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Interculturality and Masculinities: Critical Approaches to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

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Interculturality and Masculinities: Critical Approaches to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

The urge to turn the teaching of English as a foreign language into an inclusive and diverse space has recently become greater. For a few decades now, it has been highlighted the need for learners to develop not only their communicative competence, but also the intercultural one. However, the gap between these abstract expectations and specific teaching practices shows how much renovation is still a necessity. Understanding interculturality in its broadest sense, the article aims to evidence the little importance masculinities have been given in gender-critical educational research into foreign language teaching. To do so, a theoretical presentation of such concepts is carried out, as they are key to identify the related discourses that can be found in the world of English language teaching. As a conclusion, it suggests the assumption of these analytical categories in order to complement intercultural approaches, thus favouring diversity in English-teaching contexts for speakers of other languages. Finally, a list of possible themes as specific variables of upcoming empirical analysis is also proposed.

Keywords: diversity; teaching of English as a foreign language; interculturality; masculinities.

Interculturalidad y Masculinidades: Aproximaciones Críticas a la Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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Resumen

La urgencia de hacer de la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera un espacio diverso e inclusivo se ha intensificado recientemente. Desde hace algunas décadas, se insiste en la necesidad de desarrollar la competencia intercultural del alumnado, además de la comunicativa. Sin embargo, la distancia entre estas aspiraciones teóricas y la práctica educativa concreta a menudo revela la necesidad de renovación. Entendiendo la interculturalidad en un sentido amplio, a partir del desarrollo teórico de las masculinidades en general y la hegemónica en particular, el artículo llama la atención sobre la poca importancia que se ha dado a estos conceptos en la investigación educativa crítica con perspectiva de género aplicada a la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. A modo de conclusión, se propone adoptar esta categoría analítica para complementar los enfoques interculturales y favorecer así mayor diversidad en las aulas de este tipo de enseñanza, enumerando tanto posibles campos temáticos como variables específicas de análisis para un futuro estudio empírico.

Palabras clave: diversidad; enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera; interculturalidad; masculinidades.

In the last decades, research into diversity and interculturality in the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) has undeniably gained ground. As a matter of fact, both concepts have been included as competences for learners to develop both in the European Union's guidelines ([Council of Europe, 2002, 2018](#)) and in Spanish educational legislation in the last two decades ([Ley Orgánica 2/2006](#); [Ley Orgánica 3/2020](#); [Ley Orgánica 8/2013](#)), which is the context this paper is thought for. Moreover, from a gender perspective, the yearn for equal representation of men and women has often been highlighted as well.

This said, it is not so frequent to find research that explicitly questions the “hegemonic masculinity” embedded in English language teaching. Based on recent literature around this issue, the article aims to relate the concepts of masculinity/ies and hegemony with those of diversity and interculturality, as a way of supporting their role not as much as descriptive categories, but as analytic ones, thus fundamental to face a gender-critical study of both explicit and hidden realities in the teaching of foreign languages in general, and of English in particular.

To achieve this objective, a theoretical presentation and discussion of such concepts is carried out. In fact, this article is the first in a series that aims at first theoretically discussing the validity of masculinities —and femininities— as proper analytical variables to approach the teaching of foreign languages from a gender-critical perspective, eventually supporting later empirical research from this stance as a logical follow-up.

The article first faces the theoretical presentation of the concepts of masculinity and hegemony as well as some of their interrelated embodiments, to later claim their rightful place in the context of foreign language teaching and research, as essential correlates of diversity and intersectionality. After discussing all these axes in the reality of today's teaching of English as a foreign language, it concludes supporting their assumption as valid variables to achieve a critical insight into both the explicit and hidden messages around gender that populate its practices. Furthermore, it suggests specific topics and areas such empirical research should focus on.

