

Constructing Culture and Negotiating Identity in a local South African EFL classroom: Unsettling Pedagogies

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of
the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the degree of
Masters in English Language Education

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February 2008

Abstract

This research report explores the ways in which English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and an EFL teacher position themselves in relation to the themes of 'local' materials as well as to the 'global' EFL pedagogy in a local South African classroom. This research was undertaken to investigate the relevance of local constructions of culture and identity within broader global EFL discourses and classroom practices.

The research was conducted at International House Johannesburg, an affiliate member school of a British-based EFL organisation, and focused on a group of 'foreign' adult students from non-English speaking African countries. The 16 page module of materials entitled *Customs in our Time*, was designed by the researcher, and attempted to create a space for the local by incorporating texts about customs and rituals practised in certain African countries. The overall design of the study is qualitative and draws on aspects of an ethnographic methodology. Spoken interaction in the classroom, as well as transcripts of interviews with the twelve participants involved, are the focus of this analysis.

I draw on the work of Canagarajah (2005) and Pennycook (1994) in situating this research in broader sociohistorical context. I also utilise post-structuralist theory to conceptualise the key constructs of this research: language, culture and identity (Weedon, 1987). Of particular relevance to this study is the post-structuralist notion of positioning in understanding the subjectivities of the research participants (Davies & Harré, 1990). In analysing the data, I demonstrate that there are multiple, diverse and contradictory identity positions circulating in the local classroom space. I argue that the dominant EFL pedagogy works to negate the hybridity of this space and in doing so strips the communicative context of its authenticity. The research thus argues that an acknowledgment of the multiple voices and positions of the students and teacher in the local classroom space is essential for the creation of a more ethical and productive pedagogy: a localized pedagogy.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Carolyn McKinney, for all her help, input and tireless readings of my drafts. Her support and availability made the research process an enjoyable experience for me and gave me the confidence to forge ahead. Also to Yvonne Reed for encouraging me to do my masters and all the lecturers in the AELS department at Wits whose lectures provided a strong foundation for this research.

Thanks to all the staff and students at IH Johannesburg and especially the following people: the directors for approving this project; Heather for all her support and understanding especially when I needed to meet with my supervisor during school hours; and the teacher and students who were willing to participate in the research class and whose words and interactions have made the biggest contribution to this project.

Thanks to Vanessa for helping with the transcriptions and for showing such a genuine interest in my study. I would also like to thank my family and parents for their unfailing support and encouragement. Thanks to my mom for proof reading both my proposal and final draft and for helping me notice and pay attention to the details in my writing. Finally, a special thanks to my husband, Colin, who has supported me in so many ways and who has made so much possible. I look forward to our next journey of parenthood together.

Declaration

I declare that this research paper is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signed_____

Date_____

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Chapter 1: Aims and Rationale

...the notion of language as transparent has been challenged by the awareness that speakers and communities represent their identities, values, and cultural practices through this rich semiotic system (Canagarajah, 2005: xxvi).

1.1 Introduction

The English language has a hegemonic position in the world, and in countries such as South Africa, this position is rapidly increasing (Crystal, 1997; Kamwangamalu, 2003). English has become the global lingua franca and currently, non-native speakers outnumber native speakers by 2:1 (Rajagopalan, 2003). With an increased demand for the language, a variety of 'global' coursebooks have been written and successfully marketed in the world. Many coursebooks are designed in Western English-speaking countries and marketed globally. This means that they are constructed from a particular perspective and carry implicit cultural messages (Gray, 2002). Such 'Western-based' messages and views of the world are also transmitted through the medium of popular music, films and the Internet (Pennycook, 1994). As a result, not only has the language spread throughout the world but also a specific culture and ideology have been disseminated.

Phillipson (1992) argues that it is naïve to believe that English belongs to everyone and it is important to acknowledge the embedded and unequal power relations among its users. He views the spread of English as a form of linguistic imperialism which acts to further increase the influence of powerful countries over other countries through business, economics, and culture (Phillipson, 1992). 'The spread of English thus privileges certain groups of people (including native speakers and non-native elites who have the opportunity to master it) and may harm others who have less opportunity to learn it' (Warschauer, 2000: 516).

The international use of English and the culture that is propagated along with it can serve to further oppress people already in marginalised positions and create even wider power divisions in the world (Warschauer, 2000). The gap between periphery and First World societies has become more obvious in the era of globalisation

(Blommaert, 2002). Local language practices are losing value and prestige when placed in a 'global' context and defined according to First World values and expectations (Blommaert, 2002: 13). Therefore, utilising 'global' materials with all English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and in a range of different contexts raises ethical concerns regarding inclusivity and appropriacy (Gray, 2002). In order to reduce this tension and power imbalance, it is imperative for the teaching professional to ensure that the culture associated with the language is not necessarily fixed to Western ideals but changes depending on the region (McKay, 2004).

In order to engage with some of the issues outlined above surrounding the dominant position of English and the resultant widespread use of 'global' coursebooks, I developed a 16 page module of materials entitled *Customs in our Time*. The module was designed as part of an African coursebook for EFL students in South Africa. McKay (2004: 15) maintains that 'only when English is used to express and uphold local culture and values will it truly represent an international language', and hence the subject of my materials centres on Africa. As an EFL teacher, I have noticed the lack of 'locally' produced EFL materials, and I agree with Gray (2002) that a greater bridge is needed to help connect the world of local EFL learners to the world of English.

In my local classroom context, discussions about culture tend to centre on certain themes initiated by the students such as naming ceremonies, circumcision and lobola. These themes do not appear in the 'global' coursebook and I have therefore attempted to increase representation of 'local' cultures in my materials by exploring these themes in more depth. In this sense I consider my materials to be more 'local' than the 'global' coursebook. The materials focus on the meanings of customs and rituals (from birth to death) that take place in different parts of Africa. The aim was to create more representative content for the adult African EFL students I teach at The Language Lab, International House (IH) Johannesburg (The Lab). For the purposes of this study I view 'the local' as a construct encompassing the content of the materials, 'the locality' of the study (i.e. an EFL classroom in Johannesburg) and the

discursive constructions created by students and teachers within the local classroom space.

The ESL (English as a Second Language) / EFL dichotomy has been problematized especially as it relates to a country like South Africa (Nayar, 1997). According to Graddol (1997: 11) 'in EFL areas English is used primarily for communication with speakers from other countries [whereas] in an L2 (second language) area English is used for internal (intranational) communication'. Although South Africa is politically classified as a 'native English speaking country', the roles and functions of English vary greatly between and within communities and this makes a simple ENL (English as a native language) / ESL / EFL classification system inadequate in profiling the country (Nayar, 1997: 28). In practice the EFL/ESL dichotomy is ambiguous and the labels are often used interchangeably.

Although the term is contested, for the purposes of this research study the students will be referred to as *EFL* students. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, the institution where they are studying, IH (International House) Johannesburg, is an affiliate member of IH World and is marketed as an 'EFL' institution. Secondly, the students can be considered 'foreign' in the sense that they are not South African and have grown up in non-English speaking countries such as other African states where French or Portuguese are the language of education.

1.2 Research aims and Questions

This research study aims to provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be an EFL learner in South Africa by looking at how the materials, *Customs in our Time*, are taken up and engaged with in an adult EFL classroom. The focus of this investigation is two-fold: firstly, it aims to look at the ways in which the students and teacher construct notions of culture and negotiate their identities around the themes of the texts. Secondly, it aims to investigate how these local constructions of culture and identity are positioned in relation to the dominant practices and pedagogies of the classroom.

This research project aims more specifically to answer the following research questions:

- How do the students and teacher construct notions of culture and negotiate their identities around the themes of the texts?
- How are the students' and teacher's local constructions of culture and identity positioned in relation to the classroom pedagogy?

1.3 Rationale

The rationale behind this study stems from my attempts to create a space for 'the local' through the materials. In order to contextualise my research it is necessary, therefore, to firstly discuss the rationale behind the materials before presenting my reasoning for the specific aims of this study.

1.3.1 Rationale for the materials

The overall objective of my materials is to provide more culturally accessible texts, to assist in engaging the learner meaningfully at both an intellectual and emotional level (Timmis, 2004: 11). The subject of culture and customs often appears in global coursebooks. In my experience, EFL learners are motivated and engaged by this topic, especially as it connects to and is relevant to their experience. Global materials however, often represent culture and traditions in reductionist and homogeneous ways which are based on Western 'global' assumptions (Canagarajah, 2005). As a result, knowledge in the classroom is constructed from a particular angle, that of 'the global', and this has limited diversity and excludes alternative forms of meaning-making.

Canagarajah (2005) calls for a reorientation and shift in the processes of meaning-making, to embrace globalisation from the perspective of 'the local' in order to forge more pluralistic and democratic societal relationships. Knowledge constructed and interpreted from a local perspective is more likely to be contextually relevant and empowering for students (Canagarajah, 2005). In the materials, therefore, I have attempted to increase representation of local cultures and varieties of the language. This arose from Canagarajah's (2005) recommendation of 'providing a more

pronounced place for the local in disciplinary discourses' (p.xiv). 'The local' is a multifaceted, relational and deterritorialised construct which can only be understood in relation to 'the global'. It is knowledge that is discursively constructed by both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of local communities and as such is constantly evolving. 'The local' refers to the meanings that marginalised communities bring to the process of knowledge-making, as understood from a local perspective as opposed to a Western perspective (Canagarajah, 2005).

I have noticed that discussions around the topic of culture are often 'sanitised' and 'uncontroversial' in nature in the global coursebook. Gray (2002) maintains that culturally sensitive topics are often avoided as a result of commercial interests and consequently the content often lacks critical engagement. McKay (2004) suggests that ESL teachers should encourage critical thinking in their learners so that they (the learners) are not merely passive recipients of the language but can instead make careful judgements about the materials used in the classroom. By problematizing the way people, culture and knowledge are represented in coursebooks, students and teachers can gain alternative understandings which have transformative potential at a more global level (Pennycook, 1994: 297). Critical engagement aims to better enable students to 'write back' and to find their own 'insurgent voices' (Pennycook, 1994: 311). I have therefore attempted to provide opportunities for critical thinking and awareness raising in my materials by asking questions in a different way about a text such as 'Who is presented in the text?', 'How are they positioned?' and 'Who is excluded?'.

The construction of my materials draws on sociolinguistic and anthropological theories of culture. From a sociolinguistic perspective, culture and language are inseparable and discursively constructed (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). Culture contributes to the way meaning is negotiated within customs, rituals, family and interpersonal relationships. Culture is also discursively tied to one's identity. In order to validate this aspect of culture, I have included discussions and activities that centre on identity (for example, *Create a poster* in appendix A, pg.109 of materials). Students are also asked about the rituals and customs practised in their families,

what they would change about them and what they would like future children to learn from them (appendix A pg.106 of materials). This aims to raise their awareness of cultural diversity in society, and also capitalises on the dynamic, socially constructed nature of culture as a means to changing the status quo to make for better, more equitable societies.

Although my 'local' materials differ from 'global' materials in terms of content and critical engagement with texts, their design also reflects many underlying EFL pedagogical principles, which are also reflected in 'global' materials. My decision to incorporate aspects of 'the global' stems from my experience of what works well practically in the classroom as well as an attempt to embrace both global and local discourses in the process of meaning-making, as advocated by Canagarajah (2005: xx). Many of the activities of the materials are in line with the more 'global' Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Richards and Rogers, 1986): I have integrated form-focused activities with meaning-focused activities, promoted pair and group work to provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, utilised authentic texts as much as possible, scaffolded activities by breaking them down into more manageable stages and modified the language of instructions to ensure they are comprehensible to the student.

1.3.2 Rationale for the study

Upon completion of the materials, I was interested to see how they would be taken up in the classroom. I wanted to investigate what meanings the teacher and students would construct around these more localized materials. A better understanding of the way the students and teacher draw upon and construct local knowledge could have important pedagogical implications (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Bhabha and Mignolo (in Canagarajah, 2005: xviii) maintain that the 'locus of enunciation' determines our perspective and the way in which knowledge is constructed while Canagarajah makes a call to localise pedagogy by bringing in 'local identities, knowledge, and discourses...to negotiate the learning of unfamiliar codes and content in ELT' (2005: xxii).

The 'knowledge' and view of the world that materials bring to the classroom can have important consequences for the learner in terms of their identities as well as their social and economic status in society (Auerbach, 1995). My rationale for focusing on identity in the classroom context resonates with two shifts in second language acquisition theory: 'the social turn' and more recently, 'the critical turn'¹. The social turn occurred in the late 1960s and represented a paradigm shift away from the learner in isolation, to a focus on the impact of the learner's social context on language acquisition and identity (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2000). This view acknowledges the situated nature of language and focuses on the ways in which meaning and identity are negotiated. The critical turn represents a further shift to a focus on the ways in which power relations can structure interactions within the social context and affect the construction of meaning and identity (Norton Peirce, 1995). These two shifts in second language acquisition (SLA) research and theory have brought issues surrounding identity to the fore. This study draws on previous research in this area and focuses on the ways in which EFL students and teachers negotiate their identities and construct notions of culture in relation to the themes of the *Customs in our Time* materials.

In the EFL literature on culture, the focus tends to centre on definitions of culture (*cf* Atkinson, 1999), cultural stereotypes and representations of students (*cf* Kumaravadivelu, 2003; McKay, 2004), and raising the cultural awareness of the teaching professional (*cf* Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004). I have noticed an absence of studies that centre on students' constructions of culture and identity and the relationship between these constructions and the fundamental processes of EFL pedagogy. For the purposes of this study, pedagogy refers to the way English is taught, what is valued in the classroom and what is perceived to be good practice. This study aims to explore this relationship in order to offer new perspectives on the local context of the classroom; perspectives which can possibly contribute to translocal knowledge, because the English language classroom can be viewed as 'a key site in global cultural production' (Pennycook, 1994: 326).

¹ The social turn and critical turn will be discussed in more depth in the literature review chapter.

EFL in South Africa is not a frequently cited research area whereas ESL (English as a Second Language) is. Furthermore, EFL research and literature comes predominantly from academic institutions in the USA and the UK. While EFL literature from 'periphery' contexts such as South Africa is growing, it is still relatively undeveloped. As the need to learn English intensifies, more 'foreign' students are entering South Africa in order to learn the language and gain access to powerful resources in the 'global' village. By investigating EFL teacher and student constructions of culture and identity in relation to 'local' materials, this study hopes to contribute to the small but growing literature which focuses on EFL teaching, learning and materials in 'periphery' contexts (i.e. outside the USA and the UK). Another rationale for this study is to gain a deeper understanding of 'local, representative' knowledge in the South African EFL context which can assist in the design of more relevant, engaging and empowering materials and pedagogies. Finally, this study hopes to shed light on how pedagogy can be localised to enable a more 'productive negotiation between the local and global' which will ultimately make for more effective and productive teaching (Canagarajah, 2005, xx).

1.4 Chapter Outline

Having presented the aims and rationale for the research in this chapter, I now present an overview of the study and chapter outline:

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In this chapter I discuss the literature and theory of this research. I situate my study within global context and utilise the theoretical framework of post-structuralism to conceptualise the key constructs of this research: culture, identity and pedagogy.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this chapter I discuss the research approach and methodological framework of this study. I introduce the research context and the research participants. I also look at what methods were used for data collection and analysis, and why they were appropriate for this research.

Chapter 4: Discourses of Culture

This is the first data analysis chapter and here I discuss the discourses of culture that were circulating in the *African Customs and Rituals* class. I focus on the positions constructed by both the teacher and students through their discourse in the classroom interaction and interviews. I also present the case studies of two student participants who resisted being positioned in particular ways.

Chapter 5: The Culture of EFL Pedagogy

In the second data analysis chapter I look at the culture of the dominant pedagogy and the way the EFL classroom text impacted on the student and teacher discourse and their resulting subject positions. Here I also look at the ways the students resisted certain positions and took agency in the classroom space.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the conclusion I outline the main findings of my study and discuss the significance and implications of this research. I point out that there were multiple and competing discourses circulating, with resultant multifarious and conflicting subject positions. I discuss how the dominant EFL pedagogy served to constrain the diversity of the classroom space and I argue that a more localized pedagogy makes for a more productive and ethical learning space.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This research project draws on a sociocultural perspective of language, identity and culture which locates English, students and teachers in social and historical contexts. This review begins by describing the position of English in the world today and how its dominance has contributed to 'global' knowledge and the construction of the 'global' coursebook. I draw on the work and theories of Alastair Pennycook and Suresh Canagarajah who argue for a more critical focus on the global position of English to make for more equitable pedagogies and practices. Such practices would acknowledge the constructed and situated nature of language, identity and culture, and offer an alternative view of the classroom as microcosm of broader societal processes (Auerbach, 1995).

I position the study within the theoretical framework of post-structuralism and bring to the fore the way the key constructs of my research: language, culture and identity, are 'produced' through discourse and situated within particular contexts. Within these discursive contexts issues of power and the struggle for meaning are key in understanding the way knowledge is negotiated in the classroom. I look at the dominant EFL pedagogy utilized at most International House (IH) institutions. This pedagogy is based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach which evolved in the West and which supports a particular ideology. In this chapter I present the classroom as a dynamic context which provides the teacher with opportunities to implement pedagogies that can empower students and assist in the creation of more equitable societies (Andrewes, 2005).

2.1 The Position of English in the World

The discourse of English as an International Languagetends to look at the spread of English as natural, neutral and beneficial (Pennycook, 1994: 6).

In his book *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (1994), Alistair Pennycook critically discusses the dominant view of English and English language teaching in the world. He suggests that the spread of English has been constructed as something positive and transparent and that the dominance of this

view has masked alternative, more ethically-sound debates around this issue. The global spread of the language is generally viewed as a 'natural' by-product of global processes, as something 'neutral' and devoid of any specific cultural ideology and as a beneficial process providing equitable access within diverse communities to powerful social and economic resources (Pennycook, 1994: 12). This dominant and positive perception of the spread of English is what Pennycook (1994) refers to as 'the discourse of EIL' (p.6) where EIL refers to English as an International Language.

