaning interact that concepts such as indexicality and enregisterment become key tools of sociolinguistic study. Silverstein's (2003) theory of indexicality accounts for the linkages between form and meaning which

operate in different indexical orders. As he explains, "for any indexical phenomenon at order *n*, an indexical phenomenon at order *n* + 1 is always immanent, lurking in

the potential of an ethno-pragmatically driven native interpretation of the *n*-th-order paradigmatic contextual variation that it creates or constitutes as a register phenomenon" (212). This framework was approached similarly by Johnstone *et al.* (2006) and Beal (2019), who understand the three orders of indexicality as referring to the processes through which linguistic features become associated with social categories such as class, gender, or region, and how groupings of these features (i.e., registers) are mobilized by speakers in the performance of identity (Beal, 2019, 9). They differentiate three ascending levels of awareness. At the first order of indexicality, a variant comes to be associated with a social group in ways that may be invisible to speakers. At the second order, that correlation becomes noticeable to speakers themselves, who consequently style-shift as they associate that form with particular meanings. By the third order of indexicality, forms are commented and represented in practices such as dialect writing.

Silverstein's orders of indexicality are closely connected to the concept of enregisterment. First introduced by Silverstein (1992) and popularised by Agha (2003), enregisterment refers to the processes "through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (Agha, 2003, 231). A key implication is that enregisterment is neither automatic nor immediate, but rather emerges gradually through the sedimentation of shared habits of speech perception and production within specific social domains (269). Traditionally, enregisterment has been equated to third level of indexicality. In this line, Silverstein (2016) would later clarify that "enregistered indexicality is always what I have termed second- or higher-order indexicality" (38). Some recent studies, however, argue that once a linguistic feature of a variety is noticed and mentioned, it effectively becomes part of a register and can therefore be considered enregistered (Gerwin, 2023, 36).

The study of variation through the lens of enregisterment and indexicality has been explored in studies on contemporary varieties (Johnstone, 2016; Campbell-Kibler, 2012), as well as on historical dialects, such as the study on the early modern Northumberland dialect by Beal (2016), Ruano-García (2020) on Late Modern Lancashire dialect, Schintu (2022) on Late Modern Derbyshire, Gerwin's (2023) work on Cockney or Tissens (2024) on Late Modern Devonshire dialect. However, to date, there appears to be little to no research applying this framework to the Essex dialect, a gap that the present study seeks to address.

4. Methodology

The present study adopts a corpus-based approach combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, a corpus representative of Essex dialect literature was selected, consisting of two nineteenth-century dialect poems by Charles Clark: "*John Noakes and Mary Styles; or, "An Essex Calf's" Visit to Tiptree Races, a Poem Exhibiting Some of the Most Striking Lingual Localisms Peculiar to Essex, with a Glossary" (1839)* and "*The Trip to Tiptree; or, A Lover's Triumph. Humbly presented to the Philologist, as a specimen of the dialect of the peasantry of Essex" (1842)*. Both poems belong to Shorrocks' category of DL. Clark was selected because he is widely regarded as one of the key nineteenth-century writers associated with Essex dialect representation, and his poems were treated as authoritative dialect evidence by later works. This status is explicit in Richard S. Charnock's *A Glossary of the Essex Dialect* (1880), whose compiler notes that he took many items from Clark's "John Noakes and Mary Styles," describing it as containing "some of the most difficult words and phrases in the dialect" (Charnock 1880: iv) and he also reports consulting "The Trip to Tiptree". Edward Gepp (1920) also acknowledges Clark's work as part of the documentary record through which Essex speech was preserved and made

available for later study. Together, these sources provide external confirmation that Clark's poems were not merely literary works but were also received as relevant testimony of the Essex dialect.

All occurrences of the PRICE and CHOICE lexical sets in the two texts were identified and manually annotated. The analysis follows the methodological approach developed by Honeybone and Watson (2013) and Honeybone (2020), where the core aim is not only to identify which features are respelled, but also to measure the extent to which they are represented. In this spirit, respellings are treated as sociolinguistic variables: by tracking where a feature is respelled and where it is not, it becomes possible to quantify the rate of respelling across the corpus and to assess how strongly the texts foreground particular dialect features.

Finally, the corpus findings are interpreted in dialogue with non-literary metalinguistic sources of the time. These non-literary sources are used to contextualise the corpus data and their indexical values by examining how such forms were framed, recorded, and evaluated in contemporary and near-contemporary sources.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 displays the frequency whereby PRICE and CHOICE are respelled in both Charles Clark's poems. PRICE respellings display striking uniformity. Across both poems, PRICE is respelled exclusively through <oi/oy> spellings, with no alternative spellings or instances of eye dialect. This consistency is noteworthy because it suggests that Clark is not merely sprinkling non-standard spellings, but repeatedly selecting a single spelling to cue a particular pronunciation type. Forms such as *roight* 'right' and *troy* 'try' point to an [ɔɪ]-type realisation (or a closely related variant), making PRICE one of the most stable and recognisable phonological signals of Essex speech in the corpus. The difference between the two poems can be attributed to the shorter length of Trip to Tiptree and its lower overall density of respellings, which makes the use of PRICE (and CHOICE) particularly salient as a strategy to evoke Essex speech.

Table 1

Rate of respelling of PRICE and CHOICE

Lexical sets		JNMS	Tiptree
PRICE	Standard	181 (83.80%)	21 (45.65%)
	Respelling	35 (16.20%)	25 (54.35%)
CHOICE	Standard	7 (53.85%)	0 (0%)
	Respelling	6 (46.15%)	3 (100%)

CHOICE, as shown in Figure 1, occurs much less often than PRICE, yet it is represented in a strongly non-standard way when it does occur, especially in "Trip to Tiptree," where it never appears in standard form. This diphthong also exhibits a wider variety of respellings such as *bile* 'boil', *bouy* 'boy', and *joun* 'join'. Some of these respellings (most transparently *bile*) suggest an [aɪ]-type pronunciation for CHOICE.

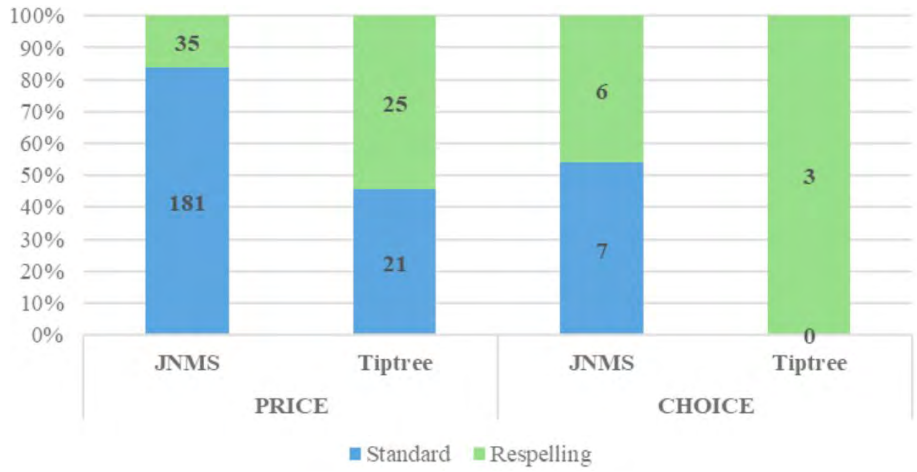


Figure 1

PRICE and CHOICE representation in both poems

Historical work suggests that there was a merger between these two diphthongs in the nineteenth century. Labov (1994) indicates that evidence for a merger is already visible in the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare provides inverted spellings such as *smoil* for *smile* and *imply* for *employ* (307). Rather than a single complete merger, Labor proposes a near-merger in which the two diphthongs approach each other closely while remaining variably distinct. He further notes that by the nineteenth century this feature is highly recessive in England, and he identifies Essex as the one county where it still appears as a living dialect feature (Labov, 1994, 308-309).

The quantitative prominence and consistency of these respellings support an interpretation in terms of enregisterment and indexical order. In both poems PRICE and CHOICE emerge as among the most heavily respelled sets, indicating that Clark tretas them as especially effective cues for dialect recognition. This repeated, systematic orthographic stylisation aligns with what is typically expected of a higher-order indexical feature; the spellings seem to be presented as recognisable and socially meaningful of Essex rural speech.

This interpretation gains strength when the data are viewed alongside contemporaneous metalinguistic sources. Charnock (1880) devotes a few pages to phonology, and states that "I has frequently a broad sound, as foine, noice, smoile, toime, twoice, for fine, nice, smile, time, twice" (6). In this line, Gepp (1920) agrees with Charnock and comments on the PRICE-CHOICE merger in the early twentieth century: "long i is universally more or less oi but conversely oi is sometimes long i as in moist, boil, soil, etc" (60). Ellis (1889) dedicates several pages to the Essex dialect, and reports that "I' and I usually lengthened, as generally in E.div., is much broadened and falls into (ƎʼI, di, ɔʼi, ʌʼi). Most writers of the dialect use oi, oy, as *toime*, *soide*" (221). In Wright's *English Dialect Grammar* (1895) he finds [ɔɪ] pronunciations for PRICE in Essex, in words such as *mile, like*, and *five* (127-128; §154). For CHOICE, Wright also reports [aɪ] pronunciation for words like *boil, noise,* or *oil* (184-185; §213).

The quantitative results and the external metacommentary converge on the same point: in Clark's DL, PRICE and CHOICE are heavily foregrounded through highly consistent respelling practices, and these practices align with broader descriptions of Essex phonology in the period. This seems to place the PRICE-CHOICE (near)merger as an enregistered feature of the nineteenth century Essex dialect and in the third indexical

order, since it is not only represented but also explicitly documented and commented upon as a distinctive dialect feature.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the orthographic representation of the PRICE and CHOICE lexical sets in Charles Clark's DL texts "John Noakes and Mary Styles" (1839) and "The Trip to Tiptree" (1842). Quantitative results show that PRICE is consistently respelled with <oi/oy> across both poems, while CHOICE, though less frequent, is proportionally more marked and displays greater respelling diversity. Read through a third-wave sociolinguistic lens, these systematic dialect respellings function not merely as phonetic cues but as semiotic resources that construct the Essex speech. Data and contemporaneous metacommentary seem to point to a high order of indexicality, as the merger of PRICE and CHOICE was certainly represented, circulated, and commented. At the same time, the results should be taken with a pinch of salt, since the analysis is based on only two texts and the orthographic choices from a single author. Nevertheless, dialect writing has been demonstrated to be a valuable source of sociohistorical linguistic information. Future studies could not only examine the extent to which these findings can be generalised, but also explore the enregisterment of additional dialect features of the Essex dialect.

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From Language to Culture: Encouraging Intercultural Engagement in Final-Year Dissertations in English Studies

Marta Iravedra

University of the Basque Country (EHU)
marta.iravedra@ehu.eus

Abstract

This autoethnographic reflection examines the role of cultural awareness and intercultural competence in the supervision of final-year dissertations within English Studies programmes. Drawing on several years of supervisory practice, it addresses the persistent gap students perceive between linguistic competence and cultural analysis. Although English Studies curricula are structured around language, literature, and culture, undergraduates often approach language as grammar and correctness, struggling to conceptualize culture as a legitimate object of academic inquiry. Grounded in the CEFR and scholarship on interculturality (Neuner 2003; Jackson 2014), this contribution explores how dissertation supervision can operate as a form of intercultural mediation. By engaging with authentic texts and socially situated discourse, students move beyond descriptive accounts toward critical analyses of representation, identity, and power. The study suggests that culturally oriented supervision fosters analytical depth, reflexivity, and self-development, while redefining the supervisor's role as facilitator of critical intercultural inquiry.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness, Intercultural Competence, English Studies, Final-Year Dissertations, Cultural Mediation, Higher Education

1. Introduction

English Studies degrees are typically structured around three foundational pillars: language, literature, and culture. In theory, these domains are inseparable; in practice, however, students often experience them as distinct and hierarchically. Language tends to be associated with grammar and measurable competence, literature with interpretation and textual analysis, and culture is frequently perceived as abstract or secondary. This tension becomes particularly visible when students design their final-year dissertations.

Drawing on my experience supervising undergraduate dissertations, this article reflects on how students engage—or struggle to engage—with English's cultural dimensions. Many initially gravitate towards linguistically bounded topics with clearer and evaluative criteria. When invited to explore "cultural awareness" or "intercultural competence," they often ask: What counts as culture? Which aspects are legitimate research objects? Where does one begin?

These questions reveal a deeper epistemological issue: if language and culture are two sides of the same coin, as applied linguistics and cultural theory suggest (Jackson, 2014; Kramsch, 1998; Nechifor & Borca, 2020), their perceived separation points to a structural and methodological gap. Final-year dissertations can become privileged sites for bridging that

gap. By reframing research supervision as intercultural mediation, students can move from a narrow focus on linguistic correctness to seeing language as a culturally embedded practice.

2. Language, Culture, and Intercultural Competence

A recurring assumption among students is that language can be treated as a neutral communication tool, detached from its cultural contexts. However, applied linguistics and cultural studies challenge this view. As Byram (1989) observes, "Teachers of a language are also teachers of a culture," a perspective reinforced by Allwright and Bailey (1991): "learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture." Language is both a product and a producer of culture, continuously shaping systems of meaning through interaction (Jackson, 2014; Risager, 2005; Thomson, 2016).

Culture may be understood as the set of "beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language serves as a vehicle of expression" (Hantrais, 1989). Likewise, language is rooted in culture and reflects it across generations, transmitting vocabulary, grammar, values, social hierarchies, and symbolic structures (Emmitt & Pollock, 1997). Hall (1997) highlights that language constructs, not merely reflects, reality. Similarly, Kramsch (1998) emphasizes its symbolic power, mediating relationships between self and other. Within this perspective, the statement that "culture and language teaching cannot be separated" (Ho, 2009) becomes not just a methodological recommendation but an epistemological claim. Teaching grammar without addressing the cultural meanings embedded in discourse reinforces the illusion of neutrality. Conversely, engaging with authentic texts —advertisements, film dialogues, social media interactions— reveals how language encodes assumptions about gender roles, family structures, work ethics, and social mobility.

Recognizing this interdependence shifts students' research questions from correctness to how discourse positions speakers within systems of power, identity and belonging. The CEFR (2001) similarly treats communication as culturally situated, integrating linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural competences. Concepts such as Neuner's "socio-cultural interim worlds" (2003) and Jackson's (2014) intercultural competence further highlight navigation between frameworks and critical reflection on cultural practices. Despite these theoretical frameworks, cultural competence often remains underdeveloped in university-level language education. Non-native language teachers, for example, may feel more confident teaching grammar and vocabulary than engaging with everyday cultural practices of the Anglophone world. Concerns about stereotyping, political sensitivity, or insufficient lived experience can lead instructors to remain within the perceived safety of linguistic form (Kramsch, 2013).

This hesitation is understandable. Culture is multiple, layered, and variable; it is also imagined and subject to individual interpretation (Jackson, 2014). Unlike grammar, culture does not present stable boundaries. Yet precisely because of this complexity, cultural análisis offers fertile ground for critical inquiry—particularly within cultural studies, where meaning is understood as socially produced and contested.

3. From Classroom to Dissertation: Cultural Awareness in Practice

Integrating cultural awareness into final-year dissertations is a complex yet highly rewarding process. Students often approach their projects with a strong focus on

language, while culture may seem abstract or secondary. This section examines how students navigate this transition, how supervision can mediate intercultural learning, and how the concept of culture itself remains a central analytical challenge.

3.1. Integrating Culture in Final-Year Dissertations

The challenge of integrating culture becomes especially evident in final-year dissertations. When students first approach the idea of researching "Cultural Awareness in the Anglophone World," for example, their initial reactions often include doubt and confusion: What cultural aspects can I choose? Is analysing food, traditions, or music too superficial? Are politics and religion acceptable topics? Where does academic rigor end and personal opinion begin?

To address this uncertainty, I designed the research line title—*Culture Awareness in the Anglophone World* —with an intentionally broad scope, allowing students to connect personal interests— film, media, social issues, discourse analysis—with theoretical frameworks. Over time, I observed a shift. Students moved beyond describing British or American traditions and began examining how English interacts with other languages, identities, and contexts. Authentic texts proved crucial in this transition. When students analyse advertising campaigns, film dialogues, social media discourse, or press articles, they begin to see how language encodes values, ideologies, and power relations. Culture becomes visible not as a list of national traits, but as a dynamic process of meaning-making. Through discourse analysis, translation studies, or media critique, students recognize that grammar and vocabulary are embedded in social worlds.

This evolution aligns with the broader aims of intercultural competence. Rather than treating culture as static knowledge about "others," students are invited to reflect critically on their own positionality. They ask how their interpretations are shaped by their own cultural frameworks and how communication operates across boundaries. In this sense, the dissertation becomes a space of intercultural mediation.