From Masculinity to Masculinities

Traditionally, men used to be understood in an abstract and anthropocentric way, as the reference for humanity as a whole. Therefore, they were singularly labelled as “the man” and have been the frequently single object of culture, science and society in general. Besides, traditional Western thought has tended to understand reality as a set of binary oppositions. This logic applied to men, the belief was held that there should be a universal and immutable “abstract masculinity”, the focus of epistemology and social relations (Hartsock, 2003), opposed to embodied masculinities. Following the “perverse logic” of a hierarchical dichotomous dualism (Braidotti, 2017), this supposedly abstract masculinity was consequently defined in opposition to physical “othernesses”, such as children, women and ethnic or non-human realities (Nardini, 2014), which, contrarily, were usually identified with just materiality or a continuum ranging from less human to non-human (Ahmed, 2000). As a result, masculinity, conceptualised as immateriality, rationalism, universality, culture, politics and even humanity itself, has for centuries hidden otherness, synonymous to inferiority, non-human and less human, comprising women, children, ethnic “minorities” and non-human beings.

It is logical then that, with the rise of post-structuralism and decolonial and feminist theories, universal, abstract, rationalist masculinity became questioned both in science and in social relations (Nardini, 2014). This is how the awareness of the gendered nature of real men arose: like women, they are far from essence or nature. In fact, rephrasing Simone de Beauvoir, you “become a man”, just like you “become” a woman (de Stéfano, 2015). This switch meant the emergence of “masculinities”, as opposed to the previous paradigm of “abstract masculinity”.

Possible and Impossible Masculinities

In this new stance, masculinities —as well as femininities— are socially constructed gender identities that underpin the apparently natural experiences of sex, which implies they are contingent or, in other words, circumstantial (Otegui, 1999). The supposedly natural and biological essence of masculinity becomes irrelevant as now what matters is to give up sterile universalistic dichotomies to, instead, understand the varying ways gender identities are

assimilated and embodied, closely influenced by other social identities like social class, ethnicity or race, among others (Otegui, 1999).

We should then pose the question of whether a definition of masculinities can be worded or not. Minello (2002) asserts that a clear definition is not yet possible. However, some common features and plausible classifications can be attempted.

Firstly, there seems to be agreement on the relational nature of masculinities. As Jociles (2001) states, the masculine is socially constructed, especially against the feminine. Though, evidently, this can be also said of femininity, as the author points out, the relational construction of masculinity seems especially negative, since to reinforce the masculine identity is, above all, to prove that you are not a baby, gay or, most importantly, a woman. All this does not work the same way in the case of women. Becoming a man, then, is a process that is problematic and far from effortless, which debunks the theoretically natural and essential nature of the masculine gender identity. Then, it can't be surprising that many men need to take part in dangerous situations in order to publicly demonstrate their own manhood (Jociles, 2001; Otegui, 1999). Jociles (2001) also points out that the troublesome character of masculinity makes it an unstable construction, heavily affected by the changes in other social factors like, for example, feminine identities.

It should be clear that here masculinities are being described from a constructivist standpoint. Jociles (2001) summarises the main features of this perspective as follows:

- Masculinities necessarily affect the interaction between men and women, which always entails the dominant power of the former over the latter. This is why Otegui (1999) explains that the learning of masculinities is never neutral.
- There is a “hegemonic masculinity” in all societies.
- It is impossible to understand masculinities out of their historical, social, geographic or economic contexts, to mention just a few. Connell (1993) emphasises the influence of institutions like the state, the labour market and the family.

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- Masculinity is usually associated with a set of symbols and behaviours, different in each society. In Western contexts, for example, muscle mass or economic success are good stances of this.
- Lastly, societies tend to interpret such symbols and behaviours as natural, thus justifying the dominance of those who embody masculinities. Genitality seems to play an important role in this process, according to Otegui (1999), who claims that the evident —[genital] difference— becomes an excuse for the existent —inequality— (p. 154). It can't be surprising, then, that Connell (1993) stresses the importance of the link between masculinities as a social construct and sexuality.

