Othering: Towards a Critical Cultural Awareness in the Language Classroom[*]

La otredad: hacia una conciencia intercultural crítica en el aula de inglés[**]

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Due to the need of decentering language learners' conceptions and practices of "othering" against the target culture, it has become necessary to help them grow in critical cultural understanding and positive appreciation towards the richness of difference and plurality, as a transversal dimension of their intercultural competence. Thus, this paper seeks to summarize the literature on the notion of *othering* and its pedagogical possibilities to promote *critical cultural awareness raising* in the language classroom. It initially presents some theoretical contributions on the concepts of the "Other" and the "Self" and its dialectical relation, and later, it proposes four pedagogical tools that could enable learners to achieve the already mentioned objective.

Key words: Critical cultural awareness, language learning, othering, pedagogical tools, the Other and the Self.

Debido a la necesidad de descentrar las concepciones y prácticas de otredad que los estudiantes de lengua poseen hacia la cultura meta, se ha hecho necesario ayudarlos a crecer en su comprensión crítico

cultural y valoración positiva de la diferencia y la pluralidad, como una dimensión transversal de la competencia intercultural. Por lo tanto, este artículo pretende resumir la literatura sobre la noción de *otredad* y sus posibilidades pedagógicas para promover la *conciencia crítico cultural* en el aula de lenguas. Inicialmente se presentan algunas aportaciones teóricas sobre los conceptos del "Otro" y el "Yo" y su relación dialéctica, y más tarde, se proponen cuatro herramientas pedagógicas que podrían permitir a los estudiantes alcanzar el objetivo ya propuesto.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje de una lengua, conciencia crítica intercultural, el Otro y el Yo, herramientas pedagógicas, otredad.

Introduction

With an increasingly interconnected world and constant flux of information going back and forth, borders have been widely opened for human beings to venture into new horizons and experiences where an encounter with the *Other* is unavoidable.

During the past years governments, international organizations, educational institutions, among other actors, have reaffirmed the need to encourage an active participation and democratic citizenship that resists all forms of prejudice, discrimination, inequality, and human rights abuses. Therefore, universal core values such as responsibility, respect, tolerance, freedom, unity, compassion, and fairness (Kidder as cited in Meacham, 2007) have been considered key elements everyone must possess in order to cultivate mutual understandings and cross-cultural dialogues.

Consequently, the need to foster in people a *critical cultural awareness* has emerged as a transversal component of their intercultural competence, so that they may reach a deeper understanding and appreciation towards the *others* (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Guilherme, 2012; Houghton, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). Mainstream education has placed special attention on this concern, arguing that it is compulsory to "help citizens to live together in culturally diverse societies, [for them to] communicate with each other across all kinds of cultural divisions" (Huber & Reynolds, 2014, p. 9).

Within this context, classrooms become "culturally sensitive places to learn" (Porto, 2010, p. 47), to build opportunities for positively transforming individuals' thinking and actions. This is particularly so in the language-teaching field, given that language is itself a reflection of people's values, meanings, and behaviors (Byram & Guilherme, 2000); thus, it has become imperative to approach learners to explore cultural complexity and multiplicity, so that they face a different social identity while questioning their own. Only in this way is it possible to break down their barriers of incomprehension, ignorance, and alienation that take them to misleading pictures of the Other.

Therefore, the present paper seeks to explore how the notion of *othering* may contribute to the *critical cultural awareness raising* in the language classroom. It first introduces a discussion from several theoretical perspectives on the concepts of "Other", the "Self", and "Othering," and then displays some pedagogical tools teachers can use to achieve this intended objective.

When writing this document, the author conducted an overall literature review by consulting updated and reliable information from books, journals, research articles, scientific databases, and thesis repositories which subsequently led to a corpus compilation of around 85 bibliographic references. These sources were localized by establishing conceptual categories such as "intercultural communicative competence," "critical cultural awareness," "othering," "ethnocentrism," "essentialism," and so forth. Then, it was necessary to sort, evaluate, and analyze them to find the possible connections among the different works and to identify landmarks, concepts, and theorists that provided a framework.