3.2. Supervision as Intercultural Mediation

Encouraging students to explore cultural dimensions also transforms the supervisor's role. Supervising culturally oriented projects often means stepping outside one's comfort zone. When students analyse Nordic cinema, multicultural classrooms, gender roles in contemporary media, or the socio-economic realities of higher education in UK and the US, the supervisor may not possess specialized expertise in each topic. This situation generates productive tension. On the one hand, supervisors may experience insecurity: Can I really guide this process? Am I sufficiently knowledgeable about these specific contexts? On the other hand, the supervisory relationship becomes dialogic rather than hierarchical. The student brings curiosity and emerging expertise; the supervisor contributes methodological structure and critical questioning. Trust becomes central. Students must feel authorized to explore topics that matter to them, even when those topics intersect with sensitive areas Duch as politics, religion, or identity. Simultaneously, supervisors must provide analytical frameworks that prevent projects from becoming purely descriptive or anecdotal. The challenge is to balance intellectual freedom with academic rigor.

This approach also connects with the formal competencies that TFGs are designed to develop: working independently and collaboratively, communicating effectively in English, comprehending complex texts, understanding the history, civilization, and culture of

English-speaking countries, relating disciplinary knowledge to other areas, and fostering inclusive attitudes toward multilingual and multicultural diversity. In line with the aims of plurilingual and intercultural education —which seek not only to enhance linguistic and intercultural skills but also to promote personal development (Beacco *et al.,* 2016)— supervision that mediates culture critically enables students not only to achieve these competencies but also to engage in self-development, reflecting on what "culture" means for them and making informed choices about what to study—whether everyday practices like food or schedules, global phenomena such as music, or specific traditions.

3.3. Defining "Culture": An Ongoing Challenge

One of the most persistent questions students raise is deceptively simple: What is culture? Definitions range from high culture (literature, art, history) to everyday practices (food, routines, social norms) and extend to broader structures such as educational systems or labour markets. Cultural Studies complicates the question further by emphasizing power, representation, and ideology.

Attempts at defining culture in a definite way are, as Lang (1997) notes, "futile." Following this perspective, students should not be presented with a rigid formula or a smorgasbord of definitions; rather, they are offered insight into the ways the concept is useful despite the impossibility of pinning it down (Jahoda, 2012). This approach encourages students to engage critically with culture as a flexible, negotiated, and socially constructed concept, rather than as a fixed set of traits or knowledge. The difficulty of defining culture, however, should not be seen as a limitation, but as an analytical opportunity. Students often find it easier to identify aspects of their own culture than to analyse those of the Anglophone world. Yet this comparative process is precisely what fosters intercultural awareness.

Through supervised research, students begin to recognize cultural patterns in seemingly mundane contexts: early-morning sports routines in Nordic societies, representations of divorce in contemporary cinema, multicultural classroom dynamics, or the expectation that young adults in UK or the US leave home to pursue higher education supported by loans and part-time work. When framed within theoretical models of identity, mobility, or neoliberal subjectivity, these observations move beyond anecdote to critical analysis, supporting the development of both academic rigor and intercultural competence.

4. Observed Outcomes and Pedagogical Implications

After several years applying this approach, certain patterns have emerged. First, students display higher levels of engagement when they perceive personal or cultural relevance in their topics. The range of dissertation titles produced in recent years reflects this shift toward culturally situated inquiry. Projects have explored issues such as the representation of the Deaf community in the US audiovisual industry, representations of Chinese communities in US media, the role of LGBT+ ballroom culture as a response to social disparities in 1980s and 1990s America, and the evolution of racism in the United States as examined through the documentary *13th* (Netflix). Others have examined historical and political dimensions of Anglophone contexts, including the influence of the British Empire on India and the impact of Brexit on the socio-political landscape of Northern Ireland. Rather than reproducing established interpretations, students position themselves as emerging researchers who negotiate complex cultural terrains, critically examining the intersections of media representation, identity formation, and power structures.

Second, students develop a broader understanding of communication. Dissertations such as *Depiction of Current American Society through TV Series: The Case of* The Big Bang Theory and *British Culture in the Interwar Period through the Series* Peaky Blinders illustrate how audiovisual texts function as sites where language, ideology, and historical memory intersect. Other projects, including analyses of the Victorian era in Disney films, further demonstrate how media representations construct masculinity, femininity, and colonial imaginaries. Through such analyses, students begin to see that successful communication is not limited to grammatical correctness but involves interpreting context, recognizing implicit norms, and understanding how discourse constructs social realities. In this sense, linguistic competence becomes inseparable from sociocultural awareness.

Third, the dissertation process often triggers self-development. Projects such as *Into the Southern USA: "A Culture of Many Voices"* or *An Analysis of the Development of the British and the Basque Punk Movements* demonstrate how students engage with questions of identity, belonging, and historical memory. Other dissertations exploring Australian Aboriginal culture or late twentieth-century Irish popular music reveal how students negotiate cultural difference while reassessing their own perspectives. As they confront unifamiliar cultural practices or revisit taken-for-granted assumptions, they reflect on their own identities and values. The research project thus becomes both academic and transformative, fostering critical distance, empathy, and reflexivity—core components of intercultural competence.

However, this approach also presents challenges. It requires sustained guidance to help students delimit research questions, select appropriate theoretical models, and avoid essentialising cultures. Supervisors must be prepared to engage in ongoing learning alongside their students. Institutions, in turn, must recognise the legitimacy of culturally oriented research within English Studies curricula.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the perceived divide between language and culture within English Studies and has argued that final-year dissertations can serve as strategic sites for bridging that gap. Although curricula formally present language, literature, and culture as interconnected pillars, students often internalize a hierarchical distinction in which language appears measurable and secure, while culture seems diffuse and conceptually unstable. The dissertation process, however, reveals that this division is neither inevitable nor pedagogically productive.

Drawing on supervisory experience, the discussion has shown that when students are encouraged to approach culture not as a static body of knowledge but as a dynamic system of meaning-making, their research questions evolve. Linguistic form becomes inseparable from ideological positioning; textual analysis becomes a gateway to examining identity, representation, and power. In this sense, dissertation supervision can be reconceptualized as a form of intercultural mediation: a dialogic process in which students and supervisors negotiate meanings, frameworks, and positionalities.

The difficulty of defining "culture" —far from being an obstacle— emerges as a productive tension. By acknowledging the conceptual fluidity highlighted by scholars such as Lang (1997) and Jahoda (2012), students are invited to inhabit uncertainty analytically rather than avoid it. This shift supports the development of intercultural competence as described in language education theory: the capacity to interpret, relate, and critically reflect on cultural practices, including one's own.

The observed outcomes suggest that culturally oriented dissertations foster deeper engagement, broaden students' understanding of communication beyond grammatical accuracy, and contribute to processes of self-development aligned with plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco *et al.,* 2016). At the same time, this approach demands careful methodological scaffolding, institutional support, and a willingness on the part of supervisors to embrace dialogic, and at times decentred, forms of expertise.

Ultimately, integrating cultural awareness into dissertation supervision is not simply a curricular adjustment but an epistemological stance. It challenges the illusion of linguistic neutrality and reaffirms the role of English Studies as a discipline concerned not only with form and canon, but with the cultural, historical, and ideological conditions that shape meaning. In doing so, final-year projects become more than capstone requirements: they become spaces where students learn to navigate complexity, difference, and responsibility as emerging scholars in an interconnected world.

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When Subjects Become Wild and Distant: Patterns of Agreement in Complex Noun Phrases

Javier Pérez-Guerra, Yolanda Fernández-Pena[1]

Instituto de Investigación Lingua, Universidade de Vigo
jperez@uvigo.gal
yolanda.fernandez@uvigo.gal

Abstract

This study examines the constraints affecting subject-verb number agreement in six inner-circle varieties of English (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States), using a large-scale corpus dataset of approximately 2.5 million main clauses derived from the *Corpus of Global Web-based English* (GloWbE). Although canonical agreement predominates (around 96 percent of the tokens), disagreement is systematic and shaped by identifiable constraints. Multivariate statistical techniques indicate that syntactic and structural complexity strongly increases disagreement probabilities. Specifically, coordinated subjects and longer subject phrases, longer pre-head and post-head constituents, and greater subject-verb distance significantly predict mismatches. A cluster analysis further reveals a robust diatopic split, with American English forming a distinct cluster characterised by lower overall disagreement and weaker sensitivity to complexity-related predictors. The findings provide corpus-based support for processing-oriented interpretations of Rohdenburg's Complexity Principle and for accounts of regularisation in American English.

Keywords: Subject-Verb Agreement, Linguistic Complexity, Complexity Principle, World Englishes, Corpus Linguistics

1. Introduction and Research Niche

Subject-verb number agreement is among the most visible devices of grammatical concord in English. The canonical pattern is easily stated: singular subjects require singular verb forms (*The cat runs*), whereas plural subjects require plural verbs (*The cats run*). In descriptive and pedagogical traditions, this rule is often treated as stable and largely categorical. Yet, as this study emphasises, authentic usage, even in relatively careful registers, regularly yields exceptions (i.e., "complications" in Biber *et al.,* 1999, "departures" in Huddleston and Pullum (2002), and "difficulties over concord" in Quirk *et al.* (1985), where the subject and the finite verb do not agree in number. An illustration of mismatch is the notional-plural pattern in (1), in which *youth* (morphologically singular but semantically collective) selects a plural verb:

(1) Today's *youth face* a future of insecurity and declining living standards. (GB, owenjones.org)

[1] We are grateful to the Spanish State Research Agency and the European Regional Development Fund (MICIU/AEI/10.13039/501100011033, project PID2023-146655NA-I00), and Xunta de Galicia (grant no. ED431C 2025/4) for generous financial support. We also wish to express our gratitude to our research assistant Xulia Sánchez Rodríguez for her valuable expertise in Python programming.

Example (1) evinces that agreement is not simply a mechanical matching operation based solely on morphological number but may be sensitive to, for instance, notional plurality. Psycholinguistic research has likewise treated agreement as a key diagnostic for production and processing constraints. Classic experiments on agreement attraction (Bock and Miller, 1991; Bock *et al.,* 1999) show that speakers are more likely to produce non-target verb number when intervening elements contain salient number features. In such accounts, 'errors' are not random: they are constrained by memory limitations, incremental planning strategies and accessibility to competing number cues during production. Variationist corpus linguistics has added another dimension by quantifying mismatch rates in naturalistic data and identifying predictors of non-canonical patterns (e.g., Hundt, 2009).

This study brings some of the traditions previously mentioned together by using a very large corpus sample and modern multivariate modelling to test whether complexity-related constraints and regional variety jointly shape disagreement probabilities across inner-circle Englishes. First, large-scale cross-variety corpus studies of agreement remain comparatively rare. Second, complexity has often been invoked in grammatical variation research (especially in connection with Rohdenburg's Complexity Principle) but has not frequently been examined in tandem with diatopic differentiation across major varieties. Rohdenburg's (1996) Complexity Principle (see also Rohdenburg, 2003; Mondorf, 2009) predicts that increased cognitive or structural complexity favours more explicit linguistic solutions. This study adapts this idea to agreement: complex environments are predicted to raise the likelihood of agreement mismatches, partly because maintaining the intended agreement controller becomes more difficult under processing load.

Two research questions guide the present research. First, do complexity-related factors affect variation in subject-verb agreement? Second, do the same complexity effects operate uniformly across the six inner-circle varieties?

2. Data and Retrieval

The empirical analysis is grounded in a corpus-based variationist methodology that combines large-scale data extraction with statistical modelling. The dataset is derived from the *Corpus of Global Web-based English* (GloWbE), compiled by Davies (2013), which contains approximately 1.9 billion words of web-based English from twenty varieties of English. The corpus is particularly suitable for the investigation because it includes a wide range of informal and semi-formal genres, including blogs and personal websites (roughly 60 percent of the corpus), as well as online newspapers, magazines and company websites (Davies and Fuchs, 2015).

The focus of this pilot study is restricted to the six inner-circle varieties in Kachru's (1985) model: Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States. This restriction is justified by the historical relatedness and broad comparability of L1 norms in these varieties, each historically linked to British standards while also exhibiting distinct national norms. These subcorpora together yield a combined sample of roughly 1.24 billion words.

A crucial methodological decision concerns the linguistic domain in which agreement variation is observable. Firstly, because English often lacks overt verbal number morphology, this investigation focuses on contexts in which number marking is available and potentially variable, that is, clauses with third-person singular or plural nominal subjects and finite verbs with overt number marking possibilities: third-person present tense forms other than full modals and third-person past tense forms of *be* (*was/were*).

Secondly, another key restriction concerns syntactic environment. Following established practice in both psycholinguistics and corpus work on agreement (e.g., Bock and Miller, 1991; Corbett, 2006), we concentrate on main (root) clauses with overt preverbal (i.e., SV) nominal subjects. This decision avoids the analysis of marked structural contexts that may affect agreement (e.g., inversion, subordinate clause embedding, subject ellipsis, clausal subjects, existential *there*-constructions, cleft structures).

Automatic retrieval was conducted using the Stanza NLP toolkit (Qi *et al.,* 2020), compatible with Universal Dependencies. The pipeline included tokenisation, lemmatisation, POS-tagging and dependency parsing. Nominal subjects were identified via the UD label *nsubj*. As shown in Table 1, from the 1.2-billion-word sample of the inner varieties in GloWbE, our script retrieved more than 43 million main clauses with overt third-person subjects of verbal groups likely to reflect explicit number variation.

Table 1

Retrieval of tokens in inner-circle GloWbE varieties

Variety	Clauses Retrieved	Words
AU	3,834,238	148,208,169
CA	4,849,117	134,765,381
GB	14,016,291	387,615,074
IE	3,443,804	101,029,231
NZ	2,954,890	81,390,476
US	14,535,699	386,809,355
Total	43,634,039	1,239,817,686

To ensure computational feasibility, one million clauses per variety were randomly sampled. After applying filtering criteria, the final dataset contained 2,548,555 clauses, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Valid tokens in one-million-clause samples

Variety	Clauses Considered	# Disagreement	% Disagreement	% Singular-Subject + Plural-Verb
AU	427,766	13,548	3.2	60.2
CA	432,980	12,980	3.0	58.6
GB	409,804	14,982	3.7	68.0
IE	435,048	17,078	3.9	69.0
NZ	429,443	14,690	3.4	63.2
US	413,514	11,458	2.8	57.8
Total	2,548,555	14,119	3.3	61.7

Across the 2.5 million clauses, agreement is overwhelmingly dominant, occurring in approximately 96 percent of cases. Nonetheless, the remaining proportion (more than 14,000 tokens) constitutes a sizeable dataset for modelling. Importantly, disagreement is not directionally balanced. Approximately 60 percent of mismatch cases involve singular subjects paired with plural verbs, whereas the reverse configuration (plural subject with singular verb) accounts for roughly 40 percent. This asymmetry is theoretically relevant because it aligns with the hypothesis that plural verb forms, which in English often represent the morphologically 'simpler' or less explicitly marked option, may serve as default solutions under processing pressure.

3. Method

The methodology is built around the first research question, that is, whether complexity-related factors predict subject-verb agreement (mis-)matches. We operationalise complexity in several ways, drawing both on syntactic structure and on length-based proxies that are plausibly related to processing load, under the assumption that expressions that are syntactically intricate or structurally 'heavier' may yield agreement mismatches.

One factor of syntactic complexity is subject coordination. Coordinated noun phrases are treated as syntactically more complex than simple noun phrases because they contain multiple conjuncts, potentially multiple number cues and evince greater structural elaboration. A second set of structural complexity measures is based on length: overall subject length (in words), length of the material preceding the subject head within the subject ('prensubj'), length of the material following the head within the subject ('postnsubj') and length of any material intervening between the subject and the verb ('between'). These measures are motivated by the idea that longer constituents impose greater working-memory and planning demands, and they may increase the chance that agreement features are lost or influenced by non-head elements. To illustrate this, example (2) displays a coordinated plural subject followed by a singular verb form, and (3) contains a plural long subject followed by a singular verb.

(2) *Men and women* wading or scooping back from chapel, with taproom noses and wind-bussed cheeks, all albinos, *huddles* their stiff black jarring feathers against the irreligious snow. (US, poemhunter.com)
(3) The *petitions* asking the federal government to recognize the right to peaceful withdrawal from the United States *needs* to be made to prevent the fight. (US, dailypaul.com)

Polarity has also been considered a potential complexity marker. The assumption is that negative polarity requires additional grammatical machinery (e.g., the presence of *not* or *n't*) and may therefore increase processing demands.

A number of lexical/semantic factors have not been considered in this pilot study. Subjects headed by collectives (*committee*), quantifiers (*lot*, *third*) and so-called '*fish*-type' nouns (*fish*, *sheep*, *data*) account for less than 3 percent of our data, so modelling the entire dataset without removing these tokens does not pose a major methodological problem. Similarly, lexical attraction effects involving non-head nouns between the subject head and the verb, illustrated in (4), have been left for later work.

(4) The *change* in the way that they are accounted for in company balance *sheets make* them more expensive. (GB, guardian.co.uk)

Two statistical procedures are applied to the data. The first is binomial logistic regression, which identifies independent predictors of disagreement while controlling for other factors (variety, subject coordination and the length measures). To account for the full categorisation of the dependent variable agreement/disagreement across the six inner-circle varieties, we further explore the distribution of the predictors by means of hierarchical agglomerative clustering.