In line with Pennycook's views, Canagarajah (2005) elaborates on the processes that have contributed to the dominant position of English and Western knowledge in the world. Canagarajah (2005) describes how the European modernist movement placed value on enlightenment and scientific enquiry at the expense of diversity and heterogeneity. He maintains that colonialism contributed to the rapid spread of modernist values (Canagarajah, 2005). During colonial times, those in power (the colonialists) presented their scientific perspective as 'value-free, culture-neutral and pure rationality' (Canagarajah, 2005: 6). Canagarajah (2005) suggests that dominant globalisation discourses construct a borderless, fluid, and pluralistic world in which knowledge flows freely between diverse communities. However, the knowledge that flows and holds value is that of the powerful communities and is thus based on modernist constructs of homogeneity and value-free science. Thus, although modernist values arose locally in specific European contexts, the Europeans were extremely successful in spreading their local knowledge and presenting it as 'the truth'. This is why Canagarajah (2005) maintains that all knowledge is local but some forms enjoy a more dominant position in the world. These forms have gone largely unquestioned because 'we accept [them] as ours' (Canagarajah, 2005: 6).

'The discourse of EIL' and the way 'global' knowledge has spread and is presented as 'the truth', are relevant to my study because they have infiltrated the way the language is presented in 'global' textbooks and the way it is taught in the classroom. A useful tool for understanding the power of the language is Phillipson's (1992) notion of *Linguistic Imperialism*, (the idea that the powerful global position of English and Western knowledge is not only incidental to colonialism but also a deliberate

political strategy of powerful nations); however, I agree with Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (1994) that a less reductionist and deterministic view of English would be more helpful in bringing about social change. In this study therefore, English is viewed not only as a language of imperialism but also as a language of agency and resistance.

Both Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (1994) focus on the ways English is appropriated in diverse contexts and 'how human agency operates within global structures of inequality' to oppose and resist linguistic imperialism (Pennycook, 1994: 57). The *resistance perspective* adopted in this research focuses on how the language is negotiated and appropriated in creative ways in order to produce alternative and more empowering languages, cultures, and identities (Canagarajah, 1999: 2). This perspective also acknowledges the way students can use the language to take agency in the classroom. This study therefore, aims to open up a space for a non-deterministic view of the spread of English by locating and describing the language practices and forms of resistance within the context of a local classroom located in the 'periphery'. As suggested by Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999), research of this nature will have important implications for the way the English language is taught in local contexts.

Pennycook (1994) argues that researchers and practitioners have failed to look more critically at the cultural, ethical and political implications of the position of English, and have therefore failed to acknowledge their role in perpetuating the 'discourse of EIL'. He maintains that a more critical view is required; a view that he calls 'the worldliness of English' (p.6). The term 'worldliness' refers to the global use of the language, the heterogeneity and changing nature of the language and the socio-political position of the language (p.34). 'The worldliness of English' is a significant perspective for this research as it serves to locate English 'within particular socio-historical relations of power' and focuses attention on the social, cultural and political positions from which people use and make meaning through the language (Pennycook, 1994: 66). This view therefore brings to the fore issues of identity and culture which are the focus of discussion in the next section.

2.2 Discourse, Identity and Culture

Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific (Weedon, 1987: 21).

In this section I draw on poststructuralist and sociocultural theories of language, identity and culture to show how language works to construct our social reality and our subjectivities. This view of language is significant to my study as it highlights the embedded nature of our subjectivities within the discursive construction of the social context and indicates how we are simultaneously constrained and enabled by competing discourses (Weedon, 1987).

The social and critical turns in SLA theory and practice represent a shift in the way that language, identity and culture are currently perceived in this field. The focus has shifted from the psychological, inherent dimensions of the individual learner to their sociocultural context and the broader power relations embedded within that context (Norton & Toohey, 2002). The dominant social discourses that have spread globally and which have upheld scientific, positivistic forms of knowledge-making have, however, continued to maintain the homogeneous, unitary and essentialised notion of the learner and of groups of people (Ricento, 2005). Ricento argues that this view is 'neither descriptively accurate nor pedagogically useful' as it 'perpetuates stereotypical thinking about the 'other'' (2005: 895). For this reason, my focus in this research study will be on the sociocultural rather than psychological dimensions of identity.

From a sociocultural perspective language is seen as 'a social practice, through which relationships are defined, negotiated, and resisted' (McKinney & Norton, 2007: 193). Gee (1996) describes how language and literacy are constructions embedded in specific societies. The meanings and uses of language can only be understood in relation to the broader sociocultural context and are centred around the notion of 'Discourses' (Gee, 1996: viii). Discourses are defined as 'ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and

writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific *groups of people*' (Gee, 1996: viii). Meaning is therefore ascribed to the world through competing Discourses and some Discourses have more power than others in organizing social relationships (Weedon, 1987: 35).

Bakhtin's social theory of language highlights the situated and reciprocal / dialogical nature of discourse (Morris, 1994: 4). According to Morris (1994), Bakhtin suggests that language can only be understood in context as the speaker and listener, or addresser and addressee, reciprocally shape the interaction and co-create the meaning. An initial utterance is made with an anticipation of an active response in the receiver and so the addresser shapes the utterance 'to take [the response] into account' (Morris, 1994: 5). At the same time the initial utterance is also a response to all previous utterances of not only the immediate context but also of the socio-historical context (Morris, 1994). Therefore, every utterance is 'doubly orientated', shaped simultaneously by past and future utterances (Morris, 1994: 13). Meaning is, as a result, struggled over and negotiated between people rather than transferred in a linear or uniform fashion from one person to the next. The dialogical nature of discourse is relevant to my study in explaining the way meaning is negotiated and co-constructed in the classroom space.

A poststructuralist definition of identity views language as central in constructing our selves and our 'subjectivity' (Weedon, 1987). Bakhtin defines subjectivity as a product of the interaction between 'inner experience and social world' (in Morris, 1994: 12). This definition emphasises the ongoing socially constructed nature of identity which is perceived as multifaceted, dynamic, continually shifting, socially and historically situated and discursively constructed (Norton Peirce, 1995). '[W]e are constituted and reconstituted through a variety of discursive practices' (Davies, 1989: xi). People appropriate the utterances of others and mould them into their own voices, according to their own intentions (Norton & Toohey, 2001: 311). Therefore, 'words are not neutral but express particular predispositions and value systems' (McKinney & Norton, 2007: 193).

Bourdieu argues that social power relations impact on speakers' abilities to 'command a listener' and that 'speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it' (in Norton & Toohey, 2002: 117). Subjectivity is therefore not innate, unified or fixed but is 'socially produced' (Weedon, 1987: 21). The relationship between subjectivity and power is captured in the poststructuralist definition of discourse as 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them' (Weedon, 1987: 108). This view of subjectivity and power is significant for my study as it highlights the embedded nature of meaning and the way meaning is produced through discourse. Every context brings with it multiple discursive practices and as a result there ensues a struggle for meaning and power (Weedon, 1987: 21).

Poststructuralist theory attempts to deconstruct the binaries constructed through language and to highlight 'the subject fictionality' (Davies, 1997: 272). We constitute our 'subjectivity' through discourse while at the same time are constituted by discursive practices (Weedon, 1987: 34). Davies and Harré (1990: 46) argue that 'the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions'. Our own and others' multiple and contradictory discursive practices make available a diversity of subject positions and the self is thus always in process and shifting (Davies & Harré, 1990). When we take up a particular position we 'see the world from the vantage point of that position' and the narratives and story lines we engage in are consistent with the discursive practice from which that position arises (Davies & Harré, 1990: 46). While Hall (2002: 36) and Davies & Harré (1990: 62) acknowledge that subjectivity and agency is limited by the discursive practices available to the individual, they argue against a deterministic view of subjectivity and maintain that new positions can be negotiated in 'unexpected' and creative ways. Positioning can therefore be viewed as a resource rather than a constraint (Davies & Harré, 1990: 62). The individual's positions may be in accordance with dominant institutional practices or in opposition to the way others choose to position them, or both of these simultaneously (Davies, 1989: xi). In my research context for example, students learn what it means to be positioned as 'learners' and through their

interactions with the teachers and each other they learn how to use the discursive practices of that context. Through this knowledge they are able to position themselves in different and multiple ways. For example, they can position themselves as expert on their own cultural practices while simultaneously as EFL student (Weedon, 1987).

Bakhtin distinguishes between single and double-voiced discourse (in Hall, 2002). The former consists of institutionalised and decontextualized resources whose meanings are resistant to negotiation and change (in Hall, 2002). For example, the resources of mainstream Western discourse and the values and meanings they come with which have become increasingly powerful and authoritative over time. As a result, their histories of use have become invisible and their resource meanings have therefore been presented and regarded as 'truths' (Hall, 2002: 14). Double-voiced discourse on the other hand, consists of resources whose sociohistorical meanings are visible and can therefore be manipulated by the speaker in unconventional ways to create atypical contexts of use (in Hall, 2002: 14, 15). Such discourse allows us 'to create our unique positioning towards a particular communicative moment' (Hall, 2002: 15). The discussion of these concepts is of particular relevance to my study as it highlights the powerful position of mainstream discourse while at the same time acknowledging individual agency.

From a sociocultural perspective, identity is discursively tied to culture because it is through language that we construct our multiple cultural identities (Hall, 2002). This is in contrast to the traditional view which constructs culture as a stable, homogeneous and fixed attribute of a group of people (Atkinson, 1999). The traditional view is dominant in the world as a result of the European modernist movement and colonial processes (Thornton, 1988). Modernist ideals have emphasised the importance of scientific enquiry into 'observable' phenomena. As a result, cultures have been constructed as distinct entities belonging to separate groups of people and existing independently of language (Thornton, 1988). Essentialised notions of culture serve to maintain the interests of powerful groups in society by stereotyping people and categorising them according to their cultural

groups instead of treating them as individuals (Atkinson,1999). He maintains that 'the groups who have power in society define or represent culture (s) in ways that tend to benefit them and promote as natural their own social practices' (Atkinson, 1999: 635). This serves to create a dichotomy between dominant Western cultures and other cultural groups with the latter often judged unfavourably against the powerful Western 'standard' (Atkinson, 1999).

Atkinson (1999: 637) problematises attempts to define culture which he describes as a 'fuzzy concept', while Street (1993) and Hall (2002) argue that it is more useful to look at what culture does than at what it is. Culture acts to define words, ideas, things and groups and through such processes of meaning-making, can be better described as a verb (Street,1993: 25). Hall (2002:19) agrees that culture is activity, and locates it within the discursive spaces 'between individuals in particular sociocultural contexts at particular moments of time'. Because culture is actively constructed through language, it is fluid, changing and dynamic (Atkinson, 1999). Therefore, in contrast to the traditional view, a sociocultural perspective places language at the centre of the 'activity' of culture. I agree with this view and find it useful for this study to view individuals as negotiators of multiple cultural identities (Hall, 2002).

2.3 The Dominant Culture of EFL Pedagogy

In this section I discuss the culture of EFL pedagogy and show how the traditional scientific perspective and the 'discourse of EIL' have come to bear on EFL classroom practice and method. In order to fully describe current EFL pedagogical practice, it is important firstly to briefly explicate the historical context of language teaching and then to draw from this the fundamental EFL pedagogical tenets as practised at most International House (IH) institutions today. A number of theories of first and second language acquisition have emerged over the past century. These include behaviourist, nativist and interactionist theories and they have influenced the emergence of a variety of approaches to, and methods of, language teaching, many of which are still widely used in classrooms today.

Behaviourist theories of language acquisition began to gain prominence in the 1940s and 1950s and are based on the work of B.F. Skinner and his theory of learning by operant conditioning (Brown, 1987). Behaviourism is part of the positivist, scientific paradigm and emphasises the importance of forming correct language habits through imitation, association, practise, memorisation and positive reinforcement (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Second language acquisition occurs as a result of the formation of *new* target language habits (Richards and Rogers, 1986). The teacher is required to use only the target language in the classroom in order to model pronunciation and grammatical structure / pattern. The learners are given many opportunities to imitate and repeat the language through pattern drills that include repetition, substitution and transformation drills (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). This is a method strongly dominated by the teacher as s/he controls all aspects of the lesson (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

In the late 1950s, behaviourism was criticised for not taking into account the generative nature of language or the creativity of the individual in the production of language (Harmer, 1991). The nativist theory of Noam Chomsky came to the forefront in 1959 and many of his ideas have informed the cognitive approach to language learning (Harmer, 1991). The cognitive approach embraces a mentalistic explanation of language which is in direct contrast to the mechanistic notions of the behaviourist theorists (Harmer, 1991). Chomsky's theory suggests that humans are born with an innate language device known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) or more recently referred to as Universal Grammar (UG), which exists somewhere in the brain (Lightbown and Spada, 1999 :16). The notion of UG is closely tied to Chomsky's model of competence and performance (Richards and Rogers, 1986). Knowledge of the grammar rules is referred to as language competence and the actual use of the language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing is known as performance (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). In the classroom there is a conscious and explicit focus on grammar rules and learners are encouraged to think about and discuss the target language in order to uncover the rules and make them explicit (Nunan, 1998). The learner is viewed as an active,

creative, and intelligent part of the learning process and to a large extent, is responsible for his/her own learning (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

The cognitive approach and Chomsky's theory of language acquisition have been criticised for providing a sterile view of language learning and not taking the sociocultural context or the functions of communication into adequate consideration (Richards and Rogers, 1986: 70). The importance of context and meaning negotiation in the process of communication was described by Dell Hymes in the late 1960s during the emergence of the social paradigm (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2000). This paradigm still dominates ELT theory and practice today in the form of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and is particularly relevant to this study as it contextualises the pedagogy utilized at The Language Lab, IH Johannesburg (The Lab) and within my materials. According to the CLT approach, language is acquired as a result of negotiating meaning through the communicative use of the language (Richards and Rogers, 1986). Dell Hymes' notion of 'communicative competence' which includes 'the language user's knowledge of (and ability for use of) rules of language use in context' was a direct challenge to Noam Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence and UG (Canale and Swain, 1980: 16). Hymes maintained that 'being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence' (Hymes in Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 121).

CLT is a functional approach to language learning with its focus on the function of communication (for example: to argue, to persuade), the social context of the interaction, and the relationship between speakers (which determines what language is appropriate and/or inappropriate to use) (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 123). The CLT approach also focuses on the different language forms that can be used to express a function (for example the function of agreeing can be expressed using the following forms: 'I agree', 'Yes', 'That's true', 'Ok' etc.) (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Communication is seen as a *process* in which meaning is negotiated between speakers, and feedback is provided by the interlocutors as to whether they have understood the message or not (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Within the context of the

classroom, CLT practitioners attempt to mimic natural communication and use of the target language and CLT is therefore a humanistic, learner-centred approach (Senior, 2006). Games and role-plays are a valuable learning tool as they provide a context for purposeful interaction, negotiation of meaning, and feedback (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 128 - 130). Authentic texts are used to provide a 'real' context for the language and for learners to determine the intentions of the writer or speaker of the text (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Also, instructions are given in the target language and learners are encouraged to use only the target language during activities and when giving their personal opinions (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The CLT approach therefore demands that the teacher creates genuine, authentic communication tasks in the classroom.

Many of the principles of CLT are in line with Krashen's innatist theory of language acquisition and in particular with his input hypothesis which states that 'input is the source of acquisition' (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 39). He suggests that exposure to comprehensible input which is just above the learner's level of competence is required for language acquisition as it allows the learners to 'construct' the target language in their minds (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 39). Authentic texts and use of the target language by the teacher can be regarded as a source of comprehensible input. There is also a focus on appropriacy of language use (depending on the context) as well as fluency and getting the meaning across rather than on accuracy and error correction (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 128 -130). This is in accordance with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis which suggests that the affective filter of the learner will be up and act as a barrier to acquisition of the available input if the learner is worried / anxious about making mistakes and being corrected all the time (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

The CLT approach advocates pair and group work to allow maximum communication time for each learner (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The teacher takes on a facilitative role, advising the learners when necessary and guiding them through the activities (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). This is in line with interactionist theories and specifically L.S. Vygotsky's notion of the zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which

he defined as 'the distance between a child's actual level of development and the level at which she could function with adult assistance' (Piper, 1993: 83). The ZPD helped inform the principles of scaffolding and modelling utilized today whereby a teacher takes the student step by step through a task by modelling and giving constructive feedback to the student, but gradually releases control back to the student (Morrow, Gambrel and Pressley, 2003). Thus, in the CLT classroom, learners are believed to develop greater communicative competence through exposure to the teacher's language and the interlanguage (the learner's current system of English) of the other learners as well as through modified input which refers to the teacher's use of language that correlates with the language level of the learners (Lightbown and Spada , 1999: 95).

Both *strong* and *weak* versions of CLT have been distinguished (Howatt in Spada, 2007:28). The *Weak* version focuses on language forms alongside functions and notions, and language is still analysed and controlled. Advocates of the *strong* version however do not pay overt attention to form but maintain that language systems will be discovered during the process of communication (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:17).

At most IH institutions, teachers are required to have a Certificate in English Language Teaching of Adults (CELTA) standardized by Cambridge University. Although the pedagogy taught during the CELTA course is generally in line with the *weak* version of CLT, teachers are also encouraged to draw from a number of different techniques in order to create relevant and engaging learning environments for their students. Typical lesson shapes taught on the course are the Present Practice Produce (PPP) model, and the Test Teach Test (TTT) model (Scrivener, 1994:114, 135). Learning is viewed as an active process which means that learners need to be able to 'fit new knowledge into what is already in [their] minds' (Hewings and McKinney 2000: 19). The teacher is therefore encouraged to utilise culturally relevant, authentic and scaffolded texts so that the input is more comprehensible to the learners (Hewings and McKinney, 2000).

Teacher trainees are taught to plan their lessons around an overall lesson aim which focuses either on a particular language point or on one of the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Scrivener, 1994). Each stage of the lesson is designed to build on the main aim. During the presentation stage of PPP lessons, the teacher typically presents the target language in context and focuses on meaning, form and pronunciation of the language (Scrivener, 1994). During the practice stage of the lesson the language is reproduced in a controlled manner. For example, pronunciation may be practised through drill-type activities similar to those advocated by the behaviourists (Harmer, 2001). This is then followed by the production stage during which students practise the language more freely in activities designed to reflect authentic, personalised use of the language (Harmer, 2001). TTT is similar to the PPP framework but uses the first test stage as the diagnostic stage where students attempt a task and the teacher assesses the accuracy of their language use.