Theoretical Framework

The Concern of "Othering": From Philosophy to the Language Class

Difference and diversity have been commonly seen as a field of ideological tensions that revolve around the social representations of a group of people in which the "Self" and the "Other" are positioned in the place of a dichotomy that polarizes individuals' collective identity in relation to what is perceived as normal, familiar, or abnormal, foreign (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010).

The "Other" as an epistemological concept intertwines with the notion of *Othering*, denoting the ways in which an individual or a particular group of people is objectified, differentiated, simplified, exotified, or created in position to the *Self* (Suomela-Salmi & Dervin, 2009; Staszak, 2008; Woodward, 1997). A binary of "Us" and "Them" socially constructed on the perceptions (typically negative) of any social identity (e.g., racial, geographic, language, ethnic, economic, ideological, etc.) may cause alienation and perpetuation of group stereotyping, discrimination, prejudice, and injustice.

This subject has been a core issue in the agendas of numerous theoretical traditions, dating from Plato's *The Sophist*, which approached the ontological question of Being and Not-Being. Down through the years, academics have become more interested in the discussion of the "alterity of the other," the way human beings shape themselves as subjects through their relations with others.

Some reference points that address these notions can be observed in the works of philosophers like Hegel (1770-1831), who first introduced the concept of the Other, later

adopted by continental philosophy as a theory framework. He claimed that for the subject to become an intentional and self-conscious agent, he or she needs to be constructed by the recognition of the Other. That is to say, the essential characteristic of the individual's awareness involves the connection between the Self and the Other as a necessary condition of the Self as being, an assumption known as the phenomenon of intersubjectivity . However, it is worth noting that it was not until Kojève's further contributions and interpretations of Hegel's ideas that the Other was taken as a fundamental topic of the subjectivity (Gasparyam, 2014).

This sense of supplementation and completeness between *selves* became a shared interest within some contemporary philosophers like Husserl (1859-1938), who argued that "the other is a 'mirroring' of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense" (Husserl, 1969, p. 94). This statement led him to recognize the Other in its form as ego, in its form of alterity but not as an alter-ego, which results in its reduction to the sameness (Derrida, 1978). Moreover, this idea of the Other is directly related to the theoretical framework of intersubjectivity that involves experimenting empathy when putting oneself into the other's shoes.

In the same line of thought, Heidegger (1889-1976) stated that "by 'Others,' we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom. . . one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too" (Heidegger as cited in Pratap, 2009, p. 101). This means that the Other "cannot be approached by the context of "egohood" (that is, as alter-ego)" (Raffoul, 1995, p. 342) but through the principle of sameness, since the individual is a being-with-another.

Nonetheless, an alternative dialectic of Self/Other was later proposed by Levinas (1906-1995) who, unlike Husserl's and Heidegger's ideas, intended to disclose the concept of the Other as a different and radical alterity that cannot be reduced to the sameness, as the starting point is the Other itself, who is not dependent on a relation with me (Bensussan, 2011). According to Little (2007), Levinas claimed that Western philosophy has overshadowed the Other above the Self and, for that reason, he suggested ethics as a solution to overcome an individuals' autonomous freedom and account for the Other, because face-to-face encounters increase their ethical subjectivity.

Likewise, Lacan (1901-1981), making use of his psychoanalytic theory, approached the notion of alterity by affirming that there are two different types of "other". The first one, the little "other" or the counterpart *autre*, arises from the Mirror Stage theory and refers to the resemblance of the ego from the imaginary realm, but it also symbolizes the individuals' recognition of other real people outside themselves, alter-egos with whom they identify and recognize themselves (Bailly, 2012; Lehman, 2008).

On the other hand, the second "other" is associated with the language symbolic order (the foundation of intersubjectivity for him) and denotes an "Absolute Other" (*Autre*), a qua

absolute alterity that surpasses the labels of "us and them" (Perniola, 2004; Seshadri, 2009). It allows infants to be aware that they are separate subjects from "their mirror images," from "their others," and for them to start developing an own identity by means of the language use. Therefore, language becomes an instrument provided by the Other (*l'Autre du language*) to build the notion of "Self" but also to communicate with other individuals mediated by exchanges of meanings loaded with diverse and probably, new social identities.