Minello (2002) differentiates three different approaches to masculinities: functionalism, psychoanalysis and gender perspective. The latter, within which this paper is conceived, agrees with everything presented so far from a constructivist perspective:

Gender perspective, with Gayle Rubin's 1975 article —which presents sociological, anthropological and psychoanalytical research—, discusses the conflictive relational character of masculinity, the need to study power relations and the historical nature of gender as well as the fundamental problem of the subordination of women. (Minello, 2002, p. 13, author's translation)¹

Minello (2002) has also explained sociological, political, anthropological and biological attempts to classify masculinities. On the other hand, Connell (1995) suggests five different approaches: essentialist, positivist, normative, structural linguistics and her own, the “political sociology of men in gender relations” (1993). This last perspective understands masculinities within the sex-gender complex and is organised around four dimensions: power, production, desire and symbols. Consequently, this discipline aims at studying the practices and spaces that embody masculinities or, in Butlerian terms, perform them (Butler, 1990). However, we should remember that these spaces and practices change in time and even within the same social group.

In light of the above, it seems to be core to the concept of masculinities to be an intellectual and political challenge that is always under construction

(Minello, 2002). This challenge is even greater if we take into account how this term has succeeded in many different contexts, from research and communication to political activism. Unfortunately, this success hasn't contributed to the conceptual clarity of the word. Contrarily, its popularity has reinforced even more, if possible, its polysemic character (de Stéfano, 2021).

Despite all these shortcomings, the following description of masculinities can aptly summarise everything said so far:

Not only are masculinities not biologically or psychologically determined, but they must be understood as social practices and representations whose only common feature is that they all tend to justify male domination. As a result, masculinity can be defined as the group of behaviours, symbols, ideas, values and behavioural norms built around men's sexual difference. (Jociles, 2001, p. 8, author's translation)²

Masculinities and Hegemony

The previous section explained how difficult it is to define and classify masculinities. Be that as it may, it is considerably more important to highlight the overwhelming consensus around the existence of a hierarchy within the universe of possible and impossible masculinities (de Stéfano, 2021; Minello, 2002).

The label "hegemonic masculinity" was coined in the 1980s by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell, based on her empirical studies on the role of men in contexts like schools and the workplace. Her work described the interaction of multiple hierarchies built around gender, class or ethnicity, among others. Supported by the feminist theories about patriarchy, the debate about the role of men in its eradication and the Gramscian notion of "hegemony" as a means of social control, she suggested a new model of diverse masculinities, necessarily linked with power relations. In fact, the connection between hierarchy and masculinities stems from findings about the violence of heterosexual men over homosexual ones (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity is the most widely spread:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell, 1995, p. 77)

The next paragraph deepens into the features of hegemonic masculinity, which may not appear so obvious when reading this definition for the first time. Connell herself revised her original concept and remarked on the following characteristics (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Firstly, it is a pattern of practices that realise social expectations in order to reinforce the patriarchal system. The fact that, statistically speaking, hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most common one, should not be disregarded. Contrarily, it is the privileged or normative one: "It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). Another intriguing aspect of hegemony is that it doesn't always resort to violence, but to persuasion, culture and institutions. Finally, hegemonic masculinity is changing and diverse: it is constantly adapting to different circumstances both in time and different synchronous contexts. This change takes place through an unsteady balance of forces in which hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities fight for predominance, this process resulting in new forms of hegemonic masculinity. Even if this, theoretically, may open the door for a positive change from a gender perspective, it is still improbable as "challenges to hegemony are common, and so are adjustments in the face of these challenges" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 835). This supports the importance of research about hegemonic masculinity, as it is always in search of subtler and more "acceptable" ways to perpetuate patriarchy.

In short, based on history and society, Connell (1995) described hegemonic masculinity as far from a mere list of physical, behavioural or psychological features, focusing instead on its circumstantial, dynamic, unstable, relational and changing nature (de Stéfano, 2021). It is then time to describe the possible

dynamics between masculinities, which Connell (1995) reduces to four: hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalisation.