A large portion of teacher input centres around questioning of the students in order to check concepts, arouse students' interest and activate prior knowledge. The traditional initiation-response-follow-up format is employed in which the teacher asks a question, allows students to respond and then provides feedback in the form of praise or error correction (Chin, 2006). Initial questions may either ask for information with a predetermined response known as display questions, or may ask for information the teacher does not know, known as reference questions (Lee, 2006). In order to manage the class and get through the aims of the lesson, teacher trainees are encouraged to give time-limits and to check instructions with the class before beginning a new activity (Scrivener, 1994).

At most IH institutions, teachers are regularly observed by the Director of Studies (DoS) to ensure standards are maintained. A 'good' lesson is one which has a 'useful' aim, follows a clear framework and provides the students with sufficient 'real' or 'authentic' practice of the target language (Scrivener, 1994). Because such practice activities tend to come towards the end of the lesson, it is imperative that the teacher keeps up the pace and doesn't spend too much time on the in-between

stages. After the allocated time for an activity a teacher may allocate more time if necessary or may stop the students and refocus them on the next activity. It is important that the lesson has a general sense of progress so that students walk away having learnt something concrete. Evidence of meeting the lesson goals can be seen in how well the students use the target language during the 'authentic' practice stage (Scrivener, 1994). Hiep (2005: 6) however, problematises the decontextualised notion of authenticity and suggests that CLT needs to be scrutinized more critically. Wallace (2006: 83) agrees and maintains that 'an authentic text...immediately loses its authenticity of original purpose once it is recontextualised in the classroom'. This questioning of 'authenticity' is significant to my study as it problematizes the use of the CLT classroom as a 'genuine' communicative context.

Hiep (2005: 6) maintains that many CLT principles have arisen from Western English-speaking countries and are therefore underpinned by Western values and beliefs. Luk (2005: 247) agrees and maintains that because of the power of Western discourses, the CLT method is generally viewed as the 'ideal model in places outside its origin where appropriate methodologies for teaching and learning English...are much sought after'. The appropriacy of transferring Western based approaches to 'periphery' contexts has been problematized by a number of writers (Pennycook, 1994, Canagarajah, 1999; Luk, 2005). The CLT approach espouses particular student and teacher roles as well as a particular way of questioning and communicating within the classroom space and this pedagogical script may contradict the experiences of teachers and students in the 'host' country (Luk, 2005: 248). The ideology inherent in the CLT approach can impact negatively on students in terms of their identities and cultures because students are judged against Western norms and standards (Kubota, 2004). Students may be deemed deficient and lacking against such standards and this has the effect of reducing students to cultural stereotypes (Atkinson, 1999). It is therefore ethically imperative for researchers and practitioners to interrogate the dominant beliefs and practices inherent in the pedagogy they employ and to be sensitive to local sociocultural

conditions (Luk, 2005). This will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter.

2.4 Identity and Culture in EFL Pedagogy and Language Education

Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice (Norton & Toohey, 2002: 115).

In this section I discuss the relevance of identity and culture within EFL pedagogy. These constructs are not foregrounded on CELTA courses and as a result are not given prominence in the pedagogy. I problematize this position and argue that all language teaching is 'culture' teaching too (Kramsch, 1993).

Norton Peirce argues for an expanded understanding of learner identity which takes the power relations between the learner and the language learning context into consideration (1995: 9). To reflect this relationship, Norton-Peirce argues that motivation is mediated by the learner's *investment* in the language. To define investment, Norton draws on Bourdieu's theory of language and specifically his notion of *cultural capital* which refers to 'the knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms' (Bourdieu & Passeron in Norton Peirce, 1995: 17). *Investment* refers to the way a learner invests in learning a second language out of their desire to obtain more symbolic resources (for example, a sense of belonging to a certain social group) or material resources (obtaining a better job, for example) which will result in an increase in the value of their cultural capital (Norton Peirce, 1995: 17). As the learner's cultural capital increases they reassess and reorganise a sense of who they are and this is why 'an investment in the target language is also an investment in a [learner's] own social identity' (Norton Peirce, 1995: 18). The discussion of *investment* is a significant one for my study as it demonstrates the need to investigate alternative teaching practices and materials which acknowledge the complex social positions, desires and identities of learners (Ricento, 2005).

In my study, the classroom is viewed as a 'real social context' which has the potential, in the post-communicative era, to be utilized in the learning process by 'building up understanding' and promoting positive relationships (Andrewes, 2005: 5). The classroom therefore operates as a microcosm reflecting the power relations operating in broader society (Andrewes, 2005). The dominant, hegemonic position of English in the world necessitates a critical focus on this microcosm and the processes taking place within it (Auerbach, 1995). It is important to acknowledge the impact the teacher has on power relations within the microcosm through the pedagogical decisions they make and through their choice of materials (Auerbach, 1995). Knowledge is not neutral and 'our choices as educators play a role in shaping students' choices' (Auerbach, 1995: 9). This view of meaning-making is relevant to this research study as it shows that the way the teacher positions themselves in relation to the students impacts on the students' identities as well as their levels of participation and motivation (Harklau, 2000).

The classroom culture therefore provides the EFL professional and the learner with valuable opportunities to resist and transform the status quo in the wider context. In order to capitalise on this, it is not enough to simply compare the microcosm to the macrocosm (Pennycook, 1999). What is required is a new attitude, a way of thinking, questioning, teaching and learning in which societal norms and assumptions are critically questioned and discussed (Pennycook, 1999: 340). I agree that it is important to engage with the *process* of creating meaning and understanding in the EFL classroom (Andrewes, 2005). Freire (in Auerbach, 1995: 12) calls this critical engagement with the learner 'conscientization'. The process of conscientization assists in creating a more meaningful and productive form of resistance to the status quo, as learners are given the opportunity to rehearse for new roles and positions outside the classroom (Auerbach, 1995: 16).

Critical pedagogy involves 'transform[ing] the possibilities of our lives and the ways we understand those possibilities' (Pennycook, 1994: 302). The discourse of EIL has not only limited the possibilities of thought and action available to the 'colonized' but also those available to 'the colonizer' (Pennycook, 1994: 324). This is because the

construction of knowledge is embedded in broader, more dominant global discourses and as a result societal views of the local are tainted by and are in accordance with such discourses (Canagarajah, 2005). Blommaert's (2002) views regarding the changing *value* of semiotic resources across physical and social spaces also resonate here. In this study I argue in line with Pennycook (1994) that a reconceptualisation of the ways in which students *and* teachers are represented is required in order to make for more productive counter-discourses within a critical pedagogy. Pennycook (1994: 326) makes the argument that:

Counter-discourses formulated through English...offer alternative possibilities to the colonizers and post-colonizers, challenging and changing the cultures and discourses that dominate the world.

In the classroom, students are represented as 'passive consumers' of knowledge and 'linguistically deficient' in relation to the teacher (Wallace, 2006: 74, 76). I agree that students need to be repositioned as 'expert interpreters' of texts in order to give them ownership of the knowledge. This type of engagement with texts not only provides students and teachers with opportunities to engage with multiplicity of meaning but also assists in the process of language learning (Wallace, 2006: 87). Canagarajah (2005) suggests that local knowledge needs to be reconstructed from a grassroots, bottom-up position and both Blommaert (2002) and Canagarajah (2005) recommend moving beyond the global-local distinction. This is important for my research as it indicates that a new understanding of knowledge is required, one which acknowledges the mobility of resources in the 'global' era and which has the potential to be effectively utilised not only locally, but also in multiple contexts (Blommaert, 2002; Canagarajah, 2005).

In my view, a new discourse of culture is required within EFL and second language education. Like Kubota (2004) I would argue for a *critical multiculturalism* approach. The dominant discourse of *liberal multiculturalism* inherent in EFL pedagogy and discourse supports the idea that all people are equal regardless of race, linguistic ability, cultural values etc (Kubota, 2004). Although a 'liberal' view is well-intentioned, by focusing mostly on superficial aspects of culture such as festivals,

artefacts, customs and traditions it fails to acknowledge or to challenge dominant ideologies of race, ethnicity, language, and power (Kubota, 2004: 35). This is because teachers tend to judge all other cultures against the 'standard' of the neutrally constructed Western culture. *Liberal multiculturalism* therefore serves to reinforce binaries and dichotomies of 'us' and 'them', 'West' and 'other' in the classroom (Kubota, 2004). Such dichotomizing perspectives have resulted in '...insensitive negativity shown by the pedagogies and discourses towards the indigenous cultural traditions' (Canagarajah, 1999: 3). Kramsch (1993: 8) suggests that culture is not given enough prominence in the language classroom because it is not seen as an intrinsic part of language. New forms of meaning-making are required to change this view of culture because 'if...language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching' (Kramsch, 1993: 8). This idea is key to my study as it focuses attention on the interconnectedness between culture and pedagogy within the EFL classroom.

Critical pedagogies acknowledge power relations and difference in representation within the microcosm of the classroom, and have potential synergies with a poststructuralist view (McKinney & Norton, 2007: 192). In the global EFL context, teachers have not been well-exposed to critical pedagogies as they have generally not formed part of the teacher training courses. Given the dominant position of English in the world, critical pedagogies are needed to make for more ethically-sound classroom practices. By focusing on the ways students negotiate culture and identity around the themes of the materials and in relation to the pedagogy, this study hopes to create a space for critical pedagogies in the South African EFL context.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to contextualise my research by drawing on the work of Alistair Pennycook and Suresh Canagarajah in describing the dominant position of English in the world and the way knowledge has come to be globally constructed from a scientific, positivistic perspective at the expense of more local perspectives. I have also utilised poststructuralist theory to delineate the key

constructs of this study: language, identity and culture. My main argument is that discourse is situated and central in constructing our social worlds, subjectivities and cultural identities. I have also looked at the culture of EFL pedagogy and how it is rooted in dominant Western approaches such as the CLT approach. While looking at what constitutes a 'good' lesson within the EFL field, I have argued that the notion of 'authenticity' in the classroom context needs to be problematized. Finally, I have looked critically at the place of culture within EFL pedagogy and this is relevant in providing the rationale for this study. In the next chapter I discuss the specific research design and methodology utilised for this research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Having looked at the aims and rationale of this study in chapter one and the theoretical framework in chapter two, this chapter turns to the design and methodology of the research. It also presents the research context and the participants in the study and discusses the limitations and biases inherent in a small-scale study of this nature.

3.2 Research Approach

The poststructuralist view of language, identity and culture which is embraced in this research study, suggests a qualitative 'open-ended' methodology. Such an approach situates language and identity in context and allows for in depth analysis of the way the learners and teachers position and construct their selves (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Qualitative research has a different emphasis to quantitative research in the following ways: the focus is on constructed meanings instead of observable behaviours; hypotheses are generated through the research process rather than tested; questioning is open-ended rather than structured; and multiple, subjective realities are given prominence over one, objective reality (Silverman, 2000: 8). Qualitative research methods 'can provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data' and are therefore better suited to the purposes of this study (Silverman, 2000: 8).

Although qualitative research methods have been criticised for being unscientific due to a lack of empirical, quantifiable data, I agree with Hammersley that an appropriate level of precision should be determined by the goals of the study and 'the nature of what we are trying to describe' (in Silverman, 2000: 12). In order to gain a deeper understanding of identity in the classroom environment, an interpretive framework is required. While such a framework may not be representative and / or generalisable in a scientific, objective sense, it is useful for

gaining insight into the multiple realities of people and how these come to bear on the identities they construct (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999).

More specifically, this research drew on aspects of an ethnographic methodology as outlined by Hammersley (1994). Firstly, it was conducted within a real and natural context. The research project focused on teacher and student interaction in a real classroom setting which was not set-up or staged for the purposes of this research. Secondly, it took a holistic as opposed to an atomistic stance on phenomena. Although the research under discussion was a small-scale project, the questions it asked were open-ended and looked at multiple aspects of identity in the classroom setting. Thirdly, it utilised a wide range of data collection methods and techniques for validity purposes. I gathered data from four main sources: non-participant observation recorded in field notes, video recordings of classroom discourse, audio recordings of individual, face-to-face interviews and the teacher's two-page written response to the course. Finally, my study entailed interpretation of data in order to gain an understanding of the participants' perspective. During the analysis stage of this research, the discourse of the learners was described and interpreted. Interpretations were then compared and cross-validated with interview data (Hammersley, 1994).

This research study did not however, incorporate all aspects of an ethnographic methodology as it did not take place over an extended period of time but rather over a period of four weeks, and it was guided by research questions and categories of interpretation rather than being completely unstructured (Hammersley, 1994: 2).

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of the research study, permission to conduct the research was sought and obtained from the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee and the principal of the school. The voluntary nature of participation was made explicit to the students and teachers through the process of informed consent (see appendix B for consent letters). Participants were made aware that they could choose not to participate and that they could withdraw at any

time and that no one would be advantaged or disadvantaged by participating or not participating. During the interviews, the students and teacher were not required to answer any questions they found uncomfortable.

In this study the participant's confidentiality has been assured through the use of pseudonyms and by removing any identifying information from the research report. The video-recordings have not and will not be seen or heard by anyone apart from myself and my supervisor and are stored in a locked safe.

3.4 Research Context:

Research Site, Course Logistics and Materials

The research was conducted at The Language Lab, International House (IH) Johannesburg (The Lab), situated in Braamfontein. The Lab is an affiliate member of IH World which is based in London and which has over one hundred and thirty affiliates in more than 40 countries worldwide. The Lab is a well-resourced school with two computer rooms, a library and a listening laboratory.

The Lab offers full-time English courses to adult foreign language students. Lessons are timetabled for six hours a day and consist of three hours of general English classes in the morning followed by an hour of self-access where students work independently in the library or computer room, and two one hour extension classes (see appendix C for school timetable). When students arrive they are placed in an appropriate level of general English after completing a placement test. Courses run for four weeks and at the end of the course students write a test which, along with the teacher's assessment, determines whether they can proceed to the next level or not. For general English, teachers are given a coursebook and syllabus from which to work. The coursebooks are designed and developed in Britain and can be defined as 'global' in that they are marketed worldwide and utilised at most IH institutions. Example titles include: *Cutting Edge* (Pearson Education Limited), *Face-2-Face* (Cambridge University Press), *Headway* (Oxford University Press) and *Inside Out* (Macmillan Publishers Limited).

The extension classes focus on one or two of the four skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students generally choose between two classes. The course for this research study, entitled *African Customs and Rituals*, was offered as an extension class and was based on the materials *Customs in our Time* which incorporate the four skills as well as grammar and vocabulary work (see appendix A for materials). Students were offered a choice between this course and a general conversation class. The course was scheduled for 14:45 – 15:45 in the afternoon and ran for four weeks.

3.5 Research Participants and Sampling Criteria

3.5.1 Student Participants

Eleven students chose the *African Customs and Rituals* course as their afternoon extension class. Prior to commencement of the study, the students were informed that participation in the course involved participation in the research. They were informed verbally and in writing that if at any time they wished to withdraw from the course, they would be allowed to do so. All the students provided written consent to participate in the study and no student asked to change to the conversation class during the length of the study. The table below summarises background information of the students which they provided during their interviews:

Table 1: Student backgrounds

Student	Nationality	Age	Sex	First Language	Reason for learning English
Francisco	Equatorial Guinean	22	Male	Spanish & Fang	University studies
Vicente	Equatorial Guinean	20	Male	Spanish	University studies
Domingos	Mozambican	34	Male	Shona	For his job as English teacher
Javier	Equatorial Guinean	20	Male	Spanish	University studies

Rosario	Mozambican	43	Male	Makhuwa	For his job as English teacher
Nunos	Mozambican	33	Male	Portuguese	For his job as English teacher
Manuel	Mozambican	17	Male	Portuguese	University studies
Alain	Congolese	21	Male	French	University studies
Victor	Mozambican	37	Male	Xitshwa	For his job as English teacher
John	Mozambican	32	Male	Nyanja	For his job as teacher trainer
Zyda	Mozambican	35	Female	Portuguese	For her job as personal assistant

As the table indicates, there was only one female student, Zyda, on the course. All the students were from African countries: three from Equatorial Guinea, seven from Mozambique and one from the DRC. Four were in their early twenties, one in his late teens, four in their thirties and one in his early forties. All the students with the exception of Manuel and Alain were sponsored by their government or an independent company to study in South Africa.

At the time of the study, all the students had been studying at The Lab for at least two months and as a result knew each other and the teacher relatively well. They all lived with host families and for many of the younger students this was their first time away from home. All the students had reached at least an Upper-Intermediate level of general English because the materials were designed for this level. At The Lab an Upper-Intermediate level indicates that the students can understand detailed instructions or advice, scan texts for relevant information, make notes while someone is talking and keep up a conversation on a fairly wide range of topics. Although the students had a fairly good command of the language and were able to discuss relatively complex, abstract ideas, the fact that they were not fully proficient

in English impacted on the data collection and analysis and is discussed in greater detail in section 3.6.

3.5.2 Researcher-student relationship: effects on the research

Because I am a teacher at the school and have taught many of the student participants, it is important to acknowledge the effects of this relationship on my research. Being known to the students may have helped establish rapport and trust regarding the nature of the research. The students did not appear intimidated or shy to be observed. Although I made my role as non-participant observer clear to the students prior to the commencement of the course and tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible, the students attempted, at times, to involve me in classroom discussion. Therefore my presence in the classroom impacted on the behaviour and discourse that took place and ultimately on my research findings (Swann, 1994). It was also difficult for me to separate my researcher role from my teacher role which is evident in the way I conducted the interviews. The students also found this a challenge as is reflected in their interview responses where their discourse shifts between their student and research participant positions. The biases inherent in the interview process are elaborated on in section 3.6.3.

3.5.3 Teacher Participants

For my research I selected a teacher who was well-experienced and comfortable experimenting with new ideas and materials. All the teachers at The Lab are CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching of Adults) qualified, as this is an official requirement of IH World. The teacher, Kimberley, who taught on this course is also DELTA (Diploma in English Language Teaching of Adults) qualified. She is originally from the United States and has been working at The Lab since 2003 first as a teacher, and then as the Director of Studies (DoS). She taught in Poland prior to coming to South Africa and was 37 years old at the time of the study.

Kimberley expressed an interest in teaching the course and, having recently completed her masters in English language education, was fully aware of the research procedure and the constraints of classroom observation. The voluntary

nature of participation in the research was discussed with her and she provided written consent to participate in the study. Although Kimberley was told she could adapt or add to the materials if necessary she made only minor changes. She did however, focus mostly on the listening and speaking sections and did very little grammar and writing with the students. This was probably a result of the time slot of the course which was during the last hour of the school day when students are tired and accustomed to a more relaxed conversation type lesson.