Derrida (1930-2004), for his part, conceived the "the other" (written in lower-case letter) as a combination of the absolute other and the alter-ego (Saghafi, 2010), rejecting Levinas' radical separation of the *other* from the *same*. He argued that alterity is relational because the Other "is an ego . . . in relation to me as to an another. . . the other cannot be absolutely exterior to the self without ceasing to be other. . .consequently, the same is not a totality closed in upon itself" (Derrida, 1978, p. 126).

This interplay of the Other and the Self either as its constituent element or its radical alterity, as described above, has managed to extend its discussions to the historically marginalized discourses of post-colonialism, feminism, multiculturalism, and gender, among others, as direct responses of the embedded social practices of exclusion, domination, and denial of the Other. Hence, from this neglected alterity that during Modernism approached the Other by its differences and led to alienation and hostility, the notion of "Othering" made more sense and was appropriated by postmodernism proponents like Bhabha (1994), Said (1978), Spivak (1985), and others. Scholars whose postcolonial theory reflected on the subjective experiences and realities that perpetuate silencing practices, reinforce hegemonic and hierarchical power dynamics as well as oppression on particular groups of people.

In this sense, Spivak (1985), taking into account Lacan's two versions of the other (*Autre/autre*), was able to coin the notion of "othering" from a critical cultural perspective, describing how the colonial discourse takes place in an ideological and dialectical process of segregating groups and creating its "others" under unequal conditions. Thus, the Other (with capital letter) represents the focus of power, the Colonizer, meanwhile the other (with lower-case letter) symbolizes the colonized inferior others, the subalterns in Gramsci's words (2011). In this regard, Dussel (as cited in Farrés & Matarán, 2014) observed that Descartes' dictum of "I think, therefore I am" (*ego cogito*) has indeed become similar to the theoretical foundation of "I conquer, therefore I am" (*ego conquiro*), a statement that seeks to differentiate ourselves from the outsiders and reaffirm the legitimacy of the "I".

On the other hand, Said (1978) addressed the issue of othering by referring to how Europe has built Orient and its identity in an exoticized, reductionist and alienating fashion. To illustrate, Bhabha (1994) affirmed that the use of racial stereotyping, for example, has validated the conquest process and institutionalized systems of imperial administration and instruction over the inferiors and degenerated others. Stereotypes become, then, derogatory

and aggressive discourse devices that fix divisions between the colonizers and colonized, between the "Self and the other." Hence, this "questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies [under] the logic of domination and subordination" (Hutchinson as cited in Hogue, 2013, p. 2) is still present because cultures coexist as a different and competing alter ego, whose identity formation is established by the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of its differences in relation to the Self (Said, 1978).

From this never-ending concern, academics of the postcolonial theory claim that it is only possible to overcome the hegemonic supremacy of the Self and thus, recognize the Others in their diversity by providing them with a place to speak back from their personal experiences and reality, so that they can demonstrate how they have been "othered" by the imperialist ideals.

We could continue providing theoretical contributions on this topic from the several philosophical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, psychoanalytical, and cultural perspectives; however, as the aforementioned have already displayed an overview of the dialectical relations between the "Self" and the "Other," it is time now to tackle it from the educational setting, more specifically, from the language teaching and learning classroom.

Theorists and researchers have asserted that *othering* can easily permeate the language classroom for being the space par excellence where identities, power, and world discourses are challenged (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012; Byram & Zarate, 1995; Kramsch, 1993; Moreno-López, 2004; Nozaki & Inokuchi, 2005). Students are commonly exposed to experiences of mutual encounters and confrontations with a foreign language and culture in which they reshape or reinforce their socially built beliefs, values, and behaviors against the Other. Therefore, the classroom, as a mirror of the social system, becomes a natural place to incubate ethnocentric relationships and biases as a consequence of the learners', teachers', and administrators' legitimized *habitus* that imply a hierarchical division of dominance and exclusion (Moreno-López, 2004).