4. Results

All predictors entering the regression model are reported as highly significant ($p < .001$), except polarity. The variety coefficients indicate that the US variety reflects lower mismatch probability relative to the baseline. The most significant predictors in the model are subject coordination and (pre- and post-) subject length, which substantially increase the probability of mismatch. This result is consistent with the view that these factors increase linguistic complexity. The positive coefficient for the measure accounting for the length of the material intervening between subjects and verbs also aligns with processing accounts: longer distance makes it harder to maintain the correct number feature of the head noun and may introduce competing number cues. By contrast, polarity, though hypothesised to reflect complexity, does not contribute significantly to the model. This finding reinforces the supremacy of syntactic and structural factors.

Figures 1 and 2 present the effects of coordination and the length-based predictors, respectively—disagreement probability rises as each of these predictor counts increase.

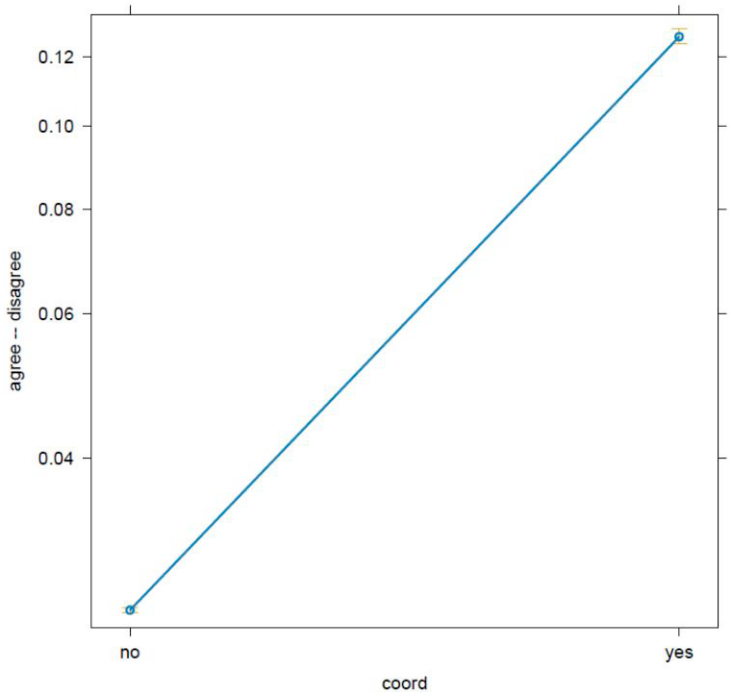


Figure 1
Effects of the independent factor subject coordination

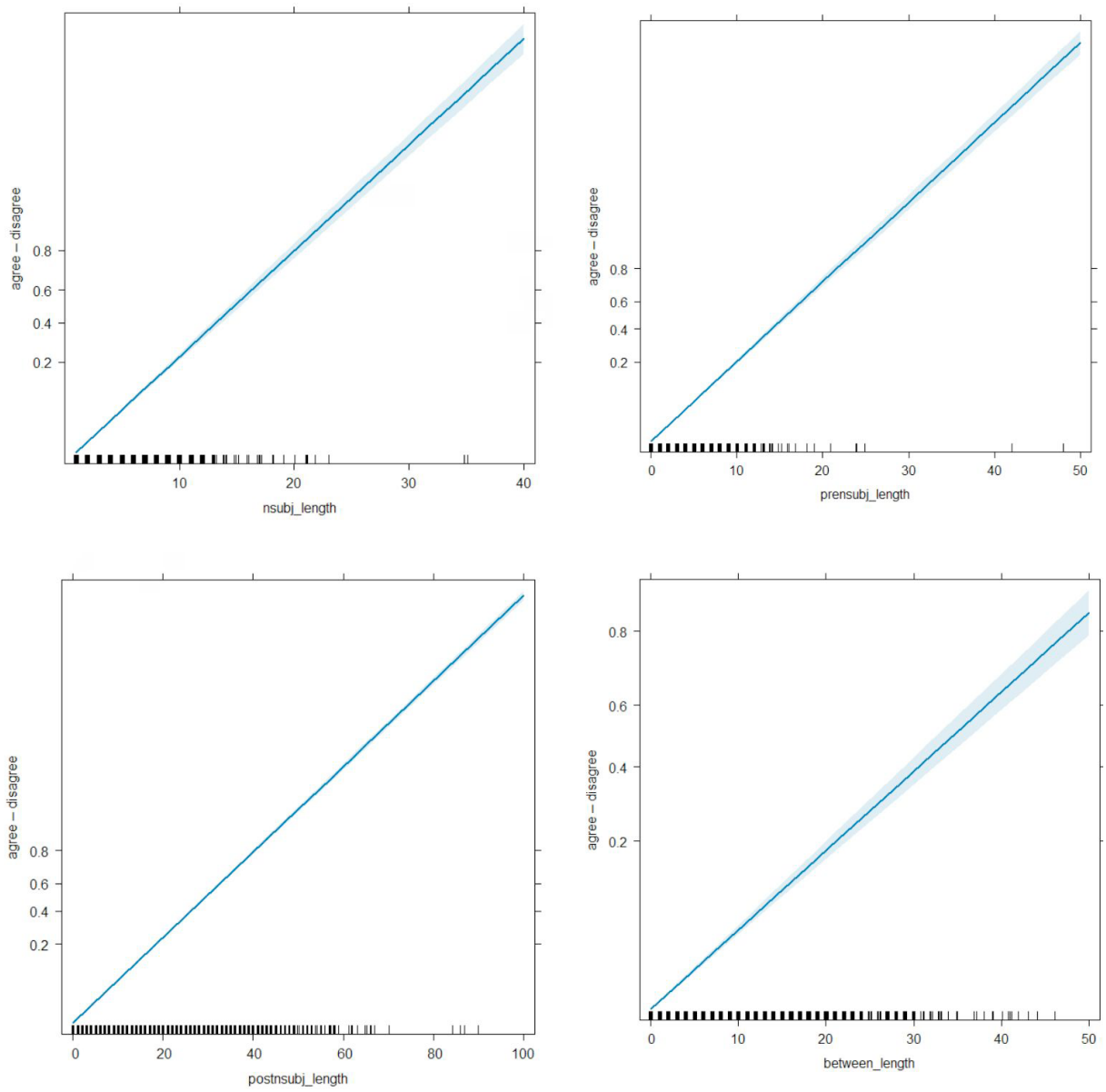


Figure 2

Effects of the independent length-related factors

Rohdenburg's (1996) Complexity Principle is commonly supported by cases where speakers choose more explicit, analytic structures under complexity (e.g., preference for complementiser *that* over Ø or for analytic comparatives like *more clever* in complex contexts). By contrast, singular and plural verb forms are not optional in contexts of agreement, since they are grammatically determined. We therefore contend that, under high processing load, the agreement system is more likely to fail, and when it fails, speakers drift toward morphologically simpler forms. Put differently, in complex contexts plural parking may behave like a default not because it is more explicit but because it is less morphologically complex and thus easier to produce when agreement computation is disrupted. In English, plural verb forms often constitute the morphologically less marked option, singular *-s* being the overtly marked alternative. From this viewpoint, the

predominance of singular-subject + plural-verb mismatches is consistent with a pressure toward morphological economy, especially in environments where maintaining the subject head's number feature is difficult.

The second analytical strand is hierarchical cluster analysis, which has been performed on a random sample of one million tokens from the complete database, and incorporates both numeric and categorical variables, including agreement rates, polarity and coordination frequencies, as well as the four length measures. Figure 3 presents the resulting dendrogram.

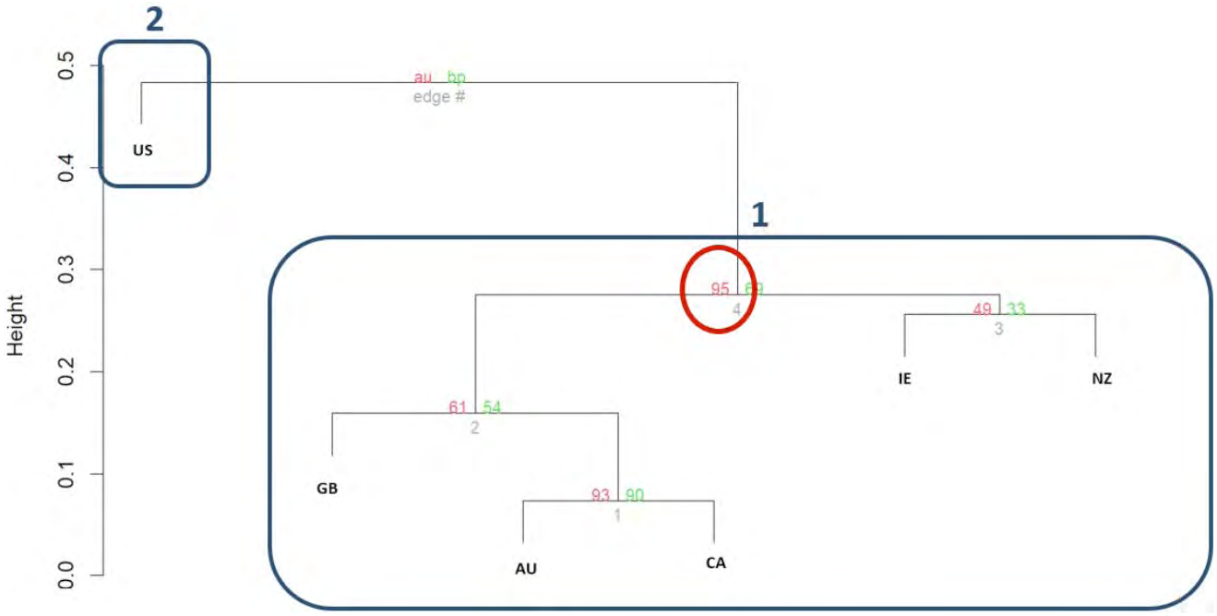


Figure 3

Hierarchical clustering of varieties

The major outcome is a two-cluster solution: one cluster includes Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland and New Zealand, and the other cluster consists solely of the United States. The split is reported to be robust, with bootstrap support around p=95. American English (US) diverges systematically from the other inner-circle varieties in its overall configuration of agreement behaviour and complexity sensitivity, as shown by the proportionsof disagreement across varieties in Table 3.

Table 3

Proportions of disagreement across varieties

Variety	% Disagreement
United Status	2.77
Canada	3.00
Australia	3.17
New Zealand	3.42
Great Britain	3.66
Ireland	3.93

The US variety has the lowest mismatch rate, while Ireland has the highest. The general interpretation is that American English is less sensitive to complexity factors: structural complexity still increases mismatch probability, but the increase is weaker than in other varieties. This finding is linked to Mair's (2013) argument that American English, as a hyper-central" hub variety in global English, exhibits a stronger tendency toward regularisation and analyticisation. In the context of agreement, regularisation is interpreted as a reduction in variability and a stronger tendency toward canonical concord even Ander processing pressure.

5. Summary, Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

This study investigated subject-verb number agreement across six inner-circle varieties of English by combining large-scale corpus extraction from GloWbE with multivariate statistical modelling. The analysis was based on approximately 2.5 million main clauses with overt preverbal third-person subjects and finite verbs in morphological environments that allow number variation. Although agreement was dominant at around 96 percent, disagreement occurred in over 14,000 cases and exhibited systematic conditioning.

Firstly, the results supported the hypothesis that structural complexity increases mismatch probability. Coordinated subjects significantly raised disagreement odds, and all four length measures (overall subject length, pre-head length, post-head length and subject-verb distance) had strong positive effects. These findings provide large-scale corpus support for processing-oriented interpretations of Rohdenburg's Complexity Principle. Specifically, we argued that processing pressure promotes morphologically simpler or less marked forms when agreement computation fails. This account has proved to be consistent with the observed asymmetry in mismatch direction: singular subjects with plural verbs constitute roughly 60 percent of mismatches, suggesting that plural verb forms may behave as default solutions under strain.

Secondly, concerning diatopic variation and regularisation, the cluster análisis revealed a robust split between the US variety and the other five inner-circle varieties. American English showed the lowest overall mismatch rate and weaker sensitivity to complexity predictors, consistent with Mair's (2013) claim that American English leads tendencies toward regularisation and analyticisation in the system of World Englishes.

Among this study's limitations and directions for further research, outer- and expanding-circle Englishes may exhibit different patterns due to second-language acquisition dynamics and contact-induced change (Williams, 1987; Steger and Schneider, 2012; Brunner, 2017; Suárez-Gómez, 2017). This pilot study has not incorporated predictors of notional number, collective noun behaviour or verb semantics (Depraetere, 2003; Fernández-Pena, 2020; Lakaw, 2024). Extending our analysis to instances of subject-verb inversion, existential constructions, clefts, subordinate clauses and instances of subject omission may reveal further complexity effects.

Overall, this investigation has given support to the view that subject-verb agreement is probabilistic rather than categorical. Canonical agreement is overwhelmingly frequent, but mismatches are systematically related to structural complexity and vary across nacional varieties. Integrating corpus linguistics, psycholinguistic processing accounts and World Englishes perspectives provides a comprehensive model of how complexity and regional regularisation shape agreement outcomes in contemporary English.

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Another Turn of the Screw on the Development of *-ity* and *-ness*: Register and Language-Internal Constraints in Early and Late Modern English

Paula Rodríguez-Puente

University of Oviedo
rodriguezppaula@uniovi.es

Abstract

This paper investigates the development of the deadjectival nominalizing suffixes *-ity* and *-ness* in Early and Late Modern English, focusing on the interaction between register and language-internal constraints. Building on previous research on suffix competition, the study examines the productivity of the two suffixes across a wide range of written and speech-related registers and explores internal structural variables, including the etymological source of the construction, the part of speech and etymology of the base, and the distribution of doublets. The analysis is inspired by Säily *et al.*'s study (2024) and draws on data from multiple historical corpora. The findings confirm the long-standing association of *-ity* with borrowed, Latinate vocabulary and of *-ness* with native lexical stock, while also showing that *-ness* displays greater morphological versatility in combining with bases of diverse origins. The paper argues that suffix competition reflects the interaction of social, stylistic, and language-internal factors rather than random variation.

Keywords: Derivational Morphology, Suffix Competition, Register Variation, Historical Corpora, *-ity*, *-ness*

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the diachronic development of the deadjectival nominalizing suffixes *-ity* and *-ness* in Early and Late Modern English, with particular attention to the interaction between register and language-internal constraints. Both suffixes are commonly used in contemporary English to form abstract nouns from adjectival bases (e.g. *curious-curiosity*; *happy-happiness*), yet they differ in their morphological behavior, semantic profiles, and stylistic distribution. While *-ity* is typically associated with borrowed, learned, and Latinate vocabulary, *-ness* is generally linked to the native lexical stock and greater morphological flexibility (Marchand, 1969; Aronoff, 1976; Romaine, 1985; Plag, 2003).

Previous research has suggested that a form of rivalry between the two suffixes has been at work since *-ity* entered the English derivational system in the Middle English period, as evidenced by the existence of doublets (i.e. pairs of forms derived from the same base with the two suffixes), such as *pureness* and *purity* (Riddle, 1985; Dalton-Puffer, 1996). However, the extent to which this rivalry is shaped by register and by internal linguistic factors has remained underexplored in diachronic perspective.

Building on earlier corpus-based studies of suffix competition (Cowie, 1998; Rodríguez-Puente, 2020, 2021; Rodríguez-Puente *et al.,* 2022), the present paper extends the analysis

by examining the internal structure of derivational formations across a broad range of registers in Early and Late Modern English. Inspired by recent work within a Construction Grammar framework (Säily *et al.,* 2024), the study explores how etymological and morphosyntactic properties of the base and the derived construction interact with register-based variation.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews previous research on the diachronic development of *-ity* and *-ness* and their relationship with register. Section 3 presents the corpora and methodology. Section 4 reports the results of the analysis, focusing on the etymological source of the construction, the etymology and word class of the base, and the distribution of doublets. Section 5 summarizes the main findings and outlines directions for future research.

2. Background and Previous Research

The suffixes *-ity* and *-ness* have long attracted attention in studies of English word formation due to their partially overlapping functions and contrasting stylistic associations. Morphological research has shown that *-ity* tends to attach primarily to Romance bases, while *-ness* combines more freely with native and non-native bases alike (Marchand, 1969; Aronoff, 1976; Plag, 2003). From a semantic perspective, both suffixes form abstract nouns, but they differ in the types of meanings they typically encode, such as states, entities, or collective notions (Riddle, 1985; Romaine, 1985; Schäfer, 2025).

Register-based variation in the use of the two suffixes has also been documented in synchronic studies, which generally associate *-ity* with formal and written contexts and *-ness* with more informal and speech-related ones (Baayen & Renouf, 1996; Cowie, 1998; Plag *et al.,* 1999; Gardner, 2014). Despite the recognized importance of register in language change (Biber & Gray, 2013), early diachronic research offered limited evidence for systematic register effects. Cowie's (1998) analysis of 1650-1990 data obtained from *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* (ARCHER), based on the aggregation of new types, did not reveal consistent long-term trends and concluded that register was not a determinant factor in suffix use.