3.5.4 Researcher-teacher relationship: effects on the research

The fact that Kimberley is DoS and therefore my superior at The Lab, and also the fact that she had recently completed her masters in the same subject area, impacted on the way she ran the course. At The Lab the teachers are officially observed quarterly and so Kimberley appeared quite comfortable to have me observing in the classroom every day. My presence, however, affected the decisions she made regarding the materials and the way she interacted with the students. In her written feedback she said that she would have adapted the materials more and supplemented more if she had not been observed. She also commented that she was worried about getting through all the themes of the materials so that I would have a good range of data to work with. This was the reason she left out certain parts such as the grammar and writing. I also noticed that Kimberley was quite strict about students coming to class on time and when asked about this in her interview she said: “As far as keeping time I think probably because I’m DOS I’m very worried, I need to set an example”. It is likely that my presence made her feel all the more obligated to ‘set an example’. It is important to acknowledge these research constraints and I have taken them into consideration in my analysis and interpretation of the data (Swann, 1994).

3.6 Methods and Techniques for Data Collection

Having obtained permission to conduct the research from the Human Research Ethics Committee and principal of the school, I collected data from four main sources: observations and field notes of classroom practice, video recordings of

classroom interactions, audio-recordings of individual interviews of each of the participants and a teacher written two-page response to the course.

3.6.1 Observations and Field Notes of Classroom Practice

I began my research by observing every class of the course 'on the spot', as a non-participant observer. The course took place over a four week period for one hour a day and amounted to a total of 16 hours of observation. In the field notes, I described and made comments on the interactions observed as they related to the research questions of the study. More specifically I focused on:

- how the students responded affectively to the material
- how the students and teachers positioned themselves in relation to the texts i.e. their stance on the issues raised.
- which issues were taken up and elaborated on and which were not
- how the discussion was distributed among participants
- silence – when it occurred and who was silent.

As recommended by Swann (1994: 31), the observations and comments were separated so that different interpretations were 'tried out' in the comments section. Significant moments were noted and used as a basis for deeper analysis of video footage. It is important to acknowledge the researcher bias inherent in a study of this nature: what I focused on during the observations and the way I interpreted the data was influenced by my particular epistemological view and subjectivity. Therefore, 'no observation is entirely free from interpretation' (Swann, 1994: 31).

3.6.2 Video recordings of Classroom Practice

In order to verify field notes and facilitate the analysis of classroom discourse, the lessons were also video-recorded. Two static video cameras were positioned in different corners of the classroom in order to capture the teacher and all the students in the field of vision. The recordings provided a permanent record of the lessons and lent reliability and validity to the study as they could be played back repeatedly, transcribed and utilised in constructing verifiable arguments during the analysis phase (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999). They also assisted in the complex

process of transcribing the discourse of several participants in conversation as this was not possible during the 'on the spot' observations. As teachers at The Lab video-record their classes on occasion, this process did not appear to be completely unfamiliar to the students. However, in order to reduce the intrusiveness, the equipment was tested beforehand and positioned as unobtrusively as possible in the classroom (Swann, 1994).

3.6.3 Interviews

Individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted with all the students involved in the study as well as the teacher in order to triangulate the data obtained from the classroom observations (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I utilized a multimethod approach to add to the validity of the research by providing new angles and insights into the research data (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

All the interviews were audio-recorded to provide a permanent record that could be transcribed and reflected on during the analysis phase of the research. This was necessary as, during the interview, I was both moderator and observer. I interviewed each participant at the end of the course for approximately 30 - 40 minutes, at a time that was convenient to the participant. The interviews took place in the library at The Lab which is a more 'neutral' context than the classroom and which helped place the participants at ease. Although the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for flexibility, they were guided by questions to assist in clarifying and contextualising significant moments of classroom observations (see Appendix D for specific interview schedules).

From a poststructuralist perspective, the interviewer is not a neutral observer but rather an active co-participant within the discursive interaction of the 'interview' (Fontana & Frey, 2000). It is important to acknowledge the relationship I have with the students and the teacher as this would undoubtedly have impacted on the results of the interview phase. Although I attempted to position myself as researcher and the students as research participants, I noticed, while analysing the interview transcripts, that my position as English teacher and theirs as English student were

also evident in our discourse. This was reflected in the way I repeated and rephrased questions for the students and assisted them with vocabulary. Multiple positionings were also evident in the interview with the teacher, most notably that of fellow colleague and masters student. Therefore, I agree with Fontana and Frey (2000: 664) that the interview is not 'neutral' or 'objective' but that 'the meaning ... is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of interviewer and respondent'.

3.6.4 Written response

Upon completion of the course, the teacher was asked to write a two-page response of her experience teaching the course. She was free to comment on whatever she felt was pertinent and of interest. Her response was used as a foundation for some of the questions I asked during her interview and to assist in providing an alternative perspective during the analysis stage. When, after I had collected my research data and begun to analyse it, it became apparent to me how all-pervasive the dominant model of EFL pedagogy was, I myself wrote a reflection on the impact of the research on my own practice and this I have included as a pedagogic connection in chapter five.

3.6.5 Transcription

I utilised the following conventions in transcribing the video recorded classroom observations and audio recorded interviews:

.,? and other punctuation	Conventions of punctuation have been used to made the transcription readable
//	Indicates overlapping speech and/or interruptions
<u>Underlining</u>	Shows word stressed
(....)	Gap in data as inaudible or irrelevant to argument
[pause]	Used to indicate a noticeable pause, longer than 2 seconds.
[st laughs]	Square brackets used for transcriber's comments mainly to include additional significant

	information, for example the physical movements, sounds or gestures of students.
Name:	Indicates the name of the speaker
xx(Researcher: OK)xx	Minimal responses are included in brackets in the main speaker's texts.
? / (?)	Indicates that the speaker or the word is unknown
(member)	Rounded brackets used within the text indicate a guess of the word or phrase.

Note: The participants often utilized the South African word 'ja' to mean 'yes'.

It was possible to transcribe the interviews fully as there were only two people speaking: the researcher and the research participant. Due to the time constraints and the difficulties inherent in making sense of multiple voices of classroom discourse, it was not possible to transcribe each video recorded observation in its entirety. Therefore I utilised the field notes I had taken during classroom observation to locate significant moments of interaction on the video recordings. Significant moments are those that are pertinent to the aims and questions of this research study. Those specific video recording were viewed and transcribed and analysed further during the analysis stage.

3.7 Methods and Techniques for Data Analysis

Data was comprised of the following:

- Researcher's field notes from 16 hours of lessons observed
- Video recordings of interactions during all classroom observations
- Selective transcripts of video recordings
- Individual participant interview transcripts
- Teacher written two-page response

The data set was read and reread in order to conduct a thematic content analysis and limited discourse analysis of the participant responses. For the thematic content analysis the field notes were firstly read to identify any patterns, surprises, inconsistencies or contradictions (Hammersley, 1995: 210). These 'significant

moments' were then transcribed and the transcriptions of both the classroom interactions and interviews were analysed by identifying themes (e.g. conflicting response to the pedagogy), patterns (e.g. the teacher missing opportunities to engage with alternative discourses) or inconsistencies (e.g. participants appropriating multiple discourses and subject positions) that emerged. The technique of *coding*, which entails assigning categories to different ideas or themes in the data, was utilised to provide 'evidence' for the interpretation of the results (Knobel & Lankshear, 1999: 94). This process enabled me to hypothesise about relationships between different sections of the data. I also utilised a limited form of discourse analysis by looking at the use of pronouns, lexical choice and metaphors. This 'language analysis' complemented the 'content analysis' as it provided a deeper understanding of the positions taken up by the participants as well as their affective responses (McKinney, 2003).

The validity of the results was enhanced by placing the interpretations into their theoretical context and by constant movement between the data and theory (McKinney, 2003). Although I utilised aspects of an ethnographic approach during the analysis process, by adopting an open and flexible attitude to the 'discovery' stage, my analysis departed from traditional ethnography as it was guided by research questions and categories of interpretation, rather than being completely unstructured (Hammersley, 1994: 2, 5).

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my research approach and methodology as well as an outline of the research context, participants, data collection methods and data analysis. A poststructuralist position taken up in this research report suggests a qualitative 'open-ended' design for a study of this nature. I have incorporated aspects of ethnography and an 'interpretive' framework in my overall design, such as conducting the study in a 'real' setting and utilising open-ended research questions. The limitations of an 'interpretive' framework such as researcher bias and non-generalisability of results have also been discussed. In the next two chapters, I will present and analyze the data of this research.

Chapter 4: Discourses of Culture

4.1 Introduction

An understanding of the way knowledge and culture are represented in the EFL classroom can be gained by focusing on the discursive practices around these constructs in 'the local' microcosm of the classroom. In this chapter I look at the discourses of culture that emerged from the *African Customs and Rituals* class and attempt to offer answers to my first research question:

- How do the students and teacher construct notions of culture and negotiate their identities around the themes of the texts?

I start by focusing on the teacher's position and how her discourse placed the students in contradictory subject positions at times. Research related to the powerful positioning of 'Western' discourse contextualises my findings, while also offering alternative possibilities of knowledge construction in the local context. I then analyse the students' constructions of culture and suggest that during the course they were caught between two dominant discourses: one which resonated with the teacher's position and one which challenged and resisted such a positioning. To illustrate the alternative ways students may resist essentialising discourses, I analyse the discourse of two students: John and Zyda.

In this chapter I argue that the participants' discourse reveals the way static and essentialised notions of culture have been internalised and how such notions appear, on the surface, to go unquestioned by the students. However, a more in-depth analysis demonstrates the subtle and sophisticated ways in which such views are contested in the classroom and how the students engage in an alternative storyline about culture and identity. These findings highlight the hybrid nature of 'the local' which I suggest can be viewed as a site of multiple cultural and linguistic discursive resources in which participants struggle to negotiate conflicting discourses and resultant multifarious subject positions.

4.2 The teacher's position

Through my reading of the data and specifically the classroom discourse and interviews, it became apparent that the teacher's dominant discourse of culture was an essentialist one. From the beginning of the course Kimberley presented a homogeneous, monolithic and pure view of culture.

4.2.1 'Culture' as homogeneous and monolithic

On the first day of the course the students were asked to define 'American' culture:

Kimberley: Okay in your tables what is the culture of America. What do you think is the culture of America? What's your perception of it? When you see it on TV, on movies, what do you think American culture is?

Kimberley's discourse above suggests that she equates culture with nationality. Her use of the article 'the' when she refers to 'the culture of America' constructs culture as a singular, separate, defined and uncontested entity. An essentialist view of culture is reinforced in Kimberley's last question in which 'American' culture is conflated with representations of 'America' on TV and in the movies. Her language reflects dominant global discourses of culture which work to construct culture as an observable object with defining characteristics (Thornton, 1988).

Later in the same lesson, Kimberley extends this notion of culture to include the students:

Kimberley: How many of you own at least one item of traditional clothes that you would wear?

Francisco: [laughs].

Kimberley: Nobody? You have no traditional clothes?

Vicente: Yeah.

Kimberley: You own some and would you wear it? Would you wear it to school?

Vicente: No because now it's Winter.

[Sts laugh]

Kimberley: Okay but if it was warmer? If it was warm would you wear it?

Vicente: Yes of course.

Kimberley: No problem. But you guys [pointing to table 2] no, you don't own anything? You don't like traditional clothes? (**Francisco:**No) How important //

Francisco: But it doesn't mean I can't wear it but I don't like it.

Kimberley: Because what?

Victor: Other influence.

Kimberley: The Western influence?

Victor: mmm

Kimberley: The influence of Western culture (**A few sts:** Yes).

Kimberley's use of the pronoun 'you' in the following utterances: "How many of you own at least one item of traditional clothes that you would wear?", "You have no traditional clothes", "[Y]ou don't own anything?", and "You don't like traditional clothes?", is used to refer to the students as a collective whole which constitutes them as a single cultural group. She does not define what she means by 'traditional' which suggests that she is employing the term to describe anything 'African' or 'from the students' culture' (as a uniform group). Kimberley's questioning of the students as a 'whole' and her use of blanket, all-encompassing terms such as 'traditional', is fairly typical of her discourse throughout the course and acts to construct the students as a homogeneous and monolithic group.

In the extract, Kimberley suggests that the influence of Western culture is the reason that students do not wear traditional clothing any longer. This serves to create a dichotomy between 'Western' culture and 'traditional' culture and implies that culture is unambiguous and can be neatly categorised. Thus, both 'Western' and 'traditional' culture are homogenised and each are constructed as separate and distinct entities. The binary she constructs is reflective of the situated nature of language (Weedon, 1987). Her language is located within the 'scientific' discourse which works to present knowledge as value-free and stable (Atkinson, 1999) and this discursive practice has also become increasingly powerful and authoritative over time (Canagarajah, 2005). This stable and bounded view is stated more explicitly in a classroom discussion about divorce that occurred on the third day of the course:

Kimberley: Just tell me, I thought it was interesting the theme we saw last week uh yesterday about uh divorce, is this common, is divorce common in your countries today?

A few sts: Yes

Kimberley: Is it? It's becoming more and more popular in Western cultures and is it the same 'cause I always felt, you always think of Africa as being very traditional.

Here the dichotomy between Western and African culture is reinforced. Africa is explicitly spoken of as 'traditional' and divorce is equated with Western culture not 'traditional' culture. In the context of culture, the word 'traditional' can have negative connotations of backwardness and stereotypical gender roles. The term 'Western' on the other hand, has more positive connotations of progressiveness, cutting-edge technology and liberal attitudes (Kubota, 1999). Although not necessarily intentional, Kimberley's choice of terminology and her construction of cultural binaries serves to validate these stereotypes.

Kimberley's discourse also exoticises the students' cultures. In the following extract John is talking about the customs around divorce for a certain group of people in Mozambique:

John: Yeah, but that thing depend on for example I saw one of the groups of tribe people they're educated in Islam and this Islam they have their own rule, they're saying you have to wait three months without after saying you have divorced, before separating you have to wait three months (**Kimberley:** Right.) they're saying these three months is to find out if the lady is not pregnant (**Kimberley:** Oh!). And if he or she is pregnant you have to wait to be responsible, have to // (**Kimberley:** Whoa, isn't that interesting!).

While Kimberley's utterances of "Oh!" and "Whoa, isn't that interesting!" are typically used by teachers to give encouragement to their students, they also suggest that Kimberley finds this information unusual and exotic. By playing on cultural stereotypes encapsulated in terms such as 'traditional' and in the construction of other cultures as different and exotic, Kimberley constructs further divisions between her culture and the students' culture. Kubota (1999) reports similar findings in a study on the way Japanese culture is constructed by researchers in the Applied Linguistics Research field. She maintains that the labels given to Japanese culture such as traditional, homogeneous, and group oriented set up a dichotomy between

the East and West, with the West being positioned more favourably through labels such as individualism, self-expression, critical and analytic thinking (Kubota, 1999: 11,12). Through labelling and the creation of binaries by the discourse of 'the dominant group', Japanese culture is constructed as the 'exotic Other' (Kubota, 1999: 11).

Kimberley's discourse is in line with the traditional view of culture which serves to construct separate cultural groups based on 'superficial' characteristics such as traditional clothing and customs (Thornton, 1988; Kubota, 2004). Her discourse indicates that she imagines the categories 'traditional' and 'Western' as bounded and homogeneous entities. The students are positioned as 'other', as a separate cultural group, while she clearly positions herself as mainstream and of Western culture. Kubota's (2004) discourse of *liberal multiculturalism* is evident in the way Kimberley questions the students and the way her choice of words attempts to present the students' culture as 'equal, but different' to hers. However, her narrative and the binaries she constructs place her in the more powerful subject position of someone of the standard and mainstream culture. It is from this 'vantage point' that the students are viewed, labelled and interrogated (Davies & Harré, 1990),

Kubota (1999: 16) discusses how '[t]his construction of Otherness is part of the colonial discourse' and serves to perpetuate a deterministic view of students by reducing them to stereotypical and unchanging characteristics. Atkinson (1999: 629) suggests that teachers may engage in such uncritical, monolithic discourses because of their positioning as teachers of language and not of culture. This reasoning is pertinent to my argument that the way Kimberley constructs herself through and is constructed by dominant and global pedagogical discourses, places her in a particular 'teacher' position which makes invisible alternative discursive practises. She is therefore constrained by the discourse and unaware of the way her language constructs an essentialised and stable narrative of culture. This finding connects with the discourse of the materials I produced and the questions I myself asked during the interviews. I focused on particular aspects of culture and tradition (for example, *How would you define culture?*) and not others and this also reflects a

bounded, definable view of culture. This dominant discourse is 'single-voiced' and in line with mainstream Western discourses in which meaning has become decontextualized and constructs are presented as 'the truth' (Bakhtin in Hall, 2002).

4.2.2 'Culture' as pure

In this section I look at the way Kimberley reinforces a homogeneous boundary between cultures through her discourse which promotes the purity of culture. The extract below is taken from the first day of the course when Kimberley asks the students if they can identify the different cultural groups in their countries:

Kimberley: Do you think there's a specific culture for your country?

A few sts: Not specific

Kimberley: How many different groups of people are there?

Vicente: In my country five.

Kimberley: Can you count how many there are and could you identify a culture for each?

Francisco: If you know all of them Ja.

Kimberley: You could do?

Francisco: Yes

Kimberley: And do the cultures blend together or do they stay separate?

A few sts: Stay separate.

Kimberley: So in the countryside it's separate but is there another kind of group forming in the city that's a combination of different cultures?

Victor: In the city or country?

Kimberley: In the city. Vicente is saying that in the city, people from different cultures all live together and are people who live in the city are they becoming more um the same? Are they losing their cultural identity?

Francisco: Not really.

Kimberley: They're forming a new culture that's a combination of other cultures?

(....)

And do you think this is a good thing or are you worried that eventually people will lose their culture, it will become too mixed?

(....)

So if you speak English and Portuguese, Spanish and French and you dress like Americans, do you think your culture is that strong?

In this extract, Kimberley's discourse suggests that when different nationalities mix, culture becomes 'diluted' and 'culture-less' societies are created. When she asks the question: "Are they losing their cultural identity?" she suggests that cultural identity is dependent on belonging to a pure and distinct group. A group can only call itself a culture if it does not blend with other cultures and "become more the same". This view is reinforced in her question "are you worried that eventually people will lose their culture, it will become too mixed?". The purity of each group should be maintained in terms of language ("So if you speak English and Portuguese..."), nationality ("Do you think there's a specific culture for your country?") and dress ("you dress like Americans...").