Within this context, the hidden curriculum to which Byram (1989) refers unveils people's difficulty in overcoming strong elitist emotions and the sense of buttressing the Self over the naturalized Other. This is what Rich and Troudi (2006) encountered when conducting a research project in a TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) graduate program at a university in the United Kingdom. They observed that five Muslim Saudi Arabian students experienced being othered as a result of the Islamophobic discourses present in their learning community. Learners felt that their identities were racialized by their own teachers and partners due to barriers related to nationality, ethnicity, and religion. Hence, they were regarded as people who have limited knowledge, who like cheating on exams, are lazy, promiscuous, and prone to be terrorists, preconceptions resulting from the several incidents students had to face, which led them to recognize themselves as being placed in a marginalized and inferior social position.

Something similar was perceived by Palfreyman (2005), whose research project in a Turkish university indicated that administrators and native-English-speaking teachers *othered* their nonnative-English-speaking colleagues and students owing to the socially constructed representations of difference among themselves. Thus, socioeconomic class, gender, national identity, and power relationships, among other factors, shaped their attitudes, perceptions, social roles, and approaches to TESOL and consequently, perpetuated a discourse of othering in which Westerners were regarded as rational or normal, whereas Turks were seen as strangers.

In the same vein, Ahmadi's (2015) study in an ESOL college, located in the Arabian Gulf, showed that there was an English linguistic imperialism on Qatari students, who were stereotyped and marginalized by their own instructors due to their sociocultural particularities (i.e., religion, values, language, ethics, etc.). Learners were constantly labeled as "lazy," "spoiled," and "arrogant" as a consequence of their teachers' sense of discomfort with their mother tongue and misunderstanding of cultural differences. This situation gave way to the phenomenon of *othering*, which resulted in increasing students' affective filter and their unwillingness to have formal learning experiences, as it was difficult for them to deal with their low self-esteem as well as to do well at college.

It is noteworthy that othering is also implicit within the body of literature that permeates the language teaching and learning field. According to Susser (1998) and Kubota (1999), literature usually addresses the concern of the Other from arguments based on cultural differences that lead to a distorted account of ESL/EFL (English as a second/foreign language) learners and classrooms. They asserted that theorists tend to create taken-for-granted, essentialized cultural labels grounded on dichotomies between the East and the West, which could be accurate in some ways but negative in others. Kubota, for example, states that the Japanese are commonly represented as having a harmonic, deep thinking, and group culture; however, Susser observes that a sense of prejudice and hostility also arises from this representation, as they are posited as an Other different and inferior from Westerners.

Clearly, these discourses of power, hierarchy, and marginalization are symptoms of vertical power relationships in which the whole educational community (i.e., students, teachers, administrators, theorists, etc.) is subject to experience or perpetuate the creation of "others" in unequal conditions. However, it should not be forgotten that the "classroom" is not itself a four wall space but an extension of the sociocultural realities of society where people from different "multicultural mosaics" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) are more likely to be othered.

An example of this was registered by Bergman (2012), whose study revealed that non-native English speakers could feel discriminated against for not having an American-like

accent when communicating and involving themselves within the community. Findings indicated that a group of four adult foreign language speakers from India, Bosnia, Brazil, and Ethiopia experienced a feeling of frustration, shame, insecurity, and annoyance caused by people treating them different because of their "unnatural accent." This affected their self-esteem and level of participation to form relationships to the extent that some of them preferred having friends from the same culture or a different cultural background rather than becoming involved with natives, as they were commonly taken for someone who lacks knowledge, has a low level of language proficiency, and is presumably an illegal resident.

The radiograph displayed by these empirical examples constitutes a sign of the widespread othering experiences reproduced by the ethnocentric views of the Self. Therefore, with the same concern felt by philosophers, education cannot be alien to the call from postcolonial scholars to establish a place where subalterns can speak and engage in some other approaches undertaken by the different disciplines in regard to this matter. According to Guilherme (2002), education has focused on working on the micro levels of society, that is, educational institutions where cultural awareness and citizenship can be promoted; specifically, the language-learning classroom plays an important cultural and political role to dehumanize alienating power structures.