Hegemonic masculinity, that “horizon of desirability” (de Stéfano, 2021) has already been sufficiently explained. Subordinated masculinities are usually identified with those of gay men, while BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) men are thought of as marginalised. On the other hand, those men that benefit from the “patriarchal dividend” are considered accomplices of hegemonic men: even if they don’t belong to the latter privileged minority, they are still their allies as long as they reinforce the system of inequalities and take advantage of their own “benefits” (Connell, 1995).

De Stéfano (2021) criticises the naïve tendency to simply identify masculinities with specific social groups according to, for example, their ethnicity, sexual orientation or social class. What is more, the concept of hegemonic masculinity itself has been critiqued.

Demetriou (2001) differentiates between external and internal hegemony. The former is the one of men over women, while the latter is the one of men over other men. This useful concept of internal hegemony sheds light on the interaction between hegemonic, subordinated, marginalised and accomplice masculinities: through an intricate process of negotiation, translation and reconfiguration known as “dialectical pragmatism” they don’t build “a unitary pattern of hegemonic masculinity but a ‘historic bloc’ involving a weaving together of multiple patterns, whose hybridity is the best possible strategy for external hegemony” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844).

Demetriou (2001) makes it clear how internal hegemony helps reinforce external hegemony. He provides examples of how Western hegemonic masculinity has progressively incorporated elements traditionally associated with the subordinated masculinities of gay men, this way adapting to changing circumstances. However, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, “such an appropriation blurs gender difference but does not undermine patriarchy” (p. 845).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is clearly complex. As a matter of fact, Raewyn Connell, the original author, has admitted the need to reject, keep and reword some of her own ideas. Firstly, she has posed the need to reject the univocal association between masculinity and men, as it is also

possible for some women to “appropriate aspects of hegemonic masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847). Additionally, she has insisted on the need to reject the link between hegemonic masculinity and certain physical, behavioural, psychological and social features. This would be totally inappropriate as masculinity “represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 841).

Unfortunately, this simplistic approach to hegemonic masculinity has sometimes wrongly led to understand it as embodied by, for instance, “a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (Goffman, 1963, p. 128) in the context of the United States. Contrarily to this, Kimmel (1994), who prefers the term “hegemonic manhood”, suggests that the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity is better described as “a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power.” (p. 61, italics in the original).

Additionally, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest the core ideas within the concept of hegemonic masculinity that should be kept. Firstly, the hierarchy of multiple masculinities, of which one is hegemonic —not necessarily by means of force, but in cultural, discursive, institutional and social ways—. Secondly, the ideal aura that this hegemonic masculinity has for all men, which makes it fit only for a privileged elite minority. Lastly, its ability to reproduce and produce new manifestations which help it adapt to changing circumstances, still preserving the patriarchal order.

Concerning certain reformulations of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) list these: “the nature of gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities” (p. 847).

Exploring this list exceeds the scope of this article but its presentation is enough to identify some of the many challenges the study of masculinities faces. This originally theoretical concept has experienced such huge success that it is no longer merely academic. It has also become a tool to analyse social realities from scientific and popular perspectives, often spread by the media (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Such has its success been that nowadays the meaning of hegemonic masculinity is not always clear. In fact, it is not uncommon to read definitions

which still reduce it to a set of psychological, individualistic factors, describing it as stable and immutable (de Stéfano, 2015, 2021) as if it was the stereotype (Minello, 2002) of a traditional chauvinist macho (Otegui, 1999).