In the last question of the extract: "So if you speak English and Portuguese, Spanish and French and you dress like Americans, do you think your culture is that strong?" Kimberley again sets up a dichotomy between her 'American' culture and the students' 'African' culture. America is presented as an 'untainted' culture associated with a pure and distinct form of language, clothing, TV and nationality. Kimberley's use of the intensifier 'that' in the question: "do you think your culture is that strong?" questions the uniqueness and purity of the students' culture. Kubota (1999) maintains that powerful constructs of culture place 'Western' culture in a superior position in relation to 'other' cultures with the 'West' being viewed as the 'standard' against which all other cultures are compared.

Kimberley's line of questioning also reflects the contradictory nature of discourse (Weedon, 1987). While on the one hand her discourse constructs culture in pure and bounded ways, on the other her discourse works to position 'Western' culture as the ideal that the students aspire to as evidenced by their clothing and taste in music. This serves to place the students in conflicting subject positions of 'purely traditional' versus 'impurely Western'. The students struggle to reconcile these positions as is evidenced in their short responses to her questions. This contradictory positioning is exacerbated in the *EFL* classroom where students are already positioned as

linguistically deficient (Wallace, 2006). In the next section I explore further the dynamic and unstable nature of the students' and teacher's discourse to show how language works to create multiple and competing subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990).

4.2.3 Shifting between positions

Although Kimberley predominantly presents a dichotomous and homogeneous narrative of culture, she is not consistent in the essentialist position. She shifts between positioning the students as separate to her in terms of cultural identity and placing the students in the same 'Western' category as she places herself. The contradictory positions she engages in reflects the poststructuralist view of subjectivity as a site of struggle between multiple discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Kimberley: (...) I always felt, you always think of Africa as being very traditional.

In this statement Kimberley starts with the pronoun 'I' and then shifts to the inclusive pronoun 'you' to refer to herself and the students. The shift between the two positions is also explicitly stated in her interview:

Kimberley: I mean I didn't really think that our students would all be in sarongs or anything like that [Interviewer laughs because Kimberley said this in a droll manner] I knew they wore Western dress [again Kimberley speaks in a mocking way towards 'Americans'], I looked up your [Interviewer laughs] website before. I guess, I didn't really think about all the colonialist aspect, I mean, so much of that that has influenced our students. They've gone through all that colonial history. They still have very specific things that they have retained, that are African. But they are much more Western, they seem much more Western than African. (I: mm mm). That's their primary influence with a bit of African culture preserved. (I: mm mm) They would fit in well in America. You know what I mean? They wouldn't be like a gigantic fish out of water thing like you see in the movies where people come to live in New York and they have no idea how to live. You know they are not from some backward culture [Kimberley is implying that most 'Americans' would think this of 'Africans']. They are pretty much, you know, they are more in line with us than that.

In this extract Kimberley speaks from two different subject positions. Firstly she positions herself as outsider with insider knowledge in relation to the discourses of 'Africa' circulating in America. She takes on the voice of the 'stereotypical American' and suggests that Americans are ignorant of the dress and behaviour of 'Africans' and that they perceive the continent to be "some backward culture" where people walk around "in sarongs". During the interview her discourse and the tone of her

speech indicated that she never expected 'Africa' to be this way but that she was aware of how she may be positioned as an 'American' coming to 'Africa'. This is in line with Bakhtin's notion of double-voiced discourse whereby the historical use of the linguistic resource is visible and manipulated to create alternative contexts of use (Hall, 2002).

In the interview, Kimberley shifts back to a single-voiced discourse when she says: "They still have very specific things that they have retained, that are African. But they are much more Western, they seem much more Western than African. That's their primary influence with a bit of African culture preserved." Here she again constructs binaries of 'Western' versus 'African'. However, instead of positioning the students as 'other' and 'traditional', as demonstrated in previous extracts, she positions them as more 'Western' and similar to her than 'African'.

Later, in the same interview however, she shifts again to positioning herself as a 'typical American' and the students as 'traditional':

Interviewer: (...) Um, I was a little bit surprised when you asked the students directly if they had been circumcised or not. How did you feel about that discussion? Did it surprise you that you were asking this question or not really?

Kimberley: I'm from America. I didn't think anything about it [I laughs] I (...) ask people personal questions [I laughs] Thinking about it now, it was appropriate. We were, it is part of their custom, so it's nothing to be embarrassed about. (...) It is part of their tradition so it shouldn't be anything that sensitive whether they were circumcised or not. It isn't something where I would normally walk up to someone and say [I laughs] but I think in the context where they are talking about their customs, it is appropriate.

In this extract, Kimberley constructs herself as an 'American' who does what 'Americans' typically do i.e. 'ask people personal questions'. This was initially perhaps a defensive response as she then says: "Thinking about it now, it was appropriate. We were, it is part of their custom, so it's nothing to be embarrassed about." Kimberley's use of the possessive 'their' along with the singular form of the noun 'custom' when she says "their custom" indicates that she is repositioning the students as 'African' from a homogeneous, singular culture. This construction is also evident when she says: "it is part of *their tradition*".

Kimberley's dominant discourse is in line with Pennycook's (1994) discourse of EIL and reflects the powerful ways that discourse operates in the context of the local classroom. In accordance with Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (2005), we can see the ways in which Kimberley's discourse options are limited and constrained by the powerful constructions of culture imbedded in the broader 'global' context. Her discourse not only positions the students in particular ways but also offers her a restricted range of subject positions and as a result, a narrow range of options within which meaning can be negotiated. This clearly indicates the need for the production of counter-discourses that make available a broader range of subject positions for all narrators negotiating meaning at 'the local' level (Pennycook, 1994).

4.3 The Students' position

Through my reading of the data and my analysis of the student's interactions with each other and with the teacher it became evident that there were two conflicting discourses operating in the classroom: a discourse of 'culture as traditional and homogeneous' and a discourse of 'culture as dynamic and multifaceted'. At various points throughout the course, the students' discourse resonates with the teacher's and culture is constructed as a stable and monolithic entity. However, there is also a discourse of resistance and a challenge to being positioned and represented in essentialist ways. From the beginning of the course, the students question and/ or refuse to consent to the homogenising discourse of both the teacher and the other students albeit in subtle and indirect ways. In this section I argue that the students were caught between these two contradictory discourses, a position which again reflects the complex ways that meaning and identity are negotiated and struggled over (Weedon, 1997).

4.3.1 Resonance with the teacher

An essentialist and dichotomous view of culture in line with the teacher's dominant discourse is reflected in the students' discourse. In the following extract Kimberley joins a discussion about circumcision:

Kimberley: Is anyone here circumcised? Are you circumcised?

A few sts: Yeah

Kimberley: Is it a tradition in Africa?

Francisco: Ja ja

Kimberley: Is everyone circumcised?

Javier: I don't remember.

Kimberley: Were you a baby or were you an adult?

A few sts: Baby

Kimberley: All babies? How old?

Francisco: I don't know.

Kimberley: You don't remember.

John: About 8 or 9

Kimberley: Really 8 or 9? You were circumcised at 8?

John: Ja

Kimberley: So you remember?

John: Ja

Kimberley: Oooh how painful, very painful!.

John: Nowadays they are, because of this erosion they go to the (bush).

Kimberley: Yes

(....)

Kimberley: How old are these people? How old are these //

John: From 5 from 5 to 10.

Kimberley: OK so they're children.

Francisco: I believe it's more painful when you are 19 or 20.

Kimberley: Oh definitely.

Francisco: Ja.

Kimberley: Definitely. I think they should do it only when you're a baby so you don't have to remember it. You know here in Xhosa culture in South Africa they do it at I think 18.

Francisco: 18? Aah my gosh!

There are close similarities between Kimberley and Francisco's discourse in this extract with Francisco's choice of word and expression mimicking Kimberley's at various points. Kimberley's question: "Is it a tradition in Africa?" constructs Africa as a single uniform entity with shared practices on circumcision. Francisco agrees ("Ja, ja") which suggests that he too views culture in monolithic and stereotyped ways. However, his agreement could also be a reflection of his position in relation to Kimberley: of student consenting to teacher. His response of "I don't know" to Kimberley's question: "All babies? How old?" serves to reposition him as ally to Kimberley as opposed to student having to respond to a question of a personal and awkward nature perhaps. Later in the conversation, Kimberley questions the group about age of circumcision and implies that it is worse when 'people', referring to 'African' boys, are old enough to remember being circumcised: "So you remember? (...) Oooh how painful, very painful!". Francisco echoes this sentiment when he says: "I believe it's more painful when you are 19 or 20" and then later: "18? Aah my gosh!". Here he is employing a similar discourse to Kimberley's and appears to mimic the form of her expression "Oooh how painful, very painful!" when he says: "Aah my gosh!". Through his discourse and by not disclosing any personal information about his own experience of circumcision, Francisco carefully positions himself in line with Kimberley. This demonstrates how individuals employ the words and utterances of others and shape them according to their own intentions (Norton & Toohey, 2001: 311). Francisco comments on this ritual as if he were an outsider to it and his and Kimberley's discourse serves to construct an exoticised and 'othered' view of circumcision.

On the fourth day of the course, a similar type of interaction to the one seen in the extract above takes place in a discussion about traditional medicine:

Francisco: Traditional medicine in my country is normal.

Kimberley: Traditional medicine is normal. In the cities or in the rural areas?

Francisco: Even in the cities.

[Alain shakes his head]

Kimberley: Sorry? [looking at Alain]

Alain: I don't do that.

Francisco: For example if your arms broke (**Kimberley:** Arms broke?) yeah arms broke (**Kimberley:** Uh huh?), I think your father would definitely take you to someone who knows (...) who can treat ja traditionally (**Kimberley:** Mmhmm). Ja only three weeks or four weeks

Javier: The proper way is to go to the hospital.

Through Francisco's use of generic terminology such as 'traditional medicine' and 'normal', he reinforces an essentialised view of culture. Javier says: "The proper way is to go to the hospital" which creates a binary of 'proper' versus 'improper'. His choice of terminology suggests that 'traditional medicine' is wrong, inappropriate and 'improper' while the 'Western' way of treating an illness (i.e. to go to a hospital) is the right, 'proper' way. Dominant global discourses construct binaries and polar opposites and work to position culture into neat categories of 'right' versus 'wrong' or 'our way' versus 'their way'. This limits the production of new and alternative meanings (Davies, 1989).

On the seventh day of the course, Kimberley, following the materials, asks the class to think about what their names tell other people about them in terms of race, nationality and culture. Vicente talks about his name and the reasons he likes it:

Kimberley: (...) What does your name tell other people about you? (...) Uh race, do you think that your name says anything about what race you are? Um like for example there are some very African names and they wouldn't sound like American names OK. Does your name sound Spanish? Does your name sound African? Uh culture, does it say anything about your actual culture and um perhaps your religion OK. So in your groups can you please discuss these three questions, I'll give you about 5 minutes.

(...)

Vicente: I was named after my grandfather, who was Garcia that's why I'm Vicente Garcia.

[Pause]

Zyda: Do you like your name?

Vicente: Of course yes of course.

Zyda: Why of course?

Vicente: Because you know my grandfather was a very powerful man, the typical African man you know, big stomach you know, three four wives [Zyda starts shaking her head, the other sts at the table laugh], seventeen seventeen children [everyone laughs] seventeen children you know. The typical African man.

Zyda: You want to be like him?

Vicente: No but I think we will have to you know //

Domingos: Conditions are very (good) [Vicente laughs].

Vicente: We have to keep our culture you know. Yeah it's part of it's part of our lives.

(....)

Vicente: Actually my grandfather he has, he had the physical appearance of a traditional African man.

In this extract, Vicente talks about 'the typical African man' with a 'big stomach, three four wives and seventeen children'. His choice of terminology such as 'typical', 'African', and 'traditional' resonates with Kimberley's discourse as discussed in the previous section. He also employs the article 'the' to refer to 'the typical African man' which indicates a uniform and consensually defined view of 'an African man'. His choice of words such as 'typical' and 'traditional' sets up a binary and suggests what is not 'traditional' or 'typically African' (i.e. a man who does not have a big stomach, four wives and seventeen children). His use of the pronouns 'we' and 'our' in his utterance: "We have to keep our culture...it's part of our lives" is inclusive of the other students and constructs a uniform, all encompassing 'African' cultural identity.

In any classroom context, the teacher's discourse is more heavily weighted because s/he has the authority to direct the discourse and to decide what is acceptable in that context (Wallace, 2006). At the Language Lab, the students are already positioned as 'linguistically deficient, foreign language learners', who are there to obtain knowledge and linguistic resources from the teacher (Wallace, 2006). There is therefore a power hierarchy between the students and teacher which limits the discursive positions available to the students. In a study by Morita (2004: 598), it was found that students often had difficulty *not* conforming to the positioning imposed on them by their instructors because of this power difference. At The Lab, the students' discourse options are also restricted by their limited language proficiency as well as the dominant discourses of culture that circulate in broader society. Wallace (2006: 82) discusses the way 'students struggle to author the text with input from their own knowledge resources' as a result of their restricted discursive options. My argument therefore is that some of the students constructed a

similar view of culture to Kimberley's because of the limited discourse options available to them and because of their desire to be positioned favourably by the teacher. In the next section I argue that although the context constrained the discursive positions available, the students were still able to exercise agency and negotiate new subject positions in unexpected and creative ways (Hall, 2002; Davies & Harré, 1990)

4.3.2 Resistance to an essentialist view

Two different kinds of 'interruptors'

Although some of the students' discourse of culture reflected the teacher's throughout the course, her position was also resisted and challenged on many occasions. Morita (2004: 590) suggests that 'agency arises out of individuals' engagement in the social world'. Although learner agency is limited given learner's inequitable power relations with teachers, Morita (2004) maintains that learners can employ various strategies to exercise their agency and resist their positioning in the classroom.

In this section I look at strategies of resistance and present detailed case studies of two research participants: John and Zyda. Both participants problematize the teacher's dominant essentialist view of culture and resist being categorised in homogeneous ways. I have chosen to focus on these two students as they were the most frequent 'interruptors' in the classroom and because they questioned the dominant discourse in unique ways. Although I present John and Zyda as isolated cases, the discourse of other students will also be incorporated and analysed where appropriate to demonstrate the way their 'cases' are inextricably linked to the discursive practices of the classroom. In both cases the discourse of both the classroom and interviews is presented to illustrate the participants' questioning position around culture.

4.3.3 John

John is an English teacher trainer who comes from the Northern part of Mozambique. He considers his first language to be his home language, Nyanja.

Because he grew up in Malawi and all his schooling was in English, he considers English to be his second language and Portuguese to be his third. In his interview he said that he wants to speak English the way South Africans do so that he can have greater opportunities.

He participates actively in class and is not afraid to question the teacher about a language point or the way a topic is presented. He has an awareness of the way powerful discourses operate in the world and he discusses this explicitly in his interview:

Interviewer: (...) How do you feel about African students having to learn English?

John: Ja, it's a good thing because nowadays once again Africa is occupied, it (has) been totally occupied by English and we (are) forgetting our own languages (I: mm) (...)

Interviewer: But how is this a good thing? Because you're saying you're forgetting your languages. Isn't this a bad thing?

John: Like everything there is positive and negative. The good thing is (...) we are not out of English, we are not out of the world. The disadvantage is we are forgetting who we are (I: mm) to develop our goals. (...) I am not speaking English I am Portuguese. I am not that way. (I: mm) It is negative. (...) How do I say, my culture is being eroded.

John also positions himself explicitly as a 'problematizer' as during the interview he says: "I like exposing things". He adopts this position from the first day of the course when Kimberley asks the class to define 'American' culture:

Kimberley: (...) What is American culture like? [pause]
(...)

John: But is it...is it um possible to identify the culture of the continent?

Kimberley: That's what I'm asking – is it? 'cause the people say America has no culture because it's been diluted by so many different people from so many different countries have moved to America that they now say America is culture-less.

In this extract John's question "is it possible to identify the culture of the continent?" implies that it is not possible to identify only one homogeneous culture for a whole continent. Kimberley's response: "America has no culture because it's been diluted by so many different people" suggests that she has understood John's question to mean: "Does America have a culture?" and through this misunderstanding misses

an opportunity to explore John's understanding of culture in greater depth. Kramsch (1993: 26) maintains that '[i]t is through the opportunities for dialogue and reflection...that cross-cultural exchanges have their value'. Later in the same lesson a similar discursive pattern emerges:

Kimberley: Do you speak a mother tongue? (**Manuel:** [nods]). Do you?

John: Most of the time if we are saying factors it doesn't mean it's the only single thing that can (define) someone.

Kimberley: Of course not. A lot of things, a combination of things makes culture // So what is most important there [points to list on the board: customs, rituals, food, dress, language, music, beliefs, religion]? What's most important? 'Cause you're saying clothes isn't that important, language isn't that important.

Here John questions the notion that culture can be defined by a specific set of criteria. While Kimberley appears to acknowledge his view when she says "[o]f course not....a combination of things makes culture", she immediately returns to the list of criteria on the board without exploring his question any further. Near the end of the lesson, John once again attempts to question Kimberley's discourse.

Kimberley: (...) We're going to move on.

John: There's a question that we haven't finished...American culture, what is it?

Kimberley: That's the thing, I don't have the answer.

Here John reflects Kimberley's initial question (i.e. "What is American culture like?") back to her. This was perhaps to demonstrate how difficult it is to define a culture according to a specific set of criteria even for the teacher. Kimberley admits that she doesn't have an answer. His question highlights the conflicting positions of the teacher who is more knowledgeable than the students with respect to the English language but not necessarily with respect to culture. This also demonstrates the active nature of culture which is constructed through the discursive interactions between individuals (Hall, 2002: 19).

Other examples of John's critical position can be seen throughout the course. On the fourth day Kimberley asked the class what they knew about Nigeria in order to lead-in to one of the readings of the materials:

Kimberley: (....) So what's your overall impression of Nigeria? Good country or bad country?

A few sts: Bad.

Kimberley: Bad country.

Vicente: You know they are not really bad you know as they are famous for.

Kimberley: Sorry?

Vicente: They're not that bad.
(....)

John: How do you consider that a government or a country is bad?

Kimberley: I'm asking you, I don't know.