As a result, othering has been increasingly gaining the attention within the framework of language learning by progressively overcoming the traditional, simplistic, and uncritical teaching approaches that mainly emphasize high culture (Heusinkveld, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Peck, 1984). In this respect, Houghton (2014) claims that teachers should be careful not to transmit a "static, fragmented and incomplete picture of culture, taught as if it was something out there to be learned as a set of facts [since it] only provides learners with a decontextualized, stereotype and misleading [idea of how the Other is]" (p. 127). Thereby, if this essentialism wants to be disrupted, it is compulsory to encourage a relativizing and reflective cultural view that promotes the development of a *critical cultural awareness* as a key component of the intercultural communicative competence.

Authors such as Byram (1997, 2002); Tomlinson (2001); Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004); Kumaravadivelu (2006); Houghton (2013) have agreed that to increase the knowledge, understanding, and collaboration towards the Other, learners should be offered chances to negotiate meanings with other cultures and critically evaluate their points of view, practices, and products as well as to reflect upon their own. This constitutes the main goal of modern political education/critical cultural awareness, which should regard the "classroom not only . . . as a window to the world but also as a space that provides opportunities for human growth" (Dasli, 2011, p. 15), where encounters with othering come to be openings to influence both negative and preconceived attitudes and ideologies.

Within this context, both language students and teachers are expected to become "critical citizens of the world" (Byram, 2006, p. 36) or "go-betweens" (Kramsch, 2004) able to construct a more complete and impartial understanding of one's own and others' cultures by taking a participant and, at the same time, a detached position (Kramsch, 1993). Therefore, the idea is to get to a neutralizing zone in the classroom, a "third space," "third domain," or "in-between space" (Bhabha, 1994; Feng, 2009; Kostogriz, 2002; Kramsch, 1993) in which the Other makes present and binary oppositions unmasked, challenged, and criticized to gain awareness of the richness that implies multiple subjectivities and hybridity.

Critical pedagogy thinkers also advocate for this same goal as they argue that students must be engaged to create discourses of respect for plurality, freedom, and social justice. For example, Freire (1970) holds that when human beings identify their own ethnocentric stance and are aware of the motives behind their othering attitudes and practices, they become active agents who can transform their reality. Likewise, Giroux (1992) advocates for "the ability to think and act critically," (p. 11) to empower oneself to make decisions and contribute to the social change as "transformative intellectuals" capable of crossing boundaries and critically questioning social structures.

As Byram (as cited in Guilherme, 2012) argues, being a critical cultural individual means going "beyond [the] understanding and interpretation of difference and intercultural relations into commitment and action" (p. 360) in order to deconstruct unjust discourses. However, this is not an aim that happens overnight since it implies exposure to intercultural encounters that stimulate self-reflection (Bennett; Hall; as cited in Houghton, 2012) and the development of new viewpoints and insights to recognize where we are positioned and what representations we are making of the Other. Therefore, the next section will display some suggestions of pedagogical tools that can enable language students to gain greater understanding of others while strengthening their critical cultural awareness.

Dealing With Othering in the Language Classroom

Learning from experience and discovery has been one of the most successful teaching approaches used for encouraging an open-minded attitude and interest about the richness of the target culture (Kramsch, 1998, 2003). The goal is to help learners perceive through the language classes how real-world issues perpetuate othering and how it influences them, so that they can reconstruct its context of production while exploring their own culturally-shaped knowledge (e.g., values, beliefs, behaviors, etc.).

Hence, educators' biggest challenge is to connect citizenship education with language teaching processes (Council of Europe, 2001), by acting as mediators and "(inter)cultural ambassadors" (Houghton, 2014, p. 217) able to boost students' participation in egalitarian cross-cultural relationships from which oppressive, essentialist, and homogenizing social

narratives emerge and are resisted. In this pursuit of encouraging "critical cultural awareness raising" (Müller-Hartmann, 2000), language teachers and researchers have advocated for the implementation of pedagogical tools as engaging and useful instruments that promote cultural "conscientization, problem-posing, dialogue, and reflection" (Houghton, Furumura, Lebedko, & Li, 2014, p. 213). Some illustrative examples of this can be evidenced in the following four pedagogical tools:

First, there are the *cultural products* such as literary and non-literary texts, media channels, national symbols, etc. that become ideal elements to foster intercultural self-reflection and conscientization. Its integration into the classroom setting leads students to critically perceive, deconstruct, and understand their own taken-for-granted assumptions as well as the social marginalized discourses of colonialism, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, etc. implied within relations of power and inequality (Byram & Zarate, 1995; Giroux, 1993; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Knight, 2009; Vief-Schmidt, 2015; Wallace, 2003).