The real risk is that the greater the success, the higher the exposure to the reaction of patriarchy, which resists change by constantly renewing its tricks, reinforcing its peculiar “common sense”, and turning our conceptual tools into empty instruments, thus eroding the criticality in our reflections. (de Stéfano, 2015, p. 14, author’s translation)³

Hegemonic Masculinity, Diversity, Interculturality and TEFL

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has shown to be a useful tool to describe different embodiments of masculinity, at the same time it can question its processes of production and reproduction of gender relationships (de Stéfano, 2021). These, of course, also take place in educational contexts, even if, like in society in general, other variables should also be considered. In the case of this article, centred on the teaching of English as a foreign language, interculturality and diversity become paramount factors that deserve to be studied.

Even if, intuitively, they don’t seem to be connected, it is important to make it clear that interculturality isn’t just about the interaction between, for example, a Japanese and a Colombian, but also about what happens between a man and a woman, a child and an elderly person, the rich and the poor, a Marxist and a liberal, a gay man and a straight man, or many other instances like these (Soto, 2019, p. 47).

If we resort to the systems theory as focused on people (Bateson, 1979) to understand foreign language teaching situations, interculturality in its broadest sense, as described in the previous paragraph, becomes relevant. According to this theory, the way the whole —the group formed by teachers and learners together with the school— behaves, depends on each individual, based on their personal interpretations, and mediated by social rules and their physical and social contexts, as well as their history (Soto, 2019).

The experience of “otherness” (Byram, 1997) is intense when learning a foreign language. This is so because of the development of the intercultural

communicative competence which, through a foreign language, leads the student to experience the familiar and the unknown at the same time, to challenge their own ideas, and to accept ambiguity, the lack of certainties, and world views different from theirs, too (Pérez et al., 2021). As a result, while developing this intercultural communicative competence, through the production of new meanings in the foreign language, learners and teachers also develop a “third culture” (Kramsch, 1993).

What is more, teachers of English as a foreign language, aware of their own traditionally colonial perspective (Lorenzo, 2000), have made an effort to overcome it in the last decades. This explains why they currently admit their role in the reproduction of unfair situations connected to domination and power, and now strive to also represent postcolonial subjects and groups, traditionally silenced and disregarded (Pérez et al., 2021). They even attempt to include a variety of accents regardless of their origin, thus fighting the bias that favours “native speakers”, known as native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006).

This change stems from an intersectional perspective (Hill Collins, 2015). This view intends to identify those messages that contribute to reproducing and reinforcing layers of privilege and oppression, mediated through language, in cooperation with other variables like ethnicity, age, educational level, social class or religion, to mention just a few (Pérez et al., 2021).

It can be concluded that diversity in all its forms —ethnic, cultural, linguistic, affective, sex-gender and many others— is an intrinsic property of the teaching of foreign languages in general and of English in particular (Liu & Nelson, 2017). Still, this conceptual belief, heavily supported by theory and research and widely spread among professionals, doesn’t seem to be an effective reality at schools: at least in the case of English as a foreign language classrooms, the reality (re)presented and communicated continues to be rather uniform and colonial (Pérez et al., 2021).

This becomes even more remarkable when we consider that the competence in a foreign language is no longer a luxury, but a necessary means to access a wide range of (inter)cultural practices, essential in the globalised 21st-century world (Pérez et al., 2021). Therefore, diversity must be an integral part of educational practices, aiming not just at non-critical inclusion but, more ambitiously, at social justice, thus helping overcome inequalities and oppression (Freire, 2005).

In short, based on sociocultural theories (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014) and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2020), and following Pérez et al. (2021), diversity can be understood as follows:

- Diversity is an inherent feature of humanity, as shown by identities, points of view, beliefs, needs or languages, among others.
- As a result, diversity should always be a characteristic of all the different elements of educational contexts.
- Educational situations with a critical perspective must aim at enacting more inclusive societies.
- Critical approaches to diversity must uncover biases, prejudices, discriminations, injustice and inequalities in the education system, even if they are unconscious.
- The development of intercultural competences and the exercise of democratic principles when teaching English as a foreign language is an opportunity to make diversity visible and, consequently, fight against hegemonic dominance of all sorts (masculine, heterosexual, ageist, ableist and many more).