John: I'm asking the class.

Kimberley: Oh the group. What makes you think Nigeria is bad?

John: What makes a country bad //

Vicente: No I don't think Nigeria is bad you know because the people are quite kind and //

Kimberley: Mmm so if John's asking what, how do you define a bad country //

Vicente: The problem is (corruption) and crime.

Kimberley: Too much crime, too much corruption.

In this extract, Vicente initially shifts the discourse which is centred around a binary of good and bad to a discourse that focuses on different layers of culture. He says "You know they are not really bad you know as they are famous for" which questions the assumption that a country can be all bad or all good. John picks up on this when he asks: "How do you consider that a government or a country is bad?" He then rearticulates his question and directs it to the whole class and for any country, not only Nigeria, when he says: "I'm asking the class." (....) "What makes a country bad?" Vicente again responds by focusing on different layers of meaning of the words good and bad ("I don't think Nigeria is bad you know because the people are quite kind ") and Kimberley then asks the class to define a bad country. Vicente says: "The problem is (corruption) and crime" and Kimberley's response of "[t]oo much crime, too much corruption" shifts the conversation back to the initial discourse of binaries. Thus, although John persists in his line of questioning and attempts to involve the whole class, his discourse is not taken up by the teacher.

John's discourse as we have seen is persistent and questioning. He challenges the binaries Kimberley constructs and attempts to place her in 'the students' shoes' by redirecting her questions back to her. Although Kimberley responds to his questions at a superficial level, she does not explore the underlying meanings of his utterances in any depth or make the alternative discourse available for negotiation in the class. This represents a missed cultural opportunity that has the potential to enrich and broaden the cross-cultural inquiry in the classroom. Kramsch (1993: 30) argues that students should be encouraged to question the boundaries of culture in order to add depth to the process of meaning-making.

4.3.4 Zyda

Zyda comes from Maputo in Mozambique and works as an assistant for the Ministry of Education and Culture. She considers both Portuguese and Betonga to be her first language and is learning English for professional reasons. She was the only woman in the class and because I had taught her before and knew that she was reserved and a little shy, I was worried that she would feel intimidated amongst all the men. Although she was not always forthcoming during the course, she did not appear to be reticent or uncomfortable at any point. Both her interview and classroom discourse indicate resistance to monolithic labelling and generalization.

On the third day of the course Kimberley asks the students about divorce in their cultures:

Kimberley: And is that considered okay though in your cultures today? Is it okay to divorce, it's not a problem?

A few sts: Ja

Kimberley: No problem?

Francisco: Sometimes.

Zyda: It's like what can I do.

Kimberley: Sorry?

Zyda: It's like what can I do if they feel like they don't want each other. What happened also, it's not so easy when they are married it's not so easy because there is this economical dependency

(Kimberley: Dependency). Yes. (If) it's though the man who doesn't want her, yes it can happen easily. But when if it's she, there's no out because she depends on him.

Kimberley: Okay so she might stay with him just for money you're saying.

Zyda: Yes for money.

Manuel: But you know most of the time some couples are like how can I say this, stupid. Because you know it's because of a little fight or she saw her boyfriend shaking hands or you know a hug something like that and they start discussing and thereafter are (?).

In this extract Zyda indirectly resists Kimberley's use of the term 'no problem' to refer to all divorces. In her first utterance: "It's like what can I do" she includes herself through the pronoun 'I' and positions herself in her own narrative about women in a particular position. She then goes on to contextualise her discourse by providing an example: "it's not so easy because there is this economical dependency" referring to women who depend on men for their survival. Zyda speaks from a feminist position as she highlights issues of power and dependency in marriage and questions the idea that divorce is a choice. Kimberley responds by saying: "she might stay with him just for money, you're saying" and through her use of the word 'just' alters and trivialises the meaning of Zyda's discourse. Kimberley implies that some women are money grabbers, 'just in it for the money'. This constructs a romanticised version of marriage, very different from Zyda's, as it suggests that people ought to get married for love and not money. Zyda's position is not followed through as is reflected in Manuel's discourse ("But you know most of the time some couples are like how can I say this, stupid...") which represents a shift to a less serious position.

There were also occasions when Zyda challenged the homogenising discourse of other students. In the following extract, the class were discussing lobola (bride price):

Vicente: You know the issue here, we're not debating culture **(Kimberley:** Mmm).

Domingos: We are following it.

Vicente: Ja, we are following it. **(Kimberley:** OK). The culture already exists.

Zyda: What happen[s] if you don't have lobola? **(Vicente:** Huh?) What happen?

Domingos: Zyda what you're saying is that if (?) was always running this way how can you expect today to take the other way round? [class laughs]. It's impossible because we've always followed this way.

Zyda: It's not the same you know, we will not just follow it because our ancestor. I think now we have (**Manuel:** Capacity to think), yes to think. There are some things that we must keep (**Vicente:** Like lobola), we must still keep, but lobola it doesn't change nothing exactly nothing. And nowadays they are they are using lobola for their business. (**Kimberley:** Mmm). Yes. Or if a father has a daughter he just see the daughter as a mine.

(....)

Domingos: As a gold mine.

Kimberley: As a gold mine.

Zyda: Yes.

The discourse of Vicente and Domingos constructs culture as a separate entity to be followed and carried out as it is. Zyda problematises their discourse when she says: "What happen[s] if you don't have lobola?". This question implies that lobola is not a fixed entity but instead a dynamic construct that can and should be open to questioning. Domingos' resists her question by returning to a stable definition while at the same time mocking Zyda's questioning of culture. Zyda responds by contextualising her initial question while also indirectly mocking Domingos' 'capacity to think'. She then employs the metaphor of 'a mine' to refer to the way lobola is conducted and thereby constructs lobola as a type of business organised around making a lot of money. Women are commodities in this business transaction that can be bought and sold. Zyda foregrounds the way lobola has the potential to exploit women and therefore again speaks in this extract from a feminist position.

I asked Zyda about her position as problematizer during her interview. She resisted being categorised or labelled in any particular way through her use of different pronouns:

Interviewer: Yes, but I think a lot of times you made the men stop and think actually "ja that's another point of view which none of the others brought up". None of the guys said that, you know, lobola was a negative thing. Most of them were saying it was positive (**Z:** mm) and then, you know, you challenged them and said what about in these situations and it's like buying a woman and all that sort of thing. So do you often take this position in your life or was it something unusual for you?

Zyda: I think that somehow in all our, if you pretend or argue or something excites you in your life (**I:** yes) I think I said what I did because I think on the problem. I didn't want to be (....) (**I:** ja). Although it is our tradition. (**I:** mm mm). Yes, it is our tradition but they say, I think about it. Is I don't agree. (**I:** yes). They can do every tradition as a formality. I accept when they follow for the, when they observe the, when they go through the formality not when follow with other objectives as they do. Yes.

Initially Zyda uses the inclusive possessive adjective 'our' when she talks about "our tradition". She then shifts to exclude herself when she uses the pronoun 'they' in her utterance: "[t]hey can do every tradition as a formality" and in this way distances herself from tradition when it is "followed with other objectives as they do".

As we can see in the extracts, Zyda, like John, also attempts to offer alternative discursive positions to Kimberley and the other students which are not however followed through. Compared to John's discourse however, Zyda's position was less direct and less persistent. She challenged the dominant homogenising labels and categories given to culture through her use of metaphor and shifting pronoun use. In a study by Harklau (2000: 60), many forms of student resistance were shown to be subtle and although the teachers in her study found the students to be ill-behaved, they were not aware of the extent to which their constructions of the learners were implicated in this behaviour.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that there were contested notions of culture circulating in the local context of the *African Customs and Rituals* classroom. On the one hand, the students' essentialising discourse resonated with the teacher's and reflected the dominant traditional view of culture circulating in broader, global contexts. It was hypothesised that the discursive practices available to the students were limited by asymmetric power relations between student and teacher along with the way EFL students are typically constructed in the classroom: in a deficit position. On the other hand, the subtle as well as manifest ways the students took agency and resisted being positioned in homogeneous ways were also demonstrated in the two case studies. The teacher however, did not engage with the alternative discourse and as a result missed opportunities to negotiate new and perhaps more useful meanings of culture in the local context.

In the study by Harklau (2000) referred to earlier, the teachers did not realise the extent to which their discourse and constructions of the students impacted on the resistance and lack of motivation in the classroom. Harklau maintains that the

reason for this is that 'they were subject to the same discourses and social and institutional forces that tended to position students in certain ways' (2000: 63).

These findings are also evident in the current research study. In Kimberley's written feedback to the course she ascribes the students' resistance to her not doing enough grammar with them:

At the beginning of the course I was much more enthusiastic for it – the students seemed engaged in the topics, conversations carried on well, etc. At the end of the course I was very aware how several students didn't like the course – or perhaps me teaching it.....I would have done more on some of the grammar in the earlier worksheets, but I was worried about getting to all the themes for the research and so cut out some parts I would have done.

I agree with Atkinson (1999: 629) that teachers do not see the interconnectedness between language and culture and therefore do not view themselves as 'cultural transmitters'. 'Quality input is still seen in structural terms, not in terms of quality of interaction, or in overall gains in cultural understanding' (Kramsch, 1993: 6). My main argument therefore, is that the position of the teacher needs to be reconceptualised in order to embrace new and alternative discourses in the local context.

In the next chapter I look at the culture of the pedagogy and how the lessons of the *African Customs and Rituals* course were structured and played out. Language teaching is presented as 'contextual shaping' and I demonstrate how the pedagogy made available particular positions to both the teacher and the students (Kramsch, 1993: 5). These positions further limited opportunities for students to create their own meanings in the classroom space.

Chapter 5: The Culture of EFL Pedagogy

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore EFL pedagogy as cultural practice and attempt to answer my final research question:

- How are the students' and teacher's local constructions of culture and identity positioned in relation to the classroom pedagogy?

The pedagogy, based on the CLT approach, is presented as the dominant discursive practice in the classroom. I look at how the classroom text played itself out and what positions the participants took up and constructed through the discursive practices and resources available to them (Davies and Harré, 1990). I focus on the way the pedagogy constrained and often limited the discourse of both the teacher and the students. The teacher's narrative as well as that of the materials had a clear objective which was to provide useful aims, a clear framework and 'authentic' practice of the target language (Scrivener, 1994). This was in the service of offering a 'good' language lesson in accordance with the way teachers are trained on CELTA courses.

During the interviews I expected to discuss the course materials, *Customs in our Time*, with the students and how their experience of them might have been different to that of the 'global' materials commonly used in their other classes. In my reading of the data however, it struck me that the students' responses centred more around the pedagogy of the course than around the materials. Many of the students had difficulty in recollecting the materials that had been used and I had to bring the materials into the interview to provide a visual reminder. In my construction of the materials and initial research questions, I hadn't considered the impact of the pedagogy on the participants. However, the interview and classroom observation data indicates that the way the course was taught and what the teacher (and the materials) valued and gave voice to, was more significant in understanding the positions the participants adopted than was the specific content of the materials.

While this chapter demonstrates the power and authority of mainstream EFL pedagogy and practice, it also shows how students may attempt to reposition themselves and negotiate alternative, more empowering subject positions in the classroom space. I argue that the students' expectations of the course were often not in line with the culture of the pedagogy and this set up a tension which placed the students in a hybrid space. It was a struggle for the students to position themselves within conflicting subject positions. Particularly salient in the data and discussed in this chapter, were two subject positions: that of adult with 'expert' knowledge of their own cultural practices and that of student with inferior knowledge of the English language in relation to the teacher. This contradictory positioning is reflected in the participants' discourse both in the classroom and during the interviews. In this chapter I argue for the provision of greater opportunity for students to negotiate and offer their own input into the classroom text in order to make for a more empowering pedagogy which allows the students to take ownership of the language (*cf* Wallace, 2006).

5.2 The fast pace of the course

"A method related to the country....a rat racing"

In the interviews, I asked the participants if they could describe the 'local' culture of The Language Lab. I was interested to see how they perceived the practices of The Lab and how local discourses were experienced by them. This assisted me as an 'insider' and EFL teacher at The Lab and helped me gain insight into the way these discourses operate (Gee 1996).

Zyda's response to this question was particularly interesting as she connected the 'method' of The Lab to the 'local' culture of the country. Her perception of 'local' culture is consistent with and reflected in her perceptions of the pedagogy of the course:

Interviewer: (...) If you had to describe the culture of The Language Lab would you be able to?

Zyda: Mm, actually I think it would be difficult. Ah, but it would be the way I see it? A way of relating, a method related to the country. Yes, I see this as a restricting country .

Interviewer: A restricting country.

Zyda: No, a rat racing.

Interviewer: Like very fast.

Zyda: Yes.

Interviewer: OK, yes, like the rat race.

Zyda: Yes, the rat race.

Interviewer: Yes.

Zyda: Yes, and it's the way it's in the way think.

Here Zyda firstly describes the 'local' culture in terms of the pedagogy at The Lab. She says it is "a way of relating, a method". She then goes on to connect this method / way of relating to the country, South Africa, which she sees as a "restricting" and very fast-paced country similar to the "rat race". This metaphor implies that the local context is experienced as a never-ending competition with no winners coming out. She says: "it's in the way [they] think" which suggests that the local 'culture' represents more than just the way things are done, it is a deeply entrenched attitude and approach to life. Also her use of the adjective 'restricting' when she says: "I see this as a restricting country", indicates perhaps that she feels limited by 'the method' and 'the country' and that there is a lack of creative freedom and / or space. Canagarajah (1999: 174) discusses the way students are often caught between 'cultural and ideological conflicts' in the classroom which are constructed through the pedagogy of the materials and the classroom text. He maintains that the dominant practices inherent in these texts limit or 'restrict' students' abilities to exercise multiple and pluralistic subject positions and identities (Canagarajah, 1999: 173). Zyda's discourse speaks to this conflicted space and demonstrates the tension between her multiple subject positions that arose as a result of the limitations of this 'restricting' space.

In the next extract, Zyda was asked more specifically about the course and the materials used. The way she perceives and positions the materials in relation to the pedagogy and the more 'global' materials utilized in her other classes reveals the powerful nature of the pedagogy:

Interviewer: Mm, OK, so you found it interesting, ja? Um, these are the materials we used. Just to refresh your memory. Did you find the material different in any way at all from the course books you use in the morning class? Did you notice any differences or were they similar or ?

Zyda: This, um, this course book

Interviewer: Yes, the material, ja?

Zyda: Um, not that different.

Interviewer: OK.

Zyda: Because I think that the aim was there. (I: OK) To go through everything we could analyse the problem, and then, although, (mm) the teacher didn't have much time to correct us in terms of make mistakes. (mm) But the aim is there (OK).

Here Zyda says that she didn't find the material "that different" from the material used in her other classes and the reason she gives is that "the aim was there". This indicates that the pedagogy and objectives of the materials were experienced as similar to those of the more 'global' materials. Her discourse positions the activities of the materials in line with EFL pedagogy which is centred on providing a clear 'aim' (Scrivener, 1994). As discussed in chapter one, while I attempted to localise the materials by changing the content of typical global materials and by incorporating aspects of critical inquiry into the activities, the pedagogy was based on mainstream EFL practice. Zyda's response of "not that different" along with her relative silence around the more localised aspects of the materials represents the power and dominance of these global pedagogical principles over 'the local'.

Zyda goes on to say: "we could analyse the problem" and this resonates with her utterance in the previous extract: "it's in the way [they] think". Zyda's choice of the word 'problem' suggests that she views "the aim" of the materials and the course as a 'problem' to be analysed and solved. Wallace (2006) discusses the way teachers enter the classroom already knowing the answers to the reading texts they have chosen for their students. The students are expected to come to a similar understanding of the text and are aware of the teacher's position as 'knower' which automatically places them in a 'lesser' position (Wallace, 2006). My argument is that EFL pedagogy functions as a broader classroom text to be read and understood in a certain, preconceived way by the students and this connects to Zyda's description of "the problem". She constructs a pedagogy that is difficult for her to make sense of

and which reflects a particular worldview entrenched in the materials and classroom as well as within the broader South African context.

I also asked Zyda how she found the course more generally:

Interviewer: (....) Um, how did you find the customs and rituals course?

Zyda: It was interesting because I could learn from other cultures.

(....)

Interviewer: So, if we talk about the teacher. OK, how did you feel, you said that you felt that she didn't correct you enough. Um, how, what else can you say about how the course was presented? What would you change? What did you like what didn't you like about the way the teacher presented the course?

(....)

Zyda: You know, although, although, before we did have this class, but, ah, you know, sometimes it's good to, how can I call it, you don't have the time to think on the sub, the (topic, ja) the topic.

Interviewer: OK. So you felt that it was rushed, like too quick? It was too quick?

Zyda: No, sometimes I think we should've, we should've researched more (mm mm) had more in certain jobs.

Interviewer: OK, so that you //

Zyda: Yes, tell more. Sometimes at that moment things don't come.

(....)

Interviewer: So do you feel that maybe the teacher rushed a little bit and that stopped your train of thought and you had to move onto the next thing?

Zyda: Yes.

Interviewer: OK

Zyda: Sometimes I thought "If I had said that"

At the beginning of the extract, Zyda says she found the course interesting because she learnt from other cultures. Her initial praise of the course could be a result of her wanting to be viewed favourably by me and to 'say the right thing' and this demonstrates the way the participant-researcher relationship can impact on the research findings (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, when asked more specifically about the way the course was presented she says: "you don't have the time to think on the sub[ject], the topic". This connects to her earlier metaphor of the fast-paced

and restricting culture / method of The Lab and the country as a “rat race”. She says: “[s]ometimes I thought “If I had said that”” which suggests that she had too little time to think on the subject and regretted not saying everything she wanted to say but couldn’t think of at the time. This finding resonates with research by Wallace (2006: 82) that shows how students struggled to author the text and provide their own input and knowledge in the classroom as a result of the way the pedagogy positioned them.

Zyda appears to have felt ‘put on the spot’ at times and compelled to give a response before she was ready to. Her discourse reflects the way the classroom text is treated as an object which students need to respond to in a certain way and within a certain time frame (*cf* Wallace, 2006). Zyda then offers a solution to the way the course was run when she says: “we should’ve researched more”. This provides a clue about an alternative way of doing things, an alternative pedagogy, in which students have the opportunity to think about and carry out their own research into the subject matter in order to gain a deeper understanding of it and to feel safer to offer their input.