More recent work has challenged this conclusion. Rodríguez-Puente (2020) examined seventeen Early Modern English (EModE) registers drawn from the *Corpus of English Dialogues* (CED; Kytö & Culpeper, 2006), the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* (PPCEME; Kroch *et al.,* 2004) and the EModE section (1535-1749) of the *Corpus of Historical English Law Reports* (CHELAR; Rodríguez-Puente *et al.,* 2018). Using both type frequency and measures of the aggregation of new types over time (see Cowie & Dalton-Puffer, 2002; Palmer, 2015), the study showed that *-ness* was dominant in the early sixteenth century, while *-ity* progressively gained ground and became the preferred suffix across most registers by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly in formal written domains such as legal texts. The significance of these results was tested in a later study (Rodríguez-Puente *et al.,* 2022), where new methods of statistical and visual analysis were introduced that enabled diachronic comparisons of competing processes across subcorpora.

A follow-up study (Rodríguez-Puente, 2021) extended the analysis to the Late Modern English (LModE) period using sixteen comparable registers from ARCHER v.2, the *Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English* (PPCMBE; Kroch *et al.,* 2010), CHELAR and a sample of the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC; Huber *et al.,* 2012). While *-ity* remained predominant overall, some speech-related registers (private letters, diaries, and sermons)

exhibited a renewed preference for *-ness* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This shift has been interpreted in connection with processes of colloquialization and the democratization of written registers (Hundt & Mair, 1999; Hiltunen & Loureiro-Porto, 2020).

At the same time, recent research has emphasized the need to consider language-internal constraints alongside social and stylistic factors. Adopting a Construction Grammar perspective, Säily *et al.* (2024) conceptualize *-ity* and *-ness* formations as partially schematic constructions embedded in a network of form-meaning pairings. Their analysis of personal letters from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates that productivity is sensitive not only to register and social variables such as gender, but also to internal properties, including the etymological source of the construction, the morphosyntactic structure of the base, and the semantic type of the derived noun.

3. Corpus and Methodology

The present study draws on the same dataset and general methodological framework employed in earlier work on the diachronic development of *-ity* and *-ness* in Early and Late Modern English (Rodríguez-Puente, 2020, 2021). The data are drawn from a range of historical corpora representing a broad spectrum of written and speech-related registers distributed along formal-informal and speech-writing continua. Together, these sources provide coverage of sixteen to seventeen registers, depending on the period (see Table 1).

Table 1

List of registers included in the analysis

Rodríguez-Puente (2020)	Rodríguez-Puente (2021)
(Auto)biographies	(Auto)biographies
Bible	Bible
Diaries	Diaries
Drama	Drama
Educational treatises History	*Educational treatises* History
Journals	Journals
Law (statutes)	Law (statutes)
Law reports	Law reports
Medicine	Medicine
Philosophy	Philosophy
Private letters	Private letters
Public letters	Public letters
Science	Science
Sermons	Sermons
Trial proceedings	Trial proceedings
Witness depositions	—

All tokens of nouns derived with *-ity* and *-ness* were extracted with *WordSmith Tools 8* (Scott 2016) and manually coded. The analysis focuses on word types rather than token frequencies in order to capture patterns of derivational productivity. In total, 1,016 distinct types were identified across the combined datasets, with approximately 41% formed with *-ity* and 59% with *-ness*.

Following and partially adapting the framework proposed by Säily *et al.* (2024), each formation was coded for the following variables: (i) the etymological source of the construction, classified as either borrowed or native, with the latter category including both inherited Germanic forms and derivations created within English; (ii) the part of speech of the base; (iii) the etymology of the base; and (iv) membership in a doublet, defined as a pair of forms derived from the same base with the two competing suffixes (e.g. *denseness-density*). Unlike Säily *et al.* (2024), the present study does not include semantic type or branching structure as variables, but instead introduces a focused analysis of etymological polarization and doublet distribution across registers.

4. Results

Across the combined dataset, *-ness* accounts for a larger proportion of distinct types (59%) than *-ity* (41%). When register is considered at a global level, *-ity* is more frequent in written texts (45%), whereas *-ness* shows a relative preference for speech-related registers (58%). This distribution is consistent with the traditional association of *-ity* with learned and formal styles and of *-ness* with more colloquial usage. However, diachronic variation and cross-register differences complicate this generalization (see Rodríguez-Puente, 2020, 2021).

With respect to the etymological source of the construction, a sharp contrast emerges between the two suffixes (Figure 1). Virtually all *-ness* formations in the dataset are native, either inherited from Germanic or created within English. The only marginal exception is *plainness*, for which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) suggests a possible (but unlikely) French source alongside a native derivation. In contrast, the vast majority of *-ity* formations are borrowed, typically from French or Latin. A small number of formations, such as *applicability* and *responsibility*, appear to have been created within English, but these still involve Romance bases.

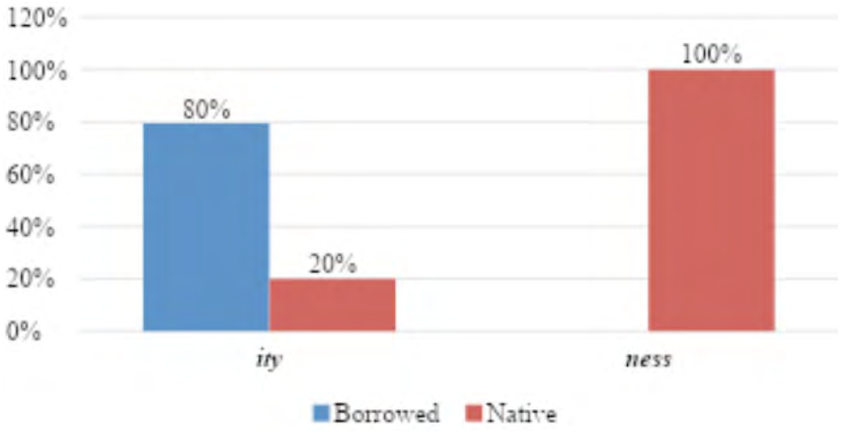


Figure 1
Proportion of *-ity* and *-ness* derivatives according to the etymological source of the base

Register does not appear to condition the proportion of borrowed versus native *-ity* formations in a substantive way (see Figure 2). Borrowed types dominate both written and speech-related registers, and the relative share of native *-ity* formations is only marginally higher in written texts. This suggests that the etymological profile of *-ity* is relatively stable across domains of use.

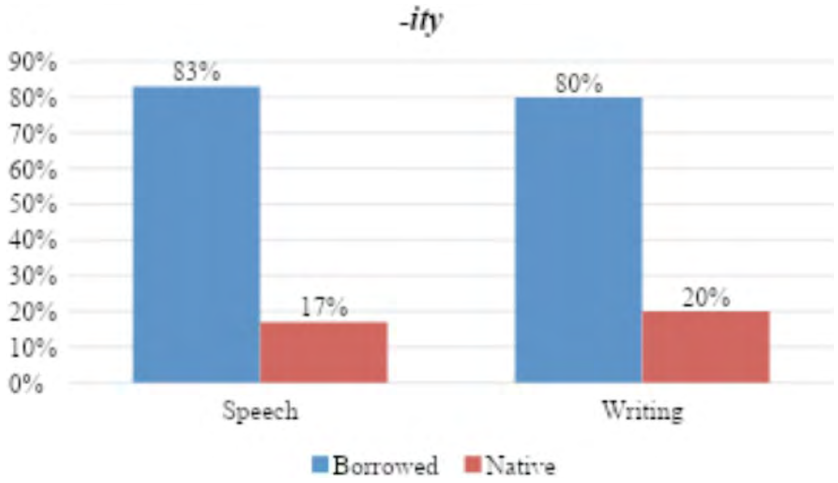


Figure 2
Proportion of *-ity* derivatives according to register and the etymological source of the base

The etymology of the base further highlights the contrasting morphological behavior of the two suffixes (see Table 2). Bases combining with *-ness* are predominantly English, but also include items of Scandinavian, Celtic, and other origins, as well as a small number of forms classified as uncertain by the OED. In contrast, bases combining with *-ity* are overwhelmingly Latin or French, or mixed Romance in origin. Apparent exceptions involve bases that are English creations but themselves derived from Romance material, such as *immoral* in *immorality* or *sentimental* in *sentimentality*. A modest register effect is observable in the distribution of Latin bases, which are slightly more frequent in written than in speech-related registers for both suffixes. However, this tendency is weak and does not alter the overall pattern of etymological polarization between *-ity* and *-ness*.

Regarding the word-class of the base, as expected, adjectives constitute the primary source for both suffixes. Other bases have been attested in the literature, even though they are rare and largely confined to borrowed *-ity* formations, including nouns (e.g. *authority*), pronouns (e.g. *quality*), and verbs (e.g. *restority*), or, in the case of *-ness*, to participles (*drunkenness*), adverbs (*backwardness*), phrases (*matter-of-factness*), and prepositions (*aboutness*). These patterns reinforce the view that *-ness* exhibits greater morphological versatility than *-ity*.

In the present sample, however, non-adjectival *-ity* formations are rare and all such items are borrowed into English already with the suffix, with the result that many of the corresponding bases are not synchronically available. This is the case, for instance, with *temerity*, ultimately derived from the Latin noun *temeritas* 'rashness', *quality*, from the Latin pronoun *qualis* 'of what kind', and *restority*, from the French verb *restorer*. By contrast, only *witness* and *nothingness* are attested as *-ness* derivatives with nominal bases, and no further non-adjectival bases are found in the corpus.

Table 2

Proportion of *-ity* and *-ness* derivatives according to register and the etymological source of the derivative

		ity	ness			ity	ness
Speech	Anglo-Norman	14 (5.9%)	8 (2.5%)	Writing	Anglo-Norman	17 (4.2%)	13 (2.6%)
	English	5 (2.1%)	204 (63.3%)		English	6 (1.5%)	294 (59.5)
	French	73 (30.8%)	65 (20.2%)		French	118 (29.3%)	100 (20.2%)
	French/Latin	2 (0.8%)			French/Latin	3 (0.7%)	1 (0.2%)
	Latin	142 (59.9%)	33 (10.2%)		Latin	257 (63.9%)	68 (13.8%)
	Scandinavian	1 (0.4%)	4 (1.2%)		Scandinavian	1 (0.2%)	5 (1.0%)
	Dutch		1 (0.3%)		Dutch		1 (0.2%)
	Unknown		7 (2.2%)		Unknown		10 (2.0%)
	Irish/Gaelic				Irish/Gaelic		1 (0.2%)
	Welsh/Irish				Welsh/Irish		1 (0.2%)

Finally, as regards the analysis of doublets, the dataset contains the following thirty-three pairs:

activity-activeness, *amiability-amiableness*, *callosity-callousness*, *clarity-clearness*, *divinity-divineness*, *equality-equalness*, *falsity-falseness*, *generality-generalness*, *gentility-gentleness*, *humanity-humaneness*, *humility-humbleness*, *impetuosity-impetuousness*, *insensibility-insensibleness*, *intensity-intenseness*, *nicety-niceness*, *nobility-nobleness*, *obscurity-obscureness*, *oddity-oddness*, *perversity-perverseness*, *porosity-porousness*, *profanity-profaneness*, *purity-pureness*, *rapidity-rapidness*, *rarity-rareness*, *scarcity-scarceness*, *security-secureness*, *simplicity-simpleness*, *sobriety-soberness*, *tenacity-tenaciousness*, *unstability-unstableness*, *vanity-vainness*, *vastity-vastness*, *voluptuosity-voluptuousness*

In most cases, the *-ity* member of the pair is borrowed, while the *-ness* form is a native creation. Only the pair *oddity-oddness* involves two native-based formations. The limited number of examples and the imbalance between written and speech-related material make it difficult to establish robust register-based tendencies. Normalized figures (not shown) indicate that both members of doublets are more frequent in writing, although *-ness* shows a slightly stronger relative presence in speech-related registers. This trend, however, remains weak and requires confirmation through larger samples.

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown that the diachronic development of *-ity* and *-ness* reflects a systematic interaction between register-based variation and language-internal constraints. The findings confirm a strong etymological polarization between the two suffixes, with *-ness* remaining consistently native and *-ity* predominantly associated with borrowed, Latinate vocabulary. In terms of base selection, *-ness* displays greater morphological flexibility, combining with items from a wider range of etymological backgrounds and word classes, while *-ity* remains largely restricted to Romance material.

The analysis of doublets further indicates that, even where formal alternatives coexist, the contrast between borrowed and native formations is maintained. Future work will extend the analysis to the twentieth century and contemporary English and will incorporate additional measures of productivity and larger, more balanced register-specific samples.

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Exploring the Use of Video Games for English Language Learning, Perceptions and Pedagogical Applications

Yonay Rodríguez Rodríguez

University Defence Centre (CUD)-Universidad de Zaragoza
yonay@unizar.es

Abstract

While formal instruction is vital for language learning, much linguistic development takes place outside the classroom, especially through online gaming. Although this activity can enhance cognitive skills alongside English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency, educators find it challenging to integrate it into traditional methods. This study surveyed 145 university Spanish students about their perceptions of EFL learning through video games, aiming to develop a teaching resource that links video games with classroom learning. Participants agreed that gaming has a positive impact on language learning, particularly receptive skills. In response, an online ESP module built on paratextual material is proposed to connect these formal and informal learning settings.

Keywords: (In)formal Learning, Video Games, Epitexts, ESP

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of technology has significantly affected how linguistic knowledge is acquired, as sociolinguistic ecologies have become more complex. Learners now have more opportunities outside the classroom, and informal learning, or Language Learning Beyond the Classroom (LBC), has become more dynamic (Reinders & Benson, 2017). These developments challenge traditional pedagogy to adapt to multimodal teaching that matches students' digital skills and habits. For example, video gaming is a context in which language is naturally learned through immersive gameplay (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012; Calvo & Belda, 2021; Mohd Tap *et al.,* 2024).

In recent decades, the use of video games as educational resources for language learning has grown in pre-university education, an important development for meeting students' needs and fostering lifelong learning, motivation, and metacognitive skills. However, their application in higher education remains limited, and further research is needed to adopt and validate their effectiveness. This study makes a dual contribution to this need: empirically, by presenting data on how video gaming is viewed as beneficial to English learning, and pedagogically, by employing paratextual material in response to these positive perceptions to help use video gaming as a link between informal learning and the classroom. For ESP Military English (MILEN henceforth), this multimodal, interactive approach may better align teaching methods with students' understanding of the real-world linguistic demands of modern operations in multinational settings.

2. Theoretical Framework

Over the past thirty years, psychologists have emphasised the cognitive benefits of video gaming (Gee, 2005; Klimmt & Hartmann, 2006). They view it as a sophisticated, intentional activity that involves active processing, goal-setting, and understanding causal relationships, thereby helping to develop mental models and responses that enhance cognitive skills. Additionally, they argue that intrinsic motivation, an internal desire for competence, enhances the usefulness of video games for cognitive development and skill learning. In language education, Digital Game-Based Language Learning, or DGBLL (Prensky, 2001; Gee, 2005), leverages these benefits by integrating digital games with educational content to create engaging learning experiences aimed at achieving foreign-language proficiency.

Several scholars have studied video games as a language-learning tool. Vocabulary improvements have been confirmed by various research (Ebrahimzadeh, 2017; Sundqvist, 2019; Rubio *et al.,* 2023), as have affective factors such as confidence and motivation (Benacer, 2022; Al Farhan & Beqiri, 2024). Additional benefits include intercultural competence, strategic communication, and scaffolding learning (Postigo & Fernández, 2020; Gómez & Urraco, 2021; Hanson, 2023). For ESP students in higher education, simulation games enhance metacognitive skills, strategic thinking, and language learning (Tan *et al.,* 2023). Games also improve ESP vocabulary and grammar, and make learning engaging, encouraging active questioning in a relaxed setting (Synekop *et al.,* 2023), which may explain students' positive attitudes towards language games in MILEN classes (Beal *et al.,* 2005; Sabanashvili, 2025).

Despite the significant potential of video games as a learning resource, their integration into education also faces challenges, including limited availability of materials, the effective matching of game mechanics with learning goals, and resource limitations such as funding for technology. There are also concerns about technical failures, student resistance—such as viewing games as trivial—and instructor supervision. Staff may consider these new methods risky or lack confidence in them, and some institutions favour research over innovation, resisting the move towards digital tools (Lean *et al.,* 2006; Squire, 2011; Hulus, 2025).

Paratextual theory applied to gaming (Genette, 1997; Consalvo, 2007; Dunne, 2016; Hazen, 2021) distinguishes between peritext (internal elements, such as the main menu, excluding gameplay) and epitext (external elements, such as online forums). This framework offers a helpful starting point for addressing related challenges, particularly by analyzing game epitextual materials, such as external digital media, trailers, podcasts, websites, and social media, as teaching tools. The educational value of these resources has been demonstrated in various studies. For example, walkthroughs, strategy guides, manuals, fan wikis, gameplay videos, and forums support the development of gaming capital, critical listening, cultural analysis, game literacy, vocabulary, and pragmatic fluency (Consalvo, 2007; Apperley & Walsh, 2012; Burwell & Miller, 2016). This framework forms the foundation of this study.

3. The Study

3.1. Research Structure and Questions

The findings in this report relate to a specific part of a larger project centred on video games and learning. Reflecting its dual contribution, this report consists of two sections:

first, it explores university students' perceptions of learning English as a foreign language through video games, gathered via a survey; second, it proposes a learning module based on video-game epitextual material and digital tools. Two key questions underlie this study: 1. What are students' perceptions of the impact of video games on EFL learning? 2. How can video games be used to enhance learning?