As presented here, the most updated literature around English language teaching heavily supports the critical and emancipatory potential of intercultural perspectives that favour diversity, coupled with communicative teaching methods (Martínez Lirola, 2022). Furthermore, in recent years the call for teachers of English as a foreign language to include new cultural groups in a broader sense has been intense. This is the case of, for example, queer people, frequently absent in most educational resources (Goldstein, 2015; Gray, 2013; López Medina, 2020, 2021, 2022; Moore, 2020; Nelson, 1999, 2009; Nemi, 2018; Paiz, 2019; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2015). Besides, we should not forget everything stated so far about the analytical use of the category of hegemonic masculinity when critically studying foreign language teaching practices from a gender perspective.

Discussion

Throughout these pages, the most important ideas around hegemonic masculinity and its relationship with interculturality and diversity in TEFL

have been presented. At least in Spain, the potential of foreign languages is significant. It is one of the few subjects that are taught throughout the entire education system, both compulsory and non-compulsory levels. Besides, with the progressive implementation of bilingual teaching programmes, the presence of foreign languages is even more relevant. This extensive presence in the education system explains the strength of foreign languages to convey an incredibly wide range of messages, both explicit and implicit, which contribute to the social construction of identities at the intersection of culture, gender and language, to mention just a few. Considering that English is the most frequently studied foreign language nowadays, its role in the aforementioned process of social construction of identities proves undeniable.

Focusing just on English as a foreign language, the emphasis placed on the combination of communicative and intercultural approaches in the last decades, even if rather theoretical and little practical, is more than evident. The claim has also been to incorporate numerous other perspectives: critical (Giroux, 2020), sociocultural (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), social justice (Freire, 2005), intersectional (Hill Collins, 2015), intercultural (Kramsch, 1993), gender (Sunderland, 2015), queer (Nemi, 2018) or “usualising” (Sanders & López Medina, 2022). However, these well-intended calls are, in most cases, still waiting for more enthusiastic practical applications in the classrooms (Pérez et al., 2021).

In light of the above, it seems surprising that no one has yet claimed for hegemonic masculinity to become an important analytical category to be considered in foreign language teaching and research. This would be essential to improve both teaching practices and resources. It must be admitted, though, that teaching materials have been studied from a gender perspective, Jane Sunderland (2015) being an outstanding example of this. However, it is still hard to find explicit questioning of the hegemonic masculinity they very frequently contain as one of their cultural contents. What realisations of masculinities can be found in foreign language teaching materials and resources? What messages around different ways of embodying manhood do teachers convey and favour in their classes?

This kind of studies and their conclusions would benefit everyone involved in education. It has been remarked before how hard and tiresome the process of enacting hegemonic masculinity can be, needing continuous external demonstrations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; de Stéfano, 2021; Minello,

2002; Otegui, 1999). Adopting this perspective, therefore, would benefit, firstly, all men who assume hegemonic masculinity. But those who enact the other masculinities already described —accomplice, marginalised and subordinated— would also benefit from these analyses, too. Finally, as long as masculinities strengthen and perpetuate the male dominance over women (Connell, 1995), it can't be questioned that women would be the most benefited from this kind of critical studies.

The challenge could not be bigger. Focusing just on the publishing industry and the production of mainstream teaching materials, as Goldstein (2015) well explains, it is a global market in which companies, foreseeably, privilege their economic results. In consequence, given the choice between producing more ethical, diverse and inclusive resources, and the plausible loss of market share that could entail, they tend to opt for a merely methodological and aesthetic renovation of their own materials. This frequently results in their leaving aside issues like gender, sexuality, interculturality, social justice or sex-gender diversity, among others. This way, given that many teachers of English as a foreign language tend to choose these mainstream materials for their lessons, publishers end up contributing to reinforcing and reproducing hegemonic masculinity and the dominance of some cultures over others.