Empirical demonstrations on this can be found in Starkey's (as cited in Dasli, 2012) teaching practice, who proposed that pupils conduct a critical discourse analysis on a newspaper article about immigration by studying the linguistic and stylistic features that represent narratives of racism, to later compare it with an Irish press and write down their feelings and reflections about their findings. Similarly, Gay and Kirkland (2003) encouraged students to examine and reconstruct major North American icons and celebrations (e.g., national holidays and patriotic songs) to make them more ethnically and culturally inclusive.

For her part, Knight (2009), an English teacher of a multicultural Australian secondary school, demonstrated how through the creation of a Unit of work her learners were sensitized on the different forms of othering. She intended to connect the curriculum with her students' realities by integrating a variety of input (e.g., articles, biographies, films, photographs) to incite discussions on topics such as identity, difference, stereotype, and so forth. As a final part of the Unit, she planned a summative task in which learners put into practice what they have learnt by producing narratives, scripts, brochures, posters, and PowerPoint presentations.

On the other hand, language students can also be encouraged to make use of qualitative research methods through *mini-ethnography and case study projects* that lead them to collaboratively explore, identify, and suggest possible solutions on cultural practices and behaviors that reinforce othering (Bateman, 2004; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Freire, 1970; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Moreno-López, 2004). Hence, conducting interviews and observations to unveil silenced realities empowers learners to become active agents able to use the acquired knowledge to reframe learning and participate in action-oriented projects (Bloome, 2012). In this regard, Bateman's (2004) study showed that encouraging students to apply ethnographic interviews as a strategy of cultural learning results in enhancing their

positive attitudes towards the target culture, increasing their competencies in approaching and communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds as well as decentralizing themselves to observe situations from different cultural standpoints.

Likewise, *critical cultural incidents* can be used to make learners face cultural differences as well as to unmask unjust power relations against the Other. They are commonly presented in the form of dialogues or description of scenarios that depict people's emotional states and reactions when facing culture shock, miscommunication, or cross-cultural misunderstandings (Lebedko, 2013; Reimann, 2013). According to Apedaile and Schill (2008), these incidents become "tools for increasing our awareness and understanding of human attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions" (p. 7) by allowing pupils to examine, discover, and critically deconstruct social stereotypes, prejudices, and conflicts.

Byram and Zarate (1995) argue that the language teacher can approach students to recognize and reflect upon some cultural misunderstandings that, for example, arise from embarrassing moments when behaviors and customs have opposite meanings (i.e., horizontal head-shaking in most places represents a *no*, while in India it means *yes*). Therefore, they advise helping learners anticipate the possible unfamiliar experiences they might encounter if living in a different physical and social reality, so that rejection and negative attitudes towards the target culture can be avoided.

Finally, a traditional tool most educators take into account when dealing with cultural teaching and othering is the *roleplay* or *simulation*. Kodotchigova (2002), Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), and Tran (2010) state that reenacting or dramatizing a cultural conflict or incident as realistic anecdotes allows learners to examine their own perceptions, cultural behaviors, and communication patterns by positing themselves in the shoes of another to be emotionally involved in cross-cultural relationships and dialogues. In this respect, Coultas, Grossman, and Salas (2012) argue that role play leads to an enculturation process in which students are aware of their own culture when reflecting upon their biases, prejudices, and norms; but it also promotes acculturation, as they become conscious of other cultures.