3.2. Methodology

The project involved 145 participants aged 19-20: 60 students from the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) in Galicia and 85 from the Centro Universitario de la Defensa (CUD) at the Universidad de Zaragoza. They completed an 18-item online questionnaire, reduced from 20 items after piloting, which was offered in Spanish, English, and Galician to enhance accessibility for USC students. The perceptions of EFL learning through video games were measured using only the five closed-ended items reported here; the remaining questions addressed other gaming phenomena unrelated to this paper. Four of these five questions used a three-level Likert scale for responses, while the fifth was a multiple-response item. The instrument's internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha (0.73), supported its reliability. In accordance with ethical guidelines, the questionnaire was anonymous, informed consent was obtained, and responses were coded numerically.

Based on the survey data, a DGBLL module was developed from a YouTube demo video of the realistic simulation game Arma III, and integrated with the educational platforms Kahoot, Genially and Moodle. The module design follows the Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE) model (Branch, 2009), a systematic framework with an interactive, iterative structure that enables the evaluation and refinement of each stage. As the project remains ongoing, the final two stages, implementation and evaluation, have not yet been completed to measure the module's effectiveness; therefore, this report only presents the module proposal. The unit focuses on the curriculum content and objectives of Modules 1 and 3, which are studied by second-year Defence and Security students, and it is scheduled for implementation and evaluation in April 2026.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Students' Perceptions about Learning English through Video Gaming

Figures 1-5 below show participants' responses to the five questions: 11.1 and 11.2 explored video gaming benefits for learning, 11.4 examined identity investment as motivation, 11.5 assessed incidental vocabulary gains, and question 12 asked which language skills were perceived to have improved most through gaming.

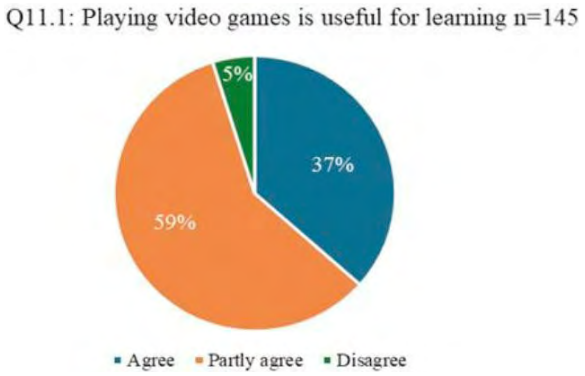


Figure 1
Participants' views on Question 11.1

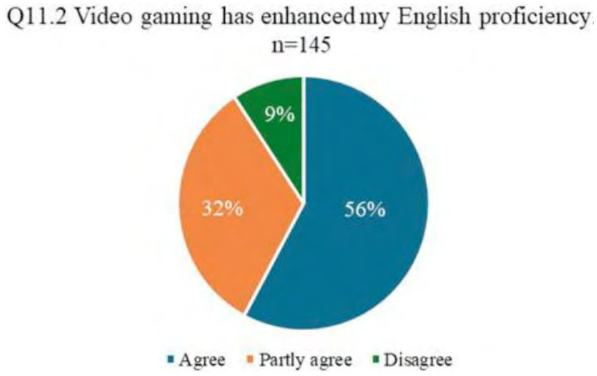


Figure 2
Participants' views on Question 11.2

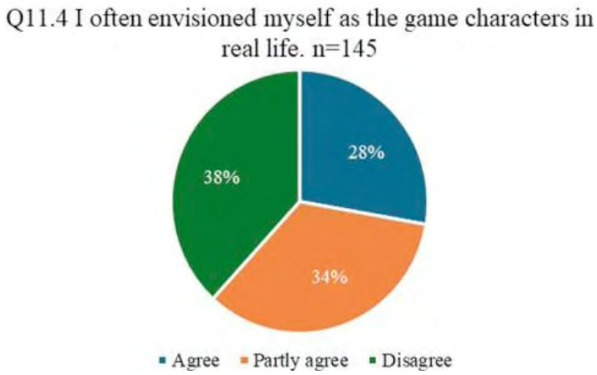


Figure 3
Participants' views on Question 11.4

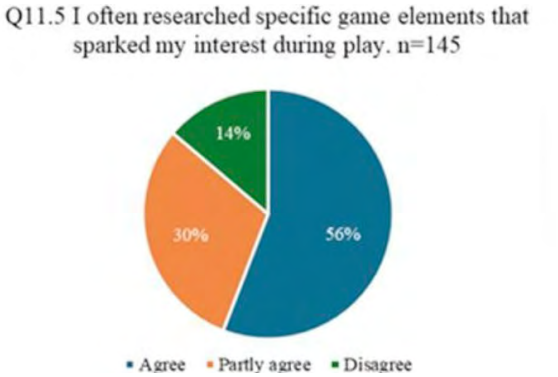


Figure 4
Participants' views on Question 11.5



Figure 5
Participants' perceived learning per skill

Although 64% of CUD students were ambivalent about whether video games support their learning, compared with 52% of USC students, Figures 1 and 2 show a general positive consensus on the matter. Furthermore, responses to Question 11.5, as shown in Figure 4, suggest that incidental vocabulary acquisition was perceived very similarly by both groups (USC: 85%; CUD: 87%). The commonality of this learning process may stem from encountering unfamiliar words in context, which motivates players to look up their meanings to improve their gaming performance, thereby supporting vocabulary development. Parallel to these findings are the responses to Question 4 (Figure 5), in which participants identify vocabulary as the skill they felt had improved most. Collectively, these data provide further evidence for previous research on how video games affect cognition and language learning. Ongoing interaction and feedback, combined with encouragement for risk-taking, entertainment, and quick communication during gameplay, enhance language development (Gee, 2005; Rubio, 2023; Synekop *et al.,* 2023).

Furthermore, responses are more evenly spread across the three levels in Question 11.4 (Figure 3), which aimed to explore motivation through how participants see themselves within an imagined community, that is, a group of people not directly accessible to a learner but with whom they feel connected (Norton, 2001, p. 163). High levels of identification with the game characters suggest that the learner uses the digital environment as a substitute for an imagined community. Pedagogically, this is important because it allows them to project their digital identity safely through avatars, thereby lowering the affective filter and reducing anxiety, which fosters motivation for spontaneous communication. This may apply to 28% of respondents, while the 38% who disagreed with the statement might have a more detached engagement with the game and possibly a higher affective filter when interacting in English during gameplay.

Consistent with previous research on receptive skills (Ebrahimzadeh, 2017; Sundqvist, 2019), the answers to Question 12 (Figure 5) indicate significant perceived gains in vocabulary, followed by listening and reading, with some progress in oral production. This may be attributed to the consistent use of the target language and repetition, as noted by Calvo and Belda (2015, 2021) and Rubio *et al.* (2023), since approximately 79.3% of participants reported playing games in competitive categories (Sports or Esports), where English is commonly used (Postigo & Fernández, 2020). While the primary gains are receptive, enhancements in oral production support the conclusions of Bennacer (2022) and Al Farhan *et al.* (2024), suggesting that digital games in low-pressure environments can boost speaking confidence. These games also offer scaffolding (Postigo & Fernández, 2020), facilitating the transition from passive understanding to active speaking.

4.2. The Learning Module Proposal

Based on these findings, it was decided that the unit design would adopt a holistic approach to the language, including tasks for each of the four main skills, with grammar integrated into the writing and vocabulary treated as a transversal skill. Figure 6 and Table 1 on the next page illustrate the module's structure, the tasks, and their alignment with the learning objectives.

To access the module and navigate the activities, users should visit the Genially platform, where the course is available as a presentation[1]. After the introduction, two

[1] A sample of the module content can be accessed at: https://view.genially.com/690f02e249de8cbd3f38bc3f/interactive-content-esp-milen-module-arma-iii

additional slides outline the main learning objectives and the module's core concepts and terminology. Each task includes its instructions and supporting materials, such as script fragments and visual layouts. A link to a reflective journal on Moodle is also provided for each task as evidence of learning growth. The resource can be adapted for both guided teaching and autonomous work. In the latter case, feedback on the student's performance for each task can be obtained from the results of gamified activities, AI-assisted self-corrected writing tasks, and the reflective journal. Regarding the speaking tasks, students can use the Dictate feature in Google Docs to transcribe and self-correct their oral output, or they can use AI.

This module primarily aims to use game epitextual material to teach a specific ESP area, but other video games with extractable epitext can serve as resources across various academic fields: Assassin's Creed Discovery Tour (History, Archaeology, Art History), World Without Oil - Demo (social sciences, environmental studies), Disco Elysium (sociology, cultural studies, criminology), Per Aspera (resource management, economics), Horizon Zero Dawn (gender), EVE Online (marketing), and World of Warcraft (psychology, cultural studies, gender).

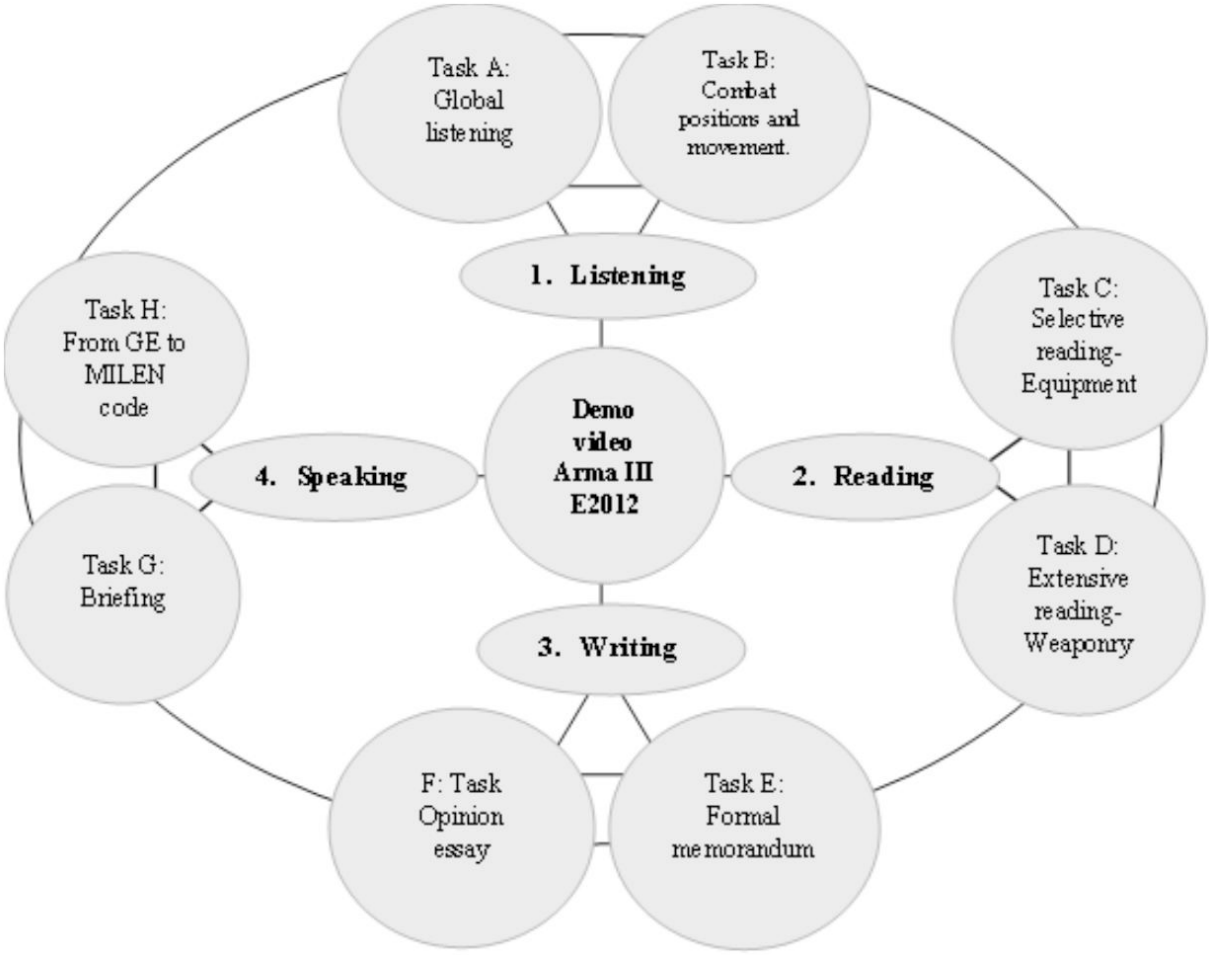


Figure 6
General structure of the learning unit

Table 1

Brief description of module tasks and their correspondence to learning objectives

Task	Brief description	Corresponding learning objective
Task A (Listening): Global listening	Students watch the video without subtitles and take a Kahoot quiz to assess understanding.	COM8.3: Use communication media (Press, radio, TV, networks, etc.) for self-learning and improvement of written and oral comprehension.
Task B (Listening): Combat positions and movement	Students identify and list five phrases for combat positions and tactical movement.	
Task C (Reading): Selective reading, equipment	Students must identify equipment and parts from a script fragment and provide details.	COM8.4: Interpret English language texts related to Defence and Security.
Task D (Reading): Extensive reading, weaponry	Students select a weapon system and track its technological changes over 50 years on a timeline.	
Task E (Writing): Argumentative essay	Students produce a 200-word argumentative essay in response to a question.	COM8.5: Write descriptive, narrative, argumentative, instructional, and explanatory documents like essays, reports, case studies, e-mails, etc., using appropriate lexis and formats.
Task F (Writing): Formal memorandum	Students write a 200-word memo comparing two topographical areas for operations.	
Task G (Speaking): Briefing	Students role-play a briefing for their team on a specialised mission.	COM8.2: Orally present written works with descriptive, narrative, argumentative, instructional, and explanatory content on course topics.
Task H (Speaking): From GE to MILEN code	Students paraphrase and present a radio message.	

The proposed micro-course, centred on the demo video, addresses survey data and students' needs and preferences by fostering gaming literacies and capital, which are increasingly important in the twenty-first century because they promote multiliteracies and multimodal thinking. These skills are essential for understanding our modern systemic, digital world (Consalvo, 2007; Apperley & Walsh, 2012). To avoid the complexity of full games, a demo video serves as authentic, curated material, helping less experienced students recognize game metalanguage and expand their cultural and linguistic repertoire. By providing low-risk scaffolding and translating abstract concepts into tangible visual, auditory, and textual inputs, this approach could help reduce communication anxiety. This reduction may, in turn, improve motivation to learn technical language (Akimov & Nalyvaiko, 2025), ultimately enhancing MILEN's communicative skills.

Although its educational impact and effectiveness are subject to future implementation and evaluation, and actual language development cannot be reported at this stage, the design appears promising for students, as they already have positive perceptions of EFL learning through video games. Furthermore, if this module helps them deepen their understanding of MILEN and improve their communication skills, it could foster a sense of competence and encourage independent exploration (Klimmt & Hartmann, 2006), both of which are essential for autonomous learning.

5. Conclusion

To bridge formal and informal learning environments, this study initially examined students' perceptions of the educational benefits of video games. The data obtained support existing research by indicating positive perceived effects on language learning and motivation. Accordingly, a fully developed learner-centred, multimodal pedagogical unit based on epitextual material is introduced. The next step will assess its effectiveness and impact on students' MILEN learning. Its implementation will involve a pilot in a single class to test the activities and the clarity of the reflective journal prompts, enabling iterative improvements. To evaluate the module's effectiveness and students' progress, quantitative data will be gathered during the full rollout from pre- and post-assessment exercises, as well as reports from the platforms' game analytics. Qualitative data, in turn, will be gathered through journal entries, and a final debriefing will be conducted within focus groups. If proven effective, the unit could serve as a model for developing additional resources using other video game paratextual material, applicable not only within military studies but also across diverse ESP and EFL curricula. Ultimately, this material could be effective in bridging the gap between informal and formal learning settings.

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‘Porque I like your Hair Long’: Code-mixing in Spoken Gibraltar English[1]

Verónica Silva-Folgar

University of Vigo
veronica.silva@uvigo.gal

Abstract

This study examines cases of insertional code-mixing in spontaneous Gibraltar English (GibE), focusing on the Spanish conjunctions *conque*, *porque*, and (*de*) *que*. Following Muysken’s (2000, 2013) code-mixing typology, the analysis draws on data from the *Spoken Corpus of Gibraltar English* (SGibE), a collection of informal conversations from the Gibraltarian podcast *Street Talk*. The study investigates the frequency, clause position and function of these items, and compares them with their English counterparts. Results show that insertions occur exclusively in the clause periphery, particularly in clause-initial position, and that they generally align in position and function with their English equivalents. These findings support previous research on Spanish-GibE code-mixing and provide further evidence that it exhibits regular patterns of insertion.

Keywords: Gibraltar English, Llanito, Code-Mixing, Insertion, Spoken Corpora

1. Introduction

Gibraltar’s strategic location has historically shaped its demographic, economic and linguistic development. While the Rock has received sustained immigration from different parts of the Mediterranean and beyond, the arrival of the Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1704 and the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 marked the handing over of Gibraltar to the British Crown. This treaty also established that English was the official language of the territory, at first exclusively spoken by the military and the British colonisers. Prolonged contact between English, Andalusian Spanish and other languages such as Genoese and Haketia gave rise to a local vernacular variety in the second half of the twentieth century, called Llanito (or Yanito). However, there is a lack of consensus regarding its categorisation. Llanito has been variously described as a local creole (Levey, 2015), a form of Spanish-English code-switching and code-mixing (Moyer, 1993; Kellermann, 2001), and as Gibraltarian Spanish (Chevasco, 2019), among other terms.