The fast pace of the course and the lack of time to think about and discuss culture in more depth is also reflected in four of the other students’ discourse from their interviews:

Nunos: I think the course was interesting. But I think that we should have opportunity of other activities. Yes, the problem is the time. We are here for a short time. I remember I had a teacher, an anthropology teacher. He would give a topic for the holidays. We had some topic we had to research. We had to ask people questions about those topics and ask questions. (.....) It was more productive. Unfortunately, we only had one month. (I: OK) It was impossible.

Alain: (....) An hour a day was too short. Because everybody wanted to say something and we didn’t have enough time to say what we want.

Vicente: (....)I think the time of discussion time was not enough.

Manuel: (....) Because you know (?) the time is always short. The first time I thought I would get ten minute but even getting fifty minutes of the class. (I: it’s not enough) It’s not enough, ja. (....) Ja, you know rushing like. But it’s because of the time. You know if it’s the last class we have to go home.

Here the students discuss not having enough time to think about their responses and to “say what [they] want”. They felt that the course was rushed and didn’t give them the space to discuss culture in the way they had expected and hoped to. When Nunos discusses a similar course he took in Mozambique but which utilised a different pedagogy he, like Zyda, is suggesting that ‘a more productive’ pedagogy entails providing more time for more authentic activities like research.

The CLT approach, upon which EFL pedagogy is based, has clear objectives and a successful outcome is dependent on successful and strategic negotiation of meaning (Andrewes, 2005). Communication is viewed primarily as functional which Andrewes (2005: 5) argues does not represent ‘authentic’ communication because it ‘does not aim to build up...understanding’ (Andrewes, 2005: 5). The students’ discourse indicates a frustration and tension in relation to the way they were positioned in limited and restricted ways by the pedagogy. The goal of a ‘good’ lesson entails getting through the stages within a specified time in order to reach the ‘authentic’ practice stage (Scrivener, 1994). This placed the students in a conflicted space. They felt caught between their position as linguistically deficient student and their position as expert of their own cultural practices. The dominance of the pedagogy did not provide them with the opportunity to explore or reveal their multiple subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990) nor did it acknowledge the way meaning is discursively constructed and struggled over within authentic communicative contexts (Morris, 1994). The classroom text therefore failed to provide the students with a platform to truly voice their selves (*cf* Luk, 2005).

5.3 The stilted flow of the course

“....we are not reaching a point where we are finding out what our cultures were, because we are starting, stop, starting stop”

In this section I focus on the discourse of two of the students, John and Nunos, who hinted more explicitly in their interviews about what aspects of the pedagogy were problematic. Both constructed a direct connection between the pedagogy and the lack of time and opportunity for in-depth discussion. John specifically commented on

the stilted flow of the course in terms of time limits and the way the teacher “filled that hour”:

Interviewer: OK. How did you find the course? The specific customs and rituals course?

John: Ja, the course for the customs, we had for the culture, it was productive but for my conclusion we are not reaching a point where are finding out what our cultures were. Because we are starting, stop, starting, stop. Because Mozambique, the cultures of Mozambique, we haven't gone deep into our cultures. I don't know if we don't have the time.

(....)

Interviewer: OK. How can we change the course to make it better?

(....)

John: Yea, we are talking about culture in the subject. Also we have to more time, how can I say (I: to research and think about it?). Yes, but more about a specific culture.

Interviewer: Oh, I see, talking about that culture.

John: But it would be difficult because of time. Maybe to add more to the time.

Interviewer: Ja, it would be. Oh, you're saying to add more time. OK, that's useful. How did you feel about the way the teacher presented the course?

John: Ja, it was fine. The teacher was presenting fine. I like the first because I was giving the teacher had the intention, whereby he or she, how can I say, the students were able to express from deep down in the hearts. They have somehow the time was more. Other than saying 15 minutes draw this thing. (...) Second point was the way the teacher was presenting the material, it seems as if it was just to fill that hour and it was not to find out what culture is, what are all the different cultures.

In this extract, John discusses the start stop nature of the course, the time limits (e.g. “15 minutes draw this thing”) and how the teacher wasn't really listening to their answers but just “fill[ing] that hour”. He says: “[b]ecause we are starting, stop, starting, stop (...) we haven't gone deep into our cultures” and this places the pedagogy or “the way the teacher was presenting the material” at the centre of his experience of the course. John's discourse is questioning the authenticity of the classroom text, including the intentions and genuineness of the teacher's interest in the students' responses. He felt that at the beginning of the course the teacher had “the intention” to get to the heart of the students' cultures but towards the end gave more time limits and rushed the students so as to get through the materials (“draw this thing”) and lesson aims. He says: “[I]t was just to fill that hour and it was not to find out what culture is”. He suggests that the course could be improved by talking

“more about a specific culture” and this indicates a dissatisfaction with the way culture was generalised and discussed in the classroom.

Another student, Nunos, also commented on the ‘start, stop’ nature of the course during his interview:

Nunos: (....) What do is to change the methodology.

Interviewer: OK. What about the methodology?

Nunos: (.....) It should be something relevant subjects to the culture which can told us to develop what we have.

Interviewer: OK. (....) What did you feel wasn't appropriate or the methodology? What exactly do you mean by that?

Nunos: Um, the main problem is, ah, this: unpack one topic and we jump to another topic, (I: OK) are jump to another topic. Which sometimes the students try to concentrate but, maybe, this is a problem of time. The time to finish the course. Too rushing it.

Here Nunos suggests that there wasn't enough time to “develop what [they] have” because of the way the teacher moved too quickly from one topic to the next without giving the students the opportunity to “concentrate”, reflect on and get to the heart of the topic. Both John and Nunos' discourse suggests that the “time level” was a problem not because there was too little of it but rather as a result of the way it was filled i.e. the pedagogy. Canagarajah (1999: 103) argues that Western methods are presented to teachers as ‘ready-made ways of dealing with the complexities of strange student populations, alien socio-cultural contexts, and peculiar learning styles’. I agree and further argue that EFL pedagogy is constructed as a value-free method of teaching. With frequent classroom observations and assessments of our teaching, this ‘particular way’ of teaching is encouraged and reinforced and as a result, the teachers at The Lab appropriate a specific classroom text. John and Nunos' discourse speaks to the way this text constructs a boundary between the students' and teacher's knowledge (*cf* Wallace, 2006: 85). The dominant start, stop pedagogy positioned the students in a particular stereotypical way and failed to acknowledge their input on the subject matter by placing their unique, individual experiences in the background.

Luk (2005: 256) demonstrates the need to create more 'authentic' communicative contexts for local students so as to allow greater 'self-representation'. She maintains that '[u]nder circumstances when we are made to speak without mediation of the "self", our utterances are no more than mere sounds' (Luk, 2005: 252). My argument therefore is that the 'start, stop' pedagogy and the way the teacher jumped from one topic to the next, decontextualised communication between the teacher and students and stripped it of its authenticity.

Their lack of ownership of the discursive space is what John and Nunos reveal in their interviews. Their discourse however, not only reveals the conflicting ways they felt positioned but also the hybrid positions Kimberley was caught between. John says: ...[at] first...the teacher had the intention...the students were able to express from deep down in the hearts. Second...was the way the teacher was presenting the material, it seems as if it was just to fill that hour". As the course progressed Kimberley began to rush through the lessons and materials in an attempt to 'cover more ground' and produce 'good, effective' lessons. She discusses this in her written feedback:

At the beginning of the course I was much more enthusiastic for it – the students seemed engaged in the topics, conversations carried on well, etc. At the end of the course I was very aware how several students didn't like the course – or perhaps me teaching it.

I would have done more on some of the grammar in the earlier worksheets, but I was worried about getting to all the themes for the research and so cut out some parts I would have done. I was told that I could do whatever I wanted with the materials, but I supposed since I've done research myself, I'm aware of ensuring that the class covered a good amount of themes and provided a good amount of materials to collect to give the researcher a variety of materials to work with.

Other ways this course was determined by the fact that it was part of research is how much I stuck to the materials, if it wasn't being watched and materials weren't being collected, I would have supplemented more.

Here Kimberley reveals her ambivalent position. Her discourse regarding her initial enthusiasm for the course which then diminished as the course progressed resonates with John's view of the course regarding her initial "intention" to discuss culture more deeply. She says: "I would have done more on some of the grammar" which is reflective of the clear objectives of EFL pedagogy and the espousal of doing 'something concrete' such as grammar in a lesson (Scrivener, 1994). Having all her

lessons observed and being aware of the research process appears to have placed Kimberley in a dilemma regarding what to cover and how quickly to get through the materials. She says she would have supplemented more if she hadn't been observed which indicates how the process of observation impacted on her behaviour in the classroom and ultimately on the research findings (Swann, 1994). The conflicting subject positions Kimberley felt caught between resonate with findings by McKinney (2005) who examined the ways in which the multifaceted identity of the teacher impacts on teaching practice. She focused on her own contradictory subject positions while teaching a critical pedagogy course at a South African Afrikaans, 'white' university. McKinney (2005) argues that the tensions that occurred between her different subject positions, between her 'democratic' teaching style and her need to promote ethical values in her students, created a dilemma for her in how to respond to the students during the course (p.375).

Towards the end of the course the students completed a feedback form, given at the end of every course at The Lab. After reading the feedback, Kimberley became aware that certain students were unhappy as she said the following in her written feedback:

At the end of the course I was very aware how several students didn't like the course – or perhaps me teaching it. It may have been better if I hadn't seen the feedback until after the course was over. I received some of lowest evaluation scores I've ever gotten from a class and I am interested to know if it was the fact that these students had issues with my strictness or the subject matter or my teaching. I tried to not let it affect my performance in the class, but it did affect my enjoyment in teaching the class over the last week.

In this extract Kimberley is interested to know why she received such negative feedback. I was also surprised by the negative comments made by some of the students and sought to find an answer. John's interview discourse is revealing in this regard. However, before analysing his discourse it is important to point out that some of the students began skipping lessons towards the end of the course and seemed less enthusiastic to be in the class. John discussed their absence during his interview:

Interviewer: OK, you didn't like the time level. OK, and that got more frequent as it went.

John: Yes, more frequent. And then again the number of the students was reducing in that class.

Interviewer: Mmm mm, but I'm trying to find out why. What else was it? What was it?

John: Yea, most of us, most of us were becoming bored (I: Mm hum) But mainly it was because of the drawing (....). Second point was the way the teacher was presenting the material, it seems as if it was just to fill that hour and it was not to find out what culture is, what are all the different cultures.

He says: "most of us were becoming bored" and includes himself in this utterance through his use of the object pronoun 'us'. This is noteworthy as John only missed two lessons. In my experience as a teacher, I have noticed that French and Portuguese speaking students sometimes use the word 'bored' when they mean something different. I therefore investigated the meaning(s) of 'bored' in Portuguese and was told by a colleague that it can mean bored as we understand it in English or it can mean 'fed-up' / 'annoyed'. John's discourse indicates that he meant 'bored' in the second sense of the word i.e. 'fed-up'. He suggests that the students were skipping lessons because they were unhappy with the way that culture was being presented and discussed i.e. with the pedagogy.

EFL pedagogy comes with an ideology of prescribed roles and positions which serve to keep the classroom text 'on track' (Luk, 2005). These research findings indicate how the pedagogy robbed both the teacher and the students of their ownership of the communicative context because it failed to create a space in which the participants could assert their 'voices' and represent their 'selves' (cf Luk, 2005). The communication became less 'authentic' as the course progressed and as the classroom text played itself out. Research by Wallace (2006) demonstrates the importance of allowing students to bring their own unique understanding to a text in order to give them a sense of authorship over the language. As a result of the dominance of the pedagogy and the way the classroom text constructed and positioned the participants, a sense of authorship was lacking in the *African Customs and Rituals* course. In the next section, I look at the way the pedagogy worked in practice during the course by analysing extracts from the classroom.

5.4 An emphasis on *procedural* aspects of pedagogy

As discussed in chapter two, a successful EFL lesson according to the dominant approach utilised at most IH institutions, is one which follows a particular procedure

based on the CLT approach. EFL teachers enter the classroom with an overall lesson aim in mind and the materials, activities and classroom procedures are all directed at meeting that aim. Such procedures were followed by the teacher on the *African Customs and Rituals* course: Kimberley gave time limits, focused the students on 'the topic(s)' of discussion and pursued certain lines of questioning and not others. The materials for the course were also consistent with these pedagogical procedures; time limits were built in and activities were scaffolded to assist the students in obtaining a particular understanding of the text. I now turn to a discussion of the classroom discourse which shows how the pedagogy positioned the participants in a particular way and which reveals the start, stop, rushed pedagogy the students refer to.

5.4.1 Time Keeping

Setting a time limit is taught on CELTA courses as a classroom management technique to focus the students and to get all the students to move at the same pace. There are a number of ways that the teacher may stop the students at the end of the allotted time. For example, s/he may tell the students that the time is up and give the next instruction, s/he may shout 'stop' and wait for the students' attention, or s/he may physically take the materials the students are working on away from them. Instructions for activities in textbooks and classroom materials also often impose time limits in the form of 'competitions' (for example, *first to finish shout 'stop'*) or more explicit limits (for example, *after 5 minutes discuss your views of the text with your partner*).

The extract below represents a 'typical' instruction given in the EFL classroom before students start an activity and is an example of what John was talking about when he said: "15 minutes draw this thing":

Kimberley: OK. You can discuss it with your table as you'd like, do it as a whole group. I'll give you 5 minutes.

During one lesson, Kimberley took Nunos' dictionary away from him to refocus his attention. I noticed that he initially seemed embarrassed by this. Canagarajah (1999:

174) presents research that shows how dominant institutional discourses can place periphery students in uncomfortable positions while Wallace (2006: 81) discusses how instructions in textbooks and materials can 'infantilize' students. After this incident Nunos appeared less enthusiastic about the course and he was less active in classroom activities. Luk (2005: 262) discusses the ways students resist being placed in particular institutional roles through for example, reticence or silence while Morita (2004) focuses on the situated nature of identity construction and the interrelationship between identity, competence, power, access and agency. Morita's (2004) findings suggest that the learner's identity and their class participation centre on the learner's sense of competence within a given community of practice (COP) or classroom community. Although silent learners appear reticent or non-participatory, they are often actively negotiating their position and identity within the classroom context (Morita, 2004). It is interesting to note that although Nunos was a fairly quiet student in class, he was very vocal about his experience of the course during the interview. He made the following comments:

Ah, I think what was somehow negative, direct questions about this or that aspect of the culture which if you had to explain something, how to organise the information and tried to present everything, it was (I: too quick) too quick, yes.

This extract indicates that Nunos found it difficult to "organise the information" in the way he wanted to within the given time limit because the questions and time were "too quick" and "direct". His discourse suggests that the time limits were too imposing and took away opportunities to explore alternative positions and discourses in the classroom space. Lin *et al* (2005) present autobiographical case studies of their personal experiences learning English. In one of their studies they discuss how being positioned as inferior and *other* can prevent the exploration of the 'hybrid self' (Lin *et al* 2005: 206). This speaks to Nunos' experience of the time limits inherent in the pedagogy. Although time limits function well to manage the class, they can serve to position students negatively and remove opportunities for both the teacher and students to engage in alternative discourses.

5.4.2 Display questions

The 'direct questions' Nunos refers to in the previous extract were evident throughout the course. On many occasions Kimberley persisted in questioning students in a direct and explicit manner even when they appeared reluctant to respond. The following interaction took place on the seventh day of the course:

Kimberley: What do they call you at home? What do your parents call you?

Manuel: It's like um you have your mother's name they call you mommy //

Kimberley: If you have your mother's name?

Manuel: If you have your grandmother's name they call you granny.

Kimberley: What do your parents call you at home?

Manuel: They use different words.

In this interaction Kimberley persists in asking Manuel "What do your parents call you?" even when it seems he is hesitant to answer. This repetitive type of questioning reveals the closed nature of the pedagogy and how 'learners are typically required to respond with 'correct' responses to the classroom text' (Wallace, 2006: 75). Manuel's final response: "[t]hey use different words" can be viewed as a strategy to prevent further questioning and unwanted exposure.

A similar form of questioning was observed on the fifth day of the course when Kimberley joined a discussion about circumcision:

Kimberley: Is anyone here circumcised? Are you circumcised?

A few sts: Yeah

Kimberley: Is it a tradition in Africa?

Francisco: Ja ja

Kimberley: Is everyone circumcised?

Javier: I don't remember.

Kimberley: Were you a baby or were you an adult?

A few sts: Baby

Kimberley: All babies? How old?

Francisco: I don't know.

Although the topic of circumcision is 'sensitive', Kimberley's question: "Is everyone circumcised?" is direct and places the students in a conflicted space as indicated by their responses of "Ja Ja", "I don't remember" and "I don't know". Because questioning is mostly utilised in the classroom to either elicit a 'correct' response from students or to check their understanding of a text, it is evident that the students are unsure of what response and position is expected of them (*cf* Canagarajah, 1999). This is also indicated by the pattern of communication: Kimberley initiates the interaction with minimal response from the students. This pattern resonates with findings by McKay and Chick (2001) who showed that one of the main discourses operating and positioning learners in selected schools in Durban, South Africa, was the one-at-a-time discourse in which the teacher is positioned as the only person with authority to initiate dialogue in the classroom and who calls on the learners one at a time for their input (p.404).

Although this pattern of questioning is a pedagogical strategy, I found it surprising that Kimberley persisted in asking the students questions directly about the taboo topic of circumcision. I asked her about it during her interview:

Interviewer: (...)Um, I was a little bit surprised when you asked the students directly if they had been circumcised or not. How did you feel about that discussion? Did it surprise you that you were asking this question or not really?

Kimberley: I'm from America. I didn't think anything about it [I laughs] I (...) ask people personal questions [I laughs] Thinking about it now, it was appropriate. We were, it is part of their custom, so it's nothing to be embarrassed about. (...) It is part of their tradition so it shouldn't be anything that sensitive whether they were circumcised or not. It isn't something where I would normally walk up to someone and say [I laughs] but I think in the context where they are talking about their customs, it is appropriate.

Kimberley found this line of questioning to be appropriate given the context and she did not appear to have noticed the students' avoidance of the question. Her discourse 'normalises' the question to the students because "it is part of their tradition so it shouldn't be anything that sensitive" while at the same time acknowledges the unusual and 'sensitive' nature of it: "It isn't something where I

would normally walk up to someone and say...". Her use of the pronoun 'their' in "their tradition" also serves to homogenise the students and position them as a collective group from the 'African' tradition where circumcision is spoken about freely.