Can any solutions be posed for this situation? It can't be denied that, in the long term, better initial training for future teachers of English must be provided, so that they are able to discover the sociocultural messages hidden in materials to then question them from communicative, intersectional, intercultural, critical and inclusive perspectives. This way, instead of perpetuating, naturalising and essentialising inequalities, they will be able to didactically unveil them (Pérez et al., 2021).

However, in-service teacher training should not be disregarded either. It should contribute to enabling them to “usualise” minoritised groups, flagrantly absent in current mainstream classrooms of English as a foreign language. “Usualising” refers to simply representing individuals and groups traditionally omitted because of their gender, sexual orientation, abilities, ethnicity or culture, among others. It is a strategy that helps implicitly question privileges and prejudices in day-to-day classroom practice, as effective

training for later actively critical activities, which can be named as “actualising” (Sanders & López Medina, 2022).

In the short term, more research is needed by applying the analytical potential of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. This kind of research could worthily complement what has already been done around interculturality, gender and disability. Otegui’s words can help us understand this need:

The “old macho” isn’t fashionable any longer, but the “new man” shares a lot of those features of old masculinity. The behaviours have changed, but have the core elements changed so much? [...] In a world where appearance is the most important, this helps reshape the representations of “manhood”. It is true that softer and milder behaviours and practices are expected [...] but in our postmodern world what matters is appearance, not essence. (Otegui, 1999, p. 156, author’s translation)⁴

Why is it so important to carry out more significant research about hegemonic masculinity? Because, as the author makes clear, hegemonic masculinity is able to mute for the sake of its own survival. As a result, it is vital to keep alert so as to discover the masculinity references that are conveyed in the education system in general and in lessons of English in particular.

Though this critical research has been started in education as a whole in Spain (Díez, 2015), the teaching of foreign languages seems not to have started yet. Still lacking empirical research about this specific field, it can be guessed that the traditional chauvinist stereotype will not be found in them, but subtler, milder forms will probably be: the old values in new wrapping (Otegui, 1999, p. 157).

Mainstream publishing companies have already been referred to. As Minello (2002) and Pérez et al. (2021) well point out, documents are a valuable source of information about the messages conveyed in classrooms: teaching materials are valuable evidence of them, either explicit or hidden. In consequence, materials and resources are a very important field to which to apply the kind of research suggested here, with the aim of tracking these old values in new wrapping.

Logically, the study of hegemonic masculinity in the teaching of English as a foreign language would not work well unless complemented with that

about “emphasized femininity”. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain this concept, parallel to hegemonic masculinity and equally analytic. However, they chose to use the adjective “emphasized” instead of “hegemonic” to make it clear the different position and hierarchy of men and women in the patriarchal system: emphasized femininity will never equal hegemonic masculinity; contrarily, it will serve it, aiding at its reinforcement, construction and reconstruction. If the question about the forms of masculinities that are conveyed and privileged in English language classrooms is posed, it is also vital to ask how femininity is also produced and reproduced in them.

Conclusions

This paper aimed to show the little importance given to masculinities when researching the explicit and hidden cultural messages conveyed in foreign language classrooms, more specifically, those of English. Through the theoretical presentation of masculinities, hegemony, diversity and interculturality, it has evidenced their analytical potential and, as a result, called for including the category of hegemonic masculinity in gender critical research into the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Heidegger (2000) used to say that “language is the house of Being” (p. 83), expression that somehow helps us realise the importance of the analysis of the messages and resources contextualised in such lessons, as they perform actual embodiments of masculinities, cultures and genders, among others. This research would help identify the aporia they very often transmit: contradictions or paradoxes that can’t be solved; logical difficulties, usually speculative, full of prejudices, caused by little acceptance of the culture of the other person interacting with us (Soto, 2017).