As the use of English became more widespread among Gibraltarians, it nativised into a distinct variety, Gibraltar English (henceforth, GibE). The prolonged contact between Andalusian Spanish and British English, and later between Llanito and GibE, has resulted in frequent code-mixing. Whereas in the first half of the twentieth century Andalusian Spanish functioned as the main language of Gibraltarians and English elements appeared

[1] Research for this study was funded by MICIU/AEI /10.13039/501100011033 and FEDER, EU (grant PID2024-157009NB-100). I also wish to express my gratitude to the hosts of *Street Talk,* Michelle Rugeroni and Davinia Torrilla, whose work has been crucial to the compilation of SGibE (see Rugeroni, 2022).

primarily in the form of insertions, this distribution began to reverse in the late twentieth century for a number of socio-political factors (cf. Weston, 2015, 680; Suárez-Gómez, 2020, 359; Suárez-Gómez and Seoane, 2026, 661-663). Today, GibE is the matrix language, while Spanish is often restricted to single words and short phrases inserted in English clause structures, especially in the clause periphery (Goria, 2016, 2017; Rodríguez-García and Goria, 2023).

The present study follows Muysken's (2000, 2013) typology of code-mixing[2] to examine cases of insertion of Spanish items in spontaneous GibE speech. The data for this study are retrieved from the *Spoken Corpus of Gibraltar English* (SGibE), which consists of informal conversations from the Gibraltarian podcast *Street Talk*[3]. As for the specific items for analysis, insertions include the conjunctions *conque* ('so'), *porque* ('because') and *que* (relativisers 'which' and 'who' and complementiser 'that', together with *de que*, equivalent to complementiser 'that'). The variables object of research are their frequencies in the corpus, their positions within the clause, and their functions.

The selected items, as well as their English counterparts, have been further examined in the context of previous research and reference grammars to identify the points in which they align with or diverge from each other across the three variables under analysis[4].

For the analysis of code-mixing practices, this study aims to answer two research questions:

— RQ1. What is the frequency, position and function(s) of the selected insertion items in the corpus?
— RQ2. Do these items occupy the same position and serve the same function(s) as their English counterparts?

2. Theoretical Framework

The current linguistic situation of Gibraltar has been described as one of diaglossia (Goria, 2021, 386-387; Rodríguez-García, 2024, 66). Diaglossia occurs when a language starts to appropriate the conversational settings of another, thereby reducing its functional value. In Gibraltar, Llanito is the 'low' language and GibE has long been considered the 'high' language. Recently, younger generations have been found to choose GibE as their preferred medium of communication with their peers and at home. As a result, Llanito has

[2] Muysken (2000) defines code-mixing as the alternation, within a single sentence, of lexical items or grammatical features from two languages. He distinguishes three main categories: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation. The present study focuses exclusively on insertion, which involves the embedding of individual lexical items or constituents from one language into the clause structure of another (Muysken, 2000, 3, 2013, 712).

[3] At a later stage of the project (SGibE2), the corpus may be expanded to include transcriptions from other Gibraltarian podcasts and television programmes (e.g., *City Pulse*), thereby increasing the range of topics of conversation, speaker profiles, and registers represented.

[4] For this study, only the Spanish conjunctions *conque, porque, and (de) que* were retrieved from SGibE, and results regarding their positions and functions were compared with previous descriptions in the literature (Bosque and Demonte, 1999; RAE-ASALE, 2010; Goria, 2017). The positions and functions of their English equivalents were established on the basis of evidence from reference grammars (Quirk *et al.,* 1985; Biber *et al.,* 1999; Huddleston *et al.,* 2002) and prior studies (Loureiro-Porto and Suárez-Gómez, 2017; Kaltenböck, 2026). Future research will examine the frequencies, positions, and functions of both English and Spanish insertions in SGibE.

begun to lose its main areas of usage, although it continues to be the everyday language of older generations (Levey, 2008; Suárez-Gómez, 2020; Goria, 2021; Rodríguez-García and Goria, 2023; Rodríguez-García, 2024). This redistribution has important consequences, namely, the language loss and linguistic marginalisation of Llanito and a tendency towards English monolingualism. As for Spanish, it is taught as a foreign language in the Gibraltarian education system, while English is the official language of instruction (cf. Goria, 2021, 387; Rodríguez-García and Goria, 2023, 116; Rodríguez-García, 2024, 65-67).

Regarding code-mixing, Auer (1999) states that there is a continuum with three stages in the process of language change: code-switching, language mixing, and fused lect formation. GibE seems to have entered the phase of language mixing, as it has the status of the matrix or main language of the region, with insertions from Spanish. Evidence for this claim is the emergence of regular, more constrained patterns in both simple (e.g., conjunctions) and complex structures (e.g., left dislocations), which may also indicate a transition toward language fusion (Goria, 2016, 294-295). In this last stage, the two languages merge into a new grammatical system and there is no longer a clear differentiation between them (Auer, 1999, 321-329, 2014). Nevertheless, further research and a larger corpus are required to determine the current status and possible paths of evolution of GibE.

3. Data and Methodology

As mentioned previously, this study is based on data retrieved from the SGibE corpus, which consists of transcribed conversations from the Gibraltarian podcast *Street Talk*. The present analysis draws on 23 episodes from seasons three and four, i.e., around 17 hours of recorded material, which amount to approximately 350,000 words[5].

The transcription process has been conducted in several stages. First, I downloaded the audio files for each episode from the podcasting platform Acast[6]. Then, using the OpenAI speech-to-text model Whisper[7], I automatically transcribed the audios and stored them in Word (.docx) files. Given Whisper's limitations in recognising Llanito and Spanish sections, all transcriptions were manually revised while simultaneously listening to the corresponding recordings to ensure the accuracy and representativeness of the texts. Example (1a) below shows the original transcription generated by Whisper. Example (1b), by contrast, provides the revised version including the insertion *porque*, which would otherwise have been omitted from the corpus.

(1a) SPEAKER 1: **because** I like your hair long.
(1b) SPEAKER 1: **porque** I like your hair long. (S4, ep8[8])

Finally, all insertion items were manually selected and stored in an Excel spreadsheet for the analysis of the three aforementioned variables.

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[5] SGibE is currently under compilation and will be available to the international scientific community upon completion.

[6] https://shows.acast.com/on-the-sofa-with-rouge/episodes

[7] https://openai.com/research/whisper

[8] S4, ep8 stands for Season 4, episode 8.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that the conjunction *que*, together with the variant *de que*, is the most frequent case of insertion in the corpus (43 items), followed closely by *porque* (40 items) and *conque* (31 items).

Table 1

Total number of tokens of *conque*, *porque*, and (*de*) *que*

Insertion items	Tokens
Conque	31
Porque	40
(De) que	43
Total	114

In terms of clause position, all insertions appear in the clause periphery, particularly in clause-initial position (92.1 per cent of the times). Furthermore, all items generally coincide in position with their English equivalents. The only exceptions are a few occurrences of *porque* in final position (10 per cent of the times). The latter are not motivated by function, but result from sudden interruptions or hesitation.

Table 2

Distribution of *conque*, *porque*, and (*de*) *que* across clause positions

Insertion items	Clause-initial	Clause-medial	Clause-final	Tokens
Conque	26 (83.9%)	0	5 (16.1%)	31 (100%)
Porque	*36 (90%)*	*0*	*4 (10%)*	*40 (100%)*
(De) que	43 (100%)	0	0	43 (100%)
Total	105 (92.1%)	0	9 (7.9%)	114 (100%)

The clausal position of insertions has also been found to be strongly tied to the function they display. An example of this is the case of the consecutive conjunction *conque*. In initial position, it introduces the second element of a consecutive construction (83.9 percent of the times; see example (2)). In final position, however, *conque* has an interactive function related to turn-giving strategies, while still expressing result (16.1 per cent of the times; see example (3)).

(2) SPEAKER 1: […] they moved other bikes, c-- super close to mine, so that they can get in, **conque** then I couldn't get in. (S3, ep7)

(3) SPEAKER 2: […] if you can't find yourself to do something, you won't be able to do it
<at the same time>
SPEAKER 13: Sí, yeah.
SPEAKER 2: and you 've
</at the same time>
done it! **Conque**.
SPEAKER 13: Oh, yeah. (S3, ep9)

Conque, therefore, has the same positions and functions as its English counterpart *so*. Kaltenböck (2026) argues that *so* can occupy clause-final position in cases where its main objective is to render the conversation more collaborative and to elicit a response from the interlocutor. This is precisely the purpose of *conque* in example (3); in this respect, it aligns more closely with discourse markers than with conjunctions.

Porque is mostly present in clause-initial position (90 per cent of the times), introducing the second clause of a causal construction (see example (4)) and answering *why*-questions (see example (5)). There are a few examples, however, where it appears in final position, a change that can be attributed to hesitation (see example (6)) or an interruption (see example (7)).

(4) SPEAKER 1: A new setting, **porque** normally we are in the kitchen, looking at the Lego. (S4, ep12)
(5) SPEAKER 1: But do you know why that is? **Porque**, in the sixties, a lot of people en La Línea went to live to London […]. (S3, ep8)
(6) SPEAKER 2: Que please can somebody explain to me what that means? **Porque**. SPEAKER 1: No, that means- […]. (S3, ep2)
(7) SPEAKER 2 And I 'm so glad I didn't have to do it, **porque**-SPEAKER 1: Nor did I. (S4, ep2)

In general, *porque* coincides with English *because* both in position and function. Nevertheless, the grammars consulted (Quirk *et al.,* 1985, 923-928; Huddleston *et al.,* 2002, 906, 1328-1330) do not account for clause-final occurrences of *because*, as these arise from the conversation dynamics rather than from a distinct function of the conjunction itself.

Finally, *que* always occupies clause-initial position (see Table 2) and functions as a relativiser and complementiser in the corpus. As a relativiser, it is an equivalent to the English relative pronouns *who* (see example (8)) and *which* (see example (9)). As a complementiser, it works as a counterpart to the English complementiser *that*, used to introduce a complement clause (see example (10)). As for the variant *de que*, it only functions as a complementiser (see example (11)).

(8) SPEAKER 2: There 's someone **que** you and I know. (S3, ep11)
(9) SPEAKER 1: I had no oestrogen. That 's another big thing **que** we talked about. (S4, ep11)
(10) SPEAKER 1: Ahora, I spoke to someone and they said **que** there 's only one person available at the moment […]. (S4, ep7)
(11) SPEAKER 2: What I 'm saying is **de que** it should be a requirement […]. (S4, ep7)

5. Conclusion

In line with previous research, this preliminary study shows that code-mixing constitutes a highly frequent phenomenon among Gibraltarians. Insertions are found mainly in the clause periphery, particularly in clause-initial position, thus occupying the same position as their English counterparts. Overall, my findings are consistent with previous research on code-mixing practices in that the inserted items tend to occur in clause-marginal positions and exhibit emerging regular patterns, a typical feature of language mixing (Auer, 1999, 2014).

With respect to function, insertions in the corpus exhibit the same functions as their English counterparts. *Conque* and *so* in initial position introduce the second clause

of a consecutive construction, whereas in final position they display an interactional function, signalling a turn transition. Both *porque* and *because* are subordinating causal conjunctions and can also introduce the answer to a *why*-question. Unlike *conque*, occurrences of *porque* in clause-final position do not fulfil an interactional function, but rather result from hesitation or an interruption by the interlocutor. Finally, *que* may function as a relativiser, equivalent to English *which* and *who*, and, together with *de que*, as a complementiser corresponding to *that*.

To sum up, Spanish-GibE code-mixing has become an emblematic feature of Gibraltarian speech. Nevertheless, age-graded language preferences and diaglossia continue to shape the region's linguistic ecology, and merit further research.

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Linguistic Capital and Language Policy: Examining the Role of English in South Africa's Historically Afrikaans Universities

Carmen Sumillera-Iglesias

Universidad de Salamanca
carmensumillera@usal.es

Abstract

The South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2020) published The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions, emphasizing the imperative for epistemic access for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Despite the attempted promotion of indigenous languages in higher education, English continues to occupy a dominant position within universities. In fact, the Constitutional requirement to accommodate and include the possibility of access of every South African to higher education demanded their shift to English as the main medium of instruction. Drawing on a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the study analyses institutional language policy texts of two historically Afrikaans Universities to investigate how English use is discursively constructed and normalised, as well as the implications of this construction for other South African languages. Engaging with the Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and Wee's (2008) notion of linguistic instrumentalism, the potential motivations for language hierarches within policy texts is studied.

Keywords: Historically Afrikaans Universities, Language Policy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Linguistic Capital

1. Introduction

The South African higher education system started its linguistic transformation process in the beginning of the democratic era in 1994, but the publication of the *Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions* in 2020 by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) established itself as the decisive landmark in the linguistic shift towards multilingualism. The Constitutional requirement to ensure epistemic access has led to the promotion of the development of indigenous languages in tertiary education to reinforce the idea of a multilingual society. Nevertheless, the high status of English in the international academic community, as well as the perception of the language as seemingly unencumbered by political connotations, positions it as the *de facto* medium of instruction in South African higher education institutions. This is the case even in Historically Afrikaans Universities (HAUs) like the North-West University and Stellenbosch University, which have officially transitioned to English-prevailing institutions.

Within a national context with 12 official languages, language policies constitute essential instruments for regulating language use across institutional domains. The DHET (2020) Framework proclaims that universities must lead the linguistic transformation towards a more multilingual society. Language policy elaboration answers to the first necessary step

in the process of this multilingual-leaning shift. Therefore, a textual analysis of the policy documents is fundamental in understanding the discursive strategies and possible implicit ideologies which conform these texts. The ineludible scientific role of English in South African higher education has proven to be a linguistic challenge in the pathway towards multilingualism (Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016; Ndebele, 2012), even in institutions with a traditionally different medium of instruction. Hence, this study of text-focus examination of North-West University's and Stellenbosch University's post-DHET 2020 Framework language policies aims at answering the following research questions:

— RQ1: How is the use of English discursively constructed and legitimised in language policy documents of historically Afrikaans universities?
— RQ2: What is the impact of this construction on the role of the other South African languages?

Employing a Critical Discourse Analysis approach and drawing on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework together with Cele's (2021) genre-relevant questions enables the examination of how English is legitimised and naturalised in language policies. It also allows for consideration of how language hierarchies are shaped by the sociohistorical context and language ideologies, as well as the implications of these processes for the use of other languages within the same context.

2. Background

The role of English as a lingua franca within and beyond South African borders establishes the language as the *de facto* medium of instruction in universities. This linguistic dominance reflects the long-term institutionalisation of the language within the country's sociopolitical context. Even though English was used for cross-cultural communication even during the apartheid period, Kamwangamalu (2003) identifies the language shift from Afrikaans to English at the beginning of the democratic era in 1994.

Dube (2017) contends that, in South Africa, the general consideration of English as the language of upward mobility and success differs from that of Afrikaans as the language of oppression, borrowing the negative connotations from its historical background. Similarly, Kamwangamalu & Tovares (2016) argue that the English-privileging ideology of development is entrenched in everyday linguistic practices and attitudes in public and domestic contexts. Moreover, Ngcobo & Barnes (2021) explain that they have found an overwhelming preference for English as a language for teaching and learning in the University of South Africa, even though it may pose some challenges for them. In accordance with the academic competency struggle that some students have in English, Xulu-Gama & Hadebe (2022) report on the lack of students' proficiency in English, which entails a barrier to epistemic access in a higher education system in which English is the *de facto* medium of instruction.

Furthermore, within the framework of linguistic imperialism, Rakgogo (2024) purports that the linguistic impositions of the colonial government still dominate the South African higher education context since western epistemologies prevail with limited integration of indigenous languages and forms of knowledge. Ndebele (2012) concurs that the colonial imposition of English has embedded these societies within an imperialist culture, limiting their agency over language-related decisions. It should also be noted that the role of English is further privileged by the fact that it translated in the form of source of income, as contended by Casale & Posel (2011), granting it with that social and economic advantage that lives in the collective imaginary of South Africans. Ultimately, the choice of medium of

instruction in universities is not a neutral pedagogical decision but a conditioned outcome of colonial history and socioeconomic factors which may function as a structural barrier to epistemic access.

3. Data and Methodology

CDA enables to conceptualise language as a social practice, thus allowing to analyse the relationship between discourse, power and ideology. The combination of Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model with the context-centred questions proposed by Cele (2021) allow to analyse how the language policies of historically Afrikaans-medium higher education institutions deal with the role of English and how this conceptualisation might affect the use of other South African languages in this context. On the one hand, Fairclough's (1995) multilevel analysis provides a map to the textual, discursive and social practices of the policies, which enables the policies to be examined from multiple analytical perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensible understanding. On the other hand, while taking into consideration contextual factors, Cele (2021) focuses on two major questions to approach policy text-analysis: 1) What are policy intentions? And 2) Who are major stakeholders in the policymaking process? (Cele, 2021, 27). The process of answering these questions using the information detailed in the policies directs attention to what is explicitly or implicitly articulated within the texts, rather than encouraging reference to external sources. Thus, integrating both approaches allows for a multilevel systematic analysis which actively considers stakeholders' interests and potentially implicit purposes.