Questioning is an important source of teacher input within the EFL context. Kimberley is making use of referential type questions in the classroom extract above where she asks the students if they are circumcised, as she is asking for information she does not know the answer to (Lee, 2006). However her interview discourse suggests that she *assumed* an answer ("[i]t is part of their tradition"), even though the students avoided providing a direct answer. Although Kimberley's form of questioning appears, on the surface, to be referential in nature, it mimics the more frequently employed closed or display questions utilised which have a predetermined answer (Chin, 2006). Lee (2006: 693, 694) reports on previous research which indicates that display questions do not provide students with practise in 'authentic' conversation nor do they 'guarantee access to the multiple layers of meaning' students may bring to the classroom. While questions are an important scaffolding technique of EFL pedagogy, the current research findings indicate that the types of questions utilised and the assumptions of the teacher need to be made more explicit to the students in order to prevent unwittingly placing them in conflicting subject positions.

5.4.3 Staying on topic

With its strong emphasis on aims and producing concrete lesson outcomes, the discourse of EFL pedagogy is centred on maintaining the topic of the lesson. This is reflected in the classroom discourse and the way Kimberley repeatedly attempts to shift the students conversation to the topics she has listed on the board for discussion. The next extract provides some examples of this from the fifth day of the course. Note that at the beginning of the lesson Kimberley elicited customs and rituals from the class and wrote the following on the board:

Customs and rituals
Circumcision
Naming ceremonies

Traditional Medicine
Birth / Death

Kimberley: What are you guys talking about now? Have you got off circumcision?

[sts don't respond and keep talking animatedly about circumcision]

Kimberley: Are we still on circumcision? [laughs].

Javier: (....)

John: [talking to Javier]. Not anybody can do that. Not anybody. There are people responsible.

Kimberley: Anybody could do it?

John: No, no.

Kimberley: Whose, are you saying anybody Javier?

(....)

Kimberley: How about some of these other things? [she looks at the list on the board] Do you have any naming ceremonies or //

John: (....). All the first name ends when he receives circumcision. After circumcision he has a new name.

Kimberley: He gets a new name?

John: Ja he gets a new name.

After a set time, Kimberley 'intervenes' in the discussion and tries to engage the students in a new topic of conversation. She appears anxious to get through all the topics and aims and this is reflected in the way she says: "Are we still on circumcision?". Her emphasis on the word 'still' indicates that she does not see it as 'productive' or good practice for the students to stay on the same topic for such a long period. Her anxiety to move on is possibly also a result of her being observed and wanting to cover a broad range of themes in a short space of time. Initially the students don't shift the topic and continue their discussion on circumcision without acknowledging her request. Their discourse resonates with findings by Wallace (2006: 86) that demonstrate how students exercise agency around the classroom text:

We see how the students persist in rearticulating both the text and the prescribed task so as to pursue discussion about issues which concern them,

and about which they are knowledgeable. They position themselves as expert interpreters.

In the extract, Kimberley makes another attempt to refocus the students when she says: “How about some of these other things? Do you have any naming ceremonies or // ”. John tries to find a compromise when he says: “[a]ll the first name ends when he receives circumcision” and he successfully negotiates this as Kimberley responds by asking a follow-up question: “He gets a new name?”.

Towards the end of the same lesson Kimberley again tries to shift the topic of conversation:

Kimberley: OK let me just bring you guys all together. Sorry everyone. Some very interesting discussions. [pause waiting for class to settle down]. Alright, some very interesting discussions. A lot of talk about circumcision on both uh, on both tables. I was just wondering um if there are any other rituals that your families have that we didn't discuss here? I heard a few over here [pointing to table 2]. Any other family traditions that your specific families have or people in your area have that we didn't talk about?

Domingos: Maybe marriage especially (**Vicente:** Ja marriage) (....)

Here Kimberley firstly apologises (“Sorry everyone”) in acknowledgement of her interruption of the discussion. She then makes one final attempt to focus the students on the topics: “I was just wondering um if there are any other rituals that your families have that we didn't discuss here?”. It is noteworthy that this was right at the end of the lesson when there was not a lot of time remaining to discuss the other topics. So powerful is the discourse of the pedagogy regarding staying on topic that Kimberley felt compelled to ‘fit it all in’ in order to feel that she had accomplished her lesson objectives.

A few months after conducting this research I had a similar experience which demonstrated to me how entrenched and authoritative the discourse of EFL pedagogy is. Here is a vignette of my own classroom practice from a two hour afternoon class. At The Lab, business students are often sponsored to take a two hour ‘Special’ class in order to receive more focused, tailor-made lessons. A

maximum of five students are placed in a special class and in this particular class, there were three Angolan students. I had planned to do specific language and skills which could assist them in their jobs and this is reflected in my lesson aims:

Pedagogic Connections

1st November 2007, 2 hour Special

Lesson aims: Language of agreeing, disagreeing and asking for opinion, listening, freer practice using language and discussion about difficulties in Angola.

What actually happened...

My timing was completely off. I've done this lesson a few times and it usually works really well but the students seemed to want to continue discussing way past the allocated 10 minutes. In the back of my mind I thought I'd get to the listening eventually and this would 'save' the lesson. After 45 mins we got to the listening. Relief! At least we'd been a little bit productive. Then we had a 10 min break after which I intended to drill the language, brainstorm the topic of 'difficulties', do another listening and get the students to practise the language in a 'freer' 'more authentic' practice activity.

After the break we started the lesson with a brainstorm about difficulties in Angola. This was supposed to be brief but developed into an absorbing discussion. I lost track of time and began to panic. I hadn't done the listening yet. I felt guilty that I hadn't met my aims or kept up the pace of the lesson. I imagined that the students were probably wondering when the actual lesson would begin. Surprisingly however, at the end of the lesson the students said how much they'd enjoyed it and wanted more of 'this kind of thing' as it was a useful way to work on their communicative ability.

Post-lesson reflection

This experience connects to my research and the positions Kimberley was placed in. While discussing this experience with my supervisor I began to realize how entrenched I was / am in the discourse of EFL pedagogy and how this would impact on my analysis of the data. The way this lesson played itself out is a reflection of the way the *African Customs and Rituals* course was presented and highlighted the importance of acknowledging my own bias in the research process. It also indicated how powerful the culture of EFL pedagogy is. In my panic to get through the classroom text I hadn't stopped to 'read' the 'texts' of the students and was therefore surprised when they appeared positive about the way the lesson had played itself out.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented EFL pedagogy as a powerful classroom text. Discourse from the classroom and interviews, as well as my own pedagogic connection, have demonstrated how deeply entrenched this text is in all aspects of classroom life and in the way the teacher and students are positioned in the classroom space.

Canagarajah (1999) presents a case study from the periphery in which a teacher struggles to adapt a Western-based method and focuses more on the *procedural* aspects of teaching such as time-keeping and sequence than on the *interpersonal* aspects such as student involvement and empathy (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennington in Canagarajah, 1999: 119). The current study indicates a similar focus: while Kimberley executes the lesson in an orderly way by keeping time, showing 'interest' by asking questions and remaining on topic, the input of the students is generally not considered in the pedagogical process. The pedagogy positions the students in a particular way and does not provide a space for them to negotiate alternative identities and positions (*cf* Luk, 2005).

Although EFL pedagogy and the dominant CLT approach aim to create authentic and real conversations in the classroom, this research shows that the procedures and dominant forms of questioning inherent in the pedagogy paradoxically decontextualise the discourse of the students and negate the knowledge they bring to the classroom. While the students are accustomed to a particular classroom text in their other classes at The Lab, the materials and topics of the *African Customs and Rituals class* set up a different expectation. The students expected to offer their knowledge and ideas and to be placed in a more 'equal' position in relation to the teacher. When the materials and teacher employed the same pedagogy of other courses and followed the same text and procedures, a tension arose. The pedagogy positioned the students as linguistically deficient and this prevented them from asserting their *selves* and taking ownership of the communicative space in the classroom (Luk, 2005). In the final chapter I discuss the significance and implications of my findings and make suggestions for a more localised pedagogy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this research report, I have aimed to provide a deeper understanding of what it means to be an EFL learner in South Africa by looking at how the materials, *Customs in our Time*, were taken up and engaged with within the microcosm of a local classroom. By providing a deeper understanding of local knowledge in the local South African EFL context, this research has attempted to fill a gap in current research and contribute to growing research from the 'periphery'. My analysis of the classroom and interview discourse was framed by two research questions:

- How do the students and teacher construct notions of culture and negotiate their identities around the themes of the texts?
- How are the students' and teacher's local constructions of culture and identity positioned in relation to the classroom pedagogy?

In order to conceptualise the relationship between language, identity and culture, I have positioned the study within the theoretical framework of post-structuralism, in which language is viewed as central in constituting our subjectivities (Weedon, 1987). Within this theoretical framework the notion of narratives and positioning has been helpful in understanding the multiple and competing ways the participants of this study struggled to make meaning (Davies & Harré, 1990). I have also made use of Pennycook's (1994) understanding of 'the discourse of EIL' and Canagarajah's (2005) view of the global construction of knowledge to place the participants' discourse and the classroom pedagogy in socio-historical context. By incorporating a *resistance perspective* into my analysis of the data, as advocated by Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (2005), I was better able to understand how the students took agency and resisted being positioned in certain ways. In this chapter I look at the significance and broader implications of my findings and argue that a more localised pedagogy makes for a more ethical and appropriate EFL pedagogy in the South African context.

6.2 Significance of the study

In chapter four I argued that there were contested and competing discourses of culture circulating in the *African Customs and Rituals* classroom. I contend that the power relations between students and teacher inherent in any classroom space, are exaggerated in the EFL classroom where students have limited language proficiency and are already positioned as linguistically deficient (Wallace, 2006). As a result, the teacher's discourse and constructions are more heavily weighted. I have revealed the way the teacher in this study constructed an essentialised and dichotomous notion of culture which served to position her and the students in particular ways. The students were discursively constructed as belonging to a single cultural group from 'traditional Africa'. This notion of culture was also appropriated by some of the students which revealed the way global and stereotyped constructions of culture have been internalised. This stable and bounded view of culture can be located within the powerful scientific paradigm which presents culture as singular, separate, defined and uncontested (Thornton, 1988).

My study also demonstrated that the discourse of both the teacher and students was not stable or uniform but contradictory and multiple (Weedon, 1987). I showed through the two case studies of Zyda and John, how students may take agency and appropriate alternative storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990). John problematized the fixed labels given to culture and the way those labels were generalised by the teacher, while Zyda offered a feminist position on certain cultural customs and traditions and questioned the assumptions inherent in the dominant discourse of the classroom.

Of particular significance is that we as teachers are missing opportunities to explore alternative meanings students bring to the discursive space. Wallace (2006: 82) discusses how '[s]tudent bids to redirect classroom discourse are sacrificed to the need for orderliness and classroom control' and as a result there is a reluctance to enter into discussions around multiplicity of meaning. In my study, the dominance and power of the essentialising discourse of culture made alternative discursive practices invisible and worked to constrain the discourse of both the teacher and

students. Compounding this was the way the dominant and 'global' EFL pedagogy restricted the way meaning was negotiated and this was the focus of my analysis in chapter five.

Following Canagarajah (2005), I argue that the way pedagogy operates has important implications for the way culture and identity are constructed in the classroom space. In chapter five I discussed how the EFL pedagogy utilised on this course and within the materials I designed, functioned as an all-pervasive classroom text to be 'read' and 'solved' by the students in a particular way and within a particular time limit. The pedagogic text impacted on the way the teacher and students were positioned and constrained the discursive practices available to them. Through a pedagogic connection of my own I demonstrated how my personal discourse options are also limited in the classroom space and how deeply entrenched the dominant pedagogic storyline has become in all aspects of local classroom life.

The assumption that dominant teaching methods and forms of questioning are value-free and inert has been problematized by various writers (Canagarajah, 1999; Luk, 2005; Lin et al, 2005, Wallace, 2006). Canagarajah (1999) discusses the problems that occur when Western, process-approaches to teaching, such as CLT, are transferred to periphery contexts and utilized without adaptation. Although EFL pedagogy and the CLT approach aim to create authentic and real conversations in the classroom, this research shows that the procedures and dominant forms of questioning inherent in the pedagogy paradoxically decontextualise the discourse of the students and negate the hybridity of the classroom space. The time limits and types of questions asked by the teacher and materials of this study placed the students in unsettling positions which did not allow for the exploration of multiple and diverse discursive practices (Canagarajah, 1999). The students therefore did not feel they could contribute to the process of knowledge-making in a deep and meaningful way (Wallace, 2006). There was no platform for the students to truly voice their selves (Luk, 2005) or engage with different layers of meaning and this impacted on the choices available to the students as well as their levels of

participation and motivation. This research therefore, puts into question the authenticity and genuineness of the classroom text.

My findings highlight the hybridity of the EFL learning context and the need to recognise the multiple voices and scripts of the students and teacher (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 2000). While the EFL teacher is generally positioned as 'expert' of linguistic resources and English knowledge in relation to the students, the *African Customs and Rituals* course opened up a space that highlighted other alternative positions circulating in the classroom that contradicted the dominant positions of both the teacher and the students. The students struggled to position themselves within these conflicting subject positions. Especially salient in the data were the two contradictory positions of student with inferior knowledge of the English language and adult with 'expert' knowledge of individual cultural practices. The teacher's position however, was predominantly monolithic and remained in line with the powerful EFL classroom text in which she was positioned as expert of the language. Her positioning often worked to invalidate the students' hybrid subjectivities and the expert cultural knowledge they brought to the classroom space. This created a tension and some of the students took agency and resisted being positioned in essentialised ways. My own pedagogic connection reveals how similar hybrid spaces occur in other classroom spaces and this has broader implications for EFL pedagogy which will be discussed in the next section.

6.3 Implications of the research

What often constrains teachers is their fear of the imagination, of unexplainable and uncontrollable meanings, of paradox and ambiguity (Kramsch, 1993: 93).

Although the small-scale and 'local' nature of this research make it impossible to generalise the findings, this study has demonstrated the need for teachers and researchers to explore local, representative knowledge more deeply in order to design more relevant materials and pedagogies. The finding in chapter five that the students responded more to the pedagogy than the content and subject matter of the materials demonstrates that to create a genuine space for 'the local', not only

does the content of the lessons need to be localised but centrally, attention needs to be paid to transforming the pedagogy as well. Dominant EFL methods need to be adapted to take local sociocultural conditions into account and to create more locally relevant pedagogical practices (Luk, 2005). This has important implications for the way knowledge is constructed and presented in EFL materials and on EFL training courses (Canagarajah, 2005).

My findings indicate that the position of the teacher and students needs to be reconceptualised in the EFL classroom in order to embrace new and alternative discourses at the local level. I contend that this will enable a more productive negotiation of meaning which will ultimately lead to more ethical and productive 'language' lessons (Canagarajah, 2005). Following Kramsch (1993: 13), I recommend adopting a *dialectic* perspective which utilizes the diversity and variability of 'local' discourses as a resource. Such a perspective entails recognising the complexity of knowledge construction and the way that competing discourses of culture and identity struggle for meaning in the local classroom space (Weedon, 1987).

Although I acknowledge that constructions of culture are reified through language, I maintain that notions of culture can be broadened in the classroom by acknowledging the multiple and contradictory nature of discourse (Kramsch, 1993). Teacher training courses and developmental sessions could do more to raise awareness of how culture is actively constructed through language and co-created as a result of the discursive interactions in the classroom (Atkinson, 1999). If culture is presented as a feature of the language itself, then teachers are more likely to shift their perceptions and embrace a more ethical position which acknowledges the interconnectedness between language and culture (Kramsch, 1993). At a practical level, this shift entails making socio-historical meanings visible to students by opening up a space in which multiple layers of meaning can be explored and alternative notions of culture debated. In the classroom, the context of communication needs to be expanded to provide a space for new and creative

sources of meaning so that students can 'author the text with input from their own knowledge resources' (Wallace, 2006: 82).

Following Canagarajah (2005: xiv), I argue that local constructions of knowledge need to be given more prominence in the classroom in order to allow the students to 'write back' and enrich the context of communication with their own voices. This new attention to context calls for a different type of pedagogy in line with the *resistance perspective* I discussed in chapter two. Weedon (1987) argues that the struggle between competing discourses enables students to resist being positioned in particular ways and to take agency in the production of new meanings. By providing a space for local, more hybrid subject positions in the classroom, more productive counter-discourses can be produced that offer alternative possibilities to students and teachers and actively challenge the 'discourse of EIL' (Pennycook, 1994, 326).

I assert, in line with Canagarajah (2005), that a more ethical and effective pedagogy is a more localised pedagogy and one which brings in the local identities and discourses of the students. A more localised pedagogy needs to recognise not only the hybrid positions of students but also those of teachers. In accordance with Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda (2000: 286), I maintain that these diverse and hybrid discourses are an intrinsic part of all learning contexts and can be utilized as a productive resource in the learning process. A focus on the multivoices and scripts of the students has transformative potential and 'helps makes visible developmental spaces that may have been ignored previously' (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 2000: 287). This is because the tensions produced within competing and hybrid discourses can disrupt 'normative practices' and result in the construction of new meanings and learning spaces (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 2000: 288).

As my research has indicated, the 'authenticity' of the dominant classroom text needs to be problematized. EFL teachers need to become aware of the way the time limits and questions of the pedagogy strip the communicative context of its authenticity. This awareness will enable the creation of more authentic materials and

tasks which provide the opportunity for more depth and exploration of meaning in the classroom space and activities that are more reflective of authentic communication (Morris, 1994). A greater emphasis on 'the local' in pedagogy will also assist the students in the learning of unfamiliar codes and content by broadening cross-cultural inquiry and providing greater linguistic and cognitive resources (Canagarajah, 2005; Wallace, 2006).

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This research study has demonstrated that the knowledge and view of the world that materials and pedagogies bring to the classroom can have important consequences for students in terms of their identities, emotions and investments in learning the language. In order to provide the student with valuable meaning-making opportunities, a reorientation to learning and pedagogy is required. Knowledge and meaning need to be collaboratively constructed from a 'local' perspective for:

It is [only] when we acknowledge the localness of each of our own knowledge that we have the proper humility to engage productively with other knowledge traditions (Canagarajah, 2005: 20).

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