An example of this can be observed in Ghadiri's, Tavakoli's, and Ketabi's (2014) work, who made use, among other teaching techniques, of simulations to prevent possible intercultural conflicts among Iranian learners and, thus, enhance their critical cultural awareness by conveying a more detailed knowledge and appreciation for difference. This made part of a culturally-adaptive foreign language syllabus they designed in which learning activities revolved around topics such as ethnic diversity, dominant attitudes, relationships, verbal interaction, and some others.

Similarly, if the goal is to develop the idea of being explained by others, that is, to have learners experience what it feels to be in the periphery and to be othered (Holliday, 2011); role-plays become the most suitable pedagogical tool for this purpose. Thus, this is what

Hughes-Tafen (2008) found when her Appalachian learners reviewed and performed four plays representing how the ideas of whiteness and Americanness become cultural barriers to critically reflect on the othering experiences lived by South Black women from the northern hemisphere. She indicated that drama is a useful tool to deal with othering discourses, since, as Kramsch (1993) and Holliday (2011) hold, students have the chance to detach themselves from their own texts and place as onlookers able to negotiate and appreciate different cultural views.

Ultimately, it can be concluded from the above that by recognizing the potential of approaching learners to live and experience new and different cultural repertoires, there are greater chances for them to "become a little bit of 'other'" (Robinson, 1985, p. 101) and, thus, growth in understanding of their power of agency and respect for the multiplicity of social identities. This in the beginning might create moments of conflict, discordance, and contradiction in students; however, if correctly directed within the classroom setting, the encounter with the Other could represent opportunities for reaching a consensus, action, and transformation of the destructive ethnocentric discourses still prevailing in society (Freire, 1970; Guilherme, 2002; Kramsch, 1998, 2003; Leitner, 2012; Wernicke, n.d.).

Conclusions

Othering manifestations are permanently reproduced, reinforced, and experienced by people all around the world, regardless of their race, language, gender, class, nationality, or religion. They imply an interplay of socially constructed and reconstructed subjectivities of the "Self" and the "Other" that continuously struggle for power, resistance, and agency over legitimized discourses of belongingness and strangeness. However, as mentioned throughout this paper, it cannot be denied that this dichotomy goes beyond difference, as the "Self" would not have been possible without the complement of a significant "Other," with whom individuals interact and build themselves. Hence, instead of perpetuating *othering* narratives that lead to misconceptions and prejudices, the aim should be promoting feelings of "oneness" that cultivate mutual recognition, appreciation, respect, collaboration, and intercultural exchanges among people.

In this constructive exercise of breaking down unjust binary oppositions as well as disrupting biased and incomplete representations of othering, classrooms have been regarded as the most appropriate in-between spaces for this task. Especially, language classrooms constitute perfect sites to provide new educational and cultural opportunities for students to empower themselves and learn how to critically read, interpret, reflect, evaluate, and reinterpret new meanings of the Other's social identity. In this sense, pedagogical tools such as *cultural products*, *critical cultural incidents*, *qualitative research methods*, and *role-plays* serve as engaging instruments to make students cross-culturally aware and avoid reductionist and

essentialist cultural visions, this by letting them experience a diversity of perspectives and realities embedded within the culture of the target language.

The purpose then is to bring society to the classroom setting for pupils to face it and learn first-hand how to negotiate othering manifestations and seek further understandings on its context of production and reproduction. In this way, as global citizens, they are encouraged to feel curiosity, recognition, and empathy for the difference while progressively multiplying their learnings to macro social scenarios, even though in the beginning they will be loaded with a certain degree of othering, as it is unavoidable to feel strangeness with people and cultures they have not been directly involved with before. However, the aim is not only to seek recognition, respect, and a critical stand towards the target culture but also to be aware of the social multiplicities found within one's own culture since, for example, living in the same country or region does not mean that everybody believes, thinks, and acts in the same way one does.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that learners are not the only beneficiaries from taking othering as an opportunity for awareness-raising; teachers as well gain rich insight on how to critically treat and handle the "target culture," so that they avoid cultural relativism and instead, promote humanizing learnings that resist the different othering processes. Therefore, further research should be done specifically in this regard, since most literature is mainly based on the students' perspectives and takes for granted that educators already know how to approach culture teaching.

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