The data corpus consists of two HUAs' language policies, namely North-West University (NWU) and Stellenbosch University (SU). These institutions were selected following their designation as "custodians" of Afrikaans in 2001. Despite later governmental rejection of this role, they maintained the Afrikaans-medium status after the introduction of English. It should be noted that NWU's languages of choice are Afrikaans, English, Setswana, and Sesotho, whereas SU's also has Afrikaans and English, but isiXhosa as the indigenous language. Furthermore, the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions is also included in the corpus (DHET, 2020) given its conception as the guiding document for public higher education institutions in the democratic South Africa.

4. Analysis

The textual analysis reveals different predication strategies to categorise the institutional languages. In SU's policy (2021, 3), English and Afrikaans are constructed through descriptions of value, such as "academic repertoire," "prestige" and "internationally respected." Conversely, isiXhosa is relegated to a demographic definition: "used by one of the largest language communities in South Africa" (SU, 2021, 4). The dissimilar descriptions can also be appreciated in the justification for the use of each language. While the use of Afrikaans and English is legitimised because of its high value, the inclusion of isiXhosa is framed as a legal requirement, as it is "prescribed by the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (2020)" (SU, 2021, 4). Similarly, the NWU (2022) document also alludes to its commitment to complying with constitutional provisions for multilingualism before stating its intention of using what they call "functional multilingualism" within their institution (NWU, 2022, § 5.2 - 5.3). Despite the policy-supported development of Setswana and Sesotho, escape clauses clash with the "functional multilingualism" aim. With adverbial phrases such as "reasonably practicable"

or "where implementable," both NWU and SU offer discursive space to avoid linguistic commitments. This textual analysis of the strategies use for justification of the policy's aim and language usage renders it possible to answer Cele's (2021) question about the policy intentions, which aim at complying with legal obligations set by the DHET in its 2020 Framework, in line with the Constitution.

Fairclough's (1995) second level of the analysis is the discourse practice, which is concerned with matters of production and consumption. While policymakers and reviewers may operate within different procedures, they act in accordance with their institution's priorities and guiding principles. At the same time, universities are accountable to the national directives and constitutional imperatives. In order to respond to Cele's (2021) question regarding the principal stakeholders of these language policies, it is necessary to identify the target audience of these texts. Students constitute the group most directly affected by language-in-education policies. Moreover, parents may also be understood as indirect stakeholders, insofar as they function as clients of higher education institutions too. The major stakeholders are thus three: 1) national leaders, therefore including the Department of Higher Education and Training; 2) public universities, given that the implementation of these policies significantly impacts their institutions; and 3) students (and parents) since they are the primary beneficiaries and main audience of university language policies.

The analysis of social practices situates these policy texts within the broader South African historical and sociopolitical conditions. It is at this level that intertextuality becomes particularly relevant. All universities' language regulations must comply with the DHET 2020 Framework. An intertextual analysis of this text and the universities' documents ratifies that the institutional policies are following the national principles, including multiple allusions to the development and strengthening of indigenous languages as academic and scientific tools. The NWU document resorts less to the argumentation strategy that considers the DHET 2020 Framework, whereas the SU policy is more explicit with its purpose aligning with the requirements of legal national regulations. From a historical perspective, the incorporation of English as a medium of instruction in HAUs following the 2002 Language Policy as the neutral language suggests that the hegemony of English encounters little overt resistance within institutional policy texts.

5. Discussion

The first research question examines how English is discursively constructed as a medium of instruction in language policies from NWU and SU. While these texts often establish English as the *de facto* language in a seemingly accidental manner, the CDA analysis conducted demonstrates that it is the result of deliberate decisions. The escape clauses normalise English as a medium of instruction simply because it is "reasonably practicable." However, these decisions respond to many sociolinguistic and economic factors that inevitably shape the elaboration of language policies and their implementation. The second research question aims at analysing the impact that the role of English has on the other South African languages, including Afrikaans, within these institutions. Despite the initial purpose of both policies to promote multilingual practices, the presence of escape clauses inevitably affects the role other languages play in academic institutions. In the case of NWU, Afrikaans is still considered a primary medium of instruction at the policy level. When it comes to Setswana and Sesotho, their role is relegated to internal, and sometimes external, communications. Nevertheless, in SU, despite its historically Afrikaans background, the language has been demoted to a supporting role for instruction. Regarding isiXhosa, its role is more performative. The little, almost non-existent provision of this indigenous language

within the policy text showcases the limited relevance that this language is assigned within the university, despite the initial statement of promotion of multilingualism.

As anticipated, the role that English has within both language policy texts is not by chance. The policymakers, stakeholders, and target audiences are all influenced by a neoliberal ideology which positions English as the language of upward mobility and success (Dube, 2017). In this context, the concept of linguistic capital, proposed by Bourdieu (1991) captivates the importance of English's role in South African higher education. With this term, Bourdieu (1991) references the linguistic skills that condition individuals' positions in society in accordance with the sociopolitical power dynamics. He goes on to explain that "on a given linguistic market, some [linguistic] products are valued more highly than others" (Bourdieu, 1991, 18). Thus, even though the linguistic capital that the English language offers may vary across contexts, in South Africa it generally situates the speaker in a more favourable place within social hierarchies (Kamwangamalu & Tovares, 2016; Ndebele, 2012). This is also connected to Wee's (2008) notion of linguistic instrumentalism. Taking Singapore as a case study, Wee (2008) emphasises the economic value of a language, which is "a view of language that justifies its existence in a community in terms of its usefulness in achieving specific utilitarian goals such as access to economic development or social mobility" (32). The instrumental value of a language is fundamental in this kind of reasoning and is often the core of decision-making at policy level.

The dominance of English in higher education, often at the expense of indigenous languages, has become increasingly noticeable across the globe (Rakgogo, 2024). South Africa is no exception to this. As previously mentioned, the neoliberalist ideology, which entails that higher education is seen as a commodity which is subjected to global capitalism, has influenced the elaboration of these policies. Heleta & Dilraj (2024) concur with this when dissecting the goals of universities from a neoliberal perspective: "The purpose, under the neoliberal logic, is to develop skilled individuals to contribute to the local and global capitalist and neoliberal project" (5). The neoliberal ideology, entrenched in the South African higher education system, is reproduced through language practices and made visible in language policy documents. This perception of the language also implies the understanding of the sociolinguistic advantages associated with English competency in economic and educational contexts (Ferguson, 2007; Grin, 2001). The value English has in the international higher education market, therefore, is decisive in the role it plays in South Africa's language policy elaboration, even if it is in detriment of the indigenous languages and cultures.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, examining the analysis while considering Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and Wee's (2008) term of linguistic instrumentalism enables to explore the potential motivation behind the role of English at the policy level. Furthermore, placing the focus on the initial phase of policymaking allows to critically reflect on the policy texts and considering the potential ideologies that might have affected the elaboration of these documents enables a more effective and realistic implementation. However, given that the existence of language policies does not imply their implementation, let alone their success (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2018; Du Plessis, 2006; Webb, 2009), further research on this topic should also consider the implementation processes of these policies as well as measure their impact. Nevertheless, the language discourse in NWU and SU current language policies reveals that while the idea of multilingualism is present, the underlying textual structures prioritise English as the main medium for social mobility, economic advantage, and formal epistemic access.

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‘Ai was glad ta zit under ez sheäde, an’ zwit was ez freut in my meuth”: Representations of FACE in Late Modern Devonshire Dialect

René Tissens

University of Salamanca

Abstract

This paper addresses literary representations of FACE in the speech of Devonshire during the Late Modern English period from a third-wave perspective. It assumes this linguistic trait was considered an enregistered feature of the dialect at the time, ideal to evoke a provincial speaker. For this purpose, a corpus of works featuring dialect has been examined to ascertain what respellings were more frequent in the representation of non-standard realisations of FACE.

Keywords: Dialect, Devonshire, Enregisterment, Nineteenth-Century, Third-Wave Variation Studies

1. Introduction

The link between perceived identities and language use has been at the centre of current sociolinguistic research. This venue was inaugurated by studies in what Eckert (2012) coins the three waves of sociolinguistics, a trend that began with a review of the associations between social stratification and speech variation and evolved into an investigation into stylistic practices and the agentive use of language to perform an identity (Bucholtz, 2003). While the former considered that “variables were taken to mark socioeconomic status” (Eckert, 2012, 90), later studies in the third wave learned that speakers make use of indexical signs to invoke ideologies embedded in the fabric of society. Such ideologies came to be part and parcel with an imagined location freighted with social assumptions that tailored “images of personhood” (Agha, 2007, 177); thus, they consider speakers actuators of meaning, drawing from a series of registers that are reformulated over time. Such registers become their stylistic domain to “perform local identity” (Johnstone *et al.,* 2006, 83), turning speakers into what Bucholtz considers social actors (2003, 399) that are capable of conjuring typified indexical links between them as individuals and a physical space via codified linguistic features. That such features are capable of executing this task indicates that they have fused with an imagined persona, becoming enregistered signs (Agha, 2003).

In this regard, third-wave perspectives have proved useful to revisit semiotic devices in the past, specifically within the regional varieties of England in the nineteenth century. During this period, local identity was performed via the enactment of regional language in literature, where authors resorted to patterns of non-standard spellings that successfully evoked rural characters. Thus, orthography was not limited to describing “a sound pattern alone, but also links to a framework of social identity in much the same way” (Clark, 2013). These representations were segregated according to Shorrocks (1996) taxonomy, wherein

dialect literature (DL) was written by and for natives of the represented variety and *literary dialects* (LD) aimed at a broader, non-native readership (386). The data compiled from these sources have illuminated the darker areas of historical regional varieties, especially in the North. Many scholars have already contributed to our understanding of linguistic social transactions by applying third-wave models to the speech of this region, relying not only on literary material, but also metalinguistic commentaries circulating at the time (see Ruano-García, 2021); the Midlands are also being analysed from these perspectives as well, as can be seen in Schintu (2023). Other varieties, however, remain to be explored this way. The dialect of Devonshire is one of them.

This paper focuses on the speech Devonshire as a potentially enregistered variety and explores a selection of nineteenth-century representations of this dialect from the *Salamanca Corpus*. Specifically, it examines the written representation of the FACE lexical set. Its link to the Devonshire rural speaker has been made evident several times in the descriptions obtained from contemporary monographs such as Ellis (1889) and Chope (1891). The goals of this paper are two: first, to narrow down those respelling strategies that were consistently used to conjure the realisations of FACE in Devonshire dialect writing, thus considering both potential ideological and perceptual differences in DL and LD. Second, to ascertain which orthographic patterns used in both types of representation showed similar distribution, indicating its enregistered status. The structure of the paper is as follows: first, an outline of the development of the FACE vowel set, followed by its recording in Devonshire by antiquarians in the nineteenth century; second, an overview of the methodology employed in this work; lastly, the quantitative analysis of the data extracted from the corpus.

2. Historical Development of FACE

The sound in the FACE diphthong stems from Old English (OE) /ɑ:/ as well as OE /ɑ/ in open position of bisyllabic words. In Middle English, these vowels became /a:/ and shifted into /æ:/ during the Early Modern English period due to the Great Vowel Shift. It turned into /ɛ:/ and eventually /e:/, while by the nineteenth century it diphthongised into /ei/. Jones (1989) observed the lengthening and diphthongisation process as "[o]ne of the most noteworthy features of the later 'development of the *English vowel shift*". In the case of FACE, he argued that it was

> [a] tendency of many modern dialects from the start of the nineteenth century to diphthongize the long mid [ee]…[which] in items such as (say), (may), (maid) and (pair) comes to be realized as showing increased palatalization *only in its second element*, such that (ee) → (ei) (292).

In the countryside, it was not uncommon to see non-standard developments of the FACE diphthong. In this situation Devon is, of course, no exception, as "[t]he FACE…[vowels] are monophthongal, [e:] in the more old fashioned kind of Devon" (Wells, 982, 347). Trudgill (1990) aligns with Wells' line of thought, as he reckons that "[t]he long English," although "this monophthong…has…begun to change into a diphthong of the type eh-ee' or 'a-ee'," a process that allegedly started in "the southeast of England" (60). In other regions (e.g. the South-West), he finds that they "have not been yet influenced by this development and still for the most part retain monophthongs" (60). For the monophthong-diphthong split in England, Devon appears to have become the southwestern boundary between the diphthong in the East and the monophthong in the West. Fig. 1 illustrates this distribution:



Figure 1

Pronunciation of *gate* in different parts of England (Trudgill, 1990: 61)

Extant metacommentary from the nineteenth century resonates with Trudgill's (1990) and Wells' (1982) evidence of FACE monophthongization in Devonshire. Ellis (1889) finds that, in this area, this vowel is realised as "méɐk" (157) or "meekin" (158), but also "mæk" in South Devon and "mek" in the East of the county, with a weaker form noted in the Southwest: "meək" (519). Wright (1905) records various examples regarding the distinct realisations of FACE in Devon. *Chamber* is noted to be pronounced "tʃæmbər" in East Devon and "tʃembə(r)" in North Devon (370). Similarly, *change* is realised as "tʃændʒ" in East Devon (370), while *eight* appears to exist as "ait" in some areas of the county, such as East Devon but not Southwest Devon. There, Wright finds "eit" as an alternative (420). It is intriguing, however, that *faith* is recorded in two different ways: "fāþ" and "feþ" (427).

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, one work stands out in relation to the vernacular of Devonshire, Richard Chope's *The Dialect of Hartland* (1891). While the basis

of this work is restricted to Hartland, it provides a more intimate glimpse into Devonshire as a speech community whose characteristics can be itemised and distributed to a public interested in learning about their variety and customs. Chope refers to the properties of "long a" in the dialect of Hartland as a sound that

> differs considerably from the literary long *a*, or diphthongal *ai*, as in mane, main. [...] Probably the *a* sound (as distinguished from the *ai* sound) in such words as 'mane', is produced by a vowel fracture, as *mai-un* or *mae-un.* (1891, 10)

More modern data collected by the *Survey of English Dialects* shows that non-standard pronunciations of FACE remained during the 60s. The word HAMES is realised in Devonshire as [e:mzɔz], [eɪmzɔz], [e:ɔmzɔz], and [ɛmzɪz] (IV. 1. I.5.4: 112). SPADE is recorded as [spe:d] and [spe:əd], pointing respectively to a lengthened variant pronunciation and the centralisation and weakening of the second element of the standard diphthong (IV.1. I.7.6: 131). (This non-standard duality appeared also in the discussion of Ellis' data above.) The pronunciation of DAISY is recorded as [dɛɪzi] as in the standard, but also [de:zi] (IV.1. II.2.10: 189). GATEWAY shows forms such as [gɛtwɛɪ], [ge:ətwɛɪ], [gi:twɛɪ], and even [ge:twe:] (IV 2. IV.3.8: 422) (thus, monophthongal and non-standard diphthongal forms appear to have coexisted at the time of the survey). What can be surmised from the *SED* is that the FACE lexical set was not fixed and allowed for variation within the dialect. Alternative diphthongal realisations where the second element of the diphthong became central and weak (i.e. [ə]) align with what Ellis (1889) and Wright (1905) already perceived.

3. Methodology

The methodology in this paper relies on a juxtaposition of contemporary metacommentaries that are used to verify the data whittled from wordlists in Excel spreadsheet format from a closed selection of literary works. While these wordlists are the output of corpus software, manual disambiguation is needed to ensure every item computed for the analysis is neither a typo, nor an instance of *eye dialect*, that is, forms that use non-standard orthography to invoke regional speech without deviating phonetically from the standard (Jaffe, 2012, 204).

The analysis in the following section observes a series of criteria designed to ensure that the samples gathered for this type of study are reliable. The texts selected must:

1. Have been published between 1800 and 1900, with one text per decade when possible.
2. Have been written by different authors, when possible.
3. Belong to either DL or LD.
4. Be written in prose to avoid unrealistic phonological realisations used for rhyming purposes.

Table 1 shows all texts taken from the *Salamanca Corpus* that have been selected for analysis, alongside their authors, year of publication and word count.

Table 1

Corpus texts

Dialect Representation	Year	Author	Title	N Words
DL	1839	Mary Reynolds Palmer	*A Devonshire Dialogue, in Four Parts*	13,388
DL	1860	G. P. R. Pulman	*The Song of Solomon*	3,533
DL	1863	Henry Baird	*The Gospel of St. Matthew*	22,963
DL	1885	Roger Giles	*"The Gude Old Times in Welcombe"*	1,426
DL	1885	Roger Giles	*"Lucy Passmore, the Wite Witch"*	2,481
Subtotal				**43,791**
LD	1812	Barbara Hofland	*The History of a Clergyman's Widow and her Young Family*	36,888
LD	1869	R. D. Blackmore	*Lorna Doone*	239,200
LD	1875	G. J. Whyte-Melville	*Katerfelto*	88,550
LD	1876	Oliver Madox-Brown	*The Dwale Bluth*	79,904
LD	1880	Francis Mary Peard	*Mother Molly*	53,814
LD	1895	Anonymous	*""'Anner""*	7,142
LD	1896	Eden Phillpotts	*Down Dartmoor Way*	52,143
LD	1896	Mary Hartier (Harriet Mary Russ)	*"An Evening with Hodge"*	4,434
LD	1899	George Ford	*'Postle Farm*	72,222
LD	1899	Zack (Gwendoline Keats)	*On Trial*	41,509
Subtotal				**675,806**
Total				**719,597**

4. Analysis

The respelling patterns in Table 2 consistently invoked non-standard realisations of FACE in all texts listed in Table 1 but one[1].