However, having this as the single conclusion would be of no real use. To enhance the applicability of this suggestion, some guidelines are posed, in order to favour a future logical continuation of this research: empirical analysis of English as a foreign language classrooms, to discover the discourses and performances around masculinities that take place in them. This kind of research should be carried out at all levels: local, regional and

global, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest. What is more, the global level becomes quite important when considering the international nature of the TEFL publishing market, already discussed (Goldstein, 2015).

Concerning the topic, Connell (1993) signalled three main contexts in which masculinities are performed: state, work and family. Therefore, it seems fundamental to study the messages about these three environments, but without disregarding other possible topics which represent social practices that also contribute to shaping and reshaping masculinities like, for example, sports. Still concerning topics, it could be asked whether the omission of certain topics in formal education contexts —like, for example, sexuality— can also aid to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Finally, the way certain themes are presented also deserves a good deal of analysis in the light of hegemonic masculinity. Social struggles, like that of feminism, would be a good instance of this.

In the context of attention to diversity and special educational needs, Roiha and Polso (2021) describe their *-Dimensional Model*: a means to differentiate teaching practices in Finland and adjust them to each learner's needs. Despite the different original application, the five dimensions they suggest can easily be adopted as variables in educational studies —both general and in foreign languages—, applying hegemonic masculinity as an analytical category. Here can be found the five dimensions they propose, including some examples in their original text with the addition of others, specific to English language teaching:

- Teaching arrangements: groupings, joint teaching, language assistants, support teachers...
- Learning environments: their physical and social characteristics...
- Teaching methods: projects, how to work the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), intercultural competence...
- Support materials: use of ICT, songs, tales, textbooks...
- Assessment: initial, formative, summative, rubrics, checklists, exams, presentations, tests, quizzes.

The use of hegemonic masculinity as an analytical category applied to gender critical research into the teaching of English as a foreign language is suggested in the hope to enhance its transformation into contexts that will

favour equal relationships and the deconstruction of the “perverse logic” of the hierarchical binary masculinity-femininity (Braidotti, 2017).

With this ideal in mind, it is worth trying this proposal of multi thematic hermeneutics which, instead of ontologising languages, genders and identities will analyse them as determined by historical processes of hegemony and dominance (Soto, 2017).

Notes

¹ Original text in Spanish: La perspectiva de género, con el artículo precursor de Gayle Rubin en 1975 —que recoge los aportes de la sociología, la antropología y el psicoanálisis—, plantea el conflicto, el carácter relacional de la masculinidad, la necesidad de estudiar las relaciones de poder, de analizar el carácter histórico del género y el problema fundamental de la subordinación de la mujer.

² Original text in Spanish: Las masculinidades, no sólo no están determinadas biológica y/o psíquicamente, sino que tienen que ser entendidas como prácticas y representaciones sociales cuyo único punto en común es que tienden a justificar la dominación del hombre. De esta forma, se puede definir la masculinidad como el conjunto de conductas, símbolos, ideas, valores y normas de comportamiento generadas en torno a la diferencia sexual de los varones.

³ Original text in Spanish: El riesgo radica en que a mayor éxito, mayor es la exposición al carácter reactivo del patriarcado, que muestra su resistencia al cambio renovando constantemente sus trampas, revitalizando su particular “sentido común” e instrumentalizando y vaciando de contenido nuestras herramientas conceptuales en un afán de erosionar el filo crítico de nuestras reflexiones.

⁴ Original text in Spanish: Ya no se lleva “el macho antiguo”, pero “el nuevo hombre” comparte muchos de los atributos inherentes a la vieja constitución de la masculinidad. Han cambiado las formas de comportamientos pero ¿es cierto que han cambiado tanto los elementos esenciales? [...] En un mundo en el que lo importante es el envoltorio, éste rearticula las formas de constitución de las representaciones de la “hombria”. Es cierto que de estos modelos iconográficos se esperan comportamientos y prácticas más suaves [...] pero en nuestro mundo posmoderno lo importante es la apariencia, no la esencia.

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