Table 2

Respellings of the FACE lexical set in the corpus texts

Respellings	Examples	DL		LD		TOTAL	
		Types	Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types	Tokens
<ea>	*afear'd* 'afraid'	18	181	3	3	21	184
<a>	*agane* 'again'	2	33	20	101	22	134
<i>	*girt* 'great'	6	51	1	10	7	61
<e>	*tek* 'take'	2	7	8	45	10	52
<aa>	*naavel* 'navel'	3	3	9	38	12	41
<u>	*gurt* 'great'	1	3	2	7	3	10
<ay>	*Aytpense* 'eightpence'	4	10	0	0	4	10
<ea>	*geät* 'gate'	2	2	0	0	3	3
<a>	*gāte* 'gate'	0	0	3	3	3	3
<ai>	*māid* 'maid'	0	0	3	3	3	3
<ai>	*staid* 'stayed'	1	2	0	0	1	2
<ay>	*wāys* 'ways'	0	0	1	2	1	2
<aa>	*paäy* 'pay'	1	1	0	0	1	1
Total		40	293	50	212	90	505

According to the data in Table 2, FACE displayed great variation in how it was represented. <ea> is the most prominent respelling overall, mainly because of its frequent use in DL. It is documented in Baird (1863), where cases like *meake* 'make', *pleace* 'place', *teake* 'take', to name a few, can be seen. This text alone provides 61.54% of all DL respellings (181/293), and 36.36% of the total number of forms documented for FACE in the corpus (184/505). The related <eä>-form is less common, only found in Pulman (1860), with two types: *geät* 'gate' (also found as *geäts* 'gates'), and *sheäde* 'shade'. It is worth noting that neither <ea> nor <eä> seem to have been exclusive of Devonshire. It is of interest to note that <eä> is employed in other southwestern dialects like Dorset, which William Barnes's dialect poems show with examples like *geäte* 'gate' that the *EDD* records (s.v. *stonen*, adj.), as well as in Gloucestershire and Wilsthire, e.g. *veäce* 'face' (s.v. *blatch*, v. 3.). That we find <eä> in texts from Devon seems to broaden our knowledge of its South-Western distribution.

<a> is the second most frequent respelling, although it was used more uniformly in LD. As shown in Table 2, <a> takes 47.64% of all respellings in LD (101/212), 11.26% in DL

[1] There was no trace of dialectal renderings of this lexical set in G. J. Whyte-Melville's *Katerfelto* (1875).

(33/293), and 26.53% in DL and LD together (134/505), 9% less than <ea>. In the corpus, <a> appeared in LD as *bakkon* 'bacon', *makk* 'make', and *tak* 'take' in Blackmore (1869), while *tak'* 'take' is also used in Ford (1899), where most of <a> forms appear along with *mak* 'make', *overtak's* 'overtakes', *shak*' 'shake', *takks* 'takes'. DL examples of <a> forms come from Baird (1863), probably due to its length: 33 tokens are documented, with *tak* 'take' used seven times.

<i> was used more consistently by DL authors, whereas <e> was common in LD. This shows that infrequent respelled forms grew apart in DL and LD. <i> was understood to be a natural way to indicate the pronunciation for insiders, while an outsider audience would be accustomed to <e> as characteristic of a Devonshire speaker. Examples from the corpus are *chimmer* 'chamber' and *tek* 'take', used in Pulman (1860), *gert* 'great' in Hartier (1896), *mebbe* 'maybe' in Ford (1899), or *girt* 'great' in Blackmore (1869).

<aa> is used sporadically in DL compared to LD. Instances of <aa> include *taake* take', which is recorded in the *EDD* (s.v. *take*, v. 8), *baake* 'bake', *maake* 'make', featured in Hartier's story (1896), or *plaace* 'place' that is used in Peard (1880). Instances documented in DL are documented in Pulman (1860) in *naavel* 'navel' and *paazing* 'pacing'. In this work, <aä> is used in *paäy* 'pay', being the sole example.

Lastly, <u>, <ay>, <ā>, <ai>, <āi>, and <āy> are not as recurrent. <āi>, and <āy> are used solely in LD, while <ai> and <ay> are confined to DL. It remains unclear what drove authors to deviate from conventional respellings in some contexts, although it is worth noting that <u> is the only rare respelling shared by both DL and LD, with examples such as *gurt* 'great' in Pulman (1860) and Madox-Brown (1876).

5. Conclusions

In revisiting the dialect of Devonshire from a third-wave sociolinguistic perspective, this paper has observed that DL and LD authors used a closed set of respellings to invoke non-standard realisations of FACE and signal the identity of a character. These respellings were not coincidental in both types of representation, proving that different codified forms were available to conjure ideologies and "perform local identity" (Johnstone *et al.,* 2006, 83) between native and non-native audiences.

As it stands, Devonshire FACE was frequently represented by three highly codified spellings: <ea>, <a> and <i>. Other respellings were less favoured, occasional or emblematic, yet equally relevant as they point at a persistent urge to mark non-standardness in this vowel set.

In brief, ongoing research of the historical varieties of England shows that much can be extracted from the perceptions of writers and readers during the nineteenth century. This paper has addressed one of many linguistically enregistered aspects that were codified in literature in Devonshire from a third-wave perspective. It is part of the ReDiaLing-ENG project, whose purpose is to return to Late Modern English dialects from third-wave sociolinguistic angles.

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ROUND TABLE

Exploring ICT, Oral Production, and Learning Situations in Secondary EFL: Preliminary Findings from the *SLS4Teens* Project

Julia García Quirós[1], Laura V. Fielden Burns[2], Gemma Delicado Puerto[3]

Universidad de Extremadura
jugarciaq@alumnos.unex.es[1]
lvfielden@unex.es[2]
gdelpue@unex.es[3]

Abstract

Recent educational reforms highlight the importance of integrating digital competence, oral communication, and competence-based methodologies in foreign language teaching. This chapter is framed within the Erasmus+ project *SLS4Teens,* Second Language Learning at School for all TEENagers, which provides professional development for secondary EFL teachers in areas related to innovation and oral production. The study discusses the role of teacher training in the integration of ICT, learning situations, and communicative approaches in the context of the Spanish LOMLOE curriculum. Drawing on the *DigCompEdu* framework and the Action-Oriented Approach, the chapter offers preliminary reflections on the pedagogical use of digital tools in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: EFL, Teacher Training, ICT, Oral Production, Learning Situations, DigCompEdu

1. Introduction

Foreign language teaching in secondary education is currently shaped by the need to develop communicative competence together with digital competence and other transversal skills required in contemporary society (Hampel and Stickler 2005). In recent years, educational reforms in Europe have emphasised the importance of designing learning environments in which students actively use language in meaningful contexts and develop the skills needed for lifelong learning and social participation (Council of the Europe, 2018; European Commission, 2025).

In the Spanish educational system, the implementation of the LOMLOE educational law (Ley Orgánica 3/2020) has reinforced a competence-based approach and has introduced learning situations as the main organisational unit of teaching. Learning situations are intended to connect knowledge, skills, and attitudes through meaningful tasks that often involve collaboration, problem solving, and the use of digital tools. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this approach represents both an opportunity and a challenge, since it requires teachers to move beyond traditional textbook-based instruction and to design activities that promote interaction and oral communication.

Digital technologies, or ICT, can support this type of pedagogy by facilitating access to collaborative work, and the creation of communicative tasks (Hampel and Stickler 2005). However, the presence of ICT in the classroom does not automatically lead to more effective language learning. Its pedagogical value depends on how teachers integrate digital tools into learning situations and on the methodological preparation they have received (Koehler and Mishra, 2009; Caena and Redecker, 2019).

This perspective is consistent with the Action-Oriented Approach described in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), which understands learners as social agents who use language to perform tasks in real or simulated contexts. It is also related to the *DigCompEdu*: European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (European Commission, 2020), which highlights the importance of using technology to empower learners and to support their active role in the learning process.

In this context, teacher training becomes a key factor in the implementation of competence-based and digitally mediated language teaching. The Erasmus+ Project *SLS4Teens*, Second Language Learning at School for all TEENagers, was designed to provide professional development for active teachers in areas related to oral learning, inclusion, and innovation. The project offers a suitable context for examining how teachers approach the integration of ICT, oral production, and learning situations in their everyday practice.

The aim of this paper is to describe the pedagogical context in which these elements are being implemented during the initial phase of the project and to discuss the role of teacher training in supporting communicative and competence-based approaches to EFL teaching.

2. Educational Context and European Framework

Current European educational policies stress the importance of equipping learners with the competences required for lifelong learning, social participation, and digital citizenship (Council of Europe, 2018). In language education, these priorities are closely related to the development of communicative competence and the creation of learning environments in which students actively use the language in meaningful contexts (Hampel and Stickler, 2005; European Commission, 2025).

In Spain, the LOMLOE curriculum (Ley Orgánica 3/2020) reinforces this orientation by introducing learning situations as a central element of teaching practice. These learning experiences are designed to integrate different competences and frequently involve the use of digital tools, collaborative work, and authentic communicative outcomes. In EFL, this implies moving beyond exercises focused only on grammar or vocabulary and designing tasks that require students to speak, interact, and create.

This competence-based perspective is compatible with the Action-Oriented Approach described in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), which emphasises the role of learners as social agents who act through language. It is also related to task-based approaches to language teaching, in which learning develops through the completion of meaningful tasks with communicative goals (Ellis, 2003; Willis and Willis, 2007; Long, 2015).

However, the successful implementation of this kind of pedagogy depends largely on teacher preparation. Digital tools alone do not guarantee communicative or inclusive learning. Bearing this in mind, the *SLS4Teens* project aims to provide teachers with the necessary training that helps them use technology in ways that support participation, oral interaction, and learner autonomy.

3. The SLS4Teens Project

SLS4Teens is an Erasmus+ project (https://sls4teens.com/portal/en-gb) developed within the EU GREEN Alliance. Its main objective is to improve second language learning in secondary education through innovative methodologies, with particular attention to oral competence, inclusion, and learner motivation. The project offers professional development for active teachers through several modules that include ICT in language learning, intercultural communication, neuroscience, affective factors, grammar teaching, oral assessment, and the Neuro-Linguistic Approach (NLA).

Although the project involves other countries (France, Italy and Germany), the present study focuses on the Spanish teachers participating in the project, and aims to provide a preliminary view of teachers' practices before the classroom implementation phase of the project.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. DigCompEdu and Empowerment

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (*DigCompEdu*) provides a model for understanding how teachers use digital technologies in their professional practice (Redecker and Punie, 2017; European Commission, 2020). The framework describes digital competence not only as technical knowledge but as the ability to use digital tolos pedagogically to support learning, assessment, inclusion, and participation.

Among the six areas included in *DigCompEdu*, the present study focuses particularly on "Empowering learners" and "Facilitating learners' digital competence". Both areas refer to the use of digital technologies to increase engagement, support individual needs, and help students participate actively in the learning process (Redecker and Punie, 2017). In language classrooms, this perspective is especially relevant because digital tools can create opportunities for collaboration, content creation, and oral interaction (Caena and Redecker, 2019).

4.2. Learning Situations and the Communicative Approach

Learning situations in the LOMLOE framework (Ley Orgánica 3/2020) are designed to promote competence-based learning through contextualised and meaningful tasks. In foreign language teaching, this approach can be connected to the Action-Oriented Approach and to task-based language teaching, which emphasise the use of language for real communication rather than only for formal practice (European Commision, 2020).

Digital tools can support this type of pedagogy by allowing learners to produce videos, podcasts, presentations, or other multimodal products, as well as to interact with classmates or external audiences. In this sense, the use of ICT may help teachers design learning situations that promote oral production, collaboration, and learner autonomy.

From an inclusive perspective, this orientation is also compatible with Universal Design for Learning, which recommends offering multiple ways for students to engage, understand, and express their learning (Meyer, Rose and Gordon, 2014; CAST, 2018).

5. Method

The study presented in this chapter was conducted during the initial phase of the *SLS4Teens* project. The study focused on a small group of secondary school teachers (N = 9) from Extremadura, Spain, who teach English as a Foreign Language in state-funded schools and who are participating in the training programme offered within the project.

As part of the diagnostic phase, an online questionnaire was administered in June and July 2025 after participants had completed the first training modules. The purpose of the questionnaire was not to obtain conclusive results but to gain an initial understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the use of ICT, the implementation of learning situations, and the promotion of oral production in their lessons. The instrument, created with Google Forms, included 24 items in the form of both closed- and open-ended questions. Questions were organised into the following sections: teachers' professional profile, their use of digital tolos in the classroom, their experience with competence-based teaching, and their views on professional development.

Responses were exported to Excel and analysed in order to identify general tendencies that could inform later stages of the project. While closed-ended items were examined descriptively, open-ended responses were analysed thematically in order to identify recurring patterns in teachers' reported practices and beliefs.

Given the small number of participants, the questionnaire was used as an exploratory tool to contextualise the training process rather than as a source of statistical evidence. The information collected serves to illustrate the pedagogical context in which the *SLS4Teens* project is implemented —where teachers must balance curricular requirements, available resources, and the need to promote communicative competence. Additionally, the questionnaire's responses may help to identify areas in which teachers may require further training support.

6. Preliminary Findings

The data gathered during the initial phase of the project confirms that digital tools are present in the everyday practice of secondary EFL teachers, although their pedagogical use may vary depending on the teacher's experience, training, and confidence in competence-based methodologies. While ICT is widely available in schools, its integration into learning situations does not automatically lead to communicative or student-centred teaching.

Designing learning situations that promote oral production requires more than access to technological resources. It involves planning tasks that allow learners to interact, create, and use the language for meaningful purposes. This type of design often demands additional preparation time, methodological knowledge, and familiarity with competence-based approaches such as the Action-Oriented Approach or task-based learning.

The questionnaire's responses also highlight the importance of teacher training in helping educators move from a tool-oriented use of technology towards a more pedagogically grounded integration of ICT. Therefore, the *SLS4Teens* project's training modules that focus on oral production, learner participation, and inclusive methodologies may contribute to a more reflective use of digital resources in the classroom.

7. Discussion

The initial phase of the *SLS4Teens* project suggests that the integration of digital tools in foreign language teaching should not be understood only in terms of frequency of use, but in terms of pedagogical purpose (Colás Bravo, de Pablos Pons and Ballesta Pagán, 2018). Technologies can support communicative and competence-based learning, but this depends largely on the teacher's ability to design tasks that involve participation, interaction, and meaningful language use.

In the context of the LOMLOE curriculum (Ley Orgánica 3/2020), learning situations provide an appropriate framework for this type of pedagogy, since they are intended to connect language learning with real or simulated communicative contexts. When digital tools are incorporated into these learning situations, they may facilitate collaboration, multimodal production, and oral practice, which are essential for the development of communicative competence.

This perspective is consistent with the Action-Oriented Approach described in the CEFR Companion Volume (European Commission, 2020) and with the principles of *DigCompEdu* (Redecker and Punie, 2017), particularly those related to empowering learners and supporting their active role in the learning process. However, the implementation of these approaches requires sustained professional development. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their practice, experiment with new methodologies, and receive guidance on how to integrate digital tools in a pedagogically meaningful way (García-Sampedro, Rodríguez Olay and Peña-Suárez, 2024).

The exploratory nature of this study also points to the importance of analysing teacher training as a key factor in educational innovation. The *SLS4Teens* project provides a context in which teachers can engage with new perspectives on oral learning, inclusion, and the use of ICT, and this process may contribute to changes in classroom practice over time.

8. Conclusions and Future Work

This paper has presented an overview of the initial phase of the *SLS4Teens* project and has discussed the role of teacher training in the integration of ICT, oral production, and learning situations in secondary EFL teaching. Rather than offering definitive results, the study has aimed to describe the pedagogical context in which the project is being developed and to highlight some of the challenges teachers face when implementing competence-based approaches.

The discussion suggests that the effective use of digital tools in language teaching depends not only on the availability of technology but also on the teacher's methodological preparation and confidence in communicative and task-based approaches. Learning situations, as proposed in the LOMLOE curriculum, offer a suitable framework for promoting oral interaction, collaboration, and learner autonomy, but their successful implementation requires time, planning, and continuous professional development (Koehler and Mishra, 2009; Caena and Redecker, 2019).

Future stages of the *SLS4Teens* project will include classroom implementation, follow-up sessions with participating teachers, and additional data collection to examine how training may influence teaching practices and student outcomes. These later phases will provide a more detailed understanding of the relationship between teacher training, digital competence, and the development of oral communication in EFL.

At this preliminary stage, the project highlights the importance of supporting teachers through structured professional development programmes that connect digital competence, communicative teaching, and competence-based learning, with the aim of empowering both teachers and learners in contemporary foreign language classrooms